

Krishna Kirti Das

From: Krishna Kirti Das [krishnakirti@gmail.com]
Sent: Friday, February 13, 2009 5:17 PM
To: 'HdG'
Subject: Our Relationship

Dear Srila Acharyadeva, please accept my humble obeisances at your feet. All glories to ISKCON Founder-Acharya Srila Prabhupada.

I feel the time has come for us to go our own separate ways in spiritual life. I hope that you will therefore give this final, personal letter of mine your full attention and consideration.

Although for years I held out hope that perhaps some day, some how, our differences on social, ethical, and theological issues could be somewhat resolved, and we could work together as we formerly had *despite* other differences (e.g. over women and kirtana), I believe that your views in these areas and homosexuality have become way too radical and too out of line with Srila Prabhupada's own consistently expressed views for me to accommodate. I no longer have faith that you are a faithful representative of Srila Prabhupada, what to speak of being a bona fide representative of the guru-parampara. This is, therefore, the last time I shall ever address you by the title "Acharyadeva."

This is not to say that I do not admire you for other qualities, nor does it mean I have forgotten the tremendous benefit you formerly bestowed upon me. Nor does it mean I have forgotten the enjoyable moments we have had together. I still admire you for your intelligence and your felt need to use that intelligence in a unique and daring way. Indeed, although I strongly disagree with you on your advocacy of "gay monogamy," I can still appreciate that you took the risk to think carefully through your own position and present it to the public. Whether right or wrong, brahmanas teach, and on account of their activities they become the heads of society. That's Lord Vishnu's system, and whether or not I agree with you, on account of your guna and karma, your place in His system is that of a brahmana.

Furthermore, I have never felt at any time that you have been guilty of any gross moral failure, such as breaking the four regulative principles or other immoral activities such as stealing, as a number of devotees I've encountered in my ISKCON career have alleged. Without exception, I've always defended you privately or publicly against such allegations.

This really just leaves differences over theology and ethics as the cause of my falling out with you. Of course, you could say that I'm just in maya, misguided, etc., and that this is the real cause. Possibly, that could be true. But many, many devotees in our society share my views about your ideas, and many of these devotees happen to be your godbrothers, mature preachers, sannyasis, and gurus who themselves have many disciples. If I am wrong about you on these matters, then so are they.

And that alone should count as some objective fact, or likelihood, that you yourself could possibly be in some sort of denial, or maya, about your own beliefs and views. But it doesn't, unfortunately, and that was made obvious by your recent public "apology" over the matter of your involvement in the blessing of homosexual nuptials. In your open letter, you had only apologized for not being austere in your speech, in not more carefully explaining your role and intentions. But many devotees (including many of your peers) are not simply distraught with the lack of "spin" you have put on recent events. They are very much concerned about basic theological differences between you and Srila Prabhupada. You never addressed that concern in your apology, perhaps because you don't recognize that there could be fundamental differences at stake.

This lack of recognition from you arises more from contempt for those who disagree with you than from any carefully considered position. By now, I'm well enough connected with enough senior devotees in our movement such that had you answered such objections from them, they would have soon made their way to me. So it's not just me you find objectionable, it's anyone who has presented to you significant doubts about your views. And even if that is not true, then why work so hard to keep their queries and your responses secret? Like it or not, you couldn't keep that a secret no matter how hard you tried. ISKCON has "thin walls." So, why not publish an explanation that must be so wonderful as to silence us all? Unless, of course, you don't have one and you're just bluffing.

But perhaps that explanation is coming. Perhaps you're working on it right now. As you said in your "apology":

"I am well aware of Srila Prabhupada's statements on this matter and I am confident that a mature, thorough knowledge of Prabhupada's preaching content and style makes possible a more moderate interpretation of those statements. I feel that I am well prepared to logically defend this view though I will not belabor it here."

I look forward to you "belaboring it" elsewhere, and I'm sure that your interpretation will be wonderful. However, I'm also just as confident that you cannot achieve your more "moderate interpretation" without employing an approach that effectively contradicts Srila Prabhupada's consistently stated views. Your interpretation will contradict Srila Prabhupada's statements in much the same way unauthorized Gita commentators have contradicted Krishna's statements in the Gita, as Srila Prabhupada has described in his preface and introduction to his own commentary on the Gita. Indeed, I pointed that out in the essay I wrote about it two years ago. An anti-intentionalistic re-imagining of Srila Prabhupada's statements on this matter coming from you would not be surprising, as anti-intentionalism is at the heart of postmodern approaches to interpretation, and postmodernism itself remains influential within Western academia—an institution that you have become too attached to.

Like many of your Western academic colleagues, where you fail in your imagination is that you have become unable to believe that Srila Prabhupada or anyone else could still be superlatively compassionate yet be against your proposal that we should give public recognition and support to what you have called "gay monogamy." Hence, in order for you to succeed, you must necessarily base your interpretation of Srila Prabhupada's statements on anti-intentionalist premises. By now, this way of interpreting, or "re-imagining Srila Prabhupada," is second nature to you. It has become something you can neither recognize nor avoid, just as fish can neither recognize nor avoid water.

As I had publicly said two years ago:

"I offer my obeisances to my spiritual master, Hridayananda das Goswami. In presenting these essays, I have meant you no malice. But please understand: I would rather be an outcast and have my arguments given a thoughtful hearing instead of an insider whose arguments are never heard. I offer my obeisances at your feet."

So, now the time has come for me to become an "outcast", at least from your shelter. The question that now remains is "who gets ISKCON"? Will it be your group, or the group I identify with, or perhaps some other group? It's no longer a question of "if" but "when." There are some who still believe ISKCON's unity is still very much a question of "if", but up to the present they have been doing little more than mouthing platitudes.

As an organization, the GBC itself has come to define itself more as a kshatriya get-things-done body rather than a

hminical body that could effectively challenge anyone or any group on philosophical and theological grounds, what to speak of being able to keep us all together on more or less the same theological "page". Though the GBC is still an important player, the issues at stake here will be decided primarily on ethical and theological grounds, not political grounds. Thus the GBC as it presently operates cannot do much about this issue either way, no matter what resolutions they could pass in the mean time. Most of ISKCON's members will follow the conclusions of whoever takes the risk to propagate his views and succeeds in convincing others of them. Depending on how you look at it, kshatriyas follow brahmanas, or less scholarly brahmanas follow more scholarly and learned brahmanas, not the other way around. That's just Lord Vishnu's system.

You don't even have to be in ISKCON to eventually establish your perspective as the normative perspective shared by most members of ISKCON, whether rank-and-file or GBC. Even if you get "kicked" out of ISKCON, ideas by nature are much more persistent and difficult to banish, and you are an "ideas" person. Indeed, it has been my observation that your consequentialist approach to moral reasoning is at this time the approach tacitly preferred by most of ISKCON's members. This is also to say that I think you stand a good chance of prevailing in this matter—a better chance than those of us who are at this time outspokenly opposed to you. In which case, I might also have to eventually leave ISKCON. But if that happens I won't regret leaving because I will be in plenty of good company.

Although I can no longer call myself your disciple, I still remain disposed to be your servant, though it is probably best if we don't encounter each other for at least a long time, if not for the rest of our lives. I do not believe you are guilty of any overt moral failings. You are still a sannyasi and a brahmana. And I shall still respect that as per the prescribed norms and conventions of the varnashram system. But I cannot respect you any more as my spiritual master.

Yours in the service of Srila Prabhupada,

Krishna Kirti Das