

GURU REFORM NOTEBOOK SATSVARŪPA DĀSA GOSWAMI

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NOTEBOOK

REPRINTED

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Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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GURU REFORM NOTEBOOK

“Every disciple must consider himself completely unaware of the science of Kṛṣṇa and must always be ready to carry out the orders of the spiritual master to become competent in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A disciple should always remain a fool before his spiritual master.”

—from the Bhaktivedanta purports to
Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā, 7.72

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PREFACE

This is one man's confession and public apology. In *Harināma Cintāmaṇi*, by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, public confession is recommended to counteract offenses against the holy name. For example, if one commits the offense of interpreting the holy name, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura advises:

He should humbly go before an assembly of Vaiṣṇavas who engage in discussions about Kṛṣṇa and reveal his offenses at their feet, begging sincerely forgiveness. The devotees of the Lord, conversant with all the glories of the holy name, will mercifully forgive him and embrace him. The offense of interpreting or concocting will not occur again.

Similarly, while discussing what to do to be forgiven for the offense of giving the name to the unfaithful, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes as follows:

If by misfortune or accident a *guru* gives the name and instructions to a faithless person, he should have great fear. He should confess in front of a Vaiṣṇava assembly and give up that disciple. If the *guru* does not do this, he himself by the offense will become devoid of *bhakti*, worthless, wandering in illusion.

My intention is not to accuse others of misdeeds, but mostly to point out my own. In the name of reform, I do not want to commit further offenses by criticizing Vaiṣṇava spiritual masters. If by my statements anyone is offended, I beg their forgiveness. We may each

present our realizations, based on the authority of *guru*, *śāstra*, and *sādhū*, and then we may decide together what is right and what should be done.

Speaking for myself, I desire to express my wrongs and take right action. Recently, by association with my Godbrothers in Vṛndāvana-dhāma during the month of Kārttika, I have come to realize my participation in a grave error. Since Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance, I have allowed myself to be worshiped and regarded on the level of a *mahā-bhāgavata paramahansa*, far above my "non-guru" Godbrothers. As a result, I have slighted and offended my Godbrothers—and Śrīla Prabhupāda—in various ways. And I have mistreated my disciples in these matters.

For years, while I was not aware of these mistakes, I thought my critics were my enemies. Now I see them as my friends. I am hopeful to regain the approval of ISKCON Vaiṣṇavas and join with them to rid ISKCON of false ego and the quest for power, wherever it may appear. I have barely begun my "*guru* reform," but I think this is the right direction. Only now do I get an inkling of the meaning of Prabhupāda's words, "Your love for me will be shown by how much you cooperate to keep this institution together after I am gone."

December 1986
Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

What follows are excerpts from my diary, which will appear in Journal and Poems, Book 4.

October 29, Krishna-Balaram Mandir

I spoke tonight with Dāmodara Paṇḍita dāsa about completing the construction of Prabhupāda's *samādhī*. He feels that unless we complete it within three years it may never be completed. Dāmodara Paṇḍita said, "In fighting against *māyā*, the best defense is a good offense." He says it is discouraging to simply wait and brace ourselves for the falldown of a leader or some other catastrophe about to happen in ISKCON. He said we should be like the losing baseball team which suddenly defeats a very formidable opponent. So if we can be successful in completing Prabhupāda's *samādhī*, "Everyone will be encouraged."

November 4

Talked with Jayādvaita Swami. He says some G.B.C. members and *gurus* are proud, spending too much money on themselves, accepting too much worship, not reforming, not leading—and all leaders bear the shame of not finishing Śrīla Prabhupāda's *samādhī*. He's right. Some say that for all their mistakes, the G.B.C. members should resign.

A disciple writes me:

Lately with the falldown of certain *gurus* it seems difficult to understand how we are supposed to view our guru. I personally feel that you are

representing Śrīla Prabhupāda and I know that whatever instructions you give must be absolute because of this fact. From sastras we hear that guru is as good as God. Yet now because of all the falldowns some devotees say that only Prabhupāda is absolute. So what are we supposed to do? From within we have faith that our guru is absolute, yet outwardly do we have to say that he isn't? I'm confused—not because of lack of faith, but in regards to how we are supposed to make advancement if we can't think that guru is as good as God.

I replied:

Although some Godbrother gurus have fallen down, that does not mean we can change the philosophy of the guru-disciple relationship. You have to look up to the spiritual master as a representative of Kṛṣṇa. I have explained my own limitations; I do not pretend to be a maha-bhagavata. But as long as I can follow the rules and regulations strictly and chant sixteen rounds and preach in parampara about Kṛṣṇa as I have heard from Prabhupāda in his books, there is no reason why you should not have full faith in me as your spiritual master. No one should impose upon you the attitude that you should not have absolute faith in your guru. To say “guru is as good as God” doesn't mean that he is God. Neither does it mean that your guru claims that he is equal to a great maha-bhagavata like Śrīla Prabhupāda. It is unfortunate that this state has come about in our Society, due to misbehavior, falldowns and adversary reactions, but you should keep faithful and in a noncontroversial way assert the philosophy of guru-disciple as found in Prabhupāda's books.

More conversation—with Yaśomatīnandana Prabhu—about the need for reform by the leaders. The Godbrothers I have talked with take a positive attitude; they say the G.B.C. has made serious mistakes, but they are hopeful that we can rectify. They still get inspired when we take right action. But we have much to overcome now. I feel ready to do the needful to help overcome corrupt leadership, of which I have been a part, if sometimes only by silently condoning. As a member of the leadership, I am implicated. The second rank

of leaders are loyal to ISKCON, and they also want to be loyal to the G.B.C., but they demand reforms. So we have to be willing to clean it up and not turn away from the job.

November 5

NOTES WHILE LISTENING TO SPEECHES ON PRABHUPĀDA'S DISAPPEARANCE DAY

His Holiness Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, a disciple of Keśava Mahārāja, Śrīla Prabhupāda's *sannyāsa guru*, praised Prabhupāda and criticized those disciples who have left Prabhupāda's shelter. He alluded to a criticism someone had made that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not teach from the position of *mādhurya-rasa*. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja said that from his intimate talks with Prabhupāda, he understood that Prabhupāda was very fond of Rūpa Gosvāmī, who is in the *mādhurya-rasa*. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja quoted from the song, "*Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī Pada*." He said Prabhupāda often asked him to sing this. Therefore, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja concluded, as an ardent follower of Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrīla Prabhupāda certainly knows the *mādhurya-rasa*.

Gaura Kṛṣṇa Goswami of the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple shared memories of Śrīla Prabhupāda's days in Vṛndāvana before going to America. He recalled Prabhupāda translating the *Bhāgavatam* and going from door to door for alms.

Viśvambhara Goswami of Rādhā-ramaṇa reminded ISKCON devotees that we are all part of the family of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. He also reprimanded the devotees for not finishing Prabhupāda's *samādhi*. He also remarked that sometimes devotees come to him and ask about *mādhurya-rasa*. We should not be interested in pursuing elevated talks of *mādhurya-rasa*, which are realized only in the highest state of *bhakti-yoga*. He said we should follow Prabhupāda's instructions and especially chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and preach.

Viśvambhara Goswami said that devotees of Prabhupāda are actually like Hanumān: They have more strength than they realize

they have. If we single-mindedly use our strength, we can do wonders to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I made my own offering by reading from a paper I had written for the occasion.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami confessed that the ISKCON leaders need to correct mistakes they have made since Prabhupāda's disappearance. He said we have failed to give shelter to all the devotees. In order to admit mistakes, he said, it will require courage and humility. He said it is embarrassing to admit that for ten years we have been committing mistakes, but he said it is better to correct ten years' mistakes than to let them go for another ten thousand years. He also gave the example of Droṇa and Bhīṣma, who condoned the insults to Draupadī and therefore had to suffer the reaction. We have to rectify our mistakes—or else.

Gopāla Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja cited three great challenges before ISKCON: 1. trying to bring back devotees who have left due to our mistakes; 2. trying to complete Prabhupāda's *samādhī*; and 3. restoring book distribution to a level which would be pleasing to Prabhupāda.

Bhakti-svarūpa Dāmodara Mahārāja mentioned the tendency among devotees to think that the other person is wrong and *I* am right. He asked us to sacrifice selfish interest and work together for Prabhupāda's cause. He told some poignant stories from Prabhupāda's last days.

Jagadīśa Goswami spoke of an apparent contradiction between strictness and liberality in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He said it is not a contradiction: Our leaders must be very strict in their personal behavior, but we are liberal toward newcomers and all people of the world, allowing them to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness according to their capacity.

Yāśomatīnandana Prabhu exhorted us to follow Prabhupāda's example of balance in humility and preaching. Prabhupāda once said that we are not "*daṇḍavat*" devotees, who simply show humility toward everyone. Rather, we have to preach in a big way. Yet in the name of acquiring land and followers and distributing books, we cannot neglect our own behavior.

“REALIZATION, REGRET . . . ”

I don't realize yet the wrong we G.B.C. *ācāryas* have done. Last year Jayādvaita Swami introduced a catchy-sounding formula to be adopted by G.B.C.-*gurus*: 1. realization; 2. regret; 3. rectification; 4. reunion. Now with one *guru* after another falling, we are ready to hear from our critics to some extent, and to rectify. By hearing from our critics we will gain realization, and after realizing what we've done, we'll naturally feel sorry.

So far I say it only theoretically: Maybe we *have* offended Prabhupāda and our Godbrothers. Maybe we *have* ruined the spiritual lives of those who stood in our way while we instituted ourselves as zonal *ācāryas* to be worshiped almost on the level of Śrīla Prabhupāda. My response has always been, “Well, it wasn't us *gurus* who made the mistake; we all did it together.” They agree, but if I were humble, how could I have accepted a place of honor way above that offered to my Godbrothers and beyond my spiritual position? If now I agree not to be called *paramahansa*, why did I allow it before?

Another defense of mine has been, “Now that I have accepted so many disciples, I can't let them think I have done wrong.” Or I think, “I am not so much an offender myself. It's the other, arrogant guys—you know the ones—the loud-speaking, angry, boasting ones. I was never so excessive.” But I am one. Quiet maybe out of timidity, but going along on the royal road of guruship, accepting the joint decision that our Godbrothers should worship us, or at least they may do so, since we are *paramahansas*, as good as liberated. Have I committed word jugglery, excusing myself in this way?

My problem now is lack of realization. I may castigate myself in public or make apologies, but if I do it without conviction or remorse, then it is another pose, another falsity. Should I go and ask the others, “Tell me my wrong. Make me feel it”? Anyway, I have enough understanding to go ahead. I discussed this with Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami this morning; we will attempt to keep our conviction and introduce it to the other G.B.C. members at our upcoming meeting.

There is an “old boy” aspect to G.B.C. relationships which has

allowed me to condone and not speak against arrogance when I see it in others. In this way I have become contaminated with the same disease.

November 8

I spoke with Jagadīśa Mahārāja, asking him to help me understand “regret and realization.” He said we should regret the zonal *ācārya* system with its by-products because it has stifled our Godbrother’s initiative to preach. The preaching at a certain level (initiation, responsibility for the lives of new devotees) has been monopolized by the few who became *gurus*. All others have had to relate to their *guru*-Godbrothers almost as if they were their *guru*-Godbrothers’ elder disciples. Thus consciously or unconsciously the non-*guru* Godbrothers were not encouraged to become fit to take disciples. Also, a disciple who has been initiated since Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disappearance is often trained to accept instructions only from his own *guru* and thus he often develops a narrow vision (like a horse with blinders) toward the instructions he receives from other senior devotees. This is a cause for regret.

I then asked Jagadīśa Goswami about rectification. He said that we should fully encourage all of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples to prepare themselves to act as *dikṣa*- and *śikṣā-gurus* according to Lord Caitanya’s instruction that everyone become a *guru* by learning and teaching the message of Kṛṣṇa. I asked what he thought of the idea some put forward that no one but Prabhupāda himself is qualified to be a *guru*. He replied that we should be honest about our level of advancement—but that we need not become *paramahāṁsas* before we take disciples. So this was another mistake. It was presented as an institutional fact that the initiating *gurus* of ISKCON were all pure devotees of the *paramahāṁsa* rank. But a devotee should be humble—the *guru* also. Aware of his own shortcomings, *gurus* should not accept worship on the level of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I think that these reformations can be accomplished without changing the disciples’ view that the *guru* is as good as God. Devotees

can see not only their own spiritual masters as direct representatives of Kṛṣṇa, but they can see others also as their *gurus*. Jagadīśa Goswami admitted that it would be difficult for the present spiritual masters to explain to their disciples that for almost ten years they have wrongly held a monopoly on the service of being *guru*, that they have received worship on too grand a scale, and that this must all change.

We will have to be convinced of these things ourselves and honestly introduce changes. All the positive aspects of our relationships with our disciples—their faith and love for us, their proper understanding of the Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy, and their taste for devotional service—should enable them to accept changes without trauma or even disruption. But even if it is difficult, it has to be done.

I have mentioned to my disciple Baladeva that I would like to introduce some further changes in *guru* worship in our zone—using only one *āsana* for all *Bhāgavatam* speakers with no separate *guru's vyāsāsanas*, using the word *paramahansa* only for Śrīla Prabhupāda in the temple prayers. His initial reaction was to resist it. He can't help but see it as resulting from a political move by my Godbrothers. I replied that they may behave politically, indiscreetly or with anger, but we can attribute that to their frustration with the defects in the system. Baladeva thinks that those who strongly advocate these changes (some of whom express even more radical attitudes) are threatening the new disciples' spiritual lives. It appears to these disciples that my Godbrothers are politically motivated and are forcing me to change the standard of worship. I hope, however, that I can convince B. and others that the changes are justified. We should realize the defects in the former system, and we should change.

November 9

Jayādvaita Swami has written a note requesting the G.B.C.—and especially the *gurus*—to offer “public, profuse, and unreserved apologies to ISKCON Vaiṣṇavas (and former ISKCON Vaiṣṇavas) for offenses committed.” We should admit that by accepting such high worship and by excluding our Godbrothers from being *gurus*,

we have misunderstood what *śāstra* says about the *guru*. Why the apologies? JAS says:

This is proper Vaiṣṇava conduct. After offending Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā doesn't just say, "I made a mistake. I admit it and I will correct it. Now let me close this chapter and I'll go on with my service." No. First he throws himself at Kṛṣṇa's feet and begs forgiveness. And he's the head of our *sampradāya*. It may be argued that this was how to act after offending Kṛṣṇa Himself. Answer: An offense to a Vaiṣṇava is even *worse*.

He goes on to state that unless we do this we cannot satisfy the Vaiṣṇavas or purify ISKCON and relate to each other as Vaiṣṇavas. He writes, "If any G.B.C. man feels that, because of his disciples or whatever, he cannot apologize and beg forgiveness, fine. But then he should be off the G.B.C."

I agree with these points. So where's my profuse, public, unreserved apologies? I suppose they will be forthcoming, especially when we as a G.B.C. can get it going by joint statement. Maybe I can take part in writing such a statement.

JAS also notes, "This must be sincere and genuine—pretense won't work." At the present moment I have a few reservations, and I lack realization. One reservation is that I'm plain afraid to do it. But if I am convinced that something is the right Kṛṣṇa conscious action, then I should be able to act courageously, knowing I will feel the immediate benefit. A further problem is: They want me to say it, so I'll say it, but in my heart I still don't feel the wrong to the extent they say I should feel it. Will my public apologies be a pretense?

It does seem right to apologize. Because I may be in great danger of Vaiṣṇava *aparādhā*, and because I am a leader, I should take the blame, even if the old *guru* system was something we all created together. But I am wary that I may become a melodramatic fool on the request of some.

When I raised the question of whether a regretting attitude is melodramatic, JAS replied, "Genuine, sincere realization, confirmed

by *śāstra*, accepted by devotees, and followed by action, is an entirely different species from melodrama.” Similarly, I expressed my worry that I was regretting my mistakes only because others wanted me to do it. JAS replied, “The shallow man thinks this way to get off the hook. The advanced person genuinely wants to clarify his understanding, purify his heart, and satisfy the devotees. It’s a question of desire, of purpose, of realization.” I also expressed hesitancy at becoming a breast-beating guilt-proclaimer. JAS replied, “Hypocrites who beat their breasts but stick to their materialistic ways are a perverted reflection; in Kṛṣṇa consciousness we find the real thing.”

As for Vaiṣṇavas expressing regret, there is much evidence in the scriptures. (See *The Nectar of Devotion*, Chapter Twenty-nine under “Lamentation,” “Humility,” and “Pride.” Also, see *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Brahmā and Indra regretting their offenses, Dhruva Mahārāja regretting his material desires, Mucukunda and the kings imprisoned by Jarāsandha regretting their past material attachments.)

In a letter to my disciple Baladeva, JAS talks about who is a *mahā-bhāgavata*:

Regarding the question of maha-bhagavata: In one sense, this is less a question of fact than of faith. What the characteristics of a maha-bhagavata are is a matter of fact: There are definite symptoms, and they are mentioned in our books. But who meets these qualifications is a more subjective question. When the G.B.C. tried to certify certain persons as “pure devotees,” “maha-bhagavatas” and “uttama-adhikaris,” we saw what happened—some of the chosen fell down, and the G.B.C. got egg all over its face.

It’s not that because I accept someone as greatest I have to insist that the whole world do so. I know what the qualifications of a maha-bhagavata are. I study that particular person carefully, and I conclude that he is a maha-bhagavata. Now, someone else may not share my faith and may in fact have more faith in someone else. That, it seems, is his prerogative. Each man is free to decide for himself whom to accept as a guru, whom to accept as a saint, and so on. I don’t see how we can force or legislate this: “Now everyone has to accept person A as an *uttama-adhikārī*, persons

B and C as *madhyama-adhikārīs*, person D as *kaniṣṭha*.” But when it comes to someone super-overwhelmingly pure and powerful—like Vyāsa, Madhva, Rāmānūja, or Śrīla Prabhupāda—his glories should be accepted by the whole world.

The fact is that at present the relationships between Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples are considerably screwed-up. (And it comes down the line to you.) This is something many devotees are trying to straighten out, and your Guru Mahārāja is taking an important role. I am hopeful that once the air is clear of accumulated poisons, all devotees will naturally offer advanced (and even less advanced) devotees the respect they naturally deserve.

November 11, 1986
ISKCON Vṛndāvana

Dear Baladeva,

Please accept my blessings.

I mentioned to you that I felt you were not close yet to the direction I am taking in regard to admitting mistakes. And at first you even made some opposition. So I want you to know that I am gathering my determination to go in this direction and I think you have no alternative but to come with me. I could say that you have two alternatives, either come with me, or resist me and be left behind. But I think I can count on you to say that you have no choice but to accept it and understand it and support me. Not only have you accepted me as your initiating and instructing spiritual master, but you are willing to perform duties of a menial servant. Especially as my indifferent health continues, you are very protective to see that I can carry on my duties for Prabhupāda in a way that continues to be limited. So I think you should emphasize your service and go on with it. As to the direction I take, that you should accept with faith and I will try my best to explain it to you.

You have to accept that I am not a victim of pressure or “transcendental politics,” but that I am trying to make spiritual advancement and that I am trying to help rectify the difficulties in ISKCON.

Neither should you think your spiritual life is being jeopardized by my admitting mistakes. You will have to go through some adjustments (as will all my disciples), but if you will follow my lead with proper understanding, you will not feel ultimately threatened.

While talking with my Godbrothers today, they told me of a nice exchange with Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. In the course of one of their discussions with him they mentioned the books that I write wherein I admit many shortcomings. I think that they were discussing whether a *guru* had to be a *mahā-bhāgavata*. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja had been explaining to them that there are two kinds of *gurus*, one who may be on the highest platform and others who perform the duty of *guru* as a “peon,” or as a dutiful servant, even though he may not be on the topmost platform. I was cited as an example of one who admits to his faults in his writings. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja replied that if one follows all the principles strictly, but admits to his faults, then the more he becomes humble and the more he approaches to the topmost platform. Lord Caitanya stated, *trṇād api sunīcena taror api sahiṣṇunā*. Only an advanced devotee can reach this stage where he thinks himself lower than a straw in the street, and ready to offer all respects to others.

Since it is natural for you to want to think of me as advanced, and it is natural for me to want to give you protection, we can take solace in this example. There will be more from me about this in writing and speaking. It will be mostly directed toward my Godbrothers, but also to my disciples. As it comes out, naturally it will be good if you can support me. Just as in the practice of Nature Cure it is advised that one have sympathetic support, similarly, as I try to admit the wrongs of the *guru* institution in ISKCON, and as we try to rectify it, it will be difficult for me if you offer resistance or if you don’t understand it as a serious attempt on my part for spiritual advancement. In the end, if I am successful, it should enhance your estimation of me as your spiritual master. And that is something that cannot be done just by protecting the right to keep the *guru*’s pictures in the temple.

Regarding the confessions of imperfection that I make, why do they please devotees? They are pleasing because devotees and readers take them as genuine. But if the confession is only lip service, then eventually it will become just a literary exercise and people will see through it. Now that I have the opportunity to actually admit mistakes in a way that is more serious and more difficult, I should not refuse the opportunity. As a preacher I often exhort listeners to remove their *anarthas*, and I describe myself as one who is undergoing purification. But is such talk mere rhetoric? When I actually have the opportunity to remove specific and real *anarthas*, why should I turn away? If in the name of protecting me you try to dissuade me, it will only be a disservice. Please allow me and assist me to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and prove in my own case that I can be humble, not just as a literary exercise or while giving a lecture on humility.

A MEETING WITH GODBROTHERS

The especially valuable part of this morning's meeting was when they spoke about my personal shortcomings. I had been expressing in different ways my inability to feel actual regret for the mistakes of the G.B.C. and *gurus*. Jagadīśa Goswami then began speaking his realization about this. He said Prabhupāda discusses the godly and ungodly qualities in *Bhagavad-gītā* as *daivī-sampat* and *āsuri-sampat*. The *āsuri-sampat*, or ungodly qualities, are described as anger, conceit, harshness, etc. Jagadīśa Goswami said that since I didn't manifest these symptoms to the degree that other leaders have manifested them, perhaps I am therefore not so guilty, and that is why I do not feel regret. When he said this, I could not accept such a complimentary viewpoint. This prompted the others, and they began to point out my personal involvement in perpetuating mistakes.

Even though I am quieter than most, nevertheless I have been an apologist for the system which we now see as defective and want to change. Prabhupāda has sometimes described the G.B.C. as the

“watchdogs” of the Kṛṣṇa conscious society. But if the watchdog does not bark when there is danger, then that is his fault.

As these shortcomings were pointed out, they sounded very familiar to me. I know well my weakness in being influenced by others and not asserting the truth. When one does this repeatedly, he loses the instinct to ascertain and assert the truth, and he goes along with the crowd. In this case the “crowd” is an elite of which I am an intimate member.

The fault of going along with things has been mine for a long time and has prevented me from setting an example of real leadership when it was most wanted. I think back to 1967 when we boys were being tricked by the real estate man, Mr. Paine. Both Kīrtanānanda and Brahmānanda were befuddled by the cheater, and at one point Prabhupāda wrote me a letter stating that I should follow what he said and cut off the dangerous relationship with Mr. Paine. I was convinced that Prabhupāda was calling on me personally to carry out his will, and I knew that Brahmānanda and Kīrtanānanda were not enlightened on the subject. But when I went to them and showed them Prabhupāda’s letter, they gradually convinced me that we should continue the policy of cooperating with Mr. Paine. They said that Prabhupāda would approve of it. Thus from an early stage in my spiritual life I began losing opportunities to carry out the truth.

Aside from these personal faults, I am a member of the G.B.C. and therefore I have to share faults, such as the neglect in completing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *samādhi*.

Jagadīśa Goswami also pointed out that I do not associate enough with my Godbrothers. He said that I cannot expect to make reforms and admit mistakes all on my own. It will come about by continued association with Godbrothers. But my tendency, he said, is to mostly surround myself with a few disciples, and this promotes an illusory view. I think it would be more accurate to say that I tend to be alone, and I engage the services of a few devotees to protect me in this desire. But I will try to increase my association with Godbrothers who can help me pull through.

Jayādvaita Swami also encouraged me to gain realization and preach for the cause of reform through writing. He said that I have a power to express myself in this way, and so I should use it. I am already thinking of a letter that I would like to write to a *guru*-Godbrother, and I am sure Kṛṣṇa will give me more opportunities to write in an attempt to bring about the change—although it is already very late, and our credibility is low.

Before Śeṣa left for America, we walked for an hour together by ourselves. I confided to him my anticipation, but also my fear, at the prospect of apologizing to the devotees for wrongs. Śeṣa advised that I surrender to it since the Vaiṣṇavas are asking for it. Even if I don't as yet have complete intellectual conviction, once I start surrendering, it will come.

LORD BRAHMĀ'S REGRET

In the *Kṛṣṇa* book, Lord Brahmā presents himself to Lord Kṛṣṇa as “the most presumptuous living entity.” After his stealing the boys and calves, Lord Brahmā finally came to his senses and admitted his mistake. On this occasion, Lord Brahmā not only made an immortal speech of humble and philosophical realization, but he was prepared to act on it. He prayed at the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa to give him a future birth as the humble grass in the Vṛndāvana forest (or at least in the area immediately outside Vṛndāvana) “so that when the devotees go out they will walk over me.”

In the examples of spiritual regret in the *śāstra*, most of the offending devotees (like Lord Brahmā and Lord Indra) overestimate themselves and minimize Lord Kṛṣṇa, and so they apologize directly to Him. They regret their material desires. I tend to excuse myself and think that I did not act out of material desire in acting as zonal *ācārya*. And yet, I admit (and regret) that vague material desires are still within me.

But there are specific offenses to which I'm still partially blind. I should not minimize the sufferings that have been forced upon my

Godbrothers in unjustly making them subordinate to myself and the other *gurus*. Furthermore, we have offended Prabhupāda for acting as if we were almost on his level—and for misguiding his movement.

It's true that Prabhupāda asked us to act as regular *gurus* and to take disciples. But the acceptance of large private *vyāsāsanas*, the placing of ourselves above our Godbrothers, and the enmity which that caused were not things ordered or approved by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The G.B.C. and the initiating *gurus* have lost the respect of their Godbrothers. We are not offering the devotees of ISKCON effective, pure leadership. The most obvious evidence of this is that some of the most prominent leaders have broken their *sannyāsa* vows. And sometimes, even after falldowns were exposed, we did not take decisive action to correct the wrongdoer. There is other evidence, such as the Society's failure to complete Śrīla Prabhupāda's *samādhi* while offering many excuses why it isn't getting done. So it seems appropriate at this time that we change our attitudes and actions if we want to be actual spiritual leaders. An essential element in this change is the realization and expression of regret.

DHRUVA'S REGRET

Dhruva Mahārāja became sorry that he approached Kṛṣṇa for fulfillment of material desires. He attained the *darśana* of the Lord, but then asked for something petty, and so he regretted his failure to worship with pure motives.

On studying Dhruva Mahārāja's case, I do not at first see how it applies to me and my G.B.C. *guru*-Godbrothers. We didn't pursue an obvious material desire as did Dhruva, who openly announced his wish to become the greatest material ruler. Nor did we perform severe austerities as did Dhruva. Nor did we get the direct *darśana* of Lord Viṣṇu and speak with Him. Nor do we feel Dhruva's keen regret. But when Dhruva Mahārāja realized that he had been performing his devotional service impurely, he exhibited the correct behavior. Dhruva was genuinely ashamed that, after so much so-called spiritual

advancement and after so much expert guidance from a spiritual master like Nārada, he was possessed of petty ambitions. Thus, when he became situated in pure consciousness due to seeing the Lord, he became morose at the disparity between pure devotional service and what he was actually doing. Similarly, when we see the poor results of our acting as caretakers of Prabhupāda's movement, we become ashamed.

When Dhruva Mahārāja attained the *darśana* of Lord Viṣṇu, he thought he would be taken immediately by the Lord back to Godhead, but the Lord instead awarded Dhruva the boon for which he was actually worshiping—a boon of material pleasure. Becoming aware of the pettiness of his heart's desire, Dhruva felt pain. And he regretted his missed opportunity to attain the real thing:

Alas, just look at me! I am so unfortunate! I approached the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who can immediately cut the chain of the repetition of birth and death, but still, out of foolishness, I prayed for things which are perishable.

—*Bhāg.* 4.9.31

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that Dhruva had received the Viṣṇu *mantra* by the causeless mercy of the Lord, and yet he missed the goal of pure love of God which is the actual purpose of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Although there are important similarities between Dhruva Mahārāja's regret and my own case, still I say, "I don't see how it applies to me." But Prabhupāda sees the application of Dhruva Mahārāja's history for all disciples in ISKCON:

. . . every one of us who is engaged in devotional service and Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be completely free from all material aspirations. Otherwise we will have to lament like Dhruva Mahārāja. . . . Pure devotees ask the Lord only for the privilege of serving Him. This is our independence. If we want anything else, it is a sign of our misfortune.

—*Bhāg.* 4.9.31,35, purports

Another application of the history of Dhruva Mahārāja is that

he acted on the platform of friends and enemies. This was exemplified in Dhruva's desire for revenge against his stepmother and his attempt to outdo all leaders. This has also become prominent in our ISKCON dealings, and so we are sometimes divided into bitterly contesting parties, although we are actually one party—the followers of Prabhupāda.

Another material conception which occurred to Dhruva Mahārāja and for which he later regretted was his attachment to proprietorship. He wanted personal empire and sovereignty, which are never desired by a pure devotee. ISKCON leaders may also have become confused about the nature of proprietorship over followers and possession of empire. Who actually “owns” the disciples? Who actually is the ruler of a particular zone of management? Can spiritual leadership deteriorate into material proprietorship? Facing these questions may make us feel regret at our actual position.

All mistakes incurred in the name of devotional service are done out of ignorance, but Lord Kṛṣṇa kindly protects His devotees, even when they err. Thus Dhruva Mahārāja prayed to Lord Viṣṇu, “To ignorant devotees like me, You are the causeless merciful maintainer, just like a cow, who takes care of the newly born calf by supplying milk and giving it protection from attack.” But it is necessary for a devotee who commits mistakes to realize his foolishness. If the foolish devotee genuinely regrets and asks the Lord for forgiveness, Kṛṣṇa will rectify the situation:

Dhruva Mahārāja regretted very much that he could not take seriously the instructions of his spiritual master and that his consciousness was therefore contaminated. Still, the Lord is so merciful that due to Dhruva's execution of devotional service, He offered Dhruva the ultimate Vaiṣṇava goal.

— *Bhāg.* 4.9.32, purport

As it is with the Supreme Lord, so it is with His devotees. Therefore, if we leaders can demonstrate actual leadership instead of

mere hierarchical authority, the Vaiṣṇavas will forgive us and respond to a pure leadership. But the challenge is whether we can wake up and do it.

MEETING WITH VIŚVAMBHARA GOSWAMI

I met with Viśvambhara Goswami, of the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple. He described the intimate connection between the *sampradāya* coming from Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī and the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. His grandfather had a close relationship with both Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. They teamed up to curb propaganda that was being spread in Vṛndāvana and Bengal that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was not an incarnation of God. This history was very interesting, but Jayādvaita Mahārāja and I became a little anxious to present our urgent questions. When Viśvambhara Goswami saw this, he encouraged us to speak.

I read a summary of the regrettable history of ISKCON from Prabhupāda's disappearance up to the present, where some of the G.B.C. and *gurus* are expressing regret.

Some of us G.B.C. men have come to realize that we have offended our Godbrothers and misguided ISKCON by allowing ourselves to be worshiped daily with *guru-pūjā* and by sitting on large *vyāsāsanas* even in the presence of our Godbrothers. We did this because we thought we should take the same position as did Śrīla Prabhupāda, but now some of us understand that this was an imitation of Prabhupāda. We also assumed titles such as *paramahansa*, thinking it was a necessary part of being a *guru*. Now some of us have come to our senses and we want to rectify the situation. But in the course of the last eight years, many Godbrothers have left, at least partly due to arrogant feelings by *guru*-G.B.C. members and many of the remainder are disillusioned about the *gurus* and G.B.C.'s.

The regrettable history includes not only breaches of etiquette, but also philosophical misrepresentations ("To get to Śrīla Prabhupāda you have to go through us") and aggressive exclusivity and consolidation of power, resulting in distress to Godbrothers, disruption or loss of their prescribed duties, or even their falldown.

Then I asked, “What are proper Vaiṣṇava expressions and acts to demonstrate regret and to seek reunion?”

Viśvambhara Goswami told us that he was well aware of the state of ISKCON, since he had visited many different temples in the West. He said that if there was penance to be performed, the best was to chant extra holy names. That especially could be done if one could not apologize in public.

I questioned the concept of penance, since we do not perform *prāyaścitta* (atonement) in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He said yes, but he said chanting the holy name is different from regular *prāyaścitta*; he said the chanting of the name is one of the ways to become purified for offending devotees. He said we should also go directly to the devotees and ask their forgiveness.

He then stressed that the heart has to be changed. Devotees should not think of themselves first by their nationality—American, Swedish or whatever—but they should think of themselves as Vaiṣṇavas. He said that we should be consistent in our words, thoughts, and actions. Then we will be able to rectify ourselves as devotees. If one speaks humbly but doesn’t act that way, then no one will follow him.

He spoke of different instances which showed ISKCON devotees’s ignorance of basic Vaiṣṇava behavior and etiquette, and said that we have to learn these things. He said that the leaders should observe Vaiṣṇava etiquette more carefully by eating with their God-brothers and sitting on the same level with them. Special treatment should only be received when one is sitting on the *vyāsāsana*. He said there is a competition between the disciple and the *guru* in that the disciple is trying to offer things, but the *guru*’s mood should be to reject them.

We asked, “How should a disciple react if his *guru* says that he made serious philosophical mistakes and mistakes in etiquette? Will this kind of admittance harm the faith of the disciple?” Viśvambhara Goswami replied that it shouldn’t hurt their faith. If the *guru* makes a sincere apology and corrects himself, that will please his God-brothers and they will express their approval. But the disciple will always maintain his faithful worshipful attitude toward his *guru*.

We also asked, “What if a person admitting mistakes and admitting regret does so out of some intellectual conviction, but doesn’t really feel it in his heart?” He replied that the heart has to be changed. Again he stressed the consistency of thoughts, words, and deeds. He said it is not up to the accused to determine how much wrong he has actually done. That will be judged by the Vaiṣṇavas. If they find him guilty of committing certain wrongs, he should not minimize it.

He stressed the Vaiṣṇava traits of humility and simplicity. The *guru* should understand that he is not great himself; if he sits on the *vyāsāsana* and speaks the words of Kṛṣṇa, that is what is great. When the *guru* is not on the *vyāsāsana*, he should think of himself as a small person.

November 13

EXPRESSIONS OF REGRET BY THE KINGS WHO WERE IMPRISONED BY JARĀSANDHA

The 20,800 kings who were imprisoned by Jarāsandha admitted to Lord Kṛṣṇa that they had previously been victims of attachment to material opulence and of acting as rulers under the influence of false ego, and so they had misled the citizens. Their imprisonment by Jarāsandha had forced them to give up their kingship and they now saw their subsequent loss of pride as a great gift. They accepted it as the Lord’s causeless mercy that they had become bereft of their kingdoms “because we were very proud of calling ourselves rulers and kings.” They realized that any ruler or king who becomes too puffed-up with false prestige and power does not get the opportunity to understand his real constitutional position in eternal life. They were sorry for their past misconduct and they expressed this to Lord Kṛṣṇa when He kindly came to deliver them from the cave where Jarāsandha had imprisoned them. The kings said:

We now consider our position to be Your causeless, unalloyed mercy upon us because now we can understand that we were falsely proud and that our material opulences could be withdrawn from us within a second

by Your will. By Your causeless mercy only, we are now able to think of Your lotus feet.

To their speeches of humility and regret, Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, “My dear Kings, your decision to give up all conceptions of material enjoyment and turn instead to My devotional service is factually the symptom of your good fortune. Henceforward you will always be blessed with blissful life.”

One may say that this incident has no bearing at all upon the present situation in ISKCON, and that the ISKCON *ācāryas* should not be portrayed as having adopted any materialistic attitude. The kings in the cave had been materialistic aggressors and sense enjoyers, whereas the ISKCON *gurus*, even if they sometimes accepted opulent places of residence, many servants, and much worship and glorification, did so for the service of Kṛṣṇa. There are also Vedic examples of kings like Svāyambhuva Manu and Mahārāja Ambarīṣa who were able to live in great material opulence and receive worship and yet were not affected in the least, and whose citizens were peaceful and happy in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But our ISKCON history proves at least to some extent that the exclusive reign of the G.B.C. *gurus* has adversely affected the Kṛṣṇa consciousness of the rulers, and the citizens have not been peaceful.

Aside from the analogy comparing the *gurus* to proud kings, we should now accept that much of what we were doing in the name of ISKCON *ācāryas* was not in accord with Vaiṣṇava etiquette. To accept so many facilities in an exclusive way and deny them to our Godbrothers was not a sign of our humility, nor was it required to discharge our duties as spiritual master. By creating this exclusivity, both we and our disciples are to blame. And therefore we are trying to understand it in the right mood and express genuine spiritual regret to our Godbrothers and to the society of Vaiṣṇavas.

Although this *Kṛṣṇa* book incident has some relevance in terms of false pride arising from rulership and also contains the kings' valuable expressions of regret before Lord Kṛṣṇa, the key difference between the kings in the *Kṛṣṇa* book and the *gurus* of ISKCON is

that ISKCON is not supposed to be a material society governed by political rulers. This is even more reason why we should give up the functions and symbols and the political diplomacy of material kingcraft. When we think and act in humility and equality with our Godbrothers, only then will we be able to also speak words like *ṭṛṇād api sunīcena* with no trace of hypocrisy.

If despite this advice a *guru* says, “But Śrīla Prabhupāda accepted exclusive worship and opulence all over the world,” we may reply, “But you are not His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. His place is special, for he is not only *guru*, but founder-*ācārya*, the *guru* to be perpetually worshiped by all followers in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.” It is only by Prabhupāda’s grace and the grace of our Godbrothers that we have been able to accumulate followers who worship us as bona fide *gurus* and offer us all facilities for devotional service. Since many, many followers of Prabhupāda feel that he is being eclipsed by personality cults maintained by those disciples he appointed as *gurus*, it is time to change in favor of the humble behavior expected of Vaiṣṇavas.

November 14

MEETING WITH ŚRĪLA NĀRĀYAṆA MAHĀRĀJA

Jayādvaita Swami and I, along with Sarvabhāvana dāsa, went to see Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja of the Devānanda Math in Mathurā. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja sat on a thin mattress on the floor of his room and invited us to sit beside him. We asked the same questions that we asked of Viśvambhara Goswami.

Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja said that the feeling of regret and repentance for wrongs committed should come from within. When one sincerely feels it, then he will automatically find the right way of expressing it. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja referred to the book, *Madhurya-Kādambinī**, by Viśvanātha Cakravartī, where specific direction is given on repentance for offenses.

*See Appendix

Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja is well aware of persons who have defected from ISKCON since many of them come to see him. He said that we should approach those who are still attached to Prabhupāda's lotus feet and who are on the path of *bhakti* and ask them to please come back. But of those who have left the shelter of *guru-paramparā* and have developed a different philosophy, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja says, "To them we owe no duty."

Question: What if one agrees intellectually that he has made serious mistakes? He is willing to rectify, and even willing to apologize publicly—but he doesn't feel it so deeply in the heart. What should he do?

To this question, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja replied that even if one doesn't feel deep regret, he should act on the basis of scriptures. A *madhyama-adhikārī* always analyzes the situation according to the *śāstra*. So for the betterment of the ISKCON society and out of compassion for devotees who have left or devotees who are suffering, we should apologize for our mistakes and humbly ask them to forgive us. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja stressed the importance of bringing devotees back to the fold after so much energy has been expended to bring them toward Kṛṣṇa.

We asked about the position of the disciple who hears his *guru* admitting to philosophical wrongs and mistakes. Will such admissions hurt the faith of the disciples? Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja replied that if the disciple is sincere, he will think, "My *guru* is so sincere, he is such a wonderful, humble person that even for these mistakes he's immediately repenting." Thus they will grow more in their attachment and respect, and their *śrāddha* will increase. But, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja said, if the mistakes are not revealed and the disciple finds out, then he will start thinking, "How is this that my *guru* is committing these blatant offenses but is not doing anything about it?" And then he will begin making offenses to his *guru* which will become suicidal for his spiritual life.

I wanted Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja to hear my own realization of what the mistake is. My understanding is that the ISKCON *gurus* accepted a very high form of worship, which is not the standard in the Gauḍīya

tradition, but we did it because that's what Prabhupāda did. So the mistake seems to be one of imitating Prabhupāda, rather than following his instructions in *paramparā*.

Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja agreed that this was a mistake. He said that it is a great mistake for a Godbrother to take worship from another Godbrother. One should worship his Godbrothers rather than take worship from them. If one thinks, "I am a Vaiṣṇava, and I'm in a position to receive worship," that is very dangerous. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja explained that in order to develop the *śrāddha* of his disciples, a *guru* may have *guru-pūjā* on special occasions, but not daily or on special elevated seats above his Godbrothers. The disciple should keep a photo of his *guru* and worship that, and he may bring flowers to offer to the *guru*. But the offering of flowers is not mandatory. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja said the mandatory offering is the offering of the heart.

Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja was very congenial, and afterwards we honored breakfast *prasādam* of fruits and Mathurā *pera*. While honoring *prasādam*, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja reminded us how even Śrīla Prabhupāda expressed repentance in his last days, apologizing to his Godbrothers for his strong preaching, which may have sometimes offended them.

Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja said he heard that I had given up daily *guru-pūjā*, and he said this was humble. I told him that it was not my own humility. Turning to Jayādvaita Mahārāja, who was standing beside me, I said to Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, "He has been pointing out my mistakes." Jayādvaita Mahārāja laughed and said, "I am a big faultfinder!" Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja looked at me significantly and said—indicating Jayādvaita Swami—"He is your friend."

Examples of great persons who considered themselves great offenders:

1. Lord Balarāma, after killing Romahaṛṣaṇa Sūta.
2. Paraśurāma, after killing the *kṣatriyas*.

3. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, who refused to take mango, saying, “No, I am an offender.”

4. Śrīla Prabhupāda, who begged forgiveness in his last days for offending his Godbrothers.

5. Narottama dāsa and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who lament in their songs not exactly for having committed offenses, but for wasting their lives in material life.

Sitting in the woods for a last time, watching the sunset. A vulture settles in a treetop, making heavy noises, crashing the branches and leaves. A peacock comes out of the woods into the field heading my way. A small boy, barefoot and wearing short pants, walks over to me and asks in Hindi for my pen and for paisā. I say no. B. sits off in the distance, a *brahmacārī* in orange. A man wearing only a short white *lūṅgī* and carrying a tiffin walks by and into the woods.

I will not be in Vṛndāvana tomorrow night. Heading to the West for heavy duty, presenting myself more honestly there, competing in humility, trying to gain resolve before I go, discussing it with others. My tendency will be that, on leaving Vṛndāvana, I'll start easing off on reforms and repentance.

I thought of divesting myself of the name Gurupāda, and of also telling my disciples that Prabhupāda *may* be their main *guru*. Is this too extreme? I am also thinking of reforms like eating on the same level with Godbrothers, simpler furniture, live more like a *sādhu*. As Thoreau said, “Simplify! Simplify!” But with so much divesting, will they recognize me? Feeling doubt, I asked a Godbrother, “Will intensive admittance of wrong affect the relationship of love and trust between the spiritual master and the disciples?” Jagadīśa Goswami replied, “Are you more concerned with how they think of you than whether they know the truth?”

November 15

The electric lights were out during the *maṅgala-āratis*.

Prabhupāda's *samādhi mandira* was lit with candles, which highlighted the scaffolding of the unfinished monument. The temple during *maṅgala-ārati* was also candlelit. Finally, the lights came on and I beheld Rādhā-Śyāmasundara. But my mind was going off to last minute exchanges with devotees, plans for communications after I leave here, packing suitcases upstairs . . . It seems good to make meditative farewells a few days in advance of actual departure.

I hope to return next year at Kārttika, and my purification is certainly incomplete. Bhūrijana wrote me aptly this morning:

Karttika is always intense for me, and it is usually so for most of the devotees who live here. My understanding is that the purification is more rapid at this time and therefore the false ego gets demolished a hundred times the normal rate. Painful, but healthy if you can handle it. It's as if Kṛṣṇa holds a mirror up to you and you can see the disparity between what you think you look like and what you actually look like. When the false ego gets creamed in this way, the tendency is to defend and build it up again as quickly as possible through rationalization. Materialists must become expert at this maneuver, for humility hinders their sense enjoyment. . . . But, of course, a devotee is different. Rather than defending for again building up his false ego, a devotee recognizes Kṛṣṇa's special mercy upon him, admits his tininess and takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa through constantly chanting His holy names.

DĪKṢA- AND ŚIKṢĀ-GURUS

One of the biggest issues at present is the understanding of *dīkṣa*- and *śikṣā-gurus*. Statements in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books are straightforward:

The initiating and instructing spiritual masters are equal and identical manifestations of Kṛṣṇa, although they have different dealings. Their function is to guide the conditioned souls back to Godhead.

—Cc. Ādi 1.34, purport

We have also seen a similar statement by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in *Harināma Cintāmaṇi*:

*dīkṣā-śikṣa-bhada, guru dui prakāra,
ubhaye samāna mana arbive sujana,
paramārtha-dhana, anāyase yādi cana*

There are two different kinds of *gurus*—initiator *guru* and instructor *guru*. Both are equally respectable. They can give unto a worthy person the treasure of the ultimate goal of life, very easily, if desired.

Harināma Cintāmaṇi Text 6.20

Clear as it is, it seems we have deviated from this *siddhānta* and establish an undue prominence to the *dīkṣa-guru*.

Godbrothers have written several essays on this subject with support from *śāstra*. In one paper, a devotee asks the question, “Can the *śikṣā-guru* take us back to Godhead?” He replies, “The answer to that question is an unqualified YES, without a doubt.” He gives the following examples:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī was the *śikṣā-guru* of Parīkṣit Mahārāja. He delivered him back to Godhead, but his *dīkṣa-guru* was Kṛpācārya. Śukrācārya was the *dīkṣa-guru* of Bali, but Prahlaḍa Mahārāja, his grandfather and *śikṣā-guru*, delivered him. Kṛṣṇa (playing the role of a human being) was given *dīkṣa* by Gargamuni, but later, when talking with his class friend Sūdāma Vipra, Kṛṣṇa ascribes all His success and knowledge to Sandipani Muni, His *śikṣā-guru*. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī was initiated by Yadunanadana Ācārya, one of the great eternal associates of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. However, he was the Raghu of Svarūpa Dāmodara, his *śikṣā-guru*. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura was given *dīkṣa* by Bipin Bihari Gosvāmī, a caste Gosvāmī, but *śikṣā* by Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī, who is credited as his eternal master by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja appears to have been initiated by Nityānanda Prabhu, but gives eternal credits, at the end of every chapter of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, to Rūpa and Raghunātha,

his *śikṣā-guru*. The list could go on forever. The *śikṣā-guru* can certainly deliver the conditioned soul back to Godhead.

One of the main differences between the two *gurus* is that a disciple is allowed to have many *śikṣā-gurus* but only one *dīkṣa-guru*. Prabhupāda writes that one who is initially the *śikṣā-guru* usually becomes one's *dīkṣa-guru*. But the functions of both *gurus* are often identical, involving the transmission of *mantras* and instructions in devotional service:

The initiating *guru* gives the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*. The instructing *guru* gives instructions on the Absolute Truth. All Vaiṣṇavas are instructing *gurus*, and they all generate auspiciousness.

Harināma Cintāmani 6.21

In ISKCON, since the disappearance of Prabhupāda we have propagated a doctrine that the *dīkṣa-guru* is the only *guru*. One of the rationalizations for this is that the *dīkṣa-guru*, with initiation, acts on behalf of Kṛṣṇa to take away the sins of the disciple. But Rūpavilāsa offers evidence that “any *sādhū* or saintly person takes the sins of his disciples by his presence, by his instruction, by his touch, by his remembrance, by his having been seen, by allowing his feet to be washed, and by accepting a seat.” This is based on the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* First Canto, Chapter Nineteen verses thirty-two to thirty-four, which ends with the statement, “The invulnerable sins of a person are forthwith vanquished in the presence of you saints.” (Translation from Śrīla Prabhupāda's original *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.)

It may also be argued that all devotees (*śikṣā-gurus*) who give association to nondevotees and neophytes risk their spiritual lives, but are protected by Kṛṣṇa. The rigid distinction between the functions of *śikṣā-* and *dīkṣa-gurus* breaks down even further if we consider the essence of *dīkṣa*, as defined by Jīva Gosvāmī:

Dīkṣa is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person

expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as *dīkṣa*.

Bhakti-sandarba 2.83

A similar statement is made by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja: “*Dīkṣa* actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes free from all material contamination” (Cc. *Madhya* 4.111). Another example is Lord Caitanya’s initiation of the Buddhist teacher whom He met in His travels in South India. The initiation simply consisted of the Buddhist disciples chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* into the ear of their *guru*, on the advice of Lord Caitanya. Describing the conversion of the Buddhists, Prabhupāda writes, “Initiation means receiving the pure knowledge of spiritual consciousness” (Cc. *Madhya* 9.61, purport). Lord Caitanya also initiated a Sufi Pathana simply by inducing him to chant the holy name. Lord Caitanya then induced the Mohammedan’s followers to also chant. As described in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, “As they all began to chant, they were overwhelmed with ecstatic love. In this way Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu indirectly initiated the saintly Mohammedan by advising him to chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa” (Cc. *Madhya* 18.203–207).

All bona fide preachers perform this kind of initiation, encouraging people to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, giving them instructions and engaging them in devotional service. In the light of these conclusions, another writer points out the grave error in the *guru* institution which has developed since Prabhupāda’s departure:

In the wake of Srīla Prabhupada’s departure, all his sincere disciples who were strictly following the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness were actually meant to be approached and seen as gurus, especially by new men. This was everyone’s legacy. It is their certain responsibility to try to deliver others. Let the new men coming to our movement determine for themselves who among the staunch devotees they meet is their spiritual master: siksa, diksa, etc. We have made a grave error in organizing the movement the way we have. Many persons have been gravely disrespected. Many have been discouraged by our erroneous behavior in Vaisnava relations. All are to be respected.

Bhūrijana Prabhu has also written me about the importance of equating the *śikṣā-guru* with the *dīkṣa-guru*:

Sikṣa- and dikṣa-guru are both equal manifestations of Kṛṣṇa. In the purport to C.c. Adi text 57, Prabhupāda states of Bilvamangala Thākura and his book Kṛṣṇa Karnamṛta, “In the beginning of that book he has offered his obeisances to his different gurus, and it is to be noted that he has adored them all equally” (instructing spiritual master, initiating spiritual master, and Kṛṣṇa, who was also his instructing spiritual master). Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja also ends each chapter of the Caitanya-caritāmṛta by offering respects at the feet of several of his instructing gurus. In Cc. Adi 1.7, he mentions that all of the six Goswamis are his instructing gurus, and he puts forward his pleas for their mercy. Our movement had equated guru with dikṣa-guru, and in my opinion, this has caused many problems. Therefore, establishing the true philosophy of guru will be a major step toward the resolution of our difficulties.

Bhūrijana feels that we should be cautious about too much apologizing, though it also has its place. Confidential meetings of Godbrothers is the best forum. We should go over the history of our movement from Prabhupāda’s disappearance to the present, understand how we imitated Prabhupāda and see the problems that that caused. The right understanding of *śikṣā* and *dīkṣa* should be established. And all Godbrothers should be encouraged to act as spiritual masters.

I had written a letter to my G.B.C. Godbrothers and assembled some of my essays about repenting for offenses with the intention of mailing it to them. Early this morning I showed the material to Bhūrijana Prabhu, and he asked my permission to consult with some of his Godbrothers. Then we had a meeting—Jagadīśa Goswami, Dhanurdhara Swami, Bhūrijana, Rūpavilāsa and myself. They suggested that I not send out the letter to the G.B.C. They thought it was more important for me to meet with my Godbrothers and

confidentially explain my realizations about the mistakes that have been made. I should take consultation on what my Godbrothers think we should do about rectifying ISKCON, the G.B.C., and about my own role in these affairs. They emphasized that I should make sure my discussions with my Godbrothers are open and frank and that they know I want their true feelings. In a note expressing their suggestions, Bhūrjana and the others wrote, "What has been going on in ISKCON for the past nine years is complex, and understanding and knowing what to do about it will take time. No one completely understands everything."

Therefore, instead of going to the open forum and asking everyone to repent, I will try to actually improve my own situation with the Godbrothers I work with, and in my own personal life.

As I equalize myself with my other Godbrothers, some of the following points seem to be important:

1. Be careful not to demand exclusive or special treatment.
2. In the temple room, disciples should not give me any larger cushion than other Godbrothers. If they make such mistakes, I should not accept them.
3. Finances for my maintenance and travel should be discussed and reviewed, as desired, by my Godbrothers.
4. No one has raised objections to my printing books, but I will discuss it with Godbrothers and see if they frankly do object and how to remove that objection. The point is I should do things in consultation with them.
5. I should not establish exclusive residences in the places I visit. Disciples were thinking of building me a small house in Guyana and one in Potomac. But I can use whatever facility is available for guests when I visit.
6. Health prevents me from any big change in the amount of association I take. I also have the tendency to write in solitude. Nevertheless, I should avail myself of the association of my Godbrothers by reading with them, attending temple functions with them, engaging in personal discussions, etc.

LORD BALARĀMA'S ATONEMENT

When Lord Balarāma killed Romahaṛṣaṇa Sūta, the *brāhmaṇas* concluded that His action was not in line with religious principles. Lord Balarāma accepted their judgment. Although both Balarāma and the sages understood that He was independent, they agreed that He should act in a way that would show the right example for others. Therefore, exemplary action is important even for the Personality of Godhead. Lord Balarāma said, "I think it is My duty to execute a suitable act of atonement enjoined in the authorized scriptures."

Prabhupāda writes, "The Lord then placed Himself in the position of an ordinary *kṣatriya* and informed the sages that He did not know in what way He could atone for His killing of Romahaṛṣaṇa, but whatever they would suggest He would be glad to accept."

The *brāhmaṇas* gave a specific prescription and said that Lord Balarāma should kill the Balvala demon who was harassing them. They also accepted Balarāma's recognition of Sūta Gosvāmī as the inheritor of the task they had assigned to Romahaṛṣaṇa. And finally they said, "After killing Balvala, You may continue touring all the sacred places of pilgrimage for twelve months, and in that way You will be completely freed from all contamination. That is our prescription."

From a lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda:

"I DON'T CLAIM I AM . . . PURE DEVOTEE"

So it is not necessary that one has to become a pure devotee immediately. Just like we are also following the instructions of our spiritual master. I don't claim that I am pure devotee or perfect, but my only qualification is I am trying to follow the instructions of the perfect. Similarly, this is called disciplic succession.

If we follow Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, then we get perfect knowledge. May not be cent percent perfect, but as far as possible if you follow the instruction as it is, that much perfect. This way one will get perfection. The same example—try to understand—a perfect expert technologist or technician or mechanic is working and somebody is working under his instruction. So this somebody, because he's strictly working under the instruction

of the expert, is also expert. Is that clear? Because he is working under the expert. Do you follow? So if you follow pure devotee, then you are also 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 you do, that is pure. Pure devotee does not mean one has to become immediately cent percent pure, but if he sticks to the principles, and he will follow a pure devotee, then his actions are as good as pure devotee.

—from a lecture by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta
Swami Prabhupāda, November 29, 1968

November 17, en route from Delhi to Frankfurt

Baladeva read the essays on *dīkṣa*- and *śikṣā*-gurus and asked whether everyone will agree or will there be counterarguments. Of course, everyone will not agree. And yet I cannot see how they can rightly argue against the clear statements of *śāstra*, that *śikṣā*- and *dīkṣa*-gurus are equal.

November 18, Dublin, Ireland

My first meeting with Pṛthu Prabhu was very good. He is hopeful that there are G.B.C. men who are ready to rectify and that they will form a majority if it comes to a vote. We agreed that I should have a meeting with the senior devotees in Ireland, who happen to be my disciples, and express my realization of the need for some adjustments. I don't have to stress confessions and apologies as much as rectification. He suggested that I could express myself like this: "There was turmoil after Prabhupāda's disappearance. That is natural when the *guru* leaves. And Śrīla Prabhupāda did not give us much instruction about how to carry out the affairs of guruship. So we have made mistakes. Now we want to reform." He thinks that if we demand that *gurus* and G.B.C.'s confess their wrongs, some of them may be unable to do this, although they would be able to make the actual changes. So the emphasis should be on rectification.

Pr̥thu said he realizes more how the disciple has a great deal to say about who is his *guru*, more than we have been aware.

He also said that a *guru*'s funds should be regulated. Viśvambhara Goswami told him that he receives *dakṣiṇā* from his disciples, but it belongs to the temple. He is able to draw from it, but there is a regulated amount which he can spend.

Pr̥thu was enlivened to hear that I was considering dropping the name Gurupāda. I told him that I would be happy to divest myself of the name, but I hesitated, thinking my disciples would rebel. Even as I said it, I realized that my hesitancy was due to attachment. Certainly some of the disciples are attached to the name, and they may think that I am being pressured to give it up. But if I am actually convinced, then I can show them philosophically that there is no need for me to use an extra title. The fact is, Prabhupāda gave me a fully blessed name, Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami. I myself, as with the other ISKCON *gurus*, took on a name of my own invention. If we do not give them up, then as the years go by, those who become ISKCON *gurus* will not take on such names, and we will be left with an archaic symbol of our own pride.

Pr̥thu Prabhu left me with an essay, "Some Observations on the Latter Day Gurus." He said it was written about a year and a half ago, but he doesn't know the author. As I read it now, it all makes sense to me, although a year and a half ago such statements used to cause me pain and I could not accept them as belonging to our *siddhānta*.

The essayist states that after Prabhupāda's disappearance, we should have made a clear distinction between the eleven *gurus* he appointed and Śrīla Prabhupāda himself. The temple should have been kept for the worship of Viṣṇu-tattva and our founder-*ācārya*. Worship of the other *gurus* could have gone on in separate quarters. The essayist states that this is the standard of the Madhva and Rāmānuja *sampradāyas*, and has helped them endure throughout the

centuries. He also states that the *gurus* should make their disciples understand their position. They should be truthful enough to say:

I did not create ISKCON. Śrīla Prabhupāda did. And every project in ISKCON is simply the manifestation of his energy. It is not really the result of anything I have done personally. It is really Śrīla Prabhupāda who did it all. All I can do is give you the same *mantra* that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave me. I personally cannot save you, but if you chant this *mantra* and study Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings as preserved in his books, then despite my own imperfections and shortcomings, you will be able to go back to Godhead because Śrīla Prabhupāda will take you.

Our foolish mistake was one of imitation. Prabhupāda was the only example of a *guru* and *ācārya* that we knew, and so we assumed that whoever was a bona fide *guru* would have to exactly imitate Prabhupāda in every way. Thus the prayers, titles, big *vyāsāsanas*, lavish *guru-pūjās* and Vyāsa-pūjās, lavish living quarters, the personal comforts . . . The essayist writes:

Unfortunately, however, simply imitating Śrīla Prabhupāda does not make one as good as him, just as imitating Śiva or Kṛṣṇa does not make one equal to them. And just as the imitators of Śiva cannot drink an ocean of poison, nor the imitators of Kṛṣṇa lift Govardhana Hill, the imitators of Śrīla Prabhupāda have not been able to maintain ISKCON as Śrīla Prabhupāda did, with the result that the majority of Śrīla Prabhupāda's dear disciples have left this movement and the movement itself has been shaken to its foundation by feuds, rivalries, and schisms. It is not that there is anything wrong with ISKCON having *dīkṣa-gurus*, but there is something fundamentally wrong with the way we have pursued it.

CHANGE AND HINDSIGHT

After Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance, sincere Godbrothers welcomed the eleven *gurus* to take almost all of the paraphernalia of Śrīla Prabhupāda. But soon the G.B.C. *gurus* raced ahead and their

Godbrothers seemed to be irrevocably left behind in the dust of the “*paramahāṃsas*.” Godbrothers have asked for changes for years, and finally I for one am ready. But why has it taken me and the others years to hear from our Godbrothers?

We thought they didn’t understand what it means to have disciples. We thought they were envious. We thought that the misbehavior of a few *gurus* didn’t indicate anything wrong with the rest of us accepting a very high standard of worship. We didn’t know a viable alternative and thought it dangerous to allow many others (or even one) to begin initiating. We hoped we would soon become purified and expert. We didn’t acknowledge that the *śikṣā-guru* is identical with *dikṣa-guru*, and we did not acknowledge that all of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples were potentially empowered in that way. We attempted to institutionalize, zonalize, consolidate power. Nothing worked. And when our Godbrothers could no longer tolerate it and raised their protest, we were too attached and we shuddered to think of giving it all up.

November 19

STEPPING DOWN

For years I’ve been preaching to my disciples that they should be attracted to me in an exclusive way if they want to please Kṛṣṇa. They *may* please others, I said, but they *must* please me. As stated in the scriptures, *yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo*.

But during Kārttika in Vṛndāvana, a Godbrother read a passage in *Journal and Poems*, Book 2, and pointed out to me that I was mistaken. I had expressed my disappointment in a disciple who was hearing lectures from another initiating *guru*. I admit now that this was a misconception due to my thinking that the *dikṣa-guru* must be *the guru*. Now I understand that a *dikṣa-* or *śikṣā-guru* *may* be the principal *guru* of a disciple, but the disciple may have many spiritual masters who inspire him in his spiritual advancement. The *guru* should encourage a disciple to take relevant instructions in *paramparā*, but he should not attempt to enforce himself on a soul as the proprietor. It

should not be legislated as dogma by the *guru* and his supporters. The disciples should be free to take bona fide guidance and inspiration as they find it. This freedom does not contradict the managerial obligation of Kṛṣṇa conscious authorities to direct devotees working within a particular temple or zone. But it does mean that no one, not even a *guru*, should try to steal men or disrupt natural relationships as they arise.

I have inflicted this exclusive obligation toward myself onto the minds of some of my disciples for whom it was difficult. It was also difficult for me to pretend that I had to be the ultimate authority in the mind and heart of a devotee, even though I saw that devotee only once a year and could barely remember his name. In many cases, the natural relationships with *śikṣā-gurus* have developed despite my official role. For the most part, I did not violate those natural relationships, and yet I remained unsatisfied at heart if a disciple did not see me as his ultimate *guru*. At least I preferred to be seen that way by those whom I initiated.

Now, if I am no longer responsible to act as the one single *guru* in the lives of my disciples, what is my most important duty in ISKCON? How shall I best occupy myself within the mission? Will it be enough to go here and there without being in charge as I used to be? Will it be satisfying enough to chant the holy name and study Prabhupāda's books?

These thoughts came as I sat on a pillow in the cold temple room in Dublin, speaking from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to half a dozen devotees, feeling not vitally needed, but more honest. Maybe I am disappointed at the letdown in pomp, but I am convinced that it is right. I am disappointed more in myself than in anyone else. And I am looking ahead. What's next for a benevolent figurehead? Am I now turned loose to do as I like, or am I still required to stay and help without claiming to be the only worshipable *guru*? May I travel as I like and simply give *śikṣā* wherever I go? Or is it part of my atonement to stay, as other Godbrothers have done for years, serving ISKCON members in a particular zone, even though I may not be seen by everyone "as good as God"?

HE REASONS ILL

Just after he disappeared
 some thought he died and
 was buried in the ground.
 But that night in a dream
 a disciple looked down into the grave
 and Prabhupāda came beside him
 “They think I am dead,” he said,
 “but I am not.”

“He reasons ill
 who says that Vaiṣṇavas die.”
 So there was no reason to tell them,
 “You cannot approach him directly.”
 There was no reason
 to think we had to replace him.
 He lives on in his books,
 in his movement, his followers,
 and anyone desiring to follow
 the science of devotion
 will lovingly serve Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I reasoned ill,
 but now I’ve learned—
 he is the head of the *sampradāya*
 and we are all
 his servants in *paramparā*.

November 20, Dublin

It’s just a couple of hours before an important meeting with my leading disciples here. Externally, it may not seem to be a momentous gathering, just three or four men in an apartment room. And it won’t be controversial—they will accept what I say. And

they are satisfied with their service to Prthu Prabhu. Yet, when I give up the name Gurupāda and give the order to give up the *vyāsāsanas* and pictures of *gurus* in the temples, and when I give up the songs describing me as a topmost transcendentalist complete in self-realization, and when I explain how *śikṣā-* and *dikṣa-gurus* are identical—it will contribute to the end of ISKCON *gurus* maintaining these symbols of exclusive guruship. If I as one give it up, then others may do it also. This is the transcendental competition Jayādvaita Swami asked for. So I anticipate with happy feelings. I pray to Prabhupāda to allow me to stick to my decision and to open my heart to his reign over ISKCON. And please allow me to open my mind and my heart to my Godbrothers.

At the Dublin morning program we introduced changes. I was addressed by disciples simply as “Satsvarūpa Mahārāja,” no other titles or *pūjās* or special seats, and when I was about to leave they accompanied me to the car chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and “*Jaya* Prabhupāda,” without the old “*Jaya* Gurupāda.” Everything was sweet and natural and nothing was lacking.

Before *Bhāgavatam* class, while singing “*Jaya Rādhā Mādhava*,” I felt a love for life as it is, with everything included—even the opposing factors—the troubles within ISKCON, and attacks from the demons. And I thought fondly of the favorable aspects, the sweetness of devotional service. The thought of leaving life struck me as bittersweet. My feeling was genuine at first, but as I became aware of it, I indulged and moved toward tearful emotions, thus spoiling the thought. And so I pulled short of the whole thing.

I may take this to mean that even the little bit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness I experience is very satisfying. How much more it would be—despite Kali-yuga’s imperfections—if I were purer. Thus, I should pursue the nonpretentious life of a real devotee.

November 21

Śivārāma Swami phoned and asked me to visit London before returning to the U.S.A. He said devotees there are suffering from an “identity crisis” since their G.B.C. *guru* fell down. Also, another preacher came through London recently and told them that they all had to be reinitiated. I said that if I go to London I will preach that devotees should take shelter in Prabhupāda and that reinitiation is not compulsory.

This is a chance for me to test my Kārttika-gained realizations. Why should they think they need still another “big” *guru*? The senior devotees of England should themselves become *śikṣā-* and *dīkṣa-gurus* without importing “big” *gurus*, who it seems are now suspect. Even if we are not personally suspect, the paraphernalia of “big” *gurus* is suspect, and whoever maintains the high profile invites danger.

I have not completed my self-correction just by announcements and changes in temple ceremonies, helpful as they are. I must eliminate pretense. I was living a pretense—that I alone was *guru* and other Godbrothers were not. It became an established fact, accepted by me and my disciples. “Non-*guru*” Godbrothers had to live with it: *I was guru, they were not*. Now I announce, “I was wrong. I am not and I was not the only *guru*. We wrongly suppressed our Godbrothers.”

I am well into the process of trying to undo a mistake. But I have to do it wholeheartedly. This itself is a distinction between myself and Śrīla Prabhupāda: He did not make such mistakes. If I admit I am weak in some ways, is it wrong that I encourage my disciples to seek protection directly from he who is not so weak?

Talked with Pṛthu on the plane to London. We agreed that a disciple needs a living *guru*. We may say that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the main *guru*, but the disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who acts as *guru* creates faith and extends Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mercy to his own disciples. Especially in the future, in a hundred years or so, it will not

be sufficient to tell disciples that only Prabhupāda is their *guru*. There is a fine line between falsely renouncing the duty to become a *guru* on behalf of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and usurping his eternal place as *śikṣā-guru*.

Pr̥thu offered a quote from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement directly receives instructions from the Supreme Personality of Godhead via persons who are strictly following His instructions. Although a follower may not be a liberated person, if he follows the supreme, liberated Personality of Godhead, his actions are naturally liberated from the contamination of the material nature. Lord Caitanya therefore says: By My order you may become a spiritual master. One can immediately become a spiritual master by having full faith in the transcendental words of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and by following His instructions.

—*Bhāg.* 4.18.5, purport

London

The last time I came to the London temple (five years ago) was also in the wake of a *guru's* falldown. There is an eerie similarity in the circumstances. Both *gurus* lived in very opulent quarters, and now both are gone. Each one left behind a stack of expensive sweaters and gold and silver paraphernalia. *Māyā* is ready to extend the offer to anyone else foolish enough to commit the same mistake.

Sivārāma Swami told me more about the identity crisis the devotees are experiencing. They are finding it difficult to place their faith in any leader. They were trained to worship their *guru* on a grand standard, and some of them seem to be hankering for someone else to come in on that high level. One of the things I see as my task here is to tell them that the system of too-high worship breeds the disease of the falldown. They should not expect someone else to fulfill those externals, and neither is that the essence of the *guru*.

The devotees have also heard about the misbehavior of leaders in different parts of the world and this only adds to their insecurity. When the crisis first occurred over a month ago, they were advised

to take shelter in Prabhupāda as their *śikṣā-guru*, and they did so. But now as time passes they are finding that difficult. So I will try to encourage them that Prabhupāda is accessible through his books and by his presence as founder-*ācārya*. They should also appreciate that their local leaders within England are qualified devotees who can act as their *śikṣā* guides. They needn't expect a *guru* to be opulent and grand, but as long as he is strictly following Prabhupāda, he can be a qualified *guru*.

November 22, Sunday

I wrote a poem inviting initiating *gurus* to step down. Pṛthu read it and noticed that I was addressing the others and not including myself. "Is it a better idea," he noted, "to say, 'Let *us* go ahead and do it'? Otherwise, someone may read between the lines and think that you are suggesting that you are the first among equals. What do you think? This might give a notion that would minimize your previous regret."

It didn't take me long to pass superficially through regret to self-righteousness. I am still in the transition stage of purifying myself. Yet, this is a hopeful stage. I will encourage everyone to eliminate *vyāsāsanas* and big *guru* titles and opulence. Encourage everyone to recognize Prabhupāda as their own *śikṣā-guru*. These are all healthy signs, even in the midst of our ISKCON diseases and the subsequent crack in faith among the devotees. It reminds me of a health crisis where poisons are coming out, and yet the poisons are a sign that the body is taking care of itself. Have faith in the natural, spiritual hygiene of ISKCON.

Let's go ahead and do it,
step down nimbly
declare ourselves as equal
it's what we are—at best.
Before *guru* titles become duncecaps
we had better give them up.

November 23, 10:55A.M.

In five minutes I give the question and answer session in Śrīla Prabhupāda's room here at Bhaktivedanta Manor. This morning's *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class was devoted to the same subject. I have the satisfying feeling that I am a servant of ISKCON. I told them not to expect another big *guru* from the ranks of the *devas* and the *pādas*, but they should do it themselves. They should become fixed up. They should realize their direct access to Prabhupāda as their *śikṣā-guru*. They may get reinitiated by another *dīkṣa-guru*, but the important thing is to find *śikṣā-gurus* from among the qualified disciples of Prabhupāda.

A two-hour meeting with devotees went well. I answered questions about *dīkṣa-* and *śikṣā-gurus*, reinitiation, direct access to Śrīla Prabhupāda, etc., etc. My presentation will be different in our own zone. I am a *guru* who is still functioning but who has to admit to serious mistakes. As a result of my presentation, some initiated disciples may realize that they should seek *śikṣā* from other devotees and consider them their main *gurus*. That is the logical consequence of my presentation. Let it happen in a healthy way.

November 24, on the plane to the U.S.A.

Someone said of me, "He's written *Japa Reform Notebook* and *Reading Reform*. Now why doesn't he write a *Guru Reform Notebook*?"

Apologies are due to Ādi-keśava, who was a natural *śikṣā-guru* in New York, but I prevented it and contributed to his *sannyāsa* downfall. And to Trivikrama Swami, who has been right on these issues for so long. Apologize in public to all devotees who were wronged by a G.B.C. action of which I was at least a silently condoning party.

I asked Pṛthu for advice about how I should speak when my disciples gather on my birthday. He thought I should go ahead and present the whole subject matter, correcting the wrong. I feel confident from my presentations in Ireland and England that I can make a full exposition of my wrongs and set it right, beginning with a

talk to my disciples. Some Godbrothers caution about too many apologies or admittance of mistakes; disciples might not understand. But I think I'm ready to make them understand. It is purifying to do this. Act with a cool head. Admittance of mistakes has to be based on *śāstra*, lest you change it later and appear doubly foolish.

We did wrong by acting as zonal *ācāryas* before our Godbrothers. And we imitated Śrīla Prabhupāda. As a result, some of us became corrupt, others suffered gross falldowns. Now we are changing, but there must be remorse.

Dear Ādi-keśeva Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Here it is, belatedly, and maybe a little too late for much solace, my apology to you for the offenses I committed when I was the zonal *ācārya* of New York.

During Kārttika in Vṛndāvana, by prolonged mercy in the *dhāma* and the mercy of my Godbrothers there, I have come to realize the grave mistake the G.B.C. has committed in instituting and maintaining the zonal *dīkṣa-guru* system in such a way that no other Godbrother could be considered *guru*. It wasn't just me who did what we did in New York and elsewhere, it was the system; but I was one of the upholders of the system and the enjoyer of the supreme position, whereas you (and others) got crushed.

You and I have made peace and we are coworkers now. The history is complex, and I cannot exactly remember all of it. Maybe you had some mixed motives, but all that has already been recognized. What has never come out to date is my own realization and remorse at the role I played as one very much in the wrong. So I'm coming to you in this written form, as I hope to do also in person, to ask for your forgiveness, so that I can be released from a specific Vaiṣṇava *aparādha*.

As a member of the elite power group and as an individual, I refused to recognize that you were acting as *śikṣā-guru* for many

devotees in New York and elsewhere. I was guilty of a major misconception in the philosophy, thinking that as *dikṣa-guru* I was the only *guru* and that your claims, (although based on *śāstra*), natural leadership, and mutual affection with the devotees, were all intrusion, bogus, unholy. If I had allowed you to discharge the natural function of *śikṣā-guru* while I had gone on initiating, we could have avoided the politics and your futile attempt to be elected *dikṣa-guru* by the G.B.C. But it would have taken great purity and boldness to act outside of the “*Ācārya* Board System,” and such purity and Vaiṣṇava vision I lacked.

Because your fall from *sannyāsa* was linked to your frustration in this matter, I must take a share of the blame for contributing to the falldown and the personal suffering you endured, and also the resultant break-up of the New York zone. Of course, all this has been suppressed for years. I am now admitting it, and I intend to do so more openly. Maybe it will be of some help to you. By Prabhupāda’s grace, you have not become one of the many casualties or joined disaffected persons, but by your determined devotion to Prabhupāda and your tolerance you are rendering valuable service in ISKCON. I will not attempt to philosophize, as Kaṁsa did after he released Vasudeva and Devakī, that all this was destined to happen by the force of *kāla*. I have to accept my wrongdoing.

I remain somewhat unredeemed and so I fear to ask you, “What should I do to atone for this offense?” I don’t know if I could do whatever you might ask. But I’m trying to say something like that, and so I ask you to consider my position now and let me know what you think is best for me to do.

I will try to listen to your advice.

RIGHT AND STUPID?

On the plane, I found an article in *Reader’s Digest* called, “Why Nothing is ‘Wrong’ Anymore.” The author, Meg Greenfield, protests that in our amoral dealings nowadays, no one seems to admit that they are wrong. We are quick to condemn other people as wrong,

“but where the concept of wrong is really important—as a guide to one’s own behavior or that of one’s own side in some dispute—it is missing.” She argues that we have developed a broad range of alternatives to “right and wrong.”

One rationalization people use instead of admitting they are wrong is to say that they are “right and stupid.” One admits that he did something dumb, but he avoids admitting wrong. Or one takes the position, “right and not necessarily unconstitutional.” Another avoidance tactic is to take the position, “right and sick”—I define my wrongdoing as a physical or psychological disorder.

Or I take the position, “right and only to be expected.” In other words, I justify my lapse by saying the other side provoked me, or it was just plain circumstance. The author of the article concludes, “As I listen to the moral arguments swirling around us these days, I become even more persuaded that our real problem is this: The ‘still, small voice’ of conscience has become far too small—and utterly still.”

Films on the plane: The PGA Golf Tournament. Each champion golfer is trying to beat the other. The crowd cheers their shots. On the news, big politicians like Reagan, Schultz, Sam Nunn, etc., etc., giving their opinions, waving to the crowds, walking to the podium. We watch the film, and even without hearing them, we perceived that their actions stink of false ego. And I remember the grand residential room at Bhaktivedanta Manor, quarters of the departed *gurus*, their trophies left behind (“Do you want a pen? Do you want some sweaters?”). A Vaiṣṇava is supposed to be something different than a material hero. Only he can think, “Smaller than the grass, more tolerant than a tree.”

I write the above to encourage myself as I again hesitate: “Maybe the confessing is another kind of passion. What if I’m wrong again? And what about my disciples? What will they think? What of their *śrāddha*?” But the real thing is, “*What is right?*”

November 25, *Gītā-nāgarī*

Paramānanda asked me about the changes. We spoke of a special potency that only Śrīla Prabhupāda had—he could initiate thousands of devotees all over the world, and even if he didn't see them he could sustain them and inspire them in a very loving way. Attempting to create love and trust beyond my capacity is another imitation. I find this confirmed by a letter I received today from a disciple who recently left.

Specifically, my dissatisfaction stems from a selfish need I have to feel appreciated and loved. That is, appreciated and loved by you. I guess I understand absolutely nothing about a spiritual relationship. You wrote at the end of your letter that you were writing to me as your duty to Prabhupada and out of affection for me. I have never heard you say this before to me and I have no experience of this affection although you express it exists. I never felt it and I never felt close to you. I thought I was developing real love for you and I do admire you for all you have done in your attempt to reach God . . . I really wanted to make that connection with you in my heart, but somehow it just didn't happen.

When I read this I thought, “What does she expect? Did she want me to be her husband?” But maybe she was given the impression by our *dīkṣa-guru* propaganda that I could fill her life with love. Maybe for a few devotees in one place if I could stay with them, I can develop personal loving relationships (by informing them about Kṛṣṇa who is the source of love). But to provide love worldwide to hundreds of devotees . . .

Ravindra-svarūpa phoned tonight. He reminded me that as spiritual masters, we actually have to take responsibility for delivering our disciples back to Godhead. This includes receiving honor and worship. We don't receive the honor for ourselves, but on behalf of Kṛṣṇa. He cautioned about going too far in concepts like “monitor *guru*,” in which the spiritual master tells disciples, “I am not your spiritual master.” Disciples have to be allowed to see their spiritual

master as worshipable, according to their faith. They should not be told that their spiritual master is not a bona fide representative in disciplic succession.

But the spiritual master shouldn't think of himself as a *guru*. According to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, if one thinks of himself as *guru*, he is actually *goruḥ*, a cow. We are disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Prabhupāda also thought of himself as a disciple of his spiritual master; that's the way one qualifies to become a *guru*.

Ravindra-svarūpa approved of my plan to confess my own mistakes. He said as long as the *guru* is not making mistakes in his basic *sādhana*, then other mistakes may be accepted without a loss of faith.

November 27, Vyāsa-pūjā day

Vaiṣṇavas celebrate Vyāsa-pūjā day on the birthday of the spiritual master, and yet the recipient of the day's worship is Śrīla Vyāsadeva himself. Vyāsa-pūjā is not the day when I receive worship as a *guru*, but the day when I offer my *pūjā* to the *guru-paramparā*. The disciples may offer worship to their spiritual master, but his concern is to worship Śrīla Prabhupāda and all the spiritual masters unto Kṛṣṇa. His actions will be a lesson to his disciples. Vyāsa-pūjā observance is described in *Caitanya-bhāgavata*. Nityānanda Prabhu refused to accept praises or a garland from Śrīnivāsācārya, Advaita Ācārya, and other devotees. Although He was supposed to be the recipient of *guru* worship, Nityānanda Prabhu performed the *pūjā* of Lord Caitanya.

November 28

Letter from Sureśvara dāsa:

If any of your disciples are disturbed by anything you said yesterday, I think they need to read (or re-read) what you've already written. For instance, the last two sentences of the Lilamṛta: "Our hope is that by hearing about Śrīla Prabhupada the reader will become himself a

Prabhupadanuga, a follower of Srīla Prabhupada. We can wish no better fortune upon anyone."

It is good to see your Prabhupada-prema now openly doing battle with the forces of arrogance and false pride.

TO GODBROTHERS

I sat on a throne above your heads
as you sat on the floor.
My lectures were not superior to yours
but we pretended
that I was supreme, "almost
as good as Prabhupāda."
Now I'm stepping down
to be what I am,
a fool before our Guru Mahārāja.

I should not have ascended above you,
even though you offered it to me.
And you said, "Here are your disciples"
although it was you
who brought them to surrender.
I blessed them and gave them
the *mahā-mantra* and spiritual names,
but I never told them,
"He is your *śikṣā-guru*."

You know all this and you are
willing to forgive me
but the wrong will linger.
Please let me offer
my repeated apologies,
and please teach me
how to honor
my Godbrothers.

Questions and Answers

The following are some questions from devotees which I answered while visiting Dublin, London, and Gītā-nāgarī.

1. Q: Should *gurus* in good standing admit to having made mistakes?

SDG: It's a good Vaiṣṇava principle with many precedents to admit wrong just because respectable people are saying you're wrong. If many *sādhus* claim a wrong has been committed, then we should not deny them. In Vedic civilization, if the citizens, the *prajāś*, said, "Wrong," then the *kṣatriya* kings felt guilty. And sometimes the citizens were outspoken.

Once a *brāhmaṇa* went to the gate of the palace of Arjuna and accosted him outloud: "What kind of a leader are you that in your reign my son has died before me?" Just because a disorder occurred in nature, this *brāhmaṇa* suspected the king of wrongdoing and irresponsible leadership.

Arjuna didn't come out and punish the *brāhmaṇa* for speaking like that, but he immediately felt guilty: "This man is a bona fide *brāhmaṇa*, and my reputation is being threatened by these reproaching words." Arjuna then went with Lord Kṛṣṇa to retrieve the *brāhmaṇa*'s son.

Then there is the example of Lord Rāma. When someone spoke against His reuniting with Sītā and suspected that Sītā may not have been chaste, that was actually a blasphemy. But Lord Rāma accepted the comments as constructive criticism. He thought, "The citizens are disturbed because Sītā was with Rāvaṇa. So that their minds may not be disturbed, I prefer to be without my wife. Let her be banished."

These are lofty examples, but we should at least see the direction they are taking. The king did not try to put down the so-called revolution or quell the disturbance by political maneuvers or by discrediting the speakers, but he acted to satisfy the aggrieved party. ISKCON's leaders should not act like the corrupt monarch who on hearing that the people were dissatisfied and had no bread to eat said,

“Let them eat cake!” meaning, “The public be damned!” Kṛṣṇa conscious rulers are responsive; we should try to satisfy the devotees.

I am appreciating more my Godbrothers as guides for myself. It's not only by the grace of Prabhupāda but also by the grace of our Godbrothers that we became spiritual masters. It was the Godbrothers who provided followers for us and said, “You be their *guru*.” Let us hear from the Vaiṣṇavas and correct our attitude so that this ISKCON movement, which is now in a seriously disarrayed state, can be brought back into unity. That will be a great achievement. And if we have to admit to making mistakes along the way, that will be nothing compared to the gain that we make.

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami: Sometimes the conception is there that if you admit to making a mistake, disciples may lose faith in you. But it is not part of our philosophy that Vaiṣṇavas cannot make mistakes. Because ultimately, we are not infallible. The example of Grandfather Bhīṣma is there; the example of Lord Brahmā is there. One may make mistakes. Śikhi Māhiti chastised one of Lord Jagannātha's servants and Lord Jagannātha considered it a mistake and came and slapped him. Although he was one of the most intimate associates of Caitanya Mahāprabhu—one of the three and a half—still he made a mistake. So the point isn't that he made the mistake, but that as soon as he realized some mistake had been made, then he went to rectify and apologize for that and tried to make that change, rather than covering it over. So admitting mistakes should not decrease faith, but actually increase faith.

2. Q: Is it possible for a devotee who took *dikṣa* from a disciple of Prabhupāda to approach Prabhupāda directly and experience direct reciprocation with him?

SDG: They are already doing that. At the end of *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, I say that Prabhupāda was not the *guru* for just one generation. So one can reciprocate directly with Prabhupāda by hearing his pastimes. And in many, many other ways one can follow Prabhupāda, be a Prabhupādānuga.

Philosophy should always be spoken in *paramparā* in a balanced way according to time, place, and person. This is a time when we

have to set the balance right. It is a time for access to Prabhupāda to be brought out.

There are examples of devotees in the past who took shelter of Vaiṣṇavas who were not their contemporaries. Viśvanātha Cakravartī was the disciple Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, but they were not contemporaries; Narottama appeared several generations earlier. Madhva was the disciple of Vyāsa. When our founder-*ācārya* appeared so recently and is so intimately connected with all the members of the movement—and is of such a stature as Śrīla Prabhupāda—surely one can reciprocate with him.

Prabhupāda made himself accessible not just for a few disciples; by his books and by creating this movement, he made himself accessible to everyone. He *expected* devotees to take shelter in him. He said his books would be the lawbooks for mankind for ten thousand years. He is giving us access to him. Who are we to refuse or say, “This is bogus. You can’t have access to Prabhupāda. This is jumping over.” It’s not jumping over.

3. Q: Is it that the present *gurus* are doormen in Prabhupāda’s house, who open the door to newcomers?

SDG: Yes. That’s a nice image. We’re inviting people into Prabhupāda’s house. It’s his house. The *mantra* that we give is the *mantra* that he gave us. Everything is an extension of his mercy.

Prabhupāda is the *śikṣā-guru* for everyone. We don’t say that there’s no *guru* except Prabhupāda, but he is everyone’s *guru* and may be approached directly. As you were saying, subsequent *gurus* bring you to Prabhupāda. That’s their worth. In the course of doing that, one may have to admit his own imperfection. As imperfect as he might be, if he can show you Prabhupāda’s books, if he can repeat what Prabhupāda said, you can rely on those solid instructions. He’s mercifully the extension of Prabhupāda’s mercy because he is available to always help you by giving you Prabhupāda’s instruction.

4. Q: If I say I’m approaching Prabhupāda directly, how does that differ from the Christian who says he’s approaching Christ directly?

SDG: We don’t criticize people for following Christ even though he lived a long time ago. What we criticize is that they claim to

follow Christ and then don't. That's a fraud in the name of following Christ. Just by the fact that Christ lived long ago doesn't mean he can't be a *guru*. Prabhupāda said that Christ is our *guru*. We don't say you can go back to Godhead by saying, "Oh, I follow Prabhupāda," and then you don't follow Prabhupāda.

5. Q: Don't we need someone who can make the adjustments of scripture to our own particular situation, to point out the illusion that we may not be able to see? Don't we need a living representative to surrender to?

SDG: When a devotee says, "I need someone to help me understand and connect me in disciplic succession," who is going to deny him? Who is going to say, "No, there are no other devotees. Only Prabhupāda is a devotee. You have to go to him"? We have to help younger devotees. But we should be honest and say, "I will help you, but this is all I can do. This is what I am." And that devotee who is seeking help will say, "Well, that's what I want. I am not asking you to be Prabhupāda, but I cannot make the connection just on my own."

Again, you shouldn't legislate. Some devotees may be able to feel Prabhupāda's reciprocation and some may not. It depends on their receptivity. We spoke about this matter with Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. He's a disciple of Prabhupāda's *sannyāsa guru*, Keśava Mahārāja, and Prabhupāda said he could be consulted. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja made a distinction. He said those devotees whose *gurus* have fallen should be given all encouragement to take shelter in Prabhupāda. And he said those disciples whose spiritual masters have not fallen should have respect for their spiritual masters and approach the disciplic succession through them. It is not that everyone should think, "Well, now I won't trust my spiritual master."

6. Q: Can a *śikṣā-guru* be your eternal spiritual master? If the *śikṣā-guru's* disciple does not go back to the spiritual world, will the *śikṣā-guru* return for him?

SDG: Yes. It is not that one can have such a relationship only with the *dīkṣa-guru*. We asked Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja about this. He said he

considered Prabhupāda to be his *śikṣā-guru*, and he said, “Does that mean if he comes back he will only take care of you? He won’t take care of me?”

7. Q: Who should receive names like “His Divine Grace” and “Viṣṇupāda”?

SDG: In a purport Prabhupāda says that a spiritual master may be called Prabhupāda or Viṣṇupāda; he says that “*pāda*” means “one who has taken the position of.” Then he says one may be given such a name if he is “completely self-realized.” So it is a very high title, just like *paramahansa*.

At this point there is no general policy about who if anyone in our Society should receive these names and titles. I have given these things up myself and I personally don’t feel spiritually diminished in doing it.

Some present *gurus* may fear that their disciples will think less of them if they give up their names and titles. But I personally recommend to the *guru*-Godbrothers that we reserve these names for Prabhupāda. They are very close in sound vibration to Prabhupāda, and if we are cleaning house of things done in imitation of Prabhupāda, why don’t we do this? For so long we weren’t able to hear our Godbrothers’s request to do so.

8. Q: What can be done to prevent the disciples from seeing their *gurus* as ordinary persons?

SDG: We can stress the philosophy that one has to see the spiritual master with great faith as the representative of Kṛṣṇa. We don’t say that a person shouldn’t keep a picture of his beloved spiritual master, and he may make a daily offering to it. And his devotion may be enhanced by things like a daily *pūjā*, which may be more privately performed. These things may be encouraged to increase the disciple’s faith in his spiritual master, but the main offering is an internal one, and by his acts of service.

We can’t change the philosophy. We can’t change Prabhupāda’s purports. The disciple must honor the *guru*, but this must be done in a way that recognizes the actual position of the spiritual master.

Honoring the spiritual master is mandatory. But it has to be done in a way that doesn't impose on others' worship of their spiritual master.

We have to realize—and since Prabhupāda's disappearance we haven't realized this so much—that there are two kinds of spiritual masters. One is the topmost spiritual master, who may even be a *śaktyāveśa-avatāra*, an intimate associate of Kṛṣṇa who comes into this world for Kṛṣṇa's business. The other is a conditioned soul who meets a liberated soul and strictly follows him and is in the process of becoming liberated himself. He may also be a spiritual master. It's not an insult to say that. It's a realistic assessment. So persons have to be very honest about how they allow themselves to be worshiped.

A *guru* must be able to discipline his disciples and say, "No, I won't accept this offering." Lord Caitanya refused to accept Jagadānanda Paṇḍita's offering of aromatic lotion. Lord Caitanya would say, "If you do this, I will leave this place and you won't see Me again," and everyone would become afraid.

9. Q: What happens when the disciple sees his *guru* relating with his Godbrothers in a relative way?

SDG: If the Godbrothers and the *gurus* treat each other with the proper Vaiṣṇava etiquette, why should the disciple be disturbed? If my Godbrother sees me and we pay our obeisances to each other, that's proper. It is very nice. Then I may offer him a seat and he may offer me something. We're behaving in what you could call a relative way, but there's nothing insulting or envious about it. The disciple will relish the nectar of the relationship of the two Godbrothers. Actual Vaiṣṇava etiquette—which we're so much lacking—is full of such nice behavior. Sometimes there may not even be such sharp distinctions. Lord Caitanya would put sandalwood paste on everyone and give everyone a garland, yet they were all His disciples. All Vaiṣṇavas are worshipable. At the same time, of course, the disciple is relating in a special way to his spiritual master. We should see the varieties.

10. Q: In the past, the system was that only one *guru* would give *dīkṣa* in a large territory. Should this system change?

SDG: It's pretty much on the way out. It cannot be just one *guru*, but many, many *gurus*.

The fear was—again a misconception—that a single *guru* was needed for the purpose of management. The idea was that one needed the absolute force of the *guru* to motivate people; nothing else was good enough. When I was zonal *guru*, I remember visiting one of the temples, and the temple commander got up to make an announcement. He said the *saṅkīrtana* devotees should be sure to put gas in the vans before returning to the temple. So he invoked the highest authority he could: “Gurupāda says . . .” (although I never said it) “. . . that you have to do this.” The idea that all management has to be referred to the *dīkṣa-guru* of the zone in order to get anybody to serve Kṛṣṇa is pragmatism taken too far.

There was another kind of fear: “Gee, if there’s not a zonal *guru*, then other people will come and steal devotees from this temple and initiate them and take them to Africa or someplace.” Some abuses are possible, but those who visit temples and create disturbances are not going to be welcomed by the managers of the temples.

There should be openness for anybody to come, and if a temple devotee comes to see a visiting devotee as his *guru*, then that relationship should be encouraged. And if he is initiated by the visiting devotee, the *guru* should not take him away from the temple.

Upon initiating a disciple, the *guru* is not supposed to think, “I am the proprietor of this living entity, and I will tell him in so many ways that if he wants to please Kṛṣṇa, he has to please me. And I will tell him to come to such-and-such a place. . . .” All *gurus* have to behave—both *dīkṣa* and *śikṣā*—and not think that part of their initiating or instructing duty is to move disciples to places outside of their area of work to help them in their service. We just have to have the right Vaiṣṇava dealings. You have to be able to give instructions without pulling the person from his bona fide duty.

On the other hand, proper arrangements may be made for devo-

tees to work according to their propensity. If a devotee has an intellectual background and if he is inclined to work with an intellectual devotee, whom he considers to be his *guru*, then it is natural for him to do some work in that field. If he is qualified, it may be artificial to say he cannot.

Cooperation is a two-way street. It is not that the local authority says, "There may be *dīkṣa* and there may be *śikṣā*, but above all is the temple president." Temple managers have to also think in terms of the actual interest of the disciples or the devotees. We all have to be responsible.

We don't need a zonal *guru* to motivate devotees. We need sincere devotees who are dedicated to the *yātrā*, and the leading servants of the *yātrā* have to be able to inspire the devotees by their own dedication and example. The managers can speak in their own right—"When you bring the cars in at night, be sure there's some petrol in it." That's good enough because the devotees are servants of Kṛṣṇa. We hope to see healthy temple life in zones governed by the devotees who are actually working there. Why not see your *gurus* among those who are actually giving you so much regular instruction?

11. Q: How can an aspiring disciple develop a relationship with his *guru* that is based on something more than hearsay?

SDG: If you feel you have no access to a person except through hearsay, then how could you develop faith in him? To develop faith, you have to see whether the *guru* lives by what he says. It is not that he says, *trṇād api sunīcena*: "be very humble," and yet he doesn't act humbly. If you are not in a position to observe that, then you are a little too far away in relation to that person. There may be someone closer to you who is actually your spiritual master, but you were thinking that a spiritual master has to be something very big, and this person is not. In any case, you have to come to the point where you feel confident, not just relate by hearsay. It's partly your responsibility to come in closer to the circle of devotees so that you get more firsthand association with the spiritual master or with the person you were considering to be your spiritual master.

Everyone must take a spiritual master—*tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet*. It's not optional; you must do it if you want spiritual life. But it is too much institutionalization to tell people, "In this place the spiritual master is so-and-so, and when you are ready, he will become your spiritual master." We shouldn't do that. When you are ready in your heart, then you can accept your *guru*.

12. Q: How should one accept a *śikṣā-guru*?

SDG: It should not be done cheaply. We were discussing this earlier this morning. Pṛthu Prabhu, would you like to explain that?

Pṛthu dāsa: Someone who is a temple authority—temple commander, temple president, *saṅkīrtana* leader—is an institutional representative, and in that sense his instruction has to be obeyed. But the *śikṣā-guru*—and it may be a temple authority—is that person in which you actually have *śrāddha*, faith that he can give you spiritual instruction. To the *śikṣā-guru* there is *śrāddha* and obedience, whereas to the temple commander there may be only obedience.

SDG: That is an important point.

Your relationship with the *śikṣā-guru* is important, and it takes time to develop that kind of faith. Arjuna first heard from Kṛṣṇa in a friendly way. Then he finally accepted Kṛṣṇa as his instructing spiritual master. From that point on, whatever Kṛṣṇa said, Arjuna followed.

With the *dīkṣa-guru*, you develop faith by observing his qualities, and then in time you put yourself under his care. Then whatever he says, you do. The same standard is there with the *śikṣā-guru*. The relationship may be formalized by fire *yajña*, but even without a fire, when you decide that whatever he says you will do, then he is your *guru*. When he first met Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Prabhupāda accepted him as his *guru*, "Not officially," Prabhupāda said, "but within my heart."

13. Q: How do you worship the *śikṣā-guru*?

SDG: You may worship the *śikṣa-guru* in the same way you worship the *dīkṣa-guru*. We want to reserve worship in the temple for Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa, but one may keep his *śikṣā-guru*'s picture and offer flowers to him privately. But the real worship, the

essential worship, is hearing his instruction, offering your services to him and allowing him to direct you to Kṛṣṇa.

Some of these questions are rather intricate, especially because we have neglected the *śikṣā-guru* for so long. Here also the G.B.C., which has been so silent on this point, is obliged to give some general direction to the Society. I myself don't know the answers to all these questions, but I am satisfied that according to *śāstra*, *śikṣā-gurus* and *dikṣa-gurus* are identical manifestations. They can both bring you back to Godhead. They both give you the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*, they both take away your sins, so why shouldn't you worship them in a similar way? That's up to the disciple and the *guru* also.

14. Q. What is the need then of *dikṣa-guru*?

SDG: There has to be a standard for everyone in ISKCON to follow. This is an authorized movement. We want to avoid *sahajiyās* and unauthorized persons presenting themselves in different ways. Our initiation process implies many things. Second initiation implies that one is allowed to go on the altar. We need that formal recognition. A law student may say, "Well, the real essence is having the knowledge of what it is to be a lawyer. I have that now. I have taken courses and I've studied. What need is there of becoming certified?" But it's by formal recognition that the state authorizes you. So we need *dikṣa*.

15. Q. Who can give *dikṣa*?

SDG: The process for deciding who gives *dikṣa* must come from the G.B.C. It should be a high standard, but it shouldn't be too restricted by an official board. The granting of *dikṣa* should be governed primarily by *śāstra* and the devotee's faith.

When Prabhupāda describes *śikṣā-guru* in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, he says that in general, one who gives *śikṣā* later becomes the *dikṣa-guru*. After receiving instruction, when you feel serious about spiritual life, you go to that same teacher and say, "Now I am ready, please give me my initiation." It's a very natural thing. And he may say, "Yes, I think you are ready." He then continues to give *śikṣā*, and when you consider it, his real importance in your life is that he gives you *śikṣā*. If he never gave you *śikṣā*, how could he be prominent in

your life? To have a strong relationship with his disciple, even the *dikṣa-guru* gives *śikṣā*.

Everyone knows that to become a *guru*, one must be on a very high standard. One of the wrongs we have committed is that the system prevented Godbrothers from thinking they could become *guru*. Therefore, the Godbrothers were not thinking, "I have to really get it together. When Lord Caitanya says, 'Everyone should become a *guru*,' that means me." It is unfortunate that this impetus to becoming serious was taken away from the Godbrothers. But better late than never. Everyone should now take up this responsibility.

16. Q. Some *gurus* are *gr̥hasthas* and some are *sannyāsīs*. How should we offer our respects to the different *gurus*?

SDG: So many intricate questions of etiquette! One thing we should be careful about thinking is that the *guru* is in a completely different category than other devotees, and that he should therefore get better food, better clothing, better everything. It should not be that as soon as a devotee accepts disciples, then everything changes. One who has disciples should not feel offended if he is not offered special respect by those who are not his disciples. According to *Śikṣāṣṭakam*, "He offers respect to others without expecting any for himself." A devotee's worth is not judged by inquiring from him, "How many disciples do you have?" "Well, I have fifty disciples." "Oh, fifty! Please forgive me for not offering you silk cloth and bathing your feet. I didn't know you had so many disciples!" Rather, he should be honored for being a Vaiṣṇava. All devotees should be respected, not just the *sannyāsa-gurus*. *Kibā vipra, kibā nyāsi, śūdra kena naya/ yei kṛṣṇa tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya*.

If we give special honor to some, it should be inspired by their exemplary qualities. Haridāsa Ṭhākura said to Advaita Ācārya, "Why are you honoring me by giving me the first plate of *prasādam* in the *śrāddha*? I'm so low born." Advaita Ācārya said, "I will argue with anyone who says that I can't give you the *prasādam* because you're better than many, many *brāhmaṇas*. You're a Vaiṣṇava." Advaita Ācārya was inspired to serve Haridāsa for his Vaiṣṇava qualities. And if someone said, "This is not good. You're offering too much wor-

ship,” Advaita Ācārya would become fiery. So no one should say, “This is a new era. Now we don’t offer devotees respect.”

17. Q. Is there a possible problem with a devotee flickering from one *guru* to another?

SDG: You mean someone might say, “Lately I have been feeling inspired by *guru* so-and-so, and although previously another *guru* was my life and soul, now I think it’s so-and-so.” Yes, there may be new loopholes for the loophole finders, new opportunities for cheating that weren’t there before. But that’s not what it means to take a *guru*. If you accept the *guru*, then you follow him.

It is not harmful for one to be inspired by someone other than his *guru*. For example, we may at a certain point in our devotional service start reading the poems of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, or we may appreciate more the achievement of a certain *ācārya* than we did before. But that doesn’t mean that suddenly our service changes. It just means that our devotional service becomes enriched. We may have many *śikṣā-gurus*, but that does not mean that one should feel pulled in contrary directions. We must conduct ourselves seriously as one family. If we can’t do that, then our movement cannot succeed. If in the name of guruship a devotee takes advantage and starts collecting disciples, he will fall down. And if a disciple is so whimsical that he keeps changing authorities, he will not make it either.

18. Q. What happens when a devotee who took *dīkṣa* prematurely later comes to see a temple authority as his *śikṣā-guru*? Does he undergo any formality?

SDG: I am a little reluctant to talk too much about *dīkṣa/śikṣā* because there has not been an overwhelming consensus about it. What I am trying to do is bring out of the closet the clear śāstric conclusion that *śikṣā-guru* is equal to *dīkṣa-guru*. This is something we have repressed, but I don’t think it’s controversial. Some details may not be clear. But this much is very clear. So I would like to keep it simple.

My understanding is that the *śikṣā* is informal. There’s not a mandatory *yajña* like in *dīkṣa*. But you receive the instruction, which is the heart of the disciple-spiritual master relationship.

Someone may say that the important thing is *dīkṣa*, but does he make it important in his own life? Unfortunately, we have initiated disciples who don't take *dīkṣa* seriously. In either case—*dīkṣa* or *śikṣā*—formality is not important. What is important is following with faith and determination.

19. Q. How should we feel about those devotees who worship their *guru* in a very opulent way?

SDG: We just present the scriptures and present our reasons and the assembly of Vaiṣṇavas can decide what is right and what is wrong.

There has been a kind of competition in opulence of *guru* worship. Prabhupāda used to note that the Americans are competitive, and he tried to dovetail it. He created a transcendental competition to distribute as many books as possible. So now we are trying to create a transcendental competition in humility and see who can outdo the other.

We don't want to cause confusion in another place, and yet we can compete. If in some zone there's tremendous book distribution or they're building a beautiful temple, it's a signal to the others: "This is what we are doing for Prabhupāda. What are you doing?" There are obvious ways to excel, and one can also excel in humility by demonstrating that a spiritual master doesn't have to accept all the paraphernalia of worship on the level of Prabhupāda. One can make the distinction very clear by reserving titles for Prabhupāda. And one can apologize to Godbrothers for acting as if one had become their *guru*. We can compete in that way.

20. Q. Can a disciple take instruction from someone other than his *guru*, or would that not be chaste?

SDG: If *guru* is one, then it's not unchaste to take instruction from different *gurus*. A *guru* should not show in any way, directly or indirectly, that he is displeased with his disciple for being inspired by a bona fide Vaiṣṇava. As long as you do not pursue it superficially, if you actually do feel deep appreciation for different devotees, why should your spiritual master regard it as unchaste? The spiritual master wants to see his disciples advance as much as possible, and if that

Appendix

The following is an excerpt from the Third Chapter (Third Shower) of Madhurya Kādambinī by Viśvanātha Cakravārti Ṭhākura, translated by Sarvabhāvana dāsa.

Sādhū-nindā is the first of the ten *nāma-aparādhas*. *Nindā* in this context is synonymous with *dveṣa* (hate or envy) and *droha* (malice). If by some accident one commits offense against a *sādhū* or devotee, then he must immediately be deeply repentant and cry out, “Oh, what have I done? I am so fallen, I have committed this offense against a devotee of the Lord!” The aphorism applicable here is, “A person burning in the fire of offense can become peaceful only by walking through the fire of repentance.” The offender must feel deep within that, “I must go and fall at his feet and try to please him and propitiate him.” In this frame of mind the offender must by any means beg forgiveness from the devotee.

For some reason if the devotee is not easily and quickly propitiated then the offender should endeavor long and hard to this end, until he is successful. However, if the offense is of a very serious nature and the devotee is still angry and upset even after long and repeated attempts, or in the case of a sudden and unexpected demise of the devotee, then only one recourse is available to the offender: He has to give up all other activities and engage in continuous chanting of the holy names. He must repent: “I have been offensive to this devotee and for this I must enter a million hells and suffer for millions of lifetimes.” Not that the offender rationalizes, “The pro-

cess of chanting the *mahā-mantra* is the most potent means for purification. What is the need to repeatedly fall at someone's feet and admit one's mistake?" Also for a person committing *nāma-aparādha*, the best means of exoneration is to take shelter of the holy name: "So let me take shelter of chanting," and thus begin to chant continuously. But this sort of chanting is definitely not going to extirpate his offenses; instead he will be caught up in another kind of *nāma-aparādha*, i.e., committing sins on the strength of the holy name (*namno balad yasya hi papa buddhi*).

The offender may again think: The scriptures describe a *sādhū* or devotee as one who is compassionate, nonenvious, tolerant of all kinds of hate and malice. Therefore if one is offensive only to such a devotee does one incur sin or offense. And those devotees who are not graced with such saintly qualities are not really considered as *sādhū*s or devotees. Hence one cannot commit any offense against them. In reply to this argument, the scriptures explain that a person may be engaged in the most abominable kinds of activities against the scriptural injunctions—he may be a cheater and a thief—but if he is attached to performing devotional service, then he is to be accepted as a *sādhū* or devotee. Therefore, just because a devotee falls due to weakness, he should not be criticized. One should not deny his status as a devotee.

Further, it is explained that if one commits grievous offenses against any elevated Vaiṣṇava or the *mahā-bhāgavata* Vaiṣṇava, that advanced devotee does not become offended due to his tolerant and compassionate nature. Still the repenting offender should approach that Vaiṣṇava and beg forgiveness.

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