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# Faith the Analytical Mind and the Uttama Adhikari

**Forward**

**“****Dear Reader” Part 1:**

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glory to Srila Prabhupada. Hare Krishna.

Readers ask me “What do you hope to accomplish with your Our Mission books?” It so happens that I wrote a letter to Bir Krishna Swami who asked this very question. Here is an excerpt from my letter of 30 May 1997, replying to him:

On your last trip to Vrndavana, pardon me if I don’t get the wording exactly right, but I heard that you were inquiring along these lines, “What is Kundali achieving by his books?” I don’t know how serious you are for an answer, but since I have noth¬ing to hide, I thought I’d inform you.

In terms of results, there are both short-range and long-range considerations. Also, some of these are naturally related, and I have several more outcomes than I shall enumerate here, but these will suffice to give you the drift. My view is that any of the following outcomes is sufficient reason for the whole enterprise.

The first and most important outcome is that researching group dynamics, social and individual psychology, and analyzing my years as a victim, as a perpetrator, and as an observer of dysfunctional dealings in ISKCON is all a tremendous growth experience for me, an opportunity disguised as a problem. In fact I’m grateful to my godbrothers for pushing me to the limit, so that I could discover this growth experience. Please note, how-ever, that my gratitude does not deter me one iota from bringing the issues out in the open, for ISKCON will heal when its dark side is exposed to light. There is simply no other cure for ignorance.

Second: This work clears my conscience. Having this, I be-lieve, is vital for attaining truly empowered Krishna consciousness in parampara. And thankfully, owing to Prabhupada’s example, I know darn well I don’t need a hierarchical rubberstamp for achieving that or any other of the items here.

Third: Those who read my books will gradually free their psyches from institutional groupthink (sheep mentality), which is the prime enemy of independent thoughtfulness, of thinking with integrity and with a conscience. They will be freed from crippling dependency, which, sadly, is the mainstay of the soci¬ety at present. Having achieved independent thoughtfulness, those that are sincere followers of this path will be able to recog¬nize others who have integrity and these people will cooperate in love and trust for Srila Prabhupada—not out of crippling de¬pendency, but out of empowering interdependency. This, I be¬lieve, will please Prabhupada immensely, more than building Mayapur. Indeed, these people will be the real ISKCON. They will be the ones to carry forward the true spirit of the parampara. Even if they are a minority, it doesn’t matter. This is not a busi¬ness of numbers. It is a matter of quality not quantity, or as Prabhupada put it “class not mass.” One moon is better than umpteen flickering stars.

Fourth: Readers will develop their capacity for critical think-ing—what I like to call hard-headed realism—as opposed to the prevailing soft-headed surrealism. Instead of soft heads and hard hearts, they will develop hard heads and soft hearts. Again, since Prabhupada said nothing should be accepted blindly, I’m sure this development, even in one of his followers, will please him immensely.

Fifth: With this capacity for critical thinking, my readers, will learn to recognize irrational dealings and misuse of authority and nail it. They will have the integrity to call lies, manipulation, humiliation, insanity, and rank foolishness byname. Every time. Then, according to their individual capacities, they will refuse to comply with irrational demands and irrational usage of the phi-losophy. They will develop what Hemingway called “a built-in shock-proof shit detector,” a feature I think essential for success in telling reality from illusion. Can you picture an ISKCON in which the leaders actually have to be competent and practice what we preach, because razzmatazz doesn’t work any more?

**“Dear Reader”, Part 2:**

Sixth: My readers will learn to penetrate the masks of pious posturing some wear when at heart they are really the jealous and envious mundane men in the dress of Vaisnavas that Srila Prabhupada said should be “completely neglected”. At least some of my readers will garner the courage to practice neglect. My example will embolden others. Without doubt this will be one of the finer accomplishments of my books.

Seventh: One long-term value of my books will be that they will serve as documents that will inform devotees and scholars and the curious both now and in the future about

Foreword

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Seventh: One long-term value of my books will be that they will serve as documents that will inform devotees and scholars and the curious both now and in the future about what the general experience of life in ISKCON is like for the “average” devotee. With books like mine in existence, it will be very difficult for intelligent people to buy into the myths that are likely to crop up around the institution in general; and certain individuals in particular, who are anticipating a page in history as great dcdryas. It’s an important consideration, keeping the record straight.

Eighth: Because I write the books, my name will be disasso-ciated from the general body of Prabhupada disciples who—ei¬ther corrupted by power or corrupted by weakness—perpetrated or tolerated abject foolishness in the name of cooperating for Srfla Prabhupada. I very much want to be disassociated from both the active and passive contributors to making hash out of Prabhupada’s mission.

Ninth: Since it is my ardent desire to meet Srfla Prabhupada again face to face, my books give me the satisfaction of knowing that when that day comes, I will be able to do so with dignity, knowing that I did not consent to nonsense by my silence. I’ll be able to tell him that I did what was in my capacity to address the core problem in his mission caused by his rogue disciples over-come with personal ambition. Whether I am successful or not in actually influencing change will be immaterial. The important thing is that I would have lived as a man, a genuine disciple, and not as a sheep; and it is the courage of attempting the needful that really counts in this process.

I realize, Maharaja, that these answers may be more than you bargained for, but they are true and from my heart. I also heard that you rather emphatically declared, again, pardon me if this is not the precise wording, “Whether Kundall is right or wrong, it doesn’t matter. Things will never change. In fact, truth is not the issue.” I happen to know that many in your circle are of the opinion that things will never change. On the other hand, I am absolutely confident that they will, because my faith is firm and unflinching by Prabhupada’s kind grace upon me. And I be¬lieve in the adage, “One man with faith is a majority.” As I told the committee in Mayapur, in your presence, I will press on these points for as long as it takes, because it is only over my dead body will I accept the present situation as the legacy of Prabhupada. It’s a pity they didn’t believe me.

The final matter, is that while I don’t baffle easily, I’m really stumpted by your remark, “Truth is not the issue.” I am eager to know precisely what you meant by that. Since I’ve answered your question, perhaps you can reciprocate by answering mine: What is the issue?

Thank you for obliging me. Hare Krishna.

I remain your servant,

Kundall dasa

Servant of the Gaudlya Vaisnava parampard,

Kundall dasa

Nrsimha Caturdasi 1997

**Preface**

**Part 1: “Human nature is that we do not like news of impending disaster. We like good news”**

.. .willingness to rock the boat is the essential quality of all those who would remedy delusion. It is the stance of the investigative reporter, the ombudsman, the grand jury, and the therapist alike. To accomplish their task, they each must bring into the open those facts that have been hidden in the service of keeping things com¬fortable. ” (Daniel Goleman)

Human nature is that we do not like news of impending disaster. We like good news. And when we consider that every member of ISKCON made a huge emotional investment by joining the soci¬ety, it is natural that we have massive resistance to the analysis in the first two volumes of Our Mission. It is not easy to come to grips with the thought “I have been seduced by surrender.”

Take myself, for example. Although I’ve known we had a deep- seated problem for years, I was in denial about the extent of it. I also was in denial about my responsibility to do something about it. For years I thought, someone smarter, someone more sincere, someone more capable, and above all, someone purer will come forward and address the issue of our faulty dynamics. So I know about massive inner resistance to getting off one’s posterior.

It is only in the last six years I began to face the issues, to research them, and find ways to articulate things. This process began with me teaching seminars on how to discriminate on the basis of the three modes of nature. Then came The Nectar of Dis¬crimination, in which one can find the seeds for all that these later books discuss. What I have come to understand about our pre¬dicament has been so worrisome that I have risked my standing in ISKCON in order to bring this matter to our attention. It is not a GBC problem; it is everyone’s problem. Thinking that it is a GBC problem is only further evidence that we are too institution¬alized. When a ship is in danger, it is the problem of the entire crew and the passengers.

Initially, I did try to get the ear of the leaders. Before publish¬ing Our Mission:Part One, I wrote several email letters to the GBC chairman of 1995, requesting the opportunity to discuss my con¬cerns about the direction of the society with members of the GBC. In return, I was stonewalled, verbally abused, threatened, and countered with ad hominem attacks. My repeated requests were re-fused, although that was the same year the GBC launched a Journal in which it was announced that the body welcomed our questions.

In my case, presumably, certain people realized that I was no longer seduced by surrender, so I was no longer a credible mem¬ber of the society. And if I would not be quiet and blindly follow (“be a gentleman and cooperate” was the actual wording), then I would have to be punished, “dropped down a shaft”, according to the 1995 GBC Chairman. Some say that my writing this series is all about getting revenge for such treatment. Perhaps. Perhaps not. I fail to see how revenge will help me or anyone else.

People wonder about my motive. In response, let me say this: If I know that someone has broken the law, do I have a duty to report that?

Suppose I happen to have a history of disagreements with the criminal, but I know of his crimes in the present, do I still have a duty to report his crimes, even if the criminal or his sympathizers can accuse me, most conveniently, of an impure motive, of want¬ing to get even?

My responsibility is clear in either case. How about this pos¬sibility? What if I know the person is a criminal and I also want revenge for past grievances, which is surely un-Vaisnava, never¬theless, do I still have a duty to report the crimes or should I clam up and let it go?

Again my duty is clear. Therefore, I say that the issue with these Our Mission books is not my motive; the issue is whether or not they speak the truth. My motive is a separate issue. It is be¬tween me and my conscience. The issue for you, the reader, is what is the truth of our situation? Do we have predominantly a rational dynamic or an irrational one in our society? Is there evi¬dence of alienation from self in our society? Are we growing or shrinking in spiritual life? Are we institutionalizing people or train¬ing them to be self-trusting and independently thoughtful? Is ISKCON, doctrine of personalism and prema notwithstanding, actually operating as a cult? Is questioning really allowed in our society? Is our society really something other than we advertise when we distribute the books of Srila Prabhupada?

If the answers are affirmative to any of these types of ques¬tions, people should be warned about this before they give their lives to the institution. And we who are already involved should make a concerted effort to make the society more in line with the spirit and intent of Prabhupada’s books. If we don’t opt to be part of the solution, then we are part of the problem.

**Part 2: “When one realizes that blind following is only a symptom of seduction to surrender and not authentic surrender, the only op¬tion is to become a person of integrity**”

When one realizes that blind following is only a symptom of seduction to surrender and not authentic surrender, the only op¬tion is to become a person of integrity. Having personally resolved as such, I could not be quiet, for silence would be immoral. Tb be quiet would be to collude, to sin by omission, and there is an ad¬age to the effect that an accomplice is nine-tenths of the law.

Worse, the price psychologically would be unbearable. I would have to become estranged from my conscience, which is diametri¬cally opposed to self-realization. It is a form of rowing with one’s anchor down. So my only choice is to be outspoken and address the issues according to my capacity, which is to write. Others should also deal with the issue of our dynamics according to their individual capacity. Yes, some chaos will result as we shift into an¬other mode, but this is the cost of growth. We should embrace it.

After Our Mission was published, but not necessarily because of it, Bir Krishna Maharaja was sent to invite me to Mayapur to talk with a GBG sub-committee. This was presented to me as the op¬portunity for dialogue I had been requesting. In reality I was put on trial. No official charge. No due process. No formal proce¬dure. According to one GBC who made me promise never to re¬veal his name, “The purpose of the meeting was to make the devo¬tees think that you got a fair hearing, but were so unreasonable that we had to push you out of the society.” My hearing was a kangaroo court, in other words.

After the 1996 GBC meetings were over, another GBC man informed me, “You should just keep quiet in the coming year, because they have passed new resolutions to make it easy to kick you out next year.” Sure enough when I saw the 1996 resolutions there were provision for censure, then probation, then excommu¬nication if one speaks against the leadership of the society.

Were there any provisions to protect us from abuses of power from said leaders, which we all know to be a problem? Nothing definitive, as far as I could ascertain, but to protest abuses could land you in trouble, according to the law.

That, Dear Reader, is the fate that awaits anyone who dares to question from the institutionalized thinking, the so-called official GBC authorized way. And the fact that one has given more than half one’s life in service to the society is not a consideration. If you don’t have a position in the hierarchy, you don’t have money, you don’t have followers and you dare to question the status quo, goodbye.

You may have intelligence and be eager to use it for Krishna, but that is a disqualification, because “Those with intelligence will always have trouble in this process” according to the 1997 GBC Chairman. The news that having intelligence is a disqualifi¬cation for bhuddi-yoga is surely a shocking revelation.

Some may pounce on the news of my history, thinking, “Aha, so this is why Kundall writes his books. He is upset and wants revenge.” I’m upset, make no mistake about that. I would have to be braindead not to be; but I don’t want revenge, for it is a down¬ward spiral. Revenge will not elevate me or anybody else.

I’m justifiably upset because of what has happened to the mis¬sion of my spiritual master and about what is being perpetuated in his name. Anyone who is not upset about that is lacking some¬thing vital both as a human being and as a follower of his. For my part, I refuse, unconditionally, to accept this state of affairs as the legacy of my spiritual master.

But revenge? What good would revenge serve? Revenge would make me into one of the people I’m trying to raise awareness about. No, I don’t want revenge, I want to see the situation recti¬fied. I want to see a spiritually healthy, thriving, empowering Krishna conscious society. I want to be a part of the solution—training devotees to be independently thoughtful. That is the very essence of the solution.

Revenge is out of the question. Ultimately I’m grateful to my detractors because their dealings have inspired me to research the matter of dynamics. It led to an education I can never regret. So actually at heart I’m thankful for their unintended mercy, which has served to push me in the right direction. However, being thank¬ful does not mean I shall not speak out against the kind of group dynamic that creates problems like this in the first place.

Though we met in Mayapur, the leaders gave me a deaf ear. Now I see no choice but to go to the masses. Unless one lives in a totalitarian atmosphere, whenever the system fails, the court of public opinion is always an option.

**Introduction**

**Part 1: “self-deception by its very nature, is the most elusive of mental facts”**

“For self-deception by its very nature, is the most elusive of mental facts. We do not see what we do not see. Self-deception operates both at the level of the individual mind, and in the collective aware¬ness of the group. To belong to a group of any sort, the tacit price of membership is to agree not to notice one's own feelings of uneasi¬ness and misgiving, and certainly not to question anything that chal¬lenges the group's way of doing things. The price for the group in this arrangement is that dissent, even healthy dissent, is stifled." (Daniel Goleman)

If you’ve read Our Mission: Part Two, you will recall that the cen¬tral point of that volume, was the concept of alienation from one’s self or losing one’s conscience. Kierkegaard aptly explained the horror of consciencelessness in The Sickness Unto Death when he pointed out that we are aware of other losses—a finger, money, a spouse and so on—but this loss is so subtle it goes undetected. In Bhagavad-gita the Lord is even more specific: He says being lost to oneself is a demonic symptom. Subsequently, self-realization and self-estrangement go ill together.

The remainder of Part Two were mostly chapters of organiza-tional self-examination, showing evidence for this sort of alien¬ation in our society. There was considerably more material on hand, but it could not all be used. Nevertheless, here is an up to date example of self-estrangement at work:

The Managerial Board of ISKCON Vrindaban

ISKCON, VRINDAVAN / (U.P.) 281124 / INDIA Tel 0565 / 442177

TUesday, April 29,1997

His Grace Kundali das Adhikari Vrindaban U.P.

Dear Kundali Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances.

Introduction

All Glories to Srila Prabhupada !

AGtSP.

The managerial board of Vrndaban temple has decided to restrict your ac-tivities within the ISKCON premises.

While you are allowed to visit the temple to take darshan and eat in the restaurant, the board does not allow you to use our ISKCON premises as a platform for propaganda activities of any sort, be it selling your literature, organize the sale of your literature here and abroad, to proselytize, look for converts or spread your negative views on the GBC governing Body, Iskcon as a whole, Iskcon personalities or what not in this regard within the walls of our institution.

If you are found transgressing we will see to it that our security men will re-move you from the premises and that you will have to take your meals outside.

If you do not cause a disturbance in the holy dham and exhibit genuine vaishnava qualities, we will again be able to appreciate your association.

Thank you,

Hare Krishna

Priuiu uas ^vuniKai 1

- on behalf of ISKCON Vrindaban-

Why is self-estrangement at work here? The author of this letter told two persons on two different occasions that he agrees with all the points raised in Our Mission: Part One. “Kundall is right.” He even admitted that “The GBC made a big mistake in the way they handled him.” Then he becomes a candidate for GBC and sends this letter with no specific charge or allegation of a trans¬gression in it. Its clear purpose—harassment, intimidation.

Even if he did have allegations and supporting evidence, the point is that he has agreed that my views and concerns are true, but in this letter, those truths have become my “negative views of the GBC governing Body, Iskcon as a whole, Iskcon personalities or what not in this regard.” I don’t have negative views about the GBC or ISKCON as a whole. I have negative views about gross and subtle illusions, vices rationalized as Vaisnava virtues, group deceptions, defective integrity, swindle, and about might-is-right dealings. These are all perfectly valid Vaisnava concerns. Anyone on this path should have negative views about them.

Purity is our avowed quest, so according to our individual capaci¬ties, it behooves us to point out illusion both in and outside of ISKCON, for the candle of enlightenment, if authentic, must shine it’s light in all directions. We are advised to give up the associa¬tion of people who practice such vices (asat-sahga-tyaga). And in Sri Harinama-cintamani, Bhaktivinoda Thakura writes that if someone says we are offensive for criticizing such people, that person should also be shunned.

If symptoms of these problems fit neatly onto the feet of some people, which Prthu prabhu has admitted privately, who is re¬sponsible to make an adjustment? What is the character of those motivated to punish the boy instead of doing something about the naked emperor?

**Part 2: “As a writer and social commentator, I do not create ISKCON, I simply reflect it”**

As a writer and social commentator, I do not create ISKCON, I simply reflect it. If people do not like what is reflected, either correct my wrong impression with facts, or, in this case, since he has admitted that I am right (and so have others), then work to change ISKCON. My fundamental complaint is that we persist, after thirty years, with all sorts of irrational dealings. Then, where is the rationality in demanding that I change, which means I co¬operate ? By persisting on the path of irrational dealings he is making my case stronger by giving me material.

One significant point to be gleaned from the line about my “negative views” (really my realistic views by his own admission), is that it reveals the authoritarian nature of our society. He is making it plain that criticizing ISKCON and “ISKCON person¬alities” is a sin for which I will be punished.

Criticizing the leaders is always the number one offense in au-thoritarian systems. The fact that aparadha can be invoked, wrongly, against social criticism, should not veil the true authoritarian nature of the dynamic. Before we invoke claims of aparadha, the truth or falsity of the criticism must be first assessed. There is no offense in stating facts. Valid criticism is always useful and can make be¬nign leaders lead more effectively, if the atmosphere is rational and leadership is receptive.

When the atmosphere is not rational, then one has to bring this fact into conscious awareness for the benefit of the group. To do this, one may have to go against the norm. One may have to break explicit or implicit ISKCON law. This kind of situation is covered in Srlla Bhaktivinoda Thakura’s translation and

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This man promises to give us 25

more years of politics, nastiness,

and manipulation. What shall we

do about him1

Blaspheming a preacher of the holy name! Leave our associa-tion this minute. When you display Vaisnava qualities you can come back.

Loss of our conscience is so subtle, voe are aware of every other loss, but this one goes unnoticed.

commentary on Bhagavad-gita 9.31, the famous ksipram bhavati dharmatma verse:

O Arjuna, declare it boldly that My exclusively devoted servitors will never come to ruin. He who declares this quickly becomes virtuous, and attains eternal divine grace.

Commentary

In the Srimad Bhagavatam (11.11.32) the Lord says:

ajnayaivam gunan dosan, mdyadistan api svakan dharman samtyajya yah sarvan, mam bhajet sa ca sattamah

The best of honest persons are those who have left behind the forms of duties that I Myself have recommended in the scrip-tures, for the general public. Although it is My direction, they cross it and come to render loving service to Me. They are the real honest men.”

In society one must obey the law, but there is also the situa-tion of crossing the law to show faithfulness to the king. If one risks his life and reputation, and crossing the general law, enters

into the royal chamber to combat an assassin, then he will be considered the best and most loyal servitor. Similarly, the Lord is saying, “I have already given some direction for the general public. Do this, don’t do that, don’t cross these laws, etc. But if for My interest anyone takes the risk of committing sin, then he

should be considered the best among all My devotees.”

\*

Logically, the same reasoning applies to the service of Srlla Prabhupada. Who is willing to challenge the autocratic rule of the GBC in order to fulfil the desire of Srlla Prahupada to have independent thinking among his followers, is in fact rendering vital service by seeing to the true spirit and intent of Srlla Prabhupada.

**Part 3: “Critics serve as a conscience for those with power, which is a desirable thing for all leaders except autocratic ones”**

Critics serve as a conscience for those with power, which is a desirable thing for all leaders except autocratic ones. In other words, criticism is a bad sign only in dysfunctional systems. Yet, though most leaders admit ISKCON is besieged with problems, some shrilly deny the authoritarian and dysfunctional state of the society. One wonders, “How much evidence do they need?” Look at how they chased away so many members of the society by their authoritarian stance on Narayana Maharaja, when they could have asked those people what is it that ISKCON is not providing that causes them to seek shelter of Narayana Maharaja? Then they could have addressed those issues and the devotees, some of them, would have been satisfied. Instead we get a medieval siege men¬tality, “Close the drawbridge. Whoever is outside, stay outside.” About criticizing, here’s something to consider: When Charlie Chaplin, an Englishman, made movies that satirized some of the un-American practices he had observed among certain authority figures in the USA, he incurred the wrath of FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover, who harassed Charlie for many, many years. Chaplin’s close friend, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., was very concerned about this clash with the powerful and ruthless J. Edgar. One day Fairbanks said to Chaplin, “If you love America you would not make movies that criticize this country.” Chaplin replied, “It is because I love America that I have that right.”

Accepting the self-evident truth of Chaplin’s statement, if one who loves ISKCON criticizes, believing that when ISKCON is wrong it should be put right, what is the motive of those who re¬press such critics? Do they love ISKCON too?

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William Hazlitt would respond with this brain-tickler: “Love of liberty (which surely entails the freedom to criticize) is love of others; love of power (which entails an enthusiasm for repressing critics) is love of ourselves.” It was Chaplin who loved America. Mr. Hoover claimed he loved America. He may even have be¬lieved it, but if one studies his conduct, he was rationalizing. His real agenda was the love for the exercise of power over others.

When we take to Krishna consciousness we are supposed to shun the “power over” paradigm. A devotee thinks of himself as the servant, not the master. Specifically, a servant of the truth.

One has to completely forego his sense of integrity, fair-play, and respect for human dignity to declare something true and then go against it. Perhaps truth is not the issue with this letter-writer as well. Thus certain truths are to be denied. Sacrificed. Kept from others in service to our friends. Aristotle was having a good day when he wrote, “Piety requires us to honor truth above our friends.” What Krishna conscious alternative is left to us if we rule out truth as the issue?

The aim in the above letter is to protect the image of the institution, but in so doing one supresses the truth. This practice, as history has shown, can only tarnish an institution.

He writes, “If you do not cause a disturbance in the holy dham and exhibit genuine vaishnava qualities, we all will again be able to appreciate your association.” How can speaking the truth be “a disturbance in the holy dham” or anywhere else? Surely it may disturb those whom the shoe fits, for as Prabhupada put it, “those who get hit yelp the loudest”; but how is that a problem to the holy dhamal

But even if he had been honest, the underlying reasoning is still unsound, because his assumption is that the disturbance is caused by the one who reports the deeds, not by those who actu¬ally perform them. Just like we are now scapegoating Narayana Maharaja, while the people who created the problem have all gone on to greater glory—falling up from rasika vaisnavism to univer¬sity education, writing essays how to be the dog of Srlla Prabhupada, penning books to teach us the philosophy of Bhagavad-gita. We are so transcendental, we go beyond piety, in¬tegrity, rudimentary common sense, and wisdom. The real culprit is he who writes books pointing out the folly of strolling naked in public.

causes people to strive to keep their power and position instead living a principle-centered life, in which love, truth, justice, and reason are always the paramount considerations. Prabhupada knew this very well; therefore he wrote, “Once there is bureau¬cracy the whole thing will be spoiled.”

**Part 4: “The challenge is how to have an organized ISKCON without too much bureaucracy”**

The challenge is how to have an organized ISKCON without too much bureaucracy. Or does organization automatically mean bureaucracy? Many aspects of this question will be discussed in the last two volumes in this series. Before that we still have sev¬eral points about diagnosis to consider, the various snags and se¬ductions along the path of the razor’s edge.

In this volume, the first few chapters, I respond to some of the reactions to my publishing works of outspoken social com¬mentary about our society. In addressing my critics, I follow in the footsteps of Srlla Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, who addressed his critics in Caitanya-caritamrta. As noted by Tamal Krishna Gosvami, “Every institution needs people like Kundall, unfortu¬nately our institution is not ready for it.”

Actually no institution is ever ready for it. Those with the conviction of the value of serving as a conscience must simply do the needful. Gradually the institution may come to appreciate it. Topics covered in the initial chapters are the value of “sweet tone” in literature of dissent and social commentary; orientation from one’s own conscience and integrity; taking charge of one’s life; cooperation for Srlla Prabhupada as dependence or as interde¬pendence; an eye-opening discussion on the distinction between truth-sayers and preachers of virtue, and the importance of a devo¬tee being an incurable optimist.

The remaining chapters are philosophical discussions relevant to specific current issues that affect our society. They enable read¬ers to get a clearer picture of things we believe, say, or do based on superficial assumptions or undigested, parrot-like repetition of Srlla Prabhupada’s words. Among the topics discussed is a de¬tailed analysis of what Prabhupada meant when he said “I blindly follow my Guru Maharaja.”

Also discussed, the imagined conflict between having firm faith in bhakti-yoga and developing an analytical mind. Along the way, some common misconceptions about the uttama-adhikari are dis¬pelled; and the ritvik heresy and other aspects of the guru issue are brought out.

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“For self-deception by its very nature, is the most elusive of mental facts. We do not see what we do not see. Self-deception operates both at the level of the individual mind, and in the collective aware¬ness of the group. To belong to a group of any sort, the tacit price of membership is to agree not to notice one's own feelings of uneasi¬ness and misgiving, and certainly not to question anything that chal¬lenges the group's way of doing things. The price for the group in this arrangement is that dissent, even healthy dissent, is stifled." (Daniel Goleman)

If you’ve read Our Mission: Part Two, you will recall that the cen-tral point of that volume, was the concept of alienation from one’s self or losing one’s conscience. Kierkegaard aptly explained the horror of consciencelessness in The Sickness Unto Death when he pointed out that we are aware of other losses—a finger, money, a spouse and so on—but this loss is so subtle it goes undetected. In Bhagavad-gita the Lord is even more specific: He says being lost to oneself is a demonic symptom. Subsequently, self-realization and self-estrangement go ill together.

**Part 5: “example of self-estrangement at work”**

The remainder of Part Two were mostly chapters of organiza-tional self-examination, showing evidence for this sort of alien¬ation in our society. There was considerably more material on hand, but it could not all be used. Nevertheless, here is an up to date example of self-estrangement at work:

The Managerial Board of ISKCON Vrindaban

ISKCON, VRINDAVAN / (U.R) 281124 / INDIA Tel 0565 / 442177

Diesday, April 29,1997

His Grace Kundali das Adhikari Vrindaban U.P.

Dear Kundali Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances.

All Glories to Srila Prabhupada !

AGtSP.

The managerial board of Vrndaban temple has decided to restrict your ac-tivities within the ISKCON premises.

While you are allowed to visit the temple to take darshan and eat in the restaurant, the board does not allow you to use our ISKCON premises as a platform for propaganda activities of any sort, be it selling your literature, organize the sale of your literature here and abroad, to proselytize, look for converts or spread your negative views on the GBC governing Body, Iskcon as a whole, Iskcon personalities or what not in this regard within the walls of our institution.

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Purity is our avowed quest, so according to our individual capaci-ties, it behooves us to point out illusion both in and outside of ISKCON, for the candle of enlightenment, if authentic, must shine it’s light in all directions. We are advised to give up the associa¬tion of people who practice such vices (asat-sahga-tyaga). And in Sri Harinama-cintamani, Bhaktivinoda Thakura writes that if someone says we are offensive for criticizing such people, that person should also be shunned.

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**Part 7: “Dear Reader, do we have a duty to point up such preposter-ousness or not?”**

As for my displaying Vaisnava qualities, he has hit on an area where I’m severely deficient. I offer no defense on this point. I can only hope against hope that I make some progress in this area of my life before dying. If any of my readers appreciate my efforts to inspire them to keenly distinguish reality from illusion, I pray that they will confer grace on me so I may develop a heart of molten gold, the acme of Vaisnava qualities,

In the meantime, I do not consider it a Vaisnava quality to bully and harass others, to side with power even after admitting the underdog is right, and then to write letters implying that oth¬ers are deficient in Vaisnava qualities. Neither will I consider for a moment the startling and novel proposal that I should desire the association of people who exhibit such qualities—bullying, harassing, siding blindly with power, and so on.

Like Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Srlla Visvanatha CakravartI Thakura advises that one should rigorously avoid associating with those Who display such symptoms. Offer them respect from a dis-tance. Srlla Prabhupada is more candid: He writes that such per¬sons should be completely neglected. Socrates was a good example in this regard. When offered the choice to recant his views or take poison, he quickly calculated the consequence of recanting. Real-izing that he would have to live with his integrity-deficient op-pressors, he said, ‘Til take the hemlock.”

Moreover, since when is speaking the truth not a genuine Vaisnava quality? Prabhupada used to say that two things are es-pecially important to a brdhmana, satyam and saucam. He said that a brdhmana “speaks the truth even to an enemy”. How, then, except in a dysfunctional atmosphere, can one be threatened with censure for doing his duty and be accused of being un-Vaisnava?

The implied message is “We will appreciate your association when you become like us, and keep your concern for your spiri¬tual master’s mission to yourself. Don’t preach about lancing boils, help us administer tranquilizers and blow on them and we shall welcome you with open arms. You will be one of us.” (In the next volume, in the chapter “Two Kinds of Conscience,” the means by which one succumbs to peer pressure and allows the peers’ voice to replace the voice of conscience is analyzed in detail. This letter is evidence of the result of that experience.)

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In this connection, in the book, Religions, Values, and Peak- Experiences, Abraham Maslow makes a staggering point: That in society people see

organized religion as the locus, the source, the custodian and guardian and teacher of the spiritual life. It’s methods, its style of teaching, its content (its dynamics) are widely and officially accepted as the path, by many as the only path, to the life of righteousness, of purity and virtue, of justice and goodness, etc.

That is the popular assumption. He then explains what is often the reality—that there are really two orientations to religion— (1) the “mystical” and individual, and (2) the legalistic and orga¬nizational. In genuine religious experience, both are integrated (or one strives to integrate them). Such persons are never reduced to the mechanical, blind, automatic, conscienceless response to events and situations. They seek to be insightful in all their af¬fairs. That is to say, they seek to be principle-guided, to be ratio¬nal and wise. Maslow notes, however (italics are mine),

Most people lose or forget the subjective religious experience, and redefine Religion (Maslow used a big R to designate the institutionalized, rigid, dogmatic approach) as a set of habits, behaviors, dogmas, forms, which at the extreme becomes en-tirely legalistic and bureaucratic, conventional, empty, and in the truest meaning of the word, anti-religious.

Indeed for most people religion is the letter of the law rather than the spirit of it. He goes on to say that the true message of that religion as brought by the founder who inspired people to pursue certain values—truth, love, justice, compassion, reason and so forth—are “forgotten, lost, transformed into anti-religion in the truest sense of the term. Instead of being something good it becomes something evil, as when God’s representatives manipu¬late, bully, coerce, and even psychologically destroy people.

What was good becomes evil without any apparent change in the content. Thus he writes, “Organized Religion, the churches, finally may become the major enemies of the religious experience and the religious experiencer.” Hear, hear, Mr. Maslow.

It was done for centuries in the name of Jesus and the Church, and one must now expect it to be done in the name of Prabhupada and ISKCON. And it is all because of bureaucratization, which causes people to strive to keep their power and position instead living a principle-centered life, in which love, truth, justice, and reason are always the paramount considerations. Prabhupada knew this very well; therefore he wrote, “Once there is bureau¬cracy the whole thing will be spoiled/’

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## Chapter 1: Sweet Tone and Other Considerations. 369

### Chapter 1 Part 1, “If I Become Involved in Someone's Likes and Dislikes, I Cannot Possibly Write the Simple Truth.”

**Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami writes in Caitanya-caritamrta Madhya 2.86**,

***“If I become involved in someone's likes and dislikes, I cannot possibly write the simple truth.”***

**Vidura to Dhrtarstra, Mahabharata 5.1.5,**

***“O king, the flatterers who speak sweetly are available in abundance. Rare is the speaker of sharp but beneficial words, and rare is the hearer who heeds them”***

Mention of truth-saying in the Preface gives rise to the need to make an important distinction—between the preacher of virtue, and the truth-Sayer—which is often confused. The discussion of this distinction, however, is in the chapter “Truth-Sayers Versus Preachers of Virtue.” For now, it will suffice to say that lacking an understanding of this distinction, some readers believe I should change the tone of the Our Mission books, make it “sweeter.”

Following in the footsteps of Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja, here and in other places in this volume, I respond to some of my critics. If I become involved in someone's likes and dislikes, I cannot possibly write the simple truth. Flatterers who speak sweetly are available in abundance. Rare is the speaker of sharp, but beneficial words, and rare is the hearer, who heeds them. You can say that Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, and Vidura Prabhu, “***have got my back***”.

Sweet tone is a nice sentiment, no doubt. So too is the idea of living in a tax-free state. Considering the situation, ISKCON is in, however, with leaders alienated from themselves; leaders who believe truth is not the issue; when we have rampant denial on several levels, along with the Little Prabhu syndrome; when we have problem-solving in the mode of passion and mundane men in the dress of Vaisnavas, when we have “power over” instead of “power to” dealings and devotees more oriented toward “having” than “being;” why emphasize “sweet tone?” I personally have experienced, all of the just mentioned negative leadership behaviors in my history in ISKCON.

If we are realists, the very nature of the message, that we have a mess on our hands, is not at all sweet. What will sweet tone do but deny us the sense of urgency we all ought to feel.

What is sweet about the revelation that anti-Krishna conscious dynamics prevail in ISKCON, and that this puts devotees into the deadliest of illusions, namely the illusion of progress out of illusion?

What is sweet about the fact that failure to address this problem constitutes a willful swindle, as ISKCON keeps on presenting Prabhupada’s books to the public and enticing people to give their life, wealth, intelligence, and words to the institution in his name?

What is sweet about the wreckage of peoples’ lives, and the high rate of devotees’ leaving, because the institution persistently fails to give them the right experience—that of empowering personalism?

What is sweet about ISKCON becoming a destructive cult in which socioeconomic pressure is openly used to manipulate and control others?

What is sweet about devotees having confused “authority” with “authoritarianism”?

What is sweet about devotees fostering crippling dependency instead of independent thoughtfulness?

There is nothing sweet about these facts. So, other than swindle or to prolong our own self-deception, why try to put it in a sweet package?

Why play “happy family?” Why take the long scenic route in an emergency?

Why not say it, present the evidence for it, and make a concerted effort to solve the problem?

When Harikesa Swami asked a godbrother why he had left the society, (but not the path of devotional service), after more than 25 years of steady service, the answer was,

“I do not like the atmosphere.”

To this Harikesa Swami replied,

“The atmosphere stinks!”

He could not put it sweetly himself. By “atmosphere” he means the dynamics within our society, which is precisely what we have been showing in these Our Mission books, and why we have such a stink atmosphere.

Where is the integrity in greater concern for form over content, by whining about “sweet tone,” which has saving face as its primary aim? How will saving face get us out of our difficulty?

Prabhupada’s prescription, is that we should completely reject those whose influence is destroying his mission from within. This calls for hard-headed realism on our part. Why do we keep confusing a soft head with a soft heart?

I can address the “tone” question in other ways. The accompanying cartoon is one example. It makes a salient point. The dynamics are oppressive and when one raises his voice in protest, that is held against him with “See how he talks to us (or about us).” This is a hopeless situation unless one has the courage to go on raising one’s voice. We must remember that solutions in sattva-guna, are poison in the beginning. One has to have the strength to delay gratification during this stage, until the nectar comes.

Another way to address the issue of tone, is with this question: Why on earth do devotees make an issue of “the tone”, after Srila Prabhupada has said so clearly that to speak the truth “only when it is palatable to others” is not truthfulness, that “the truth should be spoken in a straightforward way, so that others will understand actually what the facts are.” He then concludes with a clear declarative statement: “This is truth.” He spelled it out that the ultimate consideration is not “the tone”, but the truth, “the facts.” How can his followers, have such resistance to this precept?

Chapter 1 Part 2, “We Have a Serious Problem. The Thing to do is Make a Stark Assessment of it, and Establish the Solution and Then Apply It”

ISKCON has a serious problem. The they want to do the right thing; they would make a stark assessment of it and ascertain the solution and then apply it. What does “sweet tone” have to do with the issue? Some believe divine intervention will save ISKCON. Others simply accept the situation with, “Prabhu, there’s always problems in the material world,” which is neither a brilliant insight nor was it Prabhupada’s formula for problem-solving. Some even think it does not matter what dynamics ISKCON practices, as long as we distribute books and chant Hare Krishna. ISKCON says that the mission of Srila Prabhupada is a thoroughgoing success as it now stands.

All these types are living ostrich philosophy. The Our Mission books are intended to alert concerned ISKCON members of the horrid effects of authoritarianism, blind following, bureaucracy, and alienation from self—in short, cult dynamics.

The books are meant to inspire them, to take responsibility, for the legacy of Srila Prabhupada, and to apply the principles of problem-solving: Delaying gratification, responsibility, dedication to the truth, and openness to challenge, which were discussed in the first volume. The first step would be an unflinching look at the institution to define the problem.

There are numerous details, but the long and short of it all, is that ISKCON has deviated from the *parampara*. Our duty to the *parampara* is not just a matter of faithfulness to the teachings of Lord Caitanya; we *must* also preserve the right dynamic, or atmosphere in which, *sadhakas* can make authentic progress in spiritual life, by becoming thoughtful and wise, and free from doubt and delusion. *Parampara* also means passing on the true spirit, and intent of our acaryas. The experience of Krishna consciousness is the goal, not the mere having of a religious institution. The world already abounds with utterly useless boil-blowing religious institutions.

The true experience Krishna consciousness has been neglected, by assuming that it is automatically present, if we attend to institutional goals of opening temples, and distributing books, and initiating newcomers, and maintain the external spiritual standards. These Our Mission books prove that ISKCON’s naive assumption is a mistake, that in the resultant authoritarian scheme neither the perpetrators nor the victims thrive spiritually. Hence, we have only the illusion of progress out of illusion.

After more than 50 years, this cannot be sweet news no matter how it is packaged. And ISKCON ought to consider that the news is especially bitter to those directly or indirectly responsible for the problem; THE LEADERS. Unless one refrains from speaking the rude truth by silence, or by watering it down, whoever has massive resistance to hearing the truth, will find it bitter, harsh, unpalatable. Preaching virtue alone, or watering things down, or being silent, may raise one’s popularity, but neither of these will bring a solution.

How, for example, does one yell “FIRE!” sweetly? Of course, it is possible to grab a violin, and between the bars of a serenade, and with a twinkle in one eye, try to announce melodiously “The building is burning, do something, do something,” but that is not very convincing, is it? Who will believe the urgency of the situation and be galvanized into action by such a “sweet” presentation?

Just as one does not put on a white dinner jacket to crawl under one’s car, so a message should be dressed in appropriate language. The more urgent the situation, the less latitude there’ll be for sweet tone. And when there is rampant denial of the central cause of the problem; too much *rajas* and *tamas* in the ISKCON society, then sweet tone becomes an even more remote possibility as the situation becomes more urgent. Indeed, those who insist on sweet tone become suspect.

Conventional wisdom says that “sweet tone” means that people will be more receptive. Moreover, this does not make sense. When people lay down a condition, that they will not heed a message, unless it is sweet, compliance with which effectively allows them to avoid facing a problem squarely; how is that more receptive? Rather it prevents an accurate diagnosis, without which we cannot make an accurate prescription. If the doctor diagnoses cancer, but prescribes for a mild case of stomach cramps, for fear that his not being sweet will disturb the patient, beyond the risk of a malpractice lawsuit, what will be the value of such sentimental sweetness?

“But” someone wrote, “the people who need to hear your message ignore it because your tone seems like a personal action or that will cause outrage or offense.” Yes, the tone is a personal affront for those who have vested interest in the present system. No authentic analysis of our situation can avoid this effect. When those who have been unaccountable for a long time are finally made accountable, it always feels like an affront to them. As one ISKCON leader, referring to his peers, put it, “Their security is threatened.” This condition is unavoidable if we are to truly analyze the problems and address them. The astringent burns the wound, but it will disinfect as well.

The leaders’ first duty is to establish the kind of atmosphere that permeates the society. It should be a *sattvic* atmosphere, and this they have failed to do. And because the game in ISKCON is to hold the leaders in a sort of awe, whether deservedly or not. Naturally anyone who is going to show how they have flubbed their responsibility to Srila Prabhupada will be taken as some sort of affront, for not going with the flow. That person will be scapegoated, unless he serves their agenda, or says things in such a way that no real damage is done to the status quo, and at the end of the day, we get business as usual.

Chapter 1 Part 3, “Attacking Our Problem at its Root Means Drastic Changes for Those Who Have Vested Interest in Keeping the Way They Are”

Attacking our problem at its root means drastic changes for those who have vested interest in keeping the way they are. The root problems are:

* An authoritarian atmosphere.
* Alienation from conscience.
* Unaccountability, both financially and for things higher-ups say and do.
* The culture of blind following.
* And the use of socioeconomic pressure or emotional blackmail to keep people in line.

Only histrionic, thoughtful, and serious attitudinal changes will uproot these problems. Legislation or structural changes, or any other kinds of solutions, are all cosmetic, blowing on ISKCON’s boil.

Attitudinal changes will be reflected not by resolutions and promotions, but by shifts in the dynamics of the society. This process does not even begin to happen unless we shift from focusing on the symptoms to focusing on our core problems—a shift which is not about to happen, according to some GBC officers. They forecasted more cosmetic measures in the coming year. And, to our great dismay, others have declared that “Things will never change.” Attitudinal change is not in the wind. That is bad news. How to put this sweetly? This last sentence was written 27 years ago, and is still true today.

The good news is that we do not need the leaders’ consent or participation to implement attitudinal change in Srila Prabhupada’s society. If we change, they have to change. If our attitude of blind following changes, then they have to change. No legislation is required. No permission. No resolution. Nothing from the top is needed. If you decide “No more automatic homage to any leaders, rather I will cooperate with those who prove to be Krishna conscious, by their conduct, and neglect those who are not,”; hence, change will surely come.

To put it more tersely: If you decide to live a life of integrity, uncompromisingly, ISKCON will change. In a sense that is the tightest definition of a saintly person; someone who decides to live with one face and no more.

Institutionalized homage has to be stopped. Let our leaders command respect, not demand it. Simply stop playing the game. All that takes is for you to become a person of integrity. That decision is entirely within your power. No one can switch it on or off but you. The person of integrity is one who gives up the psychology of helplessness, and reserve reticence and is outspoken; —truthful, ational, fair-minded, and outspoken.

Let our leaders know that the child role is no longer acceptable. Initially, there will be consequences, but remember the discussion of problem-solving in the mode of goodness from the first chapter of “Raising Our Spiritual Standards”—that there must be the capacity to delay gratification, to take the poison up front, for the sake of the nectar at the end. That nectar is not an ISKCON that is problem-free or pain-free, but an ISKCON in which there is a better quality of life psychologically, and practically, for all members of the society. Lancing and cleaning out a boil is only possible if we have the ability to endure the immediate pain for the sake of the long-term relief.

In the summer of 1997 ISKCON held a conference on education in Germany. A professional facilitator was brought in to moderate the discussions. One of the first guidelines he established was that with respect to the meeting, everyone is equal, and everyone’s input is to be valued. In other words, he shot down from the onset the standard ISKCON practice of paying more attention to who is speaking, than to what is being said, that if one has a title, he can take the floor out of turn, and people are obliged to see merit in his utterances, even when merit is not there.

We pretend a naked man is fully clothed. Meanwhile others are less credible, not because they are naked too, but because they do not have a position. This is blatantly foolish, but the practice has passed as Krishna conscious among us for years. The facilitator did not care for such a convoluted, diminished system. He freed people to speak from their hearts for a change, instead of having to go the long scenic route just to pander to egos, rather than attend to the job at hand.

In the 1996 Mayapur meetings I read a poem making the same point before the full GBC body, explaining that if we are to talk about my concerns for the state of our society, then we must first put aside “this thing between us”—their titles, which implies their assumption that might is right, their assumption that because of institutional position, they automatically have the best Krishna conscious understanding in all matters, and other similarly useless baggage; and let us talk as godbrothers. After all, many of them used to talk with me as godbrothers before getting a title, and we had no problem then.

However, my proposal went over like I was the neighborhood derelict, proposing to join the Maharaja’s dinner party. Perhaps after the German experience, for I hear the meetings went very well, they will now appreciate how they use “etiquette” as a communications roadblock, and change their modus operandi from modus *rajas*, to modus *sattva*. Time will tell.

To the discriminating mind, these are all symptoms of a profound problem in ISKCON’s system. And because ISKCON alienates the very people it was created to attract; the intelligent, self-trusting, self-actualizing men and women, then it is an urgent problem. So, this is not an occasion for “sweet talk,” for saving face; it is a time for coming clean. It is a time for open, matter-of-fact communications. It is a time for hard-headed realism.

## Chapter 2: “The Rude Truth. Who Are the People Who Need to Hear This Message?”

**Tamal Krishna Gosvami:**

“People wonder about Kundali’s motives.”

**Ananda Prabhu:**

“But Maharaja, that argument applies equally to the people trying to shut him up.”

**Tamal Krishna Gosvami:**

“Granted. Actually, every institution needs people like Kundali, but our institution is not ready for it.”

In the previous chapter it was mentioned that a reader expressed concern that the people who most need to heed the message of the Our Mission series may not read the books, because of the tone being like a personal affront. This seems like a telling criticism. It deserves some discussion. One consideration, is that perhaps these books are not for people who hide behind this excuse, because most likely these are the persons whom Prabhupada said should be “completely neglected.”

Then, who are the people who need to hear this message? No doubt devotees will have different opinions as to the best answer. My own view simple: Those who come up with “the tone” or some other excuse not to read, perhaps making ad hominem attacks on the author and other irrelevancies, are not the persons for whom I write. I consider, categorically, that people who put form above content, already have a fundamental character flaw, and I am only too pleased to give them an excuse not to read my books. It is a relief to me. Perhaps someday I shall write for them. **But this series is not for them: rather, it is about them**.

The upshot is that the person who needs to heed the message of the Our Mission series, is the one reading these words right now. Let there be no misunderstanding of this point. If you are reading this book, the message is for you, and no one else. It is not for the leaders, for your wife or husband, your son or daughter, not for your authority, not for “the other guy,” not for anyone else. It is for you. Others may need the information here, but if they do not read these books, I am not writing for them: I write for the receptive—those who read the books. As for “sweet tone” I do not deny that there is value to tact in dealing with anyone. It is infinitely better than a state of all-out war. But tact and all-out war are opposite poles. Between these two extremes there is simply stating the truth in a straight forward way, which is the Vaisnava standard, although in our society we term this *aparadha*.

I also do not deny that as human beings, we all need a certain amount of stroking from each other, but when tact and stroking are imposed as the very terms whereby, we keep our illusions, rather than dispel them, then it is time to cast tact, and stroking, to the wind and speak what Kaviraja Gosvami called “the simple truth.”

This takes courage. If one cares about ISKCON, however, such courage is not difficult to muster. If one loves his profile more than ISKCON, then it is a different story. In any event, I’m write for all concerned about Prabhupada’s legacy, and who have dedicated their hearts to the *parampara*, and, do not want to deceive or be deceived. This could be a brand new bhakta, two minutes in the society. It could be anybody who is concerned and wants to tell truth from illusion (and do not forget that half-truths are also illusions).

Prabhupada’s legacy is not the sole monopoly of the leaders. His legacy is for whomsoever is fixed in following him. As he said, “Whoever follows is a leader.”

I’m writing for the person holding this book, and reading this line right at this moment. Your age, your education, your gender, your position in the Krishna consciousness movement or in society at large, does not matter. Whether you are a Prabhupada disciple or not, whether you have a title or not, none of these things matter. If you care about content over form, I’m writing for you. If you are reading this sentence, I’m writing for you. If you want to live free of illusions, whether in or out of ISKCON, I’m writing for you. If you understand that the candle of enlightenment must throw its light in all directions, I’m writing for you.

If you appreciate the central point of this quote from Emerson, I’m writing for you:

***“Who so would be a man, must be a nonconformist. Nothing is at last sacred, but the integrity of your own mind. . .. I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways.”***

If your heart’s desire is to be an independently thoughtful person for Srila Prabhupada, as per his desire, I’m writing for you. If you appreciate this description of a person of integrity, I’m writing for you:

“One of the things a calling to be an individual of integrity means, is a calling to speak out, to be outspoken. We are called to overcome the psychology of helplessness, of reticence. If we see a lie, we are called to name it a lie. If we see insanity, we are called to name it as such. If you are a preacher, you are called to preach the gospel, no matter how unpalatable it may be to your congregation. . . Yes, there are some who may find it upsetting, but perhaps they need to be upset. There are others who will respond to your outspokenness with gratitude for that leadership that gives them the courage to speak out about it.” (M. Scott Peck)

If you appreciate self-deception is a highly elusive mental fact, even in a group, and that the ticket to group deception is the unspoken fear of challenging the group’s way of doing things, and that the way out is to have the courage to break the silence and speak the truth, I am writing for you.

If you appreciate this passage from Daniel Goleman’s book on group and individual self-deception, I’m writing for you:

“It is the paradox of our time, that those with power are too comfortable to notice the pain of those who suffer, and those who suffer have no power.”

To break out of this trap requires, as Elie Wiesel has put it, the courage to speak truth to power. (Vital Lies, Simple Truths)

You could be a big leader, a sannyasi, a kid in gurukula, a shy mataji, an initiated or uninitiated devotee, it does not matter, I am still writing for you. The whole Our Mission series is for no one else but you.

## Chapter 3: The Simple Truth

### Chapter 3 Part 1: “The People These Our Mission Books Are For May Not be Born Yet”

“Critical thinking and dissent are antidotes to shared illusions, ensuring that
group schemas will be more in keeping with reality—or, at least, honest mistakes
rather than the product of groupthink.” (Daniel Goleman)

Here’s a thought: The people these Our Mission books are for may not be born yet. Bhavabhuti, one of India’s classic poets in the Sanskrit language, was not popular with his contemporaries. Presumably he did not bow and scrape to tact and political correctness and the various naked emperors of his time. He often came under attack, as is the fate of truth-sayers in every era. He once penned a verse as the invocation to one of his works:

People who speak ill of my work do not know that my effort is not towards them. Some day someone will be born who will appreciate my work, after all the world is vast and time has no end.

Bhavabhuti’s idea was that he wrote for honest men, whenever they may grace the planet. All writers should write for such a reader, and this is particularly applicable to Vaisnava writers. This is the meaning of the Bhagavatam verse which states that although imperfectly composed, such works are accepted by men who are thoroughly honest, who have integrity.

In the meantime, dear honest reader, do not think you are powerless to effect positive change in ISKCON. It was Margaret Mead who said something to the effect that “You should not think that you are one person therefore you are incapable of changing the world: that is the only way the world has ever been changed.”

And when you consider that you have the philosophy of Krishna consciousness behind you, and inside you, why have a disempowering outlook? Though outnumbered, Arjuna was not powerless against the Kauravas. Neither are you powerless against ignorance whether it appears in or outside our institution. It is up to you whether you choose to be an instrument for light (part of the solution) or an instrument for darkness (part of the problem). This is entirely your decision.

Note, however, light always conquers darkness. Satyam eva jayate. So if you want to be on the winning side, your decision is very easy. Yet this takes faith. Those who lack faith resort to cunning, thinking it expedient, wise. They make a grave mistake however, because Maya's guile is to condition us to cunning which is a rajasic symptom. It is nectar in the beginning, but always poison in the end.

As for light’s effectiveness against ignorance, you can experiment with this. Go into a dark room and turn on the light and see darkness vanquished instantly. So, our task is to be light-bringers; and to do this fully, we must stop calculating how to do it with no risk to ourselves. As Gandhi observed, cunning is not just morally wrong, but politically inexpedient in the long run, hence impractical. Also, we must not calculate how we will do things in such a way that we will be recognized for it. We must simply do our duty, by being persons of integrity. People resort to cunning because it seems to minimize risks. In this world, however, risks are reality. Rather than being controlled by our fears, we must simply bring light at every opportunity.

And we must never buy into the delusion that the candle of enlightenment shines only outside ISKCON, or perhaps in ISKCON, but not at this or that segment or tier of ISKCON. The game in ISKCON is to discourage critical scrutiny in the name of avoiding Vaisnava aparadha. In this connection, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has some wisdom for us. In Sri Harinama Cintamani, while describing three kinds of non-devotees we must shun, he warns us about the dharmadvaji, the pretender:

A dharmadvaji is a person who has no devotion or attachment in the heart but makes a show of it externally. He wears the clothes of a devotee to accomplish materialistic ends. . . a serious aspirant or sadhaka must shun such bad association. If anyone argues that criticizing such non-devotees is sadhu-ninda, his company must also be meticulously avoided.

In Bhakti-tattva-viveka, the Thakura makes the point in a slightly different way:

Those who preach that bhagavad bhakti is the highest dharma yet behave against the principles of suddha bhakti and instruct others against the principles of suddha bhakti can be especially harmful to us. In the name of bhakti they instruct us against the principles of bhakti and ultimately lead us onto a path which is totally opposed to bhagavad bhakti.

There will be several examples of such poor understanding of suddha bhagavad bhakti in the course of this volume. Here is one up front: One of our prominent preachers is fond of preaching, “Srila Prabhupada said three important things. (1) Follow the GBC. (2) Cooperate with devotees. (3) Do not leave ISKCON.”

Uncritical thinking, blind following, and staying in ISKCON equals automatic love of God are the unspoken subtext of the above supposedly three important things that Prabhupada preached. If we fall prey to group deceptions such as this, how will we be freed from illusion? Actually these three items are valid, provided we are becoming Krishna conscious by doing them. However, it is not automatic that one gets suddha bhakti because one is doing them. But this speaker makes no such distinction.

Yes, these are three things Prabhupada preached. But since the speaker is a prominent leader and the listeners are inexperienced devotees, they are apt to believe that these are the three most important things Prabhupada preached. If one is independently thoughtful, however, one knows instantly that this can’t be. If none of these items nor all of them combined can assure one of suddha bhakti, why are they so “important”?

### Chapter 3 Part 2: “We Must be Unhesitating to Shine the Candle of Enlightenment in all Directions”

For example, here are some important things Prabhupada preached: become Krishna conscious; become free from doubt and delusion; do not follow blindly; laulyam means eagerness to do whatever it takes to become Krishna conscious; accept an advanced devotee as guru; pure devotional service is not cheap; jealous and envious mundane men in the dress of Vaisnavas must be completely neglected; chant without offences; .devotional service must be free of fruitive activity and mental speculation . . .

Therefore, we must be unhesitating to shine the candle of enlightenment in all directions. Otherwise, we risk falling prey to irrational thinking and communalism or party spirit. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura considers party spirit one of the obstacles to pure devotional service (Sri Krishna Samhita):

The eleventh obstacle of the Vaisnavas is communalism, which takes the shape of the forest fire. Due to communalism a person cannot accept anyone else as a Vaisnava outside of his own group, and as a result he faces many obstacles in finding a guru and associating with devotees.

All this proves how important it is for us to fearlessly and unceasingly discriminate between mixed and pure devotional service. Thus the reader is asked to kindly pay close attention to the several examples of discriminating given herein.

Some readers may still be doubtful of the relevance of the Thakura’s advice about discerning between suddha bhakti and misra bhakti or between true Vaisnavas and dharmadvajis, because the other game in ISKCON is that everyone is a devotee and the above points could not possibly apply to us. This reasoning is faulty, since Srila Prabhupada has already declared that there are “many jealous and envious men in the Krishna consciousness movement.” And observation and analysis of symptoms confirm his warning.

But even if we accept the faulty reasoning, Srila Bhaktivinoda also describes the function of the madhyama devotee, the position of the preacher of Krishna consciousness:

The madhyama Vaisnava stage marks the beginning of pure Vaisnavism. He is required to distinguish the Vaisnava from the non-Vaisnava; serving a pure Vaisnava is his necessity. If he neglects to differentiate among the grades of Vaisnavas then he stands to commit Vaisnava aparadha. He has to continuously evaluate the Vaisnavas and serve the pure Vaisnava. (Harinama Cintamani)

Certain things are clear from this. That we must shun the association of pretenders. This requires us to be able to distinguish an authentic devotee from a pretender, who is likely to put on the biggest show of being the most devoted. Therefore the candle of enlightenment must look among those persons with the most careful scrutiny.

Also, there is no offense in evaluating Vaisnavas, rather it is our duty, because failure to do so means we can be deceived. It also may result in aparadha. Contrary to what is often preached among devotees, offenses do not result from discriminating, but from lack of doing so.

There is no offense in refusing to accept things blindly. Rather Prabhupada advises against blind acceptance. “Nothing should be accepted blindly.” For it is self-deception. It leaves us ripe to be swindled. If you play in this game, I give you ten to one odds that you will be conned.

You do not need a leader to achieve the state of integrity and listening to one’s conscience. You do not need any legislation or resolution or GBC approval. The philosophy already approves. All our acaryas approve.

You do need to make a decision, an unshakeable, unflinching resolve not to deceive and not to be deceived. That’s all. You need to decide not to enact irrational dealings and not to accept irrational dealings directed at you. You need learn the difference between humility and humiliation. For instance, Srila Prabhupada was ever so humble, yet who could walk all over him?

You need to become independently thoughtful for him and question things that do not make sense to you in the clear light of our philosophy. To do that, one must know the philosophy, of course. Prabhupada has taken care of his end by leaving us volumes of books to remove all our doubts and delusion. The question is, do we read them? And, do we read them in rajas or in sattva gunas, because these orientations give differing results?

Further, you need to stop adjusting the philosophy so you can deny your perceptions. You need to call black black, and white white. You need to vow to be a person of integrity. That’s all. Such realism is one with Krishna consciousness.

The more people who do this, the more quickly ISKCON will function as a positive alternative community and be attractive to intelligent people, rational people. The sooner we have a momentum toward independent thoughtfulness, the sooner we will stop co-operating out of crippling dependency, which does not please Srila Prabhupada no matter what you have been told. Instead we will co-operate out of empowering interdependency, which will please him to no end.

So you are not powerless at all. Do not let anyone fool you. In any social system it is the people who are the leaders because they determine what is acceptable and what is not. Only fools follow blindly and when they use the sublime Krishna consciousness philosophy to justify blind following that is only more foolishness: it is not devotion, as some believe. It is religion without science. It is religion as narcotic, as opiate.

Our situation is so bad that supposedly enlightened leaders preach that blind following is the essence of the guru/disciple or devotee/GBC relationship. This is cheating. Spiritual authority’s business is opening eyes, removing doubts, not rationalizing blind following. Otherwise, how could Vyasadeva declare that teaching people to discriminate between reality and illusion is the highest welfare work? How could we recite om ajnana timirandhasya? How could our Founder-Acarya declare that our movement is for training devotees to be independently thoughtful?

Unfortunately, so many are trying to escape from responsibility for themselves in the name of Krishna consciousness, they buy this nonsense about blind following, even in light of ISKCON’s erratic history with respect to gurus falling down; abuses of power and facility, and the high turnover of members.

We not only have cases of fall down. In some special cases, we have falling up as well, as we saw recently with the gopi-bhava fiasco in Vrindavana, where several gurus had to be “rectified”. How can one dare to be a blind follower with all this chaos going on?

In a dysfunctional, power-driven organization, however, making all these salient points is taken as a personal affront (only by those whom the shoe fits or those emotionally involved with them) rather than as a valid service. Indeed these are the best of times, because of the sankirtana mission, and the worst of times, because in this age, people are intellectually lazy, misguided, and generally deficient between the ears.

The leaders may never change, as several have promised, but that does not leave us with no alternative. We can change. The atmosphere will change when we change, when we resolve to co-operate for Srila Prabhupada by not being a blind follower, when we refuse to participate in groupthink. ISKCON will change when we have the courage to raise our voice against the wrong dynamics. That is the only way it will change. It will not change by legislation, conferences, or seminars, although these may help after we make an attitudinal change. Applying these things prior to an attitudinal change is only cosmetic. First we need an attitudinal change—and that is not a group effort but a matter of individual resolve. This is the simple truth of our situation.

The elements involved in our developing such resolve—self-trust, being conscience-centered, courage, and so on will be the main thrust of the last two volumes of Our Mission. Meanwhile, we will have one more volume presenting tools for diagnosing group dysfunction, subtitled Snags and

## Chapter 4: The Duty of a Vaisnava Writer

### Chapter 4 Part 1: “These Times Have Seen the Emergence of a New American Beed, the Truth-Teller as Hero”

These times have seen the emergence of a new American breed, the truth-teller as hero. The best example of the genre is the whistle-blower, usually a very ordinary person who somehow marshals the courage to tell the truth about some abuse. In doing so he violates the shared  lacunas that had both kept him silent and tied him to the group whose blind spots he lay bare.  The price he pays is the martyrdom groups have always dealt their betrayers. (Daniel Goleman)

One blind spot in our society is that we are conditioned to believe some are designated or empowered by the authorities to lay bare our blind spots and others are not. Actually, on behalf of the parampara, everyone has the right to think, to sift the data, to ascertain truth from illusion and to speak it according to one’s realization, with logic and reason. Whether he or she chooses to exercise that right or not is another matter.

We are conditioned to believe that “authorities,” meaning the institutionally anointed, will certify whether or not we are Krishna conscious. But when you eat, who certifies when you are full?

At the moment, our society is riddled with blind spots and our leaders are no exceptions. For example, one believes truth is not the issue, which is an amazing revelation, for it flies in the face of everything we have understood about a saintly person. Another believes that to address the problems of our group deceptions is to cause a disturbance in the holy dhama, which is also amazing. Isn’t living free of illusions is supposed to be a high priority for a Vaisnava? Another one, the same one who promised the GBC 25 more years of politics, nastiness, and manipulation “on the spontaneous platform,” wants that anyone who disagrees with him should get out of Prabhupada’s home. Another writes about shadow and substance, while giving us shadow in his attempt to hype us all about enthusiasm for the institution, so we would blindly follow, lest we become scholarly and indolent. Another calls himself Torquemadhu, alluding to and identifying himself with the head of the Spanish Inquisition.

Yet another, wants us to believe that following the GBC and staying in ISKCON is the essence of Prabhupada’s preaching, “Just stay in Prabhupada’s ISKCON, no matter what happens. Krishna will save us.” This sentimental appeal, with it’s hope for divine intervention, minus taking responsibility to solve problems ourselves, is supposed to pass as unalloyed devotion to Srila Prabhupada and firm faith in Krishna. Another one declares that the atmosphere stinks. He happens to be the same one who “feels no guilt” though he admits he does things he knows are wrong (which ranks right next to “truth is not the issue” in terms of the wonderment and awe it evokes), yet he is also bewildered as to why people leave. He also happens to be the one who believes that a disciple should blindly believe the spiritual master is on the same platform of realization as described in the gurvastaka prayer, as if mere belief will turn fiction into a fact. One leader shouted at me, “I do not care whether it is Krishna conscious or not, it’s what I want.” A truly excellent revelation of one’s level of service attitude, of one’s motivation. And in this very conversation, he was attempting to assert his right to be my authority in Krishna consciousness.

The list of eyebrow raising symptoms goes on and on. But despite all this, according to the erudite realization of yet another leader, lingering cynicism about such leaders is simply due to our ignorance. In other words, “If you see a naked emperor, get your eyes checked.” Regardless of our history, the defect is always in your eyes.

There can be no question of such deluded persons certifying for us what is suddha-bhakti, because they do now know what it is themselves. The task of illuminating these and other blind spots falls to whomsoever has the perception of those spots and the courage to break the taboo of the group and speak what has been unspoken in the service of keeping things comfortable. The principle consideration for that person is that he must hold himself accountable to his conscience first and foremost, not to the caprice of the crowd. Such a person cannot run with the herd.

Unfortunately, those who are not conscience-oriented, cannot fathom such a demeanor.

In a nutshell, a Vaisnava writer’s first duty is to tell the truth—both absolute and temporal—in an interesting way so that the reader can see. That and no more. His service is to open eyes. It is not his duty to first make the truth palatable. That could be yet another blind spot of the group—that we only want to hear what is palatable or it is the writer’s fault. Imagine the folly of the people chastising the small boy because his did not say the emperor was naked in a palatable way. The fact that a reader may not want to see or may not like what he sees is not in the writer’s responsibility. The writer’s responsibility is to speak the truth unambiguously. Narada Muni scolded Vyasa for failing to do this, even after compiling all for Vedas and the Mahabharata.

The Vaisnava writer who panders to the readers sentiments, or is dictated to by fear of “what they may say,” though he may be qualified to write for the ISKCON World Review, for example, he is not qualified to write on behalf of the parampara.

The problem is that many of us have only a superficial training in the philosophy. Thus we think hard-headed realism indicates a hard-heart and that a soft-head denotes a soft heart. Actually, many soft-headed people are quite hard-hearted. That’s not to say that there are no hard heads and hard hearts. We certainly have those as well.

### Chapter 4 Part 2: “Careful Analysis of the Vaisnava Character Reveals that a Hard-head and a Soft-heart is the Standard”

Careful analysis of the Vaisnava character reveals that a hard-head and a soft heart is the standard. This is what is meant when Caitanya Mahaprabhu is described as being soft as a rose and hard as a thunderbolt. Thus, contrary to what we have been conditioned to believe, the Vaisnava is not oriented to blind following, rather a Vaisnava’s orientation pivots around a will not to deceive and not to be deceived. Therefore Prabhupada taught us to accept nothing blindly. “Blind following,” he said, “is condemned.”

This is quite reasonable, yet people find it difficult to accept. People in this age are shocked by the simple truth but not by deceit. This can be discouraging; but only momentarily. For the preacher of Krishna consciousness is ultimately undaunted by anything. After all, there is nothing else to do but to go on distinguishing reality from illusion, truths from half-truths and from outright lies. The odds are sometimes overwhelming, but the true preacher is unflinching in the face of the odds.

Indeed we saw in Srila Prabhupada that the greater the odds the greater his enthusiasm. It cannot be any other way if one is genuinely free from doubt and delusion. One then lives from the inside-out. One gives up cunning and diplomacy. One wears only one face all day. This is all bewildering to those who have many faces, like the modern politicians. One prefers to be conscience-guided; and, of course, conscience does not necessarily guide everyone in the same way.

The true preacher knows beforehand that among many stars, there are just a few moons, sometimes none at all. He knows that when the caravan goes by many stray dogs will bark. He knows that when one is selling diamonds customers are going to be very few. How can these things deter him, and why should he pander to the sentiments of the masses, whose taste leans towards costume jewelry? Why cater to that segment of the group that prefers blowing on a boil than having it lanced?

People are shocked by honesty, never mind what they outwardly profess, but that does not mean a preacher should be any less honest or should present the truth ambiguously. A true Vaisnava, according to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, wants to be as unambiguous as possible, especially when the issue at hand is one as urgent as one's spiritual master's mission. The appropriate mood is hard-headed realism all the way. Considering ISKCON’s history, except for those overwhelmed by sentimentality or the fear of freedom to think for themselves, who can contest this practical outlook?

Here I take the liberty of rephrasing the relevant thoughts of Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja addressing his critics (Mad. 2.85-87):

If one says that the Our Mission is not understandable by the common devotee and that the tone is too sharp, I reply that what I have described reflects a true telling of the ISKCON experience for many members until 1997 and for me to satisfy everyone is not possible.

In this Our Mission series, there is no conclusion contradictory to the parampara. I have written these books to describe errant group dynamics as I have experienced them within the Krishna consciousness movement. If I become involved in someone's likes and dislikes, I cannot possibly write the simple truth.

If one does not understand in the beginning but continues carefully studying the analysis and other data, the wonderful effects of the Our Mission books will bring about an understanding of practical Krishna consciousness; of the importance of accepting nothing blindly; and of subtle illusions. The reader will get tools, knowledge, and language to identify clearly the situation, and the courage to become independently thoughtful. From this development of heightened awareness and a supple intelligence, gradually, one will become baffle-proof and this will lead to distinguishing reality from illusion.

To the original wording of the verses, Srila Prabhupada commented (remarks in parentheses are mine):

Srila Kaviraja Gosvami and one who follows in his footsteps do not have to cater to the public. Their business is simply to satisfy the previous acaryas and describe the pastimes of the Lord. (Or their business is to satisfy the previous acaryas by routing ignorance both in and outside of ISKCON). . . .It (such literature) is simply meant for those devotees who have dedicated their lives to the service of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

. . . The author says, however, that he cannot consider the opinions of those who become attracted or repelled by such things, because one cannot write impartially in that way. . . . If he had been carried away by someone's likes and dislikes, he could not have written of such a sublime subject matter in such an easy way. The actual facts are understandable to real devotees. When these facts are recorded, they are very congenial to the devotees, but one who is not a devotee cannot understand. Such is the subject matter for realization.

The same reasoning as the above quote applies to raising awareness of group dysfunctionality. Mundane attachment to sweet tone or various other social rationalizations—the accepted plausible lies of our particular circle—cannot arouse the ability to see through bluff and ignorance. It cannot arouse the capacity to recognize Maya when she puts on the garb of Krishna consciousness. Mundane attachment to tone impedes us from becoming hard-headed realists. Therefore Bhaktivinoda Thakura advises that preachers must constantly evaluate the devotees.

### Chapter 4 Part 3: ““I Write Because I Believe in the Power of Open Debate to Sort Things Out, and to Make Things Better”

Lastly, for better or worse, I am—by calling, by nature and inclination, or by sheer tiredness and frustration—a writer. My trade is to question certainties, social or group rationalizations, to question the status quo, and perhaps, above all, to say what I think. As one literary gadfly has put it “I write because I believe in the power of open debate to sort things out, to make things better”, also, to inform and to entertain, to stimulate thinking to relieve stress, to ease one's conscience, and to induce crisis, there by bringing about the birth pains of new developments. I assert this right up to and including the right to be wrong, to make a mistake and even make a complete ass of myself.

And I maintain that to be limited in these fundamental human rights, to repressed, or persecuted, even within the institution of ISKCON, and under whatever pretext tells me nothing more than that I’m not free, that I’m a slave. I refuse, categorically, to accept this as a condition of my existence and as part of the legacy of Srila Prabhupada. I refuse, categorically, to accept it as a condition for any follower of his.

My heart's desire therefore is that people read and accept my books not because “Kundali is such a sweet writer. He makes me feel warm and fuzzy all over,” or because they like me personally, or because I’m “authorized” by the GBC, but because (1) the work is Krishna conscious in that my conclusions do not deviate from the parampara, (2) the presentation makes sense in that the data adds up, and it appeals to logic and reason, (3) it doesn’t go the long scenic route but states the truth and the supporting evidence unambiguously, (4) because my books are filled with hard-headed realism, and (5) readers gets useful tools to respond productively to life; they get light to illuminate the path forward, they get inspiration to apply the philosophy and to discriminate more, to think for themselves, and to cooperate for Srila Prabhupada, not as crippled, dependent beings, but as empowered interdependent Vaisnavas, as messiahs. He wants this. He wants it very much.

Dear reader, if hard-headed realism is unappealing to you, I offer no apology. All I can do by way of consolation is point out that if the above reasons are not sufficient value for you, your choice is obvious. No one is obliging you to read on. There are scores of other books which will not threaten your sensibilities, nor your attachments, nor your emotional investments, nor your institutional illusions, nor your socioeconomic ease, there are authors whose only business is to stroke you, why not ditch this one and read one of those?

## Chapter 5: Truth-Sayers versus Preachers of Virtue

### Chapter 5 Part 1: “The Devil’s-Advocate[[1]](#footnote-1) Can Save the Group from Itself”

What the therapist does for the patient, a lone voice can do for the group—if he is willing to break the hold of the group’s blind spots. In his suggestions for countering groupthink, Irving Janis suggests that a group designate one member as a deviant—that is, as a critical evaluator of what goes on, raising objections and doubts. The devil’s advocate can save the group from itself, making sure it faces uncomfortable facts and considers unpopular views, any of which can be crucial for a sound decision.” (Daniel Goleman)

Actually, designating one member as a deviant (as the conscience for the group) can itself be politicized. Someone may get designated on the unspoken condition that he can only critically evaluate certain things or certain people and not others. So the designated lone voice may not always work. As Goleman explains, any lone voice willing to be outspoken can do the job of truth-sayer and help save a group from itself. Of course, if several voices are raised, the process can happen more quickly.

And the voice or voices do not have to be sweet. Making sweetness a condition is just another one of the blind spots that a group may harbor, as is the case in our group. The important thing, the vital thing, is that the voice or voices must speak the truth.

Our fixation with “sweet” tone has four roots. One root is that instead of being hard-headed realists, who accept or reject nothing blindly, we are sentimental, soft-headed surrealists, who want to live in “the nectar”, which is our way of opiating ourselves, mistaking a dull state of consciousness as quiescence of the mind. Many prefer this simplism over the authentic wisdom that results from deep contemplation of the philosophy, seeing things from different angles of vision, and hard-headed realism.

Since intellectual laziness is the outlook of the majority in any group or community, even on the top level of our society, when a realist comes along, he or she is viewed as a misfit. This is not surprising, considering that in the name of cooperate for Srila Prabhupada we have been encouraged to dull our analytical faculties rather than live in a state of heightened awareness, but how can this be pleasing to Krishna?

The second root of the bewilderment about tone is the propaganda of the power-elite, who have vested interest in us not discriminating, because it allows them to go on being unaccountable in the name of being advanced. They are specifically motivated to disparage the eye-opening Our Mission books or the author, as illustrated in the Introduction. Any written or spoken statement which threatens the status quo, even remotely, is automatically defective in tone. It will not be heard, sung by those who are thoroughly dishonest. This is the farcical standard we, who claim to be the intellectual class, have instituted in the name of elevated Vaisnava dealings.

Some of us want to feel like a child guided by a benign father. It feels secure. It feels like total surrender. We have made an emotional investment in this institution and do not want to find out that a dissenting voice may be right. We perhaps cannot bear the shock of disillusionment. This is certainly the truth in some cases.

Some of us prefer to sail around a problem than to face it.  Thus when an authority figure says “His books are seasoned with offences” or we read a few pages and the tone of realism is not sweet, we are relieved to have an excuse to ignore the message.

Moreover, we say, “He criticizes ISKCON”, as if this has been enshrined somewhere as one of the ten offenses in chanting the holy name.  This is all because of not being taught to think critically.  Thus we cannot see that there is a big difference between criticizing ISKCON and criticizing maya within ISKCON.

Criticizing ISKCON is not the issue. The issue is whether or not the shoe fits. If we understand that the candle of enlightenment gives light in all directions, then ISKCON is no less a place to discriminate than any other locality on this planet. And ISKCON’s history proves it.

And if we are to function as madhyama adhikaris, we should embrace all the responsibilities that come with that stage, including the duty to evaluate devotees so we can show proper respect as per their status as well as avoid being deceived. A devotee of the Lord is simple, but also wise.

The third root of the sweetness malady is that many of us simply have not penetrated the philosophy deeply enough to understand what are the ultimate considerations in this matter. Thus we are still influenced by conventional notions about tact and about how a Vaisnava should and shouldn't preach. We still believe the convention that truth should be spoken palatably or not at all is the uppermost consideration. Thus Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's disciples used to criticize his “chopping technique”, because of their mundane conventional stance. We should cleave to spiritual convention and not try to dovetail our conditioned ideas with the philosophy.

The fourth root of the problem with sweet tone, is related to the first, simplism. It manifests in a blurred distinction between the preacher of virtue and the truth-sayer. Our common assumption is that a good preacher is one who doesn't use names and preaches virtue. His preaching themes are unity, tolerance, compassion, mercy, reform yourself, do not criticize, cooperate for Srila Prabhupada, do not be like the fly but like the bee, do not look for pockmarks on the moon, none of us are up to snuff anyway, and so forth. With these themes it is easy to preach in sweet tones. After all, it exposes no one.

The truth-sayer also preaches these virtues, but he goes further. He preaches discrimination. He says “This is reality; this is illusion.” He shows how the emperors are naked and blind, for he knows that there is grave danger—the illusion of progress out of illusion—when the blind follow the blind. He says why the emperors are naked, and he teaches how to see for yourself. Unless we can see these things, how can we get out of self-deception? Therefore, we are advised to understand vidya and avidya side by side.

### Chapter 5 Part 2: “The Practice of Virtue is Meant to Have Us Deceive No One and Not Be Deceived by Anyone”

The truth-Sayer understands that when the atmosphere is corrupt the mere preaching of virtue serves to opiate rather than enlighten. It is an inappropriate measure, like having a filthy temple yet preaching tolerance instead of cleanliness. The practice of virtue is meant to have us deceive no one and not be deceived by anyone, to enable us to respond appropriately and productively to life. If virtue fails to do that, what is the practical value? Then a life of virtue is not worth living.

As the social philosopher Eric Hoffer pointed out, there are two kinds of corrupt members of organizations: Those corrupted by power and those corrupted by weakness—i.e. persons who lack the ability to resist those corrupted by power. Neither of these are in touch with their conscience. We should know that both these corrupt members of spiritual institutions love preachers of virtue. The reason is simple: Preaching virtue poses no threat to the private agenda of the power-corrupted. They go wild over the preachers of virtue. They quote them and like to be seen in public with them. They make such preachers into celebrities. In fact the corrupt preach virtue as well.

Virtue can make us forgiving and merciful; but virtue can also be a vice. When virtue is not properly understood, it can make us tolerant beyond the call of duty. It can make us accept humiliation as humility. When we forget that being forgiving and merciful must be preceded by admission of wrongdoing, virtue can be as unloving as excessive intolerance.

Virtue, when misapplied, can dull our reasoning faculties. It is thus easy to see why corrupt spiritual leaders exalt preachers of virtue. Their sweet preaching puts us in a hypnotized, opiated, docile state, most conducive to being manipulated by those working a private agenda within an institution such as ours. Ergo the preacher who makes us docile is exalted in our institution; and we have no shortage of such preachers.

Ironically, those corrupted by weakness, either out of fear of reprisal or from simplism, thinking their dulled state symptomatic of a quiescent mind, love preachers of virtue. They love them for the same reason as the corrupt leaders, namely that the virtue preachers put no pressure on them. Thus we have a sure-fire recipe for a foundering social system, in which only a few may realize their individual creative and productive potential as human beings and be successful as devotees. This is not in keeping with Prabhupada saying “Everyone of us is messiah.”

Commonsense dictates that just as sweetness is conducive for putting us into a stupor, a sharp, jarring tone is useful to get us out of it. Thus Mahatma Vidura said to Dhrtarastra (Mahabharata 5.1.5):

sulabhah purusa rajan satatam priyavadinah

apriyasya ca pathyasya vakta srota ca durlabhah

O king, the flatterers who speak sweetly are available in abundance, but rare are those who utter sharp but beneficial words, and rare are those who heed them.

Both the corrupt weak and the corrupt powerful always find a way to fault the messenger so they can avoid facing the message. Truth-sayers must understand psychology well enough not be distracted by these luckless types. They are fundamentally dishonest people to whom being stroked is more important than truth, for whom form is greater than content. The corrupt powerful can keep their agenda and the corrupt weak can feel secure.

Truth-saying is for honest people. Therefore the Srimad Bhagavatam says that such persons, even if their attempt is imperfectly composed, “are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest.” The phrase “purified men who are thoroughly honest” simply means persons of integrity. Those lacking integrity are excluded from this verse. Why should one exert oneself for people lacking integrity?

History has shown that truth-sayers always have to bear the wounded-animal-response from the naked emperors, for though naked, they wield power. On the other hand, the truth-sayers are not powerless. If their faith in satyam eva jayate is firm, history has shown that they always prevail. Therefore it is said, “One man with faith is a majority.”

A preacher of virtue must be hard-pressed before he would follow in the footsteps of the truth-sayer. The virtue-preacher’s favorite gambit is to wait until the truth-sayer has turned the tide and then quickly come on stage for the celebration, as if they were part of the action from the start. Their justification for inaction: Prudence.

Like all other virtues, prudence can also be a rationalization—for fear. The emotion of fear makes us conflicted and uncomfortable, sometimes unbearably so. We can get out of this uncomfortable condition in two ways: (1) Exhibit courage. (2) Disguise the fear, rationalize it as a virtue. Either way our discomfort evaporates into nothingness. However, unlike the first option, the second solution takes considerably less effort. A simple mental adjustment and we feel much better.

Therefore, for the majority, because weakness corrupts the many, rationalizing fear as prudence is the first option. It hides fear very well. Some hasten to point out that “A devotee is fearless, except for fear of making offenses.” Correct. But where is the offense in discriminating between truth and illusion and encouraging others to do the same? These things are only wrong or offensive in authoritarian systems. Otherwise, discriminating and speaking facts, or logical conclusions drawn from the facts, something which Srila Prabhupada did daily, can never be offensive. On the contrary, this is part and parcel of being Krishna conscious. It is our duty, a routine part of our day.

Preachers of virtue, however, unless cornered, puts the responsibility on the masses to see clothes on the emperor instead of siding with the small boy. They imply that out of fear of Vaisnava aparadha we should twist our perceptions to see the rajas-tamas actions of others as pure, transcendental, beyond the pale of our comprehension. They are apt to make award-winning observations like this: “Lingering cynicism about the leader is due to ignorance.” (It could never be due to experience. That would be pure fantasy). How could naked emperors not love such a preacher?

At least in the fairy-tale, when the boy pointed out that the emperor was nude, the citizens were not so crooked that they faulted the boy's tone.  Rather they appreciated him for speaking the rude truth and jarring them out of their illusion; but that was earlier in Kali-yuga.  Things have declined a bit since those days.

Truth-sayers teach critical thinking, which is the greatest threat to the corrupt.  The last thing they want around them is a thinking man or woman.  While virtue-preachers stress the importance of not deceibing, the truth sayers preach both sides of the coin: Do not deceive, and, equally important, do not be deceived.

There is no way in the fourteen worlds that those corrupted by power or by weakness are going to like this kind of message. Nevertheless, it is what Prabhupada stood for. He was not a virtue-preacher. None of our acaryas were virtue-preachers. They were truth-sayers, one and all. And they are our role models. We are meant to be truth-sayers too.

### Chapter 5 Part 3: “When Srila Prabhupada Says Nothing Should be Accepted Blindly, He is Telling us to be Hard-headed Realists”

When Srila Prabhupada says nothing should be accepted blindly, he is telling us to be hard-headed realists, to be truth-sayers. When he says that preaching is like throwing a brick among a pack of dogs, because “those that get hit yelp the loudest”, he is describing the truth-sayer. His definition of satyam in Bhagavad-gita makes it clear that he favors truth-saying over virtue-hoaxing. This is particularly so when we write primarily for a Vaisnava audience. He says that one can know his preaching is effective if people get disturbed by it. Only truth-sayers do this.

Virtue preachers become celebrities instead. They are crowd-pleasers. They are attached to being popular. Occasionally, they display a little courage and speak out about something, but that is always calculated to further their popularity, which they rationalize as “incremental changes” and “in like a needle out like a plough.” It is really self-deception and duplicity, because they enable the corrupt to continue exploiting our mission and destroying it from within by disheartening the intelligent devotees. Yet the virtue-preachers believe that their duplicity is really their love of harmony shining through.

The virtue-preachers are really boil-blowers. With high-sounding rhetoric, which they believe themselves, they confuse the innocent. They have not accepted in their hearts that the highest welfare work is to distinguish reality from illusion for the benefit of all, which includes themselves. Therefore they succumb to the group deceptions while proclaiming interest in reality. Their flattery and sweet demeanor wins hearts, but the blind spots remain. Thus they impede the work of the truth-sayers. That is their only real accomplishment. Failing to model themselves in the fighting spirit of our acaryas, they have not realized that preaching discrimination includes virtue, but preaching virtue does not automatically include discrimination. Ultimately, virtue preachers impede the work of Srimad Bhagavatam.

Part of the problem is that preachers of virtue believe that being popular is a symptom of genuine spirituality. They are not conscience-guided people. Rather they rely on popular opinion to guide their thinking. They appear to be inside-out oriented, but mostly they are outside-in people. Or they consider safety or expediency to be key considerations. The sixteenth century reformer, Martin Luther, has revealed the vices behind the pious rhetoric of the conscienceless who practice vice in the guise of virtue:

Cowardice asks the question, Is it safe? Expediency asks the question, Is it politic? Vanity asks the question, Is it popular? But conscience asks the question, Is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience says it is right.

Virtue preachers cannot live by this code. Yet they like to project that theirs is a higher, more realized platform than that of the truth-sayer, that they are sensitive, tactful and believe in incremental changes. And they really believe in the value of what they do and about the unity of everyone involved.

By switching the language they try to cast negative aspersions on the truth-sayers. Thus when a truth-sayer advocates keener discrimination, they say “He’s too critical”; when he advocates wisdom, they say, “He wants prominence”, or “He is a jnani”; when he demands justice, they say, “He’s angry”; and when he advocates reform, they say, “He wants revolution”.

Another part of the problem is the desire for peace. Most people believe that the litmus test of spirituality is peacefulness. Indeed it is, but people do not know what peace means. We are not here to be peaceful in the sense of having an easy life. We are here to serve in all conditions. War, peace, happiness, distress, fame, infamy—these make no difference to us. Being freed from doubt and delusion we go on with our service to the parampara, in all circumstances distinguishing reality from illusion, “for the benefit of all”, which includes ourselves, and that is our peace.

Srila Prabhupada often depicted the role of a preacher as a declaration of war on Maya. Our peace is derived from our willingness to engage in this war. The so-called peace of the virtue preachers is despicable to a Vaisnava.

We are eternal servants of Krishna. Eternal does not mean starting tomorrow. Eternal means right now and forever. So we are here to serve the spirit and intent of the parampara. When we do that with conviction and faith, sincerely, then we are peaceful amid any dualities or conflict. If we are on the side of truth, we are automatically peaceful. Arjuna wanted to be peaceful and mellow by going away from battle, but Lord Krishna said, “Forget it, Arj, ol' pal. Give up this petty weakness of heart. It does not become you, a person who knows the progressive values of life. Distinguishing reality from illusion is a battle and I want you to fight without considering your happiness or distress.”

We are at war with illusion, whether the illusion manifest in or outside of the community of devotees makes no difference. We have to fight, not go find peace. This is the point of Bhagavad-gita. The battlefield is a metaphor for life and Arjuna represents Everyman. We have to orient ourselves like Arjuna, not try to sail around our duty to be artificially advanced. This is the lesson of Srila Prabhupada’s life. Falling for the siren song of those who entice us to be higher, before we have learned to be dutiful like Arjuna is our equivalent of leaving the battlefield before the battle.

Srila Prabhupada told me that Bhagavad-gita is our ABC's. He said, “When you understand your ABC's thoroughly, then you can easily understand more complicated words. You can understand our graduate work, Srimad Bhagavatam, then you can understand our postgraduate work, Caitanya-caritamrta, Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu, like this.”

In other words, if we miss the point of Bhagavad-gita, how can we become postgraduates? We would be bluffing, and indeed such is the case in many instances.

We should not think Arjuna was not peaceful. At first he, like the virtue-preachers, had the wrong conception of peace, that it is all about avoiding conflict. So Krishna had to set him straight. Peace in this world is not, as we often see depicted in the wishful conception of mundane poets and artists—some idyllic garden where the lion lies down with the lamb. Peace comes from having a clear conscience.

The only way for a Vaisnava to have a clear conscience is to cleave to the will of the Lord in all circumstances. Therefore the first duty of a sadhaka is to understand the will of the Lord. In this way, one is freed from all doubt and delusion. This freedom is achieved under the guidance of the bona fide representative of the parampara and careful study of the sastra. Then, as Prabhupada writes, “when one knows the transcendental philosophy one acts without hesitancy.” This is ultra peaceful. Indeed, there is no other meaning to peace.

Therefore, in the midst of battle, Arjuna was peaceful, because he gave up his sentimental conception. He surrendered. We have to learn to become peaceful like that—by surrendering and being truth-sayers in the battlefield of life.

Again, Srila Prabhupada's life is the model for us all. He was peaceful by accepting greater responsibility on behalf of the parampara. Other conceptions of peace is show-bottle, a sham, a swindle. If we preach other conceptions, we deceive; if we believe those who preach them, we are deceived.

## Chapter 6: Incurable Optimism

### Chapter 6 Part 1: “Some May Say the Situation in ISKCON is Too Far Gone. The Society Cannot be Pulled Back from the Brink. We are Doomed to Accept Dysfunctional Dynamics or Go Away”

There you go, man. Keep as cool as you can. Face piles of trials with smiles.

It riles them to believe that you perceive the web they weave.

Keep on thinking free. . . (The Moody Blues)

Some readers say the situation in ISKCON is too far gone. The society cannot be pulled back from the brink. We are doomed to accept dysfunctional dynamics or go away. Admittedly things do seem bleak at times. The incessant politics can be enervating, disheartening, depressing. As one devotee wrote: “It makes some devotees prefer to jump off the boat and into the ocean.”

Nevertheless, extreme pessimism and hopelessness is not proper Vaisnava consciousness. Again, this is like Arjuna before the battle, wanting to leave everything to the dysfunctional Kauravas. Krishna did not want that, however; and He does not want it now either. Krishna does not want us to abandon ISKCON and leave it to the dysfunctional or irrational. Just as He wanted Arjuna to apply the wisdom received from Krishna, so the Lord wants us to pull ourselves together and apply the wisdom we have received in parampara.

A Vaisnava is an incurable optimist. A Vaisnava has fighting spirit. A Vaisnava believes with utter and unflinching conviction that as long as there is life there is hope. “Never say die” is an apt motto for a Vaisnava, because he knows that the Lord helps those who make a sincere effort to help themselves. Indeed, a Vaisnava understands that the Lord paints a bleak picture just so His devotee can respond with heightened optimism, heightened faith. At that time the Vaisnava finds strength in the tat te ‘nukampam susamiksamano verse. The spirited response of His devotee in the face of adversity gives pleasure to the Lord, and to the devotee as well.

The lesson of Dhruva Maharaja fighting the yakshas is that a Vaisnava fights to the finish, and owing to this spirit, a Vaisnava is never finished. When Churchill was called to give an inspirational talk to his old boyhood school, the great statesman got behind the lectern and this was his entire speech: “Never, never, never give up.” This is the diehard spirit that we should all have. This is a Vaisnava spirit. It is this very spirit that inclines the Lord to intervene and carry what we lack.

In fact, as already mentioned, the longer the odds, the more enlivened a Vaisnava becomes. Adversity did not make Prabhupada shrink. Adversity got him going. Adversity brought out the best in him. Adversity gave him life. His slogan was: “Without a hard struggle, there cannot be a glorious victory.”

He said he did not want us simply to eulogize him for this quality but to follow in his footsteps. This is possible if we take his instructions to heart and become free from doubt and delusion. Then there is no bewilderment and no hesitancy to act.

We have to overcome the disempowering view that hesitancy is a symptom of humility. It isn’t. Hesitancy in one who has knowledge in parampara is petty weakness of heart; it is lamentation, tamo guna. No Vaisnava should have this problem. Prabhupada wrote volumes to dispel ignorance. We have no excuse for not knowing the transcendental philosophy. Now we need the courage to act without hesitancy.

Our mission is finished if you believe it is. Similarly it is saved if you believe it; and if you act. Arjuna had to fight his teachers and family members in order to pass the Lord's test of courage. Our test is to stand up and claim our right to the legacy of Srila Prabhupada, by each of us deciding what sort of society we will accept as truly representative of his vision. Every follower of his has the right to have a say if he or she wants, and we should render a priceless service to Srila Prabhupada and the future generations of his followers by claiming our right. We are being cheated if “cooperate for Srila Prabhupada” somehow translates into loss of our spiritual birthright and we become blind followers instead.

### Chapter 6 Part 2: “Keep in Mind That Tests of Courage are Opportunities to Rehearse in Preparation to Face the Ultimate Test of Courage, Death”

We must also keep in mind that tests of courage are opportunities to rehearse in preparation to face the ultimate test of courage, death. The only way to prepare for a test is to practice and it will take lots of courage to change the current system. So our present predicament is an opportunity disguised as a problem. We should take full advantage of the opportunity to practice courage.

No power outside ourselves can determine whether we pass or fail this test. And it really is not as difficult as it seems. All it takes is for us to overcome the psychology of helplessness, of reticence. This is simply a matter of a decision, a resolve—that henceforth I shall be a person of integrity.

That's all. Nothing more is required. This decision requires no mystical experience or esoteric realization. One does not need to experience a radical transformation in character or personality. One does not need guru’s sanction, spouse’s sanction, or GBC sanction to decide to be a man or woman of integrity. Neither does the decision require extra japa vows, austerities, scholarship, or any other special criteria. It is not a matter of gender, age, education, time in the process, varna or asrama. It does not even require initiation. It is not even a matter of having great intelligence. Anyone can do it. A youngster in gurukula can make this decision.

Immediately, instead of fear and trembling, instead of a victim’s mentality, we will have a victor’s outlook. And what a difference that makes.

As soon as you resolve to be a man or woman of Vaisnava integrity, you are a winner. A great weight is lifted from your shoulders. Your powers of discrimination begin to flex their muscles; you will have no difficulty in calling a lie a lie, in seeing insanity for what it is—along with swindle, deception, foolishness, whimsy, and so forth. You will be able to tell darkness from light even when darkness is disguised. You will be asammoha, free from doubt and delusion.

Once you commit to integrity, you will loathe the association of those who lack it and hanker for the company of those have it. This will bring success on all sides—automatically the mundane men will be completely neglected and you will be in the best association, on the basis of individual character, not an institutional rubberstamp.

Another important by-product of having integrity is that one loses the friends and enemies basis for discriminating, which is a dead-end spiritually. It is discrimination in rajo-guna. Instead, being centered in one's own sense of integrity elevates one to discriminating strictly on the basis of truth and illusion, which is recommended as the highest selfare work, and which is discrimination in sattva-guna.

This orientation transcends institutional boundaries and prejudices. One realizes that all those on the side of truth are on the same side. Whereas friends and enemies is an ever-shifting foundation, taking a stand with truth against illusion places one on a bedrock foundation: But it does not mean life will be easy.

A life of personal integrity will not lead to a pain-free existence for the individual or problem-free institution. But this is not the goal. A pain-free, risk-free, problem-free existence is a fool's paradise. It is not any more the goal than the hollow notion of peace already shot down in the previous chapter. Individual or organizational health does not pivot around a problem-free existence. Personal and organizational health turns around actively and effectively addressing our problems. That is what the human form of life is all about—growth through problem-solving.

If we lack the courage for this, we must seek the association that will help us to get it. The capacity for problem-solving is intrinsic to our ultimate aim in devotional service, becoming a servant of the servant of the Lord of the gopis. We have to experience fearlessness before we can experience gopi-bhava, for without transcending our material emotions, we will fail to recognize authentic spiritual emotions. Our teachers have warned us against mistaking our mundane emotions as transcendental.

### Chapter 6 Part 3: “ISKCON has Become Many Things Srila Prabhupada did not Want—Power-driven, Anti-intellectual, Bureaucratic, Authoritarian, Averse to Independent Thoughtfulness, Unethical, and Indifferent to Transgressions of Human Dignity—Thus Unattractive to Intelligent People”

Our society has become many things Srila Prabhupada didn't want—power-driven, anti-intellectual, bureaucratic, authoritarian, averse to independent thoughtfulness, unethical, and indifferent to transgressions of human dignity—thus unattractive to intelligent people.

For anyone who feels indebted to Prabhupada, this is clearly an urgent situation. We must show our love for him by cooperating—according to our capacity—to put the dynamics on the right course. The solution is not legislation, but personal integrity.

And be warned that keeping the dynamics on course is a lifelong enterprise. Just as one cannot sleep and drive at the same time, so we cannot assume that an institution will stay on course automatically. The numerous snags and seductions on this royal road do not allow for quiescence. The price of staying out of illusion is unrelenting vigilance.

To achieve what Prabhupada wants of us is only possible if individually we take responsibility to make it happen. Forget about some other party doing it and the rest of us waiting to enjoy the results; or condemn, if their attempt fails.

You, the person reading this line right now, have the power to decide to be part of the solution or you are part of the problem. Those are your choices. And do not forget that not choosing is also a choice—to be part of the problem. Any excuse you may offer, is simply that, an excuse; because with the exception of the mentally defective and the crooked, there is no excuse for not being a person of integrity.

The only sweet words I can offer after all this is that I am dreadfully sorry if these tidings about taking responsibility for Prabhupada’s legacy depresses you; but there is no easier way. If there was, I would be overjoyed to tell about it.

All the above considerations lead to this: That we not ask ourselves, “I wonder what everybody else is doing about this situation?” The question seems reasonable, but it is the disempowering, outside-in approach. The real question is, “Regardless of what everyone else does, what am I going to do about the situation?”

For it does not matter what everyone else does. If everyone else is insincere, for example, do you have to be insincere too?. If everyone lacks integrity, should I be like them? Waiting to see what everyone else is going to do is like saying “If everyone goes to hell, I'm going too. After all, everyone is doing it.” But this is herd mentality, which is already the core problem. The herd may or may not change; but you can change. It is only by your changing that the herd may change. So pray as if everything depends on divine power, and then act as if everything depends on you.

Still, if you are determined to live in ease, if you really believe you are powerless to make a positive impact on the society, if you believe it is not your responsibility, if you see only obstacles; if you believe that some sort of magic-helper or divine intervention will save us, then read no further, because it is much easier to live in that condition if your eyes remain closed, if you live in a stupor, and this book will not support you in this. This book is for people who want to live in a state of open-eyed, heightened awareness, technically called Krishna consciousness.

But you should know this: That our mission is the way it is because of you. You are part of the problem. If your decision is not to be part of the solution, then Our Mission is not for you. Our Mission is for those who, regardless of their position in the hierarchy of ISKCON refuse to feel powerless; who believe with utter conviction that independent thoughtfulness is central to interdependent cooperation and know this is one with Srila Prabhupada’s heart. Our Mission is for those who refuse, unconditionally, to go through life with their headlights on dim; who refuse to live as sheep, but want to live as persons of integrity—no matter the cost. Our Mission is for those who believe that doing the needful is genuine service to the Lord; who believe that the Lord helps those who help themselves; and whose prayer is accompanied by their endeavor.

Those persons will read Our Mission with delight. They know that hard-headed realism is the rational way to go in this world. They also know that light is the only cure for ignorance. And they are eager to be cured.

And they will act. Upon achieving independent thoughtfulness, they will act inter-dependently, out of genuine love for Srila Prabhupada. Independent thoughtfulness has these vital orientations:

The ability to finely distinguish reality from illusion.

The integrity not deceive and not be deceived.

The courage to resist authority when it is abused.

The capacity to listen to one’s conscience and be guided by it.

The ability to discern what is nonsense and what is genuinely Krishna conscious and cooperate with the latter.

The courage to reject irrational authorities and cooperate with rational ones.

The ability to choose one’s association on the basis of character rather than socio-economic or hierarchical status in the institution.

More than any other scheme, implementing these seven orientations will transform our society. And implementing them requires no mandate from outside of yourself. All it takes is a personal decision, resolve from the heart.

Results will take time, but as already shown in Our Mission, first part, problem-solving in sattva-guna, with the poison up front and the nectar later, takes time. Since there is no better alternative, we might as well surrender and do the needful for our Founder-Acarya, albeit patiently, but without flinching.

## Chapter 7: A Devotee is not Blind

### Chapter 7 Part 1: “Our Philosophy is That a Spiritual Authority Removes Our Doubts with Logic and Reason and Ultimately with Philosophy, Sastra. This is the Path of Rational or Open-eyed Faith”

**A Devotee is not Blind**

*Disciple: “Guru Maharaja, do I surrender my intelligence  to the spiritual master or through my intelligence?*

*Guru Maharaja: “You surrender your intelligence to the spiritual master.”*

Often, when one discusses the dangers of blind following, one gets this response: “But Prabhupada said, 'I blindly follow my Guru Maharaja'.” Some “authorities” use this statement to browbeat devotees or disciples into submission. In some parts of ISKCON “I blindly follow my Guru” has taken on the status of a *mahavakya*, canon law. Hence the necessity to reconcile Prabhupada’s statement with the many other instances where he discouraged blind following, as in his commentary to *Bhagavad-gita*4.34, where he writes “In this verse, both blind following and absurd inquires are condemned”.

Superficially, Krishna consciousness appears to encourage giving away our power when we surrender to the spiritual master or to the institution. We believe this to be “the tradition”, which seems to endorse blind following. One godbrother told me, “Someone ought to write a refutation of your arguments in part two of *Our Mission,* ”by presenting the *siddhanta*.” He went on to explain that the *siddhanta* is that we accept that spiritual authority may know more than us and that even if we can't see, we should follow anyway. In other words, the *siddhanta*, according to him, is blind following.

This is not our philosophy. Our philosophy is that a spiritual authority removes our doubts with logic and reason and ultimately with philosophy, *sastra*. This is the path of rational or open-eyed faith. There is no explicit or implicit requirement for blind following in our philosophy. How did we wander away from the *sastric* path onto the path of blind faith?

Yet how often a demand for blind faith has been used to “inspire” devotees to do things “because the guru is absolute,” when it is actually manipulation. After all, it is not the person of the guru that is absolute, it is the message of the *parampara* that is absolute. Of course, we should cooperate with things that are reasonable and Krishna conscious, and where we have faith that it is acceptable; but where are we required to cooperate when we have doubts about the authentic value of some action or philosophical understanding, or when we are required to go against our conscience? Whose philosophy is that?

As one godbrother wrote, “Sometimes I knew I was in maya, but the leaders told me I was Krishna conscious. Other times I knew I was being Krishna conscious, but the leaders said I was in maya.” Whose version is more authentic, his experience or what the leaders said he was experiencing? Unless one is a terribly insecure person, why accept the opinion of such authorities over our own conscience?

Moreover, even if blind following of the guru has truly been the practice in the Vaisnava tradition, rational thinking is that we do not check reason by tradition, but we check tradition by reason. After all, lots of conventional or traditional practices have no rational basis. Regardless of tradition, *reason dictates that in light of ISKCON's history, blind following of a guru is a fool's proposal through and through.* Any guru who demands it or tolerates it is suspect. Any disciple looking for that situation is not fit to be called a disciple.

There is a story that demonstrates the absurdity of blindly following tradition. Once in an asrama, a guru developed affection for a cat. However, when the guru lectured, the cat would invariably choose to nuzzle and rub the guru and create a distraction. So the guru ordered that whenever he lectured the cat should be tied to a tree outdoors.

After some time, the guru passed away, but people kept tying the cat to the tree because of tradition. Eventually the cat died. Then the temple commander posted a notice on the bulletin board “All lectures are postponed until a cat can be found to tie to the tree during the lecture.” This is the result of blindly following tradition. The moral of the story is that we should not check reason by tradition: rather, tradition should be checked by reason.

To this some may counter with “But if the guru is qualified then one may blindly follow him.” No. If the guru is qualified he will not encourage blind following in the first place. A guru is not one who dictates to us what to think. A guru teaches us how to think. Take Srila Prabhupada, for instance, he said the Krishna consciousness movement is for training members to be independently thoughtful. He could have said “for training members to be blind followers,” but that is not the mission of a bona fide guru. Blind follow is the tradition in many schools of thought and perhaps it is now part of the Vaisnava tradition, but it is definitely not the Vaisnava philosophy.

II

There is no denying that sometimes, circumstantially, one has to trust blindly an authority figure, be it guru, temple president, or some lesser figure, even the police on the highway. However, that is the exception, not the general rule. Moreover, in spiritual life it should not be the result of coercion, but of voluntary faith on the part of the follower. This will be elaborated on in the next volume, when we discuss the points raised in Kramer's and Alstad's *The Guru Papers*: *Masks of Authoritarian Power*, a book that debunks many of the irrational guru myths that have appeared to clutter clear understanding.

Suffice to say, there is a gulf of difference between blindly following because I have no choice in the matter and doing it voluntarily, because I want to, out of my rational faith in the authority.

In a nutshell, when this kind of trusting faith occurs it is not entirely unreasonable if it is built upon some record of consistent rational dealings between subordinate and the authority. Therefore, Srila Prabhupada use do say that a Krishna conscious authority commands respect and does not demand it. It is not simply that the institution has rubber-stamped me as an authority thus you are obliged to blindly follow and Krishna will be pleased. Then Prabhupada would not have said “A devotee is not blind.” Or, “Nothing should be accepted blindly. Everything should be accepted with care and caution.”

Besides, as a Krishna conscious authority, why should I want someone to accept me blindly? Krishna, who is God, does not demand blind following from Arjuna. Both those who want to blindly follow and those who want a blind following should closely examine themselves on this question. If I petulantly insist on another's blind acceptance of my will, it certainly points to some defect in me. It is surely incompatible with Prabhupada's stating that the Krishna consciousness movement is for training men to be independently thoughtful. It also indicates some defect in your character if you are simply hankering for a leader to blindly follow, so you do not have to think.

### Chapter 7 Part 2: “There Must be Some Blind Following, a Small Degree, for Exceptional Circumstances”

There must be some blind following, a small degree, for exceptional circumstances. Our blunder is that because we are motivated to have an easy task or to manipulate people, we try to make the exception into the general rule. This has to be rectified if we are to be a sane society.

If blind following was the rule and not the exception, how could Caitanya Mahaprabhu say to Sanatana Gosvami that the symptoms of the *uttama adhikari*is that he preaches with logic and reason and he has faith that is not blind? Why would Krishna dasa Kaviraja Gosvami ask his readers to please try to understand the mercy of Lord Caitanya with logic (*vicara*)?

The conclusion of these considerations is that the popular conception that one has to trust blindly in spiritual authority is actually a misconception. When, owing to experience, one has faith in the fundamental reliability and consistency of a person's character, then it is easy and natural to trust them. When the dynamics are irrational and crazy-making, and trust is mandated by institutional fiat, it is plain stupid to trust.

III

Intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth means progress from dependence (*tamas*) to independence (*rajas*), and finally to the empowering stage of interdependence (*sattvas*). The guru's function is to guide us through these states of personal growth. It is not the guru’s role to simply accept service and expect the disciple to advance automatically in spiritual life. This approach is a bluff, a cheating proposition.

As mentioned in *Our Mission, Part Two*, surrender involves one of two fundamental orientations: It can be blind or irrational submission or it can be open-eyed or rational submission to authority. The respective effects of these two types of submission are worlds apart. In essence, blind surrender makes us powerless, shrunken, dependent, disempowered, although it may wear the guise of its opposite, especially if the group rewards us for it.

Rational surrender makes us powerful in that we become thoughtful, competent, self-reliant, wise, empowered. Srila Prabhupada wants us to practice rational surrender; he wants us to be empowered in devotional service. He wants all of us to follow in his footsteps. The path to this power is independent thoughtfulness, the path of discrimination, which is hard work. We have to accept this labor as a duty to the *parampara*, because “faith” in *bhakti-yoga*means rational faith, not blind faith.

Ironically, institutionally stamped authorities preach blind faith and in the same breath declare that Krishna consciousness is a science. One morning after a *Bhagavatam*class in Vrindavana, for example, in which I stressed that a Vaisnava discriminates on the basis of the three modes of material nature, which is logical and philosophically correct, a *sannyasi*went into a ten minute spiel about how the real business is that a devotee follows the guru. A devotee follows the guru: and the guru follows *sastra*; and *sastra*says that understanding things in terms of the three modes of nature is the supreme wisdom. So other than to demand blind following what conflict with the philosophy was this *sannyasi* addressing?

In a subsequent exchange of letters that I initiated in order to further discuss the matter, he wrote:

Your book (*The Nectar of Discrimination*), however, to me overly emphasizes discrimination without the balance of service and submission.

His venerable opinion, does not stand up very well when pitted against reason and *Bhagavatam*(1.1.2). We preach that the material world is a place of danger at every step. How can one overly emphasize discrimination in such a place? According to the second verse of *Bhagavatam*, the highest welfare work is reality distinguished from illusion for the benefit of all. This can be done in two ways. (1) You discriminate for me and I blindly follow you. (2) You teach me to discriminate for myself.

Clearly the second approach is the true intent of the *parampara*. So where is the conflict between discrimination and service and submission? One who serves and submits to the person teaching them to discriminate between truth and illusion is discriminating very nicely. One who serves and submits blindly is a fool. And what shall we say about one who encourages us to serve and submit without discriminating?

Moreover, ISKCON history gives us heaps of reasons why we should discriminate more: The fiasco in New Vrindavana, the so-called *gopi-bhava* club in Vrindavana, which was master-minded by senior devotees, gurus, and GBC's. Additionally, we have seen several gurus veer off the path of pure devotional service. The list can go on and on. Therefore Prabhupada says, “Blind following is condemned in this verse.” Which verse? None other than *Bhagavad-gita* 4.34. The verse about approaching the guru, proving that it behooves disciples to discriminate even with respect to the guru. Where is the sanction supporting blind following?

In a 1976 lecture, Srila Prabhupada discussed Arjuna questioning Krishna’s order to kill Asvathama. Krishna is Arjuna’s guru; He is also the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself, yet Prabhupada approved of Arjuna voicing his doubt and said, “This is devotee. A devotee is not blind.”

It is profoundly mysterious that in the organization dedicated to distributing the books of the one who cautioned us against blind following that blind following is now widely encouraged. How did we get here, and why?

IV

The problem is we do not want people to discriminate, because they may view us from an entirely different angle. Specifically, they may cease twisting their perceptions to see divine significance in words and deeds that in fact have no divine significance, but are fraught with whimsy, irrationality, and selfish interests. There is no logical or philosophical reason why we should not discriminate more and more and more. . . as much as we have the god-given capacity.

In this letter to Hamsaduta (1969), Prabhupada makes the entire distinction between a neophyte and the advanced devotee pivot on the ability to discriminate:

Unless one is able to discriminate, he is to be considered to be in the neophyte stage. In the neophyte stage the position is that the neophyte devotee worships the Deity in the temple with great awe and reverence, but he cannot discriminate who is devotee, who is non-devotee and who is neophyte. I think you must be in the second stage and should try to discriminate as above. Any devotee wanting to see you should be welcome, but your treatment should be according to his position.

### Chapter 7 Part 3: “Unless A Vaisnava is Able to Discriminate, They Are To be Considered to be in the Neophyte Stage”

Not one word against discriminating. Rather: “Unless one is able to discriminate, he is to be considered to be in the neophyte stage.” But our venerable successors to Srila Prabhupada discourage us with flimsy philosophy and scare tactics, that if you discriminate you will make offenses. This is unsound, because offenses result not from discrimination but from a lack of it. Serving and submitting to unqualified people is also a lack of discrimination. Buyer beware.

The sort of bluff and foolishness the *sannyasi* above was advocating will pass as philosophy as long as we equate hierarchical position with spiritual understanding. Despite the definition of a *madhyama*devotee, which specifically entails discriminating, rubber-stamped spiritual authorities in the Krishna consciousness movement say that discriminating is *jnana-yoga*. This reveals that the institutionally rubber-stamped are either using the philosophy to manipulate others or are ignorant of the correct philosophy. Either way it is cheating.

V

In Australia, for instance, a *sannyasi/*guru/GBC railed against “encouraging neophyte devotees to discriminate.” His point was that this would encourage neophyte devotees to think they can understand the motives and actions of senior devotees. He implied that such a thing is wrong. Apart from the fact that critical scrutiny of senior devotees, rightly or wrongly, is not the only use of discriminating in this treacherous world, where did Prabhupada discourage us, who were virtually less than neophyte, from scrutinizing his words and deeds on the basis that we were too neophyte to understand him?

He was just the opposite. He encouraged us to see if his words and deed made sense and if he practiced what he preached. With integrity like this, he did not need this gambit about being so advanced that he was shrouded in mystery. He always appealed to our sense of logic and reason. He didn’t need to scare us about offenses to hold us in thrall.

Prabhupada’s example was that he laid himself bare before us. He spoke the *sastras*and held himself up as a living example of a role model for us to examine to our full satisfaction. He taught by example. He expected us to appreciate him through eyes of knowledge. When he says no one could understand the actions of a pure devotee, he was not referring to us not understanding his intentions. He was referring to the ignorant non-devotees not understanding.

So how is it we come along and try to instill fear of discriminating in the name of *aparadha*, when the highest welfare work, according to the *Bhagavatam,*is teaching others to discriminate? Further, one gets out of the neophyte stage precisely by discriminating. “A preacher's duty,” Prabhupada writes “is to love the Supreme Personality of Godhead, make friendships with Vaisnavas, show mercy to the innocent and reject or neglect those who are envious or jealous.” This is the definition of a second-class devotee; it is all about discriminating. Obviously, one moves from the neophyte stage to this stage by practicing these symptoms.

Why, then, are we discouraging discriminating *because*one is a neophyte, when discriminating is the way to advance beyond being a neophyte? What could be the motive for that? Then, at what point does a neophyte become second-class? Discouraging discriminating and yet wanting to advance in devotional service is as inane as proposing that one learns to swim without going into the water.

However, because we are not taught and encouraged to discriminate in the first place, drivel such as “I would never encourage neophyte devotees to discriminate because they may make offenses to senior devotees” passes as transcendental wisdom. And the unfortunate disciples swallow this so-called realized knowledge whole. Is this not reason enough to emphasize discriminating?

VI

The next question for a discriminating soul is: Unless they want to keep us in ignorance so we can be manipulated, what other motivate can supposedly knowledgeable devotees have that inspires them to preach such nonsense?

For those who use the philosophy to manipulate, “discriminate” has the same effect on them that sunlight has on vampires. “Discriminate” has that same effect on fanatics and sentimentalists, and on the intellectually lazy. Nevertheless those who have intelligence must not only refuse to comply with their nonsense—we must teach others to resist it as well. It is our sacred duty to the *parampara*. Independent thinking is achieved when one has the integrity to resist authority when it is abused.

Unfortunately, we have been misled into dependent thinking, blind surrender, accepting authority, even when the “authority” is irrational. We are told this is what it means to show our love by cooperating for Srila Prabhupada.

We say simple living and high thinking, but we encourage simplistic thinking, which is one of the great impediments to spiritual progress in the age of Kali. It stems from laziness, which one might consider the main sin of the conditioned soul—causeless unwillingness to think.

Teaching *what*to think instead of *how* to think is to teach blind faith. Such teaching is only effective for attracting an inferior quality convert, the type that destructive cults like to recruit. *Sudras*, the lazy foolish, are the blind followers of the world. They are certainly welcome to practice Krishna consciousness, but creating a class of *sudras*is not the primary goal of the Krishna consciousness movement. And intelligent people instinctively want no part of any blind following program.

Yet blind or irrational surrender has been and continues to be encouraged in the name of surrendering to the spiritual master, cooperating for Srila Prabhupada, service and submission, along with other absurd rationalizations. About the disciple who asked his rubber-stamped guru “Do I surrender my intelligence or do I surrender through my intelligence” and His guru's blithe reply, “You surrender your intelligence”, it reveals in one swoop the peril of accepting an institutionally rubber-stamped *mahatma* as guru.

## Chapter 8: Did Prabhupada Follow Blindly?

### Chapter 8 Part 1: “Sastra is Our Eyes, Srila Prabhupada Taught”

**Did Prabhupada Follow Blindly?**

*First of all there must be submissiveness, no challenge. But at the same time, you must clearly understand. Because you have submitted, it is not that you have to understand something dogmatic. No. Submission must be there, but at the same time, you should have clear understanding. This is science, not that if something is pushed and you are: “Oh, my spiritual master has said; therefore I accept it.” That is fact, that you should, but at the same time, by inquiries, by inquisitiveness, you must clear everything. (*Srila Prabhupada. LA 1969*)*

Srila Prabhupada said, 'I blindly followed my spiritual master'.” And here is one of the ways we try to apply this: A junior devotee, eighteen years in the society, was discussing a philosophical point with a senior devotee, one who is reputed to be quite knowledgeable in our philosophy. When the junior pointed out that the outlook of the senior, which was supposedly Prabhupada’s outlook, conflicted with *sastra*, the senior devotee challenged, “Do not you have more faith in Srila Prabhupada than in *sastra*?”

*Sastra*is our eyes, Srila Prabhupada taught. He never said “become *guru caksusa*”, but he often encouraged us to be *sastra caksusa,*which is sanctioned in the *sastra*, yet this faithful disciple plucks out the eyes as a sign of his faith in Srila Prabhupada. Guru fanaticism is construed to be guru bhakti.

If we take into consideration the above quote from Prabhupada’s 1969 lecture, it follows that he blindly followed *after* a “clear understanding”, which is entirely different from the fanatical blind following shown by “Do not you have more faith in Srila Prabhupada than in *sastra*?” For Prabhupada, “blindly followed” simply means with firm, open-eyed faith, not with fanatical zeal.

Blind following can occur in two ways, I may voluntarily follow blindly, or it may be demanded of me by another. In the *Gita* purport where Prabhupada says “blind following is condemned,” it is clear that blind following means not having or not exercising the right to question and Prabhupada is condemning either situation. Let's look at some other examples:

We discuss this *Bhagavad-gita*only for understanding that we are not blindly following a principle. It is a science. It is based on philosophy and science. But we have made the process easy. That's all. By following great stalwart personalities. But it is not that it is a blind following. It is based on philosophy and science, this Krishna consciousness. (Lec. NY. 1966)

By his use of the word “science” Prabhupada indicates that Krishna consciousness is a systematic discipline, able to withstand rational scrutiny, for it is logical and coherent. It is not sentimental, whimsical, fanatical. It is not even pious dogma. It is not dogmatic at all. It is not arbitrary. Blind following means something else, something unable to withstand examination. Why? Because in blind following essentially I am coerced to act through methods other than by my will, other than through my intelligence.

Prabhupada did not want this. He did not say so as a kind of hype. He really did not want it. Anyone promoting blind following is not a follower of Prabhupada; he is a bluffer. People who say, “I’m not a philosopher, but I’m a Prabhupada man,” are examples of such bluffing. What is being revealed is a dogged determination to be a blind follower and to remain so. A simple declaration, “I’m an irrational man,” is more to the point.

Srila Prabhupada again:

So we simply request people that you accept this authoritative knowledge and try to assimilate it by your intelligence. It is not that you stop your arguments and intelligence, simply blindly accept something. No. We are human beings, we have got intelligence. We are not animals that we shall forced to accept something. (Lec. Pittsburgh 1972)

And another place it is said, *caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara, vicara karile citte pabe camatkara*. It is not blindly accepted, this Krishna consciousness. With considerable deliberation, we take the decision. All the *acaryas*, they have taken decision. Therefore in the next verse Krishna says, *jnanam te 'ham sa-vijnanam*. This knowledge, with practical understanding, *sa-vijnanam*. (Lec. Ahmedabad 1972)

Madhudvisa: “One should not only hear submissively from the spiritual master, but one must also get a clear understanding from him...”

Prabhupada: Yes.

Madhudvisa: “...with submission, and service, and inquiries.”

Prabhupada: Yes. Clear understanding. Do not accept anything. First of all there must be submissiveness, no challenge. But at the same time, you must clearly understand. Because you have submitted, it is not that you have to understand something dogmatic. No. Submission must be there, but at the same time, you should have clear understanding. This is science, not that if something is pushed and you are: “Oh, my spiritual master has said; therefore I accept it.” That is fact, that you should, but at the same time, by inquiries, by inquisitiveness, you must clear everything. (LA 1969)

We are not animals. “We are human beings, we have got intelligence.” The implication thus far is that one is free to question until one's sense of reason is satisfied. And if doubts come later on, then question again. This is Arjuna's example in *Bhagavad-gita*.

This does not apply only to the philosophy. It applies to any sphere of our experience be it philosophical or practical. The converse is also to be considered. If you question me and I become irrational or dogmatic, rather than reply systematically to your question that is reason to have more doubts, more questions. Of course, absurd inquires are also condemned.

If you “surrender” instead, that is blind following, unless from previous experience you have faith that my character is consistent and that I do have your best interest at heart and am only motivated by your interests, rather than serving my interests. But such faith must come from you, not from my dogmatic insistence or from the demand of a whole institution.

II

Another way to look at the matter is to consider Prabhupada's and the *sastra's*encouragement to discriminate. If giving up one's power to follow blindly was intrinsic to the path of Krishna consciousness, there would be no such encouragement, for discrimination is the natural enemy of blind following. The *Gita* and *Bhagavatam* exhorts us to be *prajna* or intelligent on the path of spiritual life, which means discriminating, because that is the principal function of intelligence.

Surrender is therefore a process of exercising our intelligence and thereby becoming powerful, not powerless. The *Srimad Bhagavatam*says, therefore, right at the beginning, “the highest welfare work is to discriminate between reality and illusion for the welfare of all.” And of course “all” includes oneself.

Krishna consciousness entails the full unfolding of our powers of reason and discriminating or we cannot perform the highest welfare work. In which case, we will have failed in the mission of human life. *Prema*can certainly go to the simple person who has faith and does service, but a careful weighing of Prabhupada's instructions shows that this is more the exception than the general rule. The general rule is *buddhi-yoga.*It is intelligent to base our spiritual life on the general rule.

ISKCON is asking us to give our physical, financial, and intellectual energies to it, which is fine. If the benefit for us and the world is growthful all around, why not? At the same time, we are entitled, according to Srila Prabhupada, to a clear understanding and to be satisfied that the institution is and remains one that squares with our conscience. “No challenge” does not mean no question, for without questions, how can one be assured of clear understanding?

“No challenge” means no arrogant questions, but surely questioning must be there. That is how our doubts are removed. Prabhupada also said that doubt is the sign of intelligence. So doubt should not be discouraged with “Just be a gentleman and cooperate for Srila Prabhupada,” which is a wordy way of saying, “Blindly follow me.” This accomplishes nothing when we are confronted by an intelligent person; and such doubters should not be alienated or ousted from the group. That is always a bad sign. As one reader wrote:

### Chapter 8 Part 2: “What Kind of Society Needs to Silence the Opposition? If They Truly Have all the Answers, They Should be Fearless of the Opposition”

What kind of society needs to silence the opposition? If they truly have all the answers, they should be fearless of the opposition. In fact the opposition should be *welcomed*because that would give the leaders who must think they have a monopoly on the truth the opportunity to publicly out-debate their opponents. Since they're not welcoming the opposition, you have to wonder what they're afraid of. Censorship and book-banning is for communist countries. Something's not quite right here. . ..

It is our personal responsibility—and human right—to see that we are not swindled either deliberately or by accident. If the institution usurps that responsibility from us, then the dynamics are immediately dysfunctional, for we are being coerced instead of being persuaded through clear understanding. An alarm should sound in our intelligence.

And there is no reason in logic, philosophy, or experience that the same accountability that the society owes us, does not apply to the spiritual master. Contrary to current ISKCON convention, the spiritual master is not the final arbiter of truth who answers to no one. The *sastra*is our final arbiter. Always will be. *Sraddha*is in *sastra*primarily and secondarily in guru. Prabhupada writes in the *Caitanya-caritamrta,*while discussing the three kinds of *pramanas*—guru, *sastra* and *sadhu—*that “*sastra*is the center”.

The *yasya deve para-bhaktir* verse does not ask us to have faith in guru before *sastra*. This is a common misconception. The verse says that one must have implicit faith in the guru and then *prakasante,*all the conclusions of the *sastras* are revealed. Before coming to that point one must know the qualifications of a guru. Guru by rubber-stamp is a disqualification. The guru must be worthy of implicit faith and that process takes time.

Guru is not one that ISKCON tells you is guru. Guru is one whose preaching has opened your eyes and you know this by personal experience, *om ajnana timirandhasya jnananjana salakaya*. Personal experience, however, is verified by *sastra*. So *sastra*is the basis of faith in the guru. Proclaiming faith in guru without concomitant faith in *sastra*is a bluff. It is religion without philosophy—i.e. sentimentality or fanaticism. It is not science.

III

How do I know that the guru is opening my eyes? Is that a mystical or ineffable experience? Not at all. I know because I see that my practical ability to distinguish reality from illusion is growing under his guidance. I see that I am becoming fearless, less and less bewildered or intimidated by the material world. My capacity to cope is increasing as I become *asammoha*, free from doubt and delusion. I am able to think for myself, sorting and sifting the data that comes at me from within and from without. Simple.

If I become a soft-headed surrealist instead, only fit for collecting money, making disciples, singing praises, and unquestioning following, working hard for the institution, and having more faith in guru than in *sastra*, that is not the meaning of *ajnana timirandhasya*. Four types of people approach Krishna to surrender, but they must all be brought to the platform of knowledge. This leads to firm faith in His words—i.e. *sastra*. We should not confuse a personality cult with *bhakti-yoga*, also called *buddhi-yoga*.

But devotees, untrained in the philosophy (but very much trained in blind zeal for the guru), believe that the guru created by vote is absolute and that means his every utterance becomes absolute, even if not supported by *sastra*. We are taught to believe that we must uncritically accept whatever is told to us by a person who has the *title* of guru and not encouraged to discern scientifically if he is practically qualified to be a guru. Because he has the title, whatever he says is absolute. This is the wrong understanding. The correct understanding is that because what he says is absolute—i.e. based on *sastra--*he is a guru. It is not that because he is a guru anything he says becomes absolute.

In practice, however, once we take the latter understanding, we rarely apply guru, *sastra*, and *sadhu pramanas*as proofs. We may use the words, but our stance is really guru, guru, and guru, and this sentimental, blind belief, passes as supreme devotion to guru. An excellent example of this can be found in the ISKCON Communications Journal, Vol. 5, No.1. The essay is entitled “The Perils of Succession: Heresies of Authority and Continuity in the Hare Krishna Movement.” The author, Tamal Krishna Gosvami, is discussing heresies that have cropped up within our society. One such topic is the controversial origin of the conditioned soul, the *jiva* issue. Herein Prabhupada’s words on the origin of the conditioned soul is made the sole basis for a conclusion. Heresy in this instance, is not deviation from sastra, but deviation from guru.

In this instance, *sadhu*, and especially *sastra*are both shunted aside. Yet another case of more faith in Prabhupada than in *sastra*. Another “Prabhupada man who is not a philosopher.” And how many of these do we have on board?

Meanwhile, Prabhupada himself taught that philosophical controversies were to be settled on the basis of *sastra*. Not only that, but even if we use Prabhupada’s words as final arbiter, this author considers only one side of Prabhupada’s words on the matter. Guru’s clear declarative statement, “The conclusion is that no one falls from Vaikuntha” along with numerous others that support this statement, all of which are backed up by *sastra,* is simply ignored.

Why? Because we believe it is a sign of great faith not to subject the guru's words to critical analysis. But by speaking of “clear understanding,” Prabhupada clearly indicates that it is not his intention that the guru’s words never be subjected to critical scrutiny. Our *acaryas*do not drink blindly the utterances of the previous *acaryas*. They apply critical reasoning, that’s why we see so many attempts to reconcile things in their writings. Yet so-called gurus and ISKCON scholars encourage that we douse the light of reason and blindly follow the guru in the name of being a good disciple.

This sentiment, emotionally gratifying as it may be, is not the science of bhakti; it is blind following, and it is condemned. It is itself a heresy. Unfortunately this heresy escaped mention in the long essay on the topic.

### Chapter 8 Part 3: “Promoters of Guru, Guru, and Guru Instead of Guru, Sastra, and Sadhu; as *Pramana*, or of Blind Following Are Swindlers”

Promoters of guru, guru, and guru as *pramana*, or of blind following are swindlers. They may be well-intentioned, as undoubtedly some of them are, but everyone knows that good intentions are the cobblestones paving the path to hell. They are swindlers because they do not have “a clear understanding.” They have not understood how to philosophize within our philosophy. Thus they are not qualified to instruct anyone. But we are supposed to drink their philosophical potions because the institution has stamped them “authorized”, and because they go to university, as if that is some certification of a clear understanding of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. More likely, however, it is another reason to be cautious of them. As for stamping, are those collectively wielding the stamp possessors of a clear understanding? Can’t be, because one sign of such an understanding is refusal to rubber-stamp.

Of course, no one says “Yes, please blindly follow me.” It is done obliquely. We disempower by dire warnings about Vaisnava *aparadha*, instilling fear of thinking for yourself in the name of cooperating for Srila Prabhupada, and in the name of protecting you. When there is a difference of opinion, the side that emotes the most and shouts “Prabhupada. . .” the loudest is the winner. We preach a misconception of the guru function, invoking dedication to Prabhupada, ignoring the fact that Prabhupada himself did not demand blind following; and ignoring the salient fact that without exception not a single one of our present gurus, are of the same caliber as Srila Prabhupada. We hobble people’s intelligence when we present Krishna consciousness in this way.

We may also accuse you of not having faith in Srila Prabhupada. That is a big favorite for putting people on the defensive and making them doubt themselves. So much of our dynamics and presentation of the philosophy pivots around creating self-mistrust. You disagree with me, not with Srila Prabhupada, but I counter that you lack faith in Prabhupada. This adds up very nicely. Sometimes we manipulate people by advocating faith in Prabhupada even if that puts one in conflict with the sastric statements, as in the case of the jiva issue, and this amazing species of non-thinking is widely accepted amongst us as exalted Krishna consciousness.

One of the sickest ploys is when authorities hasten to point out the four defects to discredit dissent, as if it is a limitation only they have transcended.

In reality, having faith in the *sastra* that is not blind, is faith in Srila Prabhupada. Claiming blind faith in Srila Prabhupada while in denial of the *sastra*is simply *utpata*, a disturbance. We have evidence for this kind of irrational submission throughout our ISKCON community.

One of the blatant examples of this kind of irrational faith is in the form of a letter to a godbrother from Harikesa Swami, featured in *Our Original Position*(Oops). Once again guru is made the only *pramana* in a philosophical discussion, which is third-class philosophizing, if that; but it passes with most devotees because we are trained to look at *who*is speaking rather than the *content*of what is spoken. Sad to say, our situation is so precarious that devotees years in the process cannot see through a dogmatic presentation disguised as a scientific explanation of the philosophy.

Dogmatism, generally symptomized by passionate intensity, but lacking an appeal to logic and reason, or pretending to appeal to logic and reason, is one of several methods for coercing blind following. Several other methods are discussed in the ensuing pages. Those who want to become baffle-proof are encouraged to pay careful attention. The whole point pivots around this approach to being Krishna conscious: That the simple person is *not*a simplistic person. Rather his simplicity consists of *the desire not to deceive*and, equally significant, *the desire not to be deceived*.

This is only possible, if we take responsibility not to follow anyone blindly, if we resolve to be independently thoughtful, which is what Srila Prabhupada wants.

Srila Prabhupada accepted his guru's order as his life and soul, and to fulfill that order he fully utilized all his faculties. He was not enfeebled; rather he was empowered. This is the litmus test in determining whether we are on the path of blind following or not. Obviously, then, Prabhupada's “blind” following cannot be equated with the blind following that he cautions us against, because they produce opposite results. However, the blind or fanatical phase may appear to have all the symptoms of being a legitimately empowering dynamic.

Therefore Srila Prabhupada encourages care and caution before accepting anything, unless we know readily that it is sound Krishna consciousness. This instruction of Prabhupada, as already noted, confers the right to question until one is satisfied. Cooperation is evoked by my appealing to our sense of reason. When our reason is satisfied, then we may “blindly” follow.

Lastly, one consideration in response to Prabhupada saying he followed his spiritual master blindly, is that we should not imitate him, we should follow his instructions; and he says, “Do not follow blindly.”

## Chapter 9: Faith and the Analytical Mind

### Chapter 9 Part 1: “A Misconception in Spiritual Life: That Having Faith and Developing an Analytical Mind are Opposed to Each Other’

A sannyasi asked me, “Who is the better devotee—one who is educated, say in psychology or philosophy, or one who is simple, but has faith?”

The question presumes that the educated person does not have faith. But Rupa and Sanatana Gosvamis, were highly educated and also had faith, so Mahaprabhu engaged them in setting forth the philosophical basis for His teachings. The Lord Himself only wrote eight verses. His example of engaging the educated class proves that one who has faith along with knowledge or some specific ability can do more to Krishna-ize the material world and to spread Krishna consciousness. Yet, on the principle of stri vaisya tatha sudra te ‘pi yanti param gatim, both the simple faithful and the knowledgeable faithful can be pure devotees.

Another devotee asked, “Prabhu, you advocate using your own intelligence in Krishna consciousness, but we often hear that we cannot become Krishna conscious by our own effort. What do you say to that?”

This question assumes that because we cannot become Krishna conscious by our own effort then we should make no effort. Actually, we must make the best effort we can, and then Krishna will carry whatever we lack. Our prayer must be accompanied by our endeavor. If we hold back, Krishna holds back. If we give our whole heart to the effort, Krishna gives His whole heart to the effort. This is the meaning of ye yatha mam prapadyante tams tataiva bhajami aham. Surrender means to make an effort, our best effort. That means to use our intelligence. God did not give us intelligence so we can forego its use.

The above two conversational snippets highlight a common misconception in spiritual life: that having faith and developing an analytical mind are opposed to each other. In our group, just as they have done with elevating “the tone” into a major principle or made blind following into a central precept, certain sentimental persons have reinforced the misconception that having an analytical mind is automatically in conflict with developing one’s faith.

Thus one godbrother told me, “I used to be into all this intellectual stuff, but now I'm just into the heart.” He earnestly believed he was making a profound statement, revealing how he’d progressed over the years. A surprising number of devotees, both old and new, would be taken in by this declaration as an indication of progress in God-realization. It is sheer bluff.

Of course, such a declaration is indicative of advancement, when one is expressing an authentic state and one is no longer in the preaching field. Bhakti involves experiencing authentic emotions, “the heart,” but one cannot preach emotions as the basis for belief in bhakti. One has to preach scientifically, with logic and reason. That’s why it is said that the uttama-adhikari comes down from the plane of pure experience to preach. One reason is that on that plane there is no duality. Everyone is seen as a devotee of the Lord. So there is no call to preach.

Another reason: if the devotee on the highest platform preaches on the basis of his emotional experiences, two things would happen, and both are undesirable. Less intelligent people would go wild out of sentimentality, and intelligent people would reject Vaisnavism as pure sentimentality. Are we primarily interested in the intelligent or the less intelligent?

Through their books our acaryas reveal an incredible capacity for “intellectual stuff”. They give us threadbare analyses of bhakti-marga from many different angles of vision. On the principle of parampara, Srila Prabhupada urged us to follow in their footsteps, by trying to understand our philosophy “from many angles of seeing”.

Of course, this is according to varying individual capacity, but to neglect to do it entirely, thinking that it an uncommon display of our unflinching faith in the Lord is really a mistake. Why would the Lord promise to give us more intelligence to reach Him unless He expects us to use what we already have in the first place? Considering this, therefore, what the above declaration about the head and the heart really says is, “I have become intellectually dull, toothless.”

II

Some people mistake a dull state of consciousness for quiescence of the mind when these two states are worlds apart. A quiescent mind is a state of heightened awareness, and at the very top of the scale of awareness we find Krishna consciousness. The confusion is owing to the illusion of progress out of illusion. To accommodate this illusion they fantasize a dichotomy between a life of faith and an analytical mindset.

True religion is inseparable from science. Thus faith and the analytical mind go side by side. We say, therefore, religion (faith) without science (analytical thinking) is mere sentimentality. Srila Prabhupada taught us this. So where is the question of rejecting “intellectual stuff”—i.e. the philosophy—to be into “the heart” or, as we saw earlier, to be a “Prabhupada man”? Where is the question of having “more faith in Prabhupada than in sastra? Where is the question of guru, guru, and guru, as our sole pramana in ascertaining heresy? This is all sentimental fanaticism. Soft-headed surrealism. This is all bluffing. Cheating.

### Chapter 9 Part 2: “Today, Through Out the World, Being Soft-headed is Spreading as the Authentic Orientation for Taking up Krishna Consciousness”

Yet tdhroughout the world, this soft-headed business is spreading as the authentic orientation for taking up Krishna consciousness. In Bombay, in South Africa, in several parts of Europe, in several parts of North America, in Australia, in Poland, in Russia (practically a hopeless situation there), in Vrindavana. Well, to make a long list short—in all ISKCON.

This predicament is because several of our preachers have discovered that they can swell our ranks if they preach charismatic, soft-headed, Krishna consciousness as opposed to hard-headed realism. This practically scares away intelligent people from our ranks. Instead we get the type who say, “I’m so glad I have a guru, now I do not have to think.”

However, the predicament is rooted in something even deeper: Our preachers who go this route have not understood our philosophy. They do not know theoretically or practically what is Krishna consciousness. What do we call persons who teach what they do not know? Cheaters. This was the answer that pleased Srila Prabhupada when he posed the question one time in Philadelphia.

If someone defends these cheaters, we should simply point out that whether we are cheated knowingly or unknowingly it is no consolation whatsoever to the victim.

Is a cheater a “Prabhupada man”. Actually, a genuine Prabhupada man is the one who faithfully combines intellectual stuff and the heart. Religion and science. Faith and the analytical mind. Faith and philosophy.

Considering all this and the number of ways cheaters have risen to prominence in our society, what does this say, then, for our state of affairs?

It says that we have several naked emperors at several levels in our society. It says that by ignoring to do something about our situation we are agreeing to be part of the problem, we agree to be cheaters too. It says that we are in dire straits, and the only way out is to resolve to be part of the solution. Most of all, what it says is that for you, dear reader, this is your equivalent of Kurukshetra. You must resolve to do your duty to the parampara and neglect these people, these cheaters, these dharmadvajis. And if anyone says that this is an offense, Vaisnava aparadha, that rascal should also be neglected. Completely.

III

Ultimately, prema transcends reason and analysis, but that is a private experience. It is not that we go out to preach how prema transcends reason, for this would create havoc, giving all kinds of encouragement to the class of lazy conditioned souls who seek for an easy spiritual life, who are enamored by their material emotions, thinking them transcendental.

Read any book by any acarya and see if they were intellectually toothless and opposed to the analytical mindset. Even a casual glance at their words should dispel any doubts. Their very presentation itself is logical, analytical, scientific. It is the non-Vaisnava religious (and Vaisnavas that are not very realized, owing to being too sentimental, lazy, and too eager to be seen as advanced) that preach with emotion and charisma and turn every gathering into something reminiscent of a multi-level marketing sales rally.

In the case of those supposedly advanced Vaisnavas who play on (or prey on) the emotions of others, it is really their substitute for authentic bhakti, which they lack. Yet rather than pay the price for the authentic experience they prefer to claim it falsely, so they tend to indulge in all sorts of artificial intimacy to convince others of their elevated platform. They advertise themselves as being advanced in love of God, but they show themselves to be applying religion without true understanding of our philosophy. Faith minus the analytical mind is cheating.

## Chapter 10: Logic and Reason are Our Tools

### Chapter 10 Part 1: “*Asammoha*, Freedom from Doubt and Delusion Can be Achieved When One is Not Hesitant and When he Understands the Transcendental Philosophy”

Asammohah, freedom from doubt and delusion can be achieved when one is not hesitant  and when he understands the transcendental philosophy. Slowly but surely he becomes  free from bewilderment. Nothing should be accepted blindly; everything should be accepted  with care and with caution. (Srila Prabhupada)

The emotional approach to religion is either due to our material conditioning, or it stems from confusion over parts of the philosophy dealing with bhava, which refers to an elevated emotional state of the soul purified by devotional service. It is an experiential state; it should not be confused with emotional or dogmatic philosophizing.

Devotees on the topmost level of Krishna consciousness, experiencing bhava, come down from that platform when they preach. They return to the platform of reason and analytical thinking and keen discrimination. However, those overwhelmed by the sentimental paradigm, or kanisthas with premature pretensions to being elevated, disdain this practice as “the over-intellectualizing of bhakti”.

For example, on the Internet, in a discussion of the relevance of reason in the practice and presentation of Krishna consciousness, a devotee on the side of unreason cited two of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura’s essays as proof that reason is against preaching Krishna consciousness:

Though we are fully aware that the unconditioned has no conditions whatever, yet our holy and sweet principle of love takes a quite different view of the matter. Reason says one thing but love prescribes its contrary. Reason tells me that God has no sorrow, but the Love sees God in tears for those of His sons that are mislead to evil. Reason tells me that the strict laws of God reward and punish me in a cold manner, but Love reveals that God slackens His laws to the Repentant and loving Soul! Reason tells me that with all his improvements, man will never touch the absolute God; but Love preaches that on the conversion of the soul into a state of spiritual womanhood, God, unconditioned as He is, accepts an eternal marriage with the conditioned soul of man! Reason tells me that God is in Infinite space and time, but Love describes that the all beautiful God is sitting before us like a respected relative and enjoying all the pleasures of society......We do not mean to say that Reason is a foolish principle. On the contrary, we do not find better admirers of Reason than our humble selves. We hold that man's superiority amongst all created beings consists in man's possessing the noble gift of Reason. What we maintain is this, that independent of this noble principle there is another gift in man which goes by the name of Love. Reason helps Love to maintain its proper bounds in the Spiritual World.

In another article this same author says, “Love alone can soften the dryness of the intellect, you must develop the intellect on all good and holy things by means of love of truth, spiritual beauty and harmony.

Being enthusiastic to defeat the importance of reason, the devotee neglected to note these words:

We do not mean to say that Reason is a foolish principle. On the contrary, we do not find better admirers of Reason than our humble selves. We hold that man's superiority amongst all created beings consists in man's possessing the noble gift of Reason. What we maintain is this, that independent of this noble principle there is another gift in man which goes by the name of Love. Reason helps Love to maintain its proper bounds in the Spiritual World.

The person submitting the passage utterly failed to appreciate its value in the overall scheme of Srila Bhaktivinoda’s argument.

Love transcends reason. Love is blind, as the saying goes. But to develop authentic love, unless we consider sentimentality authentic, we must recourse to reason in order to approach love. Therefore in bhakti-yoga reason is not discarded, rather it is engaged in the service to the goal, love. Therefore bhakti-yoga is called buddhi-yoga. It is also called science. Bhakti is a science because it is a process that appeals to reason and it gives the promised result when applied systematically. Hence the Gosvamis of Vrindavana distinguished between “dry reason” and proper reason.

This is rudimentary Gaudiya Vaisnava philosophy, but we do not train devotees in the rudiments. We only teach service and submission. Then, later on, because our members have only a superficial understanding of this path, they are easily mislead by various emotional arguments that do not reflect the true spirit and intent of the parampara.

II

In the same Internet discussion, another defender of unreason cited from the Prema Pradipa a short novel also by Srila Bhaktivinoda. The capitalized words were given by the devotee who cited the passage, which appears in Prema Pradipa under the sub-heading “Bhava is not dependent on reason”:

Brahmacarya has said that although bhava is superior, still, unless it's controlled by reason, it will be abominable. Just see what a mistake he has made. If bhakti is the embodiment of bhava, then why will it be controlled by reasoning, WHICH IS BLIND AND LAME. If bhava rushes towards Vaikuntha, then reasoning will definitely try to hold it back within the material world. Then, as reasoning restrains bhakti, how can one experience Vaikuntha? Anand Babu! With reasoning abandon reasoning in spiritual matters”.

Here we find the typical cause of confusion about the role of reason in our philosophy. The title of the sub-section quoted is “Bhava is not dependent on reason,” indicating that the entire passage has nothing to do with the topic under discussion—which was, should discussions of the philosophy be based on logic and reason or simply veer erratically all over the place?

People confuse discussions about the experience of bhava with discussions about presenting the philosophy. Thus he failed to grasp the significance of the closing remark in the same quote.

We use reason to accept the path of bhakti and to apply ourselves to the process of purification. But at last we must abandon reason too and surrender entirely to the living experience of bhakti. Provided we surrendered to using reason to achieve freedom from doubt and delusion in the first place.

A suitable analogy goes like this: When we build a house we may use so many tools (logic and reason) for accomplishing our task. When the house is completed, however, we abandon our tools and occupy the house. If we have to show another person how to build their own house, we then point out the tools to them (logic and reason). When their task is accomplished, they in turn will abandon the tools and move into the house of bhakti. If they fail to use these tools, their house will be shoddy. Inferior.

### Chapter 10 Part 2: “The Fully Perfected Devotee, if He Desires to Preach Pure Devotional Service, Must Voluntarily Give up the Highest Stage and Come Down to the Platform of Reason”

TherefDore it is said that the fully perfected devotee, if he desires to preach pure devotional service, must voluntarily give up the highest stage and come down to the platform of reason, as Srila Bhaktivinoda himself is doing throughout Prema Pradipa and so many of his other works. The perfected devotee must wield the tools once again. The guru gives the tools to the disciple, in the sense that he trains the disciple how to develop his capacity for reason so that the disciple can finely distinguish truth from illusion and train others in turn.

Therefore the guru comes down from the platform of pure experience (bhava or prema) so he can instruct the disciple with logic and reason. Give the tools to the disciple. This is generally described as abandoning the uttama or paramahamsa platform and descending to the madhyama stage for the sake of preaching.

People in the preaching field who abandon logic and reason to preach dogma, to make an emotional appeal, are not as advanced in devotional understanding as they would have us believe, even if their dogma is littered with sastric quotes. They are not even on the madhyama platform, for the intermediate devotee is not indiscriminate. Rather the madhyama devotee discriminates between the devotee, the inimical, and the innocent. Indiscriminate behavior is not indicative of advancement; it is a symptom of a neophyte pretending to be advanced. It is a bluff, a swindle, a hoax. Such a pretender may believe in his own self-deception, but that is no consolation to anyone.

Failing to understand the responsibility of the guru role, he may preach about esoteric subject matter to enthrall the innocent. He may liberally sprinkle his talks with words like prema and more technical terms, but it is a swindle, because, except to beguile, what is the point of discussing criteria that the audience has little or no capacity to judge? Then one is not preaching scientifically, with logic and reason. One is preaching fluff. It is purely an appeal to sentiment with the aim to capture a following. No real tools are given to the disciple. Why? Because such a guru does not know what are the tools for building the house of bhakti. His preaching may be ornamented with lots of sastric quotes, but lacking the support of logic and reason it is all dogma. His faith is blind.

Another method for hoaxing is to replace talks about prema with talks about the institution. Institutionalized, bureaucratized, so-called gurus, preach that one must serve ISKCON to progress in devotional service. They say this is the only way to please Srila Prabhupada and essentially make the disciple into the pawn of the institution. This succeeds for some time, because the institution is closely tied to Srila Prabhupada. Naturally one feels that the so-called guru is guiding us on the progressive path. In reality he is bluffing. He is not giving us the tools for building our house of bhakti. He is replacing that function by stressing the institution as all in all.

Why? Because he does not have a house of bhakti himself. He does not know what are the tools. He does not know what is the function of a guru. His faith is also blind. If his faith was rightly directed, he would encourage commitment to ISKCON, but he would know, and preach, that the real thing is serving the parampara. Srila Prabhupada did not initiate his disciples into an institution. He initiated them into the parampara. They voluntarily participate in the institution. Sometimes we blur these distinctions. But Prabhupada did not. Thus we find that he wrote to a disciple in November of 1975:

Even if somebody does not go in one line with the rest of the godbrothers, he can remain separately, but it does not mean that he may disobey the principles that I have laid down. So long as one follows the principles he continues to be my disciple.”

III

If analytical understanding was opposed to bhakti-yoga, Srila Prabhupada could not insist that Krishna consciousness was a science. He could not have said this:

Bhagavad-dutas, those who are gosvamis, they place everything with nyaya, or logic. Their instructions are not blind, dogmatic. Nyaya-kovidah. Everything, what is said by Krishna or His representative, they are not dogmas. Those who are not representative of Krishna, they will say simply dogmas. Just like in every religion there is a dogma. But in Bhagavata religion, Bhagavata-dharma, there is no dogma. Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Bhagavata-dharma, the Caitanya-caritamrta's author, Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, says, therefore, that caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara. Vicara means you just try to understand the gift of Lord Caitanya by logic, vicara. Do not follow blindly. Following blindly something, that is not good. That will not stay. But one should take everything with logic. But the servants of God, they put everything in logic. Caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara. If you study the Caitanya's philosophy with logic and argument. . .. Do not go by sentiment. (Lec. Cal.1971)

Similarly, if devotional service was opposed to intellectual or analytical understanding, he would not have said, “Religion based on philosophy and logic, that is religion” (Ahmedabad, 1972).

### Chapter 10 Part 3: “Let There be no Doubt That in Bhakti-yoga, Faith and Analytical or Rational Thinking Go Together”

So let there be no doubt that in bhakti-yoga, faith and analytical or rational thinking go together. If we think that we can give up logic as a symptom of our having progressed in devotional service, that is neither supported by our philosophy nor by logic. When devotees start saying how they “used to be into intellectual stuff, but now I'm just into the heart” they are really saying, “Thinking is too taxing, but I do not want to admit that. So I'll make it sound like I'm not lazy but more advanced.” Then they talk nonsense about “the heart”, sounding more pathetic with every word; yet to the innocent this bluff passes as higher realizations in devotional service.

Part of the problem, however, stems from confusion over the two methods of achieving perfection—sadhana siddhi and krpa siddhi. The confusion is that some people, motivated to avoid responsibility, probably having learnt self-mistrust as part of the group dynamic, give primacy krpa siddhi over sadhana siddhi. This translates into humility in their minds; but this is a rationalization. The real problem is they want to sidestep responsibility for themselves, for decision-making and for problem-solving. This they dress as a virtue “Prabhu, I have no qualification. I’m just a fallen soul. The mercy of my guru and the Vaisnavas are my only hope. I cannot trust my own intelligence. And besides one cannot become Krishna conscious by his own endeavor.” All such devotees are really looking for a magic helper in the name of a guru or sadhu sanga. They are looking for a free ride. This is not recommended, however.

In The Nectar of Devotion, seventeenth chapter, Srila Prabhupada has address this question of which has primacy, the effortful sadhana siddhi approach or the seemingly effortless-oriented krpa siddhi hopefulness:

Elevation to this stage of ecstasy can be possible in two ways. One way is by constant association with pure devotees. The other way is by the special mercy of Krishna or by the mercy of a pure devotee of Krishna. Elevation to the ecstatic stage of life is generally attained through association with pure devotees, while elevation to that stage by the special mercy of Krishna or His devotee is very rare. The purport is that one should execute devotional service rigidly in the association of devotees so that there will be certainty in raising oneself to that ecstatic position. In special cases, of course, there is special favor from Krishna, and although we should always expect that, we should not sit idly and simply wait for Krishna's special mercy; the regular duties must be performed. It is just as when, sometimes, it is found that a person who never attended school or college may be recognized as a great scholar, or an honorary degree from great universities may be offered to him. But this does not mean that one should avoid school and expect to automatically receive an honorary degree from some university. Similarly, one should devoutly execute the regulative principles of devotional service and at the same time hope for Krishna's favor or for His devotee's favor.

The purport to the above passage is that we should pray for the favor of krpa siddhi, the special mercy of the Lord or His devotees, but our prayer must be accompanied by our endeavor, i.e. sincerely applying oneself to the scientific method of sadhana bhakti. Indeed, primary emphasis on sadhana bhakti is the thing most likely to attract krpa siddhi. The Lord helps those who help themselves.

IV

The more we grow in faith the more rational we become. Thus Lord Caitanya defines the uttama-adhikari to Sanatana Gosvami with these words (Cc.Mad.22.65):

sastra-yuktye sunipuna, drdha-sraddha yanra
uttama-adhikari' sei taraye samsara

One who is expert in logic, argument and the revealed scriptures and who has firm faith in Krishna is classified as a topmost devotee. He can deliver the whole world.

Firm faith and expertise in logic and argument based on sastra are given in the same breath as the description of the uttama-adhikari. No mention of one and excluding the other. No mention of dogmatism. Indeed the uttama-adhikari relishes the opportunity to expound on Krishna consciousness with all logic and argument based on sastra. He gets a taste (tusyanti) from it. Throughout the Bhagavatam the sages thank their questioners for giving them the opportunity to explain Krishna consciousness. What is the Bhagavatam, but a commentary on the most thoroughgoing logical dissertation of Srila Vyasadeva, Vedanta Sutra, as revealed in the following passage from Caitanya-caritamrta (Adi 7.106 purport):

According to learned scholars, there are three different sources of knowledge, which are called prasthana-traya. According to these scholars, Vedanta is one of such sources, for it presents Vedic knowledge on the basis of logic and sound arguments. In the Bhagavad-gita (13.5) the Lord says, brahma-sutra-padaiį caiva hetumadbhir viniįcitaių: “Understanding of the ultimate goal of life is ascertained in the Brahma-sutra by legitimate logic and argument concerning cause and effect.” Therefore the Vedanta-sutra is known as nyaya-prasthana, the Upanisads are known as sruti-prasthana, and the Gita, Mahabharata and Puranas are known as smriti-prasthana. All scientific knowledge of transcendence must be sCupported by sruti, smriti and a sound logical basis.

## Chapter 11: The First-class Devotee

### Chapter 11 Part 1: “When One is Lazy Intellectually, or Overly Eager to Pass as a First-class Vaisnava, One is Prone to Make a Show About Emotional Experiences, Bhava, to Impress Others”

When one is lazy intellectually, or overly eager to pass as a first-class Vaisnava, one is prone to make a show about emotional experiences, bhava, to impress others; but the performance also serves to dupe oneself. We can recognize these types because they put on airs of being aloof from everything except “sweet” lila and “the nectar.” They preach against developing an analytical mind. They say that evaluating the devotees is fault-finding. They think it is more important to preach from the Tenth Canto than to preach from Bhagavad-gita, even if the audience is unqualified to understand Tenth Canto topics: Because their real business is to advertise themselves as advanced in pure devotional service.

They also say that one can overcome lust by hearing the topics of the Tenth Canto, which is true. Srila Prabhupada has explained in several places how this works. The gist of his explanations is that first one must be above the modes of nature, particularly the two lower modes, rajas and tamas. Otherwise, one is sure to associate the Lord’s lila with the gopis with one’s limited mundane experience and conceptions. This will not lead to elevation, but to degradation. Therefore one has to hear the Lord’s pastimes with great faith. The symptoms of such great faith will be described further along.

Actually an advanced devotee, though he preaches with logic and reason, does not claim to have a drop of love for Krishna. This is the verdict of Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami (Caitanya-caritamrta, Antya. 20.28).

Those with pretensions to advanced knowledge of prema-rasa do not know that genuine devotees relish the Bhagavad-gita as much as any other subject matter, because it is authentic katha about the glories of the Lord and His devotee. Pretenders claim to be following the true inner meaning of Lord Caitanya’s mission, but several of our acaryas, whom we consider as great aquatics swimming and diving deep in the ocean of love of God, wrote commentaries on Bhagavad-gita. The reason: One must understand basic math before one is eligible to study calculus.

Yet those with pretensions of advanced realization of the intimate lila of the Lord imagine that their indiscriminate outlook was the attitude of our acaryas, even though one would be hard-pressed to find such example in Srila Prabhupada or his Guru Maharaja. Caitanya Mahaprabhu was Himself not indiscriminate about the esoteric aspect of His teachings. His program was kirtana and prasada for the masses and confidential matters for the few. Although indisputably these confidential teachings were the ultimate purpose of His incarnation, he reserved discussion of such topics for those who were qualified.

How to become qualified? In Hawaii, Prabhupada put it nicely when he said, “Because without coming to the platform of sattva-guna, nobody can advance in spiritual life. That is a fact. Just like nobody is allowed to enter the law college unless he is a graduate. This restriction is there. What he will understand, law? He must be a graduate. So, similarly, first of all, one must come to the platform of sattva-guna.”

The same reasoning applies with the even higher stages of spiritual evolution. Unless one is a graduate from the grip of the three modes of nature what is what is the point of dwelling on topics like the gopis dealings with Krishna, which will sooner or later excite our mundane conceptions and find ourselves mired in the very bog we want to escape from?

Therefore, we find in the Caitanya-caritamrta, that when Pradyumna Misra reported to Sri Caitanya that Srila Ramananda Raya was personally touching the bodies of the young girls who would perform in his play, the point about hearing the topics of Krishna and the gopis as an antidote to lusty desires comes up (Antya.5.45,46 and purport):

vraja-vadhu-sange krsnera rasadi-vilasa
yei jana kahe, sune kariya-visvasa
hrd-roga-kama tarira tat-kale haya ksaya
tina-guna-ksobha nahe, 'maha-dhira' haya

When one hears or describes with great faith the pastimes of Lord Krishna, such as His rasa dance with the gopis, the disease of lusty desires in his heart and the agitation caused by the three modes of material nature are immediately nullified, and he becomes sober and silent.

PURPORT

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura comments in this connection, “Any person seriously inclined to hear about the pastimes of Krishna's rasa dance, as mentioned in Srimad-Bhagavatam, with great faith and a transcendental, spiritually inspired mind, is immediately freed from the natural lusty desires found within the heart of a materialistic man.”

This remark of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta seems to support that we should all hear about the rasa dance as soon as possible. But as the purport continues Srila Prabhupada gives us a significantly different picture of what this means practically. Please pay close attention:

### Chapter 11 Part 2: “When a Pure Vaisnava Speaks on Srimad-Bhagavatam and Another Pure Vaisnava Hears Srimad-Bhagavatam from Such a Realized Soul, Both of Them Live in the Transcendental World”

When a pure Vaisnava speaks on Srimad-Bhagavatam and another pure Vaisnava hears Srimad-Bhagavatam from such a realized soul, both of them live in the transcendental world, where the contamination of the modes of material nature cannot touch them. Freed from the contamination of the modes of nature, the speaker and hearer are fixed in a transcendental mentality, knowing that their position on the transcendental platform is to serve the Supreme Lord. The class known as prakrta-sahajiya, who consider the transcendental pastimes of Lord Krishna something like the behavior between a man and a woman in the material field, artificially think that hearing the rasa-lila will help them by diminishing the lusty desires of their diseased hearts. But because they do not follow the regulative principles but instead violate even ordinary morals, their contemplation of rasa-lila is a futile attempt, which sometimes results in their imitating the dealings of the gopis and Lord Krishna. To forbid such habits of the prakrta-sahajiyas, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu has excluded their material intelligence by using the word viįväsa (“faith”). In Srimad-Bhagavatam (10.33.30), Srila Sukadeva Gosvami says:

naitat samacarej jatu manasapi hy anisvarah

vinasyaty acaran maudhyad yatha rudro 'bdhijam visam

“Certainly one who is not the Supreme Personality of Godhead should never, even within his mind, imitate the activities of the transcendental rasa-lila of Krishna. If out of ignorance one does so, he will be destroyed, just as if he were to imitate Lord Siva, who drank poison produced from the ocean.”

In the context of our discussion, what shall we glean from the above? That the person who benefits from hearing the topics of the rasa-lila from the lips of a qualified speaker, a pure Vaisnava, is one on the platform of visvasa, firm faith. This is already quite a progressed stage of spiritual development. Prabhupada refers to such a hearer as “a pure Vaisnava” as well. Then, the question comes, why would a pure Vaisnava need to become free from lusty desires found within the heart of a materialistic man, which the verses assure us will be the result of hearing about the rasa-lila? How can one be pure and lusty at the same time?

To understand this we have to look at the context. Lord Caitanya began by praising the qualities of Ramananda Raya by saying the he is so exalted his mind cannot be deviated from Krishna, even by such close association of women. Rather they are like wooden dolls to the pure mind of Ramananda. The Lord then said, “I am a sannyasi and I certainly consider Myself renounced. But not to speak of seeing a woman, if I even hear the name of a woman, I feel changes in my mind and body. Therefore who could remain unmoved by the sight of a woman? It is very difficult.”

This is not a description of an ordinary lusty materialistic man, whose lust is out of control. Yet it describes someone who is affected by the lust factor. Still, he may be quite advanced and sincerely committed. In an earlier chapter Srila Prabhupada defined a pure Vaisnava as someone who has no ulterior motive. Can a person have no private agenda and still be affected in body and mind, as Lord Caitanya described? Why not? The key thing is that he remains above the modes if he does not act under the pushing of the mind or genitals. Vaco vegam manasa. . . Yet, such a devotee, when he hears rasa-lila talks from an even more accomplished devotee, will be rid of all vestiges of mundane lust. Knowing this Mahaprabhu sent Pradyumna to Ramananda to hear and become purified.

Therefore, one must not only be able to practice the four regulative principles, as a prior qualification for hearing the esoteric or confidential aspect of Krishna consciousness, but one must be above violating all subsidiary moral or ethical principles as well.

One must be a thoroughgoing Vaisnava in many respects, which is to say, one must be in control of one’s mind, which is to say, one must be quite accomplished in sattva-guna. This person may still be affected by lust, but it is not uncontrollable lust. This is the point. If one is in a “having” orientation to life, which is symptomatic of rajo-guna, and one professes interest in rasa-lila, then perhaps that is but another symptom of the having mode.

For example, to promise more politics, nastiness, and manipulation, and in the same breadth profess interest in raga-bhakti is highly incongruent. Ulterior motive is indicated. Uncontrollable lust is indicated.

This is not the kind of lust that the Sukadeva is referring to in the Bhagavatam verse or Lord Caitanya is speaking about. Rather it indicates the artificial thinking that Prabhupada is warning us about in the purport and concludes that “by using the word visvasa (faith)”, Lord Caitanya forbids such habits of the sahajiyas, people who accept their mundane emotions as transcendental.

II

Like any other subject matter bhakti has a beginner’s level, an intermediate level, and an advanced level. The sincere student must progress step by step from one stage to the other. To achieve the postgraduate stage one must graduate from the lower stage. Tripping over one’s feet “to get to the nectar” only impresses others similarly infected with immature enthusiasm to become advanced; but this means very little on the transcendental platform.

Our enthusiasm must be tempered by our patience, yet we must be fully confident, having set our sights on the goal and committed to authentic process, that our goal will be achieved. In this way, following faithfully in the footsteps of our previous acaryas success will come to us. This is the formula for success received from Srila Rupa Gosvami. Laulyam or transcendental lobha is cultivated by degrees; it is not a condition we hype ourselves into.

### Chapter 11 Part 3: “People, in the Name of Following the Teachings of Lord Caitanya, Mistake a Soft Head for a Soft Heart”

Worse than the neophytes enthusiasm to bypass the intermediate stage of devotional service, is he who encourages their misguided efforts by offering “the nectar of sweet katha”. The net effect is that huge numbers of people, in the name of following the teachings of Lord Caitanya, mistake a soft head for a soft heart. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, in taking on the sahajiya sampradayas prevalent in his time, tried to stem the tide of sentimentality, which was a disgrace to Gaudiya Vaisnavism, confusing the public as to what is the authentic Vaisnava dharma. When the same problem appears within our own ranks, however, it is far more insidious, far more confusing, owing to being in the garb of the authentic follower of our sampradaya.

One of the telltale symptoms of hasty transition through the intermediate stage of devotional service is seen when people go directly to writing books on the most elevated aspects of our philosophy. Our acaryas generally wrote books in a kind of ascending order, or at least they penned books spanning all the stages of devotional service. Their aim was not to simply impress us with their capacity to discourse on elevated topics, but to walk us through the progressive stages of devotional service.

Those who focus exclusively on the high end of the philosophy are more interested in canvassing a following than walking us through the process. Theirs it is but another cheating proposition. Discriminating readers must know to avoid such cheaters. As per the advice of Srila Bhaktivinoda, such authors are but a variation of the dharmadhvaji; they should be meticulously shunned.

Sometimes holders of the sentimental paradigm even try sounding like a character right off a page from the literature of the Gosvamis, such as Vidagdha Madhava, adopting an effeminate voice, or an effeminate walk or other effeminate mannerisms. They talk about “the nectar” as if they are tasting something ever so special that others may feel left out. In this way they lure the innocent along the path of bhakti-as-dogma instead of bhakti-as-science. All because they find discriminating too burdensome and want to practice religion without thinking. They want to advance without paying the price.

III

Srila Prabhupada warns in several places about people who mistake their sentimental notions as transcendental. Considering that sentimentality is not a sign of great faith, he says “they actually know nothing about love of God.” Prabhupada has carefully laid out the philosophy so we can know all the pitfalls on this path, but it is commonplace that devotees do not take the time to digest fully his teachings. Thus they become easily misled by people with pretensions to elevated status. Citing Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, in Caitanya-caritamrta (Antya. 20.28) Srila Prabhupada writes (Italics in English and remarks in parentheses are mine):

premera svabhava--yahan premera sambandha
sei mane,--`krsne mora nahi prema-gandha'

Wherever there is a relationship of love of Godhead, its natural symptom is that the devotee does not think himself a devotee. Instead, he always thinks that he has not even a drop of love for Krishna.

PURPORT

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura comments that persons who are actually very poor because they possess not even a drop of love of Godhead or pure devotional service falsely advertise themselves as great devotees, although they cannot at any time relish the transcendental bliss of devotional service. A class of so-called devotees known as prakrta-sahajiyas sometimes display devotional symptoms to exhibit their good fortune. They are pretending, however, because these devotional features are only external. The prakrta-sahajiyas exhibit these symptoms to advertise their so-called advancement in love of Krishna, but instead of praising the prakrta-sahajiyas for their symptoms of transcendental ecstasy, pure devotees do not like to associate with them. It is not advisable to equate the prakrta-sahajiyas with pure devotees. When one is actually advanced in ecstatic love of Krishna, he does not try to advertise himself. Instead, he endeavors more and more to render service to the Lord.

The prakrta-sahajiyas sometimes criticize pure devotees by calling them philosophers, learned scholars, knowers of the truth, or minute observers (or “into intellectual stuff”), but not devotees. On the other hand, they depict themselves as the most advanced, transcendentally blissful devotees, deeply absorbed in devotional service and mad to taste transcendental mellows. They also describe themselves as the most advanced devotees in spontaneous love (raganuga-bhaktas), as knowers of transcendental mellows (rasika-vaisnavas), as the topmost devotees in conjugal love of Krishna (gopi-bhava), and so on. Not actually knowing the transcendental nature of love of God, they accept their material emotions to be indicative of advancement. In this way they pollute the process of devotional service. To try to become writers of Vaisnava literature, they introduce their material conceptions of life into pure devotional service. Because of their material conceptions, they advertise themselves as knowers of transcendental mellows, but they do not understand the transcendental nature of devotional service.

In a conversation in Bhubaneswar, Srila Prabhupada quoted his Guru Maharaja again, that “when our men become sahajiyas that is most dangerous.” Because they pollute the process of devotional service with their foolish ideas about intellectual versus “the heart”, and thereby swindle the uninformed and the simple-minded, and themselves, too, of course.

### Chapter 11 Part 4: “Faith and the Analytical Mind are Inseparable From Each Other”

As stated before, intellectually lazy people, sentimental people, presume a conflict between developing faith and developing their powers of reason. This split is completely artificial. Faith and the analytical mind are inseparable from each other.

Yet despite all the clear arguments in the teachings of Srila Prabhupada supporting developing our powers of reason, and his open declaration that the Krishna consciousness movement is for training devotees to be “independently thoughtful,” the phenomenon of faith minus an analytical mind—blind faith—is becoming more commonplace in our society. It rears its ugly head in different ways and one must become adept at recognizing its many manifestations.

Appeals for blind faith in the institution, for example, “Because Prabhupada founded it and Prabhupada is perfect, so ISKCON is also perfect”, are the flip side of the coin of artificial advancement from the head to “the heart.” It is simply another form of substituting emotional stroking for real philosophy that appeals to our intelligence. It is a bluff. Service to the institution is not automatically devotional service, and every devotee is responsible to understand the distinction, between what is devotional service, to which we should legitimately surrender, and what is blind following of the institutionalized or socioeconomic pressure, to which we should not surrender.

All this bewilderment can be avoided by careful reading of Prabhupada's books and actually processing what we read; and by taking responsibility to sort and sift the data. Prabhupada says that when one “knows the transcendental philosophy one becomes free from doubt and delusion and one acts without hesitancy.” And he makes it so easy for us to achieve that when he makes statements like this:

When one is actually advanced in ecstatic love of Krishna, he does not try to advertise himself. Instead, he endeavors more and more to render service to the Lord.

So simple. Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami exhorts his readers to try and understand the mercy of Mahaprabhu with vicara, logic. He is preaching the highest philosophy in the Caitanya-caritamrta, but he asks us to understand it with logic. He does not want us to be dogmatic, blind believers, nor does he want us to be mushy sentimentalists. He advocates hard-headed realism, vicara. He speaks strongly in some places, so does Prabhupada, and that may seem dogmatic, but upon scrutiny we always find firm and irrefutable logic backing it all up. This is the symptom of the topmost devotee in the preaching field.

Passionate intensity accompanied by scientific logic is not the same thing as passionate intensity minus rational thinking. They are worlds apart. We must be alert to make this distinction. Passionate intensity without clear logic and argument, even if full of sastric references should be suspect.

When Srila Bhaktisiddhanta says prana ache yara se hetu pracara, here prana, or life, means passionate intensity hand in hand with a scientific or rational presentation of bhakti. One who has life and preaches with logic and reason based on sastra can represent the parampara. One who simply has life, but is irrational, throwing logic and reason to the wind, may put on an engaging show, but it is all utpata, a disturbance, even if his capacity to cite sastra invokes awe. The same verdict goes for the mellow, charismatic, “loving” presentation that is becoming more and more the craze.

Sometimes Prabhupada typified his preaching method as the Bhagavatam in one hand and a pickaxe in the other. The Bhagavatam represents vicara, the systematic, scientific presentation of the science of God, and the pickaxe symbolizes a forceful presentation, prana, life. Our first duty is to model ourselves after his method as much as possible.

Citing sastra without realization is as useless as not citing sastra at all. Therefore devotees are advised to preach according to their realization. But alas, we tend to distinguish ourselves only in the area of passionate intensity and fall very short in the area of realization, of putting forth presentations that appeal to logic and reason. Few make a distinction between a realized presentation and mere parroting.

In our society, we have the phenomenon of a sannyasi who memorizes whole passages from Prabhupada’s books and it is not uncommon when he lectures that he goes into what appears to be a trancelike state and reels off long passages from memory. And poor devotees are impressed by this tape recording presentation. If he would explain one line of his memorized spiel with logic and reason that would have far more value than his parrot-like recitation, but we are such sorry examples of thinking humans that many glorify this empty presentation. It is truly sad to see this become accepted as the meaning of Prabhupada’s mission.

### Chapter 11 Part 5: “Many Are Swayed by a Dogmatic Presentation”

And many are swayed by a dogmatic presentation. If the speaker is mellow or reputed to be super-elevated, or has a big institutional title he can make outlandish claims and bare assertions and it all goes unchallenged. And nowadays, if you speak strongly, but logically, that is taken as dogmatic. One wonders, “What other unimaginable surprises does Kali-yuga have in store?”

The amount of faulty logic that goes unchallenged in classes, in publications, and in the administration of the society is simply embarrassing considering our noble lineage. And the older devotees tend to be more guilty of this than the younger. Advanced devotees are supposed to be expert at logic and reason, according to Srila Prabhupada, but in the institutionalized atmosphere of “no challenge” the rubber-stamped advanced often speak, rule, and write, without logic and reason. Why? Because they are advanced, thus absolute; thus need not explain themselves. Proclamations are good enough.

There is a species of dogmatism that disguises itself as a rational presentation, as in the aforementioned letter featured in Our Original Position, but the alert knower of the philosophy is able to act without hesitancy and detect the face of irrationality behind the mask. In fact that applies not just to the letter but to the entire book. Persons capable of penetrating these pretenses of scientific philosophical presentations may be in the minority, but they are the real candidates for achieving Krishna consciousness.

Maya is so wonderful. The illustration entitled “Conceiving the Inconceivable” in Our Mission: Part Two depicted the phenomenon in our institution of more irrationality at the top than at the bottom, when one would assume the very opposite to be the case. When we are infected, however, with the delusion of having gone absolute as being the symptom of advanced Krishna consciousness, then one feels no need to be rational. What kind of person agrees to participate in such a society?

IV

Along the same lines of Lord Caitanya's definition of the topmost devotee, cited near the end of the previous chapter, Srila Rupa Gosvami defines the uttama-adhikari in Bhaktirasamrta Sindhu, (1.2.17):

sastre yuktau ca nipunah sarvatha drdha-niscayah
praudha-sraddho'dhikari yah sa bhaktav uttamo matah

One who is expert in logic and understanding of revealed scriptures, and who always has firm conviction and deep faith that is not blind, is to be considered a topmost devotee in devotional service.

He has deep faith “that is not blind.” How do we know a devotee’s faith is not blind? Because he is able to explain his realizations in Krishna consciousness in ways that appeal to our intelligence—i.e. with logic and argument. A realized devotee is not a human tape recording. If he preaches dogmatically, even with sastric quotes, but cannot explain his conclusions with logic and argument, we must know that “Here is blind faith. This speaker or writer has not realized the subject matter, even if he has an air of full conviction.” It is all a bluff.

Also, it is not that he browbeats one and holds his institutional position over one's head so one caves in to his title, or to the fact that he is surrounded by a huge following, which, unfortunately, is standard practice in ISKCON. Such a “preacher” can deliver nothing but high-blood pressure, or depression.

Meanwhile Lord Caitanya says that the authentic preacher “can deliver the whole world.” In The Nectar of Devotion, in the chapter describing eligibility for pure devotional service, Srila Prabhupada renders the meaning of the above verse in this lucid way:

The devotee in the first or uppermost class is described as follows. He is very expert in the study of relevant scriptures, and he is also expert in putting forward arguments in terms of those scriptures. He can very nicely present conclusions with perfect discretion and can consider the ways of devotional service in a decisive way. He understands perfectly that the ultimate goal of life is to attain to the transcendental loving service of Krishna, and he knows that Krishna is the only object of worship and love. This first-class devotee is one who has strictly followed the rules and regulations under the training of a bona fide spiritual master and has sincerely obeyed him in accord with revealed scriptures. Thus, being fully trained to preach and become a spiritual master himself, he is considered first class. The first-class devotee never deviates from the principles of higher authority, and he attains firm faith in the scriptures by understanding with all reason and arguments. When we speak of arguments and reason, it means arguments and reason on the basis of revealed scriptures. The first-class devotee is not interested in dry speculative methods meant for wasting time. In other words, one who has attained a mature determination in the matter of devotional service can be accepted as the first-class devotee.

From the above it is clear that faith and analytical thinking are at their peak in the first-class devotee. Such a devotee “being fully trained to preach and become a spiritual master himself, is considered first-class.” Such a devotee does not require anyone’s rubber-stamp of approval; he also does not care for those preoccupied with rubber-unstamping. Both these parties become like the scrawny village dogs who bark and howl while the elephant goes about its business unperturbed. He preaches pure devotional service and those who are fortunate are free to follow him. Others, those who are too bewildered, are not his concern. Another symptom of the first-class devotee is that he does not like to waste his time.

## Chapter 12: The Ritvik Heresy

### Chapter 12 Part 1: “I Shall Request Them All to Become Spiritual Master”

So all my students present here who are feeling much obliged. . . I shall request them all to become spiritual master. Every one of you should be spiritual master next. . . . Whatever you are hearing from me, whatever you are learning from me, you have to distribute the same in total without any addition or alteration. Then all of you become the spiritual master. That is the science of becoming spiritual master. To become a spiritual master is not very wonderful thing. Simply one has to become sincere soul. (Srila Prabhupada 3 Sept. 1969)

In both Caitanya-caritamrta and Bhaktirasamrta sindhu, the three classes of devotees are described to explain eligibility for pure devotional service. This is significant because it may help some to get a better grip on one of the hottest topics in our community—the guru issue.

“Eligibility” indicates that contrary to certain kinds of rhetoric one does not have to claim explicitly or implicitly to be in his siddha-svarupa, or to be a rasika-vaisnava, or have some other esoteric qualification to be guru. Obviously, such a guru is ideal. It is certainly the first choice for any intelligent aspirant. But, apart from whimsy or speculation, how will one who is not equally qualified decide who has such qualifications?

Therefore we find that careful attention to the sastra reveals that we are not encouraged to recognize the topmost devotee by esoteric or obscure criteria. Rather, Caitanya Mahaprabhu says that the uttama adhikari preaches with logic and reason. This indicates that an advanced devotee is not on the platform of blind faith, and that he is a sane, rational human being. An advanced devotee, when questioned on an apparent difference of opinion between sastra and Srila Prabhupada, for example, will not say, “Prabhu, do not you have more faith in Srila Prabhupada than in sastra?”

An advanced devotee does not say, “I’m not a big philosopher, but I’m a Prabhupada man.” How can one be “a Prabhupada man” without being a philosopher? The notion is absurd beyond words. Srila Prabhupada did not brave two heart-attacks on the Jaladuta coming come to the West in order to present this kind of religion. The world is already overwrought with such kinds of religious feelings, full of passionate intensity, but irrational when subjected to analytical scrutiny. We have nothing against passionate intensity, as long as it is rational.

In addition to displaying a steadfast capacity for logic and reason, we also see that an advanced devotee is fully absorbed in discharging devotional service. Naturally sense control and proper conduct are considerations as well. Thus we can look for the symptoms given by Srila Rupa Gosvami in the vaco vegam manasa krodha vegam verse of Sri Upadesamrta.

It is certainly interesting to note that in giving us the essence of instruction in the science of bhakti, Srila Rupa Gosvami does not give any mystical or esoteric qualifications in this important verse. Rather he gives us visible criteria. This we can use in ascertaining whom we may recognize as guru. This requires taking the time to get to know the guru personally, not just in the context of giving classes, although how he speaks is the primary consideration in determining the transcendental status of a saintly person. This Srila Prabhupada has made clear in his purport to Bhagavad-gita 2.54.

The current system, wherein the institutionalized guru flies in initiates one and flies out, is not the proper way for the guru-disciple relationship to evolve. Both are supposed to study each other prior to the initiation. At one time, studying Prabhupada’s books sufficed for studying Srila Prabhupada, who was the single initiating guru. In the ISKCON of today, however, studying his books cannot substitute for getting to know one’s prospective guru, unless perhaps he too has written substantial books on the philosophy thereby demonstrating through logic and reason his thorough realization of bhakti-marga. The sastra warns against blind acceptance from either side. Both should understand the temperament of the other.

If the guru makes himself unavailable for association, how can one make an informed determination about his qualifications? One has to go by popular opinion, which is the most hopeless basis for such a decision. It is better not to accept such a person as guru. A personal relationship between the guru and disciple must be established prior to accepting each other. There may surely be exceptions to this. Srila Prabhupada, for instance, had a relationship with many of his disciples through his books, full of his instructions illuminating the path of pure devotional service. Today he still has a siksa relationship with all his faithful followers. But we must distinguish between exceptions and the general rule. Imitating Srila Prabhupada is dangerous. Following his instructions is safe.

II

In finding one’s guru, we could not say this is a science if we used all mystical criteria that the neophyte has no ability to verify. “Science” means verifiable, visible, reasonable, and consistent—not invisible, arbitrary, and left to my whim or guesswork—which is a tendency in the near-rabid insistence of some who are concerned about the guru issue. They define guru in the most superlative terms and then conclude that no one is qualified to be guru. Probably judging more from their own intimate knowledge of their own disqualifications than from an objective assessment of others.

Actually, Prabhupada defined guru in several ways, indicating that there are many varieties of gurus, because as in all matters in devotional service, there are varieties and gradations. In devotional service, we must work from a broad understanding rather than from a keyhole vision. We fear being swindled, which is healthy, but in life it happens that people push away from something unacceptable or problematic, something irrational—the present ISKCON system of rubber-stamping gurus—only to back into something equally problematic either philosophically or practically.

An example of this is the heretical ritvik theory. Followers of this idea, desperate to find a workable alternative to the rubber-stamp method of guru making, forget that the sastra says that conclusions not based on sastra is tamo-guna and that actions in this mode results in foolishness. As we all know, two wrongs do not make a right. For those of us whose faith in sastra is fixed, regardless of how justified idea may appear, it cannot can win our hearts if it lacks sastric support.

### Chapter 12 Part 2: “We Have to Look Closely to See if Ritvik Philosophy Serves Something Other Than the Truth””

It is not uncommon to come across dogmatic insistence that guru must be an uttama-adhikari, maha-bhagavata, rasika-vaisnava or something similar, complete with sastric quotes and references to Srila Prabhupada. And these utterances are certainly true; yet in virtually every instance, the author or speaker tends to make no attempt to reconcile those superlative definitions with the other statements of Srila Prabhupada that indicate either a variety of kinds of gurus, some having less than superlative qualifications, or perhaps describe the superlative definitions of guru in more concrete terms.

The proponents of the only-the-super-Vaisnava-as-guru theory tend to insist on defining the first-class devotee by mystical criteria, perhaps not having a clear or realized understanding of the terms themselves. For example, typically, they insist that the paramahamsa, maha-bhagavata, uttama adhikari must see Krishna. But what is meant by “see”? Does it mean literally see Krishna? If so, who will decide that?

Despite their insistence, they themselves cannot say who sees or doesn’t see. If they could see, they could be guru, according to their own criteria. In which case, they can be guru themselves and the ritvik theory is null and void. And if they can’t see, why insist on that as criteria for everyone else? Then we are on the dogmatic platform, which supposed to be shunned by preachers of Krishna consciousness.

For that matter, what is meant by maha-bhagavata, pure devotee, or any other similar terms? Indeed, without clearly defining our terms, we cannot be certain that the speaker and audience both have the same ideas in mind. We often sling these words back and forth without appreciating the possibility that no participant in the discussion necessarily has the same thing in mind when we say “pure devotee”, “maha-bhagavata,” and so on.

We have been swindled by the practice of rubber-stamping gurus. But we should not be blind to the fact that we can be swindled to no end in finding a bona fide guru when we follow criteria that we have no personal capacity to verify. For example, even if I have a mystical experience—Krishna walking with me daily on the banks of Radha-Kunda—how can my private mystical revelations carry any authority for others when they have no basis for certainty? I could be cheating, putting on a show. By the same token, I could be telling the truth. But who will decide?

Thus swindle is no less a possibility when we try to ascertain the uttama adhikari by symptoms other than the quantifiable ones given in sastra and in the works of our acaryas. Nowhere are we advised to decide arbitrarily that a particular Vaisnava walks with Radha and Krishna on the banks of the Yamaha. Unless we can present proof, how can we make this superlative criteria the basis for recognizing who can be guru? How can I know for sure that this criteria applies to the person that Krishna is providing for me right now?

That is impossible. I’ll find myself on the dogmatic platform. The blind faith platform, which was already shown to be heretical in an earlier chapter. I become a guru fanatic rather than a scientific practitioner of bhakti-yoga. Dogmatism and fanaticism, symptomized by passionate intensity, but unsupportable with authentic logic and reason, are but compensations for a realized understanding. They indicate blind faith pretending to be rational faith.

Rather than a verdict reached by mature deliberation of the sastric injunctions, dogmatism indicates the person has made an emotional investment up front, and then tries to employ logic and philosophy in the service of their foregone conclusion. This approach is always a mistake in Vaisnavism. We search the sastras to find the conclusion, not to find support for our foregone conclusion, as the ritvik advocates tend to do.

Our principle is evam parampara praptam. When we focus exclusively on guru and ignore the principle of parampara, then it is easy to concoct the ritvik foolishness, or get seduced by it. Once again, out of sentiment, we find that people develop a philosophy devoid of sastric support. Once again we find ourselves mired in heresy.

Yet the ritviks cite so much sastra that those not adept at our philosophy get impressed. They think, “Yes, this makes sense. If the guru is not walking arm in arm with Krishna, like Srila Prabhupada, then I should be initiated as Prabhupada’s disciple by a ritvik guru. Brilliant.”

But where do we find a single one of our acaryas establishing their right to take disciples on the basis of their walking arm in arm with Krishna? We accepted Srila Prabhupada primarily on the basis that he came in parampara and his conduct was exemplary. And in fact, we have evidence in Prabhupada’s own words that what the ritviks claim to be “the solution” to the guru issue, is in fact nothing but the standard principle of parampara. The difference is that the ritvik version minimizes the responsibility of the initiator to be an example for the disciple. However, in this 1970 letter to Makhanlal Dasa, Srila Prabhupada wrote something amazingly close to the ritvik concept but he obviously thought it to be nothing but the standard principle—parampara:

I can assure you that if you follow my instruction as above mentioned there is no doubt about it that through me my spiritual Master Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura will be pleased, and through His mercy Lord Nityananda will be pleased. In this way Lord Caitanya and ultimately Radha Krishna will be pleased, and thus your life will be successful.

You are all intelligent boys. Please try to understand me and do the needful.

What is the objection if someone initiates in the same spirit that Srila Prabhupada expresses in this letter? Is that person a guru or a ritvik guru? It follows that if Prabhupada was a bona fide guru, this person is also a bona fide guru, following in his footsteps. Then, where is the need for the ritvik rhetoric, which adds to the confusion about the guru issue?

### Chapter 12 Part 3: “The Illusion and Misunderstanding of Our Philosophy”

In a written exchange with a godbrother, who once believed in the ritvik doctrine, when I mentioned the ritvik belief of another godbrother, I got this reply:

That's his illusion and misunderstanding of our philosophy. My realization is this: Faith in ritvik, stems from bitterness and anger, maybe over the leaders of ISKCON, but more likely in our own anger and disappointment in our own inability to fully surrender and give up all gross & subtle sense gratification. We can think that because we did not obey the order of our guru perfectly, no one has, or no one can. We also may not accept that Sri Guru and Gouranga are extremely compassionate, forgiving, and merciful to us fallen Kali Yuga entities.

To restrict Lord Caitanya to Srila Prabhupada is a great limitation on Him, and is a insult to Srila Prabhupada as it means that he is not able to bring anyone to Krishna Consciousness to any degree where the disciple could pass on the science to others. Definitely some food for thought in all this.

We have to look closely to see if ritvik philosophy serves something other than the truth. The description in this passage from the lips of a former ritvik believer opens up a significant possibility.

In the 1970 letter to Makhanlal, the last sentence quoted says “Please try to understand me and do the needful.” And as Srila Prabhupada says in the quote that opened this chapter, “Simply one has to become sincere soul.” That is the way to understand Srila Prabhupada.

How does one become a sincere soul? A definite consideration is to combine our heads and hearts. Do not practice or preach religion without philosophy, without science. Do not be a sentimental fanatic. Do not practice or preach blind faith. Do not be bluffed by cheaters. Remember this advice of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, which applies to the rubber-stampers, the blind followers, and the ritviks:

Those who propagate that bhagavad bhakti is the highest dharma yet behave against the principles of suddha bhakti and instruct others against the principles of suddha bhakti can be especially harmful to us. In the name of bhakti they instruct us against the principles of bhakti and ultimately lead us onto a path which is totally opposed to bhagavad bhakti.

This approach of discerning between authentic suddha bhakti and the pretend version is harder work, but nothing short of the hard work is going to get us to our goal anyway. God did not give us intelligence so we can forego its use. Rather He has promised to give us more of it, so we can approach Him. Simply we have to use fully what we already have.

## Chapter 13: “Who will Decide?  Who will Decide?”

### Chapter 13 Part 1: “The Primary Sense Organ in Spiritual Life is the Ear, Hearing”

Our philosophy is that the guru principle can manifest even in nature, and in animals, if only we have the eyes to see. Ultimately, “eyes” really means “ears,” because unlike the gross materialists, the primary sense organ in spiritual life is the ear, hearing. According to Srila Prabhupada, we recognize a saintly person primarily by how he speaks. If a saintly person’s speaking opens my eyes—specifically, if his speaking enables a neophyte to distinguish between matter and spirit in practical life—then I may have a guru, someone sent by Krishna to guide me, in response to the desire in my heart.

Perhaps at another stage Krishna will manifest as yet another guru. Therefore our system is one diksa guru and the option of unlimited siksa gurus; and it sometimes happens that the siksa guru is more important or more vital than the diksa guru. This is possible, but it does not nullify or invalidate the diksa guru. In any event my main concern in all stages is to be sincere and not to manufacture my own method of the bhakti science. Srila Prabhupada explains (23 Jan. 1977):

If you are actually hankering after Krishna—Krishna is within yourself—He will give you a guru. He will give you a guru. Guru-Krishna-kripaya. But we must be fortunate to get real guru. If I am unfortunate, I’ll not get a guru. Otherwise why Caitanya Mahaprabhu said, guru-Krishna-kripaya paya bhakti-lata-bija? Mälé haïä se bija kariya äropaëa. . . So how you will get the ultimate goal of life without accepting guru? Why do you manufacture this idea? There is no need of manufacturing this. You have to follow. Mahajano yena gatah sa panthah. If you manufacture, then you’ll be cheated. Do not do this. That has become a fashion, that you manufacture your own way of service. That is not possible. Therefore Rupa Gosvami stresses, adau-gurvasrayam: “The first business is that you must find out a bona fide guru.” Then other things.

In this connection, the 1990 ISKCON Journal featured a discussion with Sripada B.V. Narayana Maharaja, Ravindra Swarupa dasa and Bhurijana dasa. The talk centered around the heretical ritvik philosophy, which emphasizes only one aspect of the guru principle and concludes that only Prabhupada can be guru:

RS: . . . Rupa-vilasa and his associates insist that one can only have faith in Srila Prabhupada as guru--

NM: They can tell about those who have been initiated by fallen persons. But what about the newcomer?

RS: They say that he also can accept only Srila Prabhupada.

NM: Why?

RS: Because they think other people will fall also.

NM: But a new person will come and associate with some devotees, and he will be guided, and if he has sraddha, faith, then he can be initiated by someone present there. It is not that Prabhupada or other past acarya will come and initiate. No. He will have to be initiated by a present devotee in whom he has developed faith.

RS: Their repeated argument is that the only person really qualified to give diksa is uttama adhikari.

NM: Who will decide? Who will decide? They will decide?

The first thing is that the presumption that because persons in the service of guru have fallen we should conclude that all will fall is not only inferior logic, it is a hellish mentality. To think categorically in this way about all Vaisnavas is to be a resident of hell. Then the passage ends with a very good question. Who will decide?

Does the sastra or our acaryas give us direction who will decide who is really qualified to give diksa other than the two parties involved, namely the prospective disciple and the prospective guru? Not at all. Rather, Srila Prabhupada, citing Srila Jiva Gosvami, writes (Cc. Adi.1.35. purport):

It is imperative that a serious person accept a bona fide spiritual master in terms of the sastric injunction. Sri Jiva Gosvami advises that one not accept a spiritual master in terms of hereditary or customary social and ecclesiastical conventions. One should simply try to find a genuinely qualified spiritual master for actual advancement in spiritual understanding.

No support for the current rubber-stamp method we practice. If the rubber-stamp by fiat method is problematic, do we assume that a categorical rubber-unstamp by ritvik fiat is the solution? Let’s see if B.V. Narayana Maharaja’s answers are in line with Srila Prabhupada’s teachings on this point:

RS: I think so.

Bhurijana Dasa: They seem to have already decided that no one is qualified.

NM: They may have committed to decide, but actually the devotee who is seeking initiation, he will decide. That devotee shall see whether he (the prospective guru) is qualified or not, not any other person. The devotee will see that, “I am taking some siksa” from this devotee, and he will decide “he should be my guru” or not. No one else.

In other words, the guru is self-effulgent to the disciple. Hence the decision to take this or that person as guru is the prospective disciple's decision. This is our philosophy. Prabhupada always taught us that the person who opens our eyes is our guru. In this way, guru is self-effulgent to me even if not to the rest of the world. Both the rubber-stamp process practiced in ISKCON and the rubber-unstamp process of the so-called ritvik philosophy implicitly deny the doctrine of self-effulgence which is intrinsic to our philosophy. The ritviks vocally support it, but deny everyone the practical right to it, probably because, as with other parts of our philosophy, they have superimposed a fantastic understanding to what self-effulgence means.

II

One implication of the doctrine of self-effulgence is that if I already have initiation from Srila Prabhupada, then the guru issue is not really an issue for me, for I already have a guru. The guru issue is an issue for those who do not have a guru.

The issue for me is whether or not I’m going to fulfill Prabhupada’s desire and become qualified and be a guru, whether I’m going to practice “the science of becoming spiritual master,” whether I’m going to open eyes myself? For he wanted this:

So all my students present here who are feeling much obliged. . . I shall request them all to become spiritual master. Every one of you should be spiritual master next. . . . Whatever you are hearing from me, whatever you are learning from me, you have to distribute the same in total without any addition or alteration. Then all of you become the spiritual master. That is the science of becoming spiritual master. To become a spiritual master is not very wonderful thing. Simply one has to become sincere soul. (Srila Prabhupada 3 Sept. 1969)

Or, will I not only fail to embrace that responsibility to become a sincere soul, but throw everyone else into the same ditch as myself? This is the issue for all Prabhupada’s disciples to settle within themselves.

The issue is not that I will take it upon myself to decide whether others have that right or not. Such a disposition belies envy and malice more than anything else. We may hide our envy and malice in pious rhetoric, all aimed at justifying the ritvik foolishness, but well-disguised poison is still poison.

### Chapter 13 Part 2: “The Neophyte, is to Find a Guru on the Basis of Sastra and Not on the Basis of Social or Institutional Convention”

The issue for the neophyte, is to find a guru on the basis of sastra and not on the basis of social or institutional convention.

Our presumption that who can be guru or who can’t be guru is a matter of public or committee opinion, is owing to our institutionalized thinking. We assume that we are to manage things even if such orientation puts us at odds with the parampara philosophy. This is because of the influence of rajas and tamas on our thinking. Sattvic thinking means we cannot and will not deviate from serving the parampara philosophy, from the sastra or the siddhanta. If such thinking is poison initially, that is okay, because it will be nectar in the end. As things stand, the nectar stage is long past, we are immersed in poison. Chaos.

The guru issue is not an issue for me if I already have a guru. Other than speaking the sastric principles regarding guru, I have no right deciding who can or cannot be guru. And the question of my becoming a guru does not really arise until I preach and someone comes along professing faith in me and wants to be a disciple. The practice in ISKCON of authorizing people to be guru’s even before they have a single aspiring disciple has nothing to do with our Krishna consciousness philosophy.

ISKCON, thinking that management is the essence, made the grievous mistake of institutionalizing the guru function, which is patently wrong. It openly contradicts the principle that guru is self-effulgent—guru-Krishna-kripaya paya. It does not require management, but it requires education and that is what ISKCON should take responsibility for, teaching. Instead of teaching people “these are gurus” ISKCON should teach the principle—what is a bona fide guru—and what is a bona fide disciple.

IV

Here is Srila Prabhupada speaking on the principle of self-effulgence on 2nd. November 1977, just days before his final lesson:

Prabhupada: . . .Everyone will take, all my disciples. If you want, you can take also. But if you follow. They are prepared to sacrifice everything, so they'll take the leadership. I may, one, go away, but there will be hundreds, and they'll preach. If you want, you can also become a leader. We have no such thing, that “Here is leader.” Anyone who follows the previous leadership, he's a leader. “Indian,” we have no such distinction, “Indian,” “European.”

Brahmananda: They wanted an Indian to be the leader?

Prabhupada: Yes. (laughs) “Everyone, all my disciples, they are leaders. As purely as they follow, they become leader. If you want to follow, you can become a leader.

A self-effulgent leader. How? Because those who give authentic spiritual light and inspiration will emerge as the de facto leaders no matter what the institution does. There is no getting around this point. Those who follow will become leaders, because their preaching will empower others to discriminate between truth and illusion. No vote is required. No stamp. No unstamp. No institution can control this eventuality. It is the disciples that will decide, provided we train them to follow sastric injunctions instead of institutional convention or irrational sentiment.

Without doubt those favoring the ritvik interpretation of Srila Prabhupada’s teachings can work things in such a way that his words appear to support the ritvik concept. And those favoring the doctrine of self-effulgence can also argue and quote Prabhupada to support their conviction. The point is, which of these two orientations are consistent with the spirit and intent of the parampara?

The honest answer to this question reduces the philosophical aspect of the guru issue to its most simple yet most realistic elements and provides a firm basis for understanding the principle. This is the first step.

The second step, applying the principle, for those seeking either a siksa or diksa guru, is based on a combination of our complete sincerity and applying faithfully the sastric guidelines we have been discussing. In either case, in the matter of surrendering to a guru, it is the person surrendering that shall decide.

The Distinction Between Conditioned and Liberated

In counterpoint to ISKCON’s rubber-stamp-a-guru-program the ritviks elect themselves to decide who is not guru by their vote. They have done precisely what Prabhupada cautions against: “That you manufacture your own way of service.” On the subject of manufacturing, the ritviks say Prabhupada willed it and he, as the acarya, can do whatever he wants. This argument has fired the imaginations or perhaps the hearts of many, who apparently do not process philosophical ideas with their heads.

If they used their heads, they would know right away that this giddy doctrine is not Prabhupada’s teaching. Prabhupada taught us that the acarya is the acarya precisely because he follows the parampara. He taught that one who deviates from the parampara is not to be accepted but rejected. How can he forego fundamental Vaisnava principle, and his own teachings, to introduce a new guru system and be our acarya?

As already shown with the blind following orientation, this sort of thinking is simply the same brand of fanatical sentimentality with a twist—blind concocting disguised as blind following. It is rooted in a lack of understanding the spirit and intent of Srila Prabhupada. He does not want blind following or blind concocting. As we saw in the quote used some chapters earlier, where Prabhupada explained to Makhanlal how pleasing him, pleases Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, and so on back to Lord Nityananda, Srila Prabhupada concluded with, “You are all intelligent boys. Please try to understand me and do the needful.”

Ritviks lack this understanding, or they would never dare to float a concoction in place of the standard parampara understanding. Unfortunately, the GBC lacks it as well, because if they understood Srila Prabhupada, they would never have dared to float the rubber-stamp-a-mahatma-not-by-appointment-but-by-approval program, about which Prabhupada himself writes in the Bhagavad-gita, in the opening line to the mahatmanas tu mam partha verse, that “the mahatma is not created by rubber-stamp.”

On the basis of the above understanding, the ritviks and the GBC should be summarily rejected for preaching and practicing apasiddhanta, heresy. Our guru system is to accept the parampara system as we saw Prabhupada assert in the conversation cited a few pages earlier. We must not overlook the fact that the practice of creating gurus by elaborate approval (but not by appointment) methods—rubber-stamping—as practiced in ISKCON is philosophically wrong. However, this fact does not mean we need a new philosophy. What it means is that we need to follow the standard philosophy better. That and that alone is practical.

Whoever subverts the philosophy—making gurus by institutional vote or unmaking them by popular vote—is cheating. At least with respect to the GBC we have this warning from Srila Prabhupada, which underscores their responsibility both to him and to us (Lecture in Geneva 1974):

Yamaraja is one of the GBC of Krishna. Yes. As we have got twelve GBC’s, similarly Krishna has got GBC’s. Now, svayambhur naradah sambhu kumarah kapilo manuh Prahlado janako bhismo balir vaiyasakir vayam. That twelve men are authorized to preach Krishna consciousness. So we have to follow. Mahajano yena gatah sa panthah. Therefore we have created these GBC. So they should be very responsible men. Otherwise, they will be punished. They will be punished to become a sudra. Although Yamaraja is a GBC, but he made a little mistake. He was punished to become a sudra. So those who are GBC’s, they should be very, very careful to administer the business of ISKCON. Otherwise they will be punished. As the post is very great, similarly, the punishment is also very great. That is the difficulty. You can see from this example, Vidura. He was immediately punished. He did little mistake at Maëòüka... Because the rishis, the munis, they will curse. Dealing is very... Even Yamaraja is not taking.

It is said that a word to the wise should be sufficient. We cannot subvert the parampara philosophy and expect to walk away scot free. This is the height of folly.

### Chapter 13 Part 3: “It Was Assumed That to be Guru One Must Imitate Srila Prabhupada”

The central difficulty is that some years back it was assumed that to be guru one must imitate Srila Prabhupada. This led to wholesale granting off too much too soon to the young, inexperienced gurus. This fundamental misconception—that to be a bona fide guru one must imitate Prabhupada—which continues to some degree, has lead to havoc in the lives of those who tried to live on an artificial platform, and havoc in the disciples’ lives as well. Hence havoc in our positive alternative society.

Now the ritviks make the same mistake, but in another way. They too insist that one must be like Prabhupada to be guru, but not by imitating him. Rather one must literally be like him. This too is wrong; and in fact tinged with impersonalism, insofar as it translates into ruling out the varieties of pure devotees with a range of individual characteristic traits, such as we see throughout the Caitanya-caritamrta. The common denominator among those devotees is not their external behavior, but the condition of their hearts.

At the same time, conduct reveals character, so external characteristics are relevant, but it is not that all pure devotees will have the same external characteristics. That is impersonalism. However, they will have the same high standard of integrity and personal conduct. They will have an inordinate love for truth and justice and display qualities of compassion and so forth. Compassion does not mean sentimentality and making starry eyes at us. The ultimate display of compassion is in their willingness to perform the highest welfare work—teaching others to distinguish reality from illusion.

It is the sincere achieving of this common purpose that qualifies one to be a guru. This Prabhupada indicated in his 1969 lecture to be the heart of the science of becoming a guru: “To become a spiritual master is not very wonderful thing. Simply one has to become sincere soul.” Who will decide that so and so has achieved this level of being a sincere soul, the person himself or does someone outside himself decide for him? Well, we have tried the latter approach and from the results we have culled, the correct answer to this question becomes quite obvious.

Moreover, it is incompatible with the idea of self-realization that someone else has to tell me what my realization is. This is not indicative of achieving freedom from doubt and delusion. But one side, the GBC, assumes the right to say who has achieved this state, and the other side, the ritviks, assume the right to say who hasn’t. And their idea is whoever does not remind them of Prabhupada, is simply hopeless, even if he reminds others of Prabhupada.

Actually, why must any of us, who have not come even close to Prabhupada, especially in his state of consciousness, be perceived and be believed to be on the same spiritual platform as him in order to be guru? Where does Prabhupada teach this veiled mayavada idea?

There are various levels of devotees and gurus and all of them have one common symptom, their conduct is exemplary and they do not deviate from the parampara. Their hearts are fixed unswervingly on rendering pure devotional service to the Lord. They know the sastra and can explain it with logic and reason, and whosoever they inspire can learn from them and render service. On this fundamental basis we all accepted Prabhupada as guru in the sixties and seventies, why should the basic criteria change now?

It is not necessary. Someone may be a competent archer without being the equal of Arjuna; and the same reasoning goes for the service of spiritual master. As late as 1977, therefore, in Bombay, we find Srila Prabhupada attempting to dispel our misconception about guru, saying that to be guru one does not have to grow “four hand and eight legs”:

Prabhupada: Our point is that if you do not get knowledge from liberated person, that knowledge is useless. That is cheating. It is very easy. Just like a child. If he takes your direction, he is liberated, and if he acts according to his childish nature, then he's conditioned. If you take Krishna's instruction, then you are liberated. If you manufacture your own idea, then you are conditioned. Two things. Child is not actually liberated. He is child. But because he takes blindly the direction of the father, he's liberated. That is mam eva ye prapadyante. Anyone who has surrendered to Krishna and strictly follows what Krishna says, then he is liberated. Otherwise not. If he manufactures idea, then he's conditioned.

Dr. Patel: It is what? Sarva-dharman parityajya?

Prabhupada: Yes, and it is very easy: “Henceforward I shall simply follow what Krishna says.” That's all. You become liberated immediately. It is one minute's task, simply to decide that “No more my concoction, my imagination.” Then he is liberated.

Dr. Patel: But this decision, all these things are done by the mind which has got all the vartmas of the past births.

Prabhupada: Mind may be, but if I ask the mind that “You cannot do anything except what Krishna says,” then you are liberated. Very easy. You see? We are doing the same thing. We are not liberated. I am not liberated. But I am presenting Bhagavad-gita as it is. That's all. That's my doing.

Dr. Patel: You mean sve sve karmany abhiratah samsiddhim labhate narah. That is your duty you have. That is what ...

Prabhupada: So that verse is very important. That mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te. As soon as you become fully surrendered to Krishna, you are liberated, not that liberated means one has to grow four hands and eight legs. No. Simply you have to change the consciousness, that “Henceforward I shall act only as directed by Krishna.” That's all. You are liberated. It is one minute....

Dr. Patel: How do you get that direction moment by moment, hour by hour?

Prabhupada: By His representative, by His words, they are present. Where is the difficulty to get His direction? Tad viddhi pranipatena pariprasnena. One who has seen, one who has understood Krishna, take direction from him. “He's my representative.” Yasya prasadad bhagavat-prasado. If you get right guru, then you are liberated. If you follow the direction, if you want to please him, yasya prasadad bhagavat-prasado, then you are liberated. Otherwise, what is the meaning of this? Mam eva ye prapadyante. There is no need of waiting for liberation. “As soon as one surrenders to Me, he is immediately above the platform of maya.” Aham tvam sarva-papebhyo moksayisyami. Hare Krishna...therefore, our proposition is you take direction from Krishna and His representative. That's all. That will help you. Try to understand this point. Our system, parampara system, is that I am just like disciple of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. I do not say that l am liberated. I am conditioned. But because I am following the instruction of Bhaktisiddhanta, I'm liberated. This is the distinction between conditioned and liberated. When one is under the direction of a liberated person... The same thing: Electricity. The copper is not electricity, but when it is charged with electricity, if it is touched, that is electricity. And, similarly, this parampara system, the electricity is going. If you cut the parampara system, then there is no electricity. Therefore it is stressed so much. sa kaleneha mahata yogo nastah parantapa. The electricity is lost.

Similarly, Srila Prabhupada made this important point in other instances:

Dr. Benford: So everyone I meet who accepts Krishna as the perfect teacher is the perfect teacher?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, because he is teaching only Krishna's teachings, that's all. It is the same as the example we gave before: They may not be personally perfect, but whatever they are speaking is perfect because it is taught by Krishna.

Dr. Benford: Then you are not perfect.

Srila Prabhupada: No, I am not perfect. None of us claim to be perfect; we have so many faults. But because we do not speak anything beyond Krishna's teachings, our teaching is therefore perfect. (Consciousness: The Missing Link)

If we follow Arjuna and Krishna, then we get the perfect knowledge. We may not be cent percent perfect, but as far as possible, if we follow the instruction as it is, that much perfect. In this way one will get perfection. So one has to follow. The same example, try to understand, that a perfect, expert technologist or technician or mechanic is working, and somebody is working under his instruction. So this somebody, because he is strictly working under the instruction of the expert, he's also expert. It that clear? Because he is working under the expert. Do you follow? So if you follow a pure devotee, then you are also a pure devotee. It may not be that one is cent percent pure, because we are trying to raise ourselves from the conditional life. But if we strictly follow the pure devotee, then we are also pure devotee. So far we do, that is pure. So pure devotee does not mean one has to become immediately cent percent pure, but if he sticks to the principle “We'll follow a pure devotee,” then his actions are. . .he is as good as pure devotee. It is not that I am explaining in my own way. It is the explanation of Bhagavata. Mahajano yena gatah sa pantah. We have to follow the footprints of pure devotees. (Lecture, Los Angeles, November 25, 1968)

This is our guiding principle, that we follow the footsteps of the mahajanas; we do not concoct, no matter how practical our manufactured idea may seem. Rather we show our faith, in the parampara, in the Lord, and in the surrendering process by following, not by deviating.

## Chapter 14: The Distinction Between Conditioned and Liberated

### Chapter 14 Part 1. “In Counterpoint to ISKCON’s Rubber-Samp-a-Guru-Program the Ritviks Elect Themselves to Decide Who is Not Guru by Their Vote”

In counterpoint to ISKCON’s rubber-stamp-a-guru-program the *ritviks*elect themselves to decide who is not guru by their vote. They have done precisely what Prabhupada cautions against: "That you manufacture your own way of service." On the subject of manufacturing, the *ritviks*say Prabhupada willed it and he, as the *acarya,* can do whatever he wants. This argument has fired the imaginations or perhaps the hearts of many, who apparently do not process philosophical ideas with their heads.

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### Chapter 14 Part 2: “There Are Various Levels of Devotees and Gurus and Al of Them Have One Common Symptom; Their Conduct is Exemplary and They Do Not Deviate From the *Parampara*”

There are various levels of devotees and gurus and all of them have one common symptom, their conduct is exemplary and they do not deviate from the *parampara*. Their hearts are fixed unswervingly on rendering pure devotional service to the Lord. They know the *sastra*and can explain it with logic and reason, and whosoever they inspire can learn from them and render service. On this fundamental basis we all accepted Prabhupada as guru in the sixties and seventies, why should the basic criteria change now?

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Prabhupada: Our point is that if you do not get knowledge from liberated person, that knowledge is useless. That is cheating. It is very easy. Just like a child. If he takes your direction, he is liberated, and if he acts according to his childish nature, then he's conditioned. If you take Krsna's instruction, then you are liberated. If you manufacture your own idea, then you are conditioned. Two things. Child is not actually liberated. He is child. But because he takes blindly the direction of the father, he's liberated. That is *mam eva ye prapadyante.* Anyone who has surrendered to Krsna and strictly follows what Krsna says, then he is liberated. Otherwise not. If he manufactures idea, then he's conditioned.

Dr. Patel: It is what? *Sarva-dharman parityajya*?

Prabhupada: Yes, and it is very easy: "Henceforward I shall simply follow what Krsna says." That's all. You become liberated immediately. It is one minute's task, simply to decide that "No more my concoction, my imagination." Then he is liberated.

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Prabhupada: So that verse is very important. That *mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*. As soon as you become fully surrendered to Krsna, you are liberated, not that liberated means one has to grow four hands and eight legs. No. Simply you have to change the consciousness, that "Henceforward I shall act only as directed by Krsna." That's all. You are liberated. It is one minute....

Dr. Patel: How do you get that direction moment by moment, hour by hour?

Prabhupada: By His representative, by His words, they are present. Where is the difficulty to get His direction? *Tad viddhi pranipatena pariprasnena*. One who has seen, one who has understood Krsna, take direction from him. "He's my representative." *Yasya prasadad bhagavat-prasado*. If you get right guru, then you are liberated. If you follow the direction, if you want to please him, *yasya prasadad bhagavat-prasado*, then you are liberated. Otherwise, what is the meaning of this? *Mam eva ye prapadyante*. There is no need of waiting for liberation. "As soon as one surrenders to Me, he is immediately above the platform of maya." *Aham tvam sarva-papebhyo moksayisyami.*Hare Krsna...therefore, our proposition is you take direction from Krsna and His representative. That's all. That will help you. Try to understand this point. Our system, *parampara* system, is that I am just like disciple of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. I do not say that l am liberated. I am conditioned. But because I am following the instruction of Bhaktisiddhanta, I'm liberated. This is the distinction between conditioned and liberated. When one is under the direction of a liberated person... The same thing: Electricity. The copper is not electricity, but when it is charged with electricity, if it is touched, that is electricity. And, similarly, this *parampara* system, the electricity is going. If you cut the *parampara*system, then there is no electricity. Therefore it is stressed so much. *sa kaleneha mahata yogo nastah parantapa*. The electricity is lost.

Similarly, Srila Prabhupada made this important point in other instances:

Dr. Benford: So everyone I meet who accepts Krsna as the perfect teacher is the perfect teacher?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, because he is teaching only Krsna's teachings, that's all. It is the same as the example we gave before: They may not be personally perfect, but whatever they are speaking is perfect because it is taught by Krsna.

Dr. Benford: Then you are not perfect.

Srila Prabhupada: No, I am not perfect. None of us claim to be perfect; we have so many faults. But because we do not speak anything beyond Krsna's teachings, our teaching is therefore perfect. (*Consciousness: The Missing Link*)

If we follow Arjuna and Krsna, then we get the perfect knowledge. We may not be cent percent perfect, but as far as possible, if we follow the instruction as it is, that much perfect. In this way one will get perfection. So one has to follow. The same example, try to understand, that a perfect, expert technologist or technician or mechanic is working, and somebody is working under his instruction. So this somebody, because he is strictly working under the instruction of the expert, he's also expert. It that clear? Because he is working under the expert. Do you follow? So if you follow a pure devotee, then you are also a pure devotee. It may not be that one is cent percent pure, because we are trying to raise ourselves from the conditional life. But if we strictly follow the pure devotee, then we are also pure devotee. So far we do, that is pure. So pure devotee does not mean one has to become immediately cent percent pure, but if he sticks to the principle "We'll follow a pure devotee," then his actions are. . .he is as good as pure devotee. It is not that I am explaining in my own way. It is the explanation of *Bhagavata. Mahajano yena gatah sa pantah*. We have to follow the footprints of pure devotees. (Lecture, Los Angeles, November 25, 1968)

### Chapter 14 Part 3: “Our Guiding Principle, Is That We Follow the Footsteps of the Mahajanas; We Do Not Concoct”

This is our guiding principle, that we follow the footsteps of the *mahajanas*; we do not concoct, no matter how practical our manufactured idea may seem. Rather we show our faith, in the *parampara*, in the Lord, and in the surrendering process by following, not by deviating.

In counterpoint to ISKCON’s rubber-stamp-a-guru-program the *ritviks*elect themselves to decide who is not guru by their vote. They have done precisely what Prabhupada cautions against: "That you manufacture your own way of service." On the subject of manufacturing, the *ritviks*say Prabhupada willed it and he, as the *acarya,* can do whatever he wants. This argument has fired the imaginations or perhaps the hearts of many, who apparently do not process philosophical ideas with their heads.

If they used their heads, they would know right away that this giddy doctrine is not Prabhupada’s teaching. Prabhupada taught us that the *acarya*is the *acarya*precisely because he follows the *parampara.* He taught that one who deviates from the *parampara* is not to be accepted but rejected. How can he forego fundamental Vaisnava principle, and his own teachings, to introduce a new guru system and be our *acarya*?

As already shown with the blind following orientation, this sort of thinking is simply the same brand of fanatical sentimentality with a twist—blind concocting disguised as blind following. It is rooted in a lack of understanding the spirit and intent of Srila Prabhupada. He does not want blind following or blind concocting. As we saw in the quote used some chapters earlier, where Prabhupada explained to Makhanlal how pleasing him, pleases Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, and so on back to Lord Nityananda, Srila Prabhupada concluded with, "You are all intelligent boys. Please try to understand me and do the needful."

*Ritviks*lack this understanding, or they would never dare to float a concoction in place of the standard *parampara*understanding. Unfortunately, the GBC lacks it as well, because if they understood Srila Prabhupada, they would never have dared to float the rubber-stamp-a-mahatma-not-by-appointment-but-by-approval program, about which Prabhupada himself writes in the *Bhagavad-gita,*in the opening line to the *mahatmanas tu mam partha*verse, that "the *mahatma* is not created by rubber-stamp."

On the basis of the above understanding, the *ritviks* and the GBC should be summarily rejected for preaching and practicing *apasiddhanta,*heresy. Our guru system is to accept the *parampara*system as we saw Prabhupada assert in the conversation cited a few pages earlier. We must not overlook the fact that the practice of creating gurus by elaborate approval (but not by appointment) methods—rubber-stamping—as practiced in ISKCON is philosophically wrong. However, this fact does not mean we need a new philosophy. What it means is that we need to follow the standard philosophy better. That and that alone is practical.

Whoever subverts the philosophy—making gurus by institutional vote or unmaking them by popular vote—is cheating. At least with respect to the GBC we have this warning from Srila Prabhupada, which underscores their responsibility both to him and to us (Lecture in Geneva 1974):

Yamaraja is one of the GBC of Krsna. Yes. As we have got twelve GBC’s, similarly Krsna has got GBC’s. Now, *svayambhur naradah sambhu kumarah kapilo manuh Prahlado janako bhismo balir vaiyasakir vayam.* That twelve men are authorized to preach Krsna consciousness. So we have to follow. *Mahajano yena gatah sa panthah*. Therefore we have created these GBC. So they should be very responsible men. Otherwise, they will be punished. They will be punished to become a *sudra*. Although Yamaraja is a GBC, but he made a little mistake. He was punished to become a *sudra*. So those who are GBC’s, they should be very, very careful to administer the business of ISKCON. Otherwise they will be punished. As the post is very great, similarly, the punishment is also very great. That is the difficulty. You can see from this example, Vidura. He was immediately punished. He did little mistake at Maëòüka... Because the rishis, the munis, they will curse. Dealing is very... Even Yamaraja is not taking.

It is said that a word to the wise should be sufficient. We cannot subvert the *parampara*philosophy and expect to walk away scot free. This is the height of folly.

The central difficulty is that some years back it was assumed that to be guru one must imitate Srila Prabhupada. This led to wholesale granting off too much too soon to the young, inexperienced gurus. This fundamental misconception—that to be a bona fide guru one must imitate Prabhupada—which continues to some degree, has lead to havoc in the lives of those who tried to live on an artificial platform, and havoc in the disciples’ lives as well. Hence havoc in our positive alternative society.

Now the *ritviks* make the same mistake, but in another way. They too insist that one must be like Prabhupada to be guru, but *not* by imitating him. Rather one must *literally*be like him. This too is wrong; and in fact tinged with impersonalism, insofar as it translates into ruling out the varieties of pure devotees with a range of individual characteristic traits, such as we see throughout the *Caitanya-caritamrta*. The common denominator among those devotees is not their external behavior, but the condition of their hearts.

At the same time, conduct reveals character, so external characteristics are relevant, but it is not that all pure devotees will have the same external characteristics. That is impersonalism. However, they will have the same high standard of integrity and personal conduct. They will have an inordinate love for truth and justice and display qualities of compassion and so forth. Compassion does not mean sentimentality and making starry eyes at us. The ultimate display of compassion is in their willingness to perform the highest welfare work—teaching others to distinguish reality from illusion.

It is the sincere achieving of this common purpose that qualifies one to be a guru. This Prabhupada indicated in his 1969 lecture to be the heart of the science of becoming a guru: "To become a spiritual master is not very wonderful thing. Simply one has to become sincere soul." Who will decide that so and so has achieved this level of being a sincere soul, the person himself or does someone outside himself decide for him? Well, we have tried the latter approach and from the results we have culled, the correct answer to this question becomes quite obvious.

Moreover, it is incompatible with the idea of self-realization that someone else has to tell me what my realization is. This is not indicative of achieving freedom from doubt and delusion. But one side, the GBC, assumes the right to say who has achieved this state, and the other side, the *ritviks*, assume the right to say who hasn’t. And their idea is whoever does not remind them of Prabhupada, is simply hopeless, even if he reminds others of Prabhupada.

### Chapter 14 Part 4: “There are Various Levels of Devotees and Gurus and All of Them Have One Common Symptom; Their Conduct is Exemplary and They do not Deviate From the Parampara”

Actually, why must any of us, who have not come even close to Prabhupada, especially in his state of consciousness, be perceived and be believed to be on the same spiritual platform as him in order to be guru? Where does Prabhupada teach this veiled *mayavada* idea?

There are various levels of devotees and gurus and all of them have one common symptom, their conduct is exemplary and they do not deviate from the *parampara*. Their hearts are fixed unswervingly on rendering pure devotional service to the Lord. They know the *sastra*and can explain it with logic and reason, and whosoever they inspire can learn from them and render service. On this fundamental basis we all accepted Prabhupada as guru in the sixties and seventies, why should the basic criteria change now?

It is not necessary. Someone may be a competent archer without being the equal of Arjuna; and the same reasoning goes for the service of spiritual master. As late as 1977, therefore, in Bombay, we find Srila Prabhupada attempting to dispel our misconception about guru, saying that to be guru one does not have to grow "four hand and eight legs":

Prabhupada: Our point is that if you do not get knowledge from liberated person, that knowledge is useless. That is cheating. It is very easy. Just like a child. If he takes your direction, he is liberated, and if he acts according to his childish nature, then he's conditioned. If you take Krsna's instruction, then you are liberated. If you manufacture your own idea, then you are conditioned. Two things. Child is not actually liberated. He is child. But because he takes blindly the direction of the father, he's liberated. That is *mam eva ye prapadyante.* Anyone who has surrendered to Krsna and strictly follows what Krsna says, then he is liberated. Otherwise not. If he manufactures idea, then he's conditioned.

Dr. Patel: It is what? *Sarva-dharman parityajya*?

Prabhupada: Yes, and it is very easy: "Henceforward I shall simply follow what Krsna says." That's all. You become liberated immediately. It is one minute's task, simply to decide that "No more my concoction, my imagination." Then he is liberated.

Dr. Patel: But this decision, all these things are done by the mind which has got all the *vartmas* of the past births.

Prabhupada: Mind may be, but if I ask the mind that "You cannot do anything except what Krsna says," then you are liberated. Very easy. You see? We are doing the same thing. We are not liberated. I am not liberated. But I am presenting *Bhagavad-gita*as it is. That's all. That's my doing.

Dr. Patel: You mean *sve sve karmany abhiratah samsiddhim labhate narah*. That is your duty you have. That is what ...

Prabhupada: So that verse is very important. That *mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*. As soon as you become fully surrendered to Krsna, you are liberated, not that liberated means one has to grow four hands and eight legs. No. Simply you have to change the consciousness, that "Henceforward I shall act only as directed by Krsna." That's all. You are liberated. It is one minute....

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Similarly, Srila Prabhupada made this important point in other instances:

Dr. Benford: So everyone I meet who accepts Krsna as the perfect teacher is the perfect teacher?

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Dr. Benford: Then you are not perfect.

Srila Prabhupada: No, I am not perfect. None of us claim to be perfect; we have so many faults. But because we do not speak anything beyond Krsna's teachings, our teaching is therefore perfect. (*Consciousness: The Missing Link*)

If we follow Arjuna and Krsna, then we get the perfect knowledge. We may not be cent percent perfect, but as far as possible, if we follow the instruction as it is, that much perfect. In this way one will get perfection. So one has to follow. The same example, try to understand, that a perfect, expert technologist or technician or mechanic is working, and somebody is working under his instruction. So this somebody, because he is strictly working under the instruction of the expert, he's also expert. It that clear? Because he is working under the expert. Do you follow? So if you follow a pure devotee, then you are also a pure devotee. It may not be that one is cent percent pure, because we are trying to raise ourselves from the conditional life. But if we strictly follow the pure devotee, then we are also pure devotee. So far we do, that is pure. So pure devotee does not mean one has to become immediately cent percent pure, but if he sticks to the principle "We'll follow a pure devotee," then his actions are. . .he is as good as pure devotee. It is not that I am explaining in my own way. It is the explanation of *Bhagavata. Mahajano yena gatah sa pantah*. We have to follow the footprints of pure devotees. (Lecture, Los Angeles, November 25, 1968)

This is our guiding principle, that we follow the footsteps of the *mahajanas*; we do not concoct, no matter how practical our manufactured idea may seem. Rather we show our faith, in the *parampara*, in the Lord, and in the surrendering process by following, not by deviating.

## Chapter 15: Initiation is Always on Behalf of the Parampara

### Chapter 15 Part 1: “With Respect to the Guru Issue, We Have Seen That the Consistent Demeanor of Srila Prabhupada is His Insistence on the Principle of Parampara”

so far, with respect to the guru issue, we have seen that the consistent demeanor of Srila Prabhupada is his insistence on the principle of parampara, which is one of the central principles of our philosophy. Unlike the ritviks, he does not insist on something mystical or fantastic. Never in his discussing the practical side of understanding guru-tattva did he show that he believed in something other than the standard parampara system.

Other preachers stress mystical criteria, and this has become fashionable within our society, but Prabhupada’s integrity was such that he never stressed criteria that reduces us to guesswork. If one appreciates Prabhupada’s integrity in this matter, what does it say for the integrity of those who stress ineffable criteria for recognizing a guru?

In his conversation that became Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers, this was his perfect answer to Bob Cohen’s question about guru:

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. He (Krishna) is the original guru. Then His disciple Brahma is a guru, then his disciple Narada is a guru, then his disciple Vyasa is a guru—in this way there is a guru-parampara. Evam parampara-praptam: the transcendental knowledge is received through the disciplic succession.

Bob: So a guru receives his knowledge through the disciplic succession, not directly from Krishna? Do you receive some knowledge directly from Krishna?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. Krishna’s direct instruction is there: Bhagavad-gita.

Bob: I see, but...

Srila Prabhupada: But you have to learn it through the disciplic succession, otherwise you will misunderstand it.

Bob: But presently you do not receive information directly from Krishna? It comes through the disciplic succession from the books?

Srila Prabhupada: There is no difference. Suppose I say that this is a pencil. If you say to him, “There is a pencil,” and if he says to another man, “This is a pencil,” then what is the difference between his instruction and my instructions?

Bob: Krishna’s mercy allows you to know this now?

Srila Prabhupada: You can take Krishna’s mercy also, provided it is delivered as it is. Just as we are teaching Bhagavad-gita In Bhagavad-gita Krishna says: sarva-dharman parityajya mam ekam saranam vraja ”Just give up all other forms of religion and simply surrender unto Me.” Now we are saying that you should give up everything and surrender to Krishna. Therefore, there is no difference between Krishna’s instruction and our instruction. There is no deviation. So if you receive knowledge in that perfect way, that is as good as receiving instruction directly from Krishna. But we do not change anything.

Prabhupada had ample room here to allude to mystical connections with Krishna, but he did not. Instead he affirmed the principle of parampara. Why should we come up with new criteria than what is been spoken in all these quotes? In the aforementioned 1970 letter to Makhanlala Srila Prabhupada reveals his outlook regarding his being a guru and though it sounds quite close to the ritvik view, he obviously considers it nothing but the standard parampara system.

I can assure you that if you follow my instructions as above mentioned there is no doubt about it that through me, my spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura will be pleased, and though His mercy of Lord Nityananda will be pleased. In this way, Lord Caitanya, and ultimately Radha-Krishna will be pleased, and thus your life will be successful.

From this, we can understand that the ritvik system is really a confused way of describing the parampara system, because anybody who initiates a neophyte on the above understanding is a bona fide guru—providing he is faithfully following Prabhupada’s instructions to his best ability and not changing the parampara message. A pure Vaisnava is one with no ulterior motive, not that he must claim, or have others claim on his behalf, some mystical qualifications.

Who decides whether a preacher has ulterior motives or not? The candidate disciple decides, not a committee or any other person. And the guru is responsible to examine the candidate and make sure he or she is fit for initiation. This is our system, parampara. There is no evidence that we have another system. So if someone initiates disciples on behalf of the parampara on this basis, what is his defect?

There is no sastric support that the acarya can introduce another system. Indeed, what are the ritviks doing but changing the parampara message, manufacturing, and in the process bewildering so many?

And while some insist on invisible criteria for ascertaining who is a liberated soul, as we read in the previous chapter, Srila Prabhupada insists on visible criteria:

Our system, parampara system, is that I am just like disciple of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. I do not say that l am liberated. I am conditioned. But because I am following the instruction of Bhaktisiddhanta, I'm liberated. This is the distinction between conditioned and liberated. . . But if we strictly follow the pure devotee, then we are also pure devotee. . . None of us claim to be perfect; we have so many faults. But because we do not speak anything beyond Krishna's teachings, our teaching is therefore perfect.

This is a clear point. If someone says, “There is a heap of difference between a liberated soul like Prabhupada saying ‘I am conditioned, I have so many faults. . .’ and a conditioned soul saying the same thing,” which is typical reasoning in our devotee community, our response should be, “But because we do not speak anything beyond Krishna’s teachings, our teaching is therefore perfect.”

### Chapter 15 Part 2: “Ritvik Philosophy is Nonsense. It Should be Rejected. And Rubberstamping is Also Nonsense. That Too Should be Rejected. Both are Byond Krishna’s Teachings”

Therefore ritvik philosophy is nonsense. It should be rejected. And rubberstamping is also nonsense. That too should be rejected. Both are beyond Krishna’s teachings.

The simple point is that we can see and judge that someone follows Prabhupada in preaching the parampara conclusions with logic and reason, and in his integrity, and being engaged fully in devotional service. We do not have to accept the institution’s decision on the matter. That has been our blunder so far, but that blunder is a separate issue from the standard philosophy. No institution can decide for anyone who is their guru. Each of us has the right to judge this for ourselves and stand or fall with our decision.

But so-called knowers of the true spirit and intent of Srila Prabhupada quote his teachings selectively to prove that in a single letter and with the single use of the word “henceforward”, Srila Prabhupada undid all he taught about the principle of parampara in hundreds of lectures and conversations, and in his volumes of books. Out of thin air he manufactured a new system: ritvik initiation, so that everyone is in fact initiating on his behalf, not because this is the basic principle of parampara, but because no one is qualified to be guru.

No new system is necessary for this. Initiation is always on behalf of the parampara, on behalf of Srila Prabhupada. Why introduce new language and create confusion? Rather we should educate people to help them avoid accepting as guru people who in fact do not grasp the principle of parampara.

Ritviks claim that Prabhupada’s will is that he is the sole guru for the next ten thousand years. They claim that to be guru one must have the precise qualifications and spiritual status of Srila Prabhupada. This is all wonderful to hear, but where did Prabhupada assert this? And how would we reconcile this with his several statements that his disciples will be gurus, even as late as November 2, 1977?

That is like saying that to be an archer one’s skill must match Arjuna’s. He was the greatest archer in his day, but was he the only archer, and for the next ten thousand years?

One does not have to be super clever to see that Prabhupada wanted his disciples to initiate and take responsibility to carry on the parampara. The fact that some may have cheated or became seduced by too much too soon does not change the principle, nor does it mean that all who accept disciples are in the same stone boat. To presume categorically that everyone who takes disciples is a cheater is an offensive or hellish mentality. One is already a resident of hell.

This does not mean we have to imitate Srila Prabhupada to be guru. Prabhupada is unique in the chain of disciplic succession and his central and prominent position should remain. This should not be difficult to see. Who cannot see it is simply envious and is not fit to be his representative. On this point, the ritviks are surely right.

A guru today is a representative of Srila Prabhupada. His function is to link the disciple to Srila Prabhupada, just as he linked us to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta. A guru today establishes faith in himself by how well he encourages faith in Srila Prabhupada. Just like Prabhupada established faith in the Gosvamis, in Lord Caitanya, in Sukadeva, Vyasa, and ultimately in the Krishna Himself. But this is simply the standard principle of parampara. There is no need to concoct and confuse.

To support their case, the ritviks point to the mistakes, blunders, and in some cases outright swindle that has occurred in ISKCON since 1978. In other words, they fixate on the hole instead of the donut, then try to find support for their manufactured solution to the guru problem. However, two wrongs—rubber-stamping and rubber-unstamping—do not make a right. They assert that only Prabhupada is guru until a fully qualified, self-effulgent acarya manifests, but who will decide?

They say that Prabhupada’s purports will guide everyone for the next ten thousand years if no maha-bhagavata—whom they assume the privilege to approve—comes along. Of course his purports will guide us, just like the writings of Vyasadeva also guide us, even if dozens of maha-bhagavatas come along. But if Prabhupada’s thinking is that everyone one will be his disciples for the next ten thousand years, why isn’t that stated in his purports? And why does Prabhupada not say so when he had the chance, as in this conversation in Melbourne, 21 May 1975:

Madhuvisa: . . . So in the case of your books, is it possible to become a devotee without actually having personal association with you? Just by reading your books?

Prabhupada: No, it is not that you have to associate with the author. But one who knows, if you cannot understand, you have to take lessons from him. Not necessarily that you have to have contact with the author always. . . Simply someone who knows the subject matter, he can explain. . . Just like we are explaining Bhagavad-gita As It Is. Not that one has to learn directly from Krishna. One who has understood Krishna, from him. That is parampara.

Here was a golden opportunity for Srila Prabhupada to lay down the law about his pre-eminent position as guru forever. Instead, once again, he asserts the principle of parampara. And he did the same thing again on 2 November, 1977, when he repeatedly affirmed that “Whoever follows is the leader.”

Both the present ISKCON procedure for becoming a guru and the ritvik system ostensibly aim at protecting the newcomer. In reality both usurp the decision of whom to approach as guru from the prospective disciple. (In Vedic culture, who is attending to the question of who can be guru?) Both parties try to decide for the neophyte and in so doing neither follow the philosophy of guru Krishna prasade paya, that by the grace of Krishna one gets guru and by the grace of guru one gets Krishna.

How can someone or a committee decide for me who has opened my eyes, and in whom I should have faith? Conversely, how can someone or a committee decide for me who has not? Bhagavatam says that when we eat no one can tell us when we are satisfied. And if we do not know for ourselves, despite all the books of Prabhupada to guide us, then we are most unfortunate.

## Chapter 16: Three Kinds of Eligibility for Pure Devotional Service

Several chapters earlier it was mentioned that the three classes of devotees are described as being eligible for pure devotional service. The question comes, “how is it that the uttama-adhikari is not situated in pure devotional service but only eligible for it?”

A clear understanding of this can shed light on the guru-issue. Once again we shall find that insistence on ineffable or mystical qualifications is impractical for the neophyte seeking a spiritual master; rather it leaves one wide open to be swindled.

In case someone doubts that Srila Rupa Gosvami was rating the eligibility for anyabhilasita sunyam devotional service when he defined the kanistha, madhyama, and uttama devotee, we shall look at the relevant passage from Bhakti-rasamrta Sindhu, Chapter Two, First Wave.

In sloka 5, Srila Rupa Gosvami says that sadhana-bhakti is of two types—vaidhi and raganuga. Following Srila Rupa Gosvami’s discussion, we will consider vaidhi-sadhana-bhakti first. In sloka 6 he defined vaidhi-bhakti and gives examples up to sloka 13. In 14 he describes tatra adhikari, who is qualified to perform vaidhi-bhakti:

yah kenapy atibhagyena jata-sraddhasya sevane
natisakto na vairagyabhagasyamadhikary asau

A person who by some great fortune attains faith in the service of the Lord, who is neither overly attached to sense enjoyment nor completely renounced (dry renunciation) is qualified for vaidhi-sadhana-bhakti.

Text 15 is a Bhagavatam verse (11.20.8):

yadrcchaya mat-kathadau
jata-sraddhas tu yah puman

na nirvinno nati-sakto
bhakti-yogo 'sya siddhi-dah

If somehow or other by good fortune one develops faith in hearing and chanting My glories, such a person, being neither very disgusted with nor attached to material life, should achieve perfection through the path of loving devotion to me.

Then in text 16, Srila Rupa Gosvami writes:

uttamo madhyamas ca syat kanisthas ceti sa tridha

The qualification for vaidhi-sadhana-bhakti is of three types: uttama, madhyama, and kanistha.

Three classes of eligibility for vaidhi-sadhana-bhakti: uttama, madhyama, and kanistha. Three kinds of candidates, based on three different degrees of faith. The uppermost being a sure success, because at that stage faith is unbreakable, but no mystical qualifications need enter into the equation. This verdict is confirmed in Caitanya-caritamrta. Just before the Lord gives the definition of the three classes of devotees to Sanatana Gosvami, He describes eligibility as well (Mad.22.64):

sraddhavan jana haya bhakti-adhikari
‘uttama’, ‘madhyama’, ‘kanishtha’——sraddha-anusari

A faithful devotee is a truly eligible candidate for the loving service of the Lord. According to one’s faith, one is classified as a topmost devotee, an intermediate devotee or an inferior devotee.

This Srila Prabhupada’s entire purport to the above verse:

The word sraddhavan (faithful) means understanding Krishna to be the summum bonum, the eternal truth and absolute transcendence. If one has full faith in Krishna and confidence in Him, one becomes eligible to discharge devotional service confidentially. According to one’s faith, one is a topmost, intermediate or inferior devotee.

One who has full faith is in the topmost class of eligible persons. His qualification is faith, not his mystical attainments, which are anyway private. All three levels of faith has it’s symptoms. At the topmost level we find knowledge of the sastra plus the capacity present Krishna consciousness with logic and reason.

The significance of this is not to be overlooked. Sometimes we think knowledge of the sastra is all, probably because we do not invest in learning the sastra ourselves. Thus we are impressed by people who have a lot of sastric knowledge, even if they lack any deep realization of the subject they speak about. How do we know they lack realization? Because although they may quote sastra, they cannot explain the subject with logic and reason, convincingly. And from many angles of vision.

Few of us seem to realize the difference between mere knowledge and realization. Actually, a person can know heaps of sastra and still be a dogmatist, still speak in a parrot-like way, or even disguise the parrot-like way with a veneer of a capacity for logic and reason. It can then easily pass muster with the mass of devotees, who cannot really distinguish what’s what.

Take, for example, the analysis of the blind following syndrome in some earlier chapters. How many devotees are able to see through empty logic such as “I’m not a philosopher, but I’m a Prabhupada man,” or citing guru, guru, and guru as pramana, or “Do not you have more faith in Srila Prabhupada than in sastra?” These are but some of the numerous instances of blind following passing as true dedication to Srila Prabhupada. Most devotees become putty in our hands for such displays of faux devotion.

The purport is that we have to learn to discriminate on the basis of sastra. Indeed, sraddha, according to the authority of Srila Jiva Gosvami, means firm faith in the sastra: sraddha hi sastrartha-visvasah.

II

Just as faith in scripture is the basis for proper development in vaidhi-bhakti, lobha, or greed, is the basis in raganuga-sadhana-bhakti. In Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu (1.2.291-292), Srila Rupa Govsami gives the qualification for this form of sadhana:

ragatmika-nistha ye vraja-vasi-janadayah
tesam bhavaptaye lubdho bhaved atradhikaravan

tat-tat-bhavadi-madhurye srute dhiryad apeksate
natra sastram na yuktim ca tal lobhopatti-laksanam

The highest, most exceptional spirit of ragatmika-bhakti is that found in the vraja-vasis. One who develops greed (lobha) to attain such sentiments for Krishna is the right candidate for raganuga-bhakti. This lobha is the only qualification (adhikara) for raganuga-bhakti, not the scrutinizing study of the sastra nor the skillful use of logic.

We should note that the sadhana itself is not different than that of vaidhi-sadhana. The difference is that whereas in vaidhi-sadhana one is oriented or motivated by sastric injunctions, or one may say by a sense of duty, in raganuga-sadhana one is motivated by greed, lobha, an intense desire to achieve the goal. As in vaidhi-bhakti, the three stages of eligibility, kanistha, madhyama, and uttama, also apply in raganuga-sadhana-bhakti.

At the end of Bhakti-tattva-viveka, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura sums up the above the progressive stages of bhakti in this way:

When sraddha, based either on faith in the sastric injunctions or on eagerness to follow in the footsteps of a ragatmika devotee, appears in the heart, on achieves the eligibility for pure devotional service. . . When sraddha appears, one is a kanistha-adhikari. When one performs sadhana-bhakti and becomes free of anarthas by the influence of saintly association sraddha becomes stronger and transforms into nistha. Then one is a madhyama-adhikari. By further performance of sadhana-bhakti and saintly association, nistha intensifies and becomes ruci. Then the one is on the uttama-adhikari platform of either vaidhi or raganuga-sadhana-bhakti. Only an uttama-adhikari is eligible for suddha-bhakti.

Thakura Bhaktivinoda concludes that “This is the eternal process for sadhakas to attain suddha-bhakti,” dadati sadhake nityam esa pratha sanatano. From his analysis it is clear that the uttama-adhikari stage is also one of eligibility for pure devotional service.

III

One question that comes to mind is that whether or not one can immediately perform raganuga sadhana bhakti, or is vaidhi bhakti a preliminary stage that qualifies one for the stage of raganuga sadhana?.

Some say vaidhi-sadhana will never lead to raga-bhakti. In other words, sraddha based on sastra never can progress to sraddha based on lobha. However this claim defies logic. How can a person who has no prior conviction of the sastric conclusions, no sraddha that is based on logic and reason, suddenly have lobha for Krishna’s service? What would be the basis of sraddha that generates lobha, but blind faith, which contravenes the understanding that bhakti-marga is a scientific path?

Our understanding is that raga-bhakti is a higher form of bhakti than vaidhi, so how can a person who has blind faith be more qualified than a person who is serving with full conviction grounded in sastra and fortified with logic and reason? One likely answer is that the lobha comes not from scriptural understanding and logic, but from association of advanced devotees.

But what is the association of advanced devotees, but discussion of the sastra based on transcendental logic and reason? In response one may refer to the earlier statement, natra sastram na yuktim ca tal lobhopatti-laksanam, that this lobha is not the result of sastric study nor skill in logic. Indeed, it is understandable that once there is raga, which is a profound state of attachment to devotional service, one transcends scriptural knowledge and the need for logic as a basis for understanding and conviction about devotional service.

Is such profound attachment possible in an absolute neophyte? There are two possibilities. One is that owing to progress in devotional service made in a previous life one quickly comes to the stage of raga-bhakti. Logically, we must allow for such possibility, but it has to be the exception and not the general rule. The other is that one aspires for raga-bhakti on a purely sentimental basis, which is really a waste of time. Religion without philosophy.

What makes sense, and indeed what Srila Prabhupada preached to us as the general rule, is that one first practices vaidhi-bhakti and gradually one becomes eligible for raganuga-bhakti, because as the attraction for devotional service becomes a strong bond one’s motive changes from scriptural to spontaneous. This stage begins at the point of anatha-nivrtti, the point at which one is significantly freed from material contamination.

This makes logical sense. Why would a person burdened with heavy contamination have spontaneous attraction to serving the Lord? It does not add up. More likely, the rascal is misconstruing his material emotions as transcendental. And having known nothing but his material experience of lusty affairs, will fall prey sooner or later to his old habits. Authentic greed for raga bhakti generally awakens when one has the adhikara of anatha-nivrtti.

Therefore, Srila Prabhupada writes, “We must always remember, however, that such eagerness to follow in the footsteps of the denizens of Vraja (Vrindavana) is not possible unless one is freed from material contamination.” And he defines freedom from material contamination, ”There is a stage called anartha-nivritti, which means the disappearance of all material contamination.”

This is lucid. Yet it so happens that there is a class of devotees who rivet their attention on getting the mercy. Their tendency is not to follow the general rule. They are fascinated by the exception. It baffles reason why they are like that, but they invariably resent reason as well. We are known as rupanugas, followers in the footsteps of Srila Rupa Gosvami, he is the model of the general rule, but some like the exception. One of their symptoms is that they like to gibber about the mercy this and the mercy that. And it sounds fascinating to simple minds. They do not realize that all these instructions on how to execute devotional service scientifically is the mercy. They think it is just a lot of work. Real mercy is a free ticket. But can we model ourselves after Sivananda Sena’s dog or after Jagai and Madhai? No that is a foolish gamble. Better to follow the general rule and hope that mercy comes on the way.

IV

Another question arises, why is the uttama-adhikari so exalted, that he can deliver the whole world yet is only “eligible” for pure devotional service? It can be understood in this way: A student in primary school is eligible to become a lawyer. So is a student who is in undergraduate college. And a student in law school itself is also eligible. Yet there is a clear distinction between all these grades of students. In terms of achieving the goal, rationally, we can say that having come this far, the student in law school is certainly more eligible than the other two. And he is also capable of teaching students at the lower levels.

According to the quality of one’s sraddha—which, unlike the law school example, is not purely a matter of one’s time in the process or in the institution—one is a kanistha, madhyama, or uttama bhakta. And this faith has its symptoms as described in the verses above. One who presents his realizations in the philosophy with logic and reason, and shows clear support by sastric reference, indicates that his faith is not blind. His capacity to make those realizations accessible to others will be the proof. We understand such a person to be the recipient of Krishna’s mercy. That person is eligible for suddha-bhakti.

Devotees not focused clearly on the philosophy have a superficial idea of the uttama-adhikari, an idea that goes far beyond what Srila Rupa Gosvami had in mind. Beyond the understanding of Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, and even Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu; they have a fantasy. This is chiefly because in the lower modes of nature we do not use sastra as our eyes. Instead we follow our whim.

The role of our society is to train members to use sastra as their eyes, train them to learn to see by hearing, train them to deliberate according to the principles of the philosophy and thereby reach authentic, scripturally sound conclusions. This is what Srila Prabhupada means by independent thoughtfulness. It enables one to face any situation and sort it out in terms of truth and illusion. As one becomes more adept, one loses all doubt, all delusion, and proceeds straight on the path of liberation, which is a highly desirable and empowering stage of our spiritual lives.

But as we have seen, blind following, the natural enemy of independent thinking, is far more the norm. We institutionalize people and then tell them they are good devotees. We also formulate an opinion about issues first, and then look in the sastra for support. This is not seeing by hearing. This is seeing by rajas and tamas and then using the philosophy for support. We should do the reverse, we should first search the sastra and then formulate an opinion.

As for ascertaining who is advanced, generally we wait for a groundswell of opinion in favor of some individual and then based on that vox populi we decide this or that person is an uttama-adhikari, rasika vaisnava, premi-bhakta or whatever. But what is the scientific basis of that groundswell? This method is as arbitrary as flipping a coin. It is blind following. Instead of thinking for ourselves, we are coerced by the crowd, which is one of the subtlest yet most powerful methods of coercion, conforming to social expectations so we can remain comfortable within the group. Few humans do not live in fear of being rejected by the group or sub-group to which they belong. Brahmanas, however, are supposed to be above this fear. The only way to counter this is to know the philosophy personally, to the point of being asammoha.

We should stick to the science rigidly. That is called firm faith, which is a qualification for devotional service. The difference between a kanistha, madhyama, and uttama devotee is ultimately the degree of sraddha, which means “respect”, specifically, respect for the sastra, according to Srila Jiva Gosvami in Bhakti-sandarbha.

V

The kanistha devotee is advised to seek shelter of a first-class devotee for Mahaprabhu says “He can deliver the whole world.” In the practical sphere of preaching, however, the uttama-adhikari displays madhyama symptoms, because the topmost devotee has no reason to preach from that position. In the uttama position he sees everyone as fully Krishna conscious. Of course, despite assuming the madhyama platform of discriminating, he still preaches with logic and reason based on sastra. Considering this, how can anyone dogmatically insist that one must accept as guru a devotee who sees Krishna face to face—when one is not in a position to tell who is on this platform?.

And considering that the genuine uttama who is preaching displays madhyama symptoms, it is quite irrational on the part of the ritviks, and others who tend to seethe on this point, to go on and on as if it is solely up to them to decide the matter of guru for everyone else. Their program is as much a swindle as what currently goes on in the ISKCON camp.

We saw earlier that Sripada Narayana Maharaja made a logical point in his discussion with Ravindra Swarupa and Bhurijana prabhus—that the candidate for initiation will decide who is the guru. But what was Prabhupada’s take on who will decide? The answer is found in an 1972 lecture in Ahmedabad:

If somebody brings lamp, ajnana-timirandhasya jnananjana-salakaya. . . the jnana-rupa, torchlight, he’s guru. So maybe of different degrees, but anyone who opens the spiritual eyes, he’s guru.

## Chapter 17: Who is a Maha-Bhagavata?

Before closing the discussion on the guru issue, which will probably never be concluded to everyone’s satisfaction, we must briefly consider the question of whether or not the maha-bhagavata literally sees Krishna. Some say, repeating a select choice of Prabhupada or sastric quotes, and usually with a glazed look in their eyes, “The pure devotee, the maha-bhagavata, sees Krishna. The pure devotee talks to Krishna. Prabhupada said. And in Bhagavad-gita it says that the guru sees the truth.”

“All of this is fine, but what does it mean?”

“What do you mean, what does it mean? The guru sees Krishna and knows Krishna. The paramahamsa, maha-bhagavata, uttama-adhikari, sees Krishna and knows Krishna.” Usually the person goes on in this vein for several minutes.

And the more you press for a clarification of meaning, the more you get the above, recycled, usually with escalating intensity, and still no realized explanation of it’s meaning. This is the dogmatic approach. It is always unacceptable to thinking persons. It is thoroughly unsatisfying, unconvincing, and opposed to the scientific presentation of bhakti-yoga. Thinking people like to have their philosophical tutoring served up with logic and argument backed with sastra, as opposed to sastra crammed down one’s throat with passionate intensity and not much else.

What does it mean that the maha-bhagavata sees Krishna? This is an important question. If one is on a quest to find a guru the correct answer can save one a lot of bewilderment, gullibility, and blunder. If one is a preacher, the correct answer can save one a lot of frustration and futile speculation.

In the Eleventh Canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, we find that the three classes of devotees are described. Here is the verse describing the bhagavatottamah, the topmost devotee (11.2.45):

sarva-bhutenu yau pasyed bhagavad-bhavam atmanau

bhutani bhagavaty atmany ena bhagavatottamau

sarva-bhutenu—in all objects (in matter, spirit, and combinations of matter and spirit); yau—anyone who; pasyet—sees; bhagavat-bhavam—the ability to be engaged in the service of the Lord; atmanau—of the supreme spirit soul, or the transcendence beyond the material concept of life; bhutani—all beings; bhagavati—in the Supreme Personality of Godhead; atmani—the basic principle of all existence; enau—this; bhagavata-uttamau—a person advanced in devotional service.

The most advanced devotee sees within everything the soul of all souls, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. Consequently he sees everything in relation to the Supreme Lord and understands that everything that exists is eternally situated within the Lord.

Further along, in verse 48, Havi Yogendra elaborates on his point to Maharaja Nimi:

grihitvapindriyair arthan yo na dventi na hrinyati
vinnor mayam idaa pasyan sa vai bhagavatottamah

grihitva—accepting; api—even though; indriyaiu—with his senses; arthan—objects of the senses; yau—who; na dventi—does not hate; na hrinyati—does not rejoice; Vishnu—of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu; mayam—the illusory potency; idam—this material universe; pasyan—seeing as; sau—he; vai—indeed; bhagavata-uttamau—a first-class devotee.

Even while engaging his senses in contact with their objects, one who sees this whole world as the energy of Lord Visnu is neither repelled nor elated. He is indeed the greatest among devotees.

From the wording and the synonyms in both verses, it is clear that the uttama-bhagavata is not symptomized by literally seeing Krishna. Rather he sees everything in relation to Krishna. However, some may say, “That is not Prabhupada’s translation you are using there. We only accept Srila Prabhupada as authority in this matter. He did not translate nor comment on the Eleventh Canto.”

We next consider where Srila Prabhupada did translate and comment on this verse. In Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, where Krishnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami quotes the verse in the context of Lord Caitanya calling Ramananda Raya a maha-bhagavata. (Madhya 8.273-275). Two verses in Bengali precede the Bhagavatam verse:

maha-bhagavata dekhe sthavara-jaėgama
tahaė tahaė haya taėra sri-Krishna-sphurana

“A devotee advanced on the spiritual platform sees everything movable and inert as the Supreme Lord. For him, everything he sees here and there is but a manifestation of Lord Krishna.

Prabhupada gave no purport to this verse. The next verse is also about the maha-bhagavata.

sthavara-jaėgama dekhe, na dekhe tara murti
sarvatra haya nija inta-deva-sphurti

The maha-bhagavata, the advanced devotee, certainly sees everything mobile and immobile, but he does not exactly see their forms. Rather, everywhere he immediately sees manifest the form of the Supreme Lord.

Here Prabhupada comments

Due to his deep ecstatic love for Krishna, the maha-bhagavata sees Krishna everywhere and nothing else. This is confirmed in the Brahma-samhita (5.38): premaījana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocanena santau sadaiva hridayesu vilokayanti. As soon as a devotee sees something—be it movable or inert—he immediately remembers Krishna. An advanced devotee is advanced in knowledge. This knowledge is very natural to a devotee, for he has already read in the Bhagavad-gita how to awaken Krishna consciousness. According to Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-gita (7.8):

raso ’ham apsu kaunteya prabhasmi sasi-suryayou

pranavau sarva-vedenu sabdau khe paurunaa nrinu

“O son of Kunti [Arjuna], I am the taste of water, the light of the sun and the moon, the syllable oa in the Vedic mantras; I am the sound in ether and ability in man.”

Thus when a devotee drinks water or any other liquid, he immediately remembers Krishna. For a devotee there is no difficulty in awakening Krishna consciousness twenty-four hours a day. Caitanya Mahaprabhu therefore says here:

sthavara jaėgama dekhe na dekhe tara murti
sarvatra haya nija inta-deva-sphurti

A saintly person, an advanced devotee, sees Krishna twenty-four hours a day and nothing else. As far as movable and inert things are concerned, a devotee sees them all as transformations of Krishna’s energy. As Lord Krishna states in the Bhagavad-gita (7.4):

bhumir apo ’nalo vayuu khaa mano buddhir eva ca

ahaėkara itiyaa me bhinna prakritir astadha

“Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego—all together these eight constitute My separated material energies.”

Actually nothing is separate from Krishna. When a devotee sees a tree, he knows that the tree is a combination of two energies—material and spiritual. The inferior energy, which is material, forms the body of the tree; however, within the tree is the living entity, the spiritual spark, which is part and parcel of Krishna. This is the superior energy of Krishna within this world. Whatever living thing we see is simply a combination of these two energies. When an advanced devotee thinks of these energies, he immediately understands that they are manifestations of the Supreme Lord. As soon as we see the sun rise in the morning, we arise and set about doing our morning duties. Similarly, as soon as a devotee sees the energy of the Lord, he immediately remembers Lord Sri Krishna. This is explained in this verse: sarvatra haya nija inta-deva-sphurti

A devotee who has purified his existence through devotional service sees only Krishna in every step of life. This is also explained in the next verse, which is a quotation from Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.2.45).

Now the Eleventh Canto Bhagavatam verse comes, with synonyms:

sarva-bhutenu yau pasyed bhagavad-bhavam atmanau
bhutani bhagavaty atmany ena bhagavatottamau

sarva-bhutenu—in all objects (in matter, spirit and combinations of matter and spirit); yau—anyone who; pasyet—sees; bhagavat-bhavam—the ability to be engaged in the service of the Lord; atmanau—of the supreme spirit soul or the Transcendence beyond the material conception of life; bhutani—all beings; bhagavati—in the Supreme Personality of Godhead; atmani—the basic principle of all existence; enau—this; bhagavata-uttamau—a person advanced in devotional service.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu continued, “ ‘A person advanced in devotional service sees within everything the soul of souls, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. Consequently he always sees the form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead as the cause of all causes and understands that all things are situated in Him.’

Here Srila Prabhupada did not comment, but because the topic of all three verses is the same—the maha-bhagavata—from the context it is clear that his comment on the previous verse has already established the meaning of this verse, which is cited to support the two verses in Bengali.

The next verse (276) and purport is also relevant and instructive. Krishnadasa Kaviraja cites another Bhagavatam verse to elaborate on the meaning of his earlier verses, thus indicating what maha-bhagavata means to him as well.

vana-latas tarava atmani visnum vyanjayantya iva puspa-phaladhyah
pranata-bhara-vitapa madhu-dharah prema-hrsta-tanavo vavrsuh sma

“ ‘The plants, creepers and trees were full of fruits and flowers due to ecstatic love of Krishna. Indeed, being so full, they were bowing down. They were inspired by such deep love for Krishna that they were constantly pouring showers of honey. In this way the gopis saw all the forest of Vrindavana.’ “

Purport:

This verse (Bhag. 10.35.9) is one of the songs the gopis sang during Krishna’s absence. In Krishna’s absence the gopis were always absorbed in thought of Him. Similarly, the maha-bhagavata, the advanced devotee, sees everything as potentially serving the Lord. Srila Rupa Gosvami states:

prapancikataya buddhya hari-sambandhi-vastunah
mumuksubhih parityago vairagyam phalgu kathyate
(Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu 1.2.126)

The advanced devotee does not see anything that is not connected with Krishna. Unlike the Mayavadi philosophers, a devotee does not see the material world as false. Rather, he sees everything in the material world connected to Krishna. A devotee knows how to utilize such things in the service of the Lord, and this is characteristic of the maha-bhagavata. The gopis saw the plants, creepers and forest trees loaded with fruits and flowers and ready to serve Krishna. In this way they immediately remembered their worshipable Lord Sri Krishna. They did not simply see plants, creepers and trees the way a mundaner sees them.

Nowhere does Srila Prabhupada establish the current popular fantasy—that the maha-bhagavata is walking arm in arm between Radha and Krishna or has awe-inspiring mystical qualifications, which one has to fantasize about, because the same qualifications one believes in, is beyond one’s own capacity to verify. Thus one ends up in the realm of blind faith all over again. Vaisnavas do not practice blind or irrational faith. Our process, being scientific, is one of rational faith.

But here again, even if blind faith was the way, and mystical qualifications were the criteria, who will decide who is a maha-bhagavata? By insisting on mystical qualifications we push the issue out of the realm of quantifiable data, such as the symptoms given in Srila Prabhupada’s commentary. Instead we enter the realm of blind belief. Why move an already difficult question out of the realm of science and into the realm of mysticism? By this approach, is there any less chance of being swindled?

## Chapter 18: Two Kinds of Madhyama Vaisnavas

The discussion of guru, uttama adhikari and so forth would be incomplete if we were not to reconcile an apparent inconsistency between information in the previous two chapters and the well-known precept that the first-class devotee does not preach. In the Harinama Cintamani, for example, in the passage where Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura is stressing the importance of the madhyama devotee “to continually evaluate the devotees” so he can know who to serve and whom to avoid, we find:

The uttama Vaisnava does not see any distinction whatsoever between a Vaisnava and a non-Vaisnava, or between enemy and friend; how will he then serve a Vaisnava? How will he distinguish a Vaisnava from the non-Vaisnava?

And by logical extension, why will the uttama Vaisnava preach? To whom will he preach? Preaching is to remove ignorance, but if one is on a plane where everyone is considered fully engaged in Krishna’s service, there is no ignorance to oppose. Therefore it is said that the uttama devotee comes down to the madhyama platform to preach.

This topic came up in the conversation cited earlier, between Ravindra Svarupa Dasa and Bhurijana Dasa and Sripada B.V. Narayana Maharaja:

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

NM: To some extent.

RS: To some extent?

NM: Yes, to some extent. And I see that the uttama adhikari does not initiate at all. Only madhyama adhikari. If an uttama adhikari wants to initiate he will need to be madhyama adhikari.

RS: Yes. We’ve been taught that also.

NM: An uttama adhikari does not see anyone without a link to Krishna. He see that everyone is uttama adhikari, whether he is fallen or not fallen or anything else.

RS: If a diksa guru is not yet on the highest platform of Krishna consciousness, should his disciples still see him as being on the highest platform?

NM: How can they decide? They have no ability to decide. They can only understand, “My guru is in such a higher position than I am.” How can they decide?

With logic Narayana Maharaja, cuts down all arguments for mystical or esoteric qualifications of the guru, such as the guru literally sees Krishna or similar claims, which no one who is not himself an uttama adhikari has the capacity to decide.

Otherwise, why does Lord Caitanya say that the topmost devotee preaches with logic and reason if he does not preach at all? Why does Srila Prabhupada also speak like this in his description of the first-class devotee as found in The Nectar of Devotion, which was also cited in an earlier chapter and here cited again in part:

The first-class devotee never deviates from the principles of higher authority, and he attains firm faith in the scriptures by understanding with all reason and arguments. When we speak of arguments and reason, it means arguments and reason on the basis of revealed scriptures.

The first-class devotee “never deviates” from sastra and by understanding things rationally, he attains firm faith. This is revealed in his capacity to speak with “arguments and reason on the basis of the revealed scriptures.” Conversely, his preaching is not dogmatic. He can explain things with sound logic and reason in addition to quoting sastra appropriately. Quoting sastra minus the ability to explain things with argument and reason, or with superficial argument and reason, is preaching dogma, not science. It tells the observant listener, “Here is a person long on knowledge but short on realization.”

We should also consider another question: If it is the madhyama adhikari who initiates, then why is it enjoined that we should seek initiation from an uttama adhikari Vaisnava? In Sri Caitanya-caritamrta the qualifications of the madhyama adhikari Vaisnava is given (Mad.22.67-68):

sastra-yukti nahi jane driòha, sraddhavan
‘madhyama-adhikari’ sei maha-bhagyavan

One who is not very expert in argument and logic based on revealed scriptures but who has firm faith is considered a second-class devotee. He also must be considered most fortunate.

yah sastradisv anipunah
sraddhavan sa tu madhyamah

He who does not know scriptural argument very well but who has firm faith is called an intermediate or second-class devotee.

The madhyama Vaisnava is maha-bhagyavan, “most fortunate,” but he is inexpert in argument and logic. How can he be guru?

The reconciliation is as follows: There are two kinds of madhyama adhikari Vaisnavas. One kind is he who is coming from the kanistha platform to the madhyama stage. Such a Vaisnava is described in the two verses above. He cannot preach with thorough logic and argument; though he has heard sufficiently to have firm faith. Still, he will lapse into dogmatic preaching frequently or occasionally, depending on how he is guided and how he develops.

Gradually, as he learns to present the scriptural conclusions with firm logic, he becomes eligible to be a first class devotee. At that stage he may accept disciples. He is looking towards the spiritual platform and his disciples can learn from him how to discern matter from spirit and make sure progress.

The other kind of madhyama devotee is he who is coming down to the madhyama stage from the uttama stage for the sake of preaching. This person can preach with logic and arguments as per the description of Lord Caitanya, and Srila Rupa Gosvami in Bhaktirasamrta sindhu. He is an uttama adhikari—manifesting the madhyama symptom of discriminating between matter and spirit. Unto such a transcendentalist the neophyte should surrender, worship, and serve.

The import of this is never mind those who try to weave a web with talk of gopis and higher realizations. If you are in primary school, topics from law school will not help you get beyond primary school material. In primary school you need a teacher who will make you competent in the curriculum for that level. Whether you have the same teacher all the way through or different teachers at different stages is not really important. Our philosophy provides for both possibilities in the approval of having a diksa guru and any number of siksa gurus. All of them are provided by Krishna, who is the original guru. Krishna arranges for us to meet our guru or gurus. Thus in the same way that Krishna provided a guru at the primary school level, He will provide one at the next level if the need is there. Our business is to be sincere, authentic. Panic will not help us.

It happens, unfortunately, that owing to institutionalization there are obstacles to this process being followed freely, but that is an entirely different problem than the question of who can be guru. Lord Krishna is not restricted by institutional considerations.

Our misfortune is that because the guru-as-magic-helper conception has gained popularity, and because people are in a great haste to pass as advanced, we are seeking a guru who will give us a wink or a pat on the head and thereby elevate us to transcendence in a jiffy with little or no effort on our part. Hence the escalating rhetoric stressing mystical qualifications and the near-panic of some in trying to find the guru they blindly believe is “the one” that literally sees Krishna and knows Krishna.

They need to find gurus whose manner is enigmatic enough that they can concoct myths about their transcendental status, elevate their gods higher and higher, so they can feel justified in worshipping them, and establish their guru—and themselves—as better than others. And most of all, feel safe and secure, even in the depths of their blind belief. In reality we have no power to discern whether he deserves all the honorific titles we throw at him. This wistful, credulous approach to spiritual life, however is not the science of bhakti. It is not the science of anything; but it is a symptom of Kali-yuga.

Krishna was not a magic helper to Arjuna. He removed Arjuna’s doubts with logic and reason. In Bhagavad-gita, the Supreme Lord, even after showing His visvarupa, refused to be dogmatic with Arjuna. The Lord removed his doubts one after another, thereby showing us by example the true dynamic between guru and disciple, not the magic helper or the magic touch, or any magic at all.

Krishna’s mercy, His magic if you will, was that He enlightened Arjuna with knowledge, then Arjuna had to apply His instructions. There was no magic involved. A guru opens the eyes of the disciple. The disciple then must apply himself. And then the Lord, seeing the determination of the disciple, will carry whatever he lacks. Therefore, best to stick to seeing the guru’s conduct and his capacity to remove your doubts with logic and reason. Forget about his mystical qualifications or at least keep them in the background. Stick with the tangibles. This is practical. Scientific. Krishna conscious. And simple.

Logic and reason is stressed because if our doubts are systematically removed we apply ourselves with conviction and faith. In addition, the guru’s character and conduct should be exemplary. Then whomsoever is inspired by him may take shelter. But is it entirely up to the person taking the initiation to decide who that person is.

Yes, there is a risk factor involved. And the risk is unavoidable. Life is all about taking risks. We have not achieved anything but bewilderment and confusion by trying to create a risk-free situation with regard to the guru issue. We have made a complete mess of the guru function after Srila Prabhupada, because we did not orient ourselves from the philosophy. We oriented ourselves towards controlling and the result was rubber-stamping gurus, which is heretical to our philosophy.

About the speech of the transcendentally situated person, Prabhupada has written (Bg.2.54 purport):

As there are symptoms for each and every man, in terms of his particular situation, similarly one who is Krishna conscious has his particular nature—talking, walking, thinking, feeling, etc. As a rich man has his symptoms by which he is known as a rich man, as a diseased man has his symptoms by which he is known as diseased, or as a learned man has his symptoms, so a man in transcendental consciousness of Krishna has specific symptoms in various dealings. One can know his specific symptoms from the Bhagavad-gita. Most important is how the man in Krishna consciousness speaks; for speech is the most important quality of any man. It is said that a fool is undiscovered as long as he does not speak, and certainly a well-dressed fool cannot be identified unless he speaks, but as soon as he speaks, he reveals himself at once. The immediate symptom of a Krishna conscious man is that he speaks only of Krishna and of matters relating to Him.

And one of his speech symptoms is that he preaches with logic and reason. If he preaches without logic and reason, i.e. dogmatically, though his presentation is nicely ornamented with sastric quotes, that is more likely indicative of the madhyama who is advancing from the kanistha stage. Until he is able to speak with clear and convincing logic and reason, based on sastra, he is an unsafe bet as guru. And if he substitutes charisma or charm in place of developing his faculties of reason, then he is an even unsafer bet. Caveat emptor.

Dear Reader, you will find the following edifying passage interesting. It’s from a letter I received from a reader of Our Mission part 2, who is a follower of Sripada Narayana Maharaja. The topic is the danger of the unqualified, institutional guru, which is really no better than the family guru foisted on one by one’s parents:

Narayana Maharaja once explained to me the dangerous dynamics of taking a guru who is not an uttama adhikari. I'm mentioning it here, only to make a specific point. The unqualified guru, in his attempt to exhibit the signs of an advanced devotee, will try to show mercy to the innocent, befriend peers, neglect the envious, etc.

Because he is not situated above attraction/repulsion, on the transcendental platform of attraction to Krishna and detachment from everything else, he will unknowingly entangle himself in materialistic relationships with his supporters and detractors. He will become attached to his followers, hate his critics, and become controlled by those offer money, and flattery. Once this happens, he falls down, (or is as good as fallen) because he was simply imitating.

The qualified guru is situated above these material emotions. His love is for Krishna. But he will come down to the madhyama platform, to help others. We could hardly follow a uttama bhakta. We have to have some feeling that we are loved and needed, otherwise we will not render service or try to surrender. The uttama bhakta has no contact with this world. So he comes down, and as if playing a role, shows us love, laughs with us, chastises us, engages us, trains us.

It is partially a trick of Krishna. The pure devotee has to act like a human being, with all his frailties, so that we can relate to him. Who could follow Rsabhadeva or the avadhuta brahmana? But because the pure devotee is established in his eternal relationship with Krishna, his drama on this level does not bewilder him. He is basically detached. He has nothing really to gain from us. Like Srila Prabhupada. How he could live constantly with a bunch of circus characters like us is amazing. He wasn't sustained by our love. He was sustained by his relationship with Krishna and his Guru Maharaja. He was like the lotus leaf in the water.

So I see that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ becomes entangled in sticky relationships with his followers because he, in his attempt to follow Srila Prabhupada, merely imitates him. This problem will always be there. Either they should be qualified, or they should not take disciples. They are bound to disappoint their followers.. How else can it turn out?

There is sound logic in the above reasoning. And it comes to a sound conclusion. However, it is possible that someone has the integrity to follow Srila Prabhupada without imitating him. This is the position of the madhyama adhikari guru who is not stepping down from the uttama stage, but progressing toward it. He may not be situated in the full-fledged experience of prema, but he is above attraction and repulsion. He is essentially above the modes of nature.

From his hundreds of comments on guru from lectures and conversations, it is clear that Srila Prabhupada believed it was possible to have integrity and that such a person can accept disciples. Thus he says, “that much pure”, meaning sufficient integrity not to deviate from principle. Someone who is nistha. Fixed.

This is the kind of madhyama about whom earlier in this chapter, Sripada Narayana Maharaja said “To some extent” when he was responding to this remark by Ravindra Svarupa dasa “Let me ask another question. You said earlier that a madhyama adhikari is also qualified for giving diksa. Narayana Maharaja then followed that remark by explaining how the uttama devotee comes down to the madhyama stage and initiates, which implies that he comes down to preach as well.

From the vaco vegam manasa krodha vegam verse of Upadesamrta, it is clear from the absence of other-worldly or mystical qualifications that Srila Rupa Gosvami is indicating that a devotee of sound or consistent integrity can accept disciples. It is a quality well within human reach. However, to have such a quality, one must have the strength to resist the group dynamic when it runs counter to Krishna consciousness. Otherwise all the negative arguments above will apply, for the simple reason that one becomes alienated from one’s own conscience by conforming to the group even when the herd is wrong. Such a person will easily imitate rather than follow, and create havoc in the lives of the disciples who must twist or deny their perceptions in order to see their guru as something more than he really is. This is an illusion. We take to Krishna consciousness to get out of illusion, not to subscribe to a whole new pattern of illusions.

Some readers will recall the cartoon in the previous volume, where the unqualified guru’s anarthas are represented by a ball and chain, which the hapless disciple has to carry while having his own ball and chain, which is in his backpack. A situation like this can only end in disaster.

The minimum qualification is that the madhyama guru must be a person who is above his irrational striving. The madhyama stage, according to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, begins at nistha. And this is confirmed in the verse tad vijnana artham sa gurum evabhigacchet samit panih srotriyam brahma nistham. The guru must be firmly fixed (nistha) in the Absolute Truth. Srila Prabhupada alludes to such understanding when he wrote:

A conditioned soul is hampered by four defects: he is sure to commit mistakes, he is sure to become illusioned, he has a tendency to cheat others, and his senses are imperfect. Consequently we have to take direction from liberated persons. (Bhag. 4: 18.5 purport)

Unless one can find a person transcendental to the four basic defects, one should not accept advice and become a victim of the material condition. The best process is to take the advice and instructions of Sri Krishna or His bona fide representative. In this way one can be happy in this life and the next. (Bhag. 5. 18. 26)

“Bona fide representative” and “liberated person” means who is preaching the parampara message with logic and reason and who has the aforementioned six qualities given by Srila Rupa Gosvami, which is something a prospective disciple can judge. It is not a matter of guesswork or sentiment. One should study the guru to see if these symptoms are consistently present and if his character is good. One should not blindly accept another’s judgment in this regard. That is the path of disappointment. If one has sufficient faith in another’s opinion about who one should take as guru, then one should take the person in whom one has faith as one’s guru. That would be the most intelligent solution.

There will be further discussion on the subject of guru in a future volume of Our Mission. First we must finish the discussion of ways the group dynamic can go awry and the remedy for that—namely the individuals in the group shunning blind following and assuming the responsibility to live with integrity, with a conscience, becoming free from bewilderment and delusion; and having the courage to claim the legacy of Srila Prabhupada as their birthright.

## Chapter 19: Self-Effulgence

If somebody brings lamp, ajnana-timirandhasya jnananjana-salakaya. . . the jnana-rupa, torchlight, he’s guru. So maybe of different degrees, but anyone who opens the spiritual eyes, he’s guru. (Srila Prabhupada, Dec. 1972)

The ritvik advocates, seeking an alternative to the embarrassingly unphilosophical, politicized, and corrupt rubber-stamping guru system now practiced in ISKCON, have manufactured a philosophy. Like ISKCON, they are trying to offer a risk-free arrangement for getting a spiritual master. Thus they construe that Prabhupada alone is risk-free so let us screw out the ritvik doctrine—that Srila Prabhupada alone is guru—and save ISKCON from further embarrassment.

The ritviks have good intentions. We must not forget, however, that mere good intentions is no substitute for a realized understanding of our philosophy. In the end, as shown in the previous three chapters, neither camp—ritviks or ISKCON—follows the parampara. Therefore, both are asara, useless.

The truth is that there is no risk-free arrangement possible in the business of seeking a guru. We can either follow the philosophy or not follow the philosophy. The most sacred of all responsibilities conferred to us by our acarya is adherence to the parampara version. Yet even in following there is risk that we take the wrong person as guru. This risk is unavoidable if we follow the philosophy. Still, we can easily rule out anything that is manufactured. For our parampara philosophy is who follows can lead, can be guru, and who manufactures is bogus, a deviant, a heretic. Deviating from the parampara is the worst kind of risk and unnecessary. No one should take it.

Whatever blunders ISKCON has done until now, why does the standard process have to be altered? Where is the logic and reason—based on sastra—to support this verdict that the ritviks believe is so faithful to Srila Prabhupada? Better than manufacturing something, is to apply the standard philosophy with greater care, greater discrimination. So far that has not been tried, except perhaps in some individual cases.

If the ritviks themselves are not uttama adhikaris, how can we be so sure that their claims are based on realized knowledge? And if they are not in the first-class category, by their own philosophy, why should anyone follow them, for there is surely some inconsistency in assuming the role of guru to establish that no one can be guru? And if they are first-class, then why not simply preach pure devotional service, take disciples, and solve the problem of guru? Why take shelter of the ritvik concoction?

When we consider things from this angle, the aforementioned words of a godbrother who formerly supported the ritvik idea has a certain plausibility. His view is that ritviks are—at least the segment made up of Prabhupada disciples—fundamentally frustrated disciples who could not achieve sufficient degree of self-mastery in Krishna consciousness and subsequently could not cease from gross and subtle sense gratification. Thus they do not believe it is possible for anyone else. “If I can’t master this science, then no one else can.”

Here we have persons who, by their own definition of a pure devotee, they are not qualified to say finally what is the truth on guru, because they are not maha bhagavatas, they cannot be speaking realized knowledge. This is proven since they cannot speak with logic and reason based on sastra to establish the ritvik concept. And the Lord’s opinion is that any conclusion not based on sastra is symptomatic of tamo-guna. How can the ritviks claim to know the heart of Srila Prabhupada?

They claim that the acarya can change things, but can the acarya change the philosophy? Where is it established that the acarya can do that? The qualification to be acarya is to follow the parampara. How can he change fundamental principles and be the acarya?

How do they explain the experience of Radha-Govinda Swami? In July of 1977, Maharaja brought some newcomers to Srila Prabhupada for initiation. Prabhupada said to Maharaja, “You initiate them. You be the guru.” and did not make any clarification that these new initiates would be ritvik initiated? Radha Govinda Swami went back a second time to plead with Prabhupada and Srila Prabhupada became annoyed. “I have already told you to be guru. Do you not understand? You initiate them. You become guru.”

Maharaja took the order of Srila Prabhupada upon his head and initiated the devotees. This put him at odds with the society for more than ten years. But what was his fault? Why did Prabhupada become irritated with him when he wanted to convince Prabhupada to reconsider. That would have been an opportune time to inform Maharaja that he was only going to be a ritvik guru?

Better still, how do we explain these words of Srila Prabhupada, spoken on November 2, 1977,several months after the all-significant, all-compelling, so-called all-final “final order”:

Prabhupada: . . .Everyone will take, all my disciples. If you want, you can take also. But if you follow. They are prepared to sacrifice everything, so they'll take the leadership. I may, one, go away, but there will be hundreds, and they'll preach. If you want, you can also become a leader. We have no such thing, that “Here is leader.” Anyone who follows the previous leadership, he's a leader. “Indian,” we have no such distinction, “Indian,” “European.”

Brahmananda: They wanted an Indian to be the leader?

Prabhupada: Yes. (laughs) “Everyone, all my disciples, they are leaders. As purely as they follow, they become leader. If you want to follow, you can become a leader.

Here Srila Prabhupada was recalling the gist of a visit he’d had with the industrialist Bajaj, who had spoken privately with Prabhupada and whose concern was that Prabhupada would appoint an Indian as his successor. Prabhupada reveals his entire outlook on the guru issue in these words. And it is the standard understanding, the parampara version. There is nothing new-fangled in it. Why did he not seize this golden opportunity to expound to Bajaj on the ritvik vada and its virtues?

“As purely as they follow they become leader.” This is the ultimate meaning of leadership in Krishna consciousness, self-effulgence, not something official, some rubber-stamp. The legacy of Srila Prabhupada goes only to those who follow with integrity. The legacy of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati went to Srila Prabhupada because he followed—not just the external formality of being a disciple—he followed from the inside-out. He followed with integrity. He took the service of his Guru Maharaja as his only purpose in life and made a decision to abide by the character ethic, and he bore that responsibility both publicly and privately.

Similarly, one who follows Prabhupada is self-effulgent to those who can appreciate. The rest of the world may not. Without doing this one is not following the footprints of the mahajanas in the truest sense. One is not qualified to accept disciples. If one requires popular opinion to occupy the position of guru, he has not understood the philosophy, and he cannot be self-realized; and the disciple who requires popular opinion to recognize who is a guru also has not understood the philosophy.

Alas, integrity was manifestly absent in ISKCON practically immediately upon Prabhupada’s mahasamadhi. The main reason is that we were not dispassionately oriented to understanding things philosophically and clearly and then going forward. We are oriented from the rajo-guna, therefore we first think how to control everything, instead of how to fulfill the spirit and intent of the philosophy, which is love and trust. Freedom. Not control.

And integrity is manifestly absent in the ritvik camp as well, because part of integrity is to adhere to the parampara version through thick and thin. Any attempt to philosophize on any issue, be it the jiva, guru, or another topic, has to be reconciled with the parampara. If it cannot, it has to be discarded. We can’t manufacture some novel addition, no matter how pleasing the idea may be. So both camps are oriented from rajas, which assures us of poison in the end.

As for the maha-bhagavata’s capacity to see Krishna’s energy at work everywhere, we have seen earlier that Prabhupada explained how this may be “of different degrees.” Nevertheless, Prabhupada concluded that if someone opens my eyes, if he brings me the jnana-rupa, he’s my self-effulgent guru. He may not be effulgent to anyone else. Nevertheless he is sent to me by Krishna. I alone, and no one else, has the responsibility to decide that here is my spiritual master.

We Should All Know this Joy

## Chapter 20: We Should All Know this Joy

This chapter is made up of several short essays. Here we consider some specific concerns from a critic of the Our Mission series. The idea is to enable readers to see how to process these or similar points, because apart from criticism being valid or irrelevant, quite often a point is perhaps philosophically valid but not necessarily an ultimate consideration. So criticism, while it should be heard, like anything else, it should not be accepted blindly.

A simple example of a valid point yet not an ultimate consideration is tact. It has its valid use, but for Vaisnavas it s not ultimate; it is a variable or relative consideration. Straightforward dealings is the normal standard for Vaisnavas; it overrides tact. Also, there is a very fine line between tact and kutinati, diplomacy, or to be more explicit, duplicity, which is not part of the Vaisnava creed but an anartha. If one is uncertain about whether one is practicing tact or an anartha, it is better to err on the safe side and be straightforward.

However, all these considerations are rare in the Krishna consciousness movement today, wherein tact is confused with kutinati, and straightforwardness is Vaisnava aparadha. The ultimate consideration of a Vaisnava is straightforward dealings. So, for example, when someone argues in favor of tact, we have to discern if they mean speaking the truth delicately, not speaking it at all, or speaking a half-truth, which amounts to the same thing as not speaking it at all.

Actually, it is worse. We must remember that a half-truth is also a half-lie. By withholding half the truth we can deceive others to an even greater degree than telling an outright lie. Though white lies are socially more acceptable to black ones, the truth is that the white variety is often more dangerous, because it wears the veneer of truth. It can be a greater deception.

Often when people speak of tact what they have in mind is stroking the opposite party, i.e. compromise, which means playing into their illusions, rather than saying the clear truth. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta writes (remarks in parentheses mine):

Those who are unwilling to show any duplicity, wish to be frank and straightforward, or in other words to exercise unambiguously the function of the soul; such really sincere persons are called sectarian and orthodox (or offensive, or emotionally involved) by those who practice duplicity (or simply do not know better). We will cultivate the society only of those who are straightforward. We will not keep company with any person who is not so. We must by all means avoid bad company. We are advised to keep at a distance of a hundred cubits from animals of the horned species. We should observe the same caution in regard to all insincere persons.

Obviously, he took the matter of discriminating very seriously. In fact, I’ve heard a story that one time when he returned to Bengal from Vrindavana, someone asked “Maharaja, how was your trip to Vrindavana?” He replied, “I went to Vrindavana and I did not see a single Vaisnava.” Compare that with the simplistic way some of our members are indiscriminate when they meet the contemporary residents of Vrindavana.

Anyway, from his above words, we understand that simple, direct, straightforward, logical speech is the primary standard of Vaisnava communications and tact is a variable. Moreover, tact is to be applied more among the non Vaisnava community than among the devotees. We tend to do the opposite.

Inasmuch as straightforward dealing is the creed of Vaisnavas, to insist on any other standard is duplicitous. Also, addressing a Vaisnava audience in a roundabout is to say, “I would treat you like a Vaisnava and be straightforward, but I do not think you have enough integrity to accept it, so I will go the long scenic route.” In reality, as Prabhupada mentions in the Caitanya-caritamrta, real devotees accept straightforward dealings and others will not.

In ISKCON, we have the phenomenon where the leaders have imposed an unspoken condition that straightforward, honest communications are offensive, thus obliging our dealing to be larded with so much stroking (homage) for them, it impossible to speak the simple truth. One has to go around the bush, perhaps to the extent that persons can conveniently miss one’s message, because it was not explicit enough. So why not be straightforward right off the bat? No doubt they will object to your message owing to the absence of stroking, and say you are offensive, but that does not mean (1) you are offensive in Krishna’s eyes, (2) that other’s will not get your point, and (3) that these others will not get courage from seeing your integrity in your example of being outspoken instead of being helpless.

About this third consideration: We will only dismantle this artificial, convoluted way of dealing, this roadblock to honest communications, when we stop honoring it. As long as we give them the outcome they want, why should they stop their ways? When we stop giving them the outcome they want, then they will change.

To preach Krishna consciousness according to one’s level of realization on behalf of the parampara is every devotee’s privilege and right. There is no requirement that one must do so by first putting one’s thinking in line with the institution’s leaders. If one is in line with the spirit and intent of the parampara, one is automatically in line with whoever is following in the right spirit and intent. If one is in line with the parampara, and the institution’s leaders are not, one would be a fool to make an adjustment. Any adjustment must come from those who are out of line, whether they wield administrative power in the institution and have the ability to harass one, is not a consideration. To blindly assume that the mere having of institutional power makes one automatically in line with the parampara is foolosophy, not philosophy.

In the mode of passion we tend to divide issues on the basis of friends and enemies of the institution. This is always a mistake. It divides the issues but it also divides the devotees on a wrong basis. Our true basis for division is truth versus illusion. Automatically, whosoever is on the side of truth is united with us, no matter their guru or institutional affiliation. Moreover, this approach is free of rajas.

For the remainder of this chapter, we shall consider several criticisms, which will be in bold italics followed with my response.

“Your writing is not detached, objective, and scholarly. You should stick to presenting the principles and not be so specific with the examples.”

According to convention, that sounds pretty valid, but under the cold light of reason, like so many social conventions, it does not hold up under examination. The above brief passage speaks of what is sometimes called the theory of learning approach, widely assumed by many to be the optimal way to bring about change in people. However, this did not prove to be very effective when put to the test.

In the book On Becoming A Person, the late Carl Rogers tells of a study in which the two experimenters, Ends and Page, both of whom favored the learning approach, tried three different method of getting results—the client-centered, the learning theory, and the psychoanalytical. They got the opposite result than their expectations. This is how Dr. Rogers tells it:

As I have puzzled over this study, unusual in that the approach to which the authors were committed proved least effective, I find a clue, I believe, in the description of the therapy based on learning theory. Essentially it consisted (a) of pointing out and labeling the behaviors which had proved unsatisfying, (b) of exploring objectively with the client the reasons behind these behaviors, and © of establishing through re-education more effective problem-solving habits. But in all of this interaction the aim, as they formulated it, was to be impersonal. The therapist “permits as little of his personality to intrude as humanly possible.” The “therapist stresses personal anonymity in his activities, i.e., he must studiously avoid impressing the patient with his own (therapist’s) individual personality characteristics.” To me this seems the most likely clue to the failure of this approach, as I try to interpret the facts in the light of other research studies. To withhold one’s self as a person and to deal with the other person as an object does not have a high probability of being helpful.

What Dr. Rogers is saying is that the method we assume is highly scientific and assured of the best results turns out to be least effective because it is really impersonalism. And what are the Our Mission books protesting ultimately?

What is authoritarianism, but impersonalism? It is rooted in the withholding of one’s self under the misconception that Krishna consciousness is really about repressing our emotions. Many are taught to believe they must have no emotions. Actually, Krishna consciousness is about learning to experience authentic emotions, feelings that are unencumbered by sense gratificatory desires. To put that another way, Krishna consciousness is about experiencing emotions that are supported by the facts.

What is alienation from one’s own conscience or self, but impersonalism? The impersonalists, in the very act of pursuing self-realization deny the very definition of the self, jivera svarupa haya krsnera nitya dasa. The very meaning of the word “self” is servant of Krishna, which the impersonalists deny. So alienation that results from institutionalization or bureaucratization is but impersonalism, which comes about in two ways: (1) by treating others as an object, and (2) by withholding one’s own personal being from interactions as Dr. Rogers describes. Actually these turn out to be one and the same thing.

Why should a preacher adopt a so-called objective, scholarly, detached stance if the goal is to show the distinction between reality, and illusion and more than that, to persuade us of the validity of his conclusions—that we are practicing rampant impersonalism in the name of personalism? Where, for example, do we find Prabhupada preaching even in his purports and withholding himself?

Prabhupada preached with conviction, that this is truth, and this is illusion, and here are the reasons why. He labeled. He criticized. He said, “rascal, fool, cheater, nonsense, mudha,” etc. He said, “I kick on your face with boot.” He plainly stated the reasons, He showed with logic and reason why things were unsatisfying. He gave analysis and examples. He gave his prescriptions, his problem-solving solutions. Other than to disempower each other, how do we justify that he has license to represent the parampara in ways that others are not entitled to even though our avowed goal is to follow in his footsteps?

Actually it is a great service, “the highest welfare work,” to enable others to tell truth from illusion, but whose rule says it must be unemotional? When our slogan is that one who has life can preach, where is the logic and philosophy in this view? Dead men tell no tales. Imagine Prabhupada or Srila Bhaktisiddhanta addressing the issue of dysfunctional dynamics in a “detached, objective, and scholarly fashion” if it took hold in the community of Vaisnavas. It is impossible, a fantasy.

As preachers in parampara, we must realize that when we speak sincerely we have all the license that our predecessors had and for which we glorify them. If our contemporaries deny us that right, we are not any less entitled to that license. It is not a strike against our integrity; it is a strike against them. We can use satire, anger, parody, and whatever means if we are making a valid philosophical point. Unfortunately, when fear is rationalized as prudence, all these things are difficult to understand.

Using the emotion of anger as an example, Aristotle wrote, “Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right moment, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy.” The essence of his point is that emotions should not be allowed to overwhelm reason.

In this connection, consider the reasonableness in the following passage from the book Emotional Intelligence, by Daniel Goleman:

In a sense we have two brains, two minds—and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both. . . Indeed intellect cannot work at its best without emotional intelligence. . .

This turns the old understanding of the tension between reason and feeling on its head: it is not that we do away with emotion and put reason in its place, as Erasmus had it, but instead find the intelligent balance of the two. The old paradigm held and ideal of reason freed from the putt of emotion. The new paradigm urges us to harmonize head and heart. To do that well in our lives means we must first understand what it means to use emotion intelligently.

To prove his point, we do not find that Srila Prabhupada or others of our acaryas did not display emotions. A person whose reason is overwhelmed by emotions is irrational and if the problem is severe enough it can be pathological, leading to depression or overwhelming anxiety. Yet to go to the other extreme and represses all emotion is also sick. It is to become a dead man walking. A non-person. Studies show that these people are not really unemotional, they simply repress emotions and when that is pathological, they lose touch with their feelings. These are not normal people. They are sick. Such categorical repression of emotion is not the aim of Vaisnavas.

The goal is temperance—a balance between emotion and reason. For every emotion has its value and significance. The goal is appropriate emotions—feelings in proportion to the circumstances. This is easily judged in most cases: Does the person make sense or not? Are the emotions supported by the facts? Blind ruling out of emotions is not the goal. Indeed it is a mistake.

Furthermore, adapting the tone of objectivity does not mean that objectivity is being practiced. That could be a manipulative ploy in itself. Conversely, speaking as a person, a live and kicking human being, with color and one’s conviction out in the open, does not mean out of hand that one is unobjective. Rather it could mean one is honest and courageous. It could mean concern or conviction; it could even mean love.

This is what Rogers is pointing out. Because Prabhupada loved Krishna, he could not tolerate the nonsensical demeanor of the mayavadis. He did not speak or write about them with so-called objectivity. He was full of life, so why do we have to implement a new standard?

Who made up these contrived rules, that emotions means one is automatically irrational? In hundreds of conversations we find that Prabhupada is out to persuade; he is scholarly, but he is not “detached” and “objective” at all, yet his content makes logical sense. And we do not have a problem with that. Then, is it rational that he is exempted from being so-called objective and detached but who would follow in his footsteps are condemned out of hand?

Also, it is possible to make a sound argument that there is no such thing as objectivity. The moment a writer puts fingers to the keyboard, he is out to persuade. Why feign objectivity?

Turning to the critic’s point about being “specific with examples,” if the data adds up, what is wrong with specific examples? People complain that you are too specific implying that one should be vague or ambiguous. Thus while feigning to be giving constructive advice they try to make you less effective, by being more abstract. If some readers like abstract reading because they find reality too much to bear, who owns that problem? Such persons should simply read other material. My responsibility is to speak the truth unambiguously and give evidence to support it. It is not my responsibility to speak partial truths to appease the reader or to appeal to a broader spectrum of readership.

The Our Mission books are for those who want to face reality, who understand that problem-solving is vital to mental health and appreciate definitive out-in-the-open-discussion about the problems impacting on their lives. If the author presents one and one, what is his fault in saying “two”, and by so doing dispel any chance that some reader may get three or sixty, as some are wont to do in this age, perhaps to accommodate their emotional involvement with a naked emperor? My duty is to help the reader distinguish reality from illusion by exposing that rascal emperor.

Ironically this critic is the same person who wrote in an earlier letter, “Most people lack the intellectual rigor to catch your points”. I do not believe that is the case, but conceding his point makes it all the more crucial that I should be specific, so those readers, the majority according to this critic, can get their money’s worth.

“You should let readers come to their own conclusions.”

Who is stopping readers from doing that? My position is like a lawyer making his summation in court. I’m out to convince the jury (my readers) of the validity of my evidence and my conclusions. I do not hide my intentions behind some pretense of detachment and aloofness to manipulate them; rather I present my case with passion and force, with conviction, with life—but coherently. I’m saying in essence: “This is reality and this is illusion, and here is the evidence for my views.” This is perfectly reasonable. It is entirely up to them to weigh the evidence and reach a verdict of their own, but how does that invalidate my having and expressing my own point of view? Am I not a person?

Why should anyone present their realizations in Krishna consciousness in a colorless manner, some contrived, dull academic drone? Which acarya has oriented himself in that way? When I am in a Bhagavatam class given by a droner, I know immediately he is not alive with realization in Krishna consciousness. I get up and go find something better to do with my time. The last thing I want to do is present lifeless books like such lifeless speakers.

Perhaps I’m destined to be in the same orientation as Prabhodananda Saraswati. We think his mood is ecstatic, but he also makes sense. So if I make sense, what is the problem? Why is my mood not ecstatic? And if I do not make sense, then why not make that the issue?

At the day’s end, it is the reader’s responsibility to reach their own conclusions? Why should the author be disempowered from stating what seems to be the logical result of adding up the data? If his calculations are wrong, simply point out the fact by presenting relevant data. If his conclusions are logical, then why not be thoroughly honest and simply accept? How will that mar your integrity?

“. . . it looks personal. You seem to be emotionally involved.”

I am emotionally involved. What kind of argument is this? My spiritual master’s mission is ransacked by people wittingly or unwittingly working a private agenda, albeit in an ultimately subtle way, but extremely destructive, and I’m supposed to be aloof, emotionally uninvolved? Is that love, to be aloof under such circumstances? Where do these erroneous ideas come from? And if people want to use my emotional involvement as their excuse to sidestep issues, whose shortcoming is that? Am I supposed to write in such a way that pretends to respect such people? Why?

When Prabhupada would blast impersonalism, he was emotionally involved like anything, because he loves Krishna and these rascals are offensive to Krishna. Where is there any question of not being emotionally involved? Being emotionally uninvolved is either a manipulative technique or an absence of love. It shows a person with a deep problem understanding Vaisnavism, a person out of touch with his own being.

I am emotionally involved, but that does not change the facts that I also make sense. I’m rational, and I take great pains to frame my presentation in mature realization of the philosophy. Someone overcome by emotions would do that? If anything, I’m making too much sense for those people who want to live in denial or simply can’t believe the depth of our dysfunctionality; they also cannot believe the shamelessness of those we have been trained to revere uncritically. Perhaps they feel more comfortable if I stop making sense, so they can keep their emotional involvement, kowtowing to irrational authorities, believing that to be progress out of illusion.

Such people will surely take a long time to digest the revelations in the Our Mission books, but that is not a defect in the books. It means readers get value for their time and money. This is the first obligation of a writer. He must speak the truth in an interesting way. His task is to make his reader see—that and nothing more. If he is a boil-blower then he is simply useless.

The same critic wrote, “I agree with most of your observations, i.e. about dysfunctional dynamics (authoritarian).” Fine, and what is authoritarian dynamics but impersonalism? We should be very emotionally involved, like Prabhupada was, but not irrational. Such involvement is the correct use of emotions.

“You seem to be out to get even when you cite your own experiences as examples.”

It may look personal and about getting even, but that does not mean such is the case. When the boy reported his observation, that the emperor was naked, he simply stated the facts. He was not trying to get even, but to the emperor and those emotionally involved with him, it may have looked that way.

Also, while getting even is a sub-standard motive, can we say that wanting justice is equally bad? Are these two motives one and the same? Suppose someone whom I happen to have been slighted by also commits murder, should I refrain from pursuing justice for the crime of murder, because I may be accused of trying to get even for some other slight? This does not make sense. Truth and motive are two separate issues.

And why is it that the author’s own experiences are invalidated? Citing secondhand experiences are valid, but firsthand experiences are not? This also does not make sense. A man’s experiences may affect his objectivity, but that is not necessarily a fact. And even so, either he is telling the truth or he isn’t, or he’s telling a partial truth. He may exaggerate or outright lie, but that should not be assumed out of hand to be the case. In court, neither the witness nor the plaintiff nor the defense lawyer may be objective, but they are not faulted for that. The responsibility to ascertain what is the truth falls on the jury, the readers in this case; but the writer has every right to make his case as strong and as ardently as possible.

Moreover, it does not make sense to presume that one is any less ill-motivated about getting even because he cites others’ experiences. After all, he can just as well hyperbolize or lie outright in retelling secondhand experiences as about his own. Indeed, one who is in fact motivated solely to get even is more likely to go this indirect route, to distance himself both publicly and emotionally from his true motive.

Prabhupada says things in his purports that those whom the shoe fits may say “It looks personal. Swami Maharaja is emotionally involved. He even cites his own experiences. He is out to get even.” But we did not take it that way. To us he was Prabhupada, above emotional involvement and above getting even. We thought him perfectly serene and objective, transcendental, even when he was livid. That was to us. Others could have another point of view.

But, what was Prabhupada’s own view? When discussing his criticism of his godbrothers in Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, which Tamal Krishna Gosvami thought was “very personal,” Prabhupada’s own view was that they could not make any comment, because “These are facts.” We should stick to the facts, whether they are based on the personal experiences of the author or not. That is rational and a Vaisnava is a rational person, well, supposed to be, anyway. And when I write about the facts surrounding my godbrothers, and try to bring the dark side of ISKCON into the light, I think it is “very personal” too. A rational criticism would me to show how what I claim are facts are really falsehoods.

A valid criticism is not “It looks like this” or “It looks like that.” A valid criticism is to show that here the author added one and one and did not conclude two, but three, or perhaps forty-three. We cannot simply accuse others of fallacy when our own stance is fallacious. Two irrationalities do not add up to a rational.

I’m happy to announce that to date no one has challenged Our Mission on the rational basis that the data does not add up. I seriously doubt that it will ever happen, but if it does, no problem. We will have to subject that data to the cold light of reason and see if it is all substance, all shadow, or a blend of the two. The worst than can happen is that we agree to disagree. If my analysis is negated, then I’m happy to be enlightened. No one should expect an easy victory. Either the data adds up and the shoe fits, or it does not add up; the shoe doesn't fit.

One devotee has tried to show that I overstate my case in the previous volume when I referred to a sannyasi going to university as the pursuit of vainglory. This was after the same person make it clear that he did not agree with sannyasis going to university. Yet because he has an emotional investment with this particular sannyasi, he objected, strongly, to the bit about vainglory. Actually, the sannyasi in question, thinking that whatever he does is transcendental, routinely displays symptoms of the mode of passion, and what is the essence of the mode of passion but vainglory? “Simple deduction, Watson” as Sherlock Holmes would say. Therefore I say, no one should expect an easy victory. But if they make sense, then rest assured I will adjust my understanding.

Now it happens that some people may be exposed as having a lesser stature spiritually than the institution has allotted to them. And if one is institutionalized one may think that only the institutionally anointed can have an opinion and the rest of us should keep our heads down and graze with the herd.. One may think that he is not entitled to have an opinion of his own, so “ Who is Kundali to have an opinion? He should just give me the facts. Why should I care what he thinks?”

Then what will happen, but the very thing he disempowers me from having—the forming of an opinion? And what a peculiar orientation to invalidate my experiences in the bargain? Actually, this criticism betrays a certain lack of humanity in the critic. And a lack of courage to completely neglect those whom my analyses expose.

Let me take this opportunity to state again my outlook. Researching and writing these books has being a great education for me, and I’m grateful to my godbrothers for this, because while the dynamics of the society has disturbed me from my first days in Henry Street temple (where a woman who laughed like a fishwife was believed to be the classy heiress to the Toyota fortunes), the truth is that without their irrational dealings with me in recent years I would never have put my mind to such a laborious undertaking. The point is not to get even, but to rout ignorance, illusion, which has myriad gross and subtle forms. This is anyone’s duty in service to the parampara. Those who somehow get exposed, instead of faulting me, should simply distance themselves from ignorance. If the shoe fits, take it off. The rest of us should completely neglect those who will not come clean.

I find that my godbrothers have been merciful to me by inspiring me to study the problem of our dynamics from different angles of vision. This effort has changed me in untold ways. And without any pretense I can say that I feel much indebted to them. Nevertheless, my gratitude does not mean that I will not address the issues, the maya, in a frank and open manner. Some of them are part of the problem. I may be accused of wanting to get even but I will not shy away from the more unpleasant aspects of this effort just because it may make me unpopular or appear revenge oriented.

This knowledge is far too important for me make the first priority concern for my image, or be overwhelmed by the fear that my motives may be misunderstood. It is standard procedure that the whistle-blower will get the wrath of the group. Yet every member of the institution is entitled to get this empowering knowledge. And if as a result of these books, the quality of life in ISKCON changes for even a few devotees, and I get no credit for it, in fact if I get defamed and demonized and excluded from the society for the rest of my life, I still consider that the effort was worthwhile.

At the same time, if some owls want to remain in the dark and justify it by my “sharp tone,” I have no sympathy for them. I offer no apology. I fail to see how I own the problem. If I had a messiah complex, that would be different. I do not have such a problem. My goal is to speak the truth and others may do or not do as they see fit.

I believe it will take years to see the results of the Our Mission books. Perhaps more than ten or fifteen years. Perhaps I may not see the results in my lifetime. But this does not bother me. Sattvic solutions to problems take time. They entail delaying gratification and taking the poison up front. So, having faith in Krishna’s scientific words, I accept this sequence.

Perhaps, beyond my personal growth, my efforts will bring no tangible results ever. That possibility does not impede me. My task is to do my duty. My duty is to do the needful according to my capacity, taking guidance from my conscience—that and no more. If I become the tool of the institution, or of the herd, then I defeat my purpose, I fail my duty. If I make mistakes (“Every endeavor is covered by some fault”), they are learning opportunities; they are not a reason to quit, to deny my own intelligence, or to repress my conscience...

“You are too hard on the leaders, because mainly the problem is that they do not know how to handle feedback maturely.”

I do not find that the leaders do not know how to handle feedback maturely. The main problem I see is that they do not want honest feedback. Stroking they handle with élan. They never refuse it. But hard-headed realism they resent. This is not becoming of Vaisnavas in general; and, in light of our society’s tarnished history, not becoming of our leaders in particular.

The attitude of many is that they are leaders by divine right, that they have inherited ISKCON from Srila Prabhupada, and they need not be accountable to anyone for their imperiousness and irrational dealings. Whosoever does not like it can go away. This is the selfsame mentality that Prabhupada derided in some of his godbrothers. It is a ghastly mentality. It is destroying our mission from within, but the denial is so massive, simply because new initiates show up.

Our leaders are willing to address problems as long as the solutions leave them largely unaccountable to us, as long as they remain the parents and we remain children, as long as they save face. I call this the leaders and sheep paradigm, which is condemned in Prabhupada 1972 letter to Karandhara, in which he writes: “. . .not that one (or a body) shall dominate and distribute benefits to the others and they do nothing but beg from you and you provide. No.” Prabhupada did not sail on the Jaladuta to establish this sort of program.

On the contrary according to his own wording of ISKCON’s constitution in July 1966, he came to dismantle it (1966 New York Journal):

To discharge as a matter of course the vitiated system of supremacy of one man over another by false prestige of birthright or vested interests.

Discharge is one of those rare words in English that can have opposite meaning according to context, like “sanction” or “cleave”. Thus discharge can mean fulfill or eliminate. The use of the word in the above context means “to get rid of.” This is clear because it makes the use the word “vitiated” coherent. A synonym for vitiated that would fit in the above sentence is “corrupted”.

So in Srila Prabhupada’s thinking, one of ISKCON constitutional purposes is to eliminate the corrupted system of supremacy of one man, or a body, over others by false prestige of paramahamsa status or other vested interests. The specific method for achieving this, he also stated in an earlier paragraph:

To invoke the quality of goodness particularly in every member of the society, individually by the process of Diksha and by establishing one in the status of a Brahmin (good and intelligent man) on the basis of truthfulness, knowledge and faith in the transcendental service of the Lord.

If it is pointed out this item is listed under his secondary aims, that is only because creating Brahmins, which he has as a primary aim, would automatically accomplish this secondary aim. His stating it again as a secondary aim is for emphasis.

Hence one way to assess our situation is to ask ourselves, “After more than 30 years, how much have we succeeded in ridding our own society of the vitiated system?” If the answer is positive, then we succeeded in our primary aim. If the answer is negative, then we have failed in the primary aim. One way to know if a positive or negative answer is appropriate is to ask, “If we did not have a vitiated system, how come so many devotees, and the majority of Srila Prabhupada’s direct disciples, who want to practice Krishna consciousness, are outside of his society? It makes one wonder, doesn’t it?

Clearly, the parent-child system has to change if we are going to get out of dysfunctional dealings. However, personal experience and my research into group psychology shows me that it will only change when we have a head-on crisis, because certain parties have vested interest in keeping the present dynamic, no matter what structural changes and legislated ones we make.

We are supposed to look upon them as accomplished transcendentalists, but careful observation shows that several are not above sub-conscious irrational drives. Several of them are alienated people. Unless we hold them accountable, and oblige them to have an attitudinal change, they will be maya’s Trojan horses in our camp, regardless of any structural and legislative changes we make. After some time things will again go dysfunctional, because they can take advantage of the society when in disarray or unstable.

We have to change, because they will not. I have quotes from Tamal Krishna Gosvami, Bir Krishna Gosvami, and Virabahu Dasa, all stating flatly that they (the leaders, hence the dynamics) shall never change. And I think this is the view of the majority of our leaders. I know of two who want change, and they assure me that there are others, yet they admit that they are out-numbered and change is not likely. But we are not helpless. We can change. Then they will be obliged to change. We have to refuse to play along with the old pattern, as “the child”.

The key to seeing these persons for what they are is not to look at their tilaka, their lordly bearing, nor their tenure in the movement, nor to even look at their service record, for these are all convenient smokescreens. The key is not to look at their winning personality—but at their character. The key to discerning character: Conduct. People’s deeds reveal their character. If we looked at that and did not sentimentally rationalize away what we see, did not deny our perceptions, then there would be more realism in our ranks. And the key to interpreting their deeds is to understand the three modes of nature, “the supreme wisdom.”

In this way, no one needs to accept my opinions blindly. Apply the Lord’s teachings and see for yourself: This kind of behavior indicates this mode of nature and this mode of nature indicates such a motive, and such a motive indicates such a character. And when that is all held against the philosophy of devotional service, it becomes clear as pure water who is a devotee, who is a non-devotee, who is a mixed devotee, and who is a bluff. It becomes clear who is a cheater and who is cheated.

For example, when people make politics; when they bully and intimidate and bend others to their will; when they demand our respect rather than command it; when they manipulate peoples’ lives; when they are passive while injustice goes on; when they say things like “It doesn’t matter if it’s Krishna conscious or not, it’s what I want”; or promise us more years of manipulation, politics, nastiness, and so on, what does it all mean?

When people live in denial because of “the tone”, or say things like “Sometimes I do things that I know I should feel guilty about, but I do not”, or this doozy, “My service is to manipulate people all day long,” what does it all mean?

And I do not mean an occasional mistake, I mean that this goes on year after year after year, with predictable regularity. How smart does one have to be to see that the lower modes of nature are in charge here and this is manifestly evil, yet being done under Prabhupada’s name? To cast that another way, “How stupid does one have to be to go on looking at black and calling it white?” Personal opinions are of little relevance here.

“But exposing people, will destroy their credibility and alienate the devotees who are attached to those people. You could be more influential if you did not do that.”

Undeniably, I would be more popular, but not necessarily more influential, if I did not expose people, but so what? This argument is like saying that if the boy did not say, “Oh my, the emperor is naked” everyone would have loved him. They would have been so happy keeping their illusion. But this is simply Indra’s argument to Narada Muni, “Oh, please do not disillusion me, because I’m happy as a hog.”

Also, being popular is the proof that one is ineffective. Besides that, being popular means one risks being overcome by the popularity and start believing in his own myths the same way the emperor though he had on a magnificent suit. If one truly wants to live from the inside-out there is no question of going this route. It is a self-deception. The better route is described by the sixteenth century reformer, Martin Luther:

Cowardice asks the question, Is it safe? Expediency asks the question, Is it politic? Vanity asks the question, Is it popular? But conscience asks the question, Is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience says it is right..

Unfortunately, those who are not conscience-guided cannot comprehend someone who is. Thus they are obliged to find every kind of sinister explanation. Therefore it is said that those who are crooked see everyone else as crooked, even without tangible evidence.

In any event, if the evidence proves that the people being exposed are in fact felons, why make those who will be alienated by the news a priority? Why cater to their blind spots? Why blame me because they may not be unemotional enough to heed the warning? Actually, the same critics should thank me because my effort protects them from being swindled. Why kill the messenger?

Perhaps over a long time and in tiny increments one may wake up such people, but do we have such time on our hands? I think not. I believe that the attrition rate of devotees leaving the society constitutes an emergency. Too much scheming for subtlety and tact and long range results is, in my view, a variation of fiddling while ISKCON burns.

Also, the truth-sayer is no longer a truth-sayer if to gain influence and popularity he does not speak “the simple truth”. Then he becomes the monster he set out to destroy; he engages in deception too.

As for ruining credibility, consider this: Perhaps their credibility needs to be destroyed. When the emperor appeared before the assembly without a stitch on, the boy was struck with wonder. He was even more profoundly awestruck when several minutes went by and no one said anything about the emperor’s impropriety. Even more amazing was that almost everyone present oohed and aahed at the emperor’s “wonderful, wonderful clothes.” Finally, the boy broke the spell. “But the emperor has no clothes.”

Did he ruin the emperor’s credibility by reporting his observation? Or should we consider that the emperor ruined his own credibility by gulling himself and then gulling his subjects? If, for example, in a sane society, legal charges were to be brought against one of these parties, who would be the defendant, the emperor, who did the deed, or the boy, who reported what he saw?

“But you depict people as bad, insincere, and so forth, as if they have not a trace of genuine desire to serve.”

Here I admit openly that sometimes this appears to be the case. In all fairness, however, please consider that I do not depict people the way I want. I have no vested interests in depicting them this way or that. Rather I use the philosophy to interpret their words and deeds to understand their character. We are supposed to do this as a regular daily function, evaluate the devotees, seeing through eyes of knowledge. We are supposed to accept nothing at face value. It is intelligent to look behind the mask or persona that people present to us. And ISKCON history supports this intelligent stance. The convention that it is offensive to do this looking is hype foisted on us by the very people who have vested interest in keeping us blind, docile, sheep-like. But, except to have power over us, why would they want us to be blind? That is the question.

By bringing out the specifics, the idea is not to spite anyone,. The idea is to live in a way that I do not deceive nor am I deceived. God gave us intelligence and sastric knowledge precisely so we can discriminate. I’m no more at fault than the small boy who spoke the simple truth about the emperor rather than deny his perceptions to fit in with the crowd. It is not that he depicted the emperor as insincere and it would be more than a trifle disingenuous to accuse him of that.

It is well-known that on this path, people start out with a genuine desire to serve, but they sometimes get side-tracked; or they may be entirely devoted to a private agenda. Prabhupada has warned us to detect and neglect such mundane persons dressed as Vaisnavas. All we mortals have to go by are their actions, which speak louder than words. We may give the benefit of the doubt in some cases, but then we can't do that on a whim. We should have solid grounds for it. Otherwise, we are not being wise: but a brahmana is supposed to be wise. Our material emotions should never be confused with authentic spiritual sentiments. If we confuse the two we live in the deadliest of illusions: the illusion of progress out of illusion.

Unfortunately, owing to a lack of realization and subsequent failure to properly teach the philosophy, this problem of confusing authentic spiritual emotions with mundane ones is swelling to epidemic proportions in our community.

It may not be pleasant news and it may be especially hard to face if one of our favorite persons show up in a different light that we fancy them to be, but if we are not to be deceived, how can we focus on the person bringing the light as the issue? We should focus on assessing the data? It is denying our perceptions that got us into the present condition in the first place. If someone disagrees with a particular case, or with all my conclusions, that is all right, simply present evidence to counter it. Do not just cite that it makes you uncomfortable.

Virtually all that is growthful in life makes us uncomfortable initially. Learning to swim or ride a bike or drive a car are all initially uncomfortable experiences. Even learning to go to the toilet feels unnatural at first. Sometimes a growth experience is downright traumatic, for example learning to walk. But we do all these things, then why not learn to discriminate?

Do not get me wrong, it is perfectly fine to question my motives. I do not want that anyone accept me blindly, for that would contradict everything I stand for in these books. However, the way to expose my motives as less than honorable is to first show that my conclusions are erroneous. Show how I deliberately sorted the data wrongly, with obvious or implied intent to mislead people, then from there make a case for sinister motives—such as getting even, manipulating readers, making them shrink while claiming to educate them, discouraging them from thinking for themselves and encouraging them to blindly accept my version, and so on and so forth. I’d be defeated in a matter of moments.

“You appear to presume the worst of individuals.”

This is a misunderstanding. At one time, I used to presume the best of everyone who presented themselves with tilaka, neck beads, and a Sanskrit or Bengali name. Hard experience over two decades taught me to adjust my outlook. I learned to presume nothing. When I meet someone I initially treat them cordially. Over time, by their words and their actions, I get some insight into their character; and I do make a distinction between people’s personality and their character. By observing their conduct I begin to form an opinion of the person. I find this a rational method, but if a more rational method exists, I’m open to suggestions.

There is a saying in America that if it barks like a dog, then it probably is a dog. And if it smells like a dog, has a tail and chases it too, then I’d say definitely it is a dog. Presumption is, therefore, not necessary when one focuses on the evidence. Bhakti-yoga is a science.

“You rob people of all credibility and portray them as having no genuine desire to serve.”

This is not true. I report their words and deeds and try to show the larger implications of such words and deeds in light of our philosophy, logic and reason. This is proper use of our intelligence. How else can we distinguish between truth and illusion? The simple truth is that by their own words and deeds they rob their own credibility.

But we have opiated ourselves with the philosophy rather than use it to live in a state of heightened awareness, so when I come along, my revelations seem extraordinary and extreme.

Whether or not they have a genuine desire to serve is not for me to ascertain. If it is there, such genuine desire is not the problem for our society. The problem is, whether accidentally or willfully, they are exhibiting something other than genuine desire, or perhaps a mixed desire. And that needs to be addressed. In the parent-child dynamic, however, we are disempowered from addressing it. They are “the authorities” even if they have not a clue what’s to be done and what’s not to be done in some matters, and we are exhorted to cooperate, blindly, to show our love for Srila Prabhupada.

If they have genuine desire to serve, then why do not they show their love for Srila Prabhupada by cooperating with us when our ideas are better, i.e. more Krishna conscious or more practical than theirs? Except in authoritarian systems, cooperation is a two-way street. Who has mandated that they are automatically right because of might? Why do not they cooperate for Srila Prabhupada by being more adaptable and accommodating when they see their godbrothers in such woe?

“You really tear into the leaders. You come across as very angry at individuals.”

Perhaps I am angry. So what of it? Being angry is not a crime. Anger is a legitimate emotion when there is just cause. Perhaps I have just cause. And does my anger or annoyance or frustration overwhelm my capacity to make sense?

Prabhupada always depicted the preacher as a warrior waging war on illusion. When Subala complained about his service, that it sometimes made him angry, Prabhupada said, “Do you think Arjuna was peaceful on the battlefield. He was cutting off arms and legs, fighting for his life, how could he do this without getting angry?”

Sentimental or ignorant people think that anger is completely ruled out of spiritual life, but Prabhupada got angry so many times. We glorify him for it, but we disempower everyone else. These inconsistencies do not make sense to thinking people. Note that I’m not agreeing that I’m angry at individuals, I’m simply asserting that even if that is the case, the first consideration is whether or not there is just cause. I believe that after giving more than half my life to ISKCON, I have just cause many times over.

As for tearing into the leaders, I’m sorry to say, that this is simply not a fact. I tear into illusion, and whom the shoe fits seem to share the same fate. I do not see anyway to avoid this but for me to live in denial--or for them to take off the shoe. I think the right choice is obvious, because tearing into illusion is deemed the highest welfare work, so I do not see that I should quit. Considering that some of our leaders have wreaked havoc on our society for decades, such as one who unabashedly promised us 25 more years of nastiness, manipulation, politics etc., I think what I do is a service long overdue. It may be a thankless one, unsung, but there is no denying the value of it if one is honest.

“It appears that you use reasoning as a weapon to inflict pain and not just remove cataracts.”

What kind of sentimental argument is this? Is cataract removal painful or not? I do not use reasoning to inflict pain. I use reasoning to distinguish truth from illusion, and to expose irrationality being foisted on us in the guise of Krishna consciousness. This procedure is naturally painful for those whom the shoe fits—whether they are corrupted by power or by weakness. Such pain is unavoidable and anyone who says differently is swindling us. He or she is a fool and a rascal. Imagine someone trying to convince you that lancing a boil and squeezing out the core is not painful. Such a person is bewildered at best.

Prabhupada says, “Preaching is like throwing a brick among a pack of dogs. Those who get hit yelp the loudest.” How should one avoid this turn of events, and why should a preacher try to avoid it if he is out to do the highest welfare work? Pain is part of the experience. A preacher of Krishna consciousness is like a physician, a surgeon. To be competent he must have the strength to inflict necessary pain, or he or she is in the wrong calling. Boil-blowers have no stomach for preaching work and should stay out of the way of those who do.

Someone may then say, “Okay, I see your point, but you enjoy it.” Enjoy what, inflicting the pain or giving relief? Of course one enjoys giving relief from the boil of illusion. Why should the preacher not enjoy it? Prabhupada enjoyed it. We should all know this joy.

“Your prescription is somewhat lacking (a kind of Gandhian non-cooperation—at least that’s how it came across)”

This is not a precise statement of my prescription. The correct version is non-cooperation with irrational authorities and cooperation with rational ones. This is but a rewording of Prabhupada’s instruction that one who is in knowledge, hence free from doubt and delusion, accepts nothing blindly but with care and caution. It’s the same idea only different wording. Also he said we should practice upeksa and completely neglect the mundane men in Vaisnava dress. Again, it’s the same thing.

It is to be applied in three ways: (1) Do not cooperate with specific irrational or non Krishna conscious demands made on us. (2) Categorically not cooperate with individuals who have a consistent history of being irrational, which is the same as Prabhupada’s prescription that we “completely neglect” mundane persons dressed as Vaisnavas. (3) Observe a firm resolve not to be irrational ourselves. These sound simple, but the effects on our society would be amazing if implemented. And the beauty of it is that it is well within our individual capacity to do so, even if no one else does.

“Your presentation lacks warmth. People are best influenced by someone they like. The executioner is regarded with dread by all, not just the guilty.”

Good point, but what should be the basis of that “liking,” mutual admiration, stroking people, making them feel warm and fuzzy, even if they live in a bubble of illusion, even though they are being swindled in the name of going beyond birth and death?

For myself, I prefer someone who appears unloving but has the courage to speak the truth, has a consistent philosophy or value system and a consistent character, one that shows respect, not for my blind spots and self delusions, but for human dignity. I prefer a truth-sayer (who also preaches virtue) than a virtue preacher who withholds truth in the service of extolling virtue. For I consider embracing the truth the only way out of illusion?

Yes, it is true that most people like to make emotional decisions, having failed the opportunity of human life, which is to become rational, so they prefer preachers who make them feel warm and fuzzy. Well, my warmth is that I will not manipulate them by their irrational weakness, which they believe is the symptom of love, mistaking a soft head for a soft heart. I am content with a hard head and a soft heart. I will speak the truth and let it stand or fall. End of story.

Yes, the softies are in the majority and think that those who want to be rational should yield and make concessions to them and act as if one is obliged to cater to the irrational masses, because of their sheer numbers. However, I do not belong to that school. I am a hard-headed realists around the clock. Softies are losers when it comes to valid experience of Krishna consciousness. We may elevate them here by popular opinion all the way to saktyavesa status, but from the transcendental point of view, they are losers. Asara, useless as monopoly money. Hardly one knows Krishna in truth.

People who appreciate the value of integrity will perceive that that is what we have in common; and we will have mutual warmth on that basis. That is the association I want. Other kinds of warmth are really techniques of coercion. Our acaryas preached Krishna consciousness on the basis of logic and reason, and my plan is to follow that standard as best I can. If others believe they have better insight on this point, they are welcome to it, but I’m not interested. This process is buddhi-yoga, not bhava-yoga. Finer spiritual emotions come at the far end of this process. And that distance is not a matter of time in the process. It is a matter of the quality of one’s faith.

Other than to hoax people, all this hooey about warmth is not a primary concern for those in the preaching field, but making sense is very important. We are supposed to preach by appealing to the rational faculty in people, not through an emotional appeal. My style eliminates 99% of the emotion wallahs and that is a relief to me. Some never get beyond browsing in the books. Just the word discrimination is enough to turn many away, and my matter-of-fact tone and solid logic gets the rest. I do not see any problem there. I do not write to serve this class of reader.

Yes, indeed the executioner is regarded with dread, but am I in the role of executioner? I am in the role of prosecuting attorney. It is the reader who is judge and executioner. It is the reader who must decide whether to practice upeksa and neglect the mundane men in the dress of the Vaisnava if the evidence makes sense.

All I do is accept nothing blindly by comparing facts with the philosophy and drawing logical conclusions from the data and if I’m regarded with dread for this natural use of one’s intelligence, distinguishing reality from illusion, then it goes to show the dire straits in our society ostensibly aimed at the intelligent class of men. Either we should adjust our dynamics so our advertising rings true, or we should change our ads to better reflect what we really do. Truth in advertising is, however, a sign of integrity, which we lack, so that may put us in conflict all over again.

“You should have your own project so you can model the right way. People do not understand what to do just by knowing what they shouldn’t do.”

We have several points to be considered here. If we are aiming to establish varnasrama culture, and if we have faith in the Lord’s own blueprint for social engineering, then it cannot be that everyone who wants to function in a brahminical capacity gets told “Show, do not tell.” If everyone must have his own project in order to have sanity, where is the cooperation for Srila Prabhupada? Where is the simple living and high thinking, when we collectively model the old every-man-for-himself scheme, albeit with dhotis and kurtas, saris and kajal?

What is vital for a brahmana to model is sound character and rational conduct, to give substance instead of shadow, and display the brahminical symptoms given by the Lord in Bhagavad-Gita, and to educate. So this I’m doing in my personal dealings and in my books according to my capacity.. This may not seem like much in an institution where a rajasic achievement oriented outlook predominates.

According to the Lord, however, that’s the way it ought to be. If some lack faith in His vision for social sanity I should not let that destabilize my own faith in His prescription.

Further, my research in group healing indicates that although we diagnose the group organism to assess the problems, the central solution to ISKCON’s problems is in healing individuals. If we can inspire individuals, whether leaders or not, to practice personal integrity, to feel responsible for the whole group, to think for themselves, and to cooperate interdependently instead of from crippling dependency, this will optimize our healthy group dynamics.

These things I address in my books and strive to model in my personal life. People are the bricks of the institution, and if each brick has integrity, we get a solid structure. So getting people out of the Little Prabhu syndrome is more vital a contribution than creating a project out of fresh cloth. Therefore I model how not to surrender to irrational authorities, how not to accept anything blindly, how to take nothing at face value but to process it all, how to discriminate between reality and illusion not just outside of ISKCON but inside as well.

But even if I did not model these things, is there no value to just yelling fire, even if one does not have a pump, a hose, and a water supply? There is value in just warning people of the dangers of our current dynamics. And in any case, project or not, books are the basis. Let’s see what grows out of that.

According to Sri Isopanisad, people need to know what is vidya and avidya side by side. The first phase is educating them how to distinguish between matter and spirit, and part of that is to inform them about the seductions and snags that one encounter in dysfunctional group dynamics. Then they will appreciate the right dynamics. So we are working our way through this process. The Our Mission series is a work in progress.

In the long range, these books will serve as historical documents for future researchers interested in what life in ISKCON was like. They will also educate future generations about dynamics. So there is value in them for all posterity. The fact that my contemporaries may not admit this, does not prevent me from seeing it myself. Those looking for an excuse to deny all this are in the majority and will surely find a way to remain blind. The more light you try to give them, the more their intellectual pupils contract. One devotee said, “I looked at that book (Our Mission: I). There is no mention of Radharani in there.” One presumes he won't read Srimad Bhagavatam for the same reason. Another elevated soul said, “His books have cartoons.” He's never heard that we use everything in Krishna's service.

An old man and a young boy went on a long journey with a single jackass. The old man got on the ass and the boy walked alongside. At the first town the people said, “You are a grown man, why you let this young boy walk and you ride on the jackass like a king?” So the old man got off and the boy got on. Next town, the people crowded around. “Old man, what's wrong with you? Here is this healthy young boy, and you have him riding on the ass and you, an old man, walking. Are you mad?” They both got on the ass. In the next town, the people said, “What's this, two people riding on one ass? Have you no consideration for the poor animal?” The old man and the boy and the ass all walked to the next town. Lo, the people gathered around and laughed and jeered at them. “ Here are two fools” they bellowed. “They have a perfectly healthy jackass, yet both of them are walking on this long road. Have you no brain?” And so the story goes. . . .

If the old man was wise, he would have gone about his business with the boy and let the townspeople think what they will, because popular opinion is most times irrational and crazy-making. Self-realization means many things, one meaning is that one lives by his own light, the light of conscience. One learns to live from the inside-out and not like the old man, from the outside-in. Otherwise there can be no question of self-realization.

In conclusion, all these considerations listed here unnecessarily complicate the cause of stating what Krishnadas Kaviraja called “the simple truth”; and it is not the business of a Vaisnava to complicate things or to go the long scenic route. Our dictum is that one who has life can preach. “Life” for preaching simply means that one speaks or writes from the heart, with logic and reason and based on sastra. And having done that faithfully, leave the rest to the will of the Lord.

Uncomplicated readers will appreciate. They are a minority, but there comes a point on this path when we realize that in every era this minority is the only real audience for Krishna consciousness. We may canvass far and wide, but in the end the manusyanam sahasresu verse wins out. The true candidates for seeing this process through to the very end are sudurlabha, very, very rare. The Our Mission books are for these rare people.

1. **Devil's Advocacy:** Decision making technique designed to combat groupthink. One or more people in the group takes the "devil's advocate" role, and works to point out all the flaws and risks with an option under consideration. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)