International Society for Krsna Consciousness

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Dear disciples, friends, and family of devotees,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

I'm going to start by falling at your feet and asking for forgiveness for a mistake I committed a year and a half ago involving inappropriate dealings with a woman. I'll tell more about this later in the letter.

I want to thank you for all of the outpourings of love and support I am receiving in the many letters coming from godbrothers, disciples, and friends. In this letter, I'm going to answer some of the questions that have been raised. You have been waiting too long for these answers. I will also continue to respond by letter to each of you. Let's start with the first question.

Question 1: Can you please explain what happened?

Answer 1: For the past twenty years, I have been contending with the dominant battle in my life—a painful and serious disease. I've tried to treat this disease in a number of ways. For ten years I took no medicine of any kind, either herbal or allopathic, while receiving treatment from a naturopathic doctor. Naturopathy did not relieve me of my pain, nor did it make me better. It simply left me underweight and anemic. I won't bore you with the list of alternative medicines that I tried. From acupuncture to Ayurveda, I have tried them all. But there were no positive results. When I first started with allopathic treatments, I tried over-the-counter medicines and soon wound up with what are called rebound headaches, where the "cure" itself gives you headaches. I went to a doctor, who prescribed more sophisticated and expensive medicines, which gave me a few days off from the pain, but these too created rebound headaches. It was despairing to live each day with constant and acute pain. Somehow, in the hours in between pain, I managed to write, including letters. I even pursued a lot of traveling and visiting temples. Sometimes I would give a *Srimad Bhagavatam* class and afterwards I would have to lie down in a van in my bed all day. Then I would give another *Srimad Bhagavatam* class the next day. Devotees didn't recognize symptoms of migraine and many still can't. They didn't realize how sick I was. The travel and

lecturing only exacerbated my condition. Finally, my health almost reached a complete breakdown.

As some of you may remember, I was Guru and/or GBC manager for a geographic zone including Ireland, much of the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast United States, the Caribbean, Vancouver, and Gita-Nagari farm. Over time, the weight of this service began taking its toll on me until, with the illness, I was often confined to bed. This occurred simultaneously with a crisis in the GBC itself and dissatisfaction within the members of the movement over the "zonal guru" designation. At this time, I resigned from the GBC. I tried to keep traveling as a sannyasi even with the realization that travel worsened my headaches.

While many events in my life led to this condition, severe headaches were first triggered by my experiences as a manager and "zonal guru." My work in ISKCON in these capacities involved doing kinds of services for which I was not well suited. My psychophysical nature is more to be a poet and writer and lead a quiet life, not to be doing management and "quarrelling" with godbrothers—it hurt me to have to face my duties in this way.

Finally, I found a psychiatrist M.D., who accurately diagnosed me as suffering with anxiety disorder, the apparent cause of the migraines. Additionally, when I worry that I'm going to get a headache, the worrying itself actually causes a migraine. This is called anticipatory anxiety syndrome. He prescribed that what we must do is stop the pain. This became our priority. He said that the side effects of medicine were not as dangerous for me at the present moment as complications from chronic pain. At the same time, I should enter counseling and fully occupy myself with trying to improve my situation with this kind of health treatment. I began to try to balance my healthcare needs with my responsibilities to Prabhupada and my disciples.

The choice of counselor did not work out. First of all, especially for a sannyasi, it's not ideal that the counselor and the client be of different sexes. Among devotees, however, there were not many counselors from which to choose. This person was recommended by a close disciple and another devotee counselor because she had the same disease and had received treatment for it. In fact, she had not been formally trained as a counselor.

At first, we began working by exchanging correspondence. By telephone, she would give me different practices to do like breathing and listening to certain tapes that aid a person with my condition. Anxiety disorder is actually a widely prevalent disease in the United States, which affects millions of people. There was not too long ago a cover story about it in *Time Magazine*. She recommended that we have person-to-person sessions, in which she could try to confront the anxiety disorder. At first, this work produced some good results.

Unfortunately, a naturally occurring emotional attachment between the counselor and client was mishandled. As soon as we realized what was happening, we saw the danger of it—me being a sannyasi and she a married woman. We talked seriously and decided that we had to stop our counseling, and end our friendship, having no contact at all. I see no reason to go into further detail except to say that we did become physically intimate and this was wrong.

Question 2: Why were you silent about the inappropriate action until it had been exposed?

Answer 2: We did not see the need for it since the relationship had been completely closed. My disciples and many others could suffer because of just one incident. To broadcast it all over would simply cause more harm than good. Those who theorize about the truth and say that anything other than broadcasting is a "cover up" have a technical and theoretical definition of truth, which is not necessarily absolute. I saw a higher morality in continuing on with my devotional service by working through this test on a daily basis in counseling, this time with a trained male devotee counselor. I felt I was rectifying the mistake within my relationship with Prabhupada and Krsna and that the greater good would be served by trying to protect my community of loved ones.

Question 3: Why did it take so long to hear from you after the news came out?

Answer 3: An anonymous letter was sent to the Sannyasa Minister, who began an investigation. Dissatisfied with the pace of the inquiry, the anonymous author posted his story on the Internet. I had already responded to the Ministry as well as the GBC Executive Committee and they had asked that I not write my letter to my disciples in order for them to have time to conduct a proper inquiry. Out of respect for their request, I did not communicate with you directly at first. This accounts for why you didn't hear from me, why I was silent.

You had to hear rumors about me while I could say nothing from my side. I had to wait for the GBC to come to their final conclusions and it took a long time. I was on pins and needles every day waiting. At the end, I felt I was again collapsing from the pressure that was building. I was waiting for it for myself and I was waiting for it for you. My hands were tied; I could not tell you.

Question 4: Why did you continue operating the press if you knew you had a problem?

Answer 4: Since writing and publishing is the lifeblood of my service to others and to Krsna and Prabhupada, I went right ahead with it. It is stated in the Nectar of Devotion that if a devotee commits a mistake he does not have to perform some atonement or *prayascitta*. He just picks himself up and goes right on with his devotional service. So I acted in that way.

Question 5: Why did you keep initiating?

Answer 5: Actually for several years it has been my intention to stop initiating because of my chronic ill health. Every time I take on a disciple it involves so much entanglement for me in that person's life and in that person's family, which may include their in-laws and many, many domestic problems. I am slowing down with old age and I want to use my remaining vitality for attending to the disciples that I have and for doing my preaching work. I actually declared an event that would be the very last initiation. Since then because I am soft hearted, a few people have "snuck in." These devotees were highly recommended and in some cases had been waiting for years.

Question 6: Are you still our Guru? Can you care for the disciples you have?

Answer 6: Yes. I am happy to be Guru of the family I have. You and I have developed very loyal and loving service exchanges. Together, we are producing innovative service that is helping the whole movement. Throughout the world, as spiritual master and disciples we are carrying on Prabhupada's mission by preaching through management, farms, book sales, seminars and academic studies, deity worship, devotee care, business, and family life. There are myriad forms of Krsna conscious expression and Krsna and the spiritual masters appreciate them equally when done sincerely and wholeheartedly. This is the fruit of our guru-disciple relationship and is pleasing to Prabhupada and Krsna.

I have learned from letters that not only my disciples but also devotees and non-devotees all over the world continue to be inspired by our preaching. Srila Prabhupada gives the example that when one is hungry and one eats, one does not need a certificate to show that he is satisfied. Only you can say if you are satisfied being my disciple. Only you can say if I am still your Guru. No one can sever our relationship or the connection between you and me and Srila Prabhupada. This is our eternal relationship.

You are helping me in my old age, to do things I couldn't do alone. You don't just cook meals for me but you use your advanced life skills to get things done on my behalf. Let us use the power of our connection to spread Krsna consciousness together. Preach on my behalf and allow me more solitude at this stage of my life.

I want you to know I see the love in your hearts and know you receive the love that I am giving. You see me as a human being who is struggling but fully accept me as your spiritual master. You are fighters. You are nurturers. You are my family.

Question 7: Are you still my link to Prabhupada and Krsna?

Answer 7: The main thing I have told you *is* to follow the teachings of Prabhupada and Krsna, right? Gurus teach their own realization, in their own voice. I have linked you eternally to Prabhupada and Krsna. The fact is that some disciples may or may not follow their Guru, and they may or may not follow Prabhupada and Krsna. We all have free will. So, my dear disciples, I will stay loving and faithful to you but perhaps this current event may separate those who love me and are faithful to me from those who are not. The U.S. Marines induction poster reads, "the few but the proud." Read volume three of My Letters from Srila Prabhupada and you'll see what a few "hundred percent fixed up" devotees could do for their spiritual master and how he could give them individual care in his own way.

Question 8: How do I stay personally connected with you from a distance?

Answer 8: I have already explained my inability to give you direct *vapu* association on a regular basis. We should remember that very important statement that Prabhupada writes in the concluding words of *Caitanya-Caritamrta*. He says after the passing away of his spiritual master that he still feels that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami is always by his side giving him directions what to do. I feel something like this when I write and serve Prabhupada. The Srila Prabhupada Murti is very helpful if you have one. You can keep some pictures of me and of course read my books and it is a kind of *vapu*. I wouldn't believe this unless I had heard it myself many times from devotees who say they feel more with me when they read my books than when they

gather and see me. They actually experience things that way. Because I write so personally every time, every day they read my books they feel that all their questions are answered, all their doubts are removed, and they have a grand time being with me personally. When they go to a gathering they get distracted by other people being there, by an inevitable feeling of envy towards other devotees, and the travel, etc.. They see me sitting on a chair, and if time allows, there may be an opportunity for us to speak personally. But when they are reading the books they also feel like they are talking to me directly. You may find some devotees who have this experience and talk with them and then you'll believe it. Better yet I hope you can experience it yourself and see that it's true.

I also want to encourage you to gather together, and in association, practice Prabhupada's and my teachings. Someday, my body will be gone and what will you do then? Please take this seriously and connect authentically with our spiritual family members, study my books together, and develop the relationships that will help you in your Krsna consciousness. Prabhupada said, "Your love for me will be proven by how well you cooperate together when I have gone." I say also that your love for me will be proven by how you come together now, while I am here. Help each other, find real and lasting devotional friendships, and make relationships based on care and honesty. Then later, when I am gone you will have my books and each other to carry on.

Question 9: If I don't feel full faith in you as before should I go on serving anyway?

Answer 9: I ask you please to not lose faith. If you do feel some loss of faith then go on serving anyway. The service itself is so powerful that it will sustain you and gradually bring back your faith. After all our main connection is service to please Krsna and to please Prabhupada. It will be a healing method; the service will bring you closer to me and gradually remove your doubts. Although you may have heard me tell lots of Prabhupada stories from the 11 years that he was here, I saw him relatively few times. Prabhupada himself said he saw his spiritual master only about 11 times. But Prabhupada was always engaged in his service and that made him feel staunchly connected. Don't dwell on this fault I have committed and don't listen to people who talk anything bad about me. Go away from their presence. Go on with your service to Krsna and pray for our loving bond. Stay with disciples who have a positive, loving attitude toward me. If they are not living near you then write to them regularly.

Question 10: When we get together as disciples, how can we help, care for and nurture each other and what do I tell others?

Answer 10: I don't think you should try to just cover things over politely. Some may be more on the strong side or faithful side. Others may be more on the weak side and perhaps even afraid to speak up about it. Some may be openly doubtful. I think at these meetings everyone should be given a chance to speak. At the beginning there should be a designated person to set boundaries for this kind of a meeting. There should not be blasphemy. Frank questions should be asked and those who have faith and knowledge should try to answer them. In other words, a positive and not a negative conclusion should be the goal of the meetings. It's not that one person is acting as a know-it-all. But I would hope there would be at least several people there who will have faith and enough

information, from their experience with me, reading books, and reading these recent letters, and in touch with my representatives to know the answers to this situation. We are not trying to lie and say that I did no wrong. But we are taking a realistic look at it and saying there is every reason to continue to go to me as a spiritual master and not have an artificial view of the spiritual master, that he is on a pedestal and never makes mistakes. Think of all the good that I have done for you and the good I am willing to continue to do for you. Such meetings should be upbeat but there should be a time for facing negative and doubtful questions. When the questions are not satisfied, the doubter can ask again and again, until he is reasonably satisfied. If he is not satisfied then he/she should be told to take their time and write more to me or my representatives because time can heal wounds. Pray to Krsna that these wounds will be healed.

Question 11: What about taking another Spiritual Master?

Answer 11: I would advise you not to turn away from me and be in a hurry to take a *siksa* Guru and reject me. I don't think I've done anything so wrong that it cannot be discussed realistically, within the bounds of the *sastra*, and we can see the justification for me to continue being your spiritual master. It is reasonable and *sastric* to give me forgiveness and continue to trust my word. I've set the grounds for my own humility and making of mistakes in my books and now I have actually fulfilled the role in real life. I have laid the foundation for you to make mistakes as well, for me to accept you, and for you to accept me, on the basis of us being imperfect human beings. And I have made a place for us to have not merely an institutional relationship but a real relationship of people who may see mistakes but, out of love, overlook them.

Question 12: What is your current treatment status?

Answer 12: There are concerns that my use of medication is addiction rather than treatment. My doctor oversees my medicine. I talk with him regularly, and according to my symptoms, he may decrease or increase dosages or take away a certain medication. In addition, my treatment team monitors my health daily and, working with my doctor and counselor, track my progress through daily logs. I do not take medicine on my own whimsy but under my doctor's guidance. I have pain control now with decreasing complications. I believe we can build a sustainable recovery based on rest, recuperation, and regularity. I am able to function peacefully in my present treatment environment.

Question 13: What are your current spiritual standards?

Answer 13: When I first began to assimilate the medication and their side effects, I found that they made me sleepy and it was difficult for me to sustain my quota of sixteen rounds. This was some time ago. For many months, I have been holding to sixteen rounds a day, and if I miss, I make them up the following day. For those who want to know, I follow the four regulative principles. I have a very regular schedule of rising early in the morning and chanting with the devotees, followed by writing and reading. Soon we will be bringing my new Prabhupada Murti into my house and I am expecting Gaur-Nitai deities to arrive as well. I like to worship my deities closely as part of my daily routine. The rest of my day includes writing letters and painting pictures of Radha and Krsna and Gaur-Nitai.

Question 14: Is there some connection between your painting, your avant-garde writing, and the fact that you had that mistake a year and a half ago?

Answer 14: This is my devotional service to Prabhupada. I think of it as holy. My first publishing was in *Back to Godhead* magazine. Surprisingly, the first poems to go in the magazine were beat, free verse poems and Prabhupada liked them. These examples are in the *Handbook for Krsna Consciousness*. After reading one of them, Prabhupada looked at me and said I like this.

> When we were chanting
> Hare Krsna
> and the light of the sky
> was going in and out
> My pleasure was so
> great I was afraid
> lest I be swept to Indra's heaven
> and there given a chariot ride
> down the length of the rainbow.
>
> Whereas here on earth,
> standing on Houston Street,
> I can chant
> the holy name of Krsna and
> He is with me
> (kindly dancing on my tongue),
> Who is the Source of Everything.

One time there was a meeting of the whole BBT, who brought in a sales expert to see how sales could be increased. The man asked us what the purpose of *Back to Godhead* was and I knew he was looking for commercial answers. I couldn't help but remember hearing Prabhupada say that the purpose of *Back to Godhead* is to give my devotees a chance to write just as I am writing books so my disciples should learn how to write and Back to Godhead is a vehicle for that.

I'm bringing up this incident of the old days and the *Back to Godhead* under the larger topic of change. Some of my disciples and readers are complaining that my writing has changed over the years from the more standard, what they call the "straight stuff" or more exactly how Prabhupada writes in his books. They see that I write differently in a more avant-garde style and with my own personal voice. It's true that in the twelve years in which Prabhupada was with us I wrote very much the way he wrote. He wrote me many letters praising my articles and most of my essays were taken from *Srimad Bhagavatam* and written up into articles, almost an imitative style, like his. They weren't exactly cloning but they were retellings. He especially liked my retelling of the entire *Ramayana* in one issue even though it was drawn from a book he hadn't translated and commented on. Just before he passed away, I also published a semi-scholarly book, *Readings in Vedic Literature*, in which I did a lot of historical criticism of the first pioneers who translated the Vedas with a Christian bias. He liked that book. He said I had read the rascals without being contaminated by them.

After he passed away, my original vocation returned, to be an original writer.

I started writing again in my own voice, in my "adopted religion." More accurately, my religion is not adopted. In one of his speeches on a record, Prabhupada said "Krsna consciousness is not an artificial imposition on the mind but it is the original energy of the soul." So my original Krsna consciousness started to become expressed in this vein as a New Yorker, a boy with a certain amount of experiences in a tone of his own voice. People liked it more and more and I've written in that direction. That is the change that people have noticed.

I don't think it is less holy or less *parampara*. It is less carbon copy and it is certainly not a cloning of Prabhupada. But I remember back to those beat poems that he liked. He never wrote poems like that and yet he appreciated when we came out with them.

My writing continues to change. It is a kind of code to break and read. It's easy but you have to understand the writings by reading them my way, not just expecting to be spoon-fed in the way we have read doctrine or traditional theology in the past. There is a poem by William Carlos Williams, which was to his wife (and to everyone of his readers).

> All this – was for you, old woman.
> I wanted to write a poem
> that you would understand.
> For what good is it to me
> If you can't understand?
> But you got to try hard –
>
> ("January Morning" 1932)

Please stay with me to crack the code.

The same is true of my paintings. They are simple, innocent. I did not go to art school to learn to paint like this. For thousands of years people have painted in a primitive or naïve style and many people have been attracted to it. In the mid-20th century a great revolution occurred and top painters rebelled against the previous century's concepts of beauty such as Greek sculpture and the renaissance. Painters like Picasso and Miro and many other modernists began painting in very free style not regarding the official codes of the beauty that one learned in the academy. The leading advocate of this kind of painting was Jean DuBuffet, and he called it arte brute. In America, they usually call it outsider art. It is now very popular, and some outsider art sells for a million dollars. It is appreciated for its lack of pretentiousness and its raw truthfulness. People also make sculpture out of found objects and it's similar sometimes to jungle cultures. Some of this has even been done in India and there is a wonderful charm to it that can't be matched by taught artists who have very strict standards of what "beauty" is. I have painted and shown paintings so far in two galleries—Govinda Gallery in Washington, DC and the gallery in the Nuyorican Café on the lower east side of New York City. I received a very good review for my work by a Washington Post art critic, who saw the paintings and described them as "awfully exuberant." I mention this to point out that the painting is preaching. Ninety percent of my paintings are Radha and

Krsna, Gaura Nitai, or Krsna subjects like cowherd boys. Everybody knows they are Krsna paintings. But I paint them in a modern style. Not exactly copying the admirable paintings, which are the illustrations in BBT books but in a more outsider style, which is all I really know. It is also good therapy for me in treating my disease.

So I ask you please not to see my avant-garde writing, which is thoroughly Krsna conscious, and my original painting, as something that is drifting from the original Satsvarupa das Goswami because it is not "straight stuff," scriptural teachings like other sannyasis are doing or that its not more exactly like Prabhupada's books. My works lead one to Prabhupada's books. I receive letters from people saying that they couldn't approach Prabhupada until they approached me.

Question 15: Can we visit you?

Answer 15: Sometimes I may leave my more reclusive spot in California and go to New York where I stay in my disciple's home. When I am in New York, I am sometimes able to tolerate more visits, but I have to be careful to limit the number of visitors as I find it can be quite stressful.

I hope to increase my association by audio and video presentations that you can see as a group or with your family.

Regarding personal visits from friends, sometimes, I'll be having a good time talking with a friend and getting good instructions, but at the same time the downside is so heavy that it almost outweighs the good advice and the uplift of being with the saintly person. I have to go to my bed right away and it may take hours for me to recover from the benefit of "association." Sometimes if people have traveled a long distance they expect to stay a few days or even a week. I'm sorry to have to say this but I really dread these kinds of visits. Even from close friends. It means I have to see them the next day or at lunch and again. This builds up and builds up more and more anxiety for me. Remember how I described my disease as *anticipatory* anxiety with accompanying migraine. I become anxious about another meeting and another meeting. My body wants to rest but I have to meet. It is something I'm forced to do by the situation and I have to take more pills to get through it. By then I'm locked into the situation.

Question 16: Are you associating with other devotees?

Answer 16: I live in the association of several devotees and count on the many members of Gita Nagari Press around the world for their on-going involvement with me in my writing, editing, production, publication, and distribution of my creative work.

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As your spiritual master, I want to know if in your heart the crack of faith has occurred. I am sorry that I did wrong when I started working alone with a devotee woman. But you did wrong if you placed me on a pedestal, thinking that I'm not a human being who could commit a mistake. In the Bhagavad-gita it says that even a person who commits a bad mistake should still be seen as a pure devotee, provided he is determined in his Krsna consciousness.

I was very vulnerable at the time I made the mistake and I'm trying to become strong again. I pray and I promise that such a mistake will not happen again.

I want to continue our relationship as spiritual master and disciple. Yes you should see me as human not as perfect but you should trust me to guide you despite my mistake. Think of all the years in which I have guided you rightly and forgive me just as I have forgiven you so many times.

The best thing I can do for myself now is to mostly stay alone with a few assistants and restore my health in such an atmosphere. The best thing you can do as disciples is to become strong in your *sadhana* and principles, and to meet together as my disciples. Write to me and my appointed representatives with any questions. Pray that you will not lose faith and not allow this to weaken our bond. Time can heal things and is on our side. Please use it in that way. Now let us pray and ask for this blessing. And please read my books.

Yours in the service of Srila Prabhupada,

Satsvarupa das Goswami