

Priti-laksanam

A Forum for Vaisnava Discussion

Volume 3, July 1992

"Offering gifts in charity, accepting charitable gifts, revealing one's mind in confidence, inquiring confidentially, accepting *prasada* and offering *prasada* are the six symptoms of love [*priti-laksanam*] shared by one devotee and another."

— *Nectar of Instruction*, Text Four

Dedicated to
His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-Acarya of the
International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

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A Note from the Editor

This issue of *Priti-laksanam* sees the emergence of new topics. Aditi dasi's submission touches on a subject not often discussed in ISKCON, and Akhilesvara Prabhu hits home a point and leaves us pondering a difficult problem.

And believe it or not, I've put the women in the back! I've grouped most of the letters regarding women in ISKCON at the end of the newsletter to make way for new topics in the front. But don't let that fool you, there's a good discussion going on back there.

The second part of the "Are we Above Varnasrama-dharma" article by Krsna dharma Prabhu will be published in the next issue, as there simply wasn't enough space this time. My apologies to the readers and Krsna-dharma.

I hope the discussions stimulate your thoughts about Krsna consciousness, and inspire you to participate. From what I've seen so far I'll be able to publish quarterly. That puts the next issue out in October—I look forward to hearing from you.

I'm hopeful that the newsletter will be used by the Society of devotees as an important tool for worldwide internal communications. Mukunda Maharaja graciously voiced his support in the May/June issue of his ISKCON Communications Briefings, "A publication of this nature is long overdue." And he encouraged devotees to participate in the discussion and order *Priti-laksanam*.

Priti-laksanam will become a subscription publication, but currently is existing with donations. Your donations are welcome and needed! Single copies are free in the United States. Please send \$1 for a copy sent outside the U.S.

I would like to thank the following devotees and supporters for their kind donations for printing and mailing this issue of *Priti-laksanam*.

Sukrta dasa, Germany	\$10
Syama Kunda dasi, England	\$ 5
Joan Houston, Chico, CA	\$ 5
Kay Spier, Carmichael, CA	\$ 2
Aditi dasi, Berkeley, CA	\$20
Vimala dasi, Auckland, N. Zealand	\$12
Isani dasi, Germany	\$20
Madri dasi, Dallas	\$ 1
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Dinadayadri dasi, Ferndale, MI	\$25
Krsna Katha dasi, Ireland	\$ 5

A special thanks to Kunti dasi of *ISKCON World Review* who laid out the first three issues of *Priti-laksanam*. She's moving on to Florida in the fall and I'll miss her help and association.

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Looking for a husband or a wife, or a spouse for your child?

Priti-laksanam is currently accepting personals in good taste. \$1.00 per ad, per issue. Your ad should be 30 words or less, and acceptance will be left to editor's discretion.

— Pranada dasi

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November 1977

A Vyasa-puja homage to
His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada
by Madhudvisa dasa
Badger, California

Chip, chip, chip . . . and then a pause.
Chip, chip, chip . . . again a pause.
The chipping itself was not what annoyed me, but it was that pause. It seemed so long and out of place here in the holy *dhama*, Vrindavana, where there was no void, no cessation of that eternal flow of *prema bhakti*, no end to the sacred *nama*. But somehow that pause between chips was

there to greet me in the cool morning darkness as I approached the *mandir*.

Why no bells? No *kirtana*, no "Radhe, Radhe," no sound of excited devotees moving about, hastily preparing for the *mangala-arati*? Just that chip, chip, chip . . . then again a pause. Why a pause? There is no room for a pause, "Twenty-four hours a day everyone should be engaged," he had said this many times.

That chipping came from the shadows over there on the left. As I took off my shoes, I thought I must go there and find out what that workman was doing, so early in the morning, while the rest of the world slept. The unsettling chipping sound persisted as I entered the inner marble courtyard. And there it was, that beautiful *tamala* tree, which he had insisted not be removed when the land was being cleared for the construction. Back then this tree seemed small and neglected, situated off to the right on that vacant plot of land. Now it had grown in both size and beauty, and its fine leaves decorated the floor.

His rocking chair was still right there, but why was it moving slightly as if someone had just got up and left? Why was the chair garlanded? That garland was for him as he would sit there among all the beaming *gurukula* boys. And why was there a *murti* of him sitting on the *vyasasana* where he would majestically preside over his flock, enlightening them with his purports, leading them in the Sanskrit text of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*?

There were very few devotees standing there in the cold, clean floor of the *darsana mandapa* as the bells and conches sounded for the beginning of *arati*. My ears were still being haunted by that eerie chipping sound. I felt impelled to run back and tell them to stop making that irritating noise during this most sacred hour of the day. Didn't they realize that he was up in his room working on his books? Didn't they know that this would distract him from his meditation?

As the *arati* continued, I could not make out the face of the *pujari*, but as he moved out of the shadows and raised the ghee lamp toward the holy seat, I could see that he was crying—and as he offered the lamp to the devotees he broke down, and was helped back by his assistant. Why?

Chip, chip, chip . . . that damn sound jack-hammered my ears. I turned and ran to the back of the temple where that impudent sound was coming. By now I was in a rage, "Stop! Stop!" I shouted. The little man didn't even look up, but kept chipping away at the marble. I took him by the shoulders and shook him. He was limp to my touch. He looked up with darkened, red eyes and said, "Nay, Baba, *samadhi*. Baba, *samadhi*." He looked down and resumed working on the sacred tomb.

Now this chapter was closed; it was

hard to chant with this lump in my throat. No more reassuring glances of approval, no more cookies and sweets from his hand, no more exchanges of flowers, as he entered the temple, no more sweet feet to hold onto, no more father to tell his children everything was all right, no more sound of his gong pounding out the beat of the *kirtana*, no more beautiful, handsome Prabhupada to see shining in the morning sun.

Tears of loving separation are warm but still sad. So I pray that you will let me remember always those special promises I made to you, and thus being true to these holy vows I will live with you forever.

"He reasons ill, who think that Vaisnavas die, when they are living still in sound. The Vaisnavas die to live and living try to spread the holy name around."

WOMEN ON THE GBC?

Original Formation of the GBC

In Response to Your Letter
by Tamal Krsna Goswami

I am pleased that you have given me the opportunity to share with you my recollections about women originally being on the GBC. I have some relevant information which I am sure will be of interest to both you and the readers of your publication.

In the summer of 1969 Srila Prabhupada visited Los Angeles and stayed in a house which we rented for him. At the time, Purusottama was serving as his secretary. I would visit Prabhupada more or less on a daily basis. Over the course of perhaps a week or more, Purusottama gave me three lists of names of devotees. The first one was the longest with somewhere between fifteen and twenty names on it. These included three women: Yadurani, Yamuna, and Govinda dasi. The names were handwritten by Srila Prabhupada on the back of an envelope. Only the broad side of the envelope remained giving the paper a rectangular shape.

I recall that we were quite intrigued about the significance of this list. On the top were the letters "G.B." In our own naive way we speculated that this must mean "Going Back (to Godhead)."

In any case, Purusottama handed over two more such lists in the course of the following two days. These were also on scraps of paper, which I take it that Prabhupada discarded, otherwise I cannot imagine that Purusottama would have taken these without Prabhupada's permission. The second and third lists were shorter. The second list included only two women's names, but I cannot recall which of the three was omitted. The third list did not include any women's names and was the shortest, I believe eleven names only.

After the formation of the Governing Body Commission by mid-1970, it became clear to me that these lists had been drawn up by Srila Prabhupada while contemplating who the members would be. I kept these papers because of their being handwritten by Srila Prabhupada. I considered anything that His Divine Grace wrote personally as significant and kept it whenever I had the opportunity. I kept these lists with me for at least ten years, along with all of the letters which I received from Srila Prabhupada.

When Ramesvara Prabhu was appointed the GBC Minister of Records, I carefully handed these three lists to him. Sometime thereafter, I inquired from him what he had done with them. To my astonishment he could not remember although I had taken so much care to preserve them all of those years.

Perhaps, by good fortune, these lists may be safe within the Archives. That would certainly be wonderful. I also handed over a small scrap of paper on which Prabhupada drew the picture of Krsna's flute. On the reverse side of this paper was a list of the preparations Prabhupada wanted distributed during the opening week of Sri Sri Radha-London-isvara's temple at Bury Place. Srila Prabhupada wanted us to understand exactly how the head of Krsna's flute should be shaped.

This brings me to the personal discussion which I had with Srila Prabhupada on a similar subject.

While at the Bury Place temple, sitting with Srila Prabhupada in his room, His Divine Grace was once expressing his appreciation for Yamuna devi's wonderful service. I have often repeated what he told me at that time, which I remembered being that were she not a woman, he would have appointed her to the GBC. The only problem with this remembrance of mine is that I do not think Srila Prabhupada had officially formed the GBC at this time. There is no doubt in my mind that this conversation took place during Srila Prabhupada stay at Bury Place which was probably in December of 1969. Perhaps what he said was that he would have appointed her as Temple President. In any case, he was mentioning some important position of authority within our Society. It was either temple president, or perhaps GBC. I do not remember raising any objection to this, nor did I hear of anyone else doing so. When Srila Prabhupada did form the GBC in Los Angeles in 1970, I never heard of anyone arguing that there should be no women on the Body. Perhaps someone did say this, but at least I never heard it.

So these are my recollections, given truthfully and to the best of my remembrance. I apologize that my memory is not perfect. But I tried to recall everything that I know of this subject. I hope

that this may help to clear the matter. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share these remembrances.

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Regarding the premise that Srila Prabhupada warned women on the GBC

by Badrinarayan dasa
ISKCON San Diego

ISKCON and its devotees do not exist in a vacuum. I've observed that the general cultural trends tend to filter through our Society (love feast and painted buses in the late '60s and early '70s, daytimers and the one minute manager in the '80s). Is it possible that one of the flavors of the '90s is being politically correct? It is of value to note that Srila Prabhupada instructed the peace protesters that there are causes worth fighting for and told hippies to shave up, give up sex, and stop taking drugs. He had no hesitancy to sail against the current cultural tide, charting his course by eternal coordinates.

When I recently raised a question about men and women all having the same roles once they enter the house of bhakti, I was accused of being an "exploitative, neo-conservative dinosaur." But in trying to step aside from the emotionalism of the issue, I have asked myself the question, "Why do I think the way I think?" "What is it based on (personal desires, conditioning, or genuine spiritual and sastric analysis)?"

I have on occasion also heard this story about a GBC list penned personally by Srila Prabhupada with Yamuna and Govinda on it (the version I heard had him listing them with "half a vote each"). From my experience, the defining issue is what did Srila Prabhupada actually do? It was not uncommon that he would mull over an idea, then drop it, refine it, or present it as he originally conceived it. Srila Prabhupada discussed getting ships and visiting ports around the world with *hari-nama* festivals. He considered householders developing a whole line of medicines as a means of support (to the point of writing out a recipe for toothpaste). There are many examples. The idea of finding some list in an archive somewhere as a "smoking gun" of confirmation is a bit specious.

Ideas that Srila Prabhupada wanted, he instituted. If he didn't think we were ready for it, he said so and spelled it out clearly, for the time when we would be (*varnasrama-dharma* and the Mayapur city come to mind). And to present that Srila Prabhupada was silent or intimidated due to fear of disturbing "some senior sannyasis" flies in the face of history. Four of those sannyasis he ostracized from the Society when they challenged his will. Tamal Krsna Goswami's name is often mentioned as a source of the alleged repressions, but at the height of the Radha Damodar Party's powerful

preaching and book distribution Srila Prabhupada removed him and sent him to China. Hardly the symptoms that Srila Prabhupada was hesitant to speak out or act.

Frankly, the case as presented so far rings of the same support system fabricated for the *rittvic-acarya* conception. The obscure references and third or fourth hand stories all are at cross currents with what Srila Prabhupada actually established and developed under his own guiding hand for years, before his departure.

Believe it or not, all the above is not an argument against women being on the GBC. But if such a move is made, it should be a sober decision based on solid sastric references, a genuine need, and certainty that it is in harmony with Srila Prabhupada's desires. Srila Prabhupada handed us a carefully crafted and precious legacy, and cautioned about the "Western disease" of always changing everything. If we start chopping, cutting, adding and subtracting to fit whatever is the fashion of the day, we will have done Srila Prabhupada and the world in general the greatest disservice.

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Mixing of Internal and External Feature of Lord Caitanya's Mission

by Hrdayananda dasa Goswami
ISKCON Los Angeles

Regarding Satyaraja's essay, unfortunately I don't have a copy with me right now, but Satyaraja Prabhu seemed to me to be saying like the following:

1. Feminine qualities predominate in the pastimes of Lord Caitanya and His intimate associates.

2. Our saintly women devotees have sublime feminine qualities.

3. Therefore, the same feminine qualities that were so important in the Lord's intimate pastimes should be seen and admired in the ladies of ISKCON.

My complaint was that this argument seemed to contain certain dubious (if not dangerous) mixing of the external and internal features of Lord Caitanya's mission. Certainly Lord Caitanya and His principal followers, internally relished Radharani's unique mood of utter submission to Lord Krsna. But the external feature of the Lord's mission was the opposite. Although many exalted Vaisnavis on the highest spiritual level took part in the Lord's pastimes, they normally acted with extreme modesty and discretion, and generally did not approach the Lord, nor did they prominently figure in more of His principal pastimes. The modern adaptation in Western society of Caitanya Mahaprabhu's mission is an entirely different topic. I simply want to point out that the feminine aspect of Caitanya's mood is the internal dimension of His appearance, and to compare it with the

external dimension of ISKCON is suspect, to say the least. This was my main doubt about the article.

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More Prabhupada Consciousness

by Dinadayadri dasi
Ferndale, Michigan

I am a devotee who joined the movement in 1969 but have unfortunately been out of touch with Krsna consciousness for the past 10 years. In the last year, I have been struggling to find a way back into the association of devotees, and believe me, it hasn't been easy. Everyone seems to be on a different wavelength now, not strong and united under Srila Prabhupada as we originally were. I also must admit that after reading your first issue I was thinking, "Whoa, maybe I'd better wait a while before getting into Krsna consciousness again if things are still so bad for women in the Movement!" So for now, I feel the best thing I can do is observe the Movement from all possible angles and give my encouragement and financial support to those projects I see as most productive for spreading the glories of Srila Prabhupada and Lord Sri Krsna to every town and village.

The major suggestion I would make for temples interested in attracting older devotees "back into the fold" is to make the temples more Prabhupada conscious. When Srila Prabhupada left our external vision, a rare opportunity was presented for us all to enter the next higher stage of transcendental emotion—that is, love in separation. Unfortunately, it seems the communal experience of the highest and most intense stage of *bhakti-yoga* was somehow neglected and left largely unmanifest. Please forgive me as I don't say this to offend anyone, but in all honesty, it seems like Srila Prabhupada is now perceived in a rather vague, almost impersonal way as having somehow expanded into the ISKCON organization, or else he is appreciated mainly as the subject of various amusing "anecdotes." Encountering these attitudes creates pain in the hearts of those who love Srila Prabhupada and who had been so inconceivably fortunate as to have personally glimpsed his tremendous stature in Vaisnava history as the great deliverer of the Western world from the clutches of voidism and impersonalism.

I feel very strongly that one of the most direct and potent methods for invoking Srila Prabhupada's loving, transcendental presence is for us to consciously perform the *yuga-dharma, sankirtana-yajna*, more in line with the example set by Srila Prabhupada, which was, of course, transcendental to all earthbound "styles" of mere singing and dancing. The main thing to concentrate on is trying to appreciate the mood Srila Prabhupada displayed while chanting: "like the genuine cry of the child for mother" and "devoid of

sense of false prestige." Other more specific suggestions would be: (1) to chant "Hare Krsna *maha-mantra* and less "Hari Bol" and other things, (2) to stick to the simple melody so everyone, including guests, can follow, (3) to keep the tempo steady so everyone can dance and meditate on hearing and chanting the Lord's holy name instead of having their meditation broken by so many stops and starts; and (4) to dance in the graceful way Srila Prabhupada showed us, in the divine footsteps of Sri Panca-tattva.

This appears to be such a simple solution to the many problems plaguing ISKCON that some may dismiss it as simplistic. However, I am convinced that if groups of devotees would make an experiment and try this, they would realize it as a major key to clearing up philosophical confusion and cleansing away the unpleasant residue left behind when there are misunderstandings among devotees. We need Srila Prabhupada to unite us now more than ever, so we must realize he is "living still in sound" and experience his *darsana* through the transcendental sound vibration.

LETTERS

A Good Forum

by Vimala dasi
ISKCON Auckland, New Zealand
I xeroxed issue #2 and distributed copies to devotees here in Auckland. I had a good response and I think that in general everyone agrees that such a newsletter is a healthy way to discuss anything from controversies to Vaisnava dealings so that many misunderstandings may be cleared up and communications opened in a Vaisnava way. Please keep me on your mailing list.

Pita na sa syat

by Suresvara dasa
ISKCON Gita-nagari, Pennsylvania
I liked the second issue of *Priti-laksanam* better than the first. I don't think you should worry about getting stuck on the "women's issue" any more than we at Gita-nagari should worry about getting stuck on cow protection. For generations now, Kali has bred women the same way he has bred cows: for slaughter. It will likely be many generations before women as a class become mothers again and men become true fathers. *Pita na sa syat*. Meantime, as your newsletter suggests, we can remember Srila Prabhupada and thereby naturally treat one another with the utmost respect. I know that's good because my mother told me.

A Strengthened, Rejuvenated ISKCON

by Pancaratna dasa
ISKCON Calcutta, India

I recently came across the *Priti-laksanam*. I am not sure which issue as there was no identification. Perhaps the copy was incomplete. In any case, I was very impressed by the maturity of the presentation and would like to receive a personal copy. Is there a subscription?

As you may know I am working with Lokanath Maharaja on the master plan for Srila Prabhupada's Centennial. Your efforts are very important in realizing the goal of a strengthened, rejuvenated ISKCON for Srila Prabhupada's pleasure, which is a major element of your presentation.

Again, thank you for your good work and please put us on your mailing list.

Sign of Purity

by Maturesa dasa
ISKCON Gita-nagari

I received a copy of volume 2 from Hansarupa. Please put us on your mailing list.

In this issue the three anecdotes related by Sudharma dasi struck me in particular. It can be very helpful and purifying to hear stories like this, excruciating though they may be. Although they are "dirty laundry," open discussion of them is just the opposite—a sign of purity. It's good for us and it's good preaching too.

I do feel uneasy, however, with the raw form in which these anecdotes were presented. These things happen, it's true, but it's not true, as the rawness of the presentation unintentionally suggests, that they are indicative of ISKCON style overall or that they come close to even partially outweighing any number of positive anecdotes that could be related.

So maybe there wasn't enough space to fully preface this column, but my question is how to take advantage of the chastening effect of such anecdotes without appearing to be flies going for the sores. In one sense, after all, ISKCON will never "grow up beyond" incidents like these because there will always be the neophytes among us, if not the neophyte within each of us. We will forever need to be vigilant for these things, as well as patient and understanding of *kanistha* behavior while we purify our Society and ourselves by continued hearing and chanting.

Of course, the editorial mood of *Priti-laksanam*, including Sudharma's piece is both vigilant and understanding, but I had these reservations.

ESSAYS

Creating Economic Unity

by Jack Maurice
Canada

At the conclusion of the *Bhagavad-gita*, Sanjaya states that wherever there is Lord Krsna and Arjuna there will also certainly be opulence, victory, extraordinary power, and morality. Now, the legacy of Srila Prabhupada's purity is a small but moralistic society of devotees who daily do battle against *maya* and in the service of Krsna. So those critical elements of this transcendental equation are definitely in evidence. But at least on the material plane the opulence, victory, and extraordinary power factors of the equation have yet to become fully manifested.

Instead, the reality is that virtually every ISKCON community is a place where very little sense of community actually exists. This is due to the unfortunate fact that many of the residents there do daily scatter out into mainstream society in order to earn a living. It's a situation which negatively impacts on ISKCON's potential for growth and development. So let us consider here why it is that a community of devotees who bond with one another so well in their devotional practices; do fail so miserably to unite for their own common good when it comes to the business of supporting their individual households and families.

The root cause of the problem has to lie in the application of our ideology. Thus the first step toward curing our economic disunity might be that of ISKCON Governing Body Commission accepting that there is a need for it to offer some practical direction here. I am talking about the need for an official guiding policy on the subject of devotee proprietorship and prosperity. In that connection I ask the GBC to analyze the significance of Lord Caitanya's prediction that someday the Hare Krsna *maha-mantra* would be heard in every town and village.

What were His precise words and what exactly do they portend? Can it mean that while someday ISKCON media outlets will broadcast the culture of *sankirtana* around the world: the opportunity to actually understand and appreciate such transcendental sound vibrations by means of direct association with devotees will for the most part remain a big-city phenomenon only? Or does His prediction actually encompass all possibilities; with the degree to which it gets realized being in direct ratio to the degree of initiative and ingenuity devotees demonstrate in their practical application of Vedic philosophy?

When it comes to economic development it seems that many devotees suffer from some sort of psychological paralysis brought on by a philosophical outlook

which has it that Lord Krsna prefers that our Society will never truly prosper because immense wealth would cause devotees to lose sight of the grim underlying realities of our material existence. But to adhere to that is to effectively concede that indeed Lord Caitanya's prophecy was no more than hollow hype uttered only to give His devotees some falsely momentous sense of the movement's future. For if ever there is to be a temple in every town it will only come about as a result of enormous growth and one prerequisite of that is tremendous wealth. So we need to decide to what doctrine we shall subscribe. Is it indeed His will that for our own spiritual good we are destined to be forever financially fractured? Or do we concur that it is up to us to make His prediction mean all that it possibly can? Up to us to make it means that someday ISKCON will in fact be the biggest religion in the world.

As things stand now, ISKCON's householder class is largely left to fend for itself. Out of some misguided adherence to high ideals our householders do tend to reject the idea of uniting to establish a corporation whose product or service is anything less than purely Krsna conscious. Yet these same devotees go out and drive taxi cabs and do thus facilitate the transport of meat and all sorts of other nefarious activities. They work in offices and factories in bad association and they put up there with idle chatter, cigarette smoke, material music, the sight and the smell of finished flesh, and so on. They work at jobs which do nothing to promote ISKCON, nor even Vedic culture in general. They work hard for low wages in the service of the servants of *maya*.

Is this actually preferably to the idea of devotees working together in slightly less than perfect pursuits? I think not. What is preferable, and what I do here and now ask for, is the formulation and the promulgation of a get-real policy on such matters by the GBC. The ideology of our householders definitely needs some fine tuning. Let us recall here that in the beginning at a time when he had a few feeble followers and very little else, Prabhupada himself was quite willing to lower his own high standards in the name of progress.

Ravindra Svarupa dasa has written that there is nothing wrong with the movement's having all kinds of sympathizers who are not following the strict regulative principles but who are willing to contribute land, capital, organizational skills, and labor to projects which propagate Krsna consciousness. On the other hand, Srila Prabhupada has said that our movement is like a diamond merchant and thus we should not be interested in collecting a lot of glass buyers. There is no real disparity here. The more supporters it has the better, but ISKCON also recognizes its need to maintain some

measure of a healthy reserve between the materialists (however well-intentioned) and the transcendentalists. So I say here that its time that we commence to address this need by the establishment of a SISKCON (Society for ISKCON). Located right next to ISKCON temples everywhere, these SISKCON centers would organize and orient supporters, fallen devotees, and the casually curious. And do it in a relatively relaxed and permissive approach (offering for instance a side room for the cigarette smokers and coffee drinkers). If our householders fail to found this SISKCON some enterprising soul shall no doubt meanwhile concoct his own religion in order to capitalize on the potentially very lucrative gap between what materialists like and do not like about our culture.

Govinda Gourmet Catsup Corporation

It would produce a class of catsup not to be had anywhere else at any price. Those rare few of us lucky enough to have ever tasted home-made catsup (made with organically-grown tomatoes) do know exactly what the Govinda Gourmet brand would taste like. Do thus know as well that a dainty little chilled bottle of Govinda Gourmet's could sell at an astronomical price in top rank restaurants. It would entail devotees marketing a condiment to a clientele whose use of same would include the seasoning of meat dishes. Not a nice thought that. Much better we have our own international chain of franchise "Govinda's" family restaurants in which to exclusively distribute that catsup for use on such succulent savories as fresh cut ghee fries, spicy fried curd, and deep-fried cauliflower. But the point here is that to get there we may have to lower our standards just a mite. Not ISKCON's. Ours.

All this talk is fine but can this author produce any practical plan to improve the current economic situation of ISKCON in general and its householders class in particular? I can and I will. But not here. Not in public. My manuscript and its related project proposal have been over a decade in the writing and I am not about to risk having any of its utterly unique content and ideas scooped now. But I will say this. I have conceived of and thoroughly documented a plan whereby devotees could make millions simply by running a business whose service is only ostensibly something less than a purely Krsna conscious activity. So in name only would a bit of compromise be called for and this is an endeavor which can quite reasonably be expected to win over among others many wealthy and socially powerful converts to our religion. All the capital required to fund the project can be secured from some publisher in the form of advance royalties on the book. It's ready to roll. It only requires the active support of ISKCON's elite. The famous. The wealth. The wise. The powerful. If

you're seriously interested contact me at Box 160 (SHU), Prince Albert, SK, Canada S6V 5R6.

Falldown from Spiritual Life

by Mahakratu dasa
Belfast, Ireland

(This letter was originally submitted to *Back to Godhead* magazine, but due to the internal nature of the discussion it is being published in *Priti-laksanam*.)

I have read and re-read the article "Falldown from Spiritual Life" from the November/December issue of BTG.

I feel that it is about time topics like this are raised for the general population of devotees to discuss and address. It certainly seems to be a major problem within the ISKCON Society, as it is in most religious groups. We often hear of figures that in the region of 95% of the original initiated devotees of Srila Prabhupada have fallen away from Krsna consciousness. Does this mean they have fallen down seriously, not interested, or just moved into a different situation (like householder life)?

Sometimes I cannot help feeling that some devotees, especially those with leadership positions, are often overly skeptical of those devotees who do decide to take up the householder way of life. Also I feel that they may not fully understand and be fully sympathetic to the implications and responsibilities that go along with family life. Ravindra Svarupa speaks of "association with each others mundane mentalities," does he not feel that in many cases within the temples such so called association is also going on, often in the name of *sankirtana*? For example, for many years many temples have been maintained, from within, by the sales of oil paintings, badges, T-shirts, jewelry, etc. Devotees have been taught all manner of "sales techniques" often using such famous salesmen as Tom Hopkins and Dale Carnegie. Is this not associating with "mundane mentalities"?

Ravindra also points out that it is bad to be employed by a nondevotee, but we do see instances where Srila Prabhupada told his disciple to either maintain a particular job or even to get a job. On occasions when a devotee would ask Prabhupada if he or she could get married, Prabhupada would ask, "How will you maintain your family?" This then often posed a difficult question to the persons involved; how were they to earn a living and still remain within the movement? During those times the temples did have some different enterprises, as is before mentioned. Of course, you then get the problem that not all devotees are cut out to be door to door salesmen, or street collectors, which in turn, leaves very few options to them, what to speak of the added demands of the temple authorities to get as much out of the

collectors as is possible.

Ravindra also stated, "And then you can also have those enterprises doing purely uncompensated, non-fruitive spiritual activity for spreading Krsna consciousness, not just for family maintenance."

We often speak of ISKCON as being a family, so is it wrong to say when a devotee's collection is spent on paying the *asrama's* electric bill, rent, mortgage, land tax, all the basic needs of an individual's heating, lighting, food, clothing, etc., that this is for "family maintenance?" What to speak of the massive bills for air fares run up by traveling around the world to attend a meeting or festival—sometimes making three flights in a week or more? Please tell me, Why then is it so bad that a simple devotee tries to maintain his or her family by "doing an honest days work and earning an honest days pay . . . ? Srila Prabhupada advocates in his books: "A man should labor honestly for his maintenance, better to be an honest street sweeper than a dishonest cheater."

I feel that often too much emphasis is put on the bad things that may happen to a person in the event they work for a nondevotee. Why not look at it from the positive side? If a devotee family is able to maintain itself within the greater community and remain devotees of Krsna, that family will not be a burden on any temple or project. And, if they are able to make excess income to their own needs, they will most definitely give the remainder for the propagation of Krsna consciousness. As we can see from Rohininandana's article (in the same BTG issue) it may not always be possible to give 50% of one's earnings to a particular temple on a regular basis.

In other churches or charities different fund-raising ventures are undertaken to maintain the institution And we see that our supporters are working family people—Indians or ISKCON members.

I would suggest that Ravindra (and others) being the respected leader that he is, rethink his statements and help form a more open and positive approach to building the society of devotees that Srila Prabhupada dreamt of.

Don't the devotees who took part in the *ista-gosthi* also have material expenses and need to be maintained? Are comments made by devotees living on the outside, not necessarily up to the full standard, allowed to be printed? Is there a means for such devotees to be heard? Should we not be considered for potential input for the movement? A lot of experience could be tapped and resources brought to the movement if the leaders can become more open to other forms of input.

Another point I would like to address is Danudhara Swami's statement, "Of course, we should be sympathetic, but we still have to be careful about our

association." This can be taken too far, and often is! If Srila Prabhupada had not taken the time and trouble to come out and meet the already fallen people, none of us would have ever become devotees. Followers of Srila Prabhupada should take up this mood and distribute Krsna's mercy liberally and fearlessly.

The mercy of Lord Caitanya is unbounded. Why should you have such reservations and fears about your own welfare, especially if you can help keep a Godbrother or Godsisiter in association? You are the preachers, the front line, whose business it is to inspire and push on the movement. Not necessarily everyone will come to you looking for guidance and protection. Instead of concentrating all efforts on getting new devotees, wouldn't it be wise to put some effort into revitalizing and enthusing the old, the already converted?

Someone said, "You no longer have anything in common with old friends that are no longer coming around, they want to talk of movies or some such mundane event." Srila Prabhupada was able to speak to musicians about their music, racing drivers about their sport, etc. Most devotees I know would still be happy to speak about Krsna.

In many cases devotees within the movement tend to be too hard on those who may have a different opinion than that of a particular leader. It is often said, "The best form of defense is attack." But must this always be the case? Jesus Christ said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." And Lord Caitanya said, "*Tmad api sunicena.*"

I spoke with Srila Prabhupada on this subject during his visit to Nairobi in 1975. He broadly defined the need for devotees to learn the art of and practice the humble attitude. It's difficult. I'm the first to admit, but it is still especially essential that those who are preaching Krsna consciousness develop this trait. Sometimes that would mean swallowing one's sharp words and learning to listen.

Many of us have the malady of not being able to listen to another, especially if that person has some problem. But Srila Prabhupada took the time to listen to us and help us along with our spiritual life. He told us, "One who keeps chanting, no matter what, would have the company of guru forever." Perhaps then in defining falldown we can consider, If devotees continue chanting, though they may be fallen in other ways, there is still hope for them.

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4 Regulative Principles & ISKCON

by Akhilesvara dasa
Montreal, Canada

Recently in Gita-nagari I witnessed an initiation ceremony conducted by Satsvarupa Maharaja. The temple room was nicely decorated and filled with devotees chanting and praying. This time

however, my thoughts did not take a usual path; perhaps it was provoked by a passage I read a few days earlier. Prabhupada said, "Those fire sacrifices are only bluff, we are doing them to attract the people. The real thing is the chanting of the *maha-mantra.*"

I was standing and looking at the devotees, listening to the vows they were taking. How many of these devotees taking initiation are really going to stick to their vows after 5 or 10 years?

History indicates the results are not always encouraging. Of course, if we ask a new *bhakta* about his sincerity, he'll pledge he'll make it all the way. It's encouraging to see the enthusiasm. But I'm reminded of Yudhistira asking what was the most wonderful thing, and being told that everyone is making plans to live forever though they see everyone dies.

A similar wondrous thing is going on in our movement with regards to the following of the regulative principles. 1, 2, 3, no problem, but come to the 4th and what a nightmare! If you don't agree, then you're not aware of a major problem affecting a significant portion of our devotees. Restraining oneself from sexual intercourse is difficult to maintain in the long run.

I believe in Sri Rangam, or some other large South Indian temple, *brahmanas* take turns in worshipping the Deity. When it is a particular *brahmana's* time to worship, that *brahmana* will live in the temple for a scheduled period of time (say six months or so). Why? To ensure that the *brahmana* does not engage in any sexual activities with his wife. So if trained Indians have this problem, what to speak of the Westerners?

Outsiders are doubtful hearing us proclaim all the time that we abstain from sex. In fact, you don't have to be particularly qualified to see what is going on in our movement. So let's not fool ourselves with such pretensions and face the reality. Otherwise we are going to end up just like Christian priests. The media is regularly revealing abominations performed by so-called celibates. We need to be careful to protect ourselves from hypocrisy. People are disgusted by such shows.

There are roughly two categories of *grhasthas* who are having problems. Those who work outside and raise children many times can't get up early to chant to have some kind of *sadhana*. They probably have trouble chanting their rounds and almost always fall prey to sex life. They have tried for years to associate with a lovely wife and have sexual intercourse only for procreation (which literally means four or five times in their entire life), but it proves very difficult, if not impossible.

The other class—perhaps some skeptics won't believe me—are the ones we are dealing with in this expose. They are much more serious and have many good

qualities. They are struggling very hard to become pure. Most of the time they chant their rounds, do some service, are able to present the philosophy nicely. They can manage and have a good attitude. But they find it difficult avoiding sexual intercourse.

And what about the couples that find out they can't have children. Take *vanaprastha*, that's all—I'm not being sarcastic!

This is a very serious and great dilemma for our society. In fact, it is a great stumbling block unless we clarify some things. Apart from a very limited group of married couples, it seems that it is almost impossible to follow the fourth regulative principle. The result is that devotees are trying to build images of themselves so that others will say, "Here is a good devotee." But in fact they feel frustrated and guilty. And every one is playing that game. We have a psychology neurosis throughout the whole organization.

Yes, it is time to implement *varnasrama-dharma* as we hear it all the time. We have to give some choices other than frustration and mental disorder for the common people. A true *brahmana* has no interest in sexual life and can with little effort control it. But for others it's a whole different dimension. When not understood and properly channeled this energy provoked by the desire to enjoy sex can create disruptions in the harmony of the couple. And in the same way, the harmony of our organization. I know this is a subject which is taboo amongst devotees, but we have to solve this problem not only in private talk between some of us, but on the GBC level.

I suggest an anonymous poll asking devotees what kind of *sadhana* they are practicing and what principles they are rigidly following.

If the result is as dark as I am stating, then I feel we should refrain from giving brahminical initiation so easily. A possible alternative would be to have an impressive "fire sacrifice" for the aspirant who will promise to chant Hare Krsna seriously and will receive a spiritual name to encourage him. He will be part of the community without having to feel the pressure of having to be initiated before he's really mature. Otherwise, the tendency will be to cheat. He may think, "I'm not sure I shall be able to follow the four regulative principles my whole life, but I want to have a relationship with a guru and be part of ISKCON." He'll think he can fall under a little illusion hoping to be considered a devotee and come closer to Lord Caitanya's movement. For this he is ready to lose integrity.

I am not advocating freedom of sex here. Srila Prabhupada has made everything very clear. I would like to see more awareness regarding this matter concerning initiation and brahminical qualifications. I am unable to find a solution to this problem and if someone can enlighten

me I will be very grateful.

Concerning Sexuality

by Aditi dasi

Berkeley, California

I'd like to approach an area in which I think ISKCON must reassess its position. This concerns sexuality and how it affects our concepts concerning community and congregation. Of all the regulative principles there seems to be one which gives most of the people difficulty, most of the time: No illicit sex. And if we see many of our Godbrothers and God sisters no longer living in the temple or even associating with temple devotees, it is very likely that this restriction is one of the causes of that separation.

I think we need to become more mature in our conception of ISKCON. Just as other religions have their priests/priestesses hierarchical branches, they also have their lay community or congregation. Although the lay community is encouraged to follow the high standards of the priestly class, they are not rejected if they do not. And from what we see in ISKCON as well as in other celibate religious orders, it is a very difficult position and not many are able to maintain it over long periods of time.

When someone was having difficulty in this way, Prabhupada did not say, "Well, you should leave." He would say, "Well, perhaps you should marry. But in whatever *asrama* you are please push on this movement. Please be Krsna conscious and give it to others." So complete celibacy was not demanded of all. Those who found it necessary could marry and within marriage use their sexual energy to procreate nice children for Krsna. My respects to all those *grhasthas* who have followed this form of celibacy. Those of us who have been married know how difficult this is, and how great a strain it is on one's natural affections. And we have seen the birth of many wonderful children.

Now it may be that some *grhasthas* are not able to restrict their sexual needs to that of procreation. And it may be that some devotee's sexual orientation can't be dovetailed in the service of procreation—those bisexuals or homosexuals. Studies have shown that at least 2 in 20 persons have the same-sex orientation, and perhaps among devotees it might even be higher. Does that mean that they should not have emotional, sexual and spiritually committed relationships? Is "illicit sex" any more illicit in a same sex committed relationship than it is in a married heterosexual relationship?

I have talked with some devotees and I have found a double standard in response to this question. It's as if illicit sex in the committed heterosexual relationship is somehow more okay than sex in a committed homosexual relationship. And then devotees quote the scriptures that homosexuality is "demonic." But one

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can also say that sex of any type (other than for procreation) should cause "one to spit."

Are we really on such an elevated platform? Krsna says, "I am that sex which is not contrary to religious principles."

I have seen in other religious groups a willingness and openness to understand and accept people who have same-sex committed relationships, and I think that we in ISKCON should be able to do so also. I would prefer to see sincere feelings and commitment between any two people, rather than the overwhelming amount of divorces we have had in ISKCON.

For those who find it difficult to maintain celibacy, whether in marriage or otherwise, I do not think they should be ostracized. I think anyone who exhibits any affection for Krsna and for chanting should be encouraged to do so. I have seen many qualified people come, and then become discouraged because of sexist or homophobic attitudes. I think if we could learn to truly love and accept each other; and if we could truly desire to give Radha and Krsna to all those people who do not know of Them; and if we can tolerate that we and they may not be perfect, then we can build a religious movement that can house the whole world.

The following is a response to Aditi dasi. I asked Caru dasa to answer some of Aditi's points so that a response could be included in this issue.

Krsna Consciousness is Open to All

by Caru dasa

Spanish Fork, Utah

When I was at Berkeley temple from 1975-1978 almost every Sunday a sariclad "Gopinatha dasi" attended the Love Feast. She caused no trouble except that when using the women's rest room, other women objected who knew her when she was Bhakta Wayne. No one ever asked her how anatomically complete her transformation from man to woman had been, but we just figured that as long as she dressed and behaved as a woman consistently, using the women's bathroom was OK.

In all that time no one ever ostracized her or discouraged her from using any of our spiritual facilities either. No devotee was impolite and she obviously felt comfortable coming week after week.

Berkeley temple was good training ground practicing tolerance for people with abnormal behavior patterns. Krsna's temples are open for all visitors. The only ones we used to bar were the odorously unwashed who put people off at the Sunday Feast. We served them out the back door and at People's Park several times during the week.

We can tell at first glance (and first sniff) the state of another's external

cleanliness or lack of it, and thus admit or bar attendance to a temple. But it is less easy to judge another's heart. Mostly, it is the pot calling the kettle black.

In *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Krsna Himself says that the physician who cares for his patient does not encourage that patient to continue activities injurious to his health. In the purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.20.26, Prabhupada says, "the homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac and is not for any sane man in the ordinary course of life." Clearly, this form of unnatural sex—and any other form—is distasteful to pure devotees. Therefore, as a physician who hates the disease, but loves the patient, or a preacher who hates the sin but not the sinner, pure devotees administer the universal medicine of *harer nama sri krsna sankirtana*, the congregational chanting of the holy names.

Prabhupada states in the purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.4.18, "Even those who are constantly engaged in sinful acts are all corrigible to the standard of perfect human beings if they take shelter of devotees of the Lord . . . Lord Caitanya recommended that simply by chanting the Lord's holy name, a tremendous change of heart can take place. It is said by the Lord that there is no bar to becoming a devotee of the Lord, and by becoming a devotee everyone is eligible to return home back to Godhead."

* * *

**Personal Relationships in a
Spiritual Society.
Unity in Diversity.**

A synthesis of opposites.
by Rohininandana dasa
England

As the great ship ISKCON surges forward to her destined haven, we crew members often do not know much about the route we are taking, the kind of weather we can expect; and exactly who of us is on the ship and who is off. When the wind of uncertainty blows we tend to cling to our own thoughts, convictions and practices, sometimes claiming that our way of seeing, and dealing with a particular situation is Srila Prabhupada's way.

During the course of moving, or being moved, into different posts around the ship, we should have become old hands at the art of interpersonal dealings. Although we have had many opportunities to become expert in this vital area of our lives, we have not yet created a society made safe by a high degree of love and trust. It's as if an essential ingredient of a preparation is missing, without which the preparation cannot hold together. What that ingredient is, this article seeks to explore.

Although most of us have certainly had our fill of misunderstandings, pain and quarrel, which sometimes seemed to jeopardize the entire ship, we continue

wanting to appreciate, trust and even love each other despite our differences. This is especially true when we are daily reminded about the ideal world of the *Vaisnava sangha*.

But how? It's all very well to say, "We are brothers, let's be friends and make up." But unless we accept our brother or sister as an essential member of the crew—not just a passenger or someone whose presence we are forced to tolerate—how will we be able to knock down the walls that separate us from each other?

What is the Essence of ISKCON?

The holy name? Lord Krsna's philosophy? The Deities? Buildings? Book scores? Projects? Festivals? Money? How about ISKCON's members?

I remember those old BTGs . . . ISKCON New York, a group of happy devotees; ISKCON Boston, a van full of jubilant devotees.

A society means people. The International Society for Krsna Consciousness is especially notable in this regard because in spiritual life everything is personal.

Later, we displayed buildings, vehicles and monolithic enterprises on an increasingly grand scale, and sometimes, at least from my point of view, the run 'o the mill devotee was minimized. "Cannon fodder" was a term I heard more than once.

Today, much of the old order has been renovated and there is more care and concern for individuals than before. It would be nice to see this go further, because in the final analysis, is not the real measure of success the quality of our dealings with each other and with Lord Krsna?

"People" means relationships. Without people who know the art of relating to each other, there is no society or community. What remains is an empty shell for "the dogs and pigeons."

"People" means sharing and giving our time, that precious commodity. In an age of discord, misunderstanding and disunity, we must strive all the harder to build and maintain relationships.

"People" means variety—differences—either a botheration or a pleasure, depending on our attitude.

"People" means a team, a beautiful blend of different temperaments and talents offered to Lord Krsna's lotus feet like a nicely arranged vase of flowers.

Before loving a person, it is necessary to trust his integrity. Before we can trust a person, we must be able to appreciate him. Before we can appreciate a person, we must understand him, to see the world from his point of view.

If we only take the trouble to understand and appreciate persons who think and act like us, we rob ourselves of the wealth of much sweet association, and limit ourselves to a basically self-centered world. We deprive ourselves of the challenge and special type of nurturing that

arises when a group of divergent people get together and openly share their thoughts and feelings.

Of course, it is natural and healthy to make friends with like-minded persons. Such friendships occur spontaneously, and are defined in *sastra* to be of the nature of *bandhu* (inseparable), *suhrt* (like-minded or well-wishing), *mitram* (sharing the same occupation), or *sakha* (so close as to appear to be one life). Our hearts, however, must be open to all the members of our transcendental family. We can remember Krsnadasa Kaviraja's appreciation and affection for every one of the devotees.

In the early days of ISKCON, differences between devotees were not as apparent as they are today. As we grow up in spiritual life we are finding that we have greatly divergent temperaments. I, for one, was acutely aware of the difference between myself and one leader during the zonal *acarya* days, and I used to wrestle on one side with the desire to be accepted as a member of the zonal *acarya's* "inner circle," which meant adapting myself to fit in, and on the other with the desire to cooperate with him and be myself. I felt distressed because I didn't think that there was a place for me in the movement as I actually am. In the end I moved zones, giving up a place where I had preached for fourteen years.

In order to help us create a society infused with love and trust, it may be helpful to contemplate two basic temperaments, with their concomitant attitudes, strengths, weaknesses and fears, and to consider how both temperaments have their place within a developed individual or society.

Two natures are briefly mentioned by Sanatana Gosvami when he praises Haridasa Thakura for simultaneously behaving in an exemplary manner as a *bhajanandi*, and preaching as a *gosthyanandi*. As followers of Srila Prabhupada we are also aspiring to be well-rounded, and represent him nicely in both our *acara* and *pracara*.

We see the division of two basic natures in a wide variety of circumstances: from mundane politic's right and left wings, or sectarian religion's reflective thinkers vs. energetic evangelists, to the right and left wing gopis of the spiritual world.

I have attempted to classify two temperaments as they exist today in our society, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. For want of better words, I shall call them right and left wing attitudes. I have no desire to categorize devotees as fundamentalists or liberals, conservatives or radicals. I do desire to understand and appreciate my teammates better.

Before commencing, I want to mention that this is not about actions but about attitudes. A devotee with a right-wing attitude may behave exactly the same way as a devotee with a left-wing attitude:

following the regulative principles, attending mangala-arati, chanting sixteen rounds and preaching. Internally also, both devotees may possess the same degree of sincerity and intensity of service attitude.

Right Wing Attitude

Characteristics

Conservatism. Conformism. Orthodoxy. Fundamentalism.

Tendency to support the status quo.

Taking pride in strict following of the principles and practices of Krsna consciousness.

Tendency to consider a cause to be more important than an individual.

Tendency to look backward to the "good old days" when everyone did as they were told and performed greater feats of austerity and devotion.

Tendency to make a statement like, "Prabhupada says . . ." and then qualify it.

Absolutist approach: "A *karmi* has no good qualities; there's no love in the material world."

Exclusivism—ISKCON is the only way.

Strengths

The attitude is conducive for unity, solidarity, single-mindedness, energy and quantifiable achievement.

"Faults will be corrected by Lord Krsna—like a river, ISKCON is a self-purifying movement."

"Just by following the rules and regulations I will be successful, even if my motivation is not pure."

Weaknesses

Tendency to elitism, self-righteousness and judgementalism.

To think that "my" way of serving Srila Prabhupada is "the" way.

Intolerance. Superficial quips about appearances—judging books by their covers.

Tendency to judge devotees according to how many years they've been in the movement, or the quantity of the external results of their service.

Tendency to condemn people on principle and make thoughtless, sweeping statements like, "They're all just a bunch of *karmis*," "He's really off," "You're really in *maya*, Prabhu," "They're all out to lunch in such-and-such a country/zone/temple/group."

Group thinking, blind following.

Adoption of slogans as absolute principles.

Putting others in stereotyped boxes ("long-haired intellectuals") and/or driving them away.

Fears

"The left wingers will ruin ISKCON. They'll water things down so much that all potency will be lost. Unless there are clear standards, a strong leader and loyal followers, nothing substantial will be achieved."

"Even if the leader is off the track, it's the safest path to follow him; Krsna still accepts my service. It's best not to speculate about our leaders who Krsna has chosen. And anyway, who am I? I'm just an envious, critical worm."

Left Wing Attitudes

Characteristics

Non-conformist.

Questioning, philosophical mentality—no sacred cows.

Liberal, broadminded approach.

Inclusivity; "there are other people practicing spiritual life, who are Vaisnavas and on the way back home to Godhead, besides the members of ISKCON."

Tendency to stress needs of the individual.

Tendency to first make a logical point and then confirm it by quoting Srila Prabhupada.

Tendency to look forward.

Relative approach—"Ultimately a materialist has nothing, no good qualities, because everything he appears to have is temporary. But for the meantime a person who is not yet a devotee may have some very nice qualities (for instance, Srila Prabhupada's appreciation of the American people in general), and for the meantime an aspiring devotee may have some terrible qualities."

"There is love in a general sense here in the material world. It is not Krsna *prema*, but even a tiger possesses the propensity to love, at least in the dormant stage."

Strengths

Sensitivity to others point of view, thoughtfulness, broadmindedness, depth of character, ingenuity. Appreciation of time, place, circumstance and the individuals concerned. Discrimination. "We should do something to correct the faults of our society."

"If my motive is not pure, my efforts to rigidly follow the process will ultimately prove to be a failure. (*Bhag.* 1.2.8)

Weaknesses

Tendency to elitism and judgementalism (Those bald-heads are a bunch of robots"). "Over-intelligence," speculation and experimentalism.

"Absurd inquiries" (Bg 4.34)

Niyamagrahah (NOI 2)

Too many gray areas, watering down Krsna consciousness, over-compromising.

In the extreme, considering a cause more important than an individual.

Fears

"The right-wingers will ruin ISKCON. They'll drive all the sensitive, intelligent people away because of their narrow, unbending, uncompromising, repressive attitudes."

Does being a loyal member of ISKCON necessarily mean that I have to always agree with the "leaders"? Supposing a leader is off the track, should I blindly

follow him?" (Vidura and Vibhisana were both loyal to their brothers, but they openly disagreed with their brother's policies.)

The divergent attitudes outlined roughly above are not necessarily characteristics of different individuals, but may be found simultaneously in one person. It is quite possible for a single person to possess all these attributes at one time or another during the course of his life and spiritual development. In fact, it appears to me that Srila Prabhupada is himself a perfect balance, or synthesis, of absolute, unbending principles, and their relative, personal application. Thus we all felt understood and secure in his care.

I will repeat my contention that these two mentalities are not of themselves necessarily indicative of spiritual advancement, nor indicate the degree of dedication to Srila Prabhupada and ISKCON. Rather, in their pure form, both fundamentalism and liberalism are essential ingredients of a healthy, balanced, progressive individual or society.

Srila Prabhupada warned us that the only thing able to finish ISKCON is fighting amongst ourselves. There are many different ways of fighting, some more subtle than others. It is clear that if a house or organism is divided either grossly or subtly against itself, it cannot function with anywhere near full capacity. If there is a full unity of purpose, the various energies that compose the whole can compliment, and, like rice and dal, strengthen and increase each other's potentials.

The Pandavas are our vivid example. How different were the five brothers, and yet they were so completely united around Lord Krsna that literally nothing could touch them.

We have a great opportunity to become a transcendental family like the Pandavas. Imagine if we were genuinely so accepting, so loving and caring for each other, irrespective of class as a man, woman, child, pujari, manager, book distributor, "inside" or "outside," right or left wing devotee. Imagine what we could do!

I believe that within ourselves as individuals, and within our Vaisnava community, there is much unrealized, under used strength. It is as if we were an elephant thinking that we are a mouse. We are afraid to open our eyes to see that we are an elephant. We put each other down. We mistrust each other. We keep our distance from one another. We shame each other. We shame ourselves. We are afraid of each other. We are afraid of ourselves.

I am generalizing here, and what I am saying may be viewed by some as just one person's perception, and a faulty one at that. This may be. Still, I am a member of ISKCON and somehow I have come to think and feel this way. I am simply requesting my reader to please hear me out and try to see things from my point of

view. I am not trying to force you to see as I do or to agree with me in every instance. I am simply asking you to please accept me as I am. I have some good qualities, some bad qualities, some strengths, some weaknesses. I am trying to improve, and I need your association and help.

Putting ourselves in other's "shoes" as you just did with me here, will allow the cooperative spirit we've tried to highlight in this article to dominate all of our interactions.

• • • One Man's Perspective

Anonymous

Auckland, New Zealand

I would like to present a devotee man's perspective on the issue of women's rights in ISKCON. There are three main areas of concern, and sometimes one issue seems to cloud another. Our body of evidence and proof will always be Srila Prabhupada's books, and I will support everything I say with what I consider quotes representative of Srila Prabhupada's consistent views.

Equal Rights in the Temple Room

Should men and women stand opposite each other in *kirtana*, Greeting the Deities, chant *japa* together, etc.? In the early seventies when we did these activities together, many love affairs were being subtly enacted in the temple room. I was very relieved when policies changed and I saw that we had matured to a realistic understanding. Segregation was necessary and for our own mutual protection.

"Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura remarks that Mohini Murti dragged Lord Siva to so many places, especially where the great sages lived, to instruct the sages that their Lord Siva had become mad for a beautiful woman. Thus although they were all great sages and saintly persons, they should not think themselves free, but should remain extremely cautious about beautiful women. No one should think himself liberated in the presence of a beautiful woman." (*Bhag.* 8.12.34)

Perhaps this specifically refers to viewing the opposite sex in isolation, yet there are so many other quotes emphasizing its importance. Was Prabhupada "merely acquiescing to allay the fears of a newly celibate male population" as Vrnda devi dasi suggests? If we consider that Prabhupada was acting in this way to protect the men, then he considered at that time certainly that men were more important and I don't believe this is so. I think he initially saw that the ladies needed to mix freely, encouraging them, and later, considering us to be more mature and realistic, segregated the sexes in the temple room. Although I have been a devotee for 18 years I still think myself neophyte. I don't always see beautiful ladies as spirit souls and therefore I am

obviously not liberated. And what of the new devotees, *brahmacaris* and *brahmacarinis*, shouldn't they have the benefit and protection we had as "newly celibate"?

As Yadurani dasi says, "Maybe it was my imagination, but it seemed that everyone was seeing each other as spirit souls." Well, maybe it does happen sometimes, but perhaps it's unrealistic to assume that we are all so advanced and mature that we can maintain this realization (*bhaktas* and *sannyasis* alike) day after day for 4 hours daily in the temple. It is still more important to note that some of our "senior" devotees occasionally fall prey to illicit sexual connections with the opposite sex. Could this be an example of a nice womanly sentiment clouding a woman devotee's objectivity, I wonder?

Should women take responsible positions, give class, lead kirtanas?

Well, I have personally always supported this cause for capable, mature and sober women. I think it significant to note that Govinda dasi and Yamuna dasi were given only one vote between them while there were perhaps 10 or 12 GBC men who all had a single vote each. During *Bhagavatam* class in our temple recently we found this quote in a purport, "Here is a difference between male and female that exists even in the higher statutes of life. In fact, even between Lord Siva and his wife. Lord Siva could understand Citraketu very nicely, but Parvati could not. Thus, even in the higher statuses of life there is a difference between the understanding of a male and that of a female. It may be clearly said that the understanding of a woman is always inferior to the understanding of a man. In Western countries there is now agitation to the effect that men and women should be considered equal, but from this verse it appears that woman is always less intelligent than man." (*Bhag.* 6.17.35)

Also in the *Caitanya-caritamrta* although Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's intimate devotee woman follower, Madhava devi, was considered an associate of Srimati Radharani and quite obviously a pure devotee, she was counted as 1/2 a person. Are Prabhupada and Krsnadasa Kaviraja being sexist, or are they expressing sastrically that the correct view is that even an advanced platform there is a difference in understanding?

Satyaraja cites the examples of Gangamata Gosvami, Hemlata Thakurani and Ichcha devi as noted Vaisnavis in our line who were not *nitya-siddhas*, yet held in great respect as "*acaryinis*." But they are certain exceptionally qualified and mature women devotees. My concern is that we understand that in general women devotees should not engage in militant feminine protest for a right which is to be commanded and not demanded.

Should the wife serve the husband?

I take exception to one of Satyaraja dasa's statements, "In this age we are all equally unintelligent and anyone who thinks this is not true is probably less intelligent still." While agreeing I do probably fall in this category, I would like to raise some objections. Firstly and most importantly I am very surprised because this statement has no sastric support. In fact, it appears to be entirely speculative and flawed in its logic. The only quote I could recollect is "*kalau sudra sambhavah*," everyone is born lower than a *sudra* in Kali-yuga. But does that mean therefore in Kali-yuga men and women blend into a homogeneous mass of ignorance? Isn't it true that even in the lower classes of uncivilized humans such as *candalas* and *yauvanas* that the wife always served the husband? The fallacy of logic is appallingly apparent: In Kali-yuga we are all born less than *sudras*. Women are as intelligent as men and do not have to be subordinate. In fact, if we research Prabhupada's purports and general view, the wife was always considered to be in a subordinate position, meant to be chaste, faithful and obedient to the will of the husband. While I think it was really quite commendable that Satyaraja let Vrnda devi read the *Priti-laksanam* together with him, this does not change Prabhupada's general mood. Consider these classic quotes:

"If any wife wants to be happy with her husband, she must try to understand her husband's temperament and please him. This is victory for a woman. Even in Lord Krsna's dealings with His different Queens it has been seen that although the Queens were the daughters of great Kings they placed themselves before Lord Krsna as His maidservants. However, great a woman may be, she must place herself before her husband in this way.

I have never seen a place where Prabhupada suggests that his women disciples are equally intelligent and advanced and that therefore the wife doesn't need to serve her husband. In fact, the opposite. In his letters (quotes can be supplied on request) Prabhupada writes that we must "expect trouble because these Western girls have not been trained." I sympathize completely with those unfortunate women devotees who have suffered cruelty and exploitations at the hands of neophyte, unqualified husbands like myself, yet I cannot seriously advocate abandoning this principle. The examples of great women devotees such as Gandhari, Kunti, Devahuti, etc., are examples of devotees who served their husbands submissively and Srila Prabhupada wanted our devotee girls to be trained to do the same.

"The wife is expected to be of the same category as the husband. She must be prepared to follow the principles of the husband and then there will be happy life

... "The word *samanvrata* indicates that it is the duty of a wife to adopt the special circumstances in which the husband is situated. Of course, if the husband is a great devotee as Kardama Muni, then very good results accrue from following him. But even if the husband is not a great devotee like Kardama Muni, it is the wife's duty to adopt herself according to his mentality. That makes married life very happy."

If more of our devotee wives could follow these instructions perhaps the husbands would not become dissatisfied and irritable. If instead of agitating for equal rights, the wives try to follow these lucid formulas for happy marriage perhaps we could have more happy marriages.

Of course, I do appreciate that this does not excuse the overlording and exploitative mood yet it may very well modify it to agreeable limits in many cases.

And yes, I think there should be a justice committee to hear complaints of this nature and a counseling support group.

• • • **More Science, Less Dogma**

by Sukrta dasa

Hamburg, Germany

The attitude of male devotees toward the women in our movement must change. It was said in Vol. 2, and it is also my personal experience, that a large group of devotees don't take the problem of the "women's issue" seriously enough. The proposed changes are not only good for the women but also for the men. But how do we bring about a change?

The root cause of all problems is most probably a lack of Krsna consciousness. Do we actually know what is Krsna consciousness and what isn't? For instance, is ISKCON "Vedic" or not? What is Vedic culture? Can we give a scientific definition? Actually, "Vedic" is just as unclear and undefinable as "Hindu" and is often open for anyone to label his favorite idea as "Vedic." But this is not yet the point. We have heard from Srila Prabhupada that Krsna consciousness is not a religion, but the eternal science of self-realization and love for God. And Prabhupada compared Krsna consciousness to the sun; the sun rises on the Eastern horizon and moves West, but it doesn't belong to the East. Similarly, Krsna consciousness had a great impact on Vedic culture and this culture constituted the framework in which Krsna consciousness could purpose, but still these two are not to be mixed. While Krsna consciousness is eternal and unchangeable, a human culture, including Vedic culture, is temporary and undergoes changes. And, in fact, when Srila Prabhupada came to the West and started his movement, he did change some quite important aspects of "Vedic" tradition (for which he was criticized by persons with a limited under-

standing).

Krsna consciousness is not a religion but a science; so let's be more scientific and less dogmatic. Let us ask whether the devotees who demand the ladies follow the examples of Vedic culture (and are, ironically, most probably unable to follow the example of the Vedic man) follow the dogmatic or the scientific path. Is what they demand an eternal prerequisite and the integral part of the eternal path of Krsna consciousness, or is it, rather, a temporary manifestation of a specific human culture? We have to analyze what is eternal and what is temporary, what can never be changed and what can. If you "change" the eternal, you are a fool and will only prevent yourself from the benefit the eternal offers. If you label the temporary as eternal, your movement becomes dogmatic and the spirituality will flee you (as can generally be seen in Christianity for instance).

I believe the root cause of the problems with the "women's issue" is the above described misidentification of Krsna consciousness with temporary cultural traditions. Of course, this is only the philosophical aspect. That is, it has an emotional aspect, which is that it can be convenient for a person in a male body to consider himself superior to the ladies. This is, after all, nothing very extraordinary, since it is everyone's *maya* in this world to want to be the controller and the enjoyer. But when this *maya* is "philosophically" justified, even in the name of Krsna consciousness, there is no way to identify it as *maya*, what to speak of wanting to overcome it. It is the responsibility and duty of the leaders to teach the proper course of action by lecturing and by example.

Let's ask then, how do we change the general immaturity and the leader's failure to give proper guidance? The leaders are the most important factor in a change. They have to give the ladies a fair chance and set an example of proper attitude.

First, leaders lacking qualifications are removed from their position and replaced by someone else (hopefully more qualified). Second, the leaders agree to the need of a change to improve their service to the society. While the first seems to resemble the way of revolutionary socialists, the latter seems to be more conservative. Apart from this categorization, Srila Prabhupada preferred the latter one. The leaders have become leaders (there may be exceptions) because they are the most qualified to lead. A hasty, impatient change might well put the movement into more difficulties than we hope to solve with it. In general, the leaders are doing their best.

So we want to reform ISKCON leadership. I think, and Yadurani dasi mentioned this in her interview in Vol. 2, that there is a misconception in ISKCON regarding leadership. Which has led to a

situation where you have to accept a leader or leave—but never that the leader will change. This attitude causes trouble for ISKCON.

But I don't want to explain further now. I will say that the "women's issue" is only one aspect of "*Priti-laksanam*," or an area of much needed reform in ISKCON. So it seems right to me that Pranada suggest we deal with other issues too. But on the other hand, this "women's issue" has become a major topic and as I have shown, it addresses directly or indirectly the root cause of our problems—a lack of Krsna consciousness in practice and understanding.

This is due to a discrepancy in our leadership and it can only be solved in reforming our leadership. If we are successful in addressing this "women's issue" it will be a grand success and a major step forward, not only for women and men, but for ISKCON's health in general.

Is it "too much" for a *sannyasi* member of the GBC to have a GBC meeting with women? Satyaraja brought up this point in the last issue, and although I found his article very good, I don't share his opinion in this regard. I beg for forgiveness for any offenses I could commit and I must admit that I am very unqualified to talk about the duties of a *sannyasi*. I can only talk about what I think ISKCON should be like, and since I am a member of this movement I think I am allowed to do that. I think a GBC who has taken up the responsibility to manage and direct ISKCON has to do so for all of its members, including the women. If he doesn't want to do that, he may act as a *sannyasi* traveling and preaching, but he should better resign from the GBC. What do other devotees think about it?

The GBC should deal with the "women's issue" and give proper guidelines, this is the leader's responsibility. Dealing with the issue doesn't necessarily mean to give an ultimate decision at once. It can also mean to start to discuss it and hear all sides before one comes to a conclusion. But this has to be done. It would anyway be better if the GBC would share its insights more with the common devotees and transmit its policy. Although I didn't find everything written by the GBCs "ISKCON Journal" convincing, it was at least a good start in communicating. Why not start with a new edition dealing with women in ISKCON?

• • • **Focusing on Absolute Standards**

by Ameyatma dasa

Oak Run, California

Although we may differ in some opinions, I think *Priti-laksanam*, with its open forum dealing with social issues is very important.

Because the question, "What is the Role of Women in Krsna consciousness," is very broad, it implied, in my mind what the highest long-term standards for our

and any who may come to depend on him, out of the clutches of the material world. In this way, ideally trained male devotees will be able to offer full protection from maya to their dependents. An ideal male devotee will never abuse or take advantage of those who are dependent on him. Similarly, a soul in a female body has other duties. Among them are that she must remain always submissive to and serve her first-class devotee husband. She must never consider leaving a first-class husband nor ever consider re-marriage, especially if she has children from another man. Those are ideal standards, and are standards that our society must set for itself and work toward achieving.

Granted, not all of those standards will come easy to people who were brought up and who live and are influenced by non-brahminical culture in the West. Some concessions and rule bending has to be allowed for in this present-day environment. But my point is that we must keep the higher, ideal goals of brahminical culture as our ultimate standards in ISKCON. As devotees of Krsna that is our duty. So, even if it may be not possible for all our members to follow the highest standards we know the goals. Especially we must instill these goals in our children.

As far as specific devotees with specific problems, that is something else. Most of us are at a disadvantage. Due to these circumstances it has to be expected there will be many far less than ideal situations. There are both female and male (mostly the children) who have been the victims of less than ideal spouses. But as we try to clean up our social problems we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water. In making adjustments for these problems we must be most careful not to disregard or throw out higher standards or goals Srila Prabhupada taught.

In my last letter I was not trying to say that we should continue to neglect members who may be victims of less than ideal situations. I feel that not enough has been done for such victims, not just for our women of abusive husbands, but for all victims who suffered so much mental anguish over their gurus or GBCs falling down. PTSD is a catch word in the karmi world concerning the Viet Nam vets—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I seriously feel that many ISKCON devotees have also suffered a very real and similar stress when their gurus and GBCs fell down. And our Society should recognize this and set up some sort of brahminical counseling/networking to help devotees cope with all of these problems.

The fact that devotees are discussing these issues in the BTG and *Priti-laksanam* are good signs. You can't solve problems that you don't first admit you've got. So in this discussion, my concern is that we be careful not to throw out the

baby with the dirty water. That we keep boldly preaching the higher brahminical standards and we don't lose sight of this.

There are many quotes by Srila Prabhupada in *Bhagavatam* purports concerning marriage and divorce, specifically the importance of women being submissive and chaste to a husband. See *Bhagavatam* 9.3.10 and 9.3.21.

These instructions by Srila Prabhupada are very clear and to the point. Divorce and re-marriage are activities practiced only by sudras, and not by brahmanas.

One last point, Vrndavana-lila dasi, in her letter to *Priti-laksanam* [Vol. 2] seems to have misunderstood my position. In my previous letter I said (or meant to say) that a woman was "most unfortunate" if she had no devotee husband, father or son to be dependent on. I made this statement because Srila Prabhupada has many times stated that a woman must always be dependent upon a man. In a long-established brahminical culture most women would have had fathers, husbands, sons, guru-priests, kings, etc., who are devotees and thus qualified to give proper protection to them. What is "most unfortunate" is the lack of such ideally qualified men for the women to depend on. I was not implying that all women, especially of Western upbringing must "marry or die."

I will be presenting my views on divorce and re-marriage in future issues of my video magazine. Any one interested in obtaining copies of the video magazine I produce, on this and other topics, can reach me at Krsna Grafx, 29730 Oak Run Rd, Oak Run, CA 96069.

A Slightly Different Perspective

by Jagaddhatri dasi

Hilo, Hawaii

In your newsletter you have requested some feedback from readers concerning issues in ISKCON, specifically women's issues. Although I have a long list of experiences that could be told as far as injustices, etc., I have a different perspective on the matter. My idea is that the abuses that happened earlier had as its basis a lack of regard and respect for the unique position each spirit soul occupies in the eyes of Krsna. This lack is caused by the envy (that we all share) of Krsna, and the futile competition that we engage in to be the controller and enjoyer. The result is abuse of not only the women, but the children and other seemingly less powerful people that populate the sphere of activity that we engage in.

As you know, my son Raghunatha anudas is publishing the *ISKCON Youth Veterans* newsletter, an ongoing project for the last three years. The heartbreaking stories that he has to tell, as well as his many reader's contributions, are "only the tip of the iceberg." So there has been a consistent perpetration of abuse in all

its gory splendor for almost as long as the movement has been manifest.

It was my hope that after the problems that finally emerged with the old "zonal guru" phase, the replacing authorities would show a different approach to day to day management. Unfortunately, many times that does not seem to be the case.

I have no spiritual position to speak my mind other than my attachment to the real and original desire of Srila Prabhupada, as I understand it, from my association with His Divine Grace through *vani* and *vapu*. I see ISKCON as a collective extension in the material world of Lord Caitanya's desire to help every spirit soul come as far along as possible in their lifetime to reviving their original relationship with Krsna. We don't know who is what on the spiritual platform in the present bodies that we inhabit. Therefore, those who have a position of authority in which to serve must understand that any offenses to any living entity will result in delay in their own spiritual progress because it is not pleasing to Krsna.

My other thought is that when the present temple authorities do come to a higher platform, many of the "older" devotees that have left the temple—and even ISKCON itself—will gradually come back into the realm of spiritual association and service through temple programs. As one who has spent the last five years in the mundane world to establish some economic platform, I can attest to the genuine pleasure of festivals and other temple programs. It is perhaps ironic that when I was in the temple, my desire was to organize congregational programs not only for "Indians" but also for those "new" to Krsna consciousness and those devotees who no longer live within the temple walls. But little progress will be made until the mistakes of the past are recognized and addressed, and the temples become a spiritual oasis in the desert of the material world. An oasis is by its very nature not "owned" by anyone, and those who live within its shade are meant to give shelter. When the mentality that pervaded the first days of the movement return here, (when we were all Lord Caitanya's blissful bhaktas and absorbed in hearing and chanting the holy name in a menial state of mind), then once again the lotus flower of ISKCON will bloom and its fragrance will dispel all the anxieties of the material world.

I think the most important function of your newsletter is that it will serve to remind those of us engaging outside the temple of our identity as devotees. This is an important step in reviving our love for Krsna; when we "think" we are devotees we will make progress in acting like a devotee. *Param vijayate sri krsna sankirtana!*

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Grass Roots Communication is Essential

by Gaurangi dasi
Montanay, France

Please keep on publishing this newsletter which is fulfilling a vital need in the ISKCON society by providing a forum of expression and discussion for all its members. Official channels sometimes do allow voices to be heard. It seems that exchanges and communication at a grass root level are necessary.

I very much appreciated Satyaraja's article in the last issue. Specifically he pointed out that the women's issue could better be called the "men's issue." The Vedic scriptures define the role of women and set standards of behavior. Certainly the importance of chastity and protection for women cannot be denied.

But it hasn't always been clear whether ISKCON is promoting Vedic culture, which we cannot fully adopt or follow in the age of Kali, or is a dynamic preaching movement meant to respiritualize the whole human society. Srila Prabhupada himself penned the motto of ISKCON: Preaching is the essence, purity is the force, utility is the principle, books are the basis. So whatever facilitates the preaching without compromising the purity should be accepted. Sometimes we hear that it is not Vedic for women to assume leadership and take an active part in the decision-making process. Then it could be easily counter argued that it is not a customary practice for women in Vedic times to engage themselves in activities like preaching in the streets, selling books to all kinds of people in the most unusual or sinful places, selling a variety of paraphernalia, running around in the dark of the night collecting *laksmi* to support the preaching mission of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Nobody ever voiced any concern over the possible dangers for women in these situations and suggested we should abolish them because they were not Vedic. There seems to be a double standard somewhere, and we should honestly face it and analyze why it is so.

Happily, this year during the GBC meetings in Mayapur, an official channel has been opened through the Health and Welfare Ministry. It will allow women to express themselves to the GBC, make suggestions and present motions that can be voted upon by the GBC. Even though the question still remains whether or not women could or should be admitted on the GBC, this decision is definitely a progressive step. Half of ISKCON's population should be able to voice their concerns or dissatisfaction and present ideas and suggestions of how to improve the situation—not only of women, but of everyone in the ISKCON family.

Fortunately we have matured with years. A sign of this is that the fanatical uncompassionate attitude toward those

considered inferior has been decreasing and is being replaced by loving concern for all creatures. It is not an accident that the Health and Welfare Ministry is handling these matters since the health of ISKCON depends on the welfare of each and every one of its members.

It is encouraging to witness women in charge of various programs, such as we see in Germany. Utility is the principle, and the highest principle is to save the souls rotting in this dark material world. If we truly want to accomplish this monumental task, we really need every willing soul.

Qualification should be the discriminating factor, not what kind of body one has. While keeping the proper standards of respect and behavior between *asramas* we could all mediate on how to make ISKCON a house in which the whole world can live.

The occasion of Srila Prabhupada's Centennial celebration is a wonderful opportunity to make this house a tangible reality. At the moment this is a little hard for some female members of our Society to understand because they don't even have a roof over their heads in some ISKCON temples: no women's *asrama*, policies of simply not accepting women in some temples, etc. As a movement we are still in our infancy, but it's time to grow up fast—the world is watching us.

This Centennial celebration is forcing us to re-evaluate what has been accomplished so far, analyze the errors we have made and become wise by not committing the mistakes again.

As far as women's liberation goes, there is no need for it. The boon that Sri Advaita Acarya asked of Lord Caitanya has been granted. Everyone, even women, can receive the mercy of Lord Gauranga and be delivered. Even though Advaita Acarya gave no details on how this would happen, Srila Prabhupada brought this boon to a tangible reality by accepting women in ISKCON temples, engaging them in the devotional service of the Lord, and even giving them brahminical initiation despite the criticism of *smarta brahmanas*. Thus it is up to us to fully take advantage of this great boon for the benefit of all humanity. It is time to stop treating our "*matajis*" as second-class citizens and devotees, meant to be squeezed in a corner behind all the men and kept quiet like non-existing entities.

With the maturing of ISKCON devotees and help from publications like this one I can see that the present is improving and the future is bright and full of hope.

What better way to please Srila Prabhupada than by uniting, reuniting, strengthening and expanding his spiritual family, making ISKCON an attractive place for everyone—*sannyasis*, *brahmacaris*, *brahmacarinis*, children, *grhasthas*, teenagers, sick or old devotees.

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On Chivalry within ISKCON and the Rights of our Mother

by Jagannatha Krsna dasa
Bhaktivedanta Manor, England

(This is an excerpt from a 10-page essay written to the devotees at Bhaktivedanta Manor suggesting that changes be made in etiquette in the temple room by allowing women to stand in front of the altar to one side of the men. After a discussion reviewing this paper, temple policy there was changed and the women now stand in front with the men. It was not possible to publish the document in its entirety, and therefore many sastric quotes, examples, and other social points were omitted. I apologize for any inconvenience. You can obtain the complete original by sending \$1.00 for postage in the U.S. or \$1.75 for postage outside U.S. to *Pritilaksanam*.)

The most redeeming ornament of a gentleman is chivalry; which the Concise Oxford dictionary describes as "religiousness, morality, courtesy, honour, courage, justice and readiness to help the weak." And who amongst us men in the West will allow themselves to be thought of as ungentlemanly? I dare say none. However, every day, tacitly, most men of the ISKCON movement participate in a concocted ritual which perpetrates an ungentlemanly mentality, relegating the entire female population of the community to the back of the temple room.

Some will say, "Oh, you're disrupting Vedic culture!" Or, "That's the Vedic standard, who are you to change it?" But in my personal travels throughout the whole of India—north, south, east, and west—I have never seen a shred of evidence to support this notion. At Udupi there is equal access to the Deity for the men and women; at Tirupati; at Jagannatha Puri; at Trivandrum; equal access; at Srirangam, the same; at Dvaraka I have seen women allowed priority; at Guruvayur, the tradition of equality for men and women is again upheld. Yet at the Krsna-Balaram Mandir, the representative stronghold of the Brahma-Gaudiya-Madhva *sampradaya* we do something entirely different.

Some years ago I asked one *sannyasi* in Mayapur, Bhakti Vidya-purna Swami, "Where did this policy originate? It's not Vedic, is it?" His Holiness replied, "Not really. It comes from the Moslems." And I suddenly remembered seeing this in my travels in Southeast Asia: women are treated almost like possessions, without rights, and shunned to the periphery of the Mosque, if allowed in at all. Out of sight, out of mind. The only cultural precedent I can find for this peculiar habit is not Vedic, not Indian, not even Western, but—Islamic—and not particularly worth following. So who is actually disrupting Vedic culture?

Nor have I seen any definitive sastric statements supporting this pretense of

Western, but— Islamic— and not particularly worth following. So who is actually disrupting Vedic culture?

Nor have I seen any definitive sastric statements supporting this pretense of corralling the fairer sex out of *darsana's* views, although I have sincerely sought it. Nothing from Srila Prabhupada's books, nothing from his lectures, nor from his letters. I've given up looking. What I have found is a wealth of information to the contrary.

Some will complain that there isn't enough room or the geography of the temple is not well suited to having both men and women in the front. Yet I've experienced in various temples around the world how ecstatic *kirtanas* regularly occur where there is such a division. (Such is the case at New Mayapur, where women have more of the temple room than the men.)

Most people in the West outside of ISKCON agree that denying women and female children equal access to the Deities smells of blatant chauvinism. Do we think we're above the criticism of the secular world to ignore that? Can we afford to be glib?

Separation between men and women must be there. But separation does not perform entail obscuring the ladies' view of the Deities. If I were in a woman's shoes I would feel slighted.

And so, I know, do many women, within and outside of ISKCON. For instance, my sister, Kirsten, who just completed her doctorate in plant biology and

botany at the University of Texas at Austin, remarked after visiting the Boston temple, "I appreciate your philosophy and I agree with what you say, but your treatment of women makes it all seem a travesty. I don't mean to be rude, but I feel that women are equal to men, not in ability exactly, but in opportunity, and it seems as though you're denying the obvious by keeping up your policy of pushing the women to the back." Kirsten is married, a vegetarian, doesn't drink or smoke, and believes in reincarnation, *karma* and a personal Deity. She's a prime candidate for entering devotional service. But she won't come to the temple.

And what values are we instilling in our children? The *gurukula* boys grow up feeling that it's all right to herd their female peers to the rear. These boys will carry this latent condenscending attitude with them to the outside world in later years unless we redress it. The young girls are unconsciously indoctrinated in a gradually demeaning self-esteem that acclimates them to viewing such discrimination as normative and acceptable.

It is a form of violence to deny children normal access to the Deity. They're not on the spontaneous platform. Must we force them to remain in the temple, obliged to stare at the backs of twirling *brahmacaris* instead of their worshipful Lords? It's a disgrace I wouldn't subject my children to.

Of course, it's Kali-yuga, and there's bound to be inebriety on both sides of the issue. Men want women to be chaste,

faithful, reserved, feminine and submissive. Women want men to be chivalrous, powerful, religious, gentle, just and sense controlled. We can draw these qualities out in each other, heroism and loyalty, but it takes level-headed and patient application of the basics of Krsna consciousness.

Loving Krsna clearly implies loving His devotees, and loving His devotees implies seeking their welfare and protection. If we love someone we want the best for them. That doesn't mean we have to associate intimately with them or mix with familiarity. As men, our souls set in male bodies, let's demonstrate our chivalry, our strength, our justice, our bravery, our being "off-the-bodily platform." Let's demonstrate our fearlessness, and how much we love Krsna. Giving women equal opportunity won't threaten our position as men, it will authenticate it and naturalize it.

WANTED

Pen Pals Wanted, Full-time wife/mother (also life member) looking for women interested in corresponding about any of the following: devotional life in the home, cooking, home management, home-schooling, preaching ideas. I have 2 daughters, ages 2 and 6. I live in an isolated area and my husband is a Christian. Please write me: Anna Sherman, 33 N. Lyle St., Kennewick, WA 99336.

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