Global Duties & Responsibilities of the Governing Body Commission (GBC)

This document describes the collective service of the Governing Body Commission of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The listed functions derive primarily from Srila Prabhupada's direct instructions. Some details have been shaped, however, by insights gained over decades of observation and experience. The GBC members collaborate to fulfill their various global responsibilities and individually contribute according to their capacity, area of expertise, personal inclination, and specific requirements. It is not expected that every member will display excellence in every aspect; at the same time, absorption in and loyalty to the core elements of Srila Prabhupada's mood and mission are expected from every GBC member. In fulfilling its mandate, the Body shall involve as many qualified assistants as necessary to accomplish its duties, organizing them in as many offices, ministries, and departments as required. The list of functions is as follows:

- **Executing Srila Prabhupada's Will**
- **Guarding & Representing Srila Prabhupada's Teachings**
- **Preserving Srila Prabhupada's Position as the Founder-*Acarya***
- **Maintaining Srila Prabhupada's Standards Worldwide**
- **Providing Spiritual Leadership & Guidance**
- **Encouraging and Nurturing Devotees**
- **Communicating Effectively**
- **Establishing ISKCON Legislation**
    - **Establishing Checks and Balances**
    - **Establishing Prerequisites & Oversight for Spiritual Leadership**
- **Protecting ISKCON's Assets and Ensuring Legal and Financial Compliance**
- **Strategizing & Leading ISKCON's Qualitative & Quantitative Growth**
    - **Ensuring that Srila Prabhupada's Books Are Distributed, Studied and Assimilated**
    - **Configuring Zones and Assigning Overseers**
    - **Resourcing ISKCON Global Services**
- **Maintaining the Principle of Unity in Diversity**
- **Protecting the Reputation & Ensuring the Endurance of ISKCON**

- **Ensuring Accountability among the Commissioners and throughout the Society**
- **Cooperating with the BBT**
- **Performing Individual Global Duties**

*** * ***

Executing Srila Prabhupada's Will

On July 28, 1970, in the Direction of Management, the document establishing the Governing Body Commission, after listing the twelve Governing Body Commissioners he had selected, Srila Prabhupada wrote: "These personalities are now considered as my direct representatives. While I am living they will act as my zonal secretaries and after my demise they will be known as Executors." Executors are responsible of ensuring that a person's wishes – in this case, Srila Prabhupada's – are granted with regards to the management of his properties and legacy – in this case, the protection and guidance of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The GBC has been entrusted with this fiduciary duty of caring for the whole of ISKCON on behalf of the Founder-*Acarya.*

A few weeks after establishing the GBC, Srila Prabhupada wrote to a disciple: "Perhaps you know I have already formed a Governing Body Commission, so in my absence they will manage the affairs of the Society." (Letter to Umapati, August 23, 1970) Srila Prabhupada expressed the same idea a number of times: "The future hope of solid standing of our mission is on the proper management of our governing body." (Letter to Bhagavan, February 16, 1971) "For better management of the whole institution, the governing body commission is responsible." (Letter to Satsvarupa, February 26, 1971)

Within this broad, inclusive mandate we can identify three distinct areas. First, the aspects for which Srila Prabhupada provided clear and detailed instructions, instructions that are universal and ongoing. These should be treated as fundamental, immovable principles – one such principle is the collegial governance of ISKCON. For instance, in his purport to *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* (*Adi-lila* 12.8), Srila Prabhupada links the history of the Gaudiya Matha to ISKCON: "Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, at the time of his departure, requested all his disciples to form a governing body and conduct missionary activities cooperatively. He did not instruct a particular man to become the next *acarya*."

Second, the aspects for which Srila Prabhupada offered only general directions but no firm details. For instance, Srila Prabhupada expressed the desire to create a global legal structure for ISKCON: "Now I want to make an International Trust Board for the whole Society" (Letter to Bali Mardana, August 14, 1974); but the particulars of this overall legal entity need to be defined. In fact, Srila Prabhupada himself wrote to a GBC member: "I have built the skeleton of the building, but there is so much more work remaining before us. The GBC men are there, the world is divided into 12 zones for gradual development by these, my chosen right hand men. So however you manage it, that you know best." (Letter to Hamsaduta, January 2, 1973)

Third, aspects Srila Prabhupada did not delve into or discuss; either because they did not exist at the time (such as the Internet) or because they became prominent only at a certain stage of ISKCON's development. How initiating spiritual masters should relate with local managers is an example. Given these three categories of themes, this document will offer varying degrees of direct evidence from Srila Prabhupada's words.

One thing is certain: in his "Declaration of Will," signed on June 4, 1977, Srila Prabhupada stated: "The Governing Body Commission (GBC) will be the ultimate managing authority of the entire International Society for Krishna Consciousness." Throughout the years, Srila Prabhupada repeated and confirmed the same idea; even in the last recorded mentions of "GBC": "The institution depends on the GBC." (Room Conversation, Vrindavan, November 5, 1977) "I wish that you GBC manage very nicely." (Room Conversation, Vrindavan, November 8, 1977)

Guarding & Representing Srila Prabhupada's Teachings

In Los Angeles on June 4, 1976, a reporter asked Srila Prabhupada: "Is there anyone who is designated to succeed you as the primary teacher of the movement?" Srila Prabhupada replied: "I am training some, I mean to say, advanced students so that they may be very easily take up the charge. I have made them GBC. They are under my direct training, and I think they will be able to conduct this movement." Six days later, on June 10, 1976, also in Los Angeles, another reporter asked about succession of spiritual leadership: once Srila Prabhupada departed "Will there be one spiritual leader"? Srila Prabhupada answered: "No, I am training GBC, eighteen all over the world."

Part of this teaching function is to judge whether Srila Prabhupada's teachings are being properly applied according to time, place, and circumstance, translating the Founder-*Acarya's* instructions and desires within changing conditions and environments. Another part of the teaching function is to identify principles and distinguish them from details. An example of a theme requiring careful analysis is the application of *varnasrama-dharma* within a contemporary context. The stewardship of Srila Prabhupada's instructions includes acting as guardians of the Seven Purposes of ISKCON and thus preventing deviation from and neglect of the foundational aims Srila Prabhupada enshrined.

Preserving Srila Prabhupada's Position as the Founder-*Acarya*

Srila Prabhupada was very concerned that his status as Founder-*Acarya* be established and perpetuated. For instance, in a circular signed by two GBC members, approved (and signed) by Srila Prabhupada, and marked "TOPMOST URGENCY" – a document including "AMENDMENTS TO BE IMMEDIATELY ADDED TO ALL OFFICIAL REGISTRATION DOCUMENTS, CONSTITUTIONS, INCORPORATION PAPERS, ETC." – we find: "It is declared that His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada is the Founder-Acharya of (ISKCON) International Society for Krishna Consciousness. He is the supreme authority in all matters of the society. His position cannot be occupied by anyone else, and his name and title must appear on all documents, letterheads, publications, and buildings of the Society." (Amendments for Official Documents, July 22, 1974) Srila Prabhupada was alert to ensuring that his unique position in ISKCON not be usurped or challenged. He had been keenly aware of discrepancies in recognizing his status in the movement, and such deviations pained him deeply. He took steps to firmly establish acknowledgement of and respect for the principle of founder-*acarya*. Even in the Direction of Management document of July 28, 1970, Srila Prabhupada included: "During my absence no one shall live in my apartment." The GBC should preserve and explain Srila Prabhupada's position as the Founder-*Acarya* of ISKCON throughout the generations of devotees.

Maintaining Srila Prabhupada's Standards Worldwide

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "Now I have invested the GBC for maintaining the standard of our Krsna Consciousness Society, so keep the GBC very vigilant. I have already given you full directions in my books." (Letter to Satsvarupa,

September 13, 1970) Later, Srila Prabhupada wrote to another member of the GBC: "I have formed this GBC for that purpose, to keep the devotional standards at the highest level and at the same time to manage a world-wide organization." (Letter to Rupanuga, November 4, 1970)

Srila Prabhupada often stressed that the GBC was meant to ensure that purity was maintained throughout the Society. In a letter to Sudama Maharaja dated February 16, 1973, he wrote: "In your travelling from centre to centre, you must be very careful to see that the leaders are observing the principles of chanting 16 rounds, rising early for Mangala Arati, participating in the morning and evening classes, observing the four regulative principles etc., and if there is any deviation from this standard then it is the responsibility of you and the local GBC representative to rectify it immediately. Within these Vaisnava standards which I have put forward lies the spiritual strength of our movement."

Srila Prabhupada wanted devotees to thoroughly overhaul their personal habits and the GBC to supervise their improvement: "Our spiritual way should strictly observe the following points especially: (1). Neatness and cleanliness of all personal bodies. (I still see those who are initiated as Brahmins, they do not wash their hand after eating even; of course, there may be so many defects due to your births in non-Brahmin families, but how long it shall go on? It is very easy thing.); (2). Chanting 16 rounds daily. (I don't think everyone is following these principles.); (3) Temple worship, which should be performed rigidly between four and ten a.m.) I find that the devotees are still sleeping up to six, seven o'clock. So in the GBC Agenda I do not find any such programs for reforming our past bad habits." (Letter to Hamsaduta, April 11, 1972) Although local officers and other leaders will implement programs aimed at improving personal and collective standards, it is the duty of the GBC to oversee the process.

Providing Spiritual Leadership & Guidance

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "It is the duty of the GBC to maintain the devotees, keep them in the highest standard of Krishna Consciousness, and give them all good instruction, and let them go out and preach for making more devotees." (Letter to Satsvarupa, June 16, 1972)

Srila Prabhupada wrote to another GBC member: "The GBC should all be the instructor gurus. I am in the initiator guru, and you should be the instructor guru by teaching what I am teaching and doing what I am doing." (Letter to Madhudvisa, August 4, 1975) Earlier, on June 16, 1972, Srila Prabhupada had written to

Madhudvisa: "So you GBC men are my selected few for insuring that what I am doing will be carried on very nicely for the pleasure of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu."

Encouraging & Nurturing the Devotees

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "This is the function of the GBC, to see that one may not be taken away by maya." (Letter to Madhudvisa, August 4, 1975) In an earlier letter to Madhudvisa, dated May 26, 1972, Srila Prabhupada wrote: "Now I want that my GBC representatives shall travel extensively throughout their zone, without stopping in any one place for very long. Their job will be to see how things are going on, that the spiritual standard is maintained very high, to give encouragement to the devotees, like that."

Srila Prabhupada stressed both the need for rigorous discipline in *sadhana* and for allowing creativity, inspiration, and personal initiative: "The point is to be engaged in doing something for Krishna, never mind what is that job, but being so engaged in doing something very much satisfying to the devotee that he remains always enthusiastic. He will automatically follow the regulative principles because they are part of his occupational duty – by applying them practically as his occupational duty, he realizes the happy result of regulative principles. So the future of this Krishna Consciousness movement is very bright, so long the managers remain vigilant that 16 rounds are being chanted by everyone without fail, that they are all rising before four morning, attending mangal arati – our leaders shall be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual and spontaneous and voluntary. (Letter to Karandhara, December 22, 1972)

Spiritual guidance and nurturing is, of course, meant for all devotees, both temple-residents and home-based: "The temple center is started just to present example to the neighboring residents how they can make a small temple in each and every home. It is not necessary that hundreds and thousands of people will live in our temple, but if we can make effective propaganda, then the neighboring residents, householders, will be inclined to be initiated and follow the modes of temple life." (Letter to Tamal Krishna, June 1, 1969) Srila Prabhupada elaborates on this point in his purport to *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, *Madhya-lila* 3.190: "Everyone can execute the cult of Krsna consciousness at home, as ordered by the Lord. Everyone can congregationally chant the holy name of Krsna, the Hare Krsna *maha-mantra*. One can also discuss the subject matter of the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and install Deities of Radha-Krsna or Gaura-Nitai or both and worship them very carefully in one's own home. It is not that we have to open different centers all over the world. Whoever cares for the Krsna consciousness movement can install Deities at home and, under superior

guidance, worship the Deity regularly, chanting the *maha-mantra* and discussing the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*."

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "Now I want that we shall concentrate on making our devotees Krishna conscious and ourselves becoming Krishna conscious, and not be so much concerned with expanding ourselves widely but without any spiritual content. Just like boiling the milk, it becomes thicker and sweeter. Now do like that, boil the milk." (Letter to Rupanuga, May 9, 1972) The following month Srila Prabhupada wrote to another GBC member: "I am very much concerned that the devotees should be given all good instruction and knowledge of Krishna Consciousness, that is the duty of the GBC man . . . better to utilize time and train the devotees, especially the responsible officers." (Letter to Madhudvisa, June 16, 1972)

Although direct spiritual care will be administered by temple presidents, congregational group leaders, etc., the GBC Zonal Secretaries need to supervise and ensure that devotees everywhere receive spiritual shelter and guidance, and the GBC needs to make sure that such care is offered worldwide. Srila Prabhupada intended the focus on Krishna conscious training to extend to all age groups: "Actually it is the responsibility of the parents to maintain Gurukula . . . The GBC should make an injunction that if they beget children, then whatever the expenses are for supporting Gurukula they must pay for it." (Letter to Jagadisa, January 22, 1976)

Communicating Effectively

The GBC should regularly and effectively communicate to all devotees the vision, decisions, and initiatives meant to improve the Hare Krishna movement. To this end, GBC members may use any and all means of communication. Effective communication includes the thorough explanation of resolutions and policies and ensuring that all essential information is translated into all the languages ISKCON serves.

The GBC should promote professional, mature, and harmonious communication between ISKCON and the public, government agencies, academics, religious leaders and institutions, the media, and other relevant and influential persons or groups.

Establishing ISKCON Legislation

The GBC should produce ISKCON's legislation and, as individual members, should follow those regulations, restricting themselves from the arbitrary exercise of power and instead acting according to the rule of law – the principle that all individuals are subject and accountable to a set of legitimately established rules.

Srila Prabhupada wrote: "We require to hold this important meeting of the GBC to formulate the rules and regulations how things will be worked on." (Letter to Tamal Krishna, August 14, 1971). Later, Srila Prabhupada wrote: "As far as your proposals are concerned the real thing is that we must make broader constitution of the management by GBC." (Letter to Jayatirtha, December 16, 1974)

It's therefore the duty of the GBC to generate fair legislation and for its members to be exemplary in their observance of the law. Legislation includes the development of policies, procedures, systems, and structures that promote ISKCON's functionality and growth and ensure legal compliance throughout the world, both to internal and external laws, through regular audits and other means.

Establishing Checks & Balances

Srila Prabhupada wrote: "A GBC member cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of his power. We are in the experimental stage but in the next meeting of the GBC members they should form a constitution how the GBC members manage the whole affair." (Letter to Giriraja, August 12, 1971)

The constitution will enshrine the underlying fundamental principles on which all ISKCON laws should be based. Srila Prabhupada established the GBC as the "ultimate managing authority" for ISKCON. A structure that gives final, ultimate, and supreme authority to the GBC may raise concerns about the possibility of a dictatorial or oppressive governance. But "ultimate" does not mean the GBC has "absolute" authority. In fact, an essential element of Srila Prabhupada's teachings is that ISKCON leaders, including the GBC and its members, must recognize and respect the dignity and rights of the individuals and communities. Srila Prabhupada wrote: "I have chosen my best men to be GBC and I do not want that the GBC should be disrespectful to the temple presidents." (Letter to All Governing Board Commissioners, May 19, 1976)

Whoever wishes to peacefully serve within ISKCON according to ISKCON law should be able to freely perform his or her duties without inappropriate, oppressive, or arbitrary interference. Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "Regarding your trip to U.S.A. you say that you will be tactful and respectful in your dealings. That should be the motto of all GBC. Be tolerant, and if there is any deficiency, rectify it. All our men have volunteered good service, so the background is good will. So everything should be done on the basis of good will." (Letter to Hamsaduta, September 7, 1974)

There are various bases for legitimate authority. In our movement the Founder-*Acarya's* instructions provide fundamental parameters. Naturally, in an institution, questions will arise: Who may lead and how is leadership obtained? What powers are granted to leaders? What kind of decisions can leaders make? What sanctions may leaders impose? The leaders' decisions need clear doctrinal support and be convincingly rational. An additional source of legitimacy is the extent to which all devotees feel enfranchised – that is, they believe they have some impact on their leaders' decisions.

The GBC is studying practical ways for ensuring that decisions be made in consideration of the rightful concerns of its constituencies after comprehensive dialogue. A proper system of checks and balances would provide some measure of influence over the deliberations of the GBC and will prevent unwarranted arbitrariness. For instance, the GBC stipulated that it will no override the case decisions of the Child Protection Office.

Establishing Prerequisites & Oversight for Spiritual Leadership

The GBC's legislative duties include defining the requirements for different roles in the Society – for example, Srila Prabhupada wrote: "For taking sannyasa you may consult your GBC member as we shall be starting a new policy where the sannyasa candidate must meet certain requirements to be determined by the GBC." (Letter to Danavir, February 6, 1973)

Srila Prabhupada also indicated that spiritual knowledge be formally tested as a requirement for serving as *diksa-guru* and that the GBC establish this and other examination processes in ISKCON: "Another examination will be held sometimes in 1971 . . . One who will pass this examination will be awarded with the title of Bhaktivedanta. I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations. Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedanta will be allowed to initiate disciples." (Letter to Hamsaduta, January 3, 1969) Years later, Srila Prabhupada wrote about the necessity of having different certifications for other positions as well: "Shortly we shall be introducing the system of examinations for those students who are ready for second initiation as well as sannyasa." (Letter to Satsvarupa, January 5, 1976) Five days after writing this letter, Srila Prabhupada indicated that it would be the GBC's duty to fine-tune the examination system: "I have also suggested for the GBC's consideration, that we introduce a system of examinations for the devotees to

take. Sometimes there is criticism that our men are not sufficiently learned, especially the brahmanas. Of course second initiation does not depend upon passing an examination. How one has moulded his life – chanting, attending arati, etc., these are essential. Still, brahmana means pandita. Therefore I am suggesting examinations." (Letter to Svarupa Damodara, January 10, 1976) And next month he wrote: "As far as the Bhakti-sastri and other examinations are concerned, that we will discuss at the GBC meeting." (Letter to Nitai, January 24, 1976)

Besides standards of sastric knowledge, the GBC has the duty to establish other educational requirements, standards, and procedures for assuming (and maintaining) any and all responsibilities and positions within ISKCON. This principle applies to determining standards and requirements for serving as initiating and instructing gurus, *sannyasis,* Global Duty Officers, Zonal Supervisors, temple presidents, etc.

Protecting ISKCON's Assets & Ensuring Legal and Financial Compliance

The GBC needs to ensure that ISKCON's soft and hard assets – trademarks and real estate properties – are protected. To this end, as mentioned above, Srila Prabhupada considered creating an overarching entity to improve the level of protection of ISKCON's assets by the GBC: "Regarding the International Trust Board, we are now expanding and so our interests should be carefully guarded. Certainly the 12 GBC members are being trained up strictly under my guidance so that they will protect the interest of the society very, very carefully. All our property should be well protected, and I think in every document my name as Founder-Acarya should be mentioned. Special care should be taken that no property can be sold or mortgaged by local managers as was done by Gaurasundara. This is my only concern." (Letter to Bali Mardana, September 5, 1974)

The GBC has already formally accepted this duty by including in its incorporation, in the list of its objects:

"b. To hold and protect title to the marks, copyrights, names, patents, and other intangible assets of Srila Prabhupada as his natural legal and spiritual successor, and also such intangible assets of the worldwide International Society for Krishna Consciousness founded by him . . . and to license their use to societies, bodies, and/or persons as it deems appropriate.

"c. To ensure that the assets under the care of the affiliates of the worldwide ISKCON Society are utilized for the purposes of ISKCON."

Strategizing & Leading ISKCON's Qualitative & Quantitative Growth

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "I have issued a letter to all the GBC members only for this purpose that each one of you should always think how to improve the cause and advance our society and as soon as there is some good point you can communicate with your colleagues . . . So you should not remain for a moment without thought of improving ISKCON activity." (Letter to Tamal Krishna, September 1, 1971) To another member of the GBC Srila Prabhupada wrote: "[N]ow you may, along with the other men of GBC, take over from me management of ISKCON affairs and work combinedly to open as many centers as possible all over the world." (Letter to Satsvarupa, November 4, 1970) On the same day he wrote to another member of the GBC: "That is what I wish to see from the GBC members; that they work combinedly to open as many centers as possible all over the world . . . So please work closely together and do everything in cooperation." (Letter to Sudama, November 4, 1970) Srila Prabhupada also said: "[W]e shall perform this sankirtana yajna all over the world, town to town, town to town. Now we have got GBC all over the world. Let them organize." (Room Conversation, London, August 15, 1971)

The GBC needs to offer direction for shaping the future. The GBC as the global governing body, needs to create strategic goals for both the stabilization of ISKCON and for its expansion. Such strategic goals should be short-term and long-term. This includes planning for making Krishna consciousness relevant to everyone. As Srila Prabhupada wrote to a member of the GBC: "These festivals will be successful all over the world. As GBC member it is your duty to carefully make a broad program for implementing Krsna Consciousness in every sphere of life, in this way we will become respected as the most important members of human society." (Letter to Hamsaduta, May 6, 1973)

As visionaries for the movement, the GBC should establish whatever administrative departments, educational initiatives, and information campaigns necessary to ensure the health and development of Srila Prabhupada's movement. In particular, the GBC should give special attention to international projects, such as developing Sridham Mayapur. There should be clear service descriptions for all roles of responsibility within ISKCON, and appropriate training and regular performance assessments. All projects should be fully accountable financially, legally, morally, and spiritually. The GBC should promote a culture of succession to guarantee that all important functions remain covered in the future.

Ensuring that Srila Prabhupada's Books Are Distributed, Studied and Assimilated

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "I am so pleased that you are thinking of distributing my books to the largest extent. Distribution of books means propagation of our mission. If we can distribute KRSNA book in thousands upon thousands, automatically the Krsna Consciousness Movement will be spread up. You have rightly drawn the attention of the GBC on this point." (Letter to Bali Mardana, January 6, 1971) Srila Prabhupada also said: "So now you all GBC make a plan how to introduce the books in every home." (Room Conversation, Bhuvanesvara, January 29, 1977)

But Srila Prabhupada did not want devotees to only distribute his books; he often stressed the importance for devotees to study his books both regularly and scrutinizingly: "GBC member means they will see that in every temple these books are very thoroughly being read and discussed and understood and applied in practical life." (Lecture on *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.9.3, Melbourne, April 5, 1972) Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "Your first job should be to make sure that every one of the devotees in your zone of management is reading regularly our literatures and discussing the subject matter seriously from different angles of seeing, and that they are somehow or other absorbing the knowledge of Krishna Consciousness philosophy." (Letter to Satsvarupa, June 16, 1972) To another member of the GBC, Srila Prabhupada wrote: "[Y]ou all leaders, especially the GBC members, must become very much responsible and do the work that I am doing to the same standard. So I want you leaders especially to become very much absorbed in the philosophy of Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, and become yourselves completely convinced and free from all doubt. On this platform you shall be able to carry on the work satisfactorily, but if there is lack of knowledge, or if there is forgetfulness, everything will be spoiled in time. So especially you must encourage the students to read our books throughout the day as much as possible, and give them all good advice how to understand the books, and inspire them to study the things from every point of view . . . Now we have got so many students and so many temples but I am fearful that if we expand too much in this way that we shall become weakened and gradually the whole thing will become lost. Just like milk. We may thin it more and more with water for cheating the customer, but in the end it will cease to be any longer milk. Better to boil the milk now very vigorously and make it thick and sweet, that is the best process. So let us concentrate on training our devotees very thoroughly in the knowledge of Krishna Consciousness from our books, from tapes, by discussing always, and in so

many ways instruct them in the right propositions." (Letter to Hamsaduta, June 22, 1972)

Configuring Zones and Assigning Overseers

Planning for the whole world includes designing zones, redesigning those zones as the need arises, and appointing responsible zonal officers. Srila Prabhupada delineated some of the principles of zonal configuration and zonal assignments in a meeting with the GBC in Los Angeles:

Prabhupada: So, fix up the zone . . . Take this, take this map. First of all find out the zone, what will be the zone . . . First of all divide the whole world. It doesn't matter who goes where . . . Divide the whole world into twelve parts. That is first . . . I want to divide it in twelve zones. And we have to make more propaganda throughout the whole world. Now if you think that the world is so big, twelve members are insufficient, then you can increase more than that and make the zone similarly divided. It is world affair after all . . . You can increase the number. So according to vacant position, how many, it may be fifteen?

Devotee: Thirteen.

Prabhupada: Why not fifteen, make fifteen? . . . Then you have to reorganize the zones, fifteen zones.

Rupanuga: This is much better if we're actually expanding.

Prabhupada: Yes, we must expand, we must expand. Now the framework of expansion is done by me, but this, they should be solidified. Just like your skyscraper building. The framework is done then they are made nicely air-conditioned and covered by glass . . . It makes a nice house. Similarly, so far the framework is done. I have done with your help. Now we have to push this movement.

– Conversation with the GBC, Los Angeles, May 25, 1972

And from a 1979 GBC resolution: Srila Prabhupada instructed "that GBC men may have thousands of secretaries."

Resourcing ISKCON Global Services

Srila Prabhupada wrote: "I have formed this GBC for that purpose, to keep the devotional standards at the highest level and at the same time to manage a world-wide

organization." (Letter to Rupanuga, November 4, 1970) Although most management takes place locally, a number of global functions for which the GBC is responsible need funding and staffing for effective operation. As Srila Prabhupada explains in the *Bhagavad-gita* (12.10, purport): "Every endeavor requires land, capital, organization, and labor. Just as in business one requires a place to stay, some capital to use, some labor, and some organization to expand, so the same is required in the service of Krishna."

And the same is required for the various global services the GBC offers to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness: the various Ministries that offer consultation and training to individual members and groups, the Child Protection Office, ISKCON Resolve, and for legal expenses, communication, ISKCON's internet presence, covering the administrative budget, third-world emergencies… and the list goes on. GBC members themselves need maintenance and travel expenses at times. As Srila Prabhupada said: "Intelligence alone cannot work. Money is required . . . Simple capital will not do. Simple organization will not do. A man may have very good brain power, organization, but if he has no money – useless." (Room Conversation, Hyderabad, August 19, 1976)

Therefore it is the GBC's duty to find ways to resource its service of governing the worldwide organization. This is an example of a crucial global function about which Srila Prabhupada might not have spoken much but which is clearly important in today's ISKCON.

Maintaining the Principle of Unity in Diversity

Srila Prabhupada wrote: "Now this displeasing of godbrothers has already begun and gives me too much agitation in my mind. Our Gaudiya Math people fought with one another after the demise of Guru Maharaja but my disciples have already begun fighting even in my presence. So I am greatly concerned about it . . . Material nature means dissension and disagreement, especially in this Kali yuga. But, for this Krsna consciousness movement its success will depend on agreement, even though there are varieties of engagements. In the material world there are varieties, but there is no agreement. In the spiritual world there are varieties, but there is agreement. That is the difference. The materialist without being able to adjust the varieties and the disagreements makes everything zero. They cannot come into agreement with varieties, but if we keep Krsna in the center, then there will be agreement in varieties.

This is called unity in diversity. I am therefore suggesting that all our men meet in Mayapur every year during the birth anniversary of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. With all GBC and senior men present we should discuss how to make unity in diversity. But, if we fight on account of diversity, then it is simply the material platform. Please try to maintain the philosophy of unity in diversity. That will make our movement successful." (Letter to Kirtanananda, October 18, 1973)

The exhortation to discuss unity in diversity "every year" shows how crucial this topic is, and the instruction to discuss it collectively – "all our men . . . all GBC and senior men" – shows the need for ongoing dialogue between the GBC and other senior ISKCON spiritual leaders to find harmony and collaboration. An example of this partnership was shown when, still in Srila Prabhupada's physical presence, the GBC formally received feedback on its resolutions from the temple presidents:

Satsvarupa: After all the days' meetings of the GBC are finished, then we'll have a meeting of the temple presidents. If, at their meeting, by a two-thirds majority vote, they suggest any amendments to the resolutions or make new resolutions, these will be sent back to the GBC, who will meet again and who will again vote.

Tamal Krishna: The presidents will meet and they will give any changes to the GBC, and on the afternoon of the fourth the GBC will consider all changes.

Prabhupada: Decide. Decide.

Tamal Krishna: And that will be the end of the meeting.

Prabhupada: That's all right.

– Room Conversation on GBC Resolutions, Mayapur, March 1, 1977

Implementing unity in diversity requires maintaining the delicate balance between the need of the Society to conserve its fundamental principles and practices, and the need to encourage creativity, individuality, and innovation. Another application of unity in diversity manifests in the variety of approaches in preaching in which the message remains authentic and undiluted but the form may be inspired by local situations, environments, and the individuality of the preachers.

Protecting the Reputation & Ensuring the Endurance of ISKCON

The GBC has to coordinate worldwide efforts when needed, in emergencies, just as Srila Prabhupada did, for example in this circular letter addressed to all temple presidents: "Recently in Germany the government, police and church have started heavy persecution against our movement by arrests, investigation, and blocking our monies in the bank. By unfair and slanderous newspaper and television propaganda, they have ruined our reputation and turned the general public against our movement. We cannot sit down and be idle. Even killing of our devotees has been attempted in Berlin by shooting. Hamsaduta prabhu has formulated a plan for protesting at all German Embassies all over the world. This plan has my sanction. He will be contacting you in this connection. Please co-operate with him fully." (Letter to all temple presidents, February 6, 1975)

Protecting ISKCON involves preventing or stopping unethical or disreputable activities at all levels of the organization: "Regarding the controversy about book distribution techniques, you are right. Our occupation must be honest. Everyone should adore our members as honest. If we do something which is deteriorating to the popular sentiments of the public in favor of our movement, that is not good. Somehow or other we should not become unpopular in the public eye. These dishonest methods must be stopped. It is hampering our reputation all over the world." (Letter to Rupanuga, January 9, 1975)

The GBC should ensure that all representatives of ISKCON interact properly with the public:

Interviewer: How would I recognize a true follower of the Krishna consciousness movement – by his behavior?

Prabhupada: Yes. His behavior. He's a perfect gentleman.

– Television interview, Gainesville, July 29, 1971)

Srila Prabhupada expressed in the pages of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (10.3.23, purport) his own protective feelings about ISKCON: "Devaki and her husband, Vasudeva, were assured that their child was the Supreme Personality of Godhead and could not be killed by Kamsa, but because of affection, as they thought of Kamsa's previous atrocities, they were simultaneously afraid that Krsna would be killed. This is why the word *suvismita* has been used. Similarly, we are also astounded upon thinking of whether this movement will be killed by the *asuras* or will continue to advance without fear."

Although this apprehension should be shared by all members of ISKCON, the GBC is ultimately responsible to protect the movement from internal and external threats.

Ensuring Accountability among Its Commissioners and throughout the Society

Three months after establishing the GBC, Srila Prabhupada wrote: "Formerly I issued one circular letter requesting all GBC members who are zonal secretaries also, to give me a fortnightly report of the activities in his jurisdiction, but I am not receiving. I've received no letter since a very long time from Karandhara, and I'm very interested to know how things are going in L.A. We have a great responsibility to pay $2,000. monthly to the church trustees." (Letter to Rupanuga, October 28, 1970) Srila Prabhupada acted as overseer of the (then) twelve GBC members and was expecting regular reports of their zonal work. In his physical absence, the GBC should ensure that its commissioners and Zonal Secretaries fulfill their obligations and appropriately supervise and develop their zones, that its Ministers fulfill their mandates, etc.

Preventing neglect and entropy requires constant vigilance. Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "You mention that you are no longer much occupied with seeing that the rent and mortgage is paid and that the incense is sold, but GBC means to be occupied with everything in the zone. It is not that now we are preachers we can neglect all other points. No, the GBC member is supposed to know everything and anything about the condition and situation of all matters within his jurisdiction. That is the meaning of secretary. So because we are engaged in many fields of activity I am especially relying upon that knowledge of my GBC assistants and secretaries to manage everything properly. But if we do not take time to understand how the financial matters are going on, then at any moment we may experience some calamity due to our inattention to these matters. Therefore, you should try to keep yourself always informed how the financial matters are improving and keep your watchful eye on every feature of our Krishna Consciousness activity. That is also part of preaching work. I am also preaching daily. But I am at the same time managing everything, seeing the statements of accounts, going to the bank, giving advice on every topic, like that. Just now I have purchased one apartment house with seven apartments just adjacent to the L.A. temple and very soon we shall invest in similar properties. So practically there is no question of my neglecting the financial matters of the society, and similarly, you shall do as I am doing. That is your real business." (Letter to Satsvarupa, July 1, 1972)

Therefore Srila Prabhupada established the system of temple presidents regularly reporting to their GBC Zonal Secretaries: "In his last GBC report, Rupanuga Maharaja wrote that you are delinquent in sending him regular reports. The system of

temple presidents sending twice monthly reports to the GBC was devised by me to facilitate my receiving news of all the centers through the GBC. You are free to write me directly when the occasion arises, but do not neglect to send regular reports to Rupanuga Maharaja." (Letter to Trai, February 1, 1974)

Of course, only the most important data and issues should come to the attention of the whole Governing Body Commission, but the Body should maintain a general awareness of what's going on and verify that its representatives systematically oversee all aspects of the movement. Srila Prabhupada wanted to institute a culture of accountability and transparency, especially in regard to finances: "I am glad that you have admitted about the GBC members not very appropriately discharging their duty. I do not mind this discrepancy but you should be alert; you and all GBC members. We are now growing in volume all over the world dealing with public money. People have respect for our movement. Now it is time for GBC members to be very very careful . . . So far you are concerned, being the zonal secretary of that quarter of the world, your duty is to see that all our different centers within your jurisdiction must be going very accurately. The accounts are not being kept very scientifically . . . I have seen the rough trial balance in which it is stated that about Rs 13,000/- was spent for travelling expenditure. Of course you are all sons of big rich Americans so it may not be very big amount for you but we poor Indians, to us it is a shocking amount." (Letter to Tamal Krishna, September 1, 1971)

Cooperating with the BBT

In the document establishing the GBC, Srila Prabhupada wrote: "So far my books are concerned, I am setting up a different body of management known as the BHAKTIVEDANTA BOOK TRUST. The trustees of this body are also members of the GBC, but their function is not dependent on the GBC." (Direction of Management, July 28, 1970) The next day, in the BBT founding document, Srila Prabhupada described that the BBT and ISKCON were indissolubly connected but legally separated: "PURPOSE OF TRUST – This trust is created and shall be operated exclusively for the benefit of the INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS . . . This trust shall exist independently of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the Trustees' functions and duties stated herein shall be separate and not dependent on the Governing Body Commission of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness . . . TERM OF TRUST – This trust shall be irrevocable. In the event of . . . dissolution of the trust, the entire Trust Fund shall, in that event, be distributed to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness."

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member, explaining the rationale for the legal separation between the two entities: "You say that the lawyer suggests that BBT be a satellite organ of ISKCON, but does that mean that BBT is separate from ISKCON or not? Ramesvara gives the hint that ISKCON may go into liquidation. I cannot think of it. But, anyway, I cannot at any cost risk BBT if ISKCON goes into liquidation. Why risk the BBT by amalgamating it into ISKCON? Therefore I want to keep BBT separate." (Letter to Hamsaduta, December 8, 1974) A few months later, in a conversation with the GBC in Mayapur, Srila Prabhupada reiterated the need for legal separation between the BBT and ISKCON/the GBC, clarifying their working relationship:

Prabhupada: If the ISKCON goes to liquidation, then the BBT also will be affected.

Atreya Rsi: This is only a legal matter.

Prabhupada: Legal matter. So I want to protect BBT –

Tamal Krishna: Now, another point is, which we have put off until this meeting, especially to be considered in this meeting, is the moving of the Press. The moving of ISKCON Press. Is that –

Prabhupada: That you decide amongst the GBC.

Tamal Krishna: Is that a GBC matter or BBT matter?

Prabhupada: No. It is GBC, er, yeah, GBC.

Tamal Krishna: The GBC.

Prabhupada: Yes. I want to see, as the chairman of the BBT, that fifty percent is spent on printing and fifty percent is for constructing temples. That's all.

Tamal Krishna: And who sees to that? The GBC?

Prabhupada: Yes.

Tamal Krishna: The GBC.

Prabhupada: Yes.

Tamal Krishna: That means, practically speaking, the management . . . The BBT is separate from ISKCON for legal purposes, but the management of it is done by the GBC.

Prabhupada: Yes. That's nice.

– Conversation with the GBC, Mayapur, March 27, 1975

Srila Prabhupada had made similar statements. For example, in a letter to Jayatirtha dated September 14, 1974, he wrote: "Regarding Ramesvara being made BBT Trustee, I have no objection . . . At the upcoming GBC meeting we shall discuss it further." Later, he wrote: "Yes, someone is definitely required for BBT in New York. We shall decide in our next GBC meeting." (Letter to Hamsaduta, December 8, 1974)

This function of collaboration includes ensuring that temples pay their debts to the BBT. For instance, a letter to "GBC Godbrothers" signed by four GBC members reveals: "Srila Prabhupada is concerned that so many temples have got big debts to the BBT and he wants that the GBC take a very active interest in seeing that these debts are paid as soon as possible. He was very strong on this point and went so far as to say that temple presidents who do not keep up with their BBT payments must be replaced." (Letter from Hamsaduta, Gopal Krishna, Kirtanananda, Jayatirtha, February 2, 1975)

Performing Individual Global Duties & Responsibilities

On May 28, 1977, in Vrindavan, the GBC met with Srila Prabhupada and asked him specific questions regarding the movement's future. The first question was about GBC tenure:

Satsvarupa: Our first question is about the GBC members. We want to know how long should they remain in office?

Prabhupada: They should remain for good.

Tamal Krishna: They should remain for good.

Lifelong appointment emphasizes the solemnity of the assignment while indicating that the person should ideally demonstrate outstanding qualifications and behavior. Later in the same conversation, of his own accord Srila Prabhupada returned to the topic:

Prabhupada: So there is no question of changing GBC.

Satsvarupa: No.

Prabhupada: Rather, one who is competent, he can be selected to act by the board of the GBC . . . They must be all ideal *acarya*-like. In the beginning we have done for working. Now we should be very cautious.

Such a lofty mandate might intimidate and deter potential candidates. Nonetheless, sincerely following the process of devotional service is the essential qualification for being exemplary. Srila Prabhupada wrote in *The Nectar of Instruction* (5, purport): "[O]ne may be found to be very seriously engaged in the service of the Lord and strictly following all the regulative principles, chanting the prescribed number of rounds on *japa* beads and always thinking of how to expand the Krsna consciousness movement. Such a Vaisnava should be accepted as an *uttama-adhikari,* a highly advanced devotee."

The spiritual qualification to serve as a member of the GBC, therefore, isn't some extraordinarily elevated inner realization but tangible following. As Srila Prabhupada wrote in his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.18.15: "This Krsna consciousness movement directly receives instructions from the Supreme Personality of Godhead via persons who are strictly following His instructions. Although a follower may not be a liberated person, if he follows the supreme, liberated Personality of Godhead, his actions are naturally liberated from the contamination of the material nature."

The objective of every GBC member is to make the GBC body stronger and more effective in the execution of its global duties. This document focuses on the global aspects of the GBC members' service. Although supervising one's zone is, of course, an essential responsibility of most GBC members', for the GBC body to properly fulfill its function in ISKCON, each GBC member must properly execute both zonal and global duties. The GBC as a group can only be effective if each of its members is effective in:

- Contributing concretely to the global work of the GBC, according to his or her skills and natures.
- Participating actively during and between meetings, including in committee work.
- Abiding by the GBC Code of Honor.
- Cooperating with one another with the aim to benefit ISKCON.

- Representing the GBC properly.
- Implementing the GBC's decisions, even those with which one might not fully agree.
- Optimizing the use of technology for communication and interaction with one another and the ISKCON world.
- Doing his or her homework – reading documents in advance of deliberations, for example.
- Protecting and building the GBC reputation and legal position.
- Being exemplary devotees.

In conclusion, Srila Prabhupada always stressed purity of purpose and of motivation as an essential ingredient for serving as a Governing Body Commissioner. Srila Prabhupada wrote to a GBC member: "It is good that you GBC members are meeting and conjointly discussing such things as life membership, book distribution, etc. The future hope of solid standing of our mission is on the proper management of our governing body. Now we are increasing in volume. The area of our activity is expanding. Under the circumstances, if our management goes on nicely to maintain our prestige and good name, that will be our success. Such status quo can be maintained only on our being freed from any kind of sense gratifying attitude, because pure devotional service means: anya avhilasita sunya or without any other desire than to satisfy Krishna." (Letter to Bhagavan, February 16, 1971)