ISKCON International Office of Education

founder-acarya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada
route 2 Box 23A Alachua, FL 32615 ph (904) 462-5248 fax (904) 462-5153

Final Directive Concerning the Vrindavan Corporal Punishment Investigation

a joint statement by the GBC Executive Committee and the ISKCON International Office of Education

Preface

In May 1995 the GBC executive committee members and the director of the International Office of Education received a letter signed by 16 Vrindavan gurukula alumni alleging that Gauri dasa parbhu, Vrindavan gurukula asrama director, beat 3 students with a stick in April 1995. Further allegations against Gauri dasa prabhu included regular use of the stick as penal practice, favoritism in dealing with two cases of serious misbehavior, and that the students were living in a fearful, pressured situation. It was also alleged that one teacher would leave if Gauri dasa prabhu wasn't removed.

At a meeting in May, the chairman of the GBC, the director of the Office of Education, and a representative of the Vrindavan school administration met and took two immediate actions: 1) suspending all corporal punishment in the Vrindavan school; 2) appointing a 4-man committee, consisting of His Holiness Kavicandra Maharaja and their graces Jaya Srila, Braja Bihari, and Panca Gauda prabhus to investigate the allegations. The investigation committee spent between 3 and 4 weeks in Vrndavana and then issued their final report and recommendations to the GBC executive committee and Office of Education. In additiona, Murali Vadaka prabhu, director of the Office of Education, interviewed Dhanurdhara Swami, principal of the school; Bhurijana prabhu, GBC representative for Vrndavan; Tosan Krsna prabhu, former GBC representative for Vrndavana and former principal of the school. He also interviewed five parents of students, present and former, including [redacted] prabhu, father of one of the boys allegedly beaten. This directive is based on the report of the investigating committee as well as the interviews conducted.

Investigation Results

1. Gauri dasa prabhu used a stick to administer corporal punishment to 3 students.
   a. Gauri dasa prabhu openly admitted this.
   b. Each student was struck twice on the backside.
      i. The punishment was given in a controlled and non-angry way.
   c. The Vrndavan Child Protection Team investigated the incident.
      i. Only 2 of the 3 members were present at the time, and they were harried due to other responsibilities.
      ii. Gauri dasa prabhu was reprimanded for it and told not to use the stick again.
      iii. The incident was not reported to the International Office of Education.
   d. Gauri dasa acted independently in choosing to use this punishment.
      i. The school has a clear policy on punishment in general and corporal punishment in particular.
      ii. The only allowable corporal punishment is a slap to the face.

2. Gauri dasa prabhu has used a stick about 5 or 6 times in the last 5 years.
   a. Again, as an independent decision without consulting any other teachers or school authorities.

3. The two cases of serious (sexual) misbehavior, in 1991 and 1994, were handled differently.
   a. The situations merited different reactions.
   b. Mother Yasoda was not available for consultation in the earlier case.
   c. She was contacted in the second one and her recommendations played a significant role in dealing with it.
   d. Neither case was reported to the International Office of Education.

4. It was not a fact that a teacher was going to leave if Gauri dasa prabhu was allowed to stay.

a. The teacher, Atanu prabhu, was only committed to staying for a short time.
b. He had already made plans to leave before this incident.

5. There was no indication at all, either through the investigation or by the interviews with devotees involved in various ways with the school, that gurukula students are functioning under fearful, pressured conditions.

Conclusions

1. Gauri dasa prabhu and the use of a stick in administering corporal punishment.

This was not as much an issue of corporal punishment of its misuse, as it was of Gauri dasa prabhu's lack of discretion in acting independently of Srila Prabhupada's stated directions, the well-enunciated school policies on punishment, and of the traditional vaisnava method of receiving sanction for altering, or obtaining an exception to, a clear instruction. As a result of this independent action, improper corporal punishment was applied. The incidents with the stick were clearly not cases of beating students. Furthermore, there is no indication that the right to administer corporal punishment was being abused in any violent, uncontrolled, or excessive way, by the school personnel in general, or Gauri dasa prabhu in particular. It is also clear from the investigation report, discussions with his past and present authorities, and the written statements of his colleagues, that in spite of this transgression, Gauri dasa prabhu is a well-respected, competent member of the school's teaching staff. Braja Bihari prabhu has also reported that in his post investigation discussions with Gauri dasa prabhu, Gauri dasa prabhu was both humble and repentant.

2. The Child Protection Team

The stick incident caught the CPT in a weakened condition, having only two of its members present to deal with it, and both those members were overburdened with other responsibilities. In discharging its duties, the CPT fell short in an important area; informing the International Education Office. This general principle was established by the 1990 GBC resolution on child abuse, and in terms of the special international nature of the Vrindavan gurukula, reiterated by a 1991 resolution and by a letter dated October 7, 1991, to Braja Bihari prabhu, then Arjuna prabhu, from Sri Rama prabhu, who was the chairman of the ISKCON Board of Education at the time. In addition, the efficacy of the CPT consisting solely of school personnel must be seriously examined.

3. The School Administration

Although, from one point of view, the actual "stick incident" was not as serious as initially thought, it has revealed a problem that must be addressed; the administration was apparently unaware that for a period of 5 years one of the main teachers had independently chosen to alter the standard for corporal punishment.

4. If possible, Gauri dasa prabhu should spend some part of the 1996 summer associated with senior educators, especially those experienced in dealing with older boys.

5. Steps should be immediately taken to alter the makeup of the CPT so that there are an equal amount (or a majority) of non-school personnel on the committee. Any members chosen must be senior, mature devotees who have the respect of the teachers, the students, and all members of the Vrindavana community. The CPT members must clearly understand their responsibility to send written reports on any incidents brought before them to the International Office of Education of the appropriate agency as indicated by the GBC body.

6. The Vrindavan School should be prepared to submit, by the upcoming Mayapura meetings, to the GBC, or its designated representative, the following items:
   a. A policy statement that deals with discipline and other areas of student life.
   b. An initial draft of "statement of purpose" and "goals" for the school
   c. An initial draft of policies on teach training, supervision, and evaluation.

7. The Vrindavan school should also submit, at Mayapura, a list of ways the GBC body, the Board of Education, and the International Office of Education can help in the progressive development of that school.

Final Comments

When all is said and done, the incident that sparked the investigation and this directive has revealed several positive things. The first is that the alumni are sensitive and conscientious enough to both be concerned with the school

and to follow proper ISKCON vaisnava etiquette in raising questions they had about the school's operation. The second is that the ISKCON authorities, both internationally and locally in the school itself, were responsive to the concerns raised, took them seriously, and moved forward to resolve any problems found to exist. The third is that judging by the relative degree of impropriety in this incident, ti is apparent that the Vrindavan school has made very significant strides forward over the last half a decade to eliminate the problems of the past and have begun building the kind of first-class educational institution Srila Prabhupada envisioned there. For this, all the dedicated teachers and administrators of the Vrndavan school deserve our heartfelt gratitude and support.

As mentioned previously it is apparent that some of the problems that affect the Vrndavan school are beyond the scope of this directive. The ability to educate the students as their "varnic" nature manifests, i.e. the methods of training, the diverse facilities and staff necessary to accomplish this, is a serious concern that will require much discussion, preparation, and the development of a broad vision. An important first step will be the drafting of a "Statement of Purpose" and "Goals" by the Vrndavan school.

This incident also revealed a certain lack of communication and a concomitant lack of faith and trust between experienced educators and our society's leadership. It is therefore recommended that Bhurijana prabhu, the chairman of the GBC subcommittee on education, and Murali Vadaka prabhu, director of the Internation Office of Education, formulate a proposal for a means of communication between the educational system and the GBC that will simultaneously recognize the expertise of our experienced educators and the need for the involvement of the leadership in our educational system. This proposal should be submitted to the GBC in Mayapura 1996.