

Reply to Kundali Prabhu

by *Krishnakant*



In this paper we will be responding to selected comments that [Kundali prabhu](#) has made in chapters 9-11 in his book 'Is Discrimination Jnana-Yoga'? These chapters deal with [Kundali's views](#) on the so called '[ritvik](#) philosophy'.

The first point to note about his treatise is that most of it is based on his speculations of what the so-called '[ritvik](#)' theory is, rather than what it really is. He never quotes from any [ritvik](#) source but simply takes a stab as to what this philosophy is supposed to say. In particular his comments do not in any way deal with the points brought out in the '[Final Order](#)', the definitive [ritvik](#) position paper. This is only to be expected since his book was written before the 'Final Order' was released. This does however make his chapters on the [ritvik](#) issue largely redundant, since they do not deal with the actual [ritvik](#) position, but his supposed speculations on the subject.

The comments that Kundali prabhu makes will be boxed, and from now on Kundali prabhu shall be referred to as the author.

"There is no functional difference in using the word [ritvik](#) guru or guru. Thus we find no sastric support for the concept of [ritvik](#) guru. Either one is guru or is not." (Chapter 9, p47)

Immediately the author has displayed his ignorance on the subject. The 'Final Order' nor Srila Prabhupada ever use the term '[ritvik-guru](#)'. So the points the author makes above may well be correct but they have no relevance at all to the actual [ritvik](#) position that makes no reference to a '[ritvik-guru](#)'. It DOES make reference to '[ritvik](#)'s' who are priests who administer aspects of the initiation ceremony on behalf of Srila Prabhupada, similar to what was being done when Srila Prabhupada was on the planet. Thus in this situation, the **ACTUAL** situation, there **IS** a functional difference between the [diksa guru](#), and [the ritvik](#), who is a name-giving priest.

"[ritvik](#)-vadis say that Srila Prabhupada, as a great *acarya*, can change things, can make innovations where necessary even if those innovations are not found in philosophy." (Chapter 9, p48)

Since the 'Final Order' does **NOT** say this ever, again this objection is totally irrelevant.

"An *acarya* cannot change fundamental principles of the *parampara siddhanta*. An *acarya* is the *acarya* because he upholds those fundamental principles. A fundamental principle of Krsna Consciousness is that one must have a bona fide guru coming in disciplic succession who is fixed in the absolute truth, *srotriyam brahma-nistham*. One must please Krsna by service and submission to that person. This is an essential principle of *vaisnava siddhanta*, which has the full support of *sastra*. Since the authority of the *acarya* rests on the *sastra*, how can he change the *sastra*? The notion is preposterous." (Chapter 9, p49-50)

Since the 'Final Order' is 100% in agreement with the above statements, again this has nothing at all to do with demonstrating the supposed flaws in the [ritvik](#) position. The 'Final Order' advocates, to use the author's words, 'have a bona fide guru coming in disciplic succession who is fixed in the absolute truth, *srotriyam brahma-nistham*'. They share this person with the author himself. His name is Srila Prabhupada.

“Thus instead of proposing practical solutions to the problems (or just help to define them so they can be addressed), they advocate that we abandon the *parampara* philosophy about guru and adopt *ritvik-vada* in its place.” (Chapter 9, p50)

Since the ‘Final Order’ does no such thing, this is just another unsubstantiated allegation from the author. The author is unable to state which aspect of the ‘*parampara* philosophy about guru’ we are advocating should be abandoned. We uphold the *parampara* philosophy about guru, which is that one must accept a guru coming in the line of disciplic succession. The author must demonstrate why he can accept Srila Prabhupada as a guru in the *parampara*, and nobody else can, even though Srila Prabhupada ordered his continued role as an initiator through the [July 9th letter](#), sent to all GBC’s and temple presidents.

“So one who can explain the *sastra* with consistent logic and reason, without adding or subtracting anything, and whose conduct is clearly based on religious principles can be guru.” (Chapter 9, p51)

Again we do not see the relevance of the above comment to the position of the ‘Final Order’, since there is no **dis**-agreement. However for ISKCON, he only authorised a *ritvik* system, and did not authorise any of his disciples to initiate.

“*ritvik-vada* is not our philosophy. [...] There are matters of taste in our philosophy, which may be adjusted according to time, place, and circumstances, but philosophical core principles, such as guru-tattva cannot be adjusted.” (Chapter 10, p53)

Since the application of the system as outlined in the [July 9th letter](#), requires no change in the philosophy of *guru-tattva*, the author has again either not understood the *ritvik* position. In which case, in future he should find out what it is **BEFORE** he attacks it, (he has received the ‘Final Order’, but refuses to read it claiming it is ‘offensive to the trees’). - Or just deliberately mis-represented the true position, which is cheating. Either way we have been asking for years, if anyone could please locate which principle in Srila Prabhupada’s teachings, the application of his July 9th letter, ‘adjusts’. To date, no one including the author, has been able to locate such a principle.

“If I were a newcomer I would still think it strange after reading Srila Prabhupada’s books and finding not one sentence supporting this practice (the *ritvik* system).” (Chapter 10, p53)

Since the books stress again and again, that one must approach a bona fide guru in the disciplic succession. How can the author state that there is no such support for taking initiation from Srila Prabhupada. Unless he claims that Srila Prabhupada is not a bona fide guru in the disciplic succession. The books give no restriction that the Bona Fide guru must be physically on the planet. If such a restriction exists the author must produce it. Srila Prabhupada satisfies all the requirements that the books give for the bona fide guru who must be approached. The Bhagavad Gita actually gives a list of the *parampara* in the front, and Srila Prabhupada is listed as the most current representative. On the back cover of the same book, Srila Prabhupada is mentioned as the ‘**current representative**’ of the disciplic succession.

“By backing an idea that has no sastric support they are in tamo guna, yet they feel that as long as ISKCON does not get behind the *ritvik* understanding ISKCON is off.” (Chapter 10, p54)

Please see the answer above. Srila Prabhupada’s books **DO** support the notion that he can be approached as a bona fide guru in the disciplic succession.

“They have appointed themselves the sole arbiters of who is qualified and who is not. Without their approval, no one will ever be qualified, although they humbly admit that they are themselves are not qualified.” (Chapter 10, p54)

Since the ‘Final Order’ actually states that there could be many maha-bhagavatas in ISKCON right now, this is another

irrelevant point. The issue is simply to follow whatever system Srila Prabhupada has left for us. In this case he authorised only the *ritvik* system as given in the July 9th letter.

“Becoming guru does not necessitate esoteric qualifications. [...] Sastra is our eyes.” (Chapter 10, p57)

Since again this does not in anyway deal with or contradict any of the points made in the ‘Final Order’, this is again more irrelevancy. (As regards the qualifications of a guru, we simply repeat what Srila Prabhupada [states](#) in Madhya Lila, 24:330 - that one MUST be a *maha-bhagavata*.)

“We have no precedent in our tradition where devotees accept as diksa-guru, a vaisnava who is no longer present. The tad-viddhi pranipatena verse is clearly speaking of a living guru, for who else can we inquire submissively from? (Chapter 11, p58)

The fact that there is no precedent for an activity does not make it un bona fide. There is no precedent for accepting a vaisnava guru who is not Indian? So what. The issue is does it contravene a *sastric* principle?

The *tad viddhi pranipatena* verse **CANNOT** be speaking of a ‘living’ guru, since it speaks of the DISCIPLE inquiring submissively. Since the author is a disciple of Srila Prabhupada, maybe he can tell us whom HE has been inquiring from submissively for the last 21 years?

“But one can argue with equal force, and with sastric support, that ‘you are following the spiritual master represented by some priest or some clergyman in the line of Jesus Christ’, is simply an endorsement of the *parampara* system, which is what it is. Prabhupada is not endorsing *ritvik* here.” (Chapter 11, p59)

Since the word ‘*ritvik*’ actually **MEANS** priest, the author is rather stuck here. And since the *ritvik* system is in line with *parampara*, the author is correct that the above quote does endorse the *parampara* system.

“Without sastric support the whole *ritvik* philosophy collapses. No serious follower of Prabhupada would accept something that has no sastric support as a conclusive truth about the process of devotional service” (Chapter 11, p 62)

We have already answered this point earlier. The process of accepting Srila Prabhupada as a bona fide guru in the *parampara* is fully supported by *sastra*.

“Prabhupada said guru must be an *uttama-adhikari*; since no one is an *uttama-adhikari* we cannot have gurus. This is their logic. Do they understand the meaning of *uttama-adhikari*.” (Chapter 11, p 63)

This is another mis-representation. We **NEVER** say the above. We state that we must follow Srila Prabhupada’s last instructions on how initiations would proceed, which were given on July 9th. We also state that there maybe many *uttama adhikaris* in the movement. But Srila Prabhupada only authorised the *ritvik* system. He never authorised this system to be disbanded, and replaced with other *diksa* gurus.

The author then gives many quotes trying to show how ‘simple’ it is to be an *uttama adhikari*, and how it does not require any ‘mystical qualifications’. Again this is irrelevant to the topic at hand, since we have never claimed that someone is not, or never will be, an *uttama adhikari*. We simply state that we must follow whatever Srila Prabhupada authorised. This simple following of Srila Prabhupada’s orders is also not a ‘mystical’ qualification, but quite easily achieved. We are sure all the legions of *uttama adhikaris* will have no problem following the July 9th directive issued to the whole movement, instead of trying to remove Srila Prabhupada as the initiating guru for ISKCON.

The author also repeatedly alleges that Srila Prabhupada stated that anyone who passed some examinations was supposed to be an initiating guru in ISKCON once Srila Prabhupada had left:

"How can we tell who knows the science of Krsna? Srila Prabhupada's solution to this was to have four examinations, culminating in the *bhaktivedanta* degree. Following this, his disciples would be eligible to initiate, assuming that by their preaching they could create faith in others." (Chapter 10, p52) "Also, Prabhupada said, in one of the few direct instructions he ever gave about the eligibility to be guru in ISKCON, that one who passes the four exams - *bhakti-sastri* up to *bhaktivedanta* - would be eligible to become guru." (Chapter 11, p59)

To support these allegations he offers the following letters:

"Another examination will be held sometimes in 1971 on the four books, Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, Teachings of Lord Caitanya, and Nectar of Devotion. One who will pass this examination will be awarded with the title of *bhaktivedanta*. I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of *bhaktivedanta*, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of *bhaktivedanta* will be allowed to initiate disciples. Maybe by 1975, all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate and increase the numbers of the generations. That is my program. So we should not simply publish these books for reading by outsiders, but our students must be well versed in all of our books so that we can be prepared to defeat all opposing parties in the matter of self-realization."

(Letter to Hamsaduta, 1968) (Chapter 11, p 64)

"I have also suggested for the GBC's consideration, that we introduce a system of examinations for the devotees to take. Sometimes there is criticism that our men are not sufficiently learned, especially the brahmanas. Of course second initiation does not depend upon passing an examination. How one has moulded his life--chanting, attending arati, etc., these are essential. Still, brahmana means pandita. Therefore I am suggesting examinations. *bhakti-sastri*--(for all brahmanas) based on Bhagavad-gita, Sri Isopanisad, Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction, and all the small paperbacks. *bhakti-vaibhava*--the above plus first six cantos of S.B. *bhaktivedanta*--the above plus cantos 7-12 S.B. *bhakti-Sarvabhauma*--the above plus Caitanya-Caritamrta."

(Letter to Svarupa Damodara 1976) (Chapter 11, p 65)

Regarding the examinations, the idea is that anyone, after studying the books, who wants to gain the title of *bhakti-sastri*, can take the exam. This is academic. Just like a brahmana with sastric knowledge and a brahmana without. It is optional--one who wants may take. The real purpose is that our men should not be neglectful of the philosophy. The examinations will begin on Gaura Purnima, 1977, not this year, so there is no reason why any of the devotees should give up their normal engagement.

(Letter to Satsvarupa, 1976)(Chapter 11, p65)

However a close look at these letters reveal that these exams were not intended to certify 'initiating gurus' but simply to improve the philosophical understanding of the devotees, who are supposed to be Brahmins:

1. In the letter to Svarupa Damodara Srila Prabhupada states that passing the exams is not even necessary for getting second initiation.
2. In the letter to Satsvarupa, Srila Prabhupada states that the exams are just 'academic', and they are 'optional'.
3. Finally in the first letter to 'Hamsaduta' where the word 'initiate' is actually mentioned. Srila Prabhupada is actually talking about them initiating in his own **PRESENCE** - 'By 1975' - so he was only talking about them acting as *ritviks*, since one cannot be an initiating guru in the presence of the Spiritual master.

Thus the author's allegation that these exams certify 'initiating gurus' is completely false. Below we present a more elaborate explanation that is taken from the 'Final Order' and ['Best Not To Accept Disciples'](#):

"By 1975, all of those who have passed all of the above examinations will be specifically empowered to initiate and increase the number of the Krsna Consciousness population."

(SP Letter to Kirtanananda, 12/1/69)

Does the above statement validate the termination of the final order on initiation?

Since this is an attempt to terminate the *ritvik* system through the use of personal letters, we shall invoke here Srila Prabhupada's 'law of disciplic succession'. The first part of the 'law' states that a disciple must not act as initiating *acarya* in his own guru's physical presence. Since this was the 'law', clearly the above letter could not be referring to Srila Prabhupada's disciples initiating on their own behalf: **Srila Prabhupada was still on the planet in 1975**. We can therefore only conclude that he was already contemplating some sort of 'officiating' initiation system as early as 1968. By 1975, Srila Prabhupada had indeed 'empowered', or authorised, devotees such as Kirtanananda to chant on beads and conduct initiations on his behalf. The above letter appears then to be predicting the future use of representatives for the purpose of initiation. Later he called these representatives 'ritviks', and formalised their function in the July 9th order. Again, it would be foolhardy to suggest that Srila Prabhupada was actually authorising Kirtanananda to act as a *sampradaya* initiating *acarya* as long as he passed a few exams.

The above letters cannot be used to replace, supplant or modify the July 9th policy document since the vast majority of the recipients of that directive would not even have known of the existence of the above letters.

1. Srila Prabhupada was still physically present in 1975; therefore he could only be referring to some type of representational system like *ritvik*. There is no evidence that Srila Prabhupada had serious plans to leave the planet before 1975. Otherwise Srila Prabhupada would be proposing to set up a system that violates the 'Law of Disciplic Succession'.
2. An examination to determine qualification in itself is not absurd. If they are used to select *ritviks* that is fine by us, since *ritviks* do not need to be *mahabhagavatas*, authorised to initiate their own disciples by their predecessor *acarya*.

The argument is made that the phrase 'increase the number of generations' in the letter to Hamsaduta proves that Srila Prabhupada was talking about disciples in the future having their own disciples. However in using the term 'generations' Srila Prabhupada may have been talking in a physical sense, i.e., future generations of humanity. This is supported by the fact that in the letter to Kirtanananda, the phrase 'Krsna Conscious population' is used instead of 'generations'. 'Krsna Conscious population' merely means all future participants of the Krsna Consciousness movement - not only future members of the disciplic succession. The dictionary definition of the word 'generations' is not 'disciplic succession'. In any case the whole argument falls flat since nothing even approaching a M.A.S.S. type system was ever set up by Srila Prabhupada before, during or after 1975.

What did happen by 1975 is that Srila Prabhupada had empowered various individuals to carry out initiations and chant on beads etc., but on his behalf. This system was later formalised on July 9th 1977 and left to run henceforward. Perhaps it was this system that he was alluding to in the above two letters.

Conclusion

We can see that the author's comments on the so-called '*ritvik*' issue are at best ill-informed and complete misrepresentations. They offer no evidence to terminate Srila Prabhupada's own instructions that the system should continue, nor does the author offer a SINGLE quote from *sastra* demonstrating the *ritvik* system is unauthorised or breaks any sastric injunctions. In fact the author's chapters on the *ritvik* issue are noticeable for the almost complete absence of quotations of any kind. We would strongly suggest that the author first study the 'Final Order' to correctly ascertain what the *ritvik* position actually is.