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“It is best not to accept any disciples. One has to become purified at home by chanting the Hare Krsna *maha-mantra* and preaching the principles enunciated by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Thus one can become a spiritual master and be freed from the contamination of material life.”

(Madhya, 7:130)



by Krishnakant

A RESPONSE TO Bhakti CHARU SWAMI'S ARTICLE: "Srila Prabhupada Defeats *Rtvik*"

There follows a response to the above mentioned article which appeared in the periodical "*Spiritual Connections*" Vol 13 Jan-April '96. We will quote the main sections of the article then offer some thoughts. The article's title has been abbreviated to SPDR and the name of it's author to BCS. The article appeared on pages 6-8 of the above mentioned periodical.

"When Srila Prabhupada spoke about who will initiate after His Divine Grace's departure, he named some of his disciples, but he suggested they should not initiate while he was present on this planet. As long as he was present, they could initiate on his behalf. At that point, Tamal Krsna Gosvami asked Srila Prabhupada, "So, will they be like *Rtvik*?" Srila Prabhupada answered, "Yes, like *Rtvik*." Page 6. SPDR

The above account is basically a fabrication. BCS claims that the above conversation transpired at the point when Srila Prabhupada 'named some of his disciples'. Disciples were only specifically named on July 7th 1977, where 9 were selected by Srila Prabhupada, and then on July 9th where the number rose to 11. However, contrary to BCS's claim, on neither occasion did Srila Prabhupada make any reference to the following stipulations:

- a) That the named disciples will only initiate on Srila Prabhupada's behalf in his presence.
- b) That they will initiate on their own behalf after Srila Prabhupada's departure.

Not only are points a) and b) not mentioned on these occasions, but Srila Prabhupada states the precise opposite:

Tamal Krsna: These men (the 9 named). They can also do second initiation. So there's no need for devotees to write to you for first and second initiation. They can write to the man nearest them. But all these persons are still your disciples. Anybody who would give initiation is doing so on your behalf.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes

[S.P. Conversation July 8th 1977.]

'Now that Srila Prabhupada has named these representatives, Temple Presidents may henceforward send recommendation for first and second initiation to whichever of these eleven is nearest their temple..The newly initiated devotees are disciples of his Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada'

[July 9th 1977 letter to all GBC's and Temple Presidents]

As can be seen Srila Prabhupada only states that future disciples would be his. He says nothing about ever stopping the *rtvik* system; rather he uses the word '*henceforward*', which means from now on.. He also says nothing about those named ever becoming initiator gurus.

According to BCS's account, at the point of naming these disciples Tamal Krsna asked: "*So, will they be like Rtvik?*"

Anyone who examines the 7th July conversation, and the resulting July 9th letter, will see that the above simply never happened, it is pure invention. A similar exchange did take place, but this was two months before any disciples were named.

This was on May 28th 1977 when Satsvarupa Maharaja asked the following question:

Satsvarupa Maharaja: Then our next question concerns initiations in the future, particularly at that time when you are no longer with us. We want to know how first and second initiations would be conducted.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. I shall recommend some of you. After this is settled up. I shall recommend some of you to act as officiating *acarya*.

Tamal Krsna: Is that called *Rtvik-acarya*?

Srila Prabhupada: *Rtvik*. Yes.

Thus when asked a direct question about the system of initiation for after his departure, Srila Prabhupada clearly answers that it will be *ritvik*. This completely contradicts both BCS's stipulations - a) & b).

Further on in the conversation Satsvarupa again asks Srila Prabhupada about the ownership of these future disciples:

Satsvarupa Maharaja: so they may also be considered your disciples?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, they are disciples, but consider.... who...

Although some people have tried to speculate about what Srila Prabhupada might have said before Tamal Krsna interjected, the initial answer is quite clear. **"yes, they are disciples...."** If BCS had any hope at all of supporting a) & b) stipulations, Srila Prabhupada would have had to answer: **"No, They are not disciples..."** As can be seen, Srila Prabhupada's answer once more completely contradicts both a) and b) which are the very foundation of BCS's thesis.

It appears that BCS has got various bits of conversation all mixed up and has somehow merged and twisted them into a form which coincidentally supports the '*multiple acarya successor system*', or M.A.S.S., currently favoured by the GBC. Whilst we are sure this was not a deliberate act of deceit, he would be well advised to carefully examine what Srila Prabhupada actually said, not what he thinks he should have said, or may have said, based on imperfect speculation.

Further on in the May conversation Srila Prabhupada does mention his disciples being gurus. But he says that this will only occur when he orders:

Srila Prabhupada: When I order you become guru, he becomes regular guru. That's all.

Obviously this conversation could not have been the order itself, since in the conversation Srila Prabhupada is clearly saying that there will only be gurus when he orders them. What is certain is that Srila Prabhupada was making known his intention to appoint *Rtviks* for after his departure. On July 9th 1977 he did precisely that.

"...Srila Prabhupada suggested that his disciples in different areas could give them initiation on his behalf. As long as he was present, they could give initiation on his behalf, but after his departure they would initiate in their own right and the disciples would be theirs." Page 6 SPDR

This would appear to be another invented conversation, unless BCS has access to tapes and documents previously unseen. Again he seems to be creatively merging that which transpired on May 28th, July 8th and July 9th 1977. As already shown in all three instances Srila Prabhupada does nothing but contradict BCS's thesis. The only thing Srila Prabhupada says about the *Rtviks* is that they are for after his departure (May 28th) and that they will act '*henceforward*' (July 9th order); and that someone could only be a guru if he specifically ordered them to be one-which he never did.

Perhaps BCS is alluding to the following line in the May 28th conversation:

Srila Prabhupada: "...in my presence one should not become guru, so on my behalf!"

However all this states is that the role of guru cannot be taken in his presence. It does not say:

1. That after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance the named disciple can automatically cease his *Rtvik* duties.

Or

2. That on ceasing his *ritvik* duties he can immediately become a *diksa* guru, regardless of whether he has been ordered to do so.

Nowhere in the May 28th conversation does Srila Prabhupada come even close to stating 1) and 2) above. Nor does he in any other conversation or document. At least none that has come to light over the past 19 years.

"Later on, someone came up with the theory that Srila Prabhupada wanted his disciples to give initiation on his behalf as *ritvik acaryas*, and that all the initiates would be Srila Prabhupada's disciples. As a matter of fact, Srila Prabhupada was very much against this concept. At one point he mentioned this was the flaw of Christianity. Christianity does not accept the system of a present guru. They think Jesus is the only one and no one is coming to give initiation, or no one is coming as *acarya*. Therefore, there is no system of continuation of spiritual knowledge..." P.6 SPDR

It is hard to know where to begin when one is confronted by a passage of such unmitigated nonsense as this.

Obviously BCS has not studied what Srila Prabhupada said about Christianity, and so instead has invented more things that Srila Prabhupada never said.

- Where did Srila Prabhupada ever state that Christianity was flawed because it follows a similar system to *ritvik*?

Never. He had no criticism of accepting Lord Jesus as one's spiritual Master. His only criticism was that Christians were not following Christ's teachings:

Girl devotee: Is Jesus in the *parampara*?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. He says, "there is God. I am son of God". That is *parampara*.

(B.G. Lectures '75)

Tamal Krishna: Can a Christian in this age, without a Spiritual Master, but by reading the Bible, and following Jesus's words, reach the...

Srila Prabhupada: When you read the Bible, you follow the Spiritual Master. How can you say without. As soon as you read the Bible, that means you are following the instruction of Lord Jesus Christ. That means that you are following the Spiritual Master.

Tamal Krishna: I was referring to a living Spiritual Master.

Srila Prabhupada: Spiritual Master is not question of...Spiritual Master is eternal...[...] As you say that "by reading bible", when you read Bible that means you are following the Spiritual Master represented by some priest or some clergyman in the line of Lord Jesus Christ.

(Morning Walk, Seattle, 2.10.68.)

Srila Prabhupada: "...Or the Christians are following Christ, a great personality. Mahajano yena gatah sa panthah. You follow some mahajana, great personality..You follow one *acarya*, like Christians, they follow Christ, *acarya*. The Mohammedans, they follow *acarya*, Mohammed. That is good. You must follow some *acarya*..*Evam parampara-praptam*."

(Conv. Melbourne, May 20, 1975)

Srila Prabhupada: "This is called *guru-parampara*, disciplic succession..This is our process. We are getting knowledge from Krsna, the most perfect. Or you get knowledge from Jesus Christ, that is also perfect, because source is perfect."

(Conv. Germany 19.6.74)

Srila Prabhupada: Actually, one who is guided by Jesus will certainly get liberation.

(Perfect Questions Perfect Answers chapter 9)

"If Mohammed as the servant of God and Lord Jesus Christ is the son of God, then where is the break of the disciplic succession? After all the disciplic succession is beginning from God, so how do you find that there is no disciplic succession?"

(SPL to Vrndavana Candra, 19/7/70).

"...the conclusion is that the devotees of Lord JC are promoted to the heavenly planets"

(SPL to Bhagavan Das, 213170)

BCS's understanding of Christianity, and how bona fide *acaryas* operate, differs so greatly from Srila Prabhupada's teachings it is actually frightening. BCS seems to believe that an *acarya* can only be 'current' or accessible if he is physically present.

Srila Prabhupada taught the exact opposite:

"Physical presence is immaterial"

(S.P. Lecture 19.1.67)

"...one has to associate with liberated persons not directly, physically, but by understanding, through philosophy and logic..."

(S.B. 3.31.48)

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

(S.P.L. 19.1.67)

"Those who are proposing a *Rtvik* system of initiation, are actually proposing a system which was condemned by Srila Prabhupada himself. What they are saying is that Srila Prabhupada is the guru and no-one is qualified to become a guru". SPDR Page 7.

Firstly we are not proposing a *ritvik* system, Srila Prabhupada proposed it in the final initiation policy document of July 9th 1977. This policy document was countersigned personally by Srila Prabhupada; we had nothing to do with it.

Secondly we do not say that no-one is qualified, we simply say that everyone in ISKCON must follow Srila Prabhupada's instructions. In fact the more qualified someone is the more they will want to follow Srila Prabhupada's direct order. Nowhere in scripture does it say that once someone becomes qualified he must immediately become a *diksa* guru in direct defiance of his Spiritual master's order.

"From Brahma down to Srila Prabhupada, there was a chain of disciplic succession, but now it is going to stop."
SPDR Page 7.

Whoever said anything about stopping the chain of disciplic succession? The *parampara* system is eternal and is personally maintained by the Supreme Lord Himself. According to Srila Prabhupada the *sankirtan* movement, and hence ISKCON will only last another 9,500 years. Against eternity 9,500 years is nothing, a mere blip in cosmic time. This is the period during which Srila Prabhupada shall remain the current *acarya*, at least within ISKCON. Previous *acaryas* have remained current for thousands or even millions of years so it really is nothing to be alarmed about:

'...we find in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that the *Gita* was taught to the sungod, some millions of years ago, but Krishna has mentioned only three names in this *parampara* system-namely, Vivisvan, Manu, and Iksvaku; and so these gaps do not hamper from understanding the *parampara* system. We have to pick up from the prominent *acaryas*, and follow from him..We have to pick up from the authority of the *acharya* in whatever *sampradaya* we belong to.'

[SPL Dayananda 684-12]

"He is very much in the centre, but those who came to ISKCON after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance pastime have to be initiated by a present guru".
SPDR page 7.

Again this is pure fabrication. Nowhere did Srila Prabhupada ever state:

a) That he will not be accessible for initiation after his '*disappearance pastime*'

or

b) That once he is gone people must select a physically '*present*' *diksa* guru.

- If Srila Prabhupada did issue instructions like this to all the GBC and Temple Presidents, how is it that no-one has ever seen them?

Perhaps BCS can share with us these important documents so the matter can be put to rest.

"The immediate spiritual master is the representative of Narada Muni; There is no difference between the instructions of Narada Muni and those of the present Spiritual master. Both Narada Muni and the present Spiritual Master speak the same teachings of Krsna" (S.B 6.5.22)
Page 7 SPDR.

It is interesting that BCS should emphasise how: '*Both Narada Muni and the present Spiritual Master speak the same teachings as Krsna*'. We hope he will bare this in mind when he next speaks about Christianity and the system our '*immediate spiritual master*' put in place for initiation.

Does Srila Prabhupada teach that to act as the 'immediate' or 'current link' one must be physically present?

- a) The term '*current link*' is only used in one passage in all of Srila Prabhupada's books; there is no reference to physical presence adjacent to the term. Were physical presence essential it would certainly have been mentioned.
- b) The dictionary definitions of the word '*current*' do not refer to physical presence.
- c) Dictionary definitions of the word '*current*' can be readily applied to a physically absent spiritual master and his books:

'most recent', 'commonly known, practised or accepted', 'widespread', 'circulating and valid at present'.

(Collins English Dictionary).

As far as we can see all the above definitions can be applied to Srila Prabhupada and his books.

- d) Srila Prabhupada stated that it was to be his books that were to be the lawbooks for the next 10,000 years. It follows therefore that Srila Prabhupada wanted that the message of the *Bhagavatam* would come from him only, since we will only be reading his books. But Srila Prabhupada also states that the message of the *Bhagavatam* must come from the 'current link' in the chain of disciplic succession.

'...in order to receive the real message of *Srimad Bhagavatam* one should approach the current link, or spiritual master, in the chain of disciplic succession.'

(S.B. 2.9.7)

Thus Srila Prabhupada must be that 'current link'.

- e) Srila Prabhupada also uses the term '*immediate spiritual master*' as synonymous with '*current link*'. In fact BCS has himself quoted the term in the above quote. However as the definition of the word '*immediate*' below demonstrates, there is no need for someone to be '*physically*' present to be immediate:

'Without intervening medium', 'closest or most direct in effect or relationship.'

(Collins English Dictionary).

These definitions lend validity to a direct relationship with Srila Prabhupada without the need for intermediaries, again all regardless of physical presence/absence.

- f) Since there are examples of disciples initiating when their guru was still on the planet, there would appear to be no direct relationship between current link status and someone's physical presence or absence. In other words if it is possible to be the next current link even whilst your own guru is physically present, why should it not be possible for a departed *acarya* to remain the current link.

In conclusion we see no evidence to suggest that the emergence of a current link is based on physical or non-physical considerations.

"All the *acaryas* in our line are *nitya siddhas*, eternal beings. But they are not present on the planet at this time. Therefore, those living entities who are on this planet now cannot be linked up to them directly, they need a via media and that is the guru.." Page 7 SPDR

We agree that all the initiating *acaryas* in our line are *nitya siddhas*, eternally liberated souls. According to Srila Prabhupada only a *mahabhagavat* can initiate (**CC Madhya lila 24. 330**), and even then only when authorised.

- But where does Srila Prabhupada say that if such an *acarya* is not physically present we must accept something less?

Again BCS is inventing his own *siddhanta* which is nowhere to be found in any of Srila Prabhupada's books.

- What happened to speaking '*the same teachings as Krsna*'?

The breed of 'guru' which BCS would have us accept is treated with a high degree of ambivalence even by the very body that votes them in. Jayadvaita Swami recently succinctly summed up the way in which the GBC currently 'maintains the *parampara*':

'The word appointed is never used. But there are "candidates for initiating guru", votes are taken, and those who make it through the procedures become "ISKCON-APPROVED" or "ISKCON-authorised" gurus. To boost your confidence: On one hand the GBC encourages you to be initiated by a bona fide, authorised ISKCON guru and worship him like God. On the other, it has an elaborate system of laws to invoke from time to time when your ISKCON-authorised guru falls down. One might perhaps be forgiven for thinking that for all the laws and resolutions the role of guru is still a perplexity even for the GBC.'

(Jayadvaita Swami 'Where the Ritvik People are Right' '96).

It has to be admitted that the devices employed in the upkeep of the M.A.S.S., as described above, are not only unprecedented in the history of Gaudiya Vaisnavism, but more importantly were never once described or taught by Srila Prabhupada.

- Why then is BCS supporting the above if he is only supposed to repeat the teachings of Krsna and his pure devotees?

'If ISKCON hypothetically accepted the theory that one can accept a guru who is not present on this planet, then some may say, "I'll get initiated by Bhaktivedanta Sarasvati." Others may say, "I'll get initiated by Gaura Kisora Dasa Babaji, or it is even better to take initiation from Rupa Gosvami." Some will say, why not Caitanya Mahaprabhu? Why not Krsna Himself?'" Page 8 SPDR

Once more BCS seems to be very confused about Srila Prabhupada's final order. The 9th July letter only authorises new devotees to be disciples of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. There is no mention in the letter that we can take from any other *acaryas*, or Krsna, or any such thing. Srila Prabhupada is the current link, therefore he is the present initia-

tor in our *sampradaya*, nobody else, physically present or otherwise. If someone came to us saying he wanted to take initiation from Srila Bhaktivedanta, we would preach to him that he should follow the July 9th order.

“Those who are proposing *Rtvik* are not actually winning favour of Srila Prabhupada, they are actually disturbing him. He doesn’t want them in ISKCON because they are blind with envy,....But those who are proposing the *ritvik* system, look at them....They are already spiritually dead”. SPDR Page 8.

The above statements are inappropriate for at least four reasons:

1. In order to make such statements with any degree of integrity, BCS would have to have met, and carefully analysed, every single *ritvik* sympathiser around the world. We know he has not done this, even with those who are outspoken about their sympathy, what to speak of the hundreds who are less vocal.
2. Even if he were right it would have no validity in this discussion since it is *argumentum ad hominem* - a classic logical fallacy.
3. Such statements also directly contradict the observations of other senior Vaisnavas. For example Jayadvaita Maharaja comments that some *ritvik* sympathisers are:

“Sincere, intelligent, thoughtful, and devoted to Srila Prabhupada and Krsna.”

(Jayadvaita Swami ‘Where the *ritvik* people are right’ ‘96).

4. To say that *Rtviks* are disturbing to Srila Prabhupada is highly inflammatory. Indeed it is precisely irresponsible statements such as these which have led to the beatings and intimidation *ritvik* supporters have experienced over the years. It is also clearly premature for BCS to make this assertion when all the evidence points to Srila Prabhupada’s approval of the system.

It is ironic that one of the greatest exponents of Vaisnava etiquette should speak so rudely about large numbers of devotees, particularly when his own philosophical position is so poorly supported.

In Conclusion:

BCS titles his article “*Srila Prabhupada Defeats Ritvik*” yet he has failed to provide a single reference from Srila Prabhupada that supports his assertion that the *ritvik* system is wrong.

His article comprises of nothing more than confused and fictitious ‘*conversations*’ combined with fallacious philosophical assertions; all totally uncorroborated by anything Srila Prabhupada actually said.

Not only do Srila Prabhupada’s instruction and philosophy not support BCS’s thesis, they completely contradict it on every conceivable level.

We would humbly submit to the GBC that, with all due respect, BCS may not after all be the best person to oversee the upcoming book on the *ritvik* issue. At least he should be encouraged to properly study the evidence, rather than falsely attribute to Srila Prabhupada his own misconceptions.

We apologise to BCS for any offence this article may have caused, we simply wish to save him from future embarrassment.

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