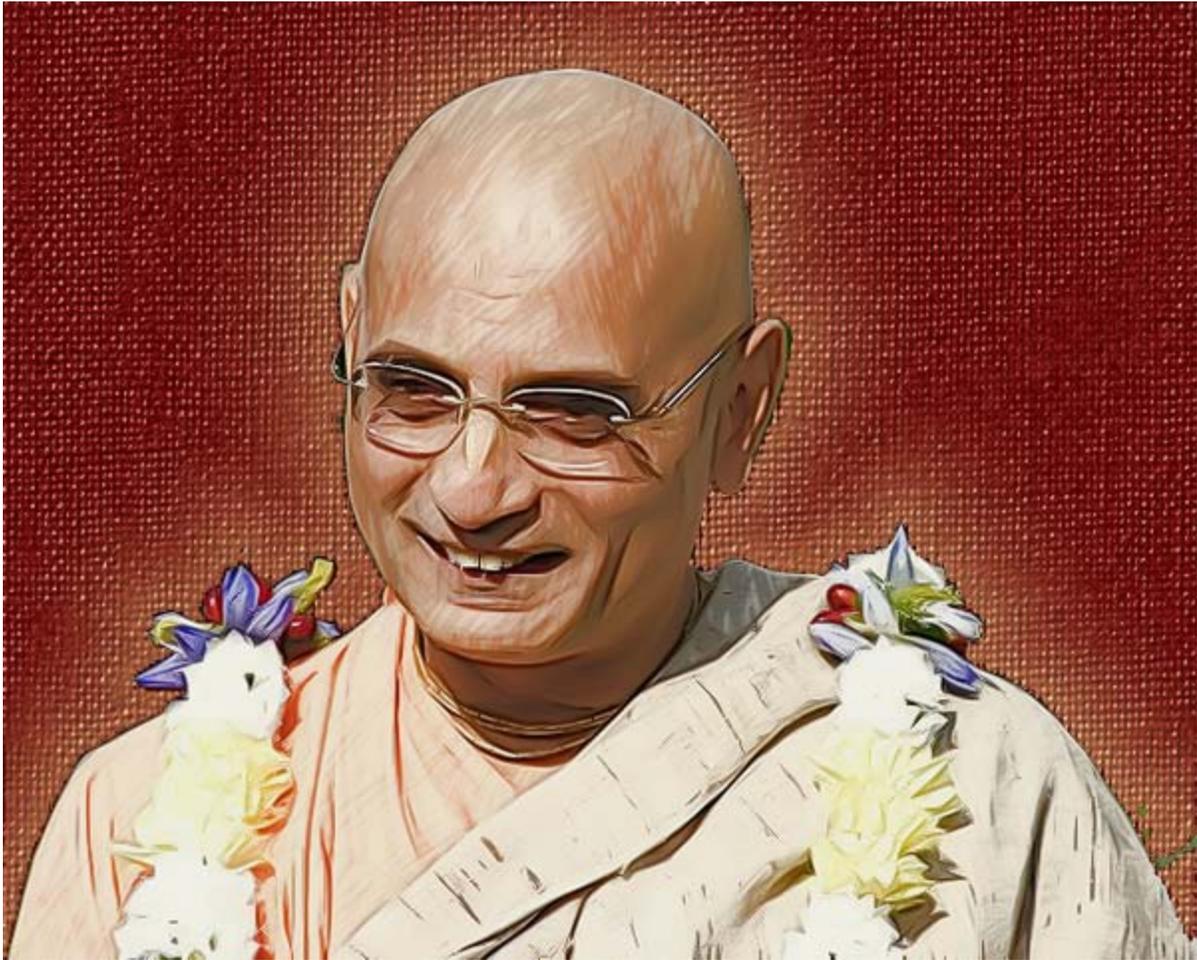


Stumbling blocks and stepping stones



By Bhakti Charu Swami

Being enlivened by so many thought-provoking observations and concepts on the subject of guru-tattva and the ISKCON institution I feel inspired to express some ideas and understandings on this issue.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, while reviving Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Sankirtana movement, realized that the massive task of spreading Krsna Consciousness all over the world, in every town and village, would not be possible without the collective endeavors of committed devotees for generations to come. Therefore he saw the need for an institution, and gave the blueprint of that institution in the form of his "Namahatta" (the market place of the holy name) and "Visva Vaisnava Raja-Sabha." (the Royal Assembly of the Vaisnavas from All Over the World). Srila Bhaktisidhanta Sarasvati Thakura gave a shape to that concept in the form of his "Gaudiya Matha" and when that institution fell apart, Srila Prabhupada revived the spirit of his Guru Maharaja through ISKCON.

It is important to note that Srila Bhakti Vinod Thakur, Srila Bhaktisidhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Srila Prabhupada, all three of them, gave more importance to the institution than to their own authority - in spite of being the founders and organizers of their institutions they placed themselves as ordinary members of their respective institutions. For example, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura indentified himself as the sweeper of the Namahatta. Srila Bhaktisidhanta Sarasvati Thakura called himself the servant of the Gaudiya Matha, and Srila Prabhupada identified himself as a mere member of the Governing body of ISKCON.

Although Srila Prabhupada spread Krsna Consciousness all over the world within the amazingly short span of ten years time, he knew that he would not be able to spread it in every town and village during his lifetime; rather, it would take generations to achieve that. That is why he was so emphatic about the effective continuity of his mission through his ISKCON. Personalities such as Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Srila Bhaktisidhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Srila Prabhupada come to grace this world only once in a blue moon. It is Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's causeless mercy that those three personalities came in such a succession. Their appearances on this planet was actually Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's divine arrangement for reviving His Sankirtana movement and fulfill His prediction that Krsna Consciousness movement would spread in every town and village on this planet. Although, being empowered by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, they could achieve anything and perform incredible miracles, yet, for the sake of fulfilling the ultimate purpose of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's mission they emphasized the collective continuity of the movement through an institution. Srila Bhaktisidhanta Sarasvati Thakura was an extremely brilliant personality who attracted countless luminaries of his time within the fold of his Gaudiya Matha. However, soon after his disappearance when the Gaudiya Matha disintegrated, in spite of all those luminaries the propagation of Krsna Consciousness practically stopped.

Srila Prabhupada explained that, that happened because most his prominent followers could not understand the importance of continuing his mission through the institution he established. They held on to the traditional concept and concluded that a spiritual heritage could not effectively continue through an institution managed by a bunch of mundane managers, they defied the instruction of their spiritual master and appointed an acarya [who eventually fell down] the institution that he so meticulously structured collapsed.

Srila Prabhupada, in order to protect his ISKCON from such an unfortunate possibility, emphatically told us not to make the same mistake that his god-brothers made after his Guru Maharaja's disappearance. He advised us to continue the mission under the authority of a collective management structure. Nevertheless, after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, we in ISKCON also made a similar mistake. Thinking that Srila Prabhupada had appointed 11 successors we also plunged in to the same syndrome of appointing spiritual heads of the institution presuming that after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance they inherited ISKCON.

In 1987, about 10 years after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, this mistake was addressed by concerned leading devotees of ISKCON, but was not fully corrected. Just

by adding more gurus and allowing them to initiate wherever they could attract disciples, that mistake was only diluted to some extent but was not really corrected.

Recently, the GBC body became painfully aware that through that mistake a parallel line of authority has been created in ISKCON which is causing a considerable amount of damage to the institution and is stifling the growth of the movement. It is very laudable of the GBC body that they have taken this issue very seriously and are working hard to rectify it.

In order to effectively establish an institution we need two essential elements - the head of the institution, and its management structure. In ISKCON we have to be absolutely clear that Srila Prabhupada is the head of the institution and he will continue to be that as long as the institution lasts, and the management structure Srila Prabhupada established - the GBC, temple presidents, departmental heads, etc, must be fully functional without any deviation.

If we compare the institution of ISKCON to a corporate structure, then we must recognize that Srila Prabhupada is the proprietor of ISKCON, and the other leaders of this institution are the managers. The managers manage, and although they get their remunerations and incentives for that, the profit belongs to the proprietor. In ISKCON, it is important that we clearly recognize the fact that everything in ISKCON, including even all the devotees, belongs to Srila Prabhupada, then only this mistake that is stifling the growth of our institution will be rectified and Krsna Consciousness movement will start to spread once again, all over the world, in leaps and bounds.