

I am very happy to see the [new article](#) on Sampradaya Sun by Raya Nitai dasa Vanacari on the new GBC 'Parallel Lines of Authority' paper. The points he made are very well presented and his article is well worth a careful reading. He has covered the main points very nicely, I just want to add one small observation.

When I joined ISKCON in 1986, the Zonal Acharya system was in full swing and ISKCON was preaching that their gurus were liberated, self-realized paramahansas who were on the same level as Srila Prabhupada. At that time they had divided the planet into zones and in each zone, the 'acharya' was the supreme and absolute authority. In those days all the authority was with the Zonal Acharyas, and practically the GBC had no authority at all. Each zone was independently managed by the Zonal Acharya.

In the mid 80's it became obvious to almost everyone that ISKCON's so-called acharyas were not really pure devotees and were far, far below the transcendental platform of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Many of them fell down very publicly and embarrassingly for ISKCON. There was some confusion for some time and even a short period where many devotees in ISKCON rediscovered Srila Prabhupada and took shelter of him after their gurus fell down. Around 1996, in conjunction with Narayana Maharaja, the GBC published a paper stating that the guru does not have to be a pure devotee, does not have to be liberated, can be a conditioned soul, etc. Then the GBC elevated many of the devotees who were very anxious to get promoted to the platform of guru to the status of "non-liberated guru". Soon there were more than 100 new ISKCON gurus.

Then this problem with authority in ISKCON become a serious management issue. It became an impossible situation because now, unlike in the Zonal Acharya days, where all the devotees in a temple and the temple president would all be disciples of the same guru, now there were so many gurus in ISKCON all preaching slightly different versions of the philosophy, and in a temple the devotees and temple authorities were disciples of many different gurus... Disciples of one guru did not like to accept the authority of the temple president, particularly if the temple president was a disciple of a different guru... And 'gurus' did not like temple presidents exercising authority over their disciples, particularly if the temple president was not their disciple. So the whole ISKCON organization became practically impossible to manage and it was a very unsatisfactory situation for both disciples and gurus. No one was happy and no one really knew who was his authority. Should he surrender to his guru? Should he surrender to the GBC? Should he surrender to the temple president? This really became a big problem, particularly if the three authorities were giving the disciple contradictory instructions...

So that is the brief history of authority in ISKCON since the physical disappearance of Srila Prabhupada. Of course, before Srila Prabhupada disappeared from our mundane vision there was no confusion at all. Prabhupada was the Spiritual Master and authority for everyone in ISKCON and he had appointed as his representatives the GBC and the temple presidents, and they were authorities in ISKCON to the extent that they were surrendered servants of Srila Prabhupada and Krishna. So Srila Prabhupada established the actual true system of spiritual authority. And that same system continues today, in fact. The person who is the real authority in ISKCON is the person who is surrendered to Srila Prabhupada and Krishna and who is simply representing Srila Prabhupada. Which means actually the real authority in ISKCON is Srila Prabhupada and one can be respected as an authority in ISKCON only to the extent that he is actually a surrendered soul at the lotus feet of Srila Prabhupada and to the degree that he is able to inspire his subordinates to purely surrender to and serve Srila Prabhupada.

There has been an ongoing fight between the GBC and the gurus for the authority in ISKCON. But neither the GBC nor the gurus are entitled to the authority in ISKCON according to Srila Prabhupada's management system. Srila Prabhupada established ISKCON as a confederation

of independent temples. Prabhupada is completely against any centralization of the management of ISKCON. In fact, Atraya Rsi attempted to establish a centralized management system, giving some authority to the GBC in this regard, and when Srila Prabhupada discovered this he was so angry that he completely dissolved the GBC and put the management of ISKCON back in the hands of the temple presidents.

Actually Srila Prabhupada's system for management and authority in ISKCON is completely local and completely decentralized. His vision is the local temple authorities will manage the temple and organize things according to their ability and level of realizations. Prabhupada's system is 'unity in diversity', so his vision is that the temples may be diverse. Not that every temple will be exactly the same as every other temple. There is room in Prabhupada's ISKCON for his disciples to develop the preaching in different ways in different temples. And in Prabhupada's management system there is a very important role for the GBC, but they are not authorities over the temples, nor are they meant to be involved in the management of the temples. The GBC's are supposed to be advanced devotees who will constantly travel to all the different temples in their zones and will preach and inspire the devotees. And their responsibility is to see that the spiritual standards of the temples are maintained. It is the GBC's responsibility to see that every devotee in every temple in his zone is rising before 4:00 am in the morning, attending the Mangal-Aroti, chanting at least 16 rounds of the Hare Krishna mantra on japa beads, strictly following the four regulative principles, attending the Bhagavatam class and going out daily on sankirtan, distributing Prabhupada's books and congregationally chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra. But the GBC has no management authority over the temple. The GBC is not in charge of the temple. The local temple authorities are in charge of the temple.

In Srila Prabhupada's management system, the GBC has no power to remove a temple president, for example -- that is up to the local temple devotees. If, however, there is a unanimous vote of the GBC, they may be able to exercise some authority, but the basic principle is they only act in an advisory capacity to the temple management and the temple management is the authority in the temple.

Anyhow, for some years in ISKCON they tried to run with this impossible 'parallel lines of authority' where a devotee was supposed to accept his guru, his temple president and his GBC all as authorities, and in many cases they would all give him contradictory instructions... So such a system is not at all practical. Therefore, now the GBC has proclaimed with this new 'parallel lines' paper that there are actually no parallel lines of authority in ISKCON, the only authority in ISKCON is the GBC and everyone must surrender to and serve the GBC. They make it very clear that initiating gurus are no exemption to this. They must also surrender to and serve the GBC...

There is absolutely no mention or even admission of the concept that a devotee in ISKCON should surrender to and serve Srila Prabhupada and Krishna. This idea has been replaced with the idea of surrender to the GBC... But the GBC is simply a political body composed of men and women who possess the four defects of conditioned souls: they make mistakes, they cheat, they are illusioned and they have imperfect senses. Unfortunately if one surrenders to conditioned souls like this, there is no hope for him in making spiritual advancement. Krishna advises in the beginning of the Bhagavad-gita that if one wants to make spiritual advancement, he must surrender to a bona fide spiritual master, inquire submissively, render service and offer obeisances because such a self-realized soul can give him real knowledge, as he has seen the truth. ISKCON has long ago rejected these clear instructions from Krishna and openly preaches to the devotees that they should surrender to 'spiritual masters' who are not self-realized and who have not seen the truth, and that somehow they will benefit from this.

But now, since this new parallel lines paper has become ISKCON law, they have practically eliminated the guru from ISKCON. Now the guru in ISKCON is simply a servant of the centralized, bureaucratic and dictatorial GBC, who give orders which the 'gurus' must follow, or be considered 'rogue gurus' and face excommunication from ISKCON. There are no parallel lines of authority any more. There is only one authority, the GBC, and everyone in ISKCON must surrender to and serve the GBC.

Hare Krishna Centre - Leicester, UK - Eliminating the Guru

Written by Madhudvisa dasa

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Like so many of the GBC's 'laws', this is completely contradictory to the teachings of Srila Prabhupada and has no validity whatsoever. It is maya. The GBC is in maya and they are simply speaking like mad crazy men. There is no sense whatsoever in their new 'parallel lines' law.

Chant Hare Krishna and be happy!

Your servant

Madhudvisa dasa