

*a historical perspective*



Our  
Affectionate  
Guardians

*Swami Bhaktibhavana Venu Maharaja*

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A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Swami Bhaktibhavana Visnu Maharaja

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## Sixteen Rounds

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## INTRODUCTION

This book should never have been written. At the same time, many will be grateful that it is now in print. It should not have been written because the events that it describes should never have happened. Yet it brings to light the actual history of a shocking period in contemporary Gaudiya Vaisnavism, one that, like many embarrassing historical events, has been grossly distorted over the past twenty years. Speaking positively, there is much to learn from those who do things wrong.

Swami Visnu sets the scene by jumping back in time to the late 1930's, a few years after the departure from mortal vision of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, the guru of two of the most prominent Gaudiya Vaisnava saints of the century. These two godbrothers, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Deva Goswami Maharaja, and their transcendental relationship are introduced in the first chapter.

Their relationship continued up until Swami Prabhupada's passing into eternal samadhi in November 1977. Yet, as Visnu Swami demonstrates, their relationship continued after Prabhupada's departure as well, in the form of Sridhara Maharaja's selfless efforts to help Srila Prabhupada's fledgling disciples in accordance with Srila Prabhupada's request. One gets the strong sense that their relationship continues even today and into eternity, for both of these saints were united, despite their differences, around the same cause—establishing the devotional conclusions of Srila Rupa Goswami and awakening love of Sri Sri Radha-Krsna in the hearts of all souls.

Both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja were of a harmonizing nature, and appropriately so, for true religion means proper adjustment. Such is possible only when one's religion is love, which alone can resolve all contradictions. This is the religion of Gaudiya Vaisnavism, in which the Vraja lila of Radha-Krsna manifests out of selfless loving union with the Absolute, replete with a cast of thousands upon thousands, all of whom have been considered incarnations of love—Srila

Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja no exception.

Despite the relationship of Srila Prabhupada and Sridhara Maharaja, Sridhara Maharaja's numerous saintly qualities, and Srila Prabhupada personally introducing his disciples to Sridhara Maharaja, Sridhara Maharaja became the direct target of slander. Indirectly, Swami Prabhupada was slandered, and all of this by his own disciples' attempt to glorify him. The slander for Sridhara Maharaja is blatant, while the more insidious slander of Srila Prabhupada is felt deeply by those who read between the lines of this book.

When lust appears in the guise of love, nothing could be more insidious. This is the greatest enemy of the spiritual aspirant. The lust for power, disguised as love for Srila Prabhupada, rears its ugly face in this historical account, in which the road to hell is tread by those of good intentions. While unity was the goal of Srila Prabhupada's disciples, their shortsightedness found them tampering with the very foundation of unity, vilifying the very saints they should serve. While the foundation cracked, snakes of misconception and apasiddhanta made their way in to bite the society's members, and today the International Society for Krsna Consciousness limps along, priding itself in external achievements with little concern for or understanding of inner life.

Swami Visnu appeals to his readers with suggested measures for reformation. Yet one will sense a hopelessness for any comprehensive reform in his acknowledgment of a place for Kali within Gaudiya Vaisnavism—Kali-chela. Read and cry.

The Publishers





## Chapter One: A Transcendental Friendship

Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Deva Goswami first met in Allahabad, India. Many times they worked very closely in establishing the preaching of the Gaudiya Matha, particularly in Allahabad, Bombay, and Calcutta. During the years of internal strife in the Gaudiya Matha, Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja lived together for more than five years in Calcutta. In the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, Satsvarupa Maharaja writes of Srila Sridhara Maharaja's subletting several rooms from Srila Prabhupada's apartment on Sita Kanta Banerjee Lane:

Here Abhay [Srila Prabhupada's name before initiation] and Sridhara Maharaja and his followers could remain aloof from the warring factions [of the Gaudiya Matha] and together pursue their plans for spreading Krsna consciousness. [*Lilamrta*, Vol. 1, p. 100]

Many years later, after establishing Gaudiya Vaisnava temples around the world, Srila Prabhupada, upon returning to India, would sometimes stay at the matha of Srila Sridhara Maharaja in Sri Navadvipa Dhama. Srila Sridhara Maharaja also sometimes visited Srila Prabhupada at his Candrodaya Mandira in Mayapur. During one such occasion, recorded in March 1973, Srila Prabhupada happily shared some of his fond remembrances with Srila Sridhara Maharaja and his own disciples, while he and Sridhara Maharaja were seated together on Prabhupada's *vyasasana*:

We are very fortunate to hear His Divine Grace Om Visnupada Paramahansa Parivrajakacarya Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja. By age and by experience, in both ways, he is senior to me. I was fortunate to have his association since a very long time, perhaps in 1930.

Maharaja, I think you remember the incident when you went to Allahabad? On that auspicious occasion, we were connected. There is a long story, it will take time, but I had

the opportunity of associating with Sridhara Maharaja for several years. Krsna and Prabhupada [Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura] liked him to prepare me. Sridhara Maharaja lived in my house for many years, so naturally we had very intimate talks and he was my good advisor. I took his advices and instructions very seriously, because from the very beginning I knew he was a pure Vaisnava, a pure devotee, and I wanted to associate with him, and I tried to help him also. Our relationship is very intimate. <sup>1</sup>

Herein, we find the history of a transcendental relationship between these two pure devotees of the Lord. They intimately associated and discussed *Srimad-Bhagavatam* for more than five years, often for five to seven hours a day. While remembering their intimate talks, specifically in regard to *Bhagavad-gita*, Srila Sridhara Maharaja recalled the depth of their conversations:

Once while discussing the verse *dadami buddhi yogam tam yena mam upayanti te* [Bg. 10.10, “I give them the understanding by which they can come to Me.”], I submitted to him that here, *upayanti* is indicative of *parakiya-rasa* [paramour relationship]. On this point he agreed with me, saying, “Yes, at this point there cannot be anything but the *parakiya-rasa* of Vraja. The conclusion of *Bhagavad-gita* must come to this.”

### **Please Look After Them**

Their many confidential talks reveal the depth of their relationship. In March 1982, Srila Sridhara Maharaja said:

When he [Srila Prabhupada] began his translation of the *Bhagavad-gita*, it was in consultation with me in a very deep way. Later, he requested me many a time, “Please look after them; I am taking them this side [to Krsna consciousness]. You have a responsibility to look after them.”

Srila Prabhupada would often consult with Srila Sridhara Maharaja regarding the spiritual significance of his failing business and family relationships. Srila Sridhara Maharaja confirmed Srila Prabhupada’s suspicion that Krsna’s special mercy was being shown to him by taking away all his material possessions as per the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 10.88.8 verse, *yasyaham anugrhnami*.

An example of Prabhupada’s helping with Sridhara Maharaja’s preaching work is seen in his financing *Prapanna-jivanamrta: Life-Nectar of the Surrendered Souls*. (*Lilamrta*, Vol. 1, p. 103) This book, the most important work of his life, shows Sridhara Maharaja’s exceptional brilliance in extracting the essence of the scriptures. *Prapanna-jivanamrta* was also greatly favored by Niskincana Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja and was the only book he carried with him.

Whether in Allahabad, Bombay, Calcutta, or other parts of India, Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja’s relationship continued to develop. Srila Prabhupada recalls:

In my householder life, I had opened an office in Bombay for our business. The Bombay Gaudiya Matha was established by Sridhara Maharaja and myself. We made a party for begging and collecting alms, consisting of Sridhara Maharaja, myself, and Bhakti Saranga Goswami Maharaja. I took the party to my chemist friends and we collected about five hundred rupees. Sridhara Maharaja would speak, I would introduce, and Goswami Maharaja would canvass. (*Lilamrta*, Vol. 1, p. 81)

In the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, Satsvarupa Goswami writes further:

Abhay would often accompany Sridhara Maharaja and his assistants at preaching programs, where he would play the *mrdanga*. And when Sridhara Maharaja fell ill, Abhay led the other devotees on preaching engagements,



performing *kirtana*, playing *mrdanga*, and giving lectures on the *Bhagavatam*. (*Lilamrta*, Vol. 1, p. 100)

## Europe Defeated by Asia

While in Bombay, Prabhupada and Sridhara Maharaja were the receiving party for a Gaudiya Matha *sannyasi* who was returning from Europe. They were dismayed by his changed appearance. He was missing the *tridanda* of a Gaudiya *sannyasi*, the *sikha* of a Vaisnava, as well as the traditional robes, but they still eagerly inquired about the preaching field in the West. The *sannyasi* remarked, "They ask questions that cannot be answered." Prabhupada inquired further as to the nature of those questions, and one after another Sridhara Maharaja answered them all. At that time Prabhupada boldly declared, "Today, Europe has been defeated by Asia!"

An example of Srila Prabhupada's trust of Srila Sridhara Maharaja is found in his letter of January 30, 1970 to Satsvarupa Maharaja, the editor of *Back to Godhead* magazine:

Regarding Sridhara Swami's article: I do not know what sort of article it is, but whatever it may be, the writer's name should be Swami B. R. Sridhara. Besides that, there is no need of giving any short introductory note at the present moment. If we publish an article, it is to be understood that the version of the article is not different from ours.

In other words, even without seeing Srila Sridhara Maharaja's article, he understood that it was philosophically sound and in agreement with his mood of presentation. Additionally, in a 1973 BBT meeting in Los Angeles, Srila Prabhupada stated that only himself and Srila Sridhara Maharaja were qualified to give commentary on the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. This is confirmed in Giriraja Maharaja's letter of September 16, 1978 to the GBC:

[In reference to] Sridhara Swami, who Srila Prabhupada said we should consult about philosophical and practical points [Srila Prabhupada said that] apart from himself, only Sridhara Swami was qualified to write the *Bhagavatam* purports.

## What I Came to Say, Will Remain

Upon meeting Srila Sridhara Maharaja, a young gentleman of high brahminical lineage who was noted for his Vedic scholarship, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura remarked, "If persons of your caliber join us, then certainly our mission will be successful." Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura greatly appreciated Sridhara Maharaja's writings and was once so pleased with a poem that Sridhara Maharaja wrote about Bhaktivinoda Thakura that he remarked to his sannyasa disciples Bhakti Yadav Goswami and Sravati Maharaja:

Bhaktivinoda Thakura himself has written this through him. Now I am satisfied that after me what I came to say, that will stay, that will remain; I find in these *slokas* the *siddhanta*.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura informed Sravana Maharaja, the editor of the Gaudiya Matha's periodicals:

If you include articles written by Sridhara Maharaja, the quality of your publications will be greatly improved.

Confirming Sridhara Maharaja's profound erudition in the *sastras*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura once directed that his name be suffixed with the title *Sastra-nipuna* [one who has very deep knowledge of the scriptures, a scriptural genius].

Srila Sridhara Maharaja composed many original Sanskrit works. Among them is the Prabhupada-padma stavaka, glorifying Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. Srila Prabhupada

requested that this song be sung daily in all his temples. Also composed by Srila Sridhara Maharaja is the sublimely beautiful *Prema-dhama deva stotram*, which presents Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's *lila* and precepts. Niskincana Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja said that within this offering he found the presence of Srila Rupa Goswami Prabhupada, the leader of our *sampradaya*.

Because of Srila Sridhara Maharaja's keen ability to explain the inner esoteric lectures of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, many of his senior *sannyasi* godbrothers would often ask Sridhara Maharaja to repeat the points covered by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta and explain them. Throughout his life, Srila Sridhara Maharaja was revered as an unrivaled "consulting physician," able to give authoritative and impartial spiritual advice to all who sought his counsel. Sridhara Maharaja reflects:

I explained and they were satisfied. Prabhupada's discourses were very deep. The general public could not understand them. It was deep philosophy, so I was requested to repeat his message by the elevated servants of our Guru Maharaja. I could repeat this at least to their satisfaction. Madhusudana Maharaja and others were always of a very skeptical nature, not prepared to rely on anyone else. But they also said that when they listened to me it was as if they are hearing Prabhupada. So, my type is very akin to that of my Guru Maharaja. By his grace. Many persons have told us this.

### **Bhaktivedanta Swami**

Srila Sridhara Maharaja advised the leaders of the Gaudiya Sangha to confer the title "Bhaktivedanta" upon the then Abhay Caranaravinda dasa. (*Lilamrta*, Vol. 1, p. 103) This was after Srila Prabhupada had been given the title "Bhaktisiddhanta dasa" by another godbrother, Bhakti Saranga Goswami Maharaja. Srila Sridhara Maharaja adjusted Prabhupada's name in response to suggestions from the Vaisnava community that the guru's name should not be given to the disciple.

Later, Srila Prabhupada's *sannyasa guru*, Sripada Bhakti Prajnana Kesava Maharaja, one of the most senior disciples of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and the third *sannyasa* disciple of Sridhara Maharaja, gave *sannyasa* to Abhay Caranaravinda Bhaktisiddhanta dasa, retaining the title "Bhaktivedanta" and conferring the *sannyasa* name "Swami." Initially Prabhupada asked Tirtha Maharaja in writing for *sannyasa*, but when he understood the conservative policy of Tirtha Maharaja, he went to Sridhara Maharaja for *sannyasa*. Srila Sridhara Maharaja replied that he was too intimate with Srila Prabhupada's family, and certainly Prabhupada's wife would give some trouble to his *matha*. Srila Sridhara Maharaja suggested he take *sannyasa* from Kesava Maharaja, who was unknown to Srila Prabhupada's wife. In a sense, this would be the same as taking *sannyasa* from Sridhara Maharaja, since Kesava Maharaja was Sridhara Maharaja's *sannyasa* disciple.

### **Lord Caitanya's Prophecy Fulfilled**

When Srila Prabhupada returned to India in October 1967, after his successful preaching campaign in America, he stayed with Srila Sridhara Maharaja in Navadvipa and observed his *Vyasa-puja* celebration. At that time, Prabhupada wrote a letter to Satsvarupa Maharaja saying:

Yesterday, we have all come to Navadvipa-dhama. This place is an establishment of one of my godbrothers. It is a very nice and extensive place, and my godbrother B. R. Sridhara Maharaja has spared one entire house for our stay. He has also agreed to cooperate with our society. We shall observe his birthday celebration, and the *brahmacaris* shall learn how to celebrate the spiritual master's birthday. (SP Ltr. Satsvarupa, Oct. 26, 1967)

Shortly afterward, Srila Prabhupada asked Srila Sridhara Maharaja

to be the head of his newly formed society, the International Society for Krsna Consciousness. (*Lilamrta*, Vol. 3, p. 205) However, out of his deep appreciation of Srila Prabhupada's preaching, Srila Sridhara Maharaja thought that Srila Prabhupada himself should be the *acarya*.

Srila Sridhara Maharaja praised Srila Prabhupada's preaching in America, repeatedly using Prabhupada's phrase "Krsna consciousness." Swamiji's work, he said, was the fulfillment of Lord Caitanya's prophecy that Krsna consciousness would one day spread all over the world. He laughed and smiled and praised the Krsna consciousness movement, with no trace of jealousy. (*Lilamrta*, Vol. 3, p. 203)

Later, on July 7, 1975, Srila Prabhupada referred to Srila Sridhara Maharaja's statement in a letter to his godbrother Bon Maharaja:

Sripada Sridhara Maharaja also appreciated my service. He said that Caitanya Mahaprabhu's prediction: *prthivite ache yata nagaradi grama, sarvatra pracara haibe mora nama*, would remain a dream only, but he congratulated me that I have done it practically. I do not know how things are going on automatically except by His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada [Bhaktisiddhanta], because I have no other assets except his causeless mercy.

In a letter to Bodhayana Maharaja on November 9, 1976, Srila Prabhupada confirmed Srila Sridhara Maharaja's nonenvious appreciation of Srila Prabhupada as a "great powerful *acarya* in the Vaisnava world at present." Indeed, both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja had very deep realizations. Satsvarupa Maharaja writes in the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*:

During the *Vyasa-puja* celebration, Acyutananda Swami saw Prabhupada and Sridhara Maharaja fully absorbed in a deep discussion in Bengali. Upon inquiry

about the nature of their talk, Prabhupada replied, "If I were to tell you, you would faint. Sridhara Maharaja has very high realizations." (*Lilamrta*, Vol. 3, p. 205)

### I Take It on My Head

It is clear in the following letter that Srila Prabhupada regarded Srila Sridhara Maharaja as his confidential friend and well-wisher throughout his life. Concerned about his failing health, Srila Prabhupada had written Srila Sridhara Maharaja asking whether he should continue living in the United States or return to India to live his last days in Vrndavana. Srila Sridhara Maharaja wrote Srila Prabhupada advising him to stay in the U.S. and preach rather than come back to Vrndavana to leave his body. He asserted in his letter, "Wherever you are, that is Vrndavana." After receiving Srila Sridhara Maharaja's reply, Srila Prabhupada wrote:

What Sripada Sridhara Maharaja has directed, I take it on my head. He is always my well-wisher. After the departure of Prabhupada [Bhaktisiddhanta], it is appropriate that I should accept his direction. I got direction from him that I shall live in this country forever. (SP Ltr. Govinda Maharaja, Jan. 29, 1969)

### My Siksa Guru

Throughout his life, Srila Prabhupada always maintained the highest respect for and confidence in Srila Sridhara Maharaja. He even sent some of his disciples to Srila Sridhara Maharaja for instruction. On January 31, 1969, in a letter to one of his disciples, Hrsikesa dasa, he wrote:

Because you are my disciple and, I think, a sincere soul, it is my duty to refer you to someone who is competent to act

as *siksa guru*... For spiritual advancement of life, we must go to someone who is actually practicing spiritual life; not to some head of a mundane institution, not to someone who has offended his spiritual master in so many ways. I do not wish to go into details here. So, if you are actually serious to take instructions from a *siksa guru*, I can refer you to the one who is the most highly competent of all my godbrothers. This is B. R. Sridhara Maharaja, whom I consider to be even my *siksa guru*, so what to speak of the benefit that you can have by his association. So, if you are serious about the advancement of your spiritual life, I will advise you to go to Sridhara Maharaja. It will be very good for your spiritual benefit, and I will feel that you are safe. When I was in India with the others, we lived with Sridhara Maharaja. You can also make arrangements for your other godbrothers to go there in the future.

### **Your Instructions Nondifferent Than Our Prabhupada's**

At the opening ceremony of the ISKCON Mayapur Candrodaya Mandira, Srila Prabhupada remarked that he considered Srila Sridhara Maharaja to be his *siksa guru*. And then he declared:

*Jaya Om Visnupada Paramahansa Parivrajakacarya Bhakti  
Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja ki jaya.*

At the 1976 Gaura Purnima celebration in Mayapur, Srila Prabhupada invited Srila Sridhara Maharaja to share his *vyasana* with him, which he did. The only other godbrother to share Srila Prabhupada's seat was Niskincana Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja. In March of 1981, it was related to Srila Sridhara Maharaja by Sudhira Goswami that Acyutananda dasa had written about him in his book *Autobiography of a Jewish Yogi*:

He compares you to a great general, when he met you.

And he tells how Srila Prabhupada told him that he regarded you as his *siksa guru*, and that Acyutananda should come to you for your instructions. He was in some spiritual difficulty. So he describes the nine months that he was living here and his hearing from you, the many different subjects you would speak about. For all these years we have wondered how Acyutananda knew so many things. Everyone has always wondered. And now we can understand, by your association where he learned so many things. His conclusion was that your instructions were nondifferent than our Prabhupada's instructions. But at the same time different. This is my understanding--the spiritual sweetness of variety. It's nondifferent but at the same time it's different. And I didn't know that it could be like that. Because as you said in your poem to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta about this world being filled with the cheaters and the cheated. So, Srila Prabhupada was the only person I ever met who did not cheat me, until I met Your Divine Grace.

When Srila Sridhara Maharaja was told that many devotees cannot understand how someone can have two gurus, he replied:

That is because they are situated in a formal position, but when they enter into substantial spiritual realization, they will not have such a grievance because they will see what is guru. Guru means one who has come to give Krsna consciousness. The formal difference will be reduced when one can catch the very substance of the teachings for which the guru is respected. When one is intimately connected with the thread of divine love which the guru comes to impart to us, he will accept it, wherever it comes from. He will see it as a friendly relation--not antagonistic, but cooperative.

Although separate in figure, at heart both of the gurus are the same because they have a common cause. They have not come to fight with one another; they have come to fight only with the agents of Satan. If we can

recognize the real thing for which we are approaching the guru, then we will understand how to make the adjustment in our relationship with the *siksa guru*, *diksa guru*, and *varma-pradarsaka guru* [the instructing spiritual master, the initiating spiritual master, and the one who first shows the way to devotional life, respectively].

We are infinitely indebted to all our gurus. We are helpless. What can we do? They are benevolent; they are infinitely gracious; they are my guardians. I may have many guardians. They are to look after my welfare; they have not come to destroy me.

### **We Are Happy; We Are Glad; We Are Proud**

The endorsements that Srila Prabhupada gave Srila Sridhara Maharaja are unparalleled in Prabhupada's statements about his other godbrothers. The fact is that Srila Prabhupada had the highest respect and appreciation for Srila Sridhara Maharaja, and Sridhara Maharaja consistently expressed his deep admiration of Prabhupada, as shown in the following eulogy:<sup>2</sup>

So our Swami Maharaja has done a miracle! Thakura Bhaktivinoda conceived and Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura began to translate this conception into action. And we find that through Swami Maharaja, in his last days, it has been fulfilled to such a great extent. We are happy; we are glad; we are proud!

Prabhupada with great humility, his voice choked with emotion, tearfully replied:

By guru and Vaisnava, whatever position I have got, it is by guru's mercy and the blessings of the Vaisnavas. Otherwise, how may I have? So, I wish that Sridhara Maharaja may bestow his blessings as he was doing always, and may Guru

Maharaja help me so I can do some service. By his grace it has become successful. I have no credit. I do not know how things are happening, because I am not at all qualified: *chadiya vaisnava seva, nistara payeche keba*. [Without serving an ideal Vaisnava, who can be delivered from the clutches of *maya*?]

In Navadvipa on June 27, 1973, Srila Prabhupada joked with Srila Sridhara Maharaja about coming to America with him.

Srutakirti wants to serve you, provided you go with us to the U.S. (laughter). He says, "If Maharaja goes with us, then I shall take care of him."<sup>3</sup>

And in their last known recorded meeting in 1977, just prior to Prabhupada's leaving this mortal world, we find him imploring Srila Sridhara Maharaja to take up residence at his temple in Sridhama Mayapur.

### **Please Stay With Me**

Excerpt of 1977 conversation in Navadvipa [transcription by Bhakti Caru Swami]<sup>4</sup>

**Srila Prabhupada:** I do not know for how long I will be able to carry on. So, I came to see Sridhara Maharaja.

**Devotee:** If you all go away, then the world will become dark.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** [to Prabhupada] It is so wonderful that the will of the Lord becomes manifest through someone.

**Srila Prabhupada:** I want very much, Maharaja, that you come and stay at Mayapur. Because Prabhupada [Bhaktisiddhanta] always desired that you preach. He told me quite a few times, "Why don't you pull him out?" [They both laugh.] You know, I

also tried to some extent before, but somehow or other it did not work out. Now, why don't you come and stay at Mayapur? Srila Prabhupada told me also, "Sridhara Maharaja is one of the finest preachers." I want to take you everywhere. At least at the place we have in Mayapur, people are coming from all over the world. If you just agree, then whatever kind of building you want, I will arrange it for you. They are trying to build a house for me. So both of us will stay there. And whenever you want, you can come here to your matha.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** Yes, as long as I am alive to fulfill [Bhaktisiddhanta] Prabhupada's desire.

**Srila Prabhupada:** This is my earnest desire. Since you could not go around the world and preach, at least stay there and people will come to you. I shall make that arrangement. If you stay, then it will be helpful to me also. Sometimes I need to consult with someone and there is no one. There is no one that I can consult with. I feel this deficiency very greatly.

**Devotee:** If he [Srila Sridhara Maharaja] stays in Mayapur, all kinds of people will get to hear from him.

**Srila Prabhupada:** Yes, that's right.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** Yes, people from all kinds of cultural backgrounds will come there.

**Srila Prabhupada:** Yes, and they are already coming. And in that house I will make arrangements for an elevator so that you won't have to go through the difficulty of walking up and down the stairs. You won't even have to move a step yourself. I'll make arrangements for a car and an elevator. My disciples are telling me that they will build a house for me. So, both of us will stay in that house. Most of the time I am traveling around, so if you are there, they can get some guidance. So, Maharaja, please, give me the

order and I will make all the arrangements for you.

That planetarium [The Temple of Understanding] also will be built under your direction. My idea is to combine the Indian culture and the American money-the lame man and the blind man policy. I tell them also that this will be very beneficial for the world.

### Temple of Understanding

Srila Prabhupada refers to "that planetarium." Srila Sridhara Maharaja was very fond of Sanatana Goswami's most famous work, the *Brhad-bhagavatamrta*, in which devotees, devotional service, and Krsna are described very scientifically. On the basis of this transcendental literature, Sridhara Maharaja had contemplated an elaborate preaching exhibition, using dioramas to depict the varieties of spiritual planetary systems and showing that the ultimate spiritual destination is Krsna's own abode, Goloka Vrndavana. Due to insufficient funds, Sridhara Maharaja humbly submitted his idea to Srila Prabhupada, who concurred, saying, "It will be built under your direction." [5]

### He Can't Be Converted

In a talk on October 8, 1981, Srila Sridhara Maharaja remarked:

Some faith, yes, he had some faith in me. I can't deny that. In his last days he expressed that two quarters side by side will be built here. And you will live in one and I in the next. Birds of the same feather flock together. Common interest has drawn us near; our common attraction has brought us nearer, closer.

Sometimes it is wondered why Sridhara Maharaja did not take up Prabhupada's offer. Sridhara Maharaja explains:

I said, “Of course I shall try to help you. Sometimes I shall go and stay there with you.” But I really did not think at the time that I shall survive [live longer than] him.

About the reticence regarding large-scale preaching that Srila Prabhupada mentions in friendly jesting, Srila Sridhara Maharaja once reflected:

I did not want to become a big person. That is not my nature. I did not want to move around with many people. I am just satisfied with whatever I have. My spiritual thinking is my life. The conclusions of the scriptures, the advice of the *mahajanas*, to relish them and practice them and to discuss them in a small confidential circle, that is the main goal of my life.

Prabhupada testifies to his having personally heard Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura mark the high qualifications of Sridhara Maharaja, whom he first chose to have go to the West. Many of the mission stalwarts recommended Sridhara Maharaja to preach, stating: “He is the fittest man to preach in the West.” In this regard, Sridhara Maharaja once remarked:

My Guru Maharaja wanted me to go to the West for preaching, but I don’t consider myself a fit person to preach in the West. Because, you see, I can’t follow your intonation. I must listen clearly, then I shall tell. So, in this way, I told that if you order, I must go, but I don’t think that I am fit to preach in the West. Anyhow, it was stopped, and Goswami Maharaja was sent to the West. I am of reserved type, of reserved mood. I am a man of more thinking and less speaking.

When Sridhara Maharaja had been selected, one of his *sannyasa* godbrothers came to him and revealed the reason Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura had chosen him to preach in the West. This godbrother explained:

Do you know why Prabhupada wanted you to be sent to the West? He said, “Because he can’t be converted.” You have checked such an ambitious chance. If you went to the West, a big name you could acquire easily as a preacher, but you left it so easily.

### **Bhakti Raksaka**

Shortly before his departure from this mortal world, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura called Sridhara Maharaja and asked him to sing Narottama dasa Thakura’s song *Sri Rupa-Manjari Pada* (the lotus feet of Rupa Manjari are my treasure). Sridhara Maharaja recalls:

So I did, hesitatingly. My nature is always hesitating, pushing back. Then, Kunja Babu asked me to stop. I was not a good singer, so as soon as he suggested, I stopped. Then, Kunja Babu asked Puri Maharaja of Kalna, “You sing.” So he began. Then, Srila Prabhupada was a little disturbed. “I don’t like to hear the sweet tune of the song,” he said. Then, he stopped singing, and I had to begin again with *Sri-rupa-manjari-pada, sei mora sampada*. He wanted me to sing that song. That is the fulfillment of life for every one of us, to be *rupanuga*—followers of Sri Rupa.

Senior godbrothers who witnessed this exchange [notably Srila Bhakti Promode Puri Maharaja] have described it as a “mystic transmission” in which Sridhara Maharaja was given admittance into the eternal entourage of Sri Rupa Manjari. Srila Sridhara Maharaja’s humble vision, however, is that he was posted as the gatekeeper, the guardian of devotion (*bhakti-raksaka*), to protect the storehouse of conclusive truths about the full-fledged theistic conception of Sri Krsna as given by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

## Divine Qualities

The innumerable high qualities and praises of our Srila Prabhupada are well-known and accepted by the vast majority of Vaisnavas around the world. Additionally, throughout this publication, we present the many wonderful glorifications of Srila Prabhupada by Srila Sridhara Maharaja. We would also like to enumerate herein a few of the divine qualities of Srila Sridhara Maharaja:

- High recognition by other saintly personalities, including Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Niskincana Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja, Srila Bhakti Promode Puri Maharaja, Bhakti Prajnana Kesava Maharaja, and a host of godbrothers and other respectable devotees and scholars.
- Numerous original Sanskrit compositions and literary contributions.
- *Brahma-gayatri* commentary--unprecedented in our sampradaya.
- Spotless character.
- Freedom from envy and faultfinding.
- Extraordinary ability to harmonize opposing elements.
- Exceptionally kind and affectionate nature in dealing with subordinates.
- Great attachment for discussing the pastimes of the Lord and Krsna conscious *siddhanta* for hours on end.
- Superexcellent realization and clarity of presentation

of Gaudiya *siddhanta*, thereby earning the title *sastra-nipuna*.

- Blessing of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura as the Guardian of Devotion (*Bhakti Raksaka*) and further as the representative of the *Rupanuga siddhanta* (*Rupanuga-acarya*).

Just prior to his departure from this mortal world, Srila Prabhupada advised his senior disciples that in his absence, when the necessity arose to consult higher authority for clarification of certain philosophical points, they should consult Sridhara Maharaja. Prabhupada thus once and for all opened the door for his disciples to associate with Sridhara Maharaja. His final instruction regarding Sridhara Maharaja takes precedent over all other instructions. It was made only weeks before Srila Prabhupada's passing from this world, a time during which one puts all else aside and shares one's heart. He did this in spite of having on occasion criticized Sridhara Maharaja, criticisms we shall discuss in later chapters.

In this chapter we have presented the spirit of the relationship shared by these two *parama* Vaisnavas. Ignoring this, while attempting to assess the nature of their relationship, one ignores the very spirit of Vaisnavism. Srila Prabhupada's glorification of Sridhara Maharaja and his stated subordination to his godbrother is balanced with similar statements of Sridhara Maharaja in praise of Srila Prabhupada. Such a transcendental exchange reveals the greatness of both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja, who thus in the very least instruct us as to genuine Vaisnava humility and the sense that all of one's success in spiritual life is derived from the blessings of the Vaisnavas. Thus we humbly submit that the transcendental relationship between Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja be viewed and respected in terms of their eternal spiritual positions and long-standing appreciation and affection for each other, rather than in terms of their differences in style.



## Notes:

References in the text to purports are to those of Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Footnote references correspond to lectures, conversations, and letters of Srila Prabhupada in the BBT Book Trust Folio Archives.

[1] 730317RC.MAY (First two paragraphs missing from BBT Folio transcription)

[2] 730317RC.MAY

[3] 730627RC.NAV

[4] 1977 BBT transcription available only, not original.

[5] 730627RC.NAV



## Chapter Two: Exalted Glorification of Srila Sridhara Maharaja

*The following is a glorification of Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja written by his godbrother, His Holiness Srila Bhakti Promod Puri Goswami Maharaja, Founder-Acarya of the Sri Gopinatha Gaudiya Matha and President of the World Vaisnava Association*

Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Deva Goswami Maharaja exhibited profound natural and intrinsic spontaneous genius in the field of Sanskrit language, literature, and thought. Thus a natural affinity was seen in him for composing articles and prayers in Sanskrit and reading *Sri Gita*, *Sri Bhagavata*, and all other lofty scriptures that have spontaneous relations with the nature of his divine original self.

In light of his divine knowledge, qualities, devotional services, realization in the field of pure devotional *siddhanta*, and his having more advanced access in the opulent, mysterious world of transcendental devotional service, along with limitless devotional qualities and the extraordinary capability of retaining (storing up) the superexcellencies of the devotional practices and preaching campaigns by special blessings of Srila Prabhupada, he is always most worshipable to this insignificant *jiva* soul as one of my *siksa* gurus. ["Srila Prabhupada" refers to Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura throughout this chapter.]

We have especially seen the most brilliant example of Pujyapada Sridhara Maharaja's service in *visrambha* mood (with firm, wholehearted confidence, intimacy, and faith in Sri Guru). He has been unendingly blessed by our Paramaradhya Srila Prabhupada for his grand preaching campaign showing the superexcellency of the teachings of Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga. By the grace of Sri Guru, the most efficient analogies, logical arguments, and expert systems and techniques of establishing the *susiddhanta* (the higher truthful devotional conclusions) would always appear in his heart with effulgent spontaneity, enabling the convincing refutation of opposing opinions and assertions.

Thus Srila Prabhupada was always glad to see the presence of Srila Sridhara Maharaja in any conference or sophisticated debating assembly. Srila Prabhupada highly praised the quality and poetic beauty of his many invaluable compositions. Every word of his numerous prayers composed about his Gurudeva and Lord Gaurasundara are full of profound devotional resonance and clearly demonstrate his intense love of Sri Guru and Lord Gaurasundara. His explanation of Sri Brahma Gayatri , the mother of all Vedas, signifying devotional worship unto Srimati Radharani, is deeply appreciated by those fortunate, intelligent devotees who are aware of the relishable beauty of pure devotional service. I am bereft of the proper language to elucidate the profound meaning of Sri Gayatri as expressed by Pujyapada Maharaja in the depth of realization, which is that sublime Sri Radha-dasya or Sri Radha-pada-dhyana, the exclusive devotional servitude to Srimati Radharani. Therefore, it can only be presented and understood through his own illustrious transcendental language and by his exclusive divine grace. This deepest meaning of Sri Gayatri has been nobly established by the message emanating from his lotus lips and by the exultant mood radiating from the core of his heart.

I have no adequate words to express the pain of separation in the absence of such a rare personality and exalted devotee of the Lord. It was Srila Prabhupada who brought to us his own associate, our Pujyapada Maharaja, and blessed us with that great fortune of having his association. I pray imploringly to him that he generously forgive all my material mortal conceptions about him, whether known or unknown, and be gracious with me, fulfilling my life by giving me the eternal servitude of Srila Prabhupada.

Many of his eastern and western disciples offer me respect since I am his godbrother, but I am very unqualified to receive that respect. Still, I am very fond of them because they are all blessed with the fortune of having shelter beneath the lotus feet of that exalted Divine Master, and I especially request all of them to take precaution against having any mortal, material misconceptions about him.

During his lifetime the wealth of ever-new, beautiful,

glorious *hari-katha* which emanated from the lotus lips of Pujyapada Sridhara Maharaja captured my heart. Regrettably, I could not offer him proper respect at that time, and today the acute feeling of the absence of that magnanimous, well-wishing friend of mine makes my heart heavy with the pain of separation. He is Srila Prabhupada's own associate and he remains by his lotus feet in the *nitya-lila*, deeply pleasing him by his charming devotional services. Now it is my earnest prayer that he graciously take me over there and engage me in the service of Srila Prabhupada.

On the day before his disappearance, Paramaradhya Sri Srila Prabhupada requested and heard from the lips of Pujyapada Srila Sridhara Maharaja that invaluable song *Sri Rupa-Manjari Pada* composed by Srila Narottama dasa Thakura, thereby indicating the rightful entry of Pujyapada Sridhara Maharaja into the Sri Rupanuga *bhajana* the intimate devotional service in the esoteric line of Sri Rupa Manjari. Srila Prabhupada has given us great hope by saying that the inner flow of the line of Srila Thakura Bhaktivinoda, the foremost associate of Sri Rupa Prabhu and the personification of the direct potency of Lord Gaurasundara, will never be obstructed. Only Sri Gurudeva can enable us to attain that all-accommodating lofty Sri Vraja *prema*, as distributed by the unparalleled Sriman Mahaprabhu, by uplifting us onto that plane of divine rasa . Srila Prabhupada has directly defined Pujyapada Sridhara Maharaja as Sri Rupanuga Bhakti Raksaka, the Guardian of Pure Devotion in the line of Sri Rupa and thus also the guardian of the pure devotional line of Srila Thakura Bhaktivinoda. Therefore, this lowly servitor of servitors prays for his grace. How will I be able to attain that most high Sri Vraja *prema* without submission and devotion unto him whom Srila Prabhupada has directly and eternally absorbed into the Rupanuga family of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura?

From the very beginning of Pujyapada Sridhara Maharaja's *matha* life, his adherence to the devotional services of his own guru, Srila Prabhupada, was super-resplendent. His calm, quiet nature and bright, beautiful, divine appearance accompanied by full simplicity, solemnity, and complete freedom from

egoistic emotions would always attract our hearts. He would so superbly explain each and every word of Sri Gurudeva [Srila Bhaktisiddhanta] in such an intensely devotional, melodious way that we would be charmed. Although he was born in a high-class, wealthy family, was handsome, and became famous for his scholarly achievements, no trace of false pride was ever found in his life or character. He was never known to give trouble to anyone in any way and never felt himself to be the loser when taking troubles from others. He was completely free from any tinge of malicious anger, which is opposed to pure devotional service. He would always heartily try, with great patience, to resolve any problems arising from the conflicts or disputes between his godbrothers. A natural, simple, and most cordial behavior was always seen on the part of this spotless personality setting an exemplary standard for the brahmacaris and sannyasis of our mission.

He is an exalted devotee of the Supreme Lord, Sri Gaurasundara, and is always beautified with the affection of his guru vargas, Sri Guru, and the Vaisnavas. He possesses pure devotional qualities and benevolently blesses all with the divine message and matchless wealth of Srila Prabhupada, thereby fulfilling his desire.

He is all-glorious, forever glorious, everywhere.

### Chapter Three: Srila Sridhara Maharaja Glorifies Srila Prabhupada and ISKCON

Srila Sridhara Maharaja has on numerous occasions resolved problems that arose between Srila Prabhupada and his godbrothers. An example of this is the controversy that arose amongst Prabhupada's godbrothers when his disciples began addressing him as "Prabhupada," and later chanting "Jaya Prabhupada" in his glorification.

Some of Srila Prabhupada's disciples, in the early days of ISKCON, while visiting the Caitanya Saraswat Matha, heard Niskincana Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja chant *Prabhupada-padma stavaka* composed by Srila Sridhara Maharaja. At the end he started singing "Jaya Prabhupada, Jaya Prabhupada" [in glorification of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura.] The disciples of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada liked this chanting of "Jaya Prabhupada" very much and introduced it in all of Prabhupada's temples. When Prabhupada's godbrothers heard of our usage of "Prabhupada," they raised strong objections.<sup>1</sup> It was Sridhara Maharaja who explained to them that it was written in the *sastra* that the disciple should pronounce the name of his guru with the titles, "*om visnupada, prabhupada* , etc." He explained that since "our Srila Prabhupada" was actually fulfilling the desires of "their Srila Prabhupada," he deserved this title, which was reserved for great personalities.

That Srila Prabhupada's attempts to obtain land in Mayapur were strongly opposed is well-known to his disciples. Some of Srila Prabhupada's godbrothers had complained to the local district magistrate that foreigners and their opulence would spoil the chastity of the holy *dhama* . What is not so well-known is that Srila Sridhara Maharaja, upon Srila Prabhupada's request<sup>2</sup> spoke with those godbrothers opposing the acquisition of 350 acres and convinced them to withdraw their complaints to the district magistrate. In addition, as a result of Srila Sridhara Maharaja's preaching, they became favorably disposed toward Srila Prabhupada. Later, one of those godbrothers told the leader

of the Janata party, Professor Haripada Bharati, to give ISKCON full support<sup>3</sup> and further, sent a telegram to Prabhupada that he was anxiously praying for his health.<sup>4</sup> In their 1977 meeting in Navadvipa, Srila Sridhara Maharaja asked Srila Prabhupada about his preaching work:

**Srila Prabhupada:** With much difficulty, I translate the books at night and they print them and sell them, and send seventy, eighty thousand dollars every month to me here. Is India benefiting from this or losing something? But they are falsely accusing them of being CIA agents. Tirtha Maharaja used to say, “The American government has given Swamiji two million dollars.” As if the American government didn’t have anything better to do or couldn’t find a better person to give the money to. So, for making the devotees chant Hare Krsna and dance, they would give me the money, two million dollars.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** A man from the Central Intelligence Department took initiation from me. He was asking me about your movement. I told him, “These are nothing but rumors. I have known Swami Maharaja for a long time. I know him very well, and this movement is nothing but a purely spiritual movement.” Actually, what they are thinking is that previously they [the British] used to send the missionaries, then they used to send the merchants, and finally the army used to come and take over, but those days are no more. Christianity has become much less effective now.

### **Saktyavesa-Avatara**

After the disappearance of Srila Prabhupada, Srila Sridhara Maharaja declared:

I consider him *saktyavesa-avatara*, and it is confirmed in his writings on his spiritual journey through the Atlantic. How

he landed there in America, and the nature of his beginning the movement, his intense degree of dedication to Krsna and dependence, and how much he made himself empty of any other desire than the order of his *gurudeva* quite empty that Krsna came down to help him, and it is corroborated that Krsna worked on his behalf. In his poem, “Prayer to the Lotus Feet of Krsna,” we find him pleading with Krsna, “My dear Brother, Your good fortune will come to You only when Srimati Radharani becomes pleased with You.” Seeing his *gurudeva*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, as Radharani’s delegation and his order as Her divine service, he humbly submitted that he did not feel himself worthy or fit to discharge the divine service, so he enlisted Krsna in the service of his guru. He had completely dedicated himself to the purpose, he was so earnest in his prayer to Krsna that he may discharge the duty that he has been given by his Guru Maharaja, that divine force, power, came down to help him. Otherwise, it is impossible. It is not a thing of the ordinary level that anyone can do--take the highest thing [Krsna consciousness] to the lowest position [fallen souls] so extensively. It cannot but be the divine power, embodied and in a great intensity and magnitude! So, *saktyavesa-avatara*, I cannot but take him to be so.

### **Vision of Iskcon**

When asked what the vision of ISKCON should be, Srila Sridhara Maharaja replied with an explanation of a prayer of Raghunatha dasa Goswami:

*nama srestham manum api saci-putram atra svarupam*, I am fully indebted to Sri Gurudeva. Why? He has given me so many things: the highest conception of the holy name of Krsna, the highest form of sound which contains the highest form of thought, aspiration, ideal, everything.

And he has given me the service of our great savior, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and His dearest assistant, Svarupa Damodara. He has brought me in connection with Sri Rupa, who was ordered to distribute the heart's innermost dealings, the highest devotional love, *raganuga-bhakti*. Gurudeva has given me Srila Sanatana Goswami, who gives us *sambandha-jnana*, a proper acquaintance with the environment, and he has given me Mathura Mandala, which will help me in my remembrance of Radha and Govinda wherever I shall cast my glance. By his grace gurudeva has revealed the superexcellent position of Radha-kunda, the favorite place of Radha and Govinda for Their pastimes and this great Govardhana. Lastly, he has given me the hope that one day I can get the service of Sri Sri Radhika and Madhava. I have been given all these assurances by my *gurudeva*, so I bow my head with all my respects to his lotus feet. If we are conscious of all these spiritual matters, we can think that we have approached our gurudeva properly. What is our guru? What is his mission? It is filled with all these things. Devoid of that, what is our interest?

ISKCON must not deviate from this line. We have not come here to deceive ourselves, but to fulfill ourselves. ISKCON will fulfill everyone's inner demand, even extending to the vegetables and stones, taking them to the feet of Mahaprabhu and the Goswamis. From village to village, everyone, in every place, should be hunted and approached, "Take the name of Krsna! Come under the flag of Mahaprabhu!" This grand worldwide mission will thrive like anything; it will touch the heavens and cover the earth, and other planets also. That was the aim of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and we understand and appreciate that.

## Bell Ringers

Another day, Srila Sridhara Maharaja spoke further:

I heard from different people that Swami Maharaja has told his disciples that in Bengal most of the disciples of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura have deviated from his teachings. So, now you have to go and reinstate them there. Giving such inspiration, he sent them there. I have not heard it from him myself. I simply heard it from others, and in a way, I think, it is quite possible that he said this to his disciples, just to encourage them. At a time when the *brahmanas* were very fallen in Bengal, the Ādisura brought *brahmanas* from Kanowj and then he re established the *varnasrama* system there. Swami Maharaja has also done something like that. I heard from Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja that before leaving this planet, Swami Maharaja requested him to beg forgiveness on his behalf from his godbrothers-that, at times, he might have offended his godbrothers while preaching. This he said, I heard it from Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja. I heard once Akincana Maharaja asked him, "What are your other godbrothers doing?" He replied, "They just eat, sleep, and ring the bell." Hearing this they became very offended and came to me. But my observation is neutral. So I said, "The drum that he is playing, if he accepts you as a player of the bell in that band, then you should consider this to be a great honor." My view is different. I saw that he is playing a huge drum, a battle drum, so if you get a chance to play the *kasi*, or cymbals, along with that, that is a great honor to you, a more dignified position. This I am speaking from the absolute consideration.

[A few Gaudiya Matha *sannyasis* had many hundreds of disciples, had opened many temples, and were at that time preaching with vigor, so they were understandably irritated at being called mere bell-ringers. For example, in a conversation in Bhuvaneshvara in 1977, Srila Prabhupada, hearing the report of his disciples that Madhava Maharaja had a whole village enthusiastically engaged in Krsna conscious activities, suggested that we should do likewise.]<sup>5</sup>

## Keeping Iskcon Together

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** I am open to all. Generally, I want both parties to come, and I shall try to help that it may not be broken asunder. Such a great thing has been done by Swami Maharaja, I love it very much. That this worldwide movement organization will be broken into factions, I can't tolerate this. So, I like that both parties will come, and I shall try to find a middle solution. But the party in power may not care to come. For a long time I am feeling unhappy whenever I come upon a person going away dissatisfied. But the party in power does not care to come to me. I am sufficiently old, but I don't like to see that Swami Maharaja's great work is disturbed in such a way. So laudable a thing. *Prthivite ache yata nagaradi grama, sarvatra pracara haibe mora nama*. Is this great action undertaken by Swami Maharaja, which is successful, going to be ruined by internal feud? Intolerable. So, if both parties come, I shall try my best before I die. I want to see a united front and a healthy institution. That is my heart's desire.

**Bhakti Caru Swami:** That is what most of the godbrothers also feel [at this time, in 1980, this includes many GBC members]. They feel that whatever Srila Sridhara Maharaja says, we will accept that decision.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** In the core of my heart I desire such. That it may be broken is intolerable. It should remain a united front and be victorious over the other religious principles. There are so many enemies in the name of religion. They are flourishing and such a great future will be lost. It is intolerable. And especially Prabhupada asked me to go to the West. I could not go, but Prabhupada has brought the West to me, so I have got some holy duty to discharge about that, I feel. It may not be broken into pieces. United we stand, divided we fall. But if hopeless, there's no alternative. We must always side with the truth, not with the falsehood. Hare Krsna.

Swami Maharaja took the responsibility of that great

unfinished work and did wonderfully successful work and we feel proud for him. We feel such pride for his activity. How can we tolerate in our lifetime, within two or three years after his departure, that it will be broken into pieces? It is intolerable. Hare Krsna. But if for the sake of quality, for the sake of truth, we are to face such a situation, it can't be helped. Truth is everything, *satyam param dhimahi*.

*From this chapter we can see the nonenvious nature of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. For more than four years he selflessly gave his sastric advice and high realizations to ISKCON. He had no desire whatsoever to capture ISKCON devotees. His nature was just the opposite--disinterested in acquirement, satisfied with a simple life.*

## Notes:

Quotations not footnoted are taken from selected talks of Srila Sridhara Maharaja in his matha in Navadvipa.

[1] SP Ltr. Rupanuga, Sept. 25, 1970

[2] SP Ltr. Sridhara Maharaja, June 6, 1976

[3] 771106RC.VRN

[4] 771012RC.VRN

[5] 770121R2.BHU



## Chapter Four: Prabhupada's Instructions

Shortly before he left us in 1977, Srila Prabhupada advised his disciples to see Srila Sridhara Maharaja if they had questions about philosophical matters. This instruction was accepted by the entire GBC at that time, and from 1977 to 1981 they did approach Srila Sridhara Maharaja with many important questions.

A substantial portion of the *GBC Guru Position Paper* of March 1978, the GBC's official statement published after their initial question-and-answer session with Srila Sridhara Maharaja, is taken directly from Srila Sridhara Maharaja's instructions to the GBC, with a few noteworthy additions and subtractions.

That it was actually the instruction of Srila Prabhupada that we should approach Srila Sridhara Maharaja for spiritual instruction is corroborated by taped statements of Jayapataka Maharaja, Satsvarupa Maharaja, Bhakti Caru Swami, Tamala Krsna Maharaja, and many other GBCs [some of whom later changed their minds regarding the validity of their previous statements], as well as by Tripurari Maharaja who was personally massaging Srila Prabhupada's lotus feet in the midst of several senior devotees when he heard this instruction from Srila Prabhupada. The instruction came in response to a question from Tamala Krsna Maharaja as to whom we could approach for advice after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance. Bhakti Caru Swami related to Srila Sridhara Maharaja on August 19, 1980:

Prabhupada gave us an instruction that if we have any difficulty then we should come to you, but they are deliberately neglecting that instruction of Srila Prabhupada.

In addition, official GBC recognition of this instruction of Srila Prabhupada was given in the GBC's March 1981 publication, "The Descending Process of Selecting a Spiritual Master." Giriraja Maharaja, in a letter of September 16, 1978 addressed to all GBC members, wrote:

According to Sridhara Swami, who Srila Prabhupada said we should consult about philosophy and practical points, there is relative and absolute consideration and we must give Sridhara Swami the highest regard. At one time, Srila Prabhupada said that apart from himself only Sridhara Swami was qualified to write the *Bhagavatam* purports. When we approached Srila Prabhupada before his departure about our writing books after his disappearance, Srila Prabhupada replied, "You can write when you are realized, but now none of you are realized."

So both in terms of relative rank and absolute realization, Sridhara Swami is far beyond any of us. Recently, I have heard statements to the effect that we have now surpassed Sridhara Swami and that we are in the position where we can improve upon Sridhara Swami's conception. In this connection, I am simply reminded of the words of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, *svami na mane yei jana vesyara bhitare, tare kariye ganana*, that we must remain faithful to our Swami [otherwise we will be prostitutes]. (Cc . *Antya-lila* 7.115)

In regard to Srila Sridhara Maharaja, Srila Prabhupada's disciples said:

[Prabhupada said] If there was question we should approach you. (Jayapataka Maharaja, tape, March 1978)

We should go to his godbrother Sridhara Maharaja for guidance. So this talk of October 21, 1980 certainly showed the gbc doing this, and Srila Sridhara Maharaja fulfilling this role, as Prabhupada requested he do for the disciples of Srila Prabhupada. (Satsvarupa Maharaja, tape, December 22, 1980)

Srila Prabhupada's leading disciples also greatly appreciated Srila Sridhara Maharaja. A historic series of *darsanas* during the

Gaura Purnima of 1981 were attended every day by many leading iskcon devotees, including Tamala Krsna Maharaja, Ramesvara Maharaja, Kirtanananda Maharaja, Giriraja Swami, Jayadvaita Swami, Bhakti Caru Swami, Atreya Risi Prabhu, and many other GBCs.

Our Guru Maharaja was kind upon us, so you are kind upon us. I find no difference at all in how you are blessing us. When I used to come every year to Mayapur, my whole purpose in coming was fulfilled when I would be in his association. So similarly, now I am feeling that as I have come here, that my purpose is being fulfilled, whenever I am in your association. (Tamala Krsna Maharaja, tape, February 26, 1981)

I take it that Prabhupada is speaking to us through you. (Ramesvara Swami, tape, March 5, 1981)

Additionally, other disciples stated:

Sridhara Maharaja's instructions are nondifferent than Prabhupada's. (*Autobiography of a Jewish Yogi*, Acyutananda dasa)

Prabhupada told me twice, "Everything I know, I learned from Sridhara Maharaja." (Hamsaduta dasa)

Maharaja, time will prove that they [ISKCON leaders] are wrong, and you are right. (Bhakti Caru Swami, tape, February 1982)

Srila Prabhupada himself spoke highly of **Srila Sridhara Maharaja**:

...who is the most highly competent of all my godbrothers. This is B. R. Sridhara Maharaja, whom I consider to be even my siksa guru . If you are serious about the



advancement of your spiritual life, I advise you to go to Sridhara Maharaja and I will feel that you are safe. You can also make arrangements for your other godbrothers to go there in the future. (SP Ltr. Hrsikesa, January 1, 1969)

What Sripada Sridhara Maharaja has directed, I take it on my head. It is appropriate that I should accept his direction. (SP Ltr. Govinda Mj, 12-9-69)

What Govinda Maharaja has said is true. I consider his guru as my siksa guru. (SP, ISKCON Mayapur Candrodaya Mandira opening ceremony 1974)

Those who are intelligent, they are making something, Sridhara Maharaja and others. (SP Conversation, Allahabad, January 13, 1977)<sup>1</sup>

One of my important godbrothers [Sridhara Maharaja] says. He's sincere. He says, "The prediction of *Caitanya-caritamrta*, *prthivite ache yata nagaradi-grama* So you have done it." (SP LA Morning Walk, December 11, 1973 & SP Ltr. Bon Maharaja, July 7, 1975)<sup>2</sup>

Our relationship is very intimate. After the breakdown of the Gaudiya Matha I wanted to organize another organization making Sridhara Maharaja as the head. (SP Conversation, March 17, 1973)<sup>3</sup>

Over the years, various facts have mysteriously changed, according to the political climate. Statements included in this book are substantiated with hard copy and tape recordings. Understandably, one may change his opinion regarding certain things, but this does not change the essential facts, the actual truth, *satyam param dhimahi*.

## Letter to Rupanuga

Despite Srila Prabhupada's final and conclusive statements regarding Srila Sridhara Maharaja, some take Srila Prabhupada's letter to Rupanuga in 1974 as the conclusive statement about Srila Sridhara Maharaja. An excerpt of the letter follows:

My dear Rupanuga Maharaja,

Please accept my blessings. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of April 17, from Washington D.C. and I have very carefully noted the contents.

You are right about Sridhara Maharaja's genuineness. But in my opinion he is the best of the lot. He is my old friend, at least he executes the regulative principles of devotional service. I do not wish to discuss about activities of my godbrothers but it is a fact they have no life for preaching work. All are satisfied with a place for residence in the name of a temple, they engage disciples to get foodstuff by transcendental devices and eat and sleep. They have no idea or brain how to broadcast the cult of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. My Guru Maharaja used to lament many times for this reason and he thought if one man at least had understood the principle of preaching then his mission would achieve success. In the latter days of my Guru Maharaja, he was very disgusted. Actually, he left this world earlier, otherwise he would have continued to live for more years. Still he requested his disciples to form a strong governing body for preaching the cult of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. He never recommended anyone to be *acarya* of the Gaudiya Matha. But Sridhara Maharaja is responsible for disobeying this order of Guru Maharaja, and he and others who are already dead, unnecessarily thought that there must be one *acarya*. If Guru Maharaja could have seen someone who was qualified at that time to be *acarya* he would have mentioned. Because on the

night before he passed away he talked of so many things, but never mentioned an *acarya*. His idea was *acarya* was not to be nominated amongst the governing body. He said openly you make a GBC and conduct the mission. So his idea was that a self-effulgent *acarya* would be automatically selected from amongst the successful members of the GBC. So Sridhara Maharaja and his two associate gentlemen unauthorizedly selected one *acarya* and later it proved a failure. The result is now everyone is claiming to be *acarya* even though they may be *kanistha-adhikari* with no ability to preach. In some of the camps, the *acarya* is being changed three times a year. Therefore we may not commit the same mistake in our ISKCON camp. Actually amongst my godbrothers no one is qualified to become *acarya*. So it is better not to mix with my godbrothers very intimately because instead of inspiring our students and disciples they may sometimes pollute them. This attempt was made previously by them, especially [names three *sannyasi* godbrothers] but somehow or other I saved the situation. This is going on. We shall be very careful about them and not mix with them. This is my instruction to you all. They cannot help us in our movement, but they are very competent to harm our natural progress. So we must be very careful about them.

When there is a conflict between opposing statements, they must be reconciled. Rupa Goswami has written:

*virodho vakyayor yatra napramayam tad isyate  
yathaviruddhata ca syat tatharthah kalpyate tayoh*

“When two scriptural statements contradict each other, one is not taken as inauthentic. One should give the meaning in such a way that the contradiction is removed.” (Laghu-bhag. 1.212)

The previously mentioned personal instruction of Srila Prabhupada to approach Srila Sridhara Maharaja for philosophy

was given three years *after* the Rupanuga letter was written. This letter of Srila Prabhupada must be harmonized with the other statements by Srila Prabhupada in order to get an accurate picture of Srila Prabhupada’s feelings about Srila Sridhara Maharaja. When seen in the light of proper historical perspective, the circumstantial nature of these remarks can be realized because the subsequent friendly and intimate dealings between Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja did not change in the slightest even after Srila Prabhupada made such remarks. Further, Srila Prabhupada and Srila Sridhara Maharaja lived together harmoniously during the majority of the problems of the Gaudiya Matha mentioned in the Rupanuga letter, [4] and subsequent to this Srila Prabhupada requested Srila Sridhara Maharaja to be the president of ISKCON:

Our relationship is very intimate. After the breakdown of the Gaudiya Matha, I wanted to organize another organization, making Sridhara Maharaja the head. (March 1973) [5]

Unfortunately, taking the Rupanuga letter out of its true historical context, a handful of leaders have attempted to utilize it in order to discredit the deep and intimate relationship between Srila Sridhara Maharaja and Srila Prabhupada. Some of these leaders are fully aware of this deep relationship. Neither have we seen the letter written to Srila Prabhupada that elicited this response. A careful study of Prabhupada’s many letters shows that quite often his letters are direct responses to particular circumstances and may even contradict other instructions in different situations.

According to Srila Sridhara Maharaja, a GBC was formed by the trustees of the Gaudiya Matha ten days after the disappearance of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, although it did not remain intact for long. Membership of the GBC was declined by Srila Sridhara Maharaja. The GBC elected an *acarya* and Srila Sridhara Maharaja helped advise the GBC when requested by them.

## The War Is Over

In spite of Srila Prabhupada's sometimes strong criticism of his godbrothers, he also wrote positively about them:

Even amongst our godbrothers we have misunderstanding, but none of us is astray from the service of Krsna. My Guru Maharaja ordered us to execute his mission combinedly. Unfortunately, we are now separated. But none of us have stopped preaching Krsna consciousness. Even there was misunderstanding amongst the godbrothers of my Guru Maharaja, none of them deviated from the transcendental loving service of Krsna. (SP Ltr. Brahmananda, November 18, 1967)

The disciples of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Goswami are all godbrothers, and although there are some differences of opinion and we are not acting conjointly, every one of us is spreading this Krsna consciousness movement according to his capacity and producing many disciples to spread it all over the world. ( *Bhag.* 4.28.31)

So far as your question about controversy amongst the disciples of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Goswami Maharaja, that is a fact. But this controversy is not material. Just like in a national program, different political parties are sometimes in conflict and make propaganda against each other, but their central point is always service to the country. Similarly, amongst the disciples of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati there may be some controversy, but the central point is how to preach the mission of His Divine Grace. (SP Ltr. Mandali Bhadra, July 28, 1969)

The above letter to Brahmananda was written early on, subsequent to which there were many problems with Srila Prabhupada's godbrothers. The above purport, however, was written quite a bit later.

Srila Prabhupada also said, "The war is over now," and he created the Bhaktivedanta Swami Charity Trust for developing *Gauda-mandala-bhumi* and encouraging better relations and cooperation between ISKCON and Srila Prabhupada's godbrothers. Specifically, Srila Prabhupada instructed that this trust construct a kirtana hall at Srila Sridhara Maharaja's Matha and also one at the birthplace of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Yogapitha.<sup>6</sup>

When we examine the activities of these two Vaisnavas, we see the real intentions of these pure devotees of the Lord, fully absorbed in devotional service. One must examine all the facts impartially, not just make a superficial estimation based on one letter and general statements and pass a decree for all time. The mistakes made by the leaders of ISKCON were much more grave than the alleged mistakes of Srila Sridhara Maharaja [supporting an *acarya* who later fell down]. Within ISKCON the many mistakes of the leaders have been whitewashed, whereas Srila Sridhara Maharaja to this day is maligned. In light of an unbiased look at Srila Prabhupada's letters, conversations, and other instructions, it can be concluded that Srila Prabhupada did not discourage his disciples from receiving instruction (*siksa*) from Srila Sridhara Maharaja; on the contrary, he encouraged it. Similarly, an unbiased look at the *siksa* of Srila Sridhara Maharaja will show that his advice was perfect. When told of Srila Prabhupada's criticism of himself in the Rupanuga letter, Srila Sridhara Maharaja replied with a chuckle, "Just see the preaching of Swami Maharaja, he has not even spared me, his intimate friend!"

Notes:

[1] 770113RC.ALL

[2] 731211M2.LA in ref to SP Ltr Bon Mj July 7, 1975 & 760122MW.MAY

[3] 730317RC.MAY

[4] Lilamrta, Vol. 1, p. 100

[5] 730317RC.MAY

[6] 771030R2.VRN & 771106RC.VRN



## Chapter Five: Misconceptions

Preaching styles among Vaisnavas may differ greatly. It is Krsna's special mercy that He empowered one Vaisnava, Srila Prabhupada, to spread Krsna consciousness all over the world and chose another, Srila Sridhara Maharaja, to stay in one place and preach. Many great Vaisnavas in our line did not preach extensively, such as Gaura Kisora dasa Babaji, Lokanatha Goswami, and Gadadhara Pandita. Yet all these devotees greatly served the Lord according to His desire and are considered most dear to the Lord. Srila Prabhupada's contribution is unique, unprecedented, and deserves the highest praise. This does not mean, however, that the activities and contributions of all other devotees must then be seen as insignificant or worthy of criticism. Each Vaisnava is unique and should be seen in this way:

One should not be envious, considering one preacher to be very great and another to be very lowly. This is a material distinction and has no place on the platform of spiritual activities. Krsnadasa Kaviraja Goswami therefore offers equal respect to all the preachers of the cult of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who are compared to the branches of the tree. Iskcon is one of these branches. (Cc. *Adi-lila* 10.7, purport)

### Madhurya-Rasa

Some say that Srila Sridhara Maharaja's tasteful illuminations of the most sublime aspects of *madhurya-rasa* and the tantamount importance of Srimati Radharani and Her dearest Rupa Goswami [Manjari] are not in line with Srila Prabhupada's teachings. But we cannot deny that we are a *madhurya-rasa sampradaya*. It is our Gaudiya *sampradaya*'s prominent teaching, and it was dealt with skillfully by Srila Prabhupada. He warned us not to read the tenth canto of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, neglecting the first nine cantos,

but presented *Krsna Book* early on, showing us the standard. We invite our readers to read *Loving Search For the Lost Servant* by Srila Sridhara Maharaja to see how he also tastefully presents *madhurya-rasa*. In this sublime literature, Srila Sridhara Maharaja presents the highest ideal, *prayojana-tattva*—the ultimate aspiration of the followers of Sri Rupa—in a sweet and relishable way with such taste and careful consideration that one will not be misled. Srila Prabhupada has also said:

Oh! It is not that the *gopis* are boycotted. The policy should be that because people may not understand the *gopis*—they may think they are ordinary girls—we should be careful how we present the *gopis*. It does not mean that we shall not even utter the word *gopis*, that we have taken a vow to boycott the *gopis*. No. They are worshipful devotees. How can we avoid them? (SP, December 24, 1969)

One who has not been attracted by the transcendental beauty of *rasa* will certainly be dragged down into material attraction, thus to act in material contamination and progress to the darkest region of hellish life, but by understanding the conjugal love of Radha and Krsna one is freed from the grip of attraction to material so-called love between man and woman. Similarly, if one understands the pure *vatsalya*, *sakhya*, and *dasya* love for Krsna, one will not be attracted by their material counterparts. (Cc. *Adi-lila* 4.35)

Srila Sridhara Maharaja was certainly qualified to speak of the higher dealings of Krsna and His confidential associates, always doing so in the most tasteful way. Srila Sridhara Maharaja's statement in 1983 was that "our mission is to uphold the integrity of *madhurya-rasa*." Srila Sridhara Maharaja's article *Fools Rush In Where Angels Fear to Tread* clearly shows him doing this. The *acaryas* in our *parampara* are predominantly of *madhurya-rasa*. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's lila is *audarya-lila*—the magnanimous distribution of *madhurya prema*, *manjari bhava-unnatojjvala-rasam*

*sva-bhakti-sriyam*. (Cc. *Adi-lila* 1.4)

*prema-rasa-niryasa karite asvadana*  
*raga-marga bhakti loke karite pracarana*

"Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu desired to taste the sweet essence of the mellows of love of God [*madhurya prema-rasa*], and He wanted to propagate devotional service in the world on the platform of spontaneous attraction [*raganuga-bhakti*]." (Cc. *Adi-lila* 4.15)

The very name of Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Deva Goswami Maharaja—*Bhakti Raksaka*—literally means guardian of devotion, a name given by his Guru Maharaja, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, in recognition of his purity in the line of Srila Rupa Goswami. When it was suggested by his godbrothers that Srila Sridhara Maharaja had been granted entrance into *manjari bhava* by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura at the time of the Thakura's departure, Sridhara Maharaja remarked that he felt that he was posted at the gate. Later, recalling this incident, he remarked further that "he was not letting just anyone in." Thus his discussions regarding the highest mellows of love, the *prayojana-tattva*, were always tasteful and appropriate. Srila Sridhara Maharaja spoke about things that Prabhupada had not gone into detail about, yet everything he spoke about was appropriate for advancing *sadhakas*. Should we think that our *siksa guru* will have nothing new to say? If so, what then is the purpose of a *siksa guru*?

## A Pound Of Caution

Srila Sridhara Maharaja's penetrating explanation of *Brahma Gayatri* pointing to *radha-dasyam* revealed his profound depth of realization. He also gave a deep explanation of *Sri Bhagavad-gita*, revealing the extent to which the Gaudiya *siddhanta* is represented in the *Gita*. His brilliant and penetrating *madhurya* commentaries charmed and captured many hearts. But it is to be noted that Srila Sridhara Maharaja always gave us a pound of caution with

every ounce of sweetness. His distaste for the *sahajiya* section was well-known. He referred to the premature *siddha-pranali* advocates as *pukura-curiwale*, pond thieves, and called their so-called *sakhi* identity false and imaginary and their achievement sheer concoction-having not even passed through *anartha-nivrtti*.

Examining the quality of Srila Sridhara Maharaja's writings, one cannot help but realize his substantial connection with the topmost object of our aspirations, his total internal absorption and dedication to the highest ideals of Vaisnavism. That Srila Sridhara Maharaja presented profound realizations and deep knowledge of the scriptures is self-evident to the unbiased observer. And this is the criterion for judging a Vaisnava as given by Srila Rupa Goswami Prabhupada--to take note of his internal absorption over his style of delivery or temperament. One simply has to read Srila Sridhara Maharaja's literatures or listen to the recordings of his talks for oneself.

## Sixteen Rounds

Most of the controversy surrounding the subject of how many rounds Srila Sridhara Maharaja recommended one to chant centers on a misrepresentation of Srila Sridhara Maharaja's teachings. Although the following excerpt instructs that a devotee should chant sixteen rounds, it was propagated that Srila Sridhara Maharaja taught that only four rounds were necessary. The following excerpt from his book *Search for Sri Krsna: Reality The Beautiful* shows how his teachings were misrepresented:

One should chant sixteen rounds, as recommended by Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, but if there is any emergency, one must chant at least four rounds; the *mala* should not be kept fasting.

This *harinama maha-mantra* is found in the *Upanisads*, as well as in the *Agni Purana* and the *Brahmanda Purana*. In the *Kalisantaranya Upanisad*, it is recommended as

the highest mantra, and scholars have mentioned this mantra as a means of address only; no appeal should be attached to it. This Hare Krsna *maha-mantra* is the *yuga-dharma nama*, or the process of God-realization especially meant for the present age: *Kali-yuga*.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura emphasized that *kirtana* means not only loudly singing the holy name, but preaching. There is a difference between the preaching mission of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and the so-called *bhajana* of the *sahajiyas*, or imitationists.

Once, one of our godbrothers (Niskincana Krsnadasa Babaji Maharaja) was the subject of our Guru Maharaja's stern remark. He was a man of good character, but his tendency was generally toward *nama bhajana*. He did not like to do any other service, but was only inclined to chant the name of Krsna on his beads. I was in charge of the Delhi temple at the time and was intimate with him, so I wrote to Prabhupada [Bhaktisiddhanta]: "If you permit, I would like to engage my godbrother in some preaching work here in the Delhi temple." The letter that Prabhupada wrote is still here. He wrote me in his letter, "If you can bring him there and make him help you in the work of preaching, then you will be doing the service of a real friend to him. I don't recognize that sitting in the jungle of Balihati only chanting, counting beads, is *krsnanusilanam*, the proper cultivation of Krsna consciousness."

So, *kirtana* means preaching, *sravanam*, *kirtanam*. *Kirtana* does not simply mean loudly chanting, but preaching. Preaching means there must be a fight with the opposition party. *Kirtana* means a fight. *Kirtana* creates the divine vibration. It will fight with all the ordinary vibrations that are floating in this world in subtle and gross waves. So, our Guru Maharaja told us that our *tulasi* beads should not fast. His minimum advice was that we must do some service in the form of chanting Hare Krsna while counting on beads, at least once daily. His exact words

were *malika upabasa na*: “The beads should not fast.” And his general instruction was to preach as much as possible.

## Krsna Nama—An Express Train to Vrndavana

Srila Sridhara Maharaja continues:

Once I had a talk with one of the big spiritual leaders of the Udupi temple in Madras. He told me, “Sometimes I preach about Madhvacharya and the *bhakti* cult, but I have no time for *sadhana*.” I supported him. Our Guru Maharaja said that *hari-katha*, preaching about Krsna, is no less important than *sadhana*. Rather, it is a more living thing, *pran ache yar sei hetu pracar*. Preaching is more vital. When we are preaching, we must have the maximum concentration, but while chanting on our *japa* beads, we may be absentminded. When we are speaking about Krsna, we must be all-attentive; otherwise, we cannot speak accurately. All our attention will automatically be concentrated when we talk about Krsna. And in writing about Krsna, accuracy is even more necessary than speaking about Krsna. So, writing is also *kirtana*. The cultivation of Krsna consciousness may even be more intense when we are engaged in writing about Krsna.

The preaching mission of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, the Gaudiya Matha, has declared totalitarian war against *maya*, illusion, and all other existing conceptions of religion. What is really all-important is the spirit of service. We are not told that the *gopis* always count the name on *tulasi* beads, yet they possess the highest position in the service of Krsna in Vrndavana.

So, *krsna-nama* will help us greatly to go toward Vrndavana. Its importance is there. Like an express train, the holy name of Krsna carries us to the goal without stopping at any other station. My Guru Maharaja’s general recommendation for his initiated

disciples was to chant 25,000 names, 16 rounds daily, or at least four rounds minimum. When someone had no work, he would chant 100,000 names, or 64 rounds.

Srila Sridhara Maharaja is enunciating the teachings of his Guru Maharaja, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, so one should be careful not to criticize these instructions of our *param guru*; rather, one should try to harmonize them with Srila Prabhupada’s.

## But Srila Sridhara Maharaja Was Outside ISKCON

While it is true that certain institutional considerations must be maintained, we cannot forget that it was Srila Prabhupada himself who opened the door for his disciples to hear from Srila Sridhara Maharaja: he sent Acyutananda Maharaja and others to Srila Sridhara Maharaja to receive *siksa* from him, and Srila Prabhupada informed his disciples that after he left this world they should “see my godbrother B. R. Sridhara Maharaja for questions of philosophy.” The principle of *siksa guru*, essential in our evolving Krsna consciousness, is discussed in detail in *Sri Guru and His Grace* by Srila Sridhara Maharaja.

## Did Srila Sridhara Maharaja Re-initiate Srila Prabhupada’s Disciples?

Srila Sridhara Maharaja has sometimes been portrayed as eager to collect Srila Prabhupada’s disciples, as several of his godbrothers were. The following section includes excerpts from various *darsanas* of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. These excerpts reveal that Srila Sridhara Maharaja’s mood was in fact just the opposite. Srila Sridhara Maharaja expressed many times, however, that he could not ignore those having a faith crisis—he felt it his duty to give them strength, nurture them, and in some cases, when devotees did not have proper connection with a guru in good spiritual

standing, connect them to the source of their newfound faith—a natural spiritual progression.

### Many Came to Take Initiation

Srila Sridhara Maharaja related on August 19, 1980 that Srila Prabhupada had implicit faith in him because he knew that Srila Sridhara Maharaja would not re-initiate his disciples:

Swami Maharaja had earlier approached me to train up some boys, but first he sent them to another Maharaja, disciples like Acyutananda, Ramanuja, Hrsikesa, and some others. But one of our godbrothers took one away from your Guru Maharaja and made him his own disciple, and then he wrote to me in the name of Govinda Maharaja asking me to look after the boys.<sup>1</sup> That letter I still have. So Acyutananda and Ramanuja came first; he wanted me to train them up. He always had great trust in me that I would not make disciples out of his disciples. For this reason, he would come to me, and also he knew me from earlier days.

Pisima (Prabhupada's sister, Bhavatarini) had taken *hari-nama diksa* from our Guru Maharaja, and she had come to me for the second initiation. At that time, I decided not to give any *diksa* because I thought myself unfit. But on the other side there was Prabhupada's (Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's) order to give *diksa pracar*. I was wavering between these two points: on one side my guru's orders, and on the other side I thought myself unfit to give *diksa*. But the point that I did not want to give was more prominent. I went to Sripada Nityananda Prabhu's birthplace, and there I felt an urge to give *diksa*. And then reading Srila Jiva Goswami, I came across a point where it is said that I should give what I have. If I don't give what I have, I am a cheater. All these points—and Guru Maharaja was always in favor of *kirtana* and *pracar*. But Pisima came before this, so I had

to turn her away. Many people had come, many, many nice people had come, but I had to turn them away, all of them.

They all wanted me to become *acarya*. Madhava Maharaja, Goswami Maharaja, and Kesava Maharaja would not have become *acaryas* if I had taken up this post of being *acarya*. They all wanted me to become the *acarya*, especially Madhava Maharaja and Kesava Maharaja, and many others, even Jajabar Maharaja. They started initiating because I did not want to initiate. Swami Maharaja had great faith that I would not try to lure away his disciples. I did not want to become a big person. That is not in my nature. I did not want to move around with many people. I'm just satisfied with whatever I have. I am only concerned about my high thinking. That is my life. My spiritual thinking is my life. The conclusions of the scriptures, the advice of the *mahajanas*, to relish them and practice them, and to discuss them in a small confidential circle, that is the main goal of my life. That's why he trusted me.

### Prabhupada's Disciples Never Re-initiated

Srila Sridhara Maharaja never re-initiated Srila Prabhupada's disciples. Some of Srila Prabhupada's disciples, out of their great love and affection for Srila Sridhara Maharaja, recognizing his unlimited grace, felt that they wanted some sort of affectionate connection with him. So, he gave a name to them--in the spirit of encouragement--hardly could this be called a re-initiation. We may recall that it was Srila Sridhara Maharaja himself who suggested the name change from "Bhaktisiddhanta" dasa to "Bhaktivedanta" dasa for Srila Prabhupada--confirmed by the assembled godbrothers. Srila Sridhara Maharaja is also the sannyasa guru of Srila Prabhupada's sannyasa guru, so in this way, he is substantially connected to our parampara prior to Srila Prabhupada, and as such his activities should not be questioned in this way. Many have wished to deny this essential truth.



Srila Sridhara Maharaja's mood of disinterest in collecting disciples may be contrasted with the mood of other godbrothers of his, some of whom re-initiated or tried to capture Prabhupada's disciples during the time of Srila Prabhupada.<sup>2</sup> It would also be prudent to contrast his disinterested mood with regard to collecting disciples with the mood of those who criticized him, asserting that he was eager to collect followers and to live off Srila Prabhupada's accomplishments.

### **Re-initiation: Grand Disciples Only**

Those who were grand disciples of Srila Prabhupada and had lost faith in their guru due to his being in questionable standing were sometimes given re-initiation. Srila Sridhara Maharaja was most careful in this regard. Many were refused. Mukunda Mala dasa, a first initiated disciple of Srila Prabhupada with *diksa* (*gayatri*) from a disciple of Srila Prabhupada, had lost all faith in his *mantra* guru and taken off his *brahmana* thread. In a disparaged state, he approached Srila Sridhara Maharaja. His faith in this divine process rekindled by the potent hearing sessions with Srila Sridhara Maharaja for many months, he requested *diksa* initiation. Srila Sridhara Maharaja then requested that his *mantra* guru be approached first for his blessings. However, his *mantra* guru replied to this humble request with, "I'd rather see him rot in the hell of *guru aparadha*." Hearing of this, Srila Sridhara Maharaja responded, "This will not increase his fame as a merciful man."

Many within ISKCON, having lost their taste for Krsna consciousness, found great inspiration and renewed enthusiasm in the words of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. Subsequent to giving initiation to devotees whose severely diminished faith had been rekindled, Srila Sridhara Maharaja sent them back to ISKCON with the instruction to continue their service there as before. The response of the ISKCON leaders to this was complete intolerance--the GBC issued an ultimatum that if these devotees wished to continue their service in ISKCON, they must reject

their initiation. No proper attempt was made to approach Srila Sridhara Maharaja on a middle ground. Nor was consideration given to the faith that the devotees had developed in their siksa guru. These devotees then had no choice but to join completely with Srila Sridhara Maharaja. Srila Sridhara Maharaja's mood was that of relief work for the discouraged and disillusioned; in no way was he "trying to collect ISKCON's devotees as disciples." Devotees who joined with Srila Sridhara Maharaja in this way were requested to live and manage themselves separately from his *matha*.

When three disenfranchised devotees left ISKCON to take shelter of Srila Sridhara Maharaja, after hearing from him over a period of many months, they were given *sannyasa*—a natural, spiritual progression in their ongoing, intimate relationship. This was taken by the ISKCON leaders as an intolerable attack—that Srila Sridhara Maharaja was stealing their men. Srila Sridhara Maharaja's sweet and substantial response to this is presented in *Sri Guru and His Grace*, in the section entitled, "God Consciousness vs. Society Consciousness."

### **We Will Be Responsible to Mahaprabhu**

Srila Sridhara Maharaja related that he felt it his duty to give proper advice when requested by devotees—that it was an offense to not help. Although asked by the GBC to not advise members of ISKCON, it soon became apparent to Srila Sridhara Maharaja that it was the GBC's activities that were the very cause of the majority of these devotees' problems. The GBC wished to maintain the status quo without any suggestion of reform. By providing counsel to disturbed ISKCON devotees, Srila Sridhara Maharaja provided a forum for the many problems within ISKCON to be voiced and proper solutions suggested. However, any such suggestion of impropriety on the part of the GBC, or reform of such, was strongly opposed.

On August 25, 1981, Srila Sridhara Maharaja addressed

accusations that his preaching to disenheartened devotees was inappropriate:

Your vision is different than mine. My vision is that a *jiva* is in the ocean and is going up and down with the weeds. Going down gradually. And anyhow he has come to the shore. And again I shall push him into the ocean? Consider his eternal life. This time he has come to you in his eternal chain of life, birth, and death and he can be saved. Back to God, back to home. He is coming home and I shall push him back into the ocean of this death and birth? I can't be so cruel.

On January 11, 1982, he spoke further:

So many good souls came under the flag of Mahaprabhu through Swami Maharaja--will they fast and die? So, some relief work should be done, that was my intention, avoiding all possible clashes with the main distribution [preaching of ISKCON]. No clash with the main distribution, but only relief work, that is my only concern--the big souls, the great souls, they are being aloof, and going away and becoming indifferent to Swami Maharaja and Mahaprabhu and our Guru Maharaja, *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, and Krsna. And I shall stand and tolerate all these things—seeing that, I shall feel that I am not seeing the real thing. [It cannot be true.] That is difficult for me. So, I ask my friends, “Start some relief work, to save your own friends, those who are not encouraged by the present organizers.” It is obvious that they [gurus] will rely more on the sons [disciples] than on the [god] brothers. It is a general thing, and we have the sad experience in our own distribution like that [in the Gaudiya Matha]. So, I could conjecture that such things should occur, and we shall try to help them somewhat; otherwise, we will be responsible to Mahaprabhu, although personally I am not fit to carry on with the responsibility of many devotees, especially in this old age. Jiva Goswami says *jnana sathya vittha sathya*, that if I

have some money and another person is suffering and I can't pay—if I keep tight that money, and he lies fasting without food, then I'll be responsible for that. *Vittha sathya*. So, *jnana sathya* is there, I have got some knowledge, I can help my neighbor, but if I don't do that, then I am responsible. I shall commit an offense against the society and against the cause.

### Is Sridhara Maharaja's Mood Different From Prabhupada's?

A more pertinent question to ask is whether the GBC's mood is different from Srila Prabhupada's. Srila Prabhupada was always ready to show with reason, logic, and scriptural references how all his plans and decisions were solidly Krsna conscious. The GBC, on the other hand, has shown a different mood over the years.

If Srila Sridhara Maharaja's mood was different from Srila Prabhupada's, the difference did not compromise the unity they both lived for. Furthermore, Sridhara Maharaja knew well both the internal and external mood of Srila Prabhupada, and he was thus competent to advise Srila Prabhupada's disciples. Indeed, it is rare to find a *siksa guru* that is as acquainted with the mood of the *diksa guru*. Rather than being a point of departure for the disciple, the difference in mood between that of Srila Sridhara Maharaja and Srila Prabhupada served as an added advantage for the advancing disciples of Srila Prabhupada. This was so because it gave them the opportunity to rise above a *kanistha-adhikari* conception of guru and consider the very principle of guru, as opposed to the guru's particular style of presentation.

### GBC Apologizes?

The GBC, in their 1995 Mayapur resolutions stated:

In the spirit of the Srila Prabhupada Centennial, the GBC formally extends apologies to any devotees who have been

hurt by poor treatment or mistakes made by ISKCON leaders.

Somaka Maharaja, a respected *sannyasi* preacher in ISKCON, in his paper entitled *In Search of Harmony*, asks relevant questions in light of this GBC statement:

What is the plan to approach the devotees and actually beg pardon from them, admit our mistakes, give them a strong embrace and try to solve the differences? Is the GBC body going to approach Pradyumna Prabhu and apologize to him and give him back his service as translator as given to him specifically by Srila Prabhupada? Is the GBC going to recognize that in the letter that Pradyumna Prabhu wrote to Satsvarupa Maharaja in 1978 he pointed out all the defects that in 1987 [sic 1985?] due to so many falldowns they had to admit? Are the GBC men going to approach Paramadwaiti Maharaja to recognize that all the defects that he was presenting in his letter of 1984 were forcibly accepted in 1987?

Vaisnavas do not get stature by bureaucracy and diplomacy; they get stature based on humility, simplicity, meekness, detachment, and so many other godly qualities. The rectification of our movement isn't finished yet. There are still so many becoming dissatisfied and going away. Let us be more careful and kind to everyone. This is the first quality of a Vaisnava.

### ISKCON: Kanistha Society?

Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu gave a still applicable description of ISKCON in his paper *Ending the Fratricidal War* (written in the mid-1980s). Therein he stated, "A society of devotees in which proper Vaisnava relations are not yet the norm is called a *kanistha-adhikari* society," and "spiritual immaturity often leads a *kanistha-adhikari* to identify spiritual advancement with organizational advancement. He thinks that attaining prestige, power, and the

perquisites of office are evidence of spiritual advancement. In this way, competition becomes institutionalized in *kanistha-adhikari* societies." Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu reiterated in February 1995 this previous statement that ISKCON is a *kanistha-adhikari* society: "Well, lets face it, ISKCON is a society of *kanisthas*."

### Living GBC Committee Wanted

In the *Prabhupadanuga* newsletter (Vol. 1, No. 1), Sivarama Swami suggests that the GBC members should be more in touch with the rest of ISKCON:

The GBC could actually be leaders or sources of inspiration. Instead, they get there once a year [to the Mayapur GBC meeting] and try to be just simply administrators, and try to solve problems through administration.

Srila Sridhara Maharaja's advice was similar:

Not just a formal meeting for two days, three days. But it must be a meeting to satisfy the real necessity of the day. That is a living committee that we want. Not a formal meeting. After one year, a formal meeting and some resolutions passed and everyone has gone to his own field and is doing as he likes. (Navadvipa conversation, 1980)

### GBC Suspended

Srila Prabhupada himself personally fired the entire GBC on at least two occasions and always reviewed their resolutions and rejected inappropriate ones. For example, a memo was sent to all ISKCON temples on April 8, 1972:

I also understand that immediate actions are going to take

place even prior to my permission, and that also, “without divulging to the devotees!” Under these circumstances, I AUTHORIZE YOU TO DISREGARD FOR THE TIME BEING ANY DECISION FROM THE GBC MEN UNTIL MY FURTHER INSTRUCTION. Finally, I beg to repeat that ALL GBC ORDERS ARE SUSPENDED HEREWITH BY ME UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. Your ever well-wisher, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

Three days later, Prabhupada wrote to Hamsaduta:

There was to be immediate action without divulging the matter to the devotees. And I am surprised that none of the GBC members detected the defects in the procedure. It was detected only when it came to me.

What will happen when I am not here? Shall everything be spoiled by GBC? So for the time being, let the GBC activities be suspended until I thoroughly revise the whole procedure. So our view is that we shall be strictly following the rules and regulations. Monetary matters are secondary.

It is ironic that the far from perfect activities of the GBC differed from the standard of Srila Prabhupada greatly, while the apparent discrepancies between the teachings of Srila Prabhupada and those of Srila Sridhara Maharaja were misperceptions on the part of those who differed considerably from Srila Prabhupada in their administrative policy as well as their understanding of Gaudiya *siddhanta*.

Notes:

[1] SP Ltr. Govinda Mj, Jan. 29, 1969 (not in BBT archives)

[2] SP Ltr. Mukunda, March 26, 1968, SP Ltr. Brahmananda, September 17, 1968, SP Ltr. Karunasindhu, November 9, 1975

## Chapter Six: Aparadha, Our Greatest Enemy

This chapter traces the course of ISKCON’s activities with regard to Srila Sridhara Maharaja from when the GBC first approached Srila Sridhara Maharaja to the present. Srila Sridhara Maharaja’s advice was much sought after by many prominent GBC members officially and privately, from even before the first meeting of the GBC with Srila Sridhara Maharaja in 1978 until 1982 when the GBC decided that no one in ISKCON could hear from Srila Sridhara Maharaja. The GBC repeatedly sought answers to the many important questions confronting them in the absence of Srila Prabhupada and asked Srila Sridhara Maharaja to settle the disputes or controversies that they could not settle themselves.

In settling disputes, Srila Sridhara Maharaja would ask each devotee involved what he saw as the problem and possible solution, then he would give several *sastric* references, relate episodes from the Vedas of similar occurrences, and finally offer his advice, charged with his widely respected realization.

Many times he hinted that an all-encompassing solution would be difficult in such a grand and expansive society as ISKCON; thus his overall suggestion to the GBC was that they go forward with “fair feeling” and make adjustments as time revealed new details. His advice did not pertain so much to the details as it did to the spirit with which the mission should be conducted.

At first, the GBC members openly and enthusiastically expressed their satisfaction with Srila Sridhara Maharaja’s advice, but gradually the feelings of the GBC members soured when they failed to understand and embrace that which Sridhara Maharaja suggested, and confidence in their leadership waned. Eventually, the GBC saw him as a threat to their sense of authority.

Their ultimate rejection of Sridhara Maharaja was not without good intention. It did however suffer from a lack of knowledge and understanding of the very spirit of spiritual life, and thus, as is the case with many well-intended roads, their course led them astray from their intention to protect the movement of

Srila Prabhupada. Ironically, they themselves became the greatest nemesis to the natural progress of the mission.

A mission the size and scope of Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON would be difficult to destroy. Its sheer momentum at the time of Srila Prabhupada's departure ensured its continuation for some time. With the common sense of good management and wide-scale propaganda, such a movement was sure to increase its numbers. Yet we would be wrong to conclude that the mere increase in new numbers of the society is the sole barometer of its health. If such is at the cost of veteran members becoming discouraged and leaving, progress is questionable. Such is the case in ISKCON today, where as devotees advance they find it difficult to find *siksa* within the society that corresponds with the level of their interest.

Depth of inner realization is the real standard of progress, and such progress will certainly show itself in the form of regard for others, what to speak of senior Vaisnavas. It is precisely this lack of regard toward others, and advanced Vaisnavas in particular, however, that characterizes the ISKCON mission today. The vilification of Srila Sridhara Maharaja flows freely within the society even today. As recently as 1994, the GBC thwarted an effort led by several of its members to retract the resolution that banned ISKCON's members from associating with Sridhara Maharaja and any other senior Vaisnava outside of the corporate structure of the society. Yet rather than erase the resolution, they underscored it and punished those who rallied for the reform. [1]

Such a bewildering turn of events are the unhappy result of *vaisnava-aparadha*. Invited into the society by its founder, Sridhara Maharaja offered his *siksa* in the spirit described below, even as he was mistreated.

I was repeatedly requested by Swami Maharaja, "Look after them. I have taken them, brought some raw things [inexperienced and unqualified persons] to you, especially to you. Please look after them." I did not think at that time that he would pass away before me. I also have some affinity

for the cause of Mahaprabhu. So if anyone is coming to seek Krsna consciousness but is going away frustrated, then naturally, some sympathy should come in my heart to help him-to give him relief. With that idea, I give help, whatever help I can, although it is very meager. I am simply sitting here. I am not running hither and thither to disturb the brains of the ISKCON followers, and those that are coming to me, how can I send them away? How can I sit tight without giving what I know, what I feel, without extending this sort of help to those persons? But the ISKCON administration has only some formal consideration. These few gentlemen, whom I consider to be students--students, not professors--speaking from my absolute consideration standpoint, I consider them to be students, not professors. And they have become self-made authorities, thinking that whatever they dictate, I shall have to obey that? I am not a person of that type. With my clear conscience to God; that is to Krsna, to Mahaprabhu, to my gurudeva, and to Swami Maharaja, what I am doing, I think it is justified. Let them capture the whole world. I'll be satisfied. I am not an enemy, because we have a common cause.

### The First Darsana

In the spring of 1978 during the annual meeting of the GBC in Sridhama Mayapur, the GBC approached Sridhara Maharaja with questions regarding the nature of disciplic succession. They went to Srila Sridhara Maharaja following the advice of Srila Prabhupada. Sadly, Sridhara Maharaja's deep insights and generous heart were later misconstrued to be philosophically deviant and arising from evil intentions.

In the following *darsana*, the GBC's first official meeting with Srila Sridhara Maharaja after the departure of Srila Prabhupada, Srila Sridhara Maharaja responds to a question asked by Jayapataka Maharaja as to how those who have

*harinama* initiation from Srila Prabhupada should select their *mantra* guru:

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** A disciple, he may like one—first or third or fourth or fifth [guru], how to solve that.

**Tamala Krsna Maharaja:** That we must solve.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** According to his *sraddha*, a newcomer should be given some time. Who will come to be initiated, he should be given a fair period of time to hear from different persons and then the *sraddha*, the faith

**Devotee:** will be awakened.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** He will consider to whom he will submit. Do you follow?

**GBC Assembly:** Yes.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** The first stage is to hear, and the second stage, *varan*, is acceptance by the guru and the disciple. Then the *sadhana*, or attempt for realization, will begin. The first stage is to hear openly—fair field to hear—then the connection should come between the guru and *sisya*—preceptor and disciple, both sides.

Srila Sridhara Maharaja goes on to explain the difficulties that can come to arise in the guru/godbrother, guru/disciple relationship. He said, “the *sisya* will be greatly disturbed if he sees any other Vaisnava disturbing the absolute position of his guru. At least one place should be there where the disciples can get their guru exclusively. That will not be possible practically in such a large and expansive society as ISKCON.” The *darsana* concludes with this advice:

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** We cannot reach a particular solution

as all complete and perfect. Go with fair feeling, go on with fair feeling--this is the utmost I can suggest to you.

Tamala Krsna Maharaja: Maharaja, we are so grateful.

**GBC Assembly:** *Jaya*.

From this *darsana* we can see that Srila Sridhara Maharaja advised according to eternal spiritual principles. He emphasized that a disciple must have free choice in selecting a guru. Some initiating gurus did not follow this advice, however, and many devotees were forced to take initiation by a certain guru because they were in his “zone.” Ironically, Srila Sridhara Maharaja was later blamed by some for the “zonal *acarya*” arrangement. It should be noted that the idea of zonal *acaryas* is not inherently bad—Srila Prabhupada himself designated the eleven gurus to initiate in the zone that they were in charge of as GBCs. When the problems that arose in the zonal *acarya* arrangement were brought to the attention of Srila Sridhara Maharaja, he replied as follows:

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** My suggestion to keep the unity is that a person of one zone may accept a guru of another zone. Free choice by *sraddha*. He who has preference for one *acarya* but is compelled to accept one whom he considers to be lower, that is an anomaly. That zonal arrangement is against free choice. Also, new appointments of *acaryas* from amongst the brothers who are considered fit, that sort of position should also be there. By sacrifice we come together. By serving attitude we come together. By assertion we separate, distance is created by self-assertion. By self-sacrifice we unite.

Srila Sridhara Maharaja brought up another point that was not well-received by some of the eleven gurus: “new appointment of *acaryas* from amongst the brothers who are considered fit.” The lack of this, along with other problems, was creating havoc in ISKCON. In suggesting the expansion of the number of

gurus, Sridhara Maharaja's opinion concurred with that of Srila Prabhupada, who stated at the time he mentioned the first eleven gurus that other "senior *sannyasis*" could be added as the necessity arose. Sridhara Maharaja realized the vision of Srila Prabhupada without being told of his statement regarding a provision for expansion. He also represented the heart of Srila Prabhupada with regard to his generous spirit of encouragement.

Certainly Prabhupada sought to encourage the first eleven gurus, inspiring them to rise to the occasion of the service at hand. This spirit, however, was severely lacking in the eleven gurus with respect to their regard toward the qualified godbrothers. As a result, the movement was stifled, and it was not until considerable hardship and discouragement were suffered by sincere godbrothers of the eleven gurus that in 1982 three new gurus were added. Less well-known is that this was largely due to the insistence of Srila Sridhara Maharaja, who accurately read the environment and often suggested this change. It is significant that the three new gurus immediately went to Sridhara Maharaja for his blessings. The movement sighed a breath of relief, but soon after the entire GBC rejected Sridhara Maharaja, beginning their official campaign of vilification.

### GBC Activities Intolerable

The GBC received much valuable advice from Srila Sridhara Maharaja, but when the many frustrated godbrothers similarly sought advice from Srila Sridhara Maharaja, the GBC strongly advised against it and eventually forbade it. They did this because these godbrothers were seeking answers to the many problems of the leadership itself: guru expansion, excessive *puja*, disrespect of non-guru godbrothers, leader deviations, excessive control, and so on.

Those who did not agree completely with whatever the leaders wanted to do were made to feel left out of the mainstream of ISKCON and many times were exiled. Those who sincerely

wanted answers to the many problems within ISKCON were consistently regarded as troublemakers. Disciples of Srila Prabhupada were frustrated that they had no voice. The GBC was maintaining tight control of ISKCON, refusing to expand the number of gurus, and discouraging the enthusiasm of many sincere devotees with their official policies. As a result, many devotees left ISKCON.

### Acarya Godbrother Relations—A Slap to the Cheek

In the following transcription of the first official meeting with the GBC in 1978, Srila Sridhara Maharaja spoke about *acarya* relations with godbrothers:

If you think—in the *tatastha vicar*, absolute consideration—that the person who is doing the function of *acarya*, that his *adhikara* is lower than yours, still you should formally give special honor to him because he is in that position. For example, the son may be a judge and the father the lawyer, so the father is giving honor to the chair of the judge—*nirodha*. Like that you should do; otherwise, the social dealings will be disturbed, is it not? That kind of adjustment should be in the mission. When the *acarya* brother and the *non-acarya* brother are alone, they can mix freely. You can give a slap to his [the *acarya's*] cheek, but when publicly amongst his disciples, you must show respect.

### Acarya Grandeur

Many disciples of Srila Prabhupada complained to Srila Sridhara Maharaja, from 1978 until 1985, about the excessive worship and grand arrangements for the ISKCON gurus. In view of the many falldowns (five GBC gurus of the original eleven), mounting frustration, and repression of so many devotees, excessive worship

became a source of great irritation. It became even more irritating when nothing was done about it year after year. Srila Sridhara Maharaja addressed this problem of *acarya* grandeur on August 18, 1980:

According to my consideration, as I hear it, the grandeur of the *acarya*, the *puja* of the present *acaryas*, it is undesirable and too much and that will create some difficulty. It should be modified. The way in which the *acarya puja* has been established, that should be modified to suit the circumstances, and some adjustment with the godbrothers should be made. A protocol, a spiritual protocol, should be evolved which may not be very harmful to the body, to the association, the ISKCON organization. It is a very difficult thing tackling the fine point of divine sentiment. So, very carefully the adjustment in the spiritual protocol should be observed. Not only adjustment with the sentiment of the godbrothers of the *acaryas*, but this difficulty will continue also amongst the disciples of the *acaryas* themselves. So, a very sober and well-thought conception should be evolved by the help of the scriptures and the statements of the Vaisnavas and their experience—all these things must be considered. Adjustment may help the mission grow—adjustment such that it may not be detrimental to the missionary activity. It is a very difficult thing to adjust. When there is *acarya puja*—afterward they should also show some respect to all others, the godbrothers of the *gurudeva*. In this way, the respect will be shown—the guru with his *parsada*, with his friends (*paricaraka sahitam*). But *puja* in a gorgeous way whenever an *acarya* will come, that gorgeous *puja* that will create havoc and disembarkment in the mission, so much grandeur. And now another thing in the opposite. *Mat guru si jagat guru*—a newcomer, he should be given such understanding that my guru is not less in capacity of divinity. The newcomers should be given the highest attraction—to draw their maximum faith. *Acaryam mam vijaniyan*—*sastra* has got no small *mantra* for

a small guru and a big *mantra* for a big guru. Guru should be looked at by the disciple with maximum reverence. To draw the maximum reverence or *sraddha*, faith, from the disciple, it is not a very easy thing. So, two things should be considered, and an intermediate process should be evolved.

### A Fair Field Is Necessary

In March of 1981 Srila Sridhara Maharaja responded to the following question of a GBC guru:

**Ramesvara Swami:** So, I have some questions about the position of our gurus. Prabhupada named me also as one of the devotees who would begin initiating. So I have felt disturbed that the position of the gurus was raised above all of our godbrothers because of too much worship. It seems to me that many of my godbrothers, they are equal or even greater—they can give Prabhupada's teachings just as well as anyone, but they are not named as gurus, so there seems to be too much difference between them and the gurus. So this has been a big disturbance to me.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** That is a very serious question. They are making much of the position of the *acarya*. They are misusing the position according to him. [Trying to imitate Srila Prabhupada.] That is a very serious question and on that point I have given my opinion many times. In brief, a system should be created or arranged for proper adjustment. From the relative standpoint, the disciple will see his guru to be the best, and he will think that the Lord has delegated him to come to me and to deliver me from the clutches of *maya*. He has some particular affinity there. And there are many *acaryas*, and what should be the behavior, the conduct of the disciples of different *acaryas*? How and what should be the behavior or conduct towards the non-*acarya*, godbrothers of the *acarya*? That should be evolved.

If direction is not given by Swami Maharaja, there might be



some signs, some hints. But if it is not found there, then we shall have to evolve some rules and regulations for a proper adjustment so that the mission may not suffer. Suffer from indifference or negligence or abhorrence of the non-*acarya* disciples of Swami Maharaja. As you say, there are more qualified disciples outside the *acarya* board, or GBC. It is not impossible, not impossible. So, we should sit together and try to see that valuable persons that came to serve Swami Maharaja with all their energy and sincerity will not go away. That would be very, very regrettable. We should try to save the mission from that great disaster. I hear that so many stalwarts are going away, becoming indifferent and going underground to the unknown quarter, depressed because they do not see a fair field. So these things should not be set aside but it must be taken in and they should be discussed. Some salient points, you should prepare a list—that this is a list of disadvantages, inconveniences. The disease has entered into ISKCON and how to treat it. This is our common cause, we are all interested in ISKCON, we are members, we have given our life, dedicated our life for this mission. We are interested and we don't like that our godbrothers will go astray dissatisfied with the management. So try your best to evolve some rulings or some sort of laws, rules which should guide us all, help us all. At the same time, it will push the cause of the mission of ISKCON. As dynamic as it is accommodative—comprehensive and dynamic mission we want to have.

We have a great field ahead. We must go to the length and the breadth of this world with the banner of our Guru Maharaja, your Guru Maharaja, and combined effort is necessary for that. We should collect all our energy, money, men, and we must go on with the banner of our Prabhupada. For this, unity and fairness in the field are necessary. This will strengthen the hearts of all the members of ISKCON. In this way, you may introduce your suggestions for reform—that such an accommodating and dynamic program we want to have, and without doing that, we won't allow you to end your meeting. You must come to such a conclusion and give us such a program. Otherwise, we won't allow you to go away

from this *matha*. Make provision to feed all the members, such that all can be satisfied, have food, proper food. Everyone must have proper food to work on. Evolve such a program and give it to us. If you will consider yourself to be efficient, then give us this thing—that we can march on with the flag with our head erect. We have to go and capture the new, but the old is already going away. They are being driven away. The old, important members who received the grace of our Guru Maharaja, they are being discouraged and becoming indifferent, and we are going to recruit new persons? Is it not a farce? I am speaking a little strongly. But as a friend of your Guru Maharaja, I feel this in my heart, so I say, this worldwide grand mission will thrive like anything. It will touch the heaven and cover the world and other planets also. And what is this? That longtime devotees are leaving the mission? There may be one, a few exceptions, but generally people came with a good and sincere heart and they are feeling discouragement. Some encouraging program must be evolved, we want to have. So, let us evolve. Not just a formal meeting for two days, three days. But it must be a meeting to satisfy the real necessity of the day. That is a living committee, that we want. Living meeting we want. Not a formal meeting. After one year, a formal meeting and some resolutions passed, and everyone has gone to his own field and is doing as he likes.

**Ramesvara Swami:** I take it that Prabhupada is speaking to us through you.

The wisdom of Srila Sridhara Maharaja's advice is further shown in the following 1980 *darsana*. Hearing that many godbrothers were leaving ISKCON in frustration, unable to tolerate the mismanagement of ISKCON, Sridhara Maharaja advised non-GBC disciples of Srila Prabhupada not to be rash—to “wait and see.” Further, he suggested that the godbrothers should “call for a meeting.” He proposed that at this meeting the grievances of the godbrothers be presented to the GBC and hopefully resolved.

Excerpt from August 19, 1980 *darsana*:

**Bhakti Caru Swami** (Bengali): Maharaja, the main consideration is that many of Prabhupada's disciples are leaving the movement. They are quite unable to tolerate all this nonsense anymore. The main reason we came is because there are many devotees, those who are impatiently waiting to hear what you have to say. Now, if you just show us the way. It has come to the point where unless some rectification is made, then they all will get together to do something about this.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** If I have to say something formally from outside, then I have to say that among you the person who enjoys the greatest confidence of all the devotees, through such a man you call for a meeting in America or wherever the field is the most important. And in that meeting, those who are willing to boldly face the situation participate, the gbc's, those who you feel are dissatisfied inwardly, call them and call a few *acaryas* who are sympathetic. And in the meeting, record the feeling of different devotees. Then, with the strength of that resolution, call for their explanation, asking, "What are you doing in the name of Prabhupada? You are not absolutely infallible. Due to your activities, the mass of the disciples of Prabhupada have become very bewildered. They are becoming very disappointed and they can see that a great loss is going to be incurred by the ISKCON society. The ISKCON society is in danger. So now, you all reconsider yourselves and appeal to them to readjust themselves, and thus this disaster can be saved.

"So many devotees are leaving the movement. So many devotees have become half-dead, and so many devotees have already died. So many are lamenting, and we cannot just sit idly without trying to rectify the situation. We ourselves do not want any position, but what is going on is intolerable. It shows that the major portion is going to die. This must be thought out and accepted." So, with this idea, you form a committee, make a resolution, and then selectively invite people to come. In this way,

you call for a meeting, pass a resolution, and then call for them and ask them to readjust their position and reconsider. Otherwise, we shall be in painful necessity to make progress independently. You can say this.

On another occasion, Srila Sridhara Maharaja gives further advice:

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** That will be fair for you, that you increase the number of designated gurus from those who are already empowered. Those who are empowered will extend their consideration, their scope. If you move in this way, it will have spiritual characteristic. It should be the duty of the godbrother not holding the position of acarya to show the disciples how to give special regard for their gurudeva. But, the acarya is obligated to teach the newcomers that they must respect his brother. Then only can it go in a harmonious way for some time. You have to show some respect. They also have received grace of my gurudeva. My gurudeva's grace, if it is in me, it is in them also. So you must look at them with respect.

**Bhakti Caru Swami:** But these *acaryas*, they are not teaching their disciples to show respect to their godbrothers. Sometimes the opposite.

### No, Only These Eleven Gurus

In March 1981 Srila Sridhara Maharaja was told that "guru extension" was to be voted upon in that year's GBC meeting:

**Devotee:** In Srila Prabhupada's last will he established the GBC as the supreme managing authority of ISKCON, but with the establishment of eleven spiritual masters the situation in the GBC has become that actually eleven people are making the decisions and not the full governing body. So the non-*acarya* section of the

GBC is very discouraged and unable to fully execute their voice as GBC members.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** So, they are to take decision on that point in this meeting [1981 Mayapur GBC meeting], a very important meeting.

**Sudhira Goswami:** They will. Ramesvara Maharaja has proposed on this question of the extension of the *acaryaship* that the GBC come to take your advice.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** I told them right at the beginning [March 1978] that this should be made into a dynamic practice so that every year during Gaura Purnima some new gurus can be added. Then the other party, the non-initiating godbrothers, will have their confidence in the initiating godbrothers and give their support to them. Otherwise, if they maintain some rigid practice [not allow other godbrothers beyond the original eleven to become initiating gurus], then the relationship will be cracked. This was my suggestion but they did not care about that. Emphatically they said, “No, only these eleven.”

#### **Guru Non-extension: Injudicious, Unfortunate, and Faulty**

At their annual Mayapur meeting in 1981, the GBC resolved that the number of initiating gurus would not be extended for an indefinite time period. After these GBC meetings, when Srila Sridhara Maharaja was queried on his opinion regarding the resolution not to expand the number of initiating gurus in ISKCON, Srila Sridhara Maharaja said:

Let us hope that their decision may help ISKCON, by the will of Krsna it may not bring any disaster to the organization. Let us hope and pray. ISKCON is a new-born child, a new-born child. There may be so many child-enemies, so

we shall pray to the Lord that the child may grow to be a strong young man and do the desired service of its founder, Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja. With good wishes we shall pray to him. It is a great campaign, the highest campaign the world has ever seen. Expansion of the creed of love of the Absolute in the religious sky. So its expansion, its happy movement is to be wished and prayed by all. Mahaprabhu's grace may reach to every unknown corner of the world. And so many souls may receive that nectar. Hare Krsna.

Srila Sridhara Maharaja repeatedly suggested for many years that the number of initiating gurus be increased. The moratorium was lifted in March 1982, when three gurus were added. More gurus were not added again until three years later in 1985, when godbrothers finally insisted on meeting with the GBC. At this meeting, it was recognized that the grandeur and excessive worship of the present gurus must be reduced and a process for guru extension implemented, as suggested for the previous seven years by Srila Sridhara Maharaja. By this time, however, the fact that such prudent advice had been offered by Sridhara Maharaja was long forgotten, if ever known by the assembly of devotees. By this time, three years of vilification of Sridhara Maharaja had saturated the consciousness of every member of the society.

The GBC officially rejected Sridhara Maharaja in 1982. Events leading up to this brought out the following sentiments and instruction of Srila Sridhara Maharaja:

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** My aspiration is unchanged in all these long years. I haven't changed my position. So you may convey to them that I am not the man to fight with anyone. The fight will be one-sided.

**Bhakti Caru Swami:** They don't want to listen, Maharaja. They don't want to listen.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** Then, they may go on in that way, but

they will have to fight with their shadow. Isn't it? If there's no one to fight, then who will they shoot?

**Bhakti Caru Swami:** And the thing is, they are looking at the world, they're looking at everybody as feeling the same way they are feeling. *Atmavat manyate jagat*. Since they want to take over the whole world.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** Yes, that is laudable. In the name of Swami Maharaja, let them capture the whole of the world. But at the same time, they should not banish the very Deity of their worship. If I see that they are deviating, my heart will ache. Cannot but ache. But they can't see that they are deviating, that they are neglecting their own property, their own wealth. Swami Maharaja repeatedly requested, "I have taken them all, so many raw things [inexperienced and unqualified persons], you have to look after them."

**Bhakti Caru Swami:** And I have been seeing that for the last four years Maharaja, you have been giving them a chance. You are always taking their side. You are trying to support them.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** As far as possible. As far as possible.

**Bhakti Caru Swami:** I remember in 1978, you wrote a letter to Tamala Krsna Maharaja, because Pradyumna and Yasodanandana Maharaja had so many complaints, and you wanted to consult with them before you gave your opinion.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** But after all, this is their finding [that they will not listen to Sridhara Maharaja's advice]. I can't help. What can I do? They should try by their combined effort to solve any problem facing their mission, and whenever they are facing any difficulty, they should refer to me. I am affectionate to them; they do not have to apprehend anything from me. I am eager to serve you, to help you, but not against the principle, that which I

understand to be the truth. In that case, I would be a traitor to my own cause, to my own master.

Later, Srila Sridhara Maharaja spoke more:

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** I am not going anywhere to do anything against them. I am sitting here. People are coming, and according to my conscience, what I have to say to them I am saying. I am not an aggressor.

**Sudhira Maharaja:** This has disturbed many of the devotees who are appreciating your instructions.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** Is it going against Swami Maharaja what I say?

**Sudhira Maharaja:** Not according to them, but there is a difference of opinion.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** But what I said was taped by you all. Was there anything which went against the preaching of Swami Maharaja? I don't think that is the case.

**Sudhira Maharaja:** No one thinks like that.

**Bhakti Caru Swami:** But it is going against them [the leaders' improprieties]. Actually many of the godbrothers started to see things from a different perspective.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** Last time also I asked them what they wanted me to do—should I give ditto to whatever they will do. Then I asked them, "Do you think that I am under your committee." "No, no, that we don't think." Then the day before yesterday, again the same thing. "We had a meeting and in our meeting we accepted the principle that the number of *acaryas* may be increased, but we did not receive any inspiration this year for extension. But this

was not told to you, so we have been told that you remarked that our decision is injudicious and unfortunate.” Yes, I did remark in such a way because I want to clear my position to you now, that I am not wholly one with ISKCON and even not wholly one with Swami Maharaja. I have got my special consideration and inclination and thinking. With other godbrothers also I differ in many ways. So everyone has his special characteristic, and I also have such. So, what you think to be *srota-pantha*, your meeting, unanimous verdict, what you think the right thing coming down, I am not bound to pronounce the same thing—that it is infallible. The meaning is like that. According to my consideration, your combined decision was a faulty one, but I did not say so clearly.

Srila Sridhara Maharaja mentions that he has his own unique contributions to make and that these may sometimes even differ from Srila Prabhupada, a viewpoint that Srila Prabhupada himself supported in a letter to Upendra in 1972.<sup>2</sup> Many non-GBC devotees, dissatisfied and discouraged by the ISKCON GBC’s overbearing style of management, also approached Srila Sridhara Maharaja for advice. His advice evoked a higher, more mature perspective in these devotees that many times also included more tolerance and compassion in regard to the ISKCON leaders. His expert advice revived many devotees’ faltering faith and earned Srila Sridhara Maharaja a fast-rising popularity, which the GBC feared would diminish their position and control. In addition to examples presented in earlier chapters, an indication of the grave problems that confronted ISKCON is that the vast majority of disciples of Srila Prabhupada left the movement in a discouraged state of mind. A further strong indication is that, of the original eleven gurus only six remained in the mid-1980s.

### **Real Seekers of Truth Are Fearless**

**Devotee:** They are afraid that the institution is breaking.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** If they are seekers after truth, they’ll be fearless. It is His movement [Krsna’s]. If He likes, He will keep it. It is spread by His will. So spacious and extensively, in such a small span of life, Swami Maharaja took it to the length and breadth of the world. It is by divine will.

**Devotee:** Their position is that now they are in so much difficulty that they are just looking for somebody to blame. They don’t want to blame themselves. They are just looking for someone outside.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** It is human nature. General weakness of man.

Although officially ignoring the advice of Srila Sridhara Maharaja, the GBC eventually implemented almost all of his suggestions, without giving him credit. Not until the New Vrndavana meetings in 1985, when they were forced by the overwhelming consensus of their godbrothers, did the GBC open up the guru extension. Many issues were at hand, as godbrothers throughout the movement demanded reform. In his September 21, 1985, Guru Reform Letter distributed to all his disciples, Satsvarupa Maharaja writes:

A near unanimous decision has been reached by the senior devotees, that the present system of zonal *acaryas* should be changed and it has become apparent that daily *guru-puja* is questionable.

These changes were recommended all along by Srila Sridhara Maharaja.

Acyutananda Swami’s November 22, 1982 letter of apology to Srila Sridhara Maharaja provides us with a glimpse into the mood of the GBC just prior to severing their connection with Sridhara Maharaja:

Revered Sridhara Maharaja,

Please accept my humble obeisances and apologies for my remarks in a letter written some time ago. I am falling at your feet--you are my *siksa* guru, and I will not go back to Godhead without your blessings.

At the time I wrote the letter, there were many disturbances in ISKCON. People were losing faith in the leadership, and I feared that there would be a split in the society, due to internal dissension. The GBC were convinced that the preaching of \_\_\_ Swami and his presentation of your opinions was one of the chief causes of the trouble in the institution. It was also known that Jayatirtha Maharaja was involved with *sahajiya* activities, and I was told that he claimed his activities were endorsed by you.

In this state of confusion and concern for the welfare of the society so loved by my spiritual master, I allowed myself to be coerced into writing a letter that was meant to minimize your exalted position and question your credibility in the matter of management.

His Holiness \_\_\_\_\_ Swami and His Holiness \_\_\_\_\_ Swami urged everyone to make strong stands to support the views of ISKCON.

Why did they want me to write? Because of my long time with you, whenever I lecture, I pray in my invocation to my guru Srila Prabhupada and sing your verse “*nikhila bhuvana maya*.” Whenever there is a precedent to cite, I cite you; whenever there is a need for *sastra* interpretation, I refer to you; whenever there is a need to confirm a point in any matter, I quote you. So, they wanted the devotees to hear from me in the state of turmoil that was happening then. At least that is how they presented it to me.

I do not want any Vaisnava in the universe to curse me; please don't curse me. You may be knowing that I have written a book about my accepting Krsna consciousness. It is called *Autobiography of a Jewish Yogi*. In it, I explain how you saved me from the *maya* of *nirjana-*

*bhajana* and certain Vaisnavas who were interfering with my faith in Guru. Three chapters are about you, and I think you are the hero of this part. Nothing changes that.

I think even the leaders and present *acaryas* of ISKCON also regard you with reverence and will show their real feelings as time goes by. In January I may go to India and I will see your feet personally.

Your servant,  
Acyutananda Swami

### **Sridhara Maharaja Used as Scapegoat**

The final incident that led to the offensive policy of the GBC regarding Sridhara Maharaja involved one of the original eleven ISKCON gurus and his deviation. Jayatirtha Maharaja had fallen from devotional standards and the GBC was unsuccessful in reinstating him in good standing. In fact their subsequent policy of forcing him out of ISKCON led to his further degradation. In spite of increasing public criticism of Sridhara Maharaja on the part of the GBC, its leader nonetheless had the sense that if anyone could help Jayatirtha, Sridhara Maharaja could. In 1982, Srila Sridhara Maharaja related the history regarding Jayatirtha Maharaja.

**Sridhara Maharaja:** Jayapataka Maharaja came to me saying that Jayatirtha Maharaja is showing much sentimentalism and saying that this is all transcendental ecstasy. He asked me, is it so? I replied, this cannot be transcendental sentiment. What is the proof? I showed him, these are the scriptural quotes and the facts, and therefore we can never accept it as transcendental sentiment.

Jayapataka Maharaja wrote a long letter to me, stating that such and such things have happened. He wrote that he had consulted with Bhavananda Maharaja who told him to consult with me. He asked me for my opinion about all the things that

have happened in regards to Jayatirtha. I told him that I don't want to say anything before meeting Jayatirtha Maharaja. I want to know what happened. And I had some doubts. They told that Jayatirtha wanted *sannyasa*. Ultimately, we have not forced. Reluctantly we gave *sannyasa*. Still I told him that I would like to hear from him [Jayatirtha] first before making any remark. Then Bhakti Caru Swami brought Jayatirtha Maharaja here from Puri, leaving his wife and son in Calcutta, but I also wanted his wife and son to be here. Then they were also brought here and I consulted with them all. I had had some apprehension he might be thinking that Swami Maharaja had delegated him for *acarya* position as a *grhastha* and that ISKCON, the present managing committee, has thrust *sannyasa* upon him and in some uncareful moment he has accepted that. Then the *sannyasa* should not be continued—what Swami Maharaja has given, my *gurudeva*, I must stick to that. I inquired and found his son thinking like that. So, I told him the *acaryas* are mostly *sannyasis*, and anyway, once you have accepted *sannyasa* you should not go back formally. It was only an accidental fall; that is not everything. You must have courage. Your Guru Maharaja appointed you as a general to fight against *maya*, and you must not leave your position. To go back, that won't look good. So I gave my opinion, that once *sannyasa* is accepted, you must retain it. Otherwise, it will give a bad name to ISKCON; that is, to your Guru Maharaja, Prabhupada. Then he agreed. I also had to convince his former wife, Manjuali. She is a good lady. She also told in the tapes what happened. And I asked her, "Did you come [to Krsna consciousness] before your marriage?" "Yes." "You came to get the grace of Lord Krsna?" "Yes." "Then you are to sacrifice for Swami Maharaja, you are to sacrifice your best beloved object for the cause of Krsna consciousness, I think. Visnupriya devi she left Mahaprabhu for the good of the public. And Krsna will look after you. You sacrifice, give him up for fighting. He is a general. One of the big generals, fighters in Krsna consciousness. I heard that he has a good name in his propagation. It must not be taken back." In the beginning, of course, she wept, shed tears, but anyhow, she got encouragement through my words and advice. The boy also

said yes—I also encouraged him and the mother. Finally they accepted my advice. Then I asked that Jayatirtha send a letter to his previous *sannyasa* guru Kirtanananda Maharaja stating that he has again taken up the *sannyasa* order given by him. Then I sent him to Katwa where Mahaprabhu took *sannyasa*. I sent him with Bhakti Caru Swami and Govinda Maharaja. After taking a bath in the Ganges, he again took his former *sannyasa* dress at the place where Mahaprabhu took his *sannyasa*. I tried my best to reinstate Jayatirtha Maharaja to the old role of a *sannyasi* to save the good name of ISKCON, and I also sent him to Katwa where Mahaprabhu himself took *sannyasa*, for his inspiration and impression that he can be firm in his future life. Afterwards he told, "Yes, I have got the strength. As if I have gotten from Swami Maharaja, I have got *sannyasa*." They asked me to touch the *kaupina* and the *danda*, and I did it. He said, "I have gotten strength from all those things, now I am strong." That is one thing. I also asked him to give a letter to his *sannyasa* guru Kirtanananda saying that I am again coming back to the role that you have given me. Please accept. But Jayatirtha is a very frank man, not diplomatic. So, what he felt in himself, he gave vent to that [he glorified Srila Sridhara Maharaja], and that created the trouble. I wanted to avoid that.

**Devotee:** But already I spoke to him and he said that he won't pursue that anymore. Just privately he'll have some appreciation but not publicly.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** And publicly he is connected to ISKCON. And that is what I wanted. That would be a smooth activity with ISKCON in harmony. Things are going otherwise.

After Jayatirtha Maharaja was secretly sent to Sridhara Maharaja, he reemerged with the miraculous effect of his return to sanity. In fact, his enthusiasm took him on an expansive preaching tour in which he did not hold back from informing all of the greatness of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. This public acclaim for Sridhara Maharaja voiced by one of the society's gurus was

too much for the GBC to bear. In March 1982 the GBC insisted that either Jayatirtha remove Sridhara Maharaja from his heart or leave ISKCON. He chose with dignity the latter. Yet the GBC could not even honor his nobility, what to speak of his spiritual principle of acceptance of a *siksa* guru, one whom they themselves had sent him to, one that Srila Prabhupada had introduced to the mission.

Rather than allow Jayatirtha to peacefully follow their own policy, upon his leaving the society the GBC mounted a campaign to expose his deviations to all the devotees from whom they themselves had been hiding them. They thus implied that they had rejected Jayatirtha, while Sridhara Maharaja had sheltered him, and in effect sanctioned his *avaisnava* habits, habits that he had, while under the shelter of Sridhara Maharaja, given up. The force of public embarrassment and crude exposure of his deviations to all of Jayatirtha's disciples proved too much for Jayatirtha. He fell even from the association of Sridhara Maharaja. One wonders then to what extent the GBC is responsible for the untimely and disgraceful demise of Jayatirtha. Without dismissing his own deviations, there is certainly a shared responsibility for his sad story on the part of the GBC, for they failed to support him in a spiritual principle, that of taking shelter of a competent *siksa* guru. Instead, they tried their best to break his faith and that of his disciples. Such reprehensible action was characteristic of the GBC at that time.

Offenses against Srila Sridhara Maharaja increased exponentially. Rumors were circulated that Srila Sridhara Maharaja sanctioned the strange activities of Jayatirtha Maharaja, that he was trying to destroy ISKCON, and many more things. Derogatory publications of the GBC, such as *Vaisnava Ke* and *Purity is the Force*, were widely distributed in their vilification campaign. Sridhara Maharaja was labeled everything from a *mayavadi* to a *sahajiyia*.

## Srila Sridhara Maharaja Severed

Following a reversal of feelings towards Srila Sridhara Maharaja in early 1982, the ISKCON GBC legislative body decided during that year's Mayapur meetings that anyone seeking *siksa* outside ISKCON must leave ISKCON. This decision was directed toward those who wished to approach Srila Sridhara Maharaja. Srila Sridhara Maharaja, however, replied very generously to this disconnection:

**Devotee:** Martial law. Dictatorship, just like in Poland.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** No, not martial. They are not happy to do that, but on policy they are to do this for the time being; they are to test what effect it may have. They have some affection for me; but still, to save their institution from the present crisis, temporarily they are giving trial to this particular injunction.

**Devotee:** Temporary injunction.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** I think like that. I think like that.

**Devotee:** You are very gracious.

**Srila Sridhara Maharaja:** They cannot forget me totally. The newcomers may think like that, but the older devotees that have seen me along with Swami Maharaja. It will be difficult for them to put such a rigid law between the two, for those older men have seen how intimately Swami Maharaja dealt with me. It will be very difficult for them, but still they have a policy to make a check.

If ever Srila Sridhara Maharaja misjudged the senior men he refers to above, it was on this occasion. He gave them far more credit for having a sense of not only Vaisnava etiquette, but even common sense and human decency. They had no difficulty whatsoever enforcing their policy of severance from Sridhara



Maharaja. Moreover, their policy proved not to be a temporary one.

### Invited by Affection's Force and Driven Out

Later, Srila Sridhara Maharaja commented:

Swami Maharaja very earnestly invited me with affection, and you are driving me out. Swami Maharaja had much affection for me, all throughout his whole life. He abused many of my godbrothers, with the exception of me alone, and he asked me several times, that you are to look after them. I was forcibly almost-by affection's force-taken into the connection of ISKCON, and now, I am being driven out of ISKCON. I give my good will, but I can't simply ditto their mandates. I am invited by your Prabhupada in his last days, and do you think that in my last days I am motivated by some mean interest? I differed from the gbc's opinion and they withdrew. Still I am their aloof well-wisher.

They are thousands of men on that side, and you are few: five, six or ten, twenty-five. And they are so much afraid of you? They have the spirit of conquering. No attitude of give-and-take learning. That, we may have to learn something yet. They have finished their learning, and they are ready only to distribute their own hoarded wealth. Hare Krsna. Alright, He is there. ISKCON does not belong to their committee, ISKCON ultimately belongs to Swami Maharaja, represents Swami Maharaja, in my opinion. I see that they are digging their own grave. This is my sincere feeling, but this hurts, and it is objectionable to a certain extent. If they are ISKCON properly, they are promised to a particular ideal.

Deviation from that ideal, that is but a shadow of the ISKCON that was created and designed by Swami Maharaja. It is a very lamentable thing. Those who are sincere, the victory will be with them: *na hi kalyana-krt kascid, durgatim*

*tata gacchati.* (Bg. 6.40) *Kalyana* means sincere to their purpose; not power-seeker, coercive nature. Hare Krsna.

### I Am Very Much Mortified

In an unfortunate conversation in March 1982, indicative of the intensity of the *aparadha* being committed, Srila Sridhara Maharaja was visibly shaken by the behavior of the GBC representatives:

I am an old man, I am tired, excited, I am very, very sorry (crying), really I say with folded palms that you are ill-treating me. I am very sorry. Swami Maharaja was so affectionate, I also treated him with such affection, and rudely you are behaving towards me. I am very much mortified for that, but what can I do?

### Aparadha's Havoc

The fate of Ramacandra Puri, described in the *Caitanya-caritamrta*, provides a stern warning of the unfortunate consequences of *vaisnava-aparadha*. He disrespected his guru and as a result was rejected, further causing him to criticize many exalted Vaisnavas and even blaspheme Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. In this regard, Lord Narayana states:

One's so-called prowess, when employed against the devotee, certainly harms he who employs it. Thus it is the subject not the object who is harmed. (*Bhag.* 9.4.69)

The incident of Daksa's offense to Maharaja Ambarisa also illustrates the severity of *vaisnava-aparadha*. Although Daksa apologized to Lord Siva for his offense, apparently it was not offered with proper remorse, for the effect of this *aparadha*

resurfaced eons later in another *manvantara*, causing Daksa to commit additional *vaisnava-aparadha* to Narada Muni.

Those responsible for the ongoing ISKCON institutional *aparadha* are directly responsible for all further *aparadha* committed as a result. Indeed *sastra* states:

The most sacred assembly loses its sanctity and religiosity with the slightest *vaisnava-ninda*, and even a powerful assembly of *sannyasis* becomes bereft of religious purity if they indulge in *vaisnava-ninda*. In fact a drunkard's party is better than such an unholy assembly. A despicable drunk has still a chance someday to be excused for his unrighteousness, but a Vaisnava offender is bound for abysmal damnation. (*Caitanya-Bhagavata, Madhya-lila* 13.3943)

Whenever an advanced devotee is insulted, for one man's fault the entire town or place is devastated—everyone in connection with him will suffer. (*Cc. Antya-lila* 3.164)

### Blasphemy Must be Undone

The offensive attitude toward Srila Sridhara Maharaja directly opposes Srila Prabhupada's final instructions and desires with regard to Srila Sridhara Maharaja—the same desires that were understood and implemented by the GBC in 1978. Additionally, many of the GBC accepted Srila Sridhara Maharaja as their siksa-guru and later rejected him.

In *The Heart of Kṛṣṇa*, Srila Bhakti Promode Puri Maharaja writes:

In spite of seeing and hearing about the fatal consequences of offending the Supreme Lord or the devotees, people refuse to become enlightened about it—such is the fearsome cloud of illusion that *maya* creates to delude everyone.

### Insubstantial Apologies

Even in the mundane world one who slanders another must retract the slander in the same form that it was given. This was not attempted in the case of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. A Vaisnava easily forgives offenses, however the dust of his feet does not. The example of Gadadhara Pandita shows how seriously one must take atonement for an offense to a Vaisnava. Gadadhara Pandita only committed a mental offense to Pundarika Vidyanidhi, yet he was ordered by Mahaprabhu to take initiation from Pundarika.

Offenses must not only be undone, but undone with interest—that is, one must make a real and substantial effort to correct the damage done, to clarify publicly any misconception or misinformation. Some token apology has been given officially and individually, yet we see that the offensive attitude of most devotees in ISKCON toward Srila Sridhara Maharaja has not changed.

That apologies were in fact insubstantial has also been stated by Somaka Maharaja in his paper *In Search of Harmony*:

All kinds of offenses against H. H. B. R. Sridhara Maharaja were broadcast, but the apologies to Sridhara Maharaja were not at all publicized.

The insincerity of these apologies is further illustrated by the fact that the offenses continued and even escalated after apologies were made for previous offenses—something like the elephant's bath, which Srila Prabhupada was fond of quoting, or the Christian confessional. A public statement should be made in print, recognizing that forgiveness for these offenses will be proportional to the effectiveness of this public statement in terms of its correcting the offensive mentality in so many devotees' minds toward Srila Sridhara Maharaja.

## Conclusion

Offenses to Srila Sridhara Maharaja constitute offenses to Srila Prabhupada as well. One can imagine how displeased Srila Prabhupada has been by his leading disciples' offensive dealings with his beloved godbrother. While Sridhara Maharaja, in the mood of a *parama* Vaisnava, did not acknowledge any offense, certainly Srila Prabhupada has been offended.

The intention of this publication is not to cause our godbrothers unnecessary embarrassment, but for the sake of clarifying certain vital points it has been necessary in certain instances to give as complete an explanation as possible. We are painfully aware of an unlimited number of embarrassing facts and unpleasant activities in great detail, but find no purpose in stating them herein. We are hoping that the illumination provided herein as to the supramundane position of the guardian of devotion of the Rupanuga *sampradaya*, Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Deva Maharaja, will clear the many misunderstandings surrounding him, and individually and collectively aspirants will realize their grievous offenses to such a very dear devotee of Srimati Radharani and Lord Krsna.

Those who are not aware of the sequence of events that are clarified within this presentation may question the necessity of this book-that ISKCON management has changed, that things are better now. While we agree that some changes have been made individually and managerially, institutionalized *aparadha* must be given serious consideration, for otherwise members cannot make proper advancement, burdened by its lingering effects.

No doubt many factors have contributed to the present status of ISKCON. However, no one factor, nor any collective factors, have the potential to damage a spiritual institution more than Vaisnava *aparadha*. If the Vaisnava is a superlative devotee and the offense is blatant, disaster is eminent. Such is the case with regard to offenses committed by ISKCON against Sridhara Maharaja. They created an explosion like an atomic bomb that initially reeked havoc and had lingering effects in the form of

*bhrama-tattva* (illusion regarding *tattva*) and the *samskara* for continued offenses to senior Vaisnavas which hover over the institution like radiation.

We hope that recognition of the purity of Srila Sridhara Maharaja's *siksa* will absolve many offenses. It is not expected that our godbrothers accept Srila Sridhara Maharaja as their *siksa* guru, nor is he amongst us at present. They must, however, develop a positive, non-offensive understanding and allow interested devotees under their care to study the books of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. Further, they should teach others to appropriately honor those who have taken shelter of Srila Sridhara Maharaja. They would do well to read his books themselves, if not print them in an effort to undue their wrongs. If we are to believe in miracles, it is possible that such a policy could restore ISKCON to the vital institution it once was. For those who do not see the need for this rectification, let them continue to think that spiritual life is measured by external success, and let them be known as *Kali-chela*, disciples of Kali.

It is not in the interest of serious devotees to continue the offenses to Srila Sridhara Maharaja, for one who has not fully amended his *vaisnava-*aparadha** can never achieve Krsna. This is confirmed by Vrndavana dasa Thakura in *Caitanya-Bhagavata, Madhya 22.8, vaisnavera thani ya're haya *aparadha* krsna-krpa hoileo tare prema-badha*:

If a person commits an offense at the lotus feet of a Vaisnava, even though he may have received Krsna's mercy, he will never attain divine love, *prema*.

We place this offering before the Vaisnavas, scholars, aspirants-whoever is a seeker of truth.

Notes:

[1] Several GBC members, in the course of establishing the spiritual validity of their relationship with Narayana Maharaja, attempted to set the record straight with regard to those who were rejected from the Society because of their relationship with Sridhara Maharaja.

[2] SP Ltr Upendra February 19, 1972

*I was repeatedly requested by Swami Maharaja, "Look after them. I have taken them to you. Please look after them." I also have some affinity for the cause of Mahāprabhu. So if anyone is coming to seek Kṛṣṇa consciousness but is going away frustrated, then naturally, some sympathy should come in my heart to help him—to give him relief. With that idea, I give help, whatever help I can, although it is very meager.*

*I am simply sitting here. I am not running hither and thither to disturb the brains of the ISKCON followers, and those that are coming to me, how can I send them away? How can I sit tight without giving what I know, what I feel, without extending this sort of help to those persons?*

*But the ISKCON administration has only some formal consideration. These few gentlemen, whom I consider to be students—students, not professors—speaking from my absolute consideration standpoint, they have become self-made authorities, thinking that whatever they dictate, I shall have to obey that?*

*I am not a person of that type. With my clear conscience to God; that is to Kṛṣṇa, to Mahāprabhu, to my gurudeva, and to Swami Maharaja, what I am doing, I think it is justified. Let them capture the whole world. I'll be satisfied. I am not an enemy, because we have a common cause.*

*~Sriḥa Sridhara Maharaja*