

USA (VNN) - Letter by Hamsaduta das to Veda Guhya das regarding the Rittvik issue:

Dear Veda Guhya Das Prabhu,

Please accept my most humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. Because you asked me to write VNN about the Ritvik matter, I thought I would first pen you my thoughts on the issue along the lines of our discussion a few days ago.

The discussions that took place on 28th May 1977 between Srila Prabhupada and some GBC regarding initiations in the future were not known to me till years after his disappearance. Srila Prabhupada would say many things on many subjects, but unless a particular policy was written in letter form, or some other legal document, such discussions on different matters were not accepted as final. Prabhupada often said you can say anything, but do not put it in writing. Writing makes it legal.

A number of questions come to my mind when the controversy over the ritvik-Guru issue comes up.

1) The system of ritvik initiations was an ongoing practice for years before Srila Prabhupada named eleven "Ritvik representatives of the Acharya" in his letter of July 9, 1977. Why would Srila Prabhupada make a special effort to write a letter appointing eleven of his senior disciples as "Ritvik representatives of the Acharya" when such ritvik initiations were already being performed on his behalf -- not only by the persons named in his July 9th Letter but by sannyasis, GBCs, Temple Presidents, and others who happened to be at hand on the occasion of such initiation ceremonies?

2) Why did Srila Prabhupada decline the suggestion Of Tamal Krishna Goswami to include Brahmananda Swami on the ritvik list? He was a leading devotee and sannyasi.

3) Why did Srila Prabhupada not simply say "All sannyasis, GBCs, and Temple Presidents of ISKCON in good standing everywhere could act as "Ritvik representatives of the Acharya" and initiate new disciples on his behalf whenever the need presented itself?

4) How would creating "Ritvik representatives of the Acharya" relieve Srila Prabhupada from the burden of taking on the Karma of newly initiated disciples if the disciples thus initiated would still be Srila Prabhupada's disciples?

5) Why did Srila Prabhupada reiterate the July 9th Letter appointing "Ritvik representative of the Acharya" in three separate letters (two to myself, and one to Kirtanananda Swami) and in several conversations, but never once mention anything about appointing Gurus or about ritviks becoming Gurus upon his anticipated disappearance from the world?

I distinctly remember when I received the July 9, 1977, letter in Sri Lanka that it was clear to me that this letter was Srila Prabhupada's arrangement for initiations for the future. I also remember feeling some disappointment with the obvious conditional authority that the "Ritvik representative of the Acharya" designation implied, because I actually had a great desire to be a Guru like Srila Prabhupada, and I think many of the leaders did have similar desires. Still, I understood it was a very responsible and authoritative appointment. On July 10th, I received another letter from Srila Prabhupada written in response to a letter I had sent him describing the preaching activities in Sri Lanka at that time. In this letter he wrote as follows:

"You are a suitable person and you can give initiation to those that are ready for it. I have selected you among eleven men as "Ritvik" representative of the Acharya, to give initiations, both first and second initiation, on my behalf." A newsletter is being sent to all temple presidents and GBC in this regard, listing the eleven representatives selected by His Divine Grace. Those who are initiated are the disciples of Srila Prabhupada, and anyone who you deem fit and initiate in this way, you should send their names to be included in Srila Prabhupada's "Initiated disciples" book.

I immediately wrote a letter to Srila Prabhupada asking him why he had been so merciful towards me by appointing me as his "Ritvik representative of the Acharya" which I understood to be a very confidential and responsible position. In other words, it was clear to me that this letter appointing "Ritvik Representatives" to initiate new disciples on Srila Prabhupada's behalf was Srila Prabhupada's final instructions in anticipation of his disappearance from the world.

Srila Prabhupada replied my letter by paraphrasing my question and answering in a letter dated July 31st 1977 as follows:

"You have written to Srila Prabhupada saying you do not know why he has chosen you to be a recipient of his Mercy. His Divine Grace immediately replied, "It is because you are my sincere servant. You have given up attachment to a beautiful and qualified wife and that is a great benediction. You are a real preacher. Therefore I like you. (Then Laughing). Sometimes you become obstinate, but that is true of any intelligent man. Now you have got a very good field. Now organize it and it will be a great credit. No one will disturb you there. MAKE YOUR OWN FIELD AND CONTINUE TO BE RITVIK AND ACT ON MY BEHALF".

It was clear that Srila Prabhupada had officially introduced the concept of "Ritvik representative of the Acharya" as the arrangement for initiations by his disciples for the future of ISKCON. Had there been anything more to clarify certainly Srila Prabhupada would have written another letter to amend what was already so clear. But he never did, other than reinforce what he had already written: "Continue to act as ritvik representative of the Acharya."

These eleven men and many others had been initiating devotees on Srila Prabhupada's behalf for years, so there was no need to make a formal declaration and name disciples who could initiate on Srila Prabhupada's behalf simply to relieve Srila Prabhupada from the burden of initiating due to his illness as it was already going on all over the world for years.

However, the July 9th letter gave authority and responsibility that was not allowed previously. The eleven men selected as "Ritvik Representatives of the Acharya" were given the freedom to initiate (first and second) and give the spiritual name without first having to consult Srila Prabhupada by letter and have an appropriate name sent by Srila Prabhupada. This was new. This system, in effect, gave these eleven "Ritvik representative of the Acharya" all the responsibilities and authority of a GURU, but at the same time it was clear by their "Job Description" as "Ritvik representative of the Acharya " that their authority was CONDITIONAL -- it was not a blank check - as they were not mature full qualified Spiritual Masters. They were apprentices of the Spiritual Master -- "Ritvik representatives of the Acharya" -- and, the disciples they would initiate would be the disciples of their Spiritual Master, Srila Prabhupada, the *Sampradaya Acharya*, The Founder-Acharya of ISKCON.

The Emperor or King delegates power to a Viceroy who thus has all the power of a King to rule over a colony or state, yet it is understood that the Viceroy is not the King, but is ruling as the King's representative. Such a Viceroy would not automatically become a King upon the death of the King, rather he would continue to act as the Viceroy until the next Emperor or King was installed on the throne. Similarly the "Ritvik representative" does not automatically become a Guru or Acharya (as we assumed when Srila Prabhupada disappeared), but the Ritvik continues to act as the representative of the Acharya, Srila Prabhupada.

Although Srila Prabhupada spoke of all his disciples becoming Gurus, he never once ordered any disciple "To be a Guru", rather he gave conditional authority and responsibility to some leading disciples to "Act as Ritvik representatives of the Acharya". Having failed to carry out this responsibility by assuming that automatically upon Srila Prabhupada's disappearance the ritviks would become Gurus we find everything has gone off track, and the whole ISKCON movement is in shambles. Still, it is better late than never. Everything can be brought back into focus if we simply come back to the order of the Spiritual Master and act as "Ritvik representative of the Acharya."

I don't think that my words will make any difference -- but for my own clarification and purification I have written down these thoughts. Perhaps they will be of some help to you.

I have one last concern and it is this idea I get from Krishna Kant's paper "The Final Order" that the "Ritvik Representative" is nothing more than a priest who performs a ritual initiation, and then is no more significant in the spiritual life of a disciple than a clerk at an army recruiting station.

Yet, the fact is that Srila Prabhupada was very careful and deliberate about choosing his "Ritvik representatives" and we will notice all of them were distinguished by their enthusiasm and success in the preaching field. So if there is going to be a reform and actual adherence to the order of Srila Prabhupada to act as "Ritvik Representatives of the Acharya," then I think that anyone who is going to be designated as such should first of all go out and show their capacity to represent Srila Prabhupada as his "Ritvik Representative" by opening some centers and recruiting 100 or 200 devotees (or families) and train them up properly to preach and worship Srila Prabhupada as his disciples. Otherwise, what is the meaning of "Ritvik

representative of the Acharya?" Without this it will simply be another office job.

I hope you and Janaki are well. Thanks for your hospitality. I hope we can meet again soon.

Your humble servant,
Hamsaduta Das