

The Humble Guru

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Note: CHAKRA first received "The Humble Guru" on October 14 with a request not to print the article until December, after it would have appeared in the ISKCON Communications Journal. In the meantime, the article has been read at a conference and posted on VNN. CHAKRA has also printed a comment on it by Danavir Maharaja. Recently, the author sent the latest version of the article to CHAKRA with a request to print it immediately. "I've heard that 'The Humble Guru' has been posted on VNN," he wrote. "I don't want devotees to think that it's some sort of anti-ISKCON piece, so therefore please post the paper on CHAKRA."

Abstract

Gurus who choose to instruct their disciples to concentrate on Srila Prabhupada in ways such as reciting Srila Prabhupada's pranam mantras and offering bhoga and arati to Srila Prabhupada, are presented as a model for the ISKCON diksa guru. Stress is given to the self-determination of the guru, as opposed to legislative force, as a foundation for this system, and to counter arguments that this approach inherently diminishes the position of diksa guru. Predominance of diksa gurus on the GBC is discussed in relation to the goals of the reform movement of the 1980s, including the dismantling of the zonal acarya system, increased GBC authority over diksa gurus, and a more responsive and accountable GBC body. The author concludes that these goals remain largely unmet, and points to continued misunderstanding of the proper position of the diksa guru as a significant factor in the dissatisfaction of ISKCON membership and in impeding ISKCON from progressing as a unified entity.

Introduction

Imagine an ISKCON diksa guru who prefers that his disciples recite Srila Prabhupada's pranam mantras instead of pranam mantras for himself. This guru also prefers that his disciples perform arati and offer bhoga to pictures of Srila Prabhupada. While this guru allows his disciples to perform a Vyasa-puja ceremony with a special feast on his appearance day, he trains his disciples that for them the most important Vyasa-puja ceremony of the year, and the most important Vyasa-puja offering that they write each year, is for Srila Prabhupada. Would ISKCON forbid this guru to act in this way? That is, would ISKCON demand that the guru train his disciples to recite pranam mantras for him, and offer arati and bhoga to his picture, and teach that the most important Vyasa-puja offering in the year is for him?

If ISKCON would restrict the guru as described above, then the institution would be limiting the guru by diminishing his self-determination. Of course, by deciding to be a guru in ISKCON an individual agrees to be limited by the institution. Since Srila Prabhupada's departure the GBC has placed many restrictions on diksa gurus in the attempt to find the balance between autonomy of the diksa guru and the best interest of the ISKCON society. The above presentation is provided to illustrate that demanding that a guru accept various externals of worship is restrictive in the same way as dictating that a guru cannot accept such externals. Either sort of restriction diminishes, within the framework of the institution, and not necessarily ontologically, the independence of the diksa guru. This paper proposes encouragement and establishment of diksa gurus in ISKCON who make choices as described in the first paragraph.

Considering ISKCON history for the past 21 years, it's safe to say that the worship received by some ISKCON diksa gurus is not completely transferred to Srila Prabhupada as it is supposed to be. This doesn't imply that pure diksa gurus who are completely transparent do not exist in ISKCON. Rather, it asserts that practically no experienced devotee in ISKCON

would agree with the position that every ISKCON diksa guru is completely pure and transparent, and that difficulties and falldowns amongst diksa gurus are finished. This author has immense appreciation for the dedicated service rendered by ISKCON diksa gurus to Srila Prabhupada's mission. Their personal sacrifice is exemplary, and these suggestions for a reevaluation of the position of diksa guru are in no way meant to minimize the glory and achievements of these surrendered Vaisnavas.

Preferences as formulated in the first paragraph can be termed "Prabhupada-centered choices". Diksa gurus regularly make decisions, with possible choices being Prabhupada-centered or non-Prabhupada-centered. If a diksa guru who is free from personal ambition and all forms of material desire makes a non-Prabhupada-centered choice, such as training his disciples to focus on his Vyasa-puja rather than Srila Prabhupada's Vyasa-puja, there is no harm, because the endeavor is totally passed on to Srila Prabhupada. However, as argued above, it is reasonable to conclude that not all of the worship by the granddisciples is being properly utilized by the ISKCON diksa gurus. Therefore, it is safer, in terms of ISKCON procedure, for diksa gurus to make Prabhupada-centered choices.

A pure diksa guru will not mind, and I suspect would be pleased, to see his disciples concentrate more on Srila Prabhupada. In the case of a diksa guru who still has some impurity, ISKCON, and also the diksa guru, should be very pleased that the granddisciples are protected from having their worshipful propensities misused, because these inclinations are now directed towards Srila Prabhupada. Therefore, it is proposed that Prabhupada-centered choices are the best option for the ISKCON society, and that ISKCON diksa gurus should make Prabhupada-centered choices whenever possible. Of course, we who are not on an elevated platform do not know a priori who is pure and impure, but a course of action that maximizes Prabhupada-centered choices is the best strategy for ISKCON in any case, even if only one percent of the diksa gurus still retain some impurity. Otherwise, ISKCON is, to some degree, institutionalizing exploitation.

Making Prabhupada-centered choices is an act of free will. By exercising free will in this way, the diksa guru is in no way diminished, but rather is exalted for making decisions that are in the best interest of Srila Prabhupada's institution. It is important to understand that it's not that diksa gurus can't have pranams, honorific titles, and other external manifestations of worship, but they choose not to have them. By encouraging its diksa gurus to make Prabhupada-centered choices, ISKCON is not making assertions about the spiritual level of any particular guru. Even if a diksa guru is a mahabhagavata, if he wants to be a diksa guru in ISKCON it already means not accepting externals such as a special seat in the temple, and not accepting titles such as "zonal acarya". These restrictions are accepted as beneficial for Srila Prabhupada's mission and the unity of ISKCON. I suggest that Prabhupada-centered choices by diksa gurus should be increasingly adopted as part of ISKCON culture, because Srila Prabhupada is the attractive principle in ISKCON.

This paper promotes an ISKCON which is more Prabhupada-centered. To accomplish this, it is suggested that diksa gurus must consider ISKCON first, putting aside individual benefit and aspirations. Creating a society that is more Prabhupada-centered will involve genuinely valuing all devotees, as opposed to excessive focus, relative to the entire membership of the movement, on diksa gurus. Further, this article asserts that greater accountability on the part of diksa gurus and GBCs is a necessity for ISKCON reform, and that to achieve this the institution must reassess the position and function of the diksa guru. These topics will now be discussed in greater detail.

Imitation and an ISKCON-First Perspective

In the domain of diksa guru, the principle of imitation, at the expense of discriminatingly following Srila Prabhupada's principle, continues in ISKCON. Just as in the past temple furniture and the concept of zonal acarya reflected imitation at the expense of genuine understanding, it seems that many of the current practices of diksa gurus reflect similar misunderstandings. Practices described in the first paragraph are only a few of the elements that could be examined, as there may be many more. Perhaps some of the elements will be found, upon philosophical and historical examination, to be essential and beyond debate. In such cases, ISKCON would be obliged to demand its diksa gurus to accept such externals, whatever their preference may be. However, if the organization becomes introspective about the institution of diksa guru, it may discover that much imitation continues, resulting in Srila Prabhupada being deemphasized. Regarding philosophical investigation, the burden of proof should probably be on demonstrating that proposed Prabhupada-centered choices are not legitimate, in which case an ISKCON diksa guru would be prohibited from making such choices. Until such choices are shown to be philosophically unacceptable, they should be encouraged. This approach is contrary to the approach of prohibiting Prabhupada-centered choices until they're proven to be legitimate. With the former strategy, if we err, we do so with Srila Prabhupada at the center. A familiar example of an apparently Prabhupada-centered choice that ISKCON has determined to be illegitimate is ritvik philosophy, and thus an ISKCON diksa guru cannot claim to his disciples that Srila Prabhupada is actually their diksa guru.

This perspective may be difficult to appreciate for many granddisciples and diksa gurus. Presently, it is common that disciples worship their guru with honorific titles, pranam mantras, and other externals. The guru passes on this worship to Srila Prabhupada, and the disciples advance in Krsna consciousness. All these activities may be legitimate, and the system works for the disciples and the diksa guru. To perceive the need for adjustment, one must adopt an ISKCON-first perspective, which transcends the unit of disciples and diksa guru. When one embraces an ISKCON-first perspective, it can be understood that by establishing a culture of Prabhupada-centered choices, nothing is lost and much is gained. For instance, granddisciples whose spiritual master becomes manifestly unqualified often experience a difficult time. In such instances the GBC instructs them to take shelter, at least till they become reinitiated, of Srila Prabhupada. If these devotees have already been trained to find shelter in Srila Prabhupada, due to a culture of Prabhupada-centered choices, then they will experience less confusion and pain if their diksa guru has difficulties.

Also, it is likely, almost inevitable, that Srila Prabhupada's disciples who are not serving as diksa gurus, especially those who feel disenfranchised and marginalized, will feel more comfortable in the ISKCON family when Prabhupada-centered choices are more common. Of course, such

marginalization is commonly, and in my opinion, often unjustifiably, attributed to envy on the part of the devotee who has left the society. Herein it is suggested that many devotees have been distanced from ISKCON because of a culture that systematically encourages diksa gurus to make non-Prabhupada-centered choices. This pervasive culture is obvious, though largely unspoken, and repulses and alienates those who have dedicated their life to Srila Prabhupada. By promoting Prabhupada-centered choices, many who have taken shelter of other movements and philosophies will again feel attracted to the ISKCON community.

For instance, consider the following scenario, which currently can be found in ISKCON. In front of the ISKCON temple, which theoretically is Srila Prabhupada's temple, is a large banner glorifying by honorific title the local diksa guru, who is apparently regarded by the temple devotees as the "local acarya". That is, he is considered to be the founder-acarya of that temple, just as Srila Prabhupada is the founder-acarya of ISKCON. Inside the temple, on the altar, is the picture of the local ISKCON acarya. An estranged disciple of Srila

Prabhupada visits the temple. Though he hasn't been in contact with ISKCON for many years, he's heard that the zonal acarya system is no longer extant. Upon seeing the banner and altar and listening to the talk of the granddisciples, however, he does not feel that this is Srila Prabhupada's temple, and goes away disappointed and resentful, feeling uncomfortable with the excessive attention given to the local diksa guru. It is not that the visitor feels personal animosity towards the local diksa guru. Rather, the visitor hoped for a Prabhupada-centered experience, and feels deprived of this, due to the non-Prabhupada-centered culture that has developed at this temple. All ISKCON temples and projects are meant to be Srila Prabhupada's projects, and visitors should sense a Prabhupada-centered atmosphere when they encounter ISKCON. Aside from veteran devotees, newcomers will also be more attracted to ISKCON as the movement institutes a culture of Prabhupada-centered choices.

While the concept of "jumping over" applies to granddisciples, due to Srila Prabhupada's unique position in ISKCON the concept does not apply in the same way, or to the same degree, as in the relationship between Srila Prabhupada's disciples and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. Srila Prabhupada was displeased when a disciple chanted intensely before a picture of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta. I would think, however, that for any member of ISKCON, now or in the future, to similarly chant in front of a picture of Srila Prabhupada would be appropriate. Again, in redefining the practical meaning of diksa guru in ISKCON, there needs to be caution to avoid blind imitation.

Devotees throughout ISKCON have expressed, especially during the past year, that the current diksa guru system suffers from unrealized imitation of Srila Prabhupada, and that lack of an ISKCON-first attitude amongst diksa gurus is causing the movement to deteriorate into a matha mentality. The Bombay Proposals of the GBC, as well as conclusions from the meetings on ISKCON leadership held in Belgium and Alachua, Florida, stress that Srila Prabhupada is the primary guru for all ISKCON members, and specific ideological and practical proposals were offered to reflect Srila Prabhupada's preeminent position. These proposals included reduction of some external forms of worship, such as guru-pujas in temples and prohibition of honorific titles, for present diksa gurus, as well as clarification that a granddisciple of Srila Prabhupada is not "jumping over" by taking shelter of Srila Prabhupada. The Bombay Proposals plainly assert that the duty of ISKCON diksa gurus is to insure that the master, Srila Prabhupada, is more prominent than the diksa guru in the life of the disciple. Clearly this is not the case for many granddisciples in ISKCON, and such proposals from the GBC are welcome. For many of Srila Prabhupada's granddisciples, the diksa guru, rather than Srila Prabhupada, is the primary person in their spiritual life. For instance, they are accustomed to regularly hear the lecture tapes of their diksa guru, and they hardly ever hear tapes of Srila Prabhupada. Such practices are the result of non-Prabhupada-centered choices on the part of diksa gurus in their training of disciples, and it is encouraging that the GBC seeks to alter this trend.

Respect

Some argue that change as described herein will further deprecate the atmosphere of respect in ISKCON. This Prabhupada-centered proposal should in no way minimize the importance of respect for superiors as delineated in Vedic culture. Propensity for offering respect will be reapportioned, however, and this is healthy for the movement.

For more than twenty years there has been a disproportionate amount of respect accorded to diksa gurus, at the expense of Srila Prabhupada and his disciples who are not serving as diksa gurus. The point regarding Srila Prabhupada is described above, and it's difficult to imagine an argument that asserts that more respect, in the form of externals, for Srila Prabhupada by granddisciples will be harmful for the individual or the society. Scriptures enjoin that the godbrothers and godsisters of the spiritual master are to be respected on the level of the



spiritual master (e.g., *Adi-lila* 17.68 purport). This injunction has been neglected in ISKCON, and a discussion of the meaning of this directive is necessary, though it is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately examine the matter.

Srila Prabhupada explains that there is no difference between the diksa guru and siksa gurus (e.g., SB 4.12.32 purport; NOD lecture 10/29/72 in Vrndavana; Room Conversation on 1/31/77 in Bhubanesvara). Granddisciples have been trained to offer Vyasa-puja to their diksa guru. If the godbrother washing the pots is supposed to be treated on an equal level, then should the granddisciples also offer Vyasa-puja to him? Should they compose a special pranam mantra for him, and offer arati to his picture? And what about the senior mataji who has been serving Srimati Tulasi Devi for 25 years? What does it mean that she should be respected on the same level as the spiritual master? Obviously, there are many gurus, and each is greatly respected, though the external manifestations of that respect vary according to roles and functions. From the pages of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, persons such as Sukadeva Gosvami and Vidura are accepted as our gurus, and no Vaisnava would doubt that they are on the highest platform of devotional service. However, devotees in ISKCON don't worship their picture, offer them pranams, or celebrate their Vyasa-puja, and this is not regarded as a sign of disrespect.

Herein it is proposed that ISKCON develops a culture that embodies the similarity between the diksa gurus and other disciples of Srila Prabhupada, and that accentuates, more than the present system, the difference between the diksa gurus and Srila Prabhupada. By focusing their respect in this way, disciples for thousands of years to come will be fully trained in the Vedic principles of respecting seniors, and the ISKCON family will assume a more well-rounded, healthy balance, with Srila Prabhupada as the center of the family.

It is widely accepted in ISKCON that each of Srila Prabhupada's followers embodies some of Srila Prabhupada's qualities, though none of them fully represents all of Srila Prabhupada's transcendental characteristics. By establishing systems and procedures that increase the exposure of Srila Prabhupada's granddisciples and future ISKCON generations directly to Srila Prabhupada, and also to Srila Prabhupada's followers other than the diksa guru of the member, ISKCON Vaisnavas will imbibe a greater diversity of spiritual attributes. Armed with such heterogeneity of devotional character, ISKCON members can effectively transmit Krsna conscious culture and philosophy by multiple methods and to variegated audiences. Alternatively, by perpetuating an inordinate predominance of the diksa guru, we face further descent to a narrow, matha mentality, wherein an idiosyncratic method of transmission is protracted through generations, at the expense of a cooperative, unified mission.

A diksa guru who makes Prabhupada-centered choices is encouraged to preach vigorously. Such a guru may distribute millions of Srila Prabhupada's books, open dozens of temples, and make thousands of disciples, though another issue is that accountability for those disciples needs to be established. The point is that this humble guru system encourages dynamic preaching activity, as concentrating on Srila Prabhupada will naturally foster a preaching mood. Disciples will glorify their diksa guru for his preaching achievements, and they'll be inspired to follow in his footsteps. It is the natural quality of a Vaisnava to be humble, and it is also natural for a devotee to dedicate himself to sharing Krsna consciousness with others. With such a constellation of qualities, disciples and others will spontaneously offer all respects to such an exalted servant of Srila Prabhupada.

To avoid change towards a humble guru system, a false dichotomy is sometimes presented. Specifically, it is suggested that decreasing external manifestations of worship for the diksa guru creates a new species of guru that is not condoned in the Vedas. Hence, it is argued, since ISKCON does not want a concocted type of guru, it must stay with the current system and its trappings. In response, as explained from several angles earlier in this paper, the

humble guru is in no way diminished, for his deflection of worship to Srila Prabhupada flows from his free will, and is consistent with the highest aims of Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON and the truest concerns for his disciples. Such a guru is ennobled more than any guru in ISKCON except Srila Prabhupada, because such a diksa guru has fully understood the meaning of sacrifice for Srila Prabhupada and his society.

Honorific Titles

As Srila Prabhupada describes in his books, spiritual masters can accept honorific titles, though in this humble guru system they would choose not to accept them. The propensity of the disciple to use honorific titles should be reserved for Srila Prabhupada. There are diksa gurus that find it difficult to imagine by what name their disciples would refer to them if not the honorific title. In response, it may be pointed out that the name bestowed upon the disciple by Srila Prabhupada is glorious, and this name may be suitable for the term of address used by granddisciples. By not using the name conferred by Srila Prabhupada, the diksa guru may send the message that this name is not adequate. By making the Prabhupada-centered choice of teaching disciples to refer to him by the name given at initiation by Srila Prabhupada, the humble guru sends the message that no title of respect could be greater than the name chosen by Srila Prabhupada, which signifies that the spirit soul is a servant of Krsna. With such a choice, granddisciples absorb the feeling of love that their diksa guru has for Srila Prabhupada. Most diksa gurus don't have honorific titles, and this system seems to work fine, which causes one to further question the necessity of other diksa gurus to train their disciples to use honorific titles.

To reiterate, it is understood that gurus can accept these titles, but the question is whether accepting them is consistent with the highest welfare of Srila Prabhupada's institution. Moreover, there are already ISKCON laws against using honorific titles. By continuing to use them, the diksa guru conveys the message that he doesn't care enough about ISKCON to follow its laws. Disciples naturally discern this mentality of disregard for the institution. For senior members of the movement, especially when the diksa guru with illegitimate honorific title speaks on the importance of following the GBC, the contradictory behavior may rightly be perceived as hypocrisy, further alienating sincere devotees from Srila Prabhupada's movement. ISKCON laws regarding guruship are routinely flouted by ISKCON diksa gurus, diminishing the integrity and credibility of the institution.

Though it may be convenient for a diksa guru to claim that he doesn't want the honorific title, or pranam mantras, or other externals, but that his disciples insist, a diksa guru who genuinely appreciates the importance of Prabhupada-centered choices will ensure that his disciples follow his instructions to implement Prabhupada-centered choices. By fulfilling these Prabhupada-centered desires of the diksa guru, the granddisciple advances because he will be satisfying the essential principle of spiritual life, which is to follow the instructions of the spiritual master. The humble diksa guru feels great bliss seeing his disciple worshiping and respecting Srila Prabhupada, and the granddisciple feels pleasure to see his diksa guru pleased. The term "humble guru" is used to designate as humble those diksa gurus who make Prabhupada-centered choices whenever possible, though it does not denote that bona fide diksa gurus who make other choices are not humble.

Diksa Gurus and the GBC

While the idea of diksa gurus serving on the GBC is not inherently unworkable, there is doubt whether the GBC, approximately 90% of whose members are diksa gurus, can visualize and implement appropriate reforms. All devotees should strive to become gurus, so to forbid GBCs from being gurus may not be a desirable long-term solution. However, there are serious

problems in the current culture of the ISKCON diksa guru, and unless these are repaired, it is debatable whether the GBC and the society can properly function.

The idea, instilled in the minds of many leaders, that ISKCON was reformed about a dozen years ago often hinders genuine reforms that are greatly needed. As an example, though I was introduced to Krsna consciousness in the United States, I joined and grew up in the movement in the zone of Bhagavan dasa in the mid-1980s. At the time, I understood that I could take initiation from any authorized diksa guru in ISKCON, though I also palpably felt that, if I stayed in that zone, I was implicitly expected to take initiation from Bhagavan dasa. The import is that, technically speaking, there was no zonal acarya system because I could have chosen any diksa guru, regardless of my geographical location. Practically, however, there was a zonal acarya system, due to the pressure applied to take initiation from the local acarya. From my experience of ISKCON in the late 1990s, zonal acaryas persist. There are places in the movement, not scarce, where a newcomer will feel at least as much pressure to take initiation from a particular diksa guru as I did in the zone of Bhagavan dasa. Devotees in ISKCON know it's true, but changes are not made, partly because leaders are convinced that the problem was addressed a decade ago. On the general issue of accountability for gurus, it is sometimes expressed by leaders that ISKCON gurus are now fully accountable to the GBC, though the typical devotee would laugh, or perhaps cry, at the assertion.

As described above, rules meant to regulate gurus are routinely defied, and GBCs are aware of this. Such ineffectiveness may be connected with the managerial arrangement of a body of diksa gurus having the mandate to monitor and reform themselves. At the Alachua leadership meetings, as well as in other gatherings of devotees concerned about ISKCON, the idea of separation of management and initiation was favored. Currently the system resembles the Acarya Board of the early 1980s, and conflicts of interest abound, often resulting in a matha-like structure.

Apart from disbanding the zonal acarya system and establishing gurus as subordinate to the GBC, the reform movement of the 1980s sought to institute a more brahminical and accountable managerial style, with leaders being more sensitive and tolerant to the needs and views of the membership. From extensive discussions with many devotees, I'd conclude that if there has been progress in this area, it is so minimal as to be irrelevant, and continued lack of sensitivity, competence and accountability has made the GBC irrelevant for most followers of Srila Prabhupada. Still, there endures an attitude amongst leaders that the skepticism, resentment and apathy towards the GBC is a result of the pre-1987 culture. The implication is that the present GBC is doing an admirable job, and the cynicism of the devotees is due to the behaviors of the pre-1987 GBC. Such a mentality may have been passable in 1988, but not a decade later.

I personally have many experiences of GBC members acting hostilely, even violently, towards devotees, often for no apparent or even vaguely justified reason. Also, I've frequently experienced GBC members who demonstrate little or no interest, over a period of many years, in fulfilling the basic functions of their post. Further, my general experience is that attempts to discuss and resolve such apparent flagrancies with the GBC member and with the post-reform GBC body are met with apathy, incivility, derision, and most importantly, a blatant unwillingness to be accountable.

Though my experience is not necessarily representative, many ISKCON members with whom I've spoken have experienced, on a regular basis, ISKCON leaders who callously mistreat devotees, and who are deficient in basic human decency and lack even a minimal sense of responsibility. Also, it should be noted that most devotees with whom I speak are dedicated ISKCON people, not devotees on the outskirts or persons who feel so disenchanting that they've left the movement. Though it may be difficult, it is healthy for ISKCON leaders to

hear what the membership is actually thinking and feeling about the leadership of the society. A major protest is that the GBC is remarkably out of touch with the concerns of devotees.

Clearly there are members of the GBC body who are competent, sincere, and attuned to the goals of Srila Prabhupada's mission and the needs of a diverse contingent of devotees. Still, the overriding disposition of devotees towards the GBC as a whole is one of mistrust and cynicism. This attitude amongst devotees may at least partly be due to continued misunderstanding amongst the leadership of the role of the diksa guru relative to the GBC. This of course was the crux of the reform attempts of the 1980s, with the result being not so much a change in the conception of diksa

guru, but an expanded inclusion of diksa gurus on the GBC body. This is not inherently deleterious, but has prevented genuine change in the ISKCON culture. In essence, the culture is the same, though the perceived and perhaps real hypocrisy has increased.

Previously ISKCON had a zonal acarya system and admitted it. Now there are zonal acaryas who are impervious to the dictates of the GBC, and the institution pretends that there aren't. Though the GBC is often not willing to monitor, evaluate or discipline gurus, ISKCON advertises that the diksa gurus are fully accountable to the GBC. Fifteen years ago ISKCON perhaps didn't talk much about accountability and responsiveness in its leaders. Now the organization bandies about such buzzwords, with leaders often assuming that they manifest such attributes, and increasing numbers of devotees feeling appalled by the hypocrisy and lack of integrity they perceive in the leadership, with no real avenue of redress for iniquities. Much of the effort spent in reform is used to convince others that reform has happened, with little actual progress.

These words are not meant as disrespect for the GBC, but reflect great respect for what Srila Prabhupada envisioned for the GBC. He said that GBC is for life, and I consider this to mean that a member of the GBC should ardently strive to be qualified for the service for the duration of this lifetime, not that any level of performance qualifies for remaining on the body. Fortunately, the GBC has demonstrated awareness of many of these concerns. In the Bombay proposals, the GBC recommends more stringent qualifications for diksa gurus, establishment of a Guru Review Board, and training for gurus in areas such as interpersonal skills and ISKCON laws and standards.

Time for Introspection

By not genuinely reforming the institution of ISKCON diksa guru to a substantially more Prabhupada-centered conception, the movement drives sincere Vaisnavas away from ISKCON. If the leadership has the courage to create authentic transformation of the diksa guru, veteran devotees and newcomers will again be attracted to ISKCON. While on an individual and local level ISKCON needs to establish the Vaisnava siddhantha against threats from apasiddhanthas, the best image to project as a worldwide movement at this time is not one of bashing oppositional parties. That is, if a new devotee in a temple is becoming bewildered due to exposure to a deviant philosophy, naturally local devotees should explain things to him in the proper context of Srila Prabhupada's instructions. However, as an international institution, the predominant focus should be introspective. There's too much internal corruption, in the form of hypocrisy and discrediting practices, to concentrate much energy on external criticism. If ISKCON is willing to do the arduous labor of internal rectification, then many if not most external problems, such as devotees leaving for other movements and philosophies, will resolve themselves. ISKCON is where Srila Prabhupada's followers really want to be, and the organization needs to seriously consider how to make ISKCON a more attractive place. Devotees are disappointed with ISKCON, and with the

leadership's failure to reform the organization. ISKCON should see this failure as a major reason for devotees leaving and taking shelter elsewhere.

In the opinion of this author, ritvik philosophy was adequately handled, philosophically, by the GBC with the ISKCON Journal early in this decade. Yet the ritvik movement continues to attract devotees, because, at least on the surface, it's an appeal to put Srila Prabhupada in the center of our lives. Recently I heard a prominent ISKCON diksa guru express, in a public forum, that he doesn't understand the commotion about putting Srila Prabhupada in the center, because, from his stated perception, Srila Prabhupada is already in the center of ISKCON. Such apparent unwillingness for critical assessment of the movement on behalf of the leaders should leave no surprise when devotees are attracted elsewhere.

Conclusions

This generation of diksa gurus knows only Srila Prabhupada as an example of a guru, so some imitation is expected, and perhaps excusable. Still, ISKCON is challenged to develop a model of diksa guru that is suitable for carrying the movement into the next millennium, serving an enormous diversity of membership and bringing credibility and pride to Srila Prabhupada's institution.

ISKCON is accustomed to a particular model for diksa gurus, and transitioning to a new model may be difficult. Perhaps for some gurus and disciples a major change will not be possible, and ISKCON may need to grandfather some individuals to prevent defections. That is, the organization, in its attempts at reform, may need to recognize that change may need to be gradual, as some diksa gurus and granddisciples may not be willing to relinquish old ways of doing things. Rather than lose these devotees, it may be preferable to accommodate them, while simultaneously setting up systems to ensure that Prabhupada-centered choices are established for posterity.

Generally, disciples who are raised in an atmosphere that resembles a zonal acarya system feel secure and protected, more so than in other places in ISKCON, because such a system provides a strong paternal figure and a family group of godbrothers and godsisters. It is not the intention of this proposal to impede the natural expression of disciples for their diksa guru, or to remove shelter for granddisciples without providing a replacement. It is proposed that by maximizing Srila Prabhupada's centrality in ISKCON, all members will feel greater shelter and protection. Further, the current diksa guru system is a result of a process of acculturation for the past 21 years, and not all components of this culture are natural and self-evident. Therefore, it can be inferred that we don't necessarily and fully know what constitutes natural expression for Srila Prabhupada's granddisciples towards their diksa guru. Choices were made about the institution of diksa guru when Srila Prabhupada departed, and some of these choices were not Prabhupada-centered. I suggest that the society will learn a lot about natural expression between disciple and guru when ISKCON maximizes Prabhupada-centered choices. Such maximization will require substantial change, which entails a sincere desire on the part of leaders to effect change, despite convenient excuses militating against it.

Another important consideration is that the ISKCON society must organize itself to properly care for those who have dedicated themselves to the service of being diksa gurus. Otherwise, qualified people may be reluctant to accept this service, and, to compensate for inadequate systems of material and spiritual care, diksa gurus and their disciples may be impelled towards non-Prabhupada-centered choices.

This paper has focused on cultural change and conscious choice, rather than legislation. While legislation may be integral to a new cultural paradigm, in itself it is not effective, as evidenced by current ISKCON laws meant to regulate diksa gurus that are blatantly

transgressed by those gurus. The Bombay Proposals and the results from the Alachua and Belgium meetings reveal consensus amongst many levels of ISKCON membership that substantial changes in the interpretation and implementation of the diksa guru are needed. For the ISKCON constituency to be satisfied, modifications must entail more than a few resolutions passed at the Mayapur meetings. Real transformation is required. Ideas such as pranam mantras only for Srila Prabhupada, proscription against honorific titles for diksa gurus, and granddisciples offering arati and bhoga to a picture of Srila Prabhupada are examples of possible changes. For legislation to result in meaningful cultural change, leaders must genuinely endorse the resolutions. The preponderance of diksa gurus on the GBC raises questions about whether ISKCON is positioned for true guru reform. Though this author understands that comprehensive reform involves many more issues than addressed here, these ideas on the cornerstone issues of initiating gurus and the integrity of the GBC are presented in a mood of discussion for the betterment of ISKCON.

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