

ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA ON MĀYĀPUR

Yes, Śrīvāsa Pandit has *śikhā*. Vaiṣṇava must have *śikhā*. Advaita Prabhu has a full white beard. He was an old man. He was practically older than the father of Lord Caitanya. He was an elder gentleman in the town of Navadvīpa, elder of the *brāhmaṇa* community. All should wear Tulasī kuntī beads, not less than two strands. Three, four strands, or my Guru Mahārāja had five strands. Only Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda wear crowns and nose-pins. Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda can be decorated with all kinds of jewelry.

Regarding the Pañca-tattva deities, the pictures you have sent are very nice. Because they live in Bengal, *dhōti*, shirt, and *chaddar* are the standard dress, and if they are dressed in this style with different colors, that is nice. They should normally always be dressed in *dhōti*, but if occasionally you dress them in skirt-dress outfit, that can be also. They may all five wear jewellery, why not?

— Letters to Govinda Dāsī



—Letters



Ties of Love

As Srila Prabhupada's movement glides through it's fifth decade - and into the 21st century - we ask the inevitable: How are we doing? Hari-sauri Das shares his view of ISKCON worldwide ...

I have always done a bit of traveling, at least since 1975 when I was fortunate enough to join Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal entourage. I got to travel India and around the world with His Divine Grace, and it gave me my first look at worldwide ISKCON. I was impressed. Impressed with Śrīla Prabhupāda and impressed with his disciples and the amazing scope of transcendental activity that was manifesting all over the globe. Unity was the key, and that was achieved through the presence and desire of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Later, after His Divine Grace's disappearance, I served as a GBC for over seven years. It seemed like I was in the air or on the road more often than I wasn't. I had a far-flung South Seas zone and international duties to fulfill. It was a boom time: we went from four temples to seventeen centers, including three farms, two schools, with additional restaurants and two new BBT divisions. From 95 full time devotees (the official count in that zone in 1977) we jumped to over 400. It was a time of rapid expansion and it seemed for a short while we could do no wrong.

Of course, human frailty wasn't far behind and mundane realities exerted themselves, individually and collectively. Maintaining what Śrīla Prabhupāda had left us proved a difficult task. The spiritual waves of preaching *śakti* emanating from Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal presence, which had swept us almost effortlessly along, like a great tsunami surging around the globe, subsided. After 1984 I left management and became an ISKCON private citizen. I was much more stationary. I still traveled a bit, but nothing like the scale of my earlier years. I lived in England, then India, then Australia, then the USA, and finally back to India nine years now.

In the last two years I have resumed a bit of traveling again, delivering a seminar series entitled *Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Living Bhāgavatam*. I have visited Brazil, USA, England, and several parts of the old eastern Europe – Croatia and Slovenia, Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Latvia, and Lithuania. People sometimes ask me what Śrīla Prabhupāda would think of the current condition of ISKCON. Having traveled with Śrīla Prabhupāda throughout the ISKCON world when it was, by some criteria, at its peak in the west, I suppose they think I have some kind of special insight into how Śrīla Prabhupāda views it now. I wish I had.

By what criteria do I make such a judgement? I certainly have no idea of Śrīla Prabhupāda's view of the world (if I had I would be a *mahā-bhāgavata*!), and anyway, do *mahā-bhāgavatas* make such assessments? I remember sitting with His Divine Grace in his room in Bombay on January 6, 1977. He told me, "You should always remember that you have taken a very, very difficult task, *manuṣyāṇām*



sahasreṣu kaścīd yatati siddhaye. It is not a very easy task but one thing is sure, if you be successful or not successful, it is your victory. Because you try for this, Kṛṣṇa will be very much pleased. It is not that in every case you will be successful, that is not possible. I went to your country not to become successful – that Bengali poem I wrote – I never went there to become successful. I knew, ‘Who will accept this philosophy? Still let me try, my Guru Mahārāja has said.’ And yet on another occasion in Māyāpur in 1977, just before he became seriously ill, Śrīla Prabhupāda told me, “I want to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness everywhere, at once.”

So on the one hand, anything that established Kṛṣṇa consciousness was a success because none was expected; and on the other, no amount of expansion could match the pure devotee’s ambition. Still there must be some measure by which we can understand if we are doing things to his satisfaction or not. These are myriad and my assessment can only be subjective, so whatever I say, I pray my reader will understand that this is just one man’s observation, telescoped through the very limited lens of a conditioned soul’s coverings.

I suppose the best criteria for making such a judgment is that set by Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, the one we most often quote: “Your love for me will be shown by how well you cooperate together.” Or at least that’s the loose rendition, the sentimental one we like to refer to when we want to encourage each other, whether we are in or out of ISKCON, to respect each other and participate together in devotional activities.

Except that’s not exactly what Śrīla Prabhupāda said. The actual quote is much more specific (and typical of Śrīla Prabhupāda): “Your love for me will be tested how after my departure you maintain this institution. We have glamour and people are feeling our weight. This should be maintained. Not like Gauḍīya Maṭha. After Guru Mahārāja’s departure so many ācāryas came up.” (TKG’s Diary, May 23, 1977).

Śrīla Prabhupāda was precise in stating his criteria. If we love him, not ourselves, then we will work cooperatively to maintain that specific, powerful entity he set up, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, ISKCON. And just to emphasize what that meant, he gave the negative example for us to compare ourselves with – the Gaudiya Matha, which lost its unity and became fragmented by so many independent *ācāryas*.

By that criteria, at least we can say ISKCON, good or bad, continues to exist. Wherever one goes around the world there are ISKCON devotees who are eager to receive you, to offer their services, to eagerly hear and chant with you, to take *prasādam* with. For sure, many centers are depleted from their original levels of attendance and occupation. But then again, the number of centers have more than tripled since Śrīla Prabhupāda left us, and unimaginable events have occurred in places where, during his time, it was a criminal offense to simply possess a *Bhagavad-gītā*.

This year I traveled around the world with my wife Śītala, our daughter Rāsarāṇī, and her friend Rādhā. Not an easy task, but made a great pleasure by the wonderful hospitality extended to us wherever we went. Selfless devotees turned over their homes to us, fed us and catered to all our needs. Add to this the generous hospitality from temple managers in Honolulu, London, Belgium, Milan and Rome, and we had an exceptionally good time, sheltered and cared for by the *kalpa-vṛkṣa* of ISKCON.

Apart from this I did a two month preaching tour of several countries in Eastern Europe. Everywhere I went I was received with generosity, gentility, and genuine friendship. Hundreds of devotees were eager to hear about Śrīla Prabhupāda for as long as I could talk about him. There is a real thirst and excitement among the devotees to know more and more details about the life of our Founder-*ācārya*. It's a healthy sign, and a great encouragement for the future.

Local cultural traits notwithstanding, Kṛṣṇa consciousness has taken root all around the world. The culture of spirituality, the lifestyle of *bhakti*, the characteristics of real transcendentalism have been irrevocably implanted in the most unlikely places, all through the aegis of that singular entity, ISKCON. It is undeniable that Śrīla Prabhupāda's

brainchild has made, and continues to make, a lasting impact on the world.

Of course not everyone has the same experience as me. I received a letter just a few weeks ago from a godbrother who has been estranged from mainstream ISKCON for some years, expressing this in no uncertain terms: *"In all reality when you are an older Prabhupāda disciple who has not already made his mark in ISKCON, there is little hope for feeling comfortable amongst the leadership. You are kind of put under an emotional penury and have very little support ... associating with most big gatherings*

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— Śrīla Prabhupāda

of ISKCON illuminati for devotees like me is frankly depressing and humiliating – which is actually why so many Prabhupāda disciples are not coming back into the fold. First the fold has to fold – if you get my point. It may be hard for you to imagine what it's like for Prabhupāda disciples like me since you are so famous and appreciated in ISKCON; as a whole your experience is totally different. It's acknowledgment and support at every turn. My only chance of that is when someone with some power inside knows my service, like you! Such persons like that are just about non-existent for me in the ISKCON leadership now."

It would be foolish to deny such sentiments and leave them unaddressed. The leadership of ISKCON clearly has a lot of work to do to make the Society a place where, to quote another well known adage, "the whole world can live". ISKCON is, by any measure, a work in progress and none of us would deny that.

But it does exist. Although fragmentation has occurred (and who among us thought it would not?), the main body of the Society has held together. There is a unity and a determination to execute the desire of Śrīla Prabhupāda that is tangible in countries all around the globe. As one senior godbrother told me, "Say what you like

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about ISKCON, but it's the only act in town." Who else is putting on Rathayātrā in multiple cities? Who else is distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books on the streets and in the airports – literature that was written and has the potency to change the whole world? Who else is putting on festivals like the Odessa gathering in Ukraine or Anapa in Russia when 1500–2500 devotees dance, chant, and hear with great eagerness from a host of senior Vaiṣṇavas? Who else is developing educational

facilities such as the VIHE/ MIHE, the BBT Sanskrit college in Govardhana, and Bhaktivedanta College in Belgium, to teach advanced courses in the science of bhakti yoga? Who else has temples like Juhu, Vṛndāvana, Māyāpur, and the Manor, that regularly host hundreds of thousands of pilgrims on major festival days? And who else has hundreds of centers all around the world where any devotee can be received in friendship with a place to stay and *prasādam* to eat? The list is a long one.

Wherever I travel I meet dedicated, sincere souls who are working hard to maintain Śrīla Prabhupāda's Society. They are inspired by his personal example, by the words in his books, and by the determination of his disciples and grand-disciples to preserve his work and not lay to waste his lifetime of effort. It is a tribute to his brilliance that in the midst of Kali-yuga, when it is far easier to find fault and flake away, his transcendental creation ISKCON has held together and continues to provide spiritual succor to the distressed and spiritually bereft. And it is a tribute to his sincere followers that despite the potential for disagreement



and dissent, despite the deficiencies – both the personal and the collective – they continue working together with hope and confidence.

This is love. In January 1976, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to Bhūrijana Dāsa: “Unless there is loving feeling, how is it possible for you to always make offerings to me? The spiritual master is always instructing his disciples and they in turn are always trying to serve their spiritual master. It is a reciprocal relationship of love.” And again in January 1977 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to Mrs. Polly Perlmutter, the mother of Śravaṇānanda Dāsa: “Yes, our Society is depending on love and respect; we are bound by love.”

We are bound by love. And by self-interest we are rent asunder. Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda told us in 1977, “Your love for me will be tested how after my departure you maintain this institution.”

On a morning walk on August 11, 1976, when Śrīla Prabhupāda was visiting Tehran, he told us about passing that test: “To be recognized by Kṛṣṇa, as He says, *na ca tasmān manuṣyeṣu*, one has to pass examination, severe test of examination. All the big, big devotees we see. Nārada Muni, before becoming Nārada Muni, he had to pass through severe examination, test ... Faith means that you are meant for giving some service to Kṛṣṇa. You should stick to that service, that path, in spite of all impediments. That is the passing of test. Generally, just like we are meant for preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. So there may be severe test, but still we shall remain determined. That is wanted. There may be so many impediments, punishment, still you should do that. That is test. Not that as soon as there is some difficulty I give it up. There may be severe test, but still we shall not give it up. We must go on. That is determination.”

“Passing the test means executing the order of the spiritual master,” Nava-yauvana said.

Prabhupāda agreed. “Yes, that is spiritual life. One has to take order from the spiritual master and execute it, despite all impediments. That is determination.”

Do we pass the test? From this fallen soul’s perspective and experience, I think so. We may not get 100%, but a pass at least. ISKCON continues on as a united preaching force, and as long as it does, that is the passing of the test of love that Śrīla Prabhupāda set for us. ❀

