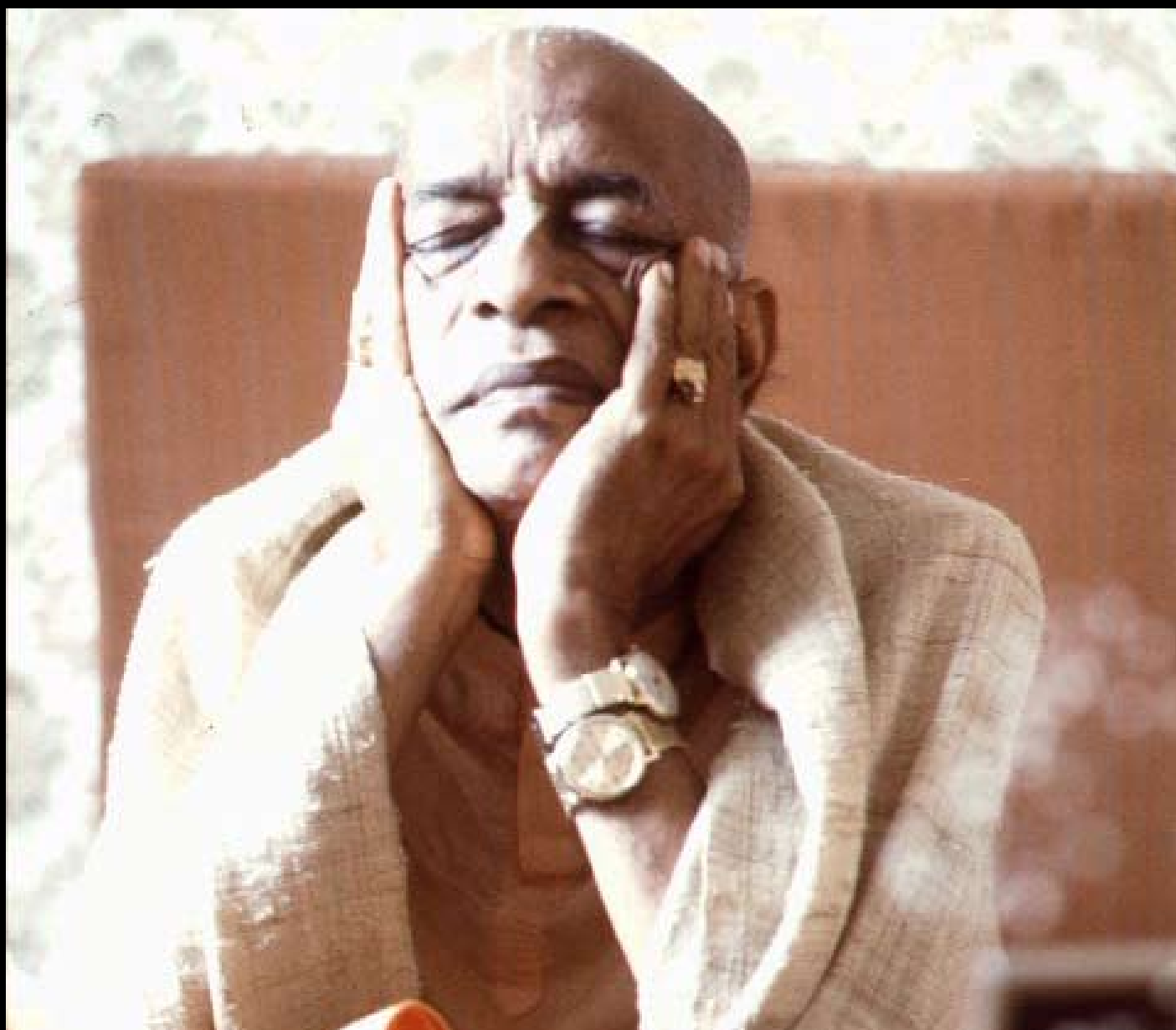


a response to: Allegiance to Guru, to ISKCON and to Prabhupada

Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu

Defends His M.A.S.S.



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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

Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu Defends His M.A.S.S.

A response to:

“Allegiance to Guru, to ISKCON and to Prabhupada.”(1998)

We were originally excited to learn from our sources present at this year’s GBC meetings that one of the principal architects of the M.A.S.S. (Multiple *Acarya* Successor System, the Guru system currently practised in ISKCON) and core member of the special new GBC executive committee, His Grace Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu, was soon going to deal specifically with the *ritvik* issue. Our gratitude and pleasure at such a prominent and respected devotee taking the trouble to respond to our concerns dissipated rapidly, however, when we read the above mentioned paper, which was written specifically to accompany a new GBC resolution that was passed at this year’s Mayapura meetings, on 26th February, 1998. Full details of this were posted on CHAKRA last week. Not only does Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu seriously misrepresent our position, as expressed in ‘*The Final Order*’, he also offers a confused and self-contradictory holy trinity ‘*siddhanta*’ of his own as a replacement for Srila Prabhupada’s clear and unequivocal order on how initiations should run within ISKCON. All of Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu’s comments from his paper will be boxed.

Key Omission

His Grace Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu (hereafter referred to as the ‘author’) gives the following brief history:

In his time, Prabhupada formed a governing board for ISKCON, and he personally supervised its operations so that it was already “up and running” at the time of his departure. Nevertheless, it remained difficult even for some ISKCON members to accept this form of organisation.

Our response:

- What Srila Prabhupada left us “up and running”, amongst other things, was the *ritvik* system. This is just a plain, stubborn historical fact. A fact which for some reason the author neglects to mention here.
- It was no doubt very “difficult” for many “ISKCON members” to accept the disbanding of this system, and the subsequent crafting of two replacements, namely the zonal *acarya* system and the current M.A.S.S. The author unfortunately offers no good reason as to why this was done. Nor has he ever done in the past.

Where is his evidence for **modifications A & B** as set out on page 2 of ‘*The Final Order*’?

- As far as we are concerned, this is still Srila Prabhupada’s “time”, since he remains the current link, (at least for members of ISKCON).

Misrepresentation:

In order to discredit the *ritvik* position, the author makes the following serious misrepresentation

Two deviations from Prabhupada’s order - the “zonal *acarya*” system and the “posthumous *ritvik*” system - rest on adherence to the traditional idea of leadership. Each in its own way presumes that genuine authoritative leadership for the movement is found only when an autocratic figure become recognised by his compelling, charismatic presence or “self-effulgence”, and who can then personify the institution.

Our response:

1. The above proposition is never once made in 'The Final Order', which is the paper the author really needs to be addressing. We hope he will take the time to read this definitive *ritvik* paper before he writes anything else on this subject. When he does, he will find the above 'charismatic' philosophy is actually REFUTED on pages 46 and 47.
2. Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu is here stating that the *ritvik* system would be a deviation from the system of organisation that Srila Prabhupada personally set up and practised. Since the whole contention of the *ritvik* system is that the same system Srila Prabhupada set up and practised should be continued without change, the above assertion becomes complete nonsense. It actually represents the *ritvik* theory as being the complete OPPOSITE of what it is. Under the *ritvik* system the GBC would be the ultimate managing authority, and the initiator would be Srila Prabhupada, just as when Srila Prabhupada was here. We are simply asking that the GBC re-institute the system that Srila Prabhupada left us, instead of carrying on with the concocted 'anyone not caught falling down in the last 5 years' guru system we have now. Thus what we are proposing is in no sense a 'deviation' from Srila Prabhupada's 'order', merely a re-adoption of it.
3. He states that in the *ritvik* theory we need to find some 'self-effulgent' figure to help us 'personify the institution' and give us authoritative leadership. No, we state that we ALREADY have that. The basis for such authoritative leadership was put in place by Srila Prabhupada himself - a GBC that executes the orders of His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada. But they must follow his orders, that's all we ask. We already have our charismatic, autocratic presence in the form of Srila Prabhupada. We are certainly not waiting for anyone else to take over ISKCON. ISKCON is Srila Prabhupada's body. Thus it is already personified. It does not require any other 'self-effulgent' *acaryas*. We already have our *acarya* - the saviour of humanity for the next ten thousand years - Srila Prabhupada.
4. We see that the author 'reasons ill' by implying that Srila Prabhupada is in fact 'dead' - the word 'posthumous' means "after a person's DEATH" -(Oxford Dictionary). After repeated past protests at the use of this mundane term by others, their Holiness's Jayadvaita and Umapati Maharajas, to their credit, used the more appropriate term 'post-samadhi' in their recent anti-*ritvik* papers.
If a member of the GBC Executive Committee speaks like this, we wonder what sort of a message will be sent to the rest of the society?
How will devotees feel inspired to have 'allegiance' to a 'dead' person whose 'time' has gone?
Perhaps H.H. Jayadvaita Maharaja could bring Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu up-to-speed on such basic matters of etiquette.
5. It is also interesting that the author should believe our *ritvik* deviancy has somehow arisen through being overly attached to tradition:

the "zonal *acarya*" system and the "posthumous *ritvik*" system - rest on adherence to the traditional idea of leadership.

This is certainly the first time we have been accused of being too traditional, in any sense! This point is indirectly re-enforced later:

In the event, the Gaudiya Matha leaders disregarded this order, and instead they reverted to the traditional single-*acarya* rule to which they were, after all, culturally habituated.

Thus the system of having one *acarya* is actually the original tradition according to Ravindra Svarupa. By his own admission the M.A.S.S. is a radical departure from this great tradition of vaisnava culture. A departure followed with enormous zeal by the Gaudiya Matha themselves since, after a brief dabble with single *acaryas*, they eventually adopted a multiple *acarya* system also. A system Srila Prabhupada roundly condemned as unauthorised.

It is a source of considerable puzzlement that the same author who now dismisses tradition, should have gone to Narayan Maharaja in 1990 (*ISKCON JOURNAL* p.23) with the sole purpose of showing how the *ritvik* system was bogus since it did not follow tradition!

- Has historical tradition suddenly lost all spiritual value in the last eight years?

Or maybe the author hopes we have forgotten about that particular piece of philosophical shenanigans.

Leaving that aside, may we now implore the author to get back in line with vaisnava culture and tradition by re-introducing a single-*acarya* system within ISKCON. Might we suggest Srila Prabhupada as that *acarya*, since this was his expressed order. Given his newly acquired liberal acceptance of unorthodoxy, we are sure the author will be able to overlook the spiritually irrelevant detail of Srila Prabhupada's physical absence. Once this is done we will all be able to happily serve under the GBC, which was indeed the wish of Srila Prabhupada.

Contradiction

The personal form of allegiance is wholly retained in the relation between the disciple and the spiritual master.

- But why does this 'personal form of allegiance' need 'retaining' in the first place?

The author has already said it is fully present in the institution, and of course its founding *acarya*. By insinuating that the 'per-

sonal' aspect is only 'wholly retained' by some third principle, the author is clearly contradicting himself. In order to support this idea the author radically departs from the teachings and personal example of Srila Prabhupada.

Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu further claims Srila Prabhupada wanted a 'modern form of organisation' for ISKCON which:

in a certain manner subordinate the PERSONAL elicit loyalty and commitment beyond the allegiance to any particular leader, however highly placed

This 'modern form of organisation' he claims is in stark contrast to traditional forms of organisation like the monarchy where:

the kingdom was perceived by the subjects as an EXTENSION of the king's own person. The King was the Kingdom personified

It is also in stark contrast to traditional spiritual organisations where the organisation:

would be viewed as the natural extension or EMBODIMENT of his (the founder's) personal charisma or spiritual power

However Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu had just said that ISKCON is an instrument crafted by Srila Prabhupada which:

is his manifest BODY for receiving PERSONAL service from us.
and allegiance to ISKCON is IDENTICAL with allegiance to Prabhupada

(All emphases are mine)

It can be clearly seen that Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu is contradicting himself, agreeing that ISKCON IS an extension of Srila Prabhupada's person, created specifically to receive our PERSONAL service. ISKCON IS Srila Prabhupada's KINGDOM. The GBCs are simply the ministers to manage that kingdom on behalf of the king.

Thus there is no question of giving any allegiance beyond that which is given to Srila Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada IS that "particular leader" who is "highly placed" beyond which we do NOT give allegiance. This concept is enshrined in the very raison d'être of the GBC as given in the 1975 GBC resolution whereby the GBC was officially defined by Srila Prabhupada:

"Resolved: The GBC (Governing Body Commission) has been established by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada to represent Him in carrying out the responsibility of managing the International Society for Krishna Consciousness of which He is the Founder-Acarya and supreme authority. The GBC accepts as its life and soul His divine instructions and recognises that it is completely dependent on His mercy in all respects. The GBC has no other function or purpose other than to execute the instructions so kindly given by His Divine Grace and preserve and spread His Teachings to the world in their pure form."

(Definition of GBC, Resolution 1, GBC minutes 1975)

It is very clear from the above that not only is ISKCON set up to facilitate complete and supreme allegiance to Srila Prabhupada only, but that it is the job of the GBC to enforce that allegiance. There is no mention above of the GBC having any authority to concoct resolutions that are not totally supported by direct instructions from Srila Prabhupada. We have been awaiting for such instructions to support the current M.A.S.S. guru system from the GBC for many years now.

Confused Thinking

The author makes the following assertion:

ISKCON devotees find themselves committed to a double allegiance; that is, their allegiance is directed toward two distinct manifest objects. One allegiance is to the spiritual master. The other is to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. These two allegiances are different in kind: The first is personal; the second, institutional.

Above the author seeks to differentiate between allegiance to guru and service to ISKCON. He says one is personal, the other institutional.

This is further re-enforced:

The personal relationship, by its very nature, is more ardent than the institutional.

Our response:

- Is the author then implying that institutional allegiance to ISKCON is somehow impersonal, or that service and allegiance to the institution are different from direct service and allegiance to Srila Prabhupada?

Far from it in fact:

ISKCON is the instrument which Srila Prabhupada crafted by his own hands for our service to him, and which, in virtue of his position as founder-*acarya*, continues to be his manifest body for receiving personal service from us.

So according to the author, by serving the institution we are directly serving Srila Prabhupada, who of course is a person. Thus we can approach, enquire, and serve the bona fide spiritual master merely by interacting with ISKCON.

The author further states:

It is the specific genius of Srila Prabhupada to have incorporated the intense personal form of allegiance within the framework of institutional allegiance.

Thus we have an institution which can give us total 'personal' access to a bona fide spiritual master who can fill our hearts with transcendental knowledge and in that way annihilate all our sinful reactions, the very definition of *diksa*.

- So is the author really a closet *ritvik*?

Not quite.

The author is proposing devotees recognise three aspects of allegiance. The institution of ISKCON, the founder *acarya*, and the guru. Unfortunately when the author speaks of the 'guru' he is not talking about Srila Prabhupada, at least not for newcomers. This is strange since Srila Prabhupada is generally accepted as a bona fide guru, as well as being the founder *acarya*, and the author has already stated that anyone can serve him directly, personally, by serving ISKCON; the institution being his manifest body. All aspects of *diksa* can be thus supplied by Srila Prabhupada through his movement and books.

- Why then do we need to bring in a second category of (*diksa*) guru?

Straw Man Argument

The author also attempts to deflect attention from the GBC's poor record at following Srila Prabhupada's orders by pretending that most devotee's dissatisfaction with the GBC is actually with the PRINCIPLE of the GBC rather than with their poor performance:

Such people tend to find fault continually with the particular members, procedures, and decisions of the governing body, but underlying that is an implicit dissatisfaction with the corporate form of governance as such.

Our response:

This clever tactic shifts criticism of the GBC from the realm of the many decisions they have actually taken, that are impossible to defend from Srila Prabhupada's teachings, to the realm of objecting to the very principle of the GBC. The latter of course is something on which the GBC stands on extremely solid ground since the concept of the GBC was personally set up and authorised to continue by Srila Prabhupada. In this way, Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu has with a swift deft of hand equated anyone who criticises the GBC as actually not desiring to follow Srila Prabhupada. The reality of course is the exact OPPOSITE, in that the majority of the devotees who dis-agree with the GBC do so simply because **THEY**, the GBC, have actually dis-obeyed Srila Prabhupada. They dis-obeyed Srila Prabhupada in 1978, they dis-obeyed Srila Prabhupada in 1986 when they concocted the current M.A.S.S. system, and they are continuing to disobey him today, even though it has been proven by *The Final Order* paper that their current guru system has no authorisation from Srila Prabhupada.

There is nothing that most devotees would like more than to be united as a world-wide preaching organisation co-operating under the management of a GBC that is strictly following Srila Prabhupada, just as when Srila Prabhupada was physically present, because this is what Srila Prabhupada wanted.

Speculation

Spiritual progress cannot effectively take place unless the candidate is immersed in the effectively rich environment provided by the direct face-to-face reciprocal relationship with a teacher who manifestly represents God for him.

Our response:

The above assertion is never once made by Srila Prabhupada. Indeed Srila Prabhupada states the precise opposite over and over again (please see appendices to '*The Final Order*'). Even whilst physically present there are many initiated devotees who never met Srila Prabhupada 'face to face' even once.

- Did Srila Prabhupada ever ask to have 'face to face' reciprocal relationships with every one of his thousands of disciples?
- Did he ever once state that without such one-on-one association 'spiritual progress cannot effectively take place'?

Of course not. Such notions are purely the invention of the author. It is such speculation as this which has brought the GBC

into disrepute, and created a large number of disaffected devotees who will indeed need a lot of nurturing if they are ever to see the institution of ISKCON as truly representing Srila Prabhupada.

Conclusion:

We have demonstrated that His Grace Ravindra Svarupa prabhu's new GBC resolution and the rationale behind it, which is supposed to help control any 'guru' problems in ISKCON, is in actuality nothing but a mixture of contradiction, confused thinking, serious mis-representations and speculation.

In particular:

1. The author seriously misrepresents the *ritvik* position as set out in the very paper the GBC was meant to have answered over a year ago.
2. To support his speculations, throughout his whole paper the author merely assumes that which needs to be demonstrated, namely that Srila Prabhupada 'ordered' all his disciples to become *diksa* gurus.
3. He inadvertently implies that Srila Prabhupada is 'dead'.
4. The author contradicts himself over whether the institution of ISKCON retains the personal aspect of allegiance.
5. He invents his own 'face to face' *guru tattva* philosophy in order to support the concocted M.A.S.S. (which was inspired by his own groundbreaking paper, '*Under My Order*', 1985)
6. He fails to grasp the fact that the number of disaffected and critical devotees will continue to increase as long as the GBC systematically disobey important orders from Srila Prabhupada, and then go on to invent their own philosophy to support their insubordination, and that this is the reason they reject the GBC, not because they have problems with the principle of a GBC as set up by Srila Prabhupada.

Also from the above very serious mis-representation of the *ritvik* philosophy it seems the new GBC Executive Committee proposes to answer the *ritvik* question in a manner wholly consistent with their previous efforts -i.e.: 'Let's make up assertions which '*The Final Order*' never makes, and answer those instead of answering what the paper actually says'. Such an approach is a complete waste of time for all concerned, and can do nothing to increase the authority of the GBC, which is what we all ultimately want. We sincerely pray that in future GBC members might take the trouble to read '*The Final Order*' before they write anything more on the issue, and that they quote assertions verbatim from our position paper before trying to discredit them.

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