ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (ICOCP)

P.O. Box 1438, Alachua, Florida, USA 32616-1438

Tel. (904) 418-0882 • Fax: (904) 418-0982 • E-mail: dgovinda@aol.com

Official Decision on the Case of Dhanurdhara Maharaja

October 28, 1999

I. Procedural History of this Case

In 1986, largely as a result of complaints about child abuse in the Vrndavana gurukula, Dhanurdhara Maharaja resigned his position as principal of the school, a post that he held since 1979. In 1989, on the request of the GBC, Dhanurdhara Maharaja reassumed his role as principal of the school. In the early 1990s Dhanurdhara Maharaja wrote a letter of apology to former students of the Vrndavana gurukula, acknowledging some of the mistakes he made during his first tenure as principal.

In November, 1995, Dhanurdhara Maharaja met with several Vrndavana gurukula alumni in Los Angeles, and they discussed incidents of child abuse and mistreatment that occurred in the Vrndavana gurukula under the supervision of Dhanurdhara Maharaja.

In December, 1995, Dhanurdhara Maharaja submitted his letter of resignation from the gurukula to the Chairman of the GBC. Also at this time Dhanurdhara Maharaja wrote several individual letters of apology to former students who expressed grievances about him. Due to concerns about possible ramifications of these letters, the GBC held these letters in abeyance, without consulting Dhanurdhara Maharaja.

At the 1996 GBC meeting in Mayapur, with Dhanurdhara Maharaja present, the GBC members viewed an edited video of the talks between the former students and Dhanurdhara Swami in Los Angeles. Viewing the video heightened the awareness of events which were alleged to have occurred at the Vrndavana gurukula, and this also tended to politicize the issues.

On July 3, 1996, a committee of the GBC that met with Dhanurdhara Maharaja decided that he could not initiate new disciples, including those who were aspiring to be his disciples at that time, and Dhanurdhara Maharaja complied with this directive. During this meeting the GBC committee also agreed that the GBC will take a stand against any demands for further sanctions made against Dhanurdhara Maharaja.

Despite this agreement, a few weeks after the July 3rd meeting Dhanurdhara Maharaja received a letter from the GBC Chairman stating that he must relocate himself "out of the USA entirely for the next five years...." Shortly after this, however, Dhanurdhara Maharaja was told by a member of the committee who represented the GBC at the July 3rd meeting that he (Dhanurdhara Maharaja) should remain in the United States and preach.

In mid-1997 the Chairman of the North American GBC told Dhanurdhara Maharaja that he should not reside in ISKCON centers, he should cease preaching in ISKCON, and he should submit to a forensic psychological evaluation. Dhanurdhara Maharaja cooperated with these demands.

In April, 1998, the GBC established the ISKCON Central Office of Child Protection (ICOCP). One of the main functions of the ICOCP is to investigate and adjudicate cases of alleged child abuse connected with ISKCON. For the purposes of resolving the case of alleged child abuse against Dhanurdhara Maharaja, a panel of six members was formed. Dhanurdhara Maharaja has been cooperative with this panel and with the procedures of the ICOCP concerning the processing of this case. This panel would like to acknowledge that during the past several years there have been inconsistent and ineffective attempts to address this case and its ramifications. These failed attempts have been the source of pain and frustration for many, including the former students of the Vrndavana gurukula and Dhanurdhara Maharaja.

II. Jurisdiction and Authority of the Panel

This panel is authorized by ISKCON, by dint of the GBC's ratification of the ISKCON Child Protection Task Force Report, to finally resolve all issues concerning Dhanurdhara Maharaja and his conduct as a gurukula principal and teacher. The ISKCON Child Protection Task Force Report provides the authority to investigate, by means determined in the report, allegations, rumors, complaints, and other statements surrounding the treatment of children in ISKCON gurukulas, temples, farms, and other projects.

This determination, issued on October 28, 1999, was rendered in accordance with the guidelines for adjudicating cases of alleged child abuse established by the ISKCON Child Protection Task Force Report and ratified by the ISKCON Governing Body Commission. This judgment is the official decision of the ICOCP on allegations of child abuse against Dhanurdhara Maharaja.

III. Historical Perspectives on the Evidence

The ICOCP has received many testimonies from former gurukula students describing mistreatment they suffered when they were children under the care of ISKCON in the Vrndavana gurukula while Dhanurdhara Maharaja served as principal of the school. From their descriptions, this maltreatment was inflicted directly by Dhanurdhara Maharaja, or by others who were working under the supervision of Dhanurdhara Maharaja. These statements by the former gurukula students refer to the period before 1986, when Dhanurdhara Maharaja served his first tenure as the principal of the Vrndavana gurukula.

This panel herein acknowledges the many years of service that Dhanurdhara Maharaja devoted to gurukula education and to Srila Prabhupada's movement. Dhanurdhara Maharaja served in gurukula education at a time when there were many and extreme environmental hardships that caused immense pressure on all staff members, especially the principal of the school. For example, the Vrndavana gurukula was underfunded and the teachers were inadequately trained. In addition, in the late '70s and early '80s members of ISKCON and society in general were much less aware of child abuse, its effects, and the predatory nature of child abusers. Much of the abuse in the Vrndavana gurukula was a result of this naïveté.

IV. Evidence Presented

A. Dhanurdhara Maharaja's Personal Responsibility as Principal of the Gurukula

While taking into account the above, we must also consider that Dhanurdhara Maharaja is responsible for his actions and decisions. That is, while environmental stressors should be considered a mitigating factor in assessing this case, they do not negate the personal responsibility of Dhanurdhara Maharaja for his behavior. To illustrate this principle, there were other gurukula teachers and administrators subjected to similar circumstances at the same time in ISKCON's history who did not make the same sorts of decisions that resulted in child mistreatment as Dhanurdhara Maharaja. As headmaster of the Vrndavana gurukula, Dhanurdhara Maharaja's responsibility included rooting out any child neglect and abuse, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, that occurred under his supervision. Otherwise there is no meaning to the authority he assumed as principal of the gurukula.

We acknowledge that Dhanurdhara Maharaja attempted to manage the Vrndavana gurukula according to Srila Prabhupada's instructions as he understood them, and he repeatedly has emphasized that he felt he had to protect Srila Prabhupada's standards for gurukula from the influence of others. However, it is also apparent that he not only applied these instructions in many instances without realization, which he readily acknowledges was the source of much of the maltreatment, but also that his choice of which instructions to try to apply was selective.

For instance, Dhanurdhara Maharaja, in his administration and personal conduct, did not emphasize instructions from Srila Prabhupada such as "Encourage them to chant as much japa as possible, but there is no question of force or punishment. If there is need you may shake your finger at them but never physical punishment is allowed" or "Now the thing is, children should not be beaten at all, that I have told. They should simply be shown the stick strongly. So if one cannot manage in that way then he is not fit as teacher. If a child is trained properly in Krishna Consciousness, he will never go away. That means he must have two things, love and education. So if there is beating of child, that will be difficult for him to accept in loving spirit, and when he is old enough he may want to go away--that is the danger. So why these things are going on... marching and chanting japa, insufficient milk, too strict enforcement of time schedules, hitting the small children? Why these things are being imposed? Why they are inventing these such new things like marching...."

While Dhanurdhara Maharaja endeavored to strictly adhere to some of Srila Prabhupada's instructions on gurukula, in many ways he independently did as he desired, without reference to the founder/acarya of ISKCON. For instance, the censoring of mail, the excessive corporal punishment, and the atmosphere of manipulation and intimidation, at the expense of genuine love and kindness towards the children, are contrary to the letter and spirit of Srila Prabhupada's desires. Therefore Dhanurdhara Maharaja is responsible for the choices he made, and for the consequences of those choices.

B. Creating an Atmosphere of Intimidation in the Gurukula

From the testimonies of the former gurukula students, it is clear that the atmosphere in the Vrndavana gurukula was permeated by intimidation and fear. This mood facilitated the mistreatment and abuse of children, and made it prohibitive for children to speak about the abuse. Further, the atmosphere of intimidation militated against rational and productive discussion for the prevention and eradication of child abuse. Dhanurdhara Maharaja, directly and in his managerial capacity, contributed to and was largely responsible for this context of fearfulness that resulted in the emotional and medical neglect and physical, psychological and sexual abuse of many children.

Dhanurdhara Maharaja has expressed realization of and remorse for the terrorizing atmosphere of the school, as well as the role he played in creating it. For example, one former student made the following statement: "In the Vrndavana gurukula we were forbidden to read *Amar Chitra Katha* (Indian comic books). I used to love to read them. So I would buy them in Lohi Bazaar and kept them in a footlocker under my clothes. Other boys would borrow them and we would exchange them. One day, my "crime" was discovered. Dhanurdhara Swami immediately assumed that I had stolen them, despite the thing that my parents sent me small sums of money on a regular basis. He beat me and then ordered me to walk around the gurukula for the rest of the day, sweeping and yelling so everyone could hear. "I am a thief, hari bolo!"

Dhanurdhara Swami's written reply included the following excerpt. "I don't remember punishing [ ] for reading *Amar Chitra* comic books, but it certainly could've happened. We were fanatics. Even watching *Mahabharata* on television became a controversy in the school. I just wish I had deeper realizations about the education of children and wasn't such an impractical purist and fundamentalist."

From the testimonies of former students it is clear that the mood in the school did not facilitate trusting relationships. In this regard Dhanurdhara Maharaja stated "...by stressing a system of education which overly stressed obedience by the students at the expense of developing relationships and communicating with them, I inadvertently created an atmosphere where the children could not open themselves to their teachers, and were therefore prey to exploitation by pedophiles. [ ] Prabhu especially took advantage of this, as he knew that the children wouldn't easily reveal their minds to their teachers."

Concerning intimidation, Dhanurdhara Maharaja stated, "In terms of intimidating the students, I thought that discipline and obedience were essential for gurukula training, and that those students who did not want to surrender their authority to the school to train them, should be afraid to rebel and act independently...I regret that in doing that I lost sight of the objectives of the institution, and that I tried to get the authority exclusively by discipline. I regret that I neglected to spend sufficient time commanding that authority by the power of our character and example."

The morning assemblies in the Vrndavana gurukula were problematic. One former student describes them as follows. "Dhanurdhara would call them up in front of the kids during the assembly... Position the kid in front of him so that they would both be facing the other children. Pull him by the ears, twist the ears and then smack him with both open hands on the ears and cheeks... And he wouldn't only smack once or twice. You never knew how much it would be. It seemed to me, that the more and longer he could talk about it, the more he would smack while talking. During the whole scene, everybody had to stare straight ahead and see what was happening to this boy. And the boy had to just stand there with his hands folded, just like all the others. And if he dared to put his hands up to the side of his head to protect himself, DDS would scream "put your hands down!" And smack him even more... Needless to say, the kid would be crying, and after some smacking would be shuffled towards the other kids and told "go stand back in line!"...

"The only feelings I can remember from such times is extreme fear, and my heart was pounding. I remember feeling pressure and heat rise to my head where I would feel like my eyes would pop out. Sweat would sometimes break out. I would fight back tears. There was an extreme feeling of vulnerability... Nowhere to turn for help, no way to defend yourself. Being all alone in this environment with no end in sight. I would push back memories of these events as soon as the assembly was over. It was the only thing I could do. Anything to take my mind off it... I had my favorite spot towards the middle of the line which was along the right wall, close to where the gong was suspended. I didn't want to be up front, because that would make you the first target in case someone like [ ] got out of control. I can still feel what it was like to have or to witness this..."

In response, Dhanurdhara Maharaja stated "I basically imitated Dr. Sharma and kept up the assemblies without thinking much about the purpose behind it. In my eyes it was a part of an accepted tradition, and it was my duty to follow it. I therefore also used the assemblies, like Dr. Sharma, to intimidate misbehaved children. There was a difference, however, between my use of punishment and his.

"Dr. Sharma's punishment was deep with affection for the children, while my punishment was mixed with a darker side of myself, my ego and my desire for control. It therefore also had a different effect for many of the children, and these children resented my punishment... When I met the alumni in LA, I was very embarrassed by the descriptions of the assemblies. I thought I was a respected authority, but many of the children apparently saw the impurity within me that I had mixed with my service. When I heard in LA what many of them were thinking at the time, I felt like I was the emperor who wore no clothes..."

A former Vrndavana gurukula student stated "The worst thing DDS did to me was in assembly. He would twist my ear and then he'd slap both my ears. My ears would ring for a week."

One former Vrndavana gurukula student stated "It was the awards assembly, awards were given out once a year, it was tape over the new name for that year. I was standing near the front...I was 7 or 8...I was curious. I tried to move the tape to see the first letter of the name, or something like that, and Dhanurdhara Swami, who was speaking at that time, noticed that I was moving the tape. Dhanurdhara Swami slapped me up the side of my head. Hard enough to knock me off my feet to the floor. This was like a normal occurrence for me." This same student described the atmosphere in the school as "One of constant fear of being hit...standing with hands folded together like prayer, verbally chewed out, slap or two, yelling..."

Dhanurdhara Maharaja replied "I wouldn't remember the incident of slapping [ ], but I could imagine slapping a boy if I was giving an awards assembly and he peeled off the tape on the certificate to peek at the name of the winner. I feel ashamed that I would overreact in this way to such a minor infraction. [ ] was a very gentle boy and I am sorry he had to experience this environment of fear."

Not all former students experienced the assemblies in the same way. One Vrndavana gurukula veteran stated "The assemblies were not all that bad; sometimes kids were made an example of."

C. Censoring of the Mail

Dhanurdhara Maharaja perpetuated the policy of mail censoring in the school, which exacerbated the feelings of isolation and entrapment in the children. One former student wrote "We were told what to write. Suggestions were written on the board. I was given letters and told to rewrite them."

Regarding mail-censoring, Dhanurdhara Maharaja stated "The [mail censoring] policy was already there when I took over the school. The system was that the children wrote letters only in their English class once a month...I thought that everything in the school was fine and that the children who wanted to get out were not sincere and would just write anything to freak out the parents. Often when we would stop the letters it seemed like the letters had no specific complaints but were basically emotional... I thought it was unfair to the parents to get letters like this that would disturb them when there were no means of communication for them to immediately allay their fears and they were all busy in some way or otherwise vigorously spreading Krsna consciousness. I was feeling dutiful and somewhat compassionate for the parents, and at the same time thought that the children were getting so much benefit from staying in Vrndavana that it would be a shame if they were whimsically taken out. After all Srila Prabhupada said that even to stay in Vrndavana a fortnight guarantees liberation.

"As crazy and myopic as it may seem this is exactly how I was thinking at the time...I realize now that the students who wanted to express their dissatisfaction to their parents felt absolutely trapped in a hostile environment, like a prison, with teachers who didn't trust them and whom they didn't trust or reveal their mind to. They couldn't turn to their teachers who saw their complaints as their lack of surrender to Srila Prabhupada and who were too busy just trying to control and discipline them to understand their feelings. I feel horrible for subjecting them to such pain and helplessness. No one should be subjected to such isolation. I didn't realize what I was doing at the time."

D. Personal Misbehavior

Occasionally Dhanurdhara Maharaja lost his temper and was physically abusive to children. Such incidents were not frequent, and Dhanurdhara Maharaja has expressed remorse for them. A former Vrndavana gurukula student states "One time, I took a pack of crackers from one of the vendors out front. When Dhanurdhara found out, he dragged me up and down while the boys were taking prasadam yelling "I found the thief. We found the monkey from the jungles of Africa!" several times. When my mother had trouble paying my tuition, Dhanurdhara asked me what was going on and threatened to send me to Mayapur to work in the fields if my mom didn't pay... Overall, I really felt that gurukula took away self-esteem and confidence. We didn't count... Dhanurdhara beat me going up and down the aisle. It was humiliating. He was calling me that I was out of the jungles of Africa. Continuously hitting me with his hand, lifting me up. I had to be the ape from the jungles of Africa..." This student also said that he routinely saw Dhanurdhara smack the gurukulis and that bruises and marks were not an uncommon sight. "You'd be smacked or pulled on your ear...if you didn't dance in kirtan ...Caring and love doesn't take resources."

Dhanurdhara Maharaja replied "I have a vague remembrance of the incident where [ ] was punished by me for stealing from a shop across the street. Even if I had no remembrance of the incident, I remember [ ] as an honest boy, and I accept that he is telling the truth...I am not the type of person to use racial slurs. If I lost my temper and said something that sounded racial, I feel very ashamed for it... My ego was invested in the school. I would certainly become angry if a student embarrassed us by stealing from the outside..."

Another student, who had exploded firecrackers outside the door of a school building and thereby endangered the

safety of school personnel and visitors to the school, related: "So in the morning I was rudely awakened by Dhanurdhara kicking me, asking if I had done the bomb [a bomb that exploded outside of Dhanurdhara Maharaja's office], if I had actually set it there. And he began kicking me on the floor. Then he stood me up and he began to punch me, so I was fearful. The beating went on for five or ten minutes, I really don't remember. But from then I was stuck in his office for the day. I think it was Prabhupada's disappearance day, there was a big feast and I didn't eat anything all day...I had a bruised ear. My ear was strange, I think I had something on my arm, right or left arm, I don't remember. Maybe something on my back. There were a couple of bruises, but they weren't, maybe I was just in shock cause I hadn't eaten all day, I don't know. I don't remember feeling a lot of bruises afterwards. There was one on my arm and one on my back." In another part of the interview this Vrndavana gurukuli further stated "There was, actually I only got beat once. It was for lighting a firecracker..or more like a Ganga bomb, which they're actually pretty powerful...I had one of those lit by a time bomb, which was where the wick of the firecracker was wrapped around a stick of incense...I put one next to the headmaster, Dhanurdhara's door, underneath a bench that sat outside..."

In response, Dhanurdhara Maharaja replied "The bomb could've hurt [name of visitor to the school] seriously, and I was furious. I left my room and immediately went looking for the culprit... I went right to [ ] room, which was the room next to the bathroom in the southwest corner of the gurukula, and beat him. I was screaming at him and did punch him several times, although I am positive that this was more like sporting to scare him, and that I was conscious not to hurt him. I was however venting my anger. I did drag him and push him down the veranda towards my room. I kept him in my office and sat him in a corner and berated him. It was quite abusive. It was the morning of Srila Prabhupada's disappearance and I kept him there until the afternoon. I think that he was not fed until after the feast."

A former Vrndavana gurukula student states "You [Dhanurdhara Maharaja] were like, you better dance, or you're going to get it. You chased me out of the temple room. You knew I could barely stand on my feet, you dragged me up the stairs and started beating on me. You dragged me into the shower and turned it on, while everyone else was getting hot milk. You were beating on me, I was 9 or 10...Every day Dhanurdhara would bring one kid in front of the assembly before classes and smack him around. It was the daily example...It was one of his trademark beating techniques, to lift the kid up by his kaupins and swing him around like a suitcase. The cloth would dig into your sides until you could barely breathe."

In reply to the above statement, the defense response of Dhanurdhara Maharaja states "...Dhanurdhara Swami, however, accepts here that [ ] is telling the truth, at least to the extent that he improperly punished [ ], and caused him deep suffering...

V. Evaluating the Evidence

Excerpts of Section 1 of the *ISKCON Child Protection Task Force Report* are included herein to provide guidelines for evaluation of the evidence in this case. Section 1 states: "Cultural norms and/or poverty are to be taken into consideration when considering neglect, corporal punishment and psychological abuse. Cultural norms refer to different perspectives on child-raising, discipline, education, etc., according to local custom and practice... There will naturally be variances in facilities and outlooks on child care, but at the same time there are basic and universal standards...Cultural norms...are not a loophole but a factor for consideration. They are never an excuse for child abuse...ISKCON is an international organization encompassing many countries and cultures. While recognizing these variations, there are universal and basic standards of decency and morals..."

Section 1.I.B.1 defines child neglect as a type of child maltreatment that is an act of omission where the caretaker "fails to provide for the child's basic needs and proper level of care. It is important to distinguish between willful neglect and a parent's or caretaker's only being able to provide a reduced standard of life due to poverty or cultural norms." The report lists types of neglect as including failure to provide an adequate diet, failure to provide clothing adequate for the season, failure to provide a clean, hazard free place to live, refusal or delay in seeking necessary medical care, failure to keep the child clean and tidy, failure to watch the child appropriate to the child's developmental abilities to ensure his or her safety, failure to provide a climate that emotionally nourishes the child, and permitting chronic truancy or neglect to provide a minimal education.

Section 1.I.B.2 defines child physical abuse as an "act of commission by the caretaker where the child is physically injured or marks such as bruises, welts, lacerations, or burns are visible. Although the injury is not an accident, the parent may not have intended to hurt the child..." Section 1.I.B.2.a states "Forms of physical abuse include: punching, beating, shaking, whipping, caning, burning, slapping, biting, kicking, ear-twisting, and throwing." Section 1.I.B.2.b states "Corporal punishment can also be considered abusive if, although no single incident leaves a

mark or results in an injury, the frequent and chronic use of such has a deleterious cumulative effect..."

Section 1.I.B.5 defines child psychological abuse as "A repeated pattern of behavior that conveys to the child that they are worthless, flawed, unwanted, unloved, or only of value to meet another person's needs. This verbal battering seriously erodes and damages the child's self-esteem and sense of worth as a person." The report lists forms of psychological abuse as including spurning, terrorizing, corrupting, and denying emotional responsiveness.

After carefully reviewing documentation provided by many parties, including testimonies, character references, correspondences, and responses, this panel deliberated on the evidence. A prime standard for accepting the veracity of allegations was the admission of those accusations by the defendant. An inconclusive denial by the defendant was also taken as evidence for the validity of the allegations, though this evidence was of course not considered to be as strong as instances where Dhanurdhara Maharaja acknowledged the allegations. Corroboration of accusations were also considered important in determining authenticity of allegations. A majority of evidence, meaning that the evidence weighs on the side of guilt, was the standard used to evaluate accusations. This standard should be understood in contradistinction to the standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt".

Based on the above definitions and guidelines, this panel has determined the following:

Child Neglect

Food, Clothing, Shelter, and Hygiene – While there was neglect of children in all of these areas at the Vrndavana gurukula under the supervision of Dhanurdhara Maharaja, he did attempt to adequately meet the children's needs, and the shortfall in these areas was largely due to inadequate resources, harsh environmental conditions, and managerial inability and inexperience on the part of Dhanurdhara Maharaja.

Medical – The panel found that there was neglect by Dhanurdhara Maharaja in this area, though in most cases he tried his best, with the resources at his command, to properly attend to the children's medical needs.

Supervision – In many instances Dhanurdhara Maharaja did not appropriately ensure the safety of the children under his care, and this constitutes neglect of supervision.

Emotional – In general, Dhanurdhara Maharaja did not provide a climate that emotionally nourished the children under his care, and in many instances this failing was sufficiently extreme to be classified as emotional neglect.

Child Physical Abuse

With reference to the definitions of child physical abuse in the Task Force Report, Dhanurdhara Maharaja did physically abuse children on some occasions. Dhanurdhara Swami admits that he sometimes punished with hostility and sometimes with excess, and he accepts personal culpability for these mistakes.

Child Psychological Abuse

There is convincing evidence that Dhanurdhara Maharaja engaged in psychological abuse as defined in section 1.I.B.5 of the *ISKCON Child Protection Task Force Report.*

This panel believes that Dhanurdhara Maharaja did not intentionally try to harm children. Due to immaturity and investment of his ego in the image of the Vrndavana gurukula, his attempts at discipline were excessive and sometimes hostile and abusive, and his abilities to protect the children and respectfully relate to them as Vaisnavas deserving of dignity and proper care were compromised. There is persuasive evidence that Dhanurdhara Swami was physically and psychologically intimidating towards the children. Dhanurdhara Maharaja acknowledges his unwarranted use of force and intimidation and his insensitivity to the needs of the children under his authority.

This panel respects the fact that Dhanurdhara Maharaja has progressed beyond the stage of immaturity that characterized his first tenure as Vrndavana gurukula principal. Still, many children suffered greatly and continue to experience anguish due to his neglect of supervision and personal conduct. He must be held responsible for the consequences of his behavior, though this does not imply that others, such as ISKCON leaders at that time, do not also share in the responsibility for the childrens' suffering.

In addition to the remorse he has demonstrated, Dhanurdhara Maharaja has performed restitution for his mistakes of the past in several ways, including apologizing, verbally and in writing, to many of the former students, and paying some restitution for the children who suffered under his care. Also, Dhanurdhara Maharaja has been punished in ways such as being removed from his service of headmaster of the Vrndavana gurukula, a service to which, despite his deficiencies, he wholeheartedly dedicated himself, and also by being barred from ISKCON properties and ISKCON functions for several years. Although Dhanurdhara Swami made mistakes in gurukula, he has also sacrificed in good faith much of his life energy to help ensure the appropriate

care and education for the children of Srila Prabhupada's movement.

We would also like to state that from the testimonies in the case file it is clear that not all of the childrens' experiences in the Vrndavana gurukula during the first tenure of Dhanurdhara Maharaja were unpleasant and harmful. We heard many reports from students, including those who were neglected and abused, who had a positive overall experience in the Vrndavana gurukula, and some students expressed that Dhanurdhara Maharaja did his best under the circumstances.

Comments by Sesa dasa: As a panel member in this case, I took it as my responsibility to personally evaluate the evidence presented, both in the investigative report of the Child Protection Office and in the response submitted by Sadhusangananda Prabhu on behalf of Dhanurdhara Swami, for its reliability and probative value. In approaching this task the guidelines provided by the ISKCON Task Force on Child Abuse discussed above certainly provided both useful definitions and a practical framework for evaluating the actions of Dhanurdhara Swami during his tenure as principal of the Vrndavana gurukula. However, determining what evidence to accept and which to reject required additional guides.

Perhaps our most difficult task was determining the reliability of testimony of events which took place many years ago. In this regard, I believe the process of independently interviewing as many former students and other devotees as possible, cross-referencing their statements, independently interviewing Dhanurdhara Swami, and finally putting the student statements before Dhanurdhara Swami for response, greatly helped in recreating a persuasive view of the school during the years in question, isolating particular incidents, and weeding out errors of memory.

The emotionally charged nature of the subject matter being investigated certainly added to the complexity of this case. For instance, a student directly involved in an incident often remembered the incident as less severe than his classmate remembered the same incident. However, this seeming contradiction is not as simple as one report canceling out the other. Both students' recollections provided useful information about the incident as well as the atmosphere created in the gurukula. I believe the panel members did have the necessary maturity and objectivity to not be caught up in the emotions of the case.

Additionally, the political atmosphere and resultant pressures surrounding this case tended to accentuate certain evidence and devalue other evidence. In this regard, I believe the consistency of evidence presented over the many years this case has been pending was extremely important.

Personally, I found it edifying that complaints made during the meeting videotaped in Los Angeles during November 1995 were presented virtually unchanged in the interviews conducted in 1999 — this despite the politicization of the case which occurred during the intervening years. And, while the unfortunate ups and downs of the process have undoubtedly been difficult for him, this process also allowed Dhanurdhara Swami the opportunity to present evidence not previously available to any ISKCON authorities investigating the case.

As indicated in the section of this decision above entitled "Evidence Presented," after carefully reviewing all the evidence the panel felt the most probative evidence, the evidence upon which our conclusions are based, primarily involve those incidents personally acknowledged by Dhanurdhara Swami.

The significance of this approach is highlighted by a glimpse at the manner in which law prioritizes evidence. Generally speaking, the law of evidence places more importance on direct evidence, which in this case could be interpreted to mean direct testimony by Dhanurdhara Swami and the individuals involved in particular incidents. I present the following sections from the California Evidence Code not to introduce the Law of Evidence or legal principles in general to this procedure, but to give some indication of importance of direct evidence:

> 410. As used in this chapter, "direct evidence" means evidence that directly proves a fact, without an inference or presumption, and which in itself, if true, conclusively establishes that fact.
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> 411. Except where additional evidence is required by statute, the direct evidence of one witness who is entitled to full credit is sufficient for proof of any fact.
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> 412. If weaker and less satisfactory evidence is offered when it was within the power of the party to produce stronger and more satisfactory evidence, the evidence offered should be viewed with distrust.
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> 413. In determining what inferences to draw from the evidence or facts in the case against a party, the trier of fact may consider, among other things, the party's failure to explain or to deny by his testimony such evidence or facts in the case against him, or his willful suppression of evidence relating thereto, if such be the case.

After coming to our conclusions about the reliability of the evidence, such evidence had to then be evaluated in light of standards or laws which clearly show what Dhanurdhara Swami did wrong and how the conclusions of the panel may be justified. The only such standards or laws that existed at the time in question were Srila Prabhupada's direct instructions on gurukula and the operating procedures derived from his instructions.

As the principal of the Vrndavana gurukula Dhanurdhara Swami made conscious decisions about the operation and atmosphere of the school. Decisions which, because they are grossly neglectful of the Vaisnava duties of a leader in ISKCON and Srila Prabhupada's instructions on gurukula, I have a hard time accepting as simple mistakes or errors in judgment.

In 1982 Jagadish Goswami published his book, *Srila Prabhupada on Guru-Kula.* In the Acknowledgment at the front of the book he specifically thanks Sriman Dhanurdhara das brahmacari and others who "helped me organize ISKCON's guru-kula programs and who have given me insights into their development." Dhanurdhara Swami was a significant contributor to the gurukula scene in 1982. He had been involved in gurukula since at least 1975, was the principal in the flagship gurukula of the movement, was awarded the sannyasa order in 1982 based primarily on his longtime service in the gurukula, and was acknowledged with only 10 others as one who helped organize ISKCON gurukulas world-wide. However, an examination of Jagadish Goswami's book presents a much different picture of gurukula than we get from reading the persuasive evidence and admissions of Dhanurdhara Swami presented in this case.

Chapter 7 of *Srila Prabhupada on Guru-Kula* is entitled "Discipline." Here we find many longstanding instructions of Srila Prabhupada which, if they had been followed, would have made all the difference in the Vrndavana gurukula in terms of the atmosphere of intimidation and the frequent physical abuse of the students which took place during Dhanurdhara Swami's tenure. We cannot assume that he did not know of these instructions. Indeed, Dhanurdhara Swami has specifically stated that he and his staff felt that they had to protect Srila Prabhupada's gurukula from the zonal acaryas of the day who wanted to make it their gurukula and not Srila Prabhupada's. Yet, Srila Prabhupada's instructions were grossly neglected.

Chapter 10 of *Srila Prabhupada on Guru-Kula* is entitled "Parents." Entries number 7 and 17 read:

> 7. Every parent wants to see that his children are taken care of very nicely.
>
> This is the first duty. (Letter from Srila Prabhupada to Srila Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, dated October 9, 1971)
>
> Comments:
>
> (a) The administrators of the guru-kula should be sensitive to the suggestions of the parents. The guru-kula program given by Srila Prabhupada, however, should not be compromised or altered in any way. The spiritual and physical care of the children should be seen to very responsibly. Their diet should be good, clothing and living conditions adequate, they should be learning the basic academic skills, and they should be in association with fixed-up devotees.
>
> (b) Report cards containing grades for academic achievement and comments on behavior should be sent to the parents at the end of each term.
>
> (c) The children should write to their parents (if they do not see one another regularly) once a month. The teachers can also include a personal note to the parents. It is also nice to enclose samples of the children's school work. The parents should naturally reciprocate any letters they receive from their children or their children's teachers.
>
> (d) The parents should be welcome to visit the guru-kula. They should give advance notice of their visit and the duration should be limited to about three days (as far as possible). During their visit they should be careful not to disturb the guru-kula program.
>
> 17.Commentator's note:
>
> Because they have a common interest for the child's spiritual and material well-being, the teacher and parent should maintain good and open communication. When the teachers and parents work together to train the child and encourage him in his Krsna consciousness, it has a great positive effect on the child. When there is conflict between the parents and the teacher, it can cause a very difficult situation for the child. He will be pulled in both directions and will tend to become disobedient and uncooperative.
>
> In communicating on the child's progress, the teacher should be straightforward with the parents. He should not artificially paint a gloried picture of the child. On the other hand, the teacher should not cause alarm by unnecessarily painting a ghastly picture. The teacher's evaluation should be objective and considerate. The teachers and parents should relate with one another on the basis of directions given in the *Nectar of Instruction.* If one is considered more advanced in Krsna consciousness, the other should take the humble position. If they are on the same level of advancement in Krsna consciousness, they should cultivate a friendly relationship, offering mutual respect.

These passages provide considerable detail about the communication and relationship of the teachers to the parents, detail which could have helped Dhanurdhara Swami deal with the pressures of his service given the lack of support he received from ISKCON authorities. However, for all intents and purposes these instructions went unheeded, and in their place Dhanurdhara Swami perpetuated destructive policies such as censoring the mail.

We all are aware of the sometimes overbearing approach to leadership taken by ISKCON authorities. Such management style was the norm in ISKCON during the years in question here. What to speak of an overbearing approach to leadership, even a sensible approach to leadership results

in responsibility for the spiritual engagement of those in one's charge, their care, their evaluation, their discipline and conduct, and their removal for misbehavior. Although not codified during the years in question, such duties of an ISKCON leader have since been made ISKCON law and are found in Section 5.6.2.5 of the *ISKCON Law Book*. There is little doubt that, although unrecorded at the time, such responsibilities of leadership are universal and applicable to the facts of this case.

There is no evidence to suggest that in his leadership of the gurukula Dhanurdhara Swami acted in a manner significantly different than the norm of the times. Indeed, to the contrary, there is testimony that he would not take suggestions from others on the running of the school, and consciously created the atmosphere he desired for the school. Thus, he must be held accountable for those in his charge, both students and staff.

It is in light of these standards and laws that the actions and omissions of Dhanurdhara Swami have been evaluated. **[End of comments by Sesa dasa]**

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Unless otherwise noted, the following conclusions, directives and recommendations have been unanimously accepted by this panel. The conclusions of this panel are:

A. Preaching Within ISKCON

The term "unrestricted", as mentioned in the paragraph below, is used to contrast the present restrictions under which ISKCON has placed Dhanurdhara Maharaja. The current restrictions on Dhanurdhara Maharaja must be lifted, and they should be replaced by the following conditions. In the following paragraph "unrestricted" is not meant in an unqualified sense, as the remainder of this section will clarify.

Dhanurdhara Maharaja should be encouraged to preach Krsna consciousness as a member of ISKCON within a defined geographical area for a specified time period. This geographical area should not have a substantial presence of gurukula veterans, though it should have an ISKCON presence. Specifically, Dhanurdhara Maharaja can preach unrestrictedly in one of the four following geographical areas for five years[1] from the date of this *Official Decision:* 1) Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt; 2) The Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union; 3) Indonesia; 4) The West African countries.

If Dhanurdhara Maharaja would like to develop a preaching field during the next five years, then he may select one of the four above-mentioned geographical areas as his preaching territory. Before beginning to preach in that area Dhanurdhara Maharaja must notify the Child Protection Office which of the four areas he has chosen. Within the specified area Dhanurdhara Maharaja is encouraged to spread Krsna consciousness by all means at his disposal. He may give classes, lead kirtanas, establish temples, and develop preaching programs such as festivals, prasadam distribution and book distribution. He may not engage in these preaching activities in any area until he chooses one of the four areas and communicates this choice to the Child Protection Office.

During the five-year period of restriction, outside of his specified geographical area Dhanurdhara Maharaja cannot give class or lead kirtana in ISKCON temples, ISKCON projects, ISKCON-affiliated organizations, or at ISKCON functions, though he may reside in ISKCON temples or on the property of ISKCON projects and ISKCON-affiliated organizations. Also, he must not attend public functions, such as ratha yatras and major festivals, outside his geographical area during the five year restricted period. An exception to this restriction is that during the 5-year period of restriction Dhanurdhara Maharaja may attend Srila Prabhupada's *Vyasa-puja* festival outside of the specified geographical area. In exercising this exception, Dhanurdhara Maharaja must be fully sensitive to gurukula veterans and their parents. If there is a gurukula veteran or a parent of a gurukula veteran present at the *Vyasa-puja* festival of Srila Prabhupada, and if this gurukula veteran or the parent of a gurukula veteran is in any way disturbed by Dhanurdhara Maharaja's presence at the festival, then Dhanurdhara Maharaja should not attend the festival. During the five year period Dhanurdhara Maharaja may attend regular temple functions, such as *Mangala arati,* Sunday feasts, Srila Prabhupada's *guru-puja,* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class, outside the specified geographical area. In determining this five-year period of restriction, this panel has considered and recognized that Dhanurdhara Maharaja has already been restricted from preaching and serving in ISKCON in several ways, as described in the "Evaluating the Evidence" section.

The principle behind these decisions is that Dhanurdhara Maharaja's former students should be able to attend ISKCON temples and ISKCON events such as ratha-yatras without encountering Dhanurdhara Maharaja, and especially not in a leadership capacity. This will help to protect the gurukula veterans from undue emotional disturbance, and will also protect Dhanurdhara Maharaja from potential attacks from former students harboring ill feelings. Dhanurdhara Maharaja should show deference to his former students. For instance, if he is visiting or residing at a temple outside his specified geographical area

during the five year period and a former student is there and irritated by the presence of Dhanurdhara Maharaja, then Dhanurdhara Maharaja should leave. This panel agrees to allow Dhanurdhara Maharaja to visit and reside in temples outside his specified geographical area during the restricted time period because we feel that Dhanurdhara Maharaja, other than in extremely pressured circumstances such as he experienced as Vrndavana gurukula Headmaster, is not a danger to children. However, as described above, we feel he should be restricted from assuming any position implying leadership. It is expected that Dhanurdhara Maharaja will spend at least 75% of his time preaching in his specified geographical area during the period of restriction.

B. Accepting Disciples

Dhanurdhara Maharaja must show this *Official Decision* to all his disciples and aspiring disciples, and he must ensure that they read the entirety of this document. This is a lifetime injunction. This directive is to ensure that his disciples and aspiring disciples are informed, and also to protect them. That is, by being informed about the past their spiritual life and faith will less likely be damaged in the future if they are to hear about prior activities of Dhanurdhara Maharaja when he was principal of the Vrndavana gurukula.

For the duration of the five-year period of restriction, each disciple and aspiring disciple must send a signed statement to the Child Protection Office stating that he or she has read this *Official Decision.* Dhanurdhara Maharaja must send a list of all his disciples and aspiring disciples to the Child Protection Office by one month from the date of this *Official Decision.* The Child Protection Office must receive a signed statement from all of Dhanurdhara Maharaja's initiated disciples, indicating that they have read this document, within three months of this Official Decision. For the duration of the five-year period of restriction the Child Protection Office must receive a signed statement from all aspiring disciples of Dhanurdhara Maharaja before they are initiated.

Though it is a lifetime directive that Dhanurdhara Maharaja must ensure that all his aspiring disciples read this entire *Official Decision* before taking initiation, the regulation that aspiring disciples must send a signed statement to the Child Protection Office indicating that they have read this *Official Decision* is extant only for the five year period. Strictures in this regard during the five year period are described above. If Dhanurdhara Maharaja would like to initiate disciples after the five year period, then before the end of the five year period he must send the Child Protection Office a signed statement declaring that he will not initiate any disciples before they have read this entire Official Decision.

Dhanurdhara Maharaja may initiate any currently aspiring disciples whose name appears on the list that he will provide to the Child Protection Office. Any person whose name is not on this list, which the Child Protection Office must receive from Dhanurdhara Maharaja within one month from the date of this decision, cannot receive initiation from Dhanurdhara Maharaja for two years[2] from the date of this *Official Decision.* Initiations of persons whose names appear on the list may take place within his specified geographical area, or by mail. After two years from the date of this *Official Decision* Dhanurdhara Maharaja may initiate persons other than those who are currently aspiring to be his disciples, although these initiation ceremonies must take place within his specified geographical area or by mail for the duration of the five year period of restriction. That is, as of Oct. 28, 2001, Dhanurdhara Maharaja may initiate disciples who are not on the list of currently aspiring disciples, although Dhanurdhara Maharaja may not perform initiation ceremonies outside his specified geographical area until Oct. 28, 2004.

If Dhanurdhara Maharaja does not comply with all of the injunctions mentioned in this section of the *Official Decision* (section VI B), concerning accepting disciples, then this non-compliance may be grounds for suspension of his initiation privileges.

With the above injunctions this panel is in no way commenting on Dhanurdhara Maharaja's qualification to serve as a *diksa guru.* If the ISKCON Governing Body Commission allows Dhanurdhara Maharaja to initiate disciples, then his service in this capacity must be constrained according to the directives described above. This panel respects the choice of devotees who wish to take initiation from Dhanurdhara Maharaja, though we have also concluded that some restrictions in this capacity are requisite due to his past transgressions concerning mistreatment of children, and we have also determined that it is important that his disciples and aspiring disciples be informed of his past to some extent. Further, this panel wishes to express herein that the position of guru entails providing shelter, and Dhanurdhara Maharaja's past indiscretions regarding children involved failure to adequately provide shelter, both material and spiritual, for dependents.

C. Financial Recompense

After ensuring a minimum standard of living for a renounced sannyasi, Dhanurdhara Maharaja must donate at least 50% of any donations that he receives, as guru daksina or otherwise, during the five year period of restriction, to projects directly benefiting Vaisnava youth, such as the Vrndavana gurukula or Children of Krishna. As part of

this 50%, Dhanurdhara Maharaja should provide funding for a child abuse victim from the Vrndavana gurukula to spend a week in Vrndavana every year. Former students who contributed statements to the case file of this case can select which former student will go to Vrndavana each year. The former student who visits Vrndavana is invited to inspect the current Vrndavana gurukula and give recommendations to the present administration of the school. This program must be coordinated with the management of the Vrndavana gurukula.

D. Managing Within ISKCON

As a lifetime restriction, Dhanurdhara Maharaja must not assume any management position in ISKCON. He is encouraged to inspire others to establish and manage temples, print and distribute books, and develop other preaching projects, but he himself should never hold any position of management. This injunction results from the fact that many of the difficulties in the Vrndavana gurukula were due to his failings as a manager.

E. Vaisnava Association and Relationships

From studying the case files this panel has determined that one of the causes of the inhumanity that occurred in the Vrndavana gurukula under the supervision of Dhanurdhara Maharaja was the lack of healthy personal relationships amongst the staff, headed by Dhanurdhara Maharaja. Further, we have heard many testimonies from which we conclude that Dhanurdhara Maharaja was largely impervious to constructive feedback regarding his management of the school and his interpersonal relationships. This panel recommends that Dhanurdhara Maharaja receive some form of training in interpersonal relations.

We realize that for a Vaisnava, and especially for a sannyasi, there may be deleterious effects from intimately associating with a non-Vaisnava in a counseling relationship. Therefore, Dhanurdhara Maharaja may take shelter in a Vaisnava in whom he has faith in a relationship of spiritual counseling. For at least the next year Dhanurdhara Maharaja must receive counseling from someone approved by the Child Protection Office, or he must take shelter of a Vaisnava in good-standing in ISKCON. The counselor or Vaisnava must submit a report on the status of Dhanurdhara Maharaja to the Child Protection Office approximately one year after the date of this *Official Decision.*

F. Publications in ISKCON

For the duration of the five year period of restriction, any books written by Dhanurdhara Maharaja must not be advertised in official ISKCON publications.

G. Relationship with Former Students

Dhanurdhara Maharaja should continue his efforts to make amends with those who suffered under his care when they were children.

H. Case Record

Full documentation of this case is in the ICOCP. This documentation is open to review at the discretion of the ICOCP. This panel strongly recommends that if someone wants to read the case files, then all the case files should be read. Otherwise, there is a substantial possibility that an accurate and balanced understanding of this *Official Decision* will not be attained.

I. Failure to Comply with this Decision

If Dhanurdhara Maharaja violates any of the points of this decision, then his connection with ISKCON will be suspended until his case is reviewed by this panel. As described above, Dhanurdhara Maharaja has been steadily cooperative with ISKCON's attempts to resolve this case. This panel humbly requests him to continue in that mood by abiding by this *Official Decision.*

J. Appeal of this Decision

According to the ISKCON Child Protection Task Force Report, Section 5, Dhanurdhara Maharaja may appeal this *Official Decision* to the GBC Executive Committee within six months of the date of the Official Decision. The *Official Decision* described in this document is effective immediately, and Dhanurdhara Maharaja must abide by its guidelines during the appeal process, should he choose to appeal this decision.

VII. ISKCON's Responsibility

Several gurukula veterans who contributed to the case file of this case commented that, more than Dhanurdhara Maharaja, all of ISKCON leadership was responsible for the abuse and decadence of their gurukula experience, and this panel concurs with this perspective. Although there are of course varying opinions on shares of responsibility, one Vrndavana gurukuli, upon being asked "How much of what happened to you do you hold Dhanurdhara Maharaja responsible for?" replied "not so much, the society put him there. The society has the responsibility because they should monitor." Upon being asked "How much do you hold ISKCON responsible for?" he replied "All one-hundred percent. They brought my parents, you trust us. You put your child in our hands. To say we will take care of your child." In the course of reviewing the case file several allegations of child neglect and physical, emotional, and sexual child abuse

against many persons other than Dhanurdhara Maharaja surfaced, as did accusations of cover-up and negligence in addressing reports of child abuse. The Child Protection Office will investigate and process all of these cases. Further, ISKCON leadership was responsible for gross neglect in the failure to provide minimally acceptable resources for the children of Srila Prabhupada's movement. We apologize to the young Vaisnavas who suffered as children in the ISKCON gurukula system, and especially the Vrndavana gurukula, and we beseech the ISKCON leadership to do all that is necessary to ensure that such child neglect and child abuse will never again happen in our Vaisnava society. We pray that this *Official Decision* sends a strong statement, not only that teachers and administrators cannot mistreat children without incurring consequences in ISKCON, but also that the neglect and abuse of children in our society is an intolerable injustice and must not continue.

ISKCON leaders responsible for setting priorities in Srila Prabhupada's movement grossly neglected the proper care of ISKCON's children. This neglect did much to bring about the sufferings reported in this case, and therefore all of ISKCON leadership must accept its share of the burden for what happened in the Vrndavana gurukula. Although Dhanurdhara Maharaja is responsible for his misbehavior, he was not singly responsible for the neglect and tyranny in the school. ISKCON leaders demonstrated appalling neglect of social concerns, and this was very apparent in the dearth of resources provided to the Vrndavana gurukula.

Members of the adjudicative panel in this case were Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja, Laxmimoni dasi, Sesa dasa, Bhusaya dasa, Kalakantha dasa, and Dhira Govinda dasa. The Director of ICOCP at the time of this *Official Decision* was Dhira Govinda dasa.

Footnote 1: Kalakantha dasa, Laxmimoni dasi, and Sesa dasa favored a five year period of restriction. Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja agrees with the mood and content of this *Official Decision,* though he feels the period of restriction should be less than five years, due to the period of time for which Dhanurdhara Maharaja has already been restricted, as well as the number of times that Dhanurdhara Maharaja has already been tried for the transgressions described in this *Official Decision.* Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja suggested a period of restriction of two or three years. Bhusaya dasa and Dhira Govinda dasa favored a period of restriction of eight years. The final conclusion of the panel, therefore, is that the period of restriction is for five years.

Footnote 2: After the panel resolved a five-year period of restriction for preaching within ISKCON for Dhanurdhara Maharaja, a proposal was presented by a panel member that the period of restriction for accepting disciples should be two years instead of five years. Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja, Sesa dasa, Laxmimoni dasi, and Kalakantha dasa favored this proposal, and Bhusaya dasa and Dhira Govinda dasa did not favor this proposal. As a result of this 4 to 2 vote, the period of restriction for accepting disciples is two years.

[Signatures]

Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja	Kalakantha dasa
Sesa dasa	Bhusaya dasa
Laxmimoni dasi	Dhira Govinda dasa