Subj: Re: case processing
Date: Friday, April 7, 2000 11:36:51 AM
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April 6, 2000

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

Bhakti Vikas Maharaja wrote "BVP Maharaja's being removed from his role in the Mayapur 'older student's'
gurukul and forbidding him from lecturing in Iskcon centers in no way benefits either those who have been abused or anybody else."

Based on my experience with hundreds of victims of child abuse, and their parents, and dealing with well over a hundred cases of child abuse connected with ISKCON, I'd say that the above statement is not accurate. In asserting this I am not commenting on the validity or lack of it of the allegations against Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja. Rather, I am commenting on the apparent presumption in the statement that, if a devotee was responsible for child abuse in the past, then restrictions as described above do not benefit anyone. There are many child abusers connected with ISKCON, and the official decisions of the Child Protection Office have often restricted such persons, at least for some time, from giving class, leading kirtana, and assuming other services that imply leadership. In many cases these devotees are adept at giving Srimad-Bhagavatam class, leading inspiring kirtanas, etc. What happens when someone who was abused by the person walks into a Hare Krsna temple and there on the

vyasa-sana is the person who did the abusing? Or a devotee walks into the temple, perhaps for the first time in a long time, and the person leading the kirtana is the very same person who abused the visitor when the visitor was a child in gurukula? I spend lots of time dealing with young adults who were abused, and their parents and friends, who contact me to describe such situations, and the pain and suffering it causes them, what to speak of the destruction of whatever tiny shred of faith they may still have in the ISKCON organization. Conversely, when the abusing devotee is restricted (for at least some time, commensurate with the degree, duration, and extent of the abuse) from such leadership services, it sends a message that the organization is sensitive to those who suffered child abuse while under the care of the organization, and that we don't advocate child abusers taking leadership positions, and it lends some integrity to the organization.

I recall one letter that I received from a mataji more than a year ago. In the letter she described a recent incident wherein she walked into an ISKCON temple and witnessed a known child abuser leading a kirtana. For her this was the last straw, and pushed her over the edge to make the decision to no longer have any connection with the ISKCON organization. She is the mother of children and decided that an organization that is so insensitive and callous does not deserve her support.

I'm not commenting here whether such restrictions should apply in the case of Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja. I'm only commenting on the fact that there is benefit to such restrictions for some, and perhaps many, in at least some cases.

Whatever restrictions the Child Protection Office may impose on a child abuser, we expect that it's understood that, no matter how severe the abuse was, we hope and pray that the abuser continues to perform devotional service and contribute to the sankirtana mission. Whatever restrictions may be imposed, there are still a multitude of ways for the devotee to serve Srila Prabhupada's mission. But it is not the direct service of the Child Protection Office to enumerate those ways, or to direct the devotee as to what sort of service to perform. It is one of the services of the Child Protection Office to define restrictions. Still, we've now added a paragraph such as the following to the official decisions:

"This Official Decision describes restrictions and recommendations concerning []. It is of course understood that devotional service is the ultimate and primary means for purification and rectification. [] has shown himself to be a dedicated servant of Srila Prabhupada's mission, and ISKCON and the ICOCP would like that he continue to serve this mission within the organization within the parameters outlined herein. Within these parameters there are a multitude of ways in which [] can contribute to the sankirtana movement."

The decisions could include statements such as "The Child Protection Office encourages [] to chant 16 rounds per day and encourage others to do so, and to regularly study Srila Prabhupada's books, and distribute prasadam, and hold home programs, ..." but, as stated above, such support to perform devotional service is implied in the decisions.

So, even if Bhakt Vidya Purna Maharaja were to be restricted in the ways discussed at the Feb. 17 meeting (and as of now he has not been restricted in any way by the Child Protection Office), he could still, by so many means, provide spritual guidance and inspiration to those who seek it.

Bhakti Vikas Maharaja wrote "Why single him out for punishment? Why not punish the local GBC,
i.e. Jayapataka Maharaja, in the same way? Is he not equally responsible?"

These are very important points for discussion. The ISKCON Child Protection Task Force Report defines a type of child maltreatment called neglect of supervision. Although there are also accusations of other types of more direct child abuse in the cases of Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja and Dhanurdhara Maharaja, neglect of supervision is a primary element in the allegations of these cases. Since these two cases have, from the opening of the Child Protection Office, been placed on the docket for the CPO to address, and since neglect of supervision is a type of child maltreatment defined in the Task Force Report, the CPO assumed that the GBC wants the Office to resolve these cases according to the parameters of the Task Force Report, including the accusations of neglect of supervision. Some are implying that although neglect of supervision may be a type of child maltreatment, the one who is culpable should not be restricted (perhaps, especially, if they are sannyasis) in ways such as being restricted from giving Srimad-Bhagavatam class. If the GBC wants to impose such constraints on the consequences for various types of transgressions, the Child Protection Office will of course abide by those boundaries, though not necessarily understanding the logic behind them. (It could be argued that for the extent of neglect of child supervision in some of the cases we have, some governments would put people in prison, and therefore it may be perceived as curious why ISKCON is mortified at the thought of restricting the neglecter from giving Srimad-Bhagavatam class.) Also, if the GBC wants to define the constraints on imposed restrictions, then the need to even give such cases to the CPO is questionable. That is, let the GBC resolve the cases itself.

Regarding the case of Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja, the CPO has received several responses from GBCs indicating dissatisfaction, even outrage, at the processes and course of discussions of this case. I can understand the affections from which these objections derive, though I do not see a rational basis for them with regards to the GBC mandate from which the CPO was established, or with regards to the facts of the case file. Of course I understand that the commentators are not familiar with the entirety of the case file, and they are trying their best to give valuable input based on what they've heard from here and there (Often the comments I read seem to assume too much about what happened or didn't happen, what Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja knew or didn't know).

Still, I take seriously the many and vehement protests from the senior Vaisnavas. Therefore, the CPO has put this case on hold until it receives a letter from the GBC Executive Committee stating that the GBC is satisfied with the way the Office has handled the case of Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja and stating that the GBC requests the CPO to continue processing the case till completion. Or, the CPO will contine to process the case when it receives a letter from the GBC Executive Committee that defines the shortcomings of the CPO intervention thus far in this case, as well as a prescribed course for rectification, and a stipulation that if the rectification is achieved then the CPO should continue to process the case.

Apart from this particular case, I think it's a good idea if the GBC provides some formal evaluation for the entirety of the CPO functioning. When I signed the contract to do the service of director of the CPO, more than two years ago, I deliberately required that the contract include a yearly evaluation for the CPO, so that I know how I'm doing, rather than hear innuendo, partially informed opinion, and rumor. I am always open to hear suggestions as to how the CPO can be more effective.

There is also the question of neglect of supervision that is indirect. That is, whether and to what extent the authority of the authority is responsible for the children who were abused. The CPO has received many pressured requests from many sources, urging that the Office must deal with the cases of everyone who was in authority positions at the time of the extensive abuse. This would include several devotees who currently retain ISKCON leadership positions. I believe that it is important for the integrity of ISKCON to responsibly deal with these cases. However, I don't think it's the best idea for the Child Protection Office to handle these situations. Rather, and this may be unrealistically ideal, the GBC should deal with these situations directly. It is questionable whether the GBC gives its full mandate for the CPO to even deal with cases of direct neglect of supervision (e.g., the cases of Dhanurdhara Maharaja and Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja), what to speak of cases a step or few removed. Without a clear and strong mandate, there is no point in the CPO getting into these cases. Also, the nature of the cases themselves are inherently amorphous, even more so than the typical physical or sexual abuse cases the Office adjudicates. These neglect of supervision cases concern how much someone knew, what was said, what was perceived to be said (since almost nothing is in writing, this involves retrospective interviews asking the interviewee to remember a statement that was heard, perhaps second hand, 19 years ago), what response was given or perceived to be given, all in the context of what was understood about child abuse at the time of the events. So, especially considering the doubtful authority given to the CPO by the GBC to deal with cases such as this, especially when they involve GBCs or close friends of GBCs, I believe that taking on these cases would simply involve the CPO in unnecessary disputes and distract the office from effeciently performing other services, such as adjudicating relatively non-controversial cases, processing grants for abused children, and helping ISKCON temples and schools to establish child protection systems. I think it might be advisable for the GBC to deal with these situations as an administrative issue. For example, it is common in some governments and companies that if there is a major scandal in a department, regardless of how much was known or not known by the director of the department, the director resigns from the position. Or, at the very least, the director takes full accountability for the happenings in the agency (again, regardless of what was known or not known), and offers personal apologies to those who were hurt by the misconduct.

Srila Prabhupada has made many statements similar to the following (SB 3:16:10 purport):

"Those who are helpless must be taken care of by their respective guardians, otherwise the guardians will be subjected to the punishment of Yamaraja, who is appointed by the Lord to supervise the activities of sinful living creatures. The assistants, or messengers, of Yamaraja are

likened here to vultures, and those who do not execute their respective duties in protecting their wards are compared to serpents. Vultures deal very seriously with serpents, and similarly the messengers will deal very seriously with neglectful guardians."

I believe that to some extent we have adopted the mentality that the above purport does not apply to us as guardians, because no matter how negligent we may appear to be, we are practicing a transcendental process and are therefore transcendental to punishment by Yamaraja and vultures, and all such unpleasant consequences. Individually, some of us may or may not be transcendental, but as far as the message that the organization sends to the society of devotees as well as the larger society (keeping in mind that the vast majority of both of these societies decidedly does not consider ISKCON leaders to be transcendental to much of anything), ISKCON leaders would probably be well served if they acted as if they were subject to ordinary laws. Thus some consequences for neglectful guardianship, albeit less severe for more distant instances, should be in place (again, regardless of what is claimed was known or not known).

Concerning the effect of sincere apology, below I include an excerpt of some notes that I took from a conversation I had with a gurukula veteran. This young devotee considers himself an ISKCON supporter, practices some Krsna consciousness, and is against suing the movement. Still, he had an extremely rough time growing up in the movement, was badly abused by many teachers, etc.

"[] remembers a teacher named T, who was an asrama teacher when [] was in .... T beat [] badly many times. But [] has fond memories and these incidents are resolved for him because a few years ago T, who had left the Hare Krsna movement, contacted [] and made a heartfelt apology to him. T had no excuses but made a sincere apology, and therefore [] can put the incidents with T behind him, but not so with the incidents involving the other teachers, because they haven't apologized. [] and I discussed for a while that in most cases this is all that is needed. The gurukula veterans want to be heard, and to hear genuine apologies. This would take care of most of the problem. [] emphasized that even if the apologies were not from those who directly did the abusing, but from someone who was in the line of authority (and who in many cases continues to hold an authority position), the former students would feel much satisfaction and relief, as did [] in the case of T."

I understand that apologies from persons in authority may pose legal risks, because a real apology includes acknowlegement of what happened and taking responsibilty for it, and I won't attempt to enter into the nuances of that discussion here, except to mention that an apology that is too legalistic in spirit and word often does more harm than good. From the standpoint of the integrity of the institution, as well as the therapeutic benefit to those who suffered abuse when they were children under the care of ISKCON, and to the ISKCON society itself, it is very important that the leaders, past and present, take full responsibilty for the mistakes and suffering of the past.

This point of leaders taking responsibility was briefly addressed in the Official Decision on the case of Satadhanya. In that decision the CPO recommended that ISKCON Mayapur take some responsibility for the abuse suffered by Satadhanya's child sexual abuse victims, and specific recommendations for how this responsibility could be expressed were given in the decision. If ISKCON Mayapur (and some of the leaders in Mayapur were in responsible positions at the time when Satadhanya was abusing children, and some weren't) accepts these recommendations I believe it will be a very good example for the rest of the ISKCON society.

I've made the point before that the general tenor of comments from GBCs are that the official decisions of the CPO are too heavy on the perpetrators, and the general tenor of comments from

other devotees (including temple presidents, senior devotees, new devotees, gurukula veterans, parents, etc.) is that the decisions tend to be too light on the perpetrators. Nowhere is this dynamic more evident than in the case of Dhanurdhara Maharaja. Amongst the various criticisms that the CPO has received concening this case (and the CPO has also received many compliments- in fact mostly compliments- on this as well as its other decisions. So this isn't about complaining that the office is receiving criticism), the one that I find most valid is that Dhanurdhara Maharaja is being used as a scapegoat. Similar criticisms are being leveled concerning the processing of the case of Bhakti Vidya Purna Maharaja. I don't believe that either of these Maharajas are being scapegoated, in the sense that their cases, in terms of internal consistency and due process, have been dealt with fairly and justly. However, the perception that they are being scapegoated is valid if ISKCON does not responsibly deal with the cases of others who were in the line of authority when and where extensive child abuse occurred.

Hare Krsna.

Your servant,

Dhira Govinda dasa