

Where the rtvik people are right

by Jayadvaita Swami

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From my point of view, it's easy to see where the rtvik people are wrong. Their theories are supported by matchsticks and held together with Scotch tape. They tell us what Srila Prabhupada "must have" intended, not what he clearly and repeatedly said. In short, they are speculating, and their speculations are defective.

But what concerns me at this point is not where they're wrong but where they're right. What is it they see about ISKCON's present way of doing things that makes them want to go in for even such a poor alternative as the rtvik one?

Some are just "sour grapes." They have rendered themselves unfit to serve as gurus, and now that they can't be gurus, no one can.

Others, clearly, have simply been warped by the material energy. Their brains are in their feet and their tongues in their armpits, at best.

But some, it's equally clear, are sincere, intelligent, thoughtful, and devoted to Srila Prabhupada and Krsna.

So scratch the first two bunches. What's driving these other people? Even if we reject the point they've come to, how did they get there?

In part, of course, they are responding to history, both old and recent. Let's take a look at some unpleasant facts:

FACT: ISKCON gurus in good standing have fallen.

FACT: The ISKCON GBC has supported even fallen gurus and tried to paper over their falldowns.

FACT: ISKCON gurus have opposed, oppressed and driven out many sincere godbrothers and godsisters.

FACT: ISKCON gurus have usurped and misused money, and diverted other ISKCON resources for their own personal prestige and sense gratification.

FACT: ISKCON gurus have had illicit sexual intercourse with both women and men, and possibly children as well.

FACT: Some ISKCON gurus still in good standing have had such serious personal difficulties that the GBC has been obliged to suspend them from initiating.

FACT: Other ISKCON gurus have snapped back into line only after "narrow misses."

FACT: ISKCON gurus recently led a movement advocating a premature and inappropriate emphasis on rasika-bhakti.

FACT: Some ISKCON devotees have felt obliged to accept a new guru twice or even three times over.

In contrast, Srila Prabhupada was staunch, unflinching, always perfect in his discretion and determination. He was undisputably an exalted and empowered acarya, a pure and intimate personal associate of Krsna.

Is it any wonder, then, that some devotees feel that only Srila Prabhupada can give them shelter and that no one else deserves the same surrender and trust?

And when it comes to the subject of gurus, who trusts the spiritual guidance of the GBC?

First the GBC gave us the "eleven pure devotees appointed by Srila Prabhupada," each deserving the fealty of his godbrothers and destined to be your guru if you joined the Hare Krsna movement in his zone.

Then the GBC told us the gurus were never appointed. Or, rather, members gave us at least two different stories, some GBC men declaring emphatically that Srila Prabhupada never appointed anything more than rtviks, others sure, to this day, of having been appointed "regular gurus."

The GBC itself then appointed new gurus--or did it? 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-authorized" gurus.*

To boost your confidence: On one hand the GBC encourages you to be initiated by a bona fide, authorized 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-authorized 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.

Some devotees have no problem with any of this. They have their guru. They trust him. They are making advancement. They are happy.

But others can only lament the passing of the days when Srila Prabhupada was the only guru and the position of guru was sure.

Merely to "smash" the theories of the post-samadhi rtvik people, then, will not make such theories go away. We must honestly face the underlying issues.

Who is a bona fide spiritual master? What qualifications must he have? Are the gurus in ISKCON factually qualified--all of them, some of them, or any of them? If all or any of them are less than fully fit, what implications does this have for their disciples and for ISKCON? In ISKCON today, how can one be sure that the spiritual master to whom one is surrendering is genuine and infallible? Above all, how can every member of ISKCON be connected with Srila Prabhupada as his disciple, his follower, in a true and legitimate sense?

The spiritual leaders of ISKCON ought to recognize the importance of these questions and deal with them honestly, openly, sincerely, and deeply.

Hare Krsna.

NOTE:

* Candidates must also meet various criteria, among them "Must not have had a fall-down within five years."

Students of ISKCON history trying to trace the GBC's stand on "guru issues" might have a hard time figuring out what to make of the following passage. It appears in "'On My Order' Understood," a paper first published by the GBC in 1991 and reconfirmed in 1995 to represent "the official GBC position."

After Srila Prabhupada named some disciples to initiate, his personal secretary suggested some others for also starting to initiate, but Srila Prabhupada, after considering the matter, said they were not yet ready. His Divine Grace said the GBC could consider and later add others when needed. Thus, by delegating that duty to the GBC, Srila Prabhupada personally detailed the procedure for increasing the number of initiating gurus. Earlier, His Divine Grace had taught Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's instruction that his Governing Body Commission would be responsible to 'elect' qualified devotees to be initiating gurus.

Here the GBC mentions that Srila Prabhupada personally named some disciples to initiate (whose disciples they were named to initiate is a matter the passage finesses). Srila Prabhupada delegated to the GBC the duty of naming more initiators (he "detailed the procedure"). Furthermore, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura had instructed that his GBC should "elect"

qualified devotees to serve as initiating gurus, and Srila Prabhupada taught this same instruction.

On what evidence, one might wonder, does the GBC assert all this? If the evidence is not to be found, the conclusions here seem hardly less concocted than the doctrines of the post-samadhi rtvik people.

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