

1st Letter to the GBC

From: **Murari Das** <muraridas.bvks@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Aug 15, 2016 at 12:13 PM
Subject: Letter from HHBVKS Disciples to the GBC
To: ananda.tirtha.das@pamho.net, ananda.tirtha.pvs@pamho.net

Dear Ananda Tirtha Prabhu,
Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada

The following is a letter sent by some disciples of HH Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja to the GBC. Please note my contact email and phone number for any replies or communications that may need to be made to this group of disciples.

Your servant,
Murari Das
(+91) 9159 484 378

Dear Respected GBC members,

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

We are a group of concerned, senior disciples and followers of H.H. Bhakti Vikasa Swami who are formally requesting to discuss with the GBC its resolution 313 from this year's "Minutes of the Annual General Meeting," concerning Maharaja's book Women: Masters or Mother? (WMM). In this regard, we have summarized in this message our views and concerns about this resolution and the GBC's subsequent statements and actions around this.

Furthermore, as senior students of Maharaja, we are confident that the view expressed here represents the view held by the majority of the more than 1500 disciples of H.H. Bhakti Vikasa Swami and innumerable followers. Given that this is a non-trivial number of ISKCON members, we suggest that it would be in everyone's best interests that you give careful consideration to the view expressed herein.

As members of ISKCON, loyal to the Founder-Acarya; His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, we are taught to accept the authority and rulings of the GBC and see them as the ultimate managerial authority of ISKCON. And according to the conclusions of our discipic succession, we are enjoined to consider our guru the direct representative of the Lord-saksad-dharitvena samasta-sastrair uktas tatha bhavyata eva sadbhih, acaryam mam vijaniyan, etc. Yet ISKCON's Founder-Acarya also taught that authorities are no longer to be followed if they disregard or abandon the regulative principles of devotional service, give misguidance, or go against the will of the Lord.[1]

The salient point here is that as disciples, when some doubt arises as to the validity of guidance being offered to us by some authority, we are supposed to use our own discrimination. The sastras enjoin us not to be blind followers. This applies not only to the guidance coming from one's guru, such as our own guru Sri Bhakti Vikasa Swami, but also to the guidance of learned assemblies such as yours. On account of your public admonition of Maharaja and his book, and your subsequent, silent withdrawal of your ban, it is now our prerogative, sanctioned by sastra, to judge whether our Gurudeva's guidance is bona fide or your guidance is bona fide.

Our assessment is that however imperfect Sri Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja's efforts to present the will of Srila Prabhupada might have been seen in writing WMM, he has followed the process given by our acaryas. But in publicly attesting to the alleged unfitness of his work, you, the GBC, have only proffered an institutional opinion—a decision backed by a plurality of votes—without citing sadhu, sastra, or guru to demonstrate that Maharaja has indeed given any misguidance. This act of yours is highly irregular and against the regulative principles of devotional service, as described further in this text.

Hence, as representatives of the body of Sri Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja's disciples, we collectively express our strongest protest at:

- 1) The fact that the GBC at no time has offered any reason based on sastra, previous acaryas, and guru-either for their initial ban or for the amended resolution with the ban removed.
- 2) The current (and highly amended) form of resolution 313 continues to besmirch both the book and its author.
- 3) The GBC passed and amended resolution 313 without due process or proper communication.
- 4) The GBC failed to communicate their removal of the ban to the rest of ISKCON and even to the author.
- 5) Bans still in place by GBC sub-institutions such as the still standing NA GBC's ban, the UK ban, and bans by individual temples such as in Vrindavan.

Here is why our protest is justified:

- a) Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja's book is a transcendental work that represents the will of Krishna. Yes, we know you disagree that it is, but to be fair, in writing his book he has followed the standard process prescribed by our acaryas whereas in criticizing it you have not. The example of Sri Svarupa Damodara Gosvami in CC Antya chapter 5, in which he extensively quoted sastra to show the disqualification of a work purporting to be transcendental, is the standard that should be followed-especially by the GBC, whose members are supposed to be exemplary in matters such as this.
- b) While some of you who emphasize your personal experiences with Srila Prabhupada may feel Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja's book is improper, your say-so without the support of sastra is against the principle of guru, sadhu, and sastra. That is not the way Srila Prabhupada taught us to understand these matters. In this case, you have quoted none of them, hence your transgression of this principle is extreme.
- c) We are not defending Maharaja merely because he is our guru, and we're just fanatics. We are defending him because he has followed the standard process prescribed by our acaryas in composing a sacred work whereas in criticizing it you have not. Why should we believe you over Maharaja when he has made a good-faith effort to follow sastra and the acaryas and you have acted independently of them and whimsically (niyamagraha)?
- d) Prima facie, you have committed the nama-aparadha of sruti-sastra-nindanam, blasphemy of Vedic literature or literature in pursuance of the Vedic version. And because of your position as ISKCON's ultimate managerial authority, you are inducing wide swaths of ISKCON to also engage in such blasphemy and thereby leading otherwise innocent members of ISKCON astray in their spiritual lives.
- e) Your dealings with Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja at nearly every stage of this episode have lacked the quality of straight-forwardness-so much that even those who have reservations about Maharaja's stance on certain matters have made their disapproval of your behavior toward him known. For example, Mother Urmila, a long-time ISKCON educator whose known stance on some of the subjects discussed in WMM differs in some respects with Maharaja's stance, writes in a letter to Maharaja as follows:

--- begin quote ---

"I read every word carefully of this link: http://bvks.com/reader/wmm/harmonizing_our_preaching_efforts/

"I would like to express my disappointment in the lack of due process on the part of the GBC body, particularly in regards to making decisions about others' services without hearing from those persons directly, and without a thorough review of the subject about which they are deciding. Aside from my feelings about that particular book of yours, I wish our leading body would follow civilized codes of due process when dealing with all members, what to speak of long-time, very loyal members such as your good self. You may quote me as long as there is no possibility of anyone mistakenly believing I am taking any particular position in regards to that specific book" (email dated 8 June 2016).

---- end quote ----

Comments like this cause us to believe that you have yet to fully appreciate the extent to which your

transgression of basic fairness and decency has damaged your own individual reputations as well as the GBC's reputation overall.

f) There was extensive dialogue between the present GBC EC and Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja regarding the book and THEIR demand that he withdraw it. It was disingenuous of them to thereafter remove the ban they demanded and then not make a public statement. The GBC EC, and now the full GBC body, owe it to a sense of public decency and Vaisnava etiquette to announce this publicly.

g) The heavily redacted, and current, version of resolution 313 has removed language explicitly banning the book but continues to allege that the book represents only Maharaja's opinion and not that of Srila Prabhupada and the guru-parampara. But if you are still convinced that Maharaja's book is a departure from the parampara, why not retain the ban? You don't want books you feel misrepresent Srila Prabhupada circulating in ISKCON, do you? And if Maharaja's book is indeed a transcendental work, then you have a duty to remove this resolution in its entirety and apologize to the rest of ISKCON for your mistake.

h) And finally, the bans and strong and blasphemous language still in place by GBC sub-institutions against Maharaja for his book cannot be allowed to stand as they are, as they are not fully independent of GBC oversight and control. Either a ban is warranted, or it is not.

This is our position, and we are open to changing our view on receipt of superior evidence that we are in error. As we have described above, merely someone's say-so that we are in error is not good enough. We are obliged to present the proper evidence in the proper way as given by Srila Prabhupada-if not for ourselves, at least for the general body of devotees.

In lieu of any better account of your activities from yourselves, we believe that the following recommended actions if pursued in a spirit of reconciliation by the GBC institution will put this matter to rest for the satisfaction of all:

- 1) An unconditional, public apology to Sri Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja for besmirching his character.
- 2) An unconditional, public apology for misleading devotees to believe that Maharaja's book *Women: Masters or Mothers?* (or its other titles, such as *Mothers and Masters*) does not represent the guru-parampara coming in the line of His Divine Grace, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-Acarya of ISKCON.
- 3) An unconditional, public apology and retraction of bans enacted by ISKCON sub-institutions under your direct or indirect authority-specifically the North American GBC, the GBC of the United Kingdom, and ISKCON Vrindavan.

And finally, with regard to Vaisnava etiquette, we would like to note that we regret having to use such strong words with elder devotees who are so much senior to us. This is something we very much dislike. Yet the way you have dealt with this matter up to the present has left us with no other option than to broadcast our concerns with plain and straightforward language.

We hope you come to understand that your determination not to first discuss the matter with our Guru Maharaja before acting and your determination to avoid dealing with him in a Vaisnava way has brought us to this point.

We pray to Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai, Srila Prabhupada and the Acaryas that we can quickly put this dark episode behind us and move forward together in spiritual life and preaching, with the affection that is natural between juniors and seniors in Lord Caitanya's sankirtana Movement.

Your servants,

Swami B.A. Tirtha, initiated 1996, TP ISKCON San Diego, California (USA)
Krishna Kirti Das, initiated 1990, Accepted as siksa disciple of HH BVKS May 2014, Editor, Author, Statistician. (USA)
Gokul Candra Das, initiated 1994, TP ISKCON Salem, Tamil Nadu, Author, (India)
Akincana Krsna Das, initiated 1997, TP ISKCON Vellore Tamil Nadu, (India)
Caitanya Mahaprabhu Dasa, initiated 1997, BTG Gujarati Publishing, Preacher for 24 Namhatta Programs,

ISKCON Vallabh Vidya Nagar Vice-president, Gujarat (India)
Savyasaci Das(JPS), initiated 1999, Head of Steering committee, Nandagram Farm project, Gujarat and Preaching Coordinator for ISKCON Bhopal (India)
Vasudeva-datta Das, initiated 1999, TP ISKCON Batticaloa (Sri Lanka)
Kisora Das, initiated 1999, Sanskrit Editor (India)
Nityananda Das, initiated 2001, Sanskrit translator, BBT (India)
Radhesh Das, initiated 2002, BTG Gujarati Preacher, Congregational Preacher - Surat, Book Distribution cocordinator, Gujarat (India)
Aravindaksha Das, initiated 2002, Congregational Preacher, Bhakti Vikasa Trust official, Surat (India)
Sri Giridhari Das, initiated 2002, BTG Tamil Editor, Translator and Editor for BBT Tamil (India)
Sankirtan Das, initiated 2003, TP ISKCON Brno (Czech Republic)
Nateswar Narottam Das(JPS), initiated 2004, Sankirtan Leader and Youth preacher (India)
Nitai Pada Kamala Das, initiated 2004, General Manager, ISKCON Mayapur, West Bengal (India)
Priya Govinda Das, initiated 2005, Youth preacher, (India)
Gopalacarya Das, initiated 2005, TP ISKCON Inis Rath Island (Ireland)
Sridhara Srinivas Das, initiated 2006, Fulltime Grhastha Book Distributor and Preacher.
Damodar Das, initiated 2006, BVKS media ministry, Vedic culture research, Nandagram Farm project, Gujarat (India)
Damodara Nityananda Das, initiated June 2006, (Phd, Prof) Author (India)
Murari Das, initiated 2007, TP ISKCON Blantyre (Malawi)
Vrindavana Candra Das, initiated 2010, Book production, Former Secretary to HH BVKS (India)
Jagannatha Das, initiated 2013, Manager of ISKCON Bhopal (India)

p.s. We would like to settle our differences on this matter with you privately, as far as possible. However, as all of you have already given extensive time to discussing this amongst yourselves, long before you have received our letter, we think that 15 days' time is sufficient to wait for any kind of response. In lieu of hearing timely from you, we shall continue to increase our efforts to raise awareness of our perspective among the general body of devotees and the public at large.

[1] There are innumerable pramanas for this position. Some prominent ones as given by Srila Prabhupada are given here: SB 8.20.1, "According to sastra, the duty of the guru is to take the disciple back home, back to Godhead. If he is unable to do so and instead hinders the disciple in going back to Godhead, he should not be a guru." And several other references are given in the purport: SB 5.5.18, guror na sa syat. . . ; Mahabharata Udyoga 179.25 guru apy avaliptasya. . . ; Padma Purana sat-karma-nipuno vipro. . . , etc.

GBC's response to the 1st Letter

----- Forwarded message -----
From: GBC EC <GBC.EC@pamho.net>
Date: Sun, Aug 28, 2016 at 12:13 PM
Subject: Response from the GBC Chairman
To: Murari Das <muraridas.bvks@gmail.com>

Dear Devotees:

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

Thank you for your letter of August 5, 2016 concerning Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja's, Women: Masters or Mothers/Mothers and Masters.

As I am sure you are well aware, ISKCON is very large international organization within which diverse opinions on the sastra, Srila Prabhupada's instructions, and our mission of spreading Krishna Consciousness may co-exist without rising to the level of nama-aparadha of sruti-sastra-nindanam. Srila Prabhupada himself was certainly responsive to the differing views amongst his senior disciples concerning issues affecting the

reputation of ISKCON, missionary activities of the ISKCON devotees, and of course, the truth and guidance of the sastra when applied to ISKCON.

Seeking to unify ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada often put the ability to effectively spread Krishna Consciousness above individual points of view. As his representatives, the GBC EC has attempted, however faultily, to follow Srila Prabhupada's example of keeping a unified ISKCON first. To the best of my knowledge, neither this office nor other GBC members have deliberately besmirched the good name of Bhakti Vikasa Swami. Thus, I would hope that differing opinions would not automatically be considered as personal attacks which could stifle the dialogue necessary to reach consensus.

Let me provide you with a few areas of concern by some of the GBC members concerning Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja's book *Women: Mothers or Masters?*

1. It is true that the concepts in the book such as polygamy and child marriage are found in Srila Prabhupada's books, but they are not concentrated in one place and presented in opposition to modern society. There is some indication in the book that the author has encouraged his followers to go against the laws of the country in, for instance, marrying one's daughter at what appears to be at an illegal age.

2. There are countries around the world where ISKCON's activities are on a large scale, such as Russia, in which Srila Prabhupada's books have been attacked for some of the concepts presented. Only due to the intervention by the Indian government was ISKCON's work in Russia not put into difficulty. Given such history, it would seem irresponsible for a representative of ISKCON to put out an internationally distributed book which contains concepts which might put ISKCON's activities at risk in countries such as Russia.

3. There are references in the book which imply that women who have reached a certain age, such as 30, and are not yet married have been unchaste during their devotional lives, or that mature women who are traveling and preaching are doing something other than devotional service.

As I mentioned above, our efforts in handling this entire matter have been faulty and we certainly are not above being held accountable for our dealings and any disturbed feelings experienced due to our actions or inactions. However, it is not that there exists no arguable reasons for the GBC's actions.

With regard to the individual management of GBC zones around the world, the GBC rules have for decades given the authority to individual GBC members to determine whether particular gurus, sannyasis, and other devotees may visit the temples or geographic areas the individual GBC member is responsible for. This rule also gives authority to individual GBC members with respect to literature distributed at or through temples in their zone.

With regard to the recently published GBC Resolution 313/2016: *Harmonizing Our Preaching Efforts*, the said resolution had two parts which are paraphrased thus:

The first part is an incorrect statement that the GBC Body approved restrictions on the sale of "*Women: Masters or Mothers?*". This was incorrectly published without having been properly voted on by the GBC, and has now been removed.

Subjectively ascribing motives to the actions of others is not generally the best method for reaching common ground. Errors followed by correction does not automatically equate with dubious intentions.

The second part states that the opinions in the book are solely those of the author and do not reflect ISKCON policy. This second part was correctly passed at the GBC plenary and thus was correctly published with the GBC resolutions.

With regard to the second part, no ill motivation is ascribed to Bhakti Vikasa Swami. Rather, saying the opinions stated in the book are solely those of the author both correctly identifies the opinions as being based on the author's realizations, and allows for differing opinions amongst sincere followers of Srila Prabhupada.

Let me make one final point in response to your letter. The GBC EC is currently in dialogue with Bhakti Vikasa Swami through Prahladananda Swami to cooperatively work toward resolution of this matter and he recently wrote to the GBC the following and the proposed steps:

Dear GBC members,
Please accept my obeisances. _/o_ All glories to Srila Prabhupada!

I spoke with Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja about the concerns about his book "Women Masters and Mothers" that Malati dd sent. He agreed either to change the wording in passages in his book or eliminate the statements of concern, before or if he prints his book again.

Please let me know if there are any other points of concern in the book you would like me to present to him.

This request is not to get into other discussions about the book.

Your servant,
Prahladananda Swami

Obviously the work must be given the time necessary to come to consensus. We hope that you will join in these efforts so that the differences amongst us help to make us stronger as an ISKCON unit.

Your servant,

Sesa das

GBC EC Chair

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2nd letter to the GBC

From: **Murari Das** <muraridas.bvks@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Oct 11, 2016 at 2:33 PM
Subject: Letter from HHBVKS Disciples to the GBC - 2
To: GBC EC <GBC.EC@pamho.net>

Dear Sesa Prabhu,

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

Thank you for your response. We appreciate that you have taken the time from an otherwise very busy schedule to discuss the ISKCON GBC's dealings with our Gurudeva, Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja on the matter of his book, Women: Masters or Mothers? In this regard, we have some observations and concerns about your response that we would like to share with you.

Our first concern is with your objection to a book that focuses on Srila Prabhupada's teachings on women in society. We do not think that you object specifically to books focused on a specific topic, but it appears that you are opposed to specific topics related to women and that have been advocated by Srila Prabhupada. While

acknowledging that polygamy and child marriage are found in Srila Prabhupada's books, your objections to having presented them at all seems to be that they are "concentrated in one place" and "presented in opposition to modern society."

Actually, both of these have been done before without any GBC opposition. There are many books that compile and organize Srila Prabhupada's teachings and concentrate them in one place. Such books include Sri Namamrta, Spiritual Master and Disciple, different books with the word "Reform" in them, many books about Varnasrama-dharma, and so forth. And we should remember that our canonical literature by way of spreading Krishna consciousness is "directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization" (SB 1.5.11). Whatever is transcendental is understood to be "presented in opposition to modern society" because it factually is opposed.

Whenever and wherever Srila Prabhupada presented concepts like polygamy and child marriage, he typically did so in opposition to modern society. As quoted in WMM (2nd ed. 147), Srila Prabhupada writes, "People have become so degraded in this age that on the one hand they restrict polygamy and on the other hand they hunt for women in so many ways." This is how Srila Prabhupada *typically* discussed these topics whenever he did discuss them. "Marriage means taking complete charge of a woman and living peacefully without debauchery," says Srila Prabhupada in the same quoted passage. "At the present moment, however, debauchery is unrestricted. Nonetheless, society makes a law that one should not marry more than one wife. That is typical of demoniac society." It was typical of Srila Prabhupada to speak "in opposition to modern society" whenever he discussed these topics.

Child marriage is another example of Srila Prabhupada's outspokenness against modern society. As quoted in WMM (129), Srila Prabhupada says,

--- begin quote ---

In Vedic society no girl was allowed to remain independent and unmarried. Independence for women means they become like prostitutes, struggling to capture some man who will take care of her. In this way the so-called independent woman has to work very hard to make herself attractive by artificially wearing cosmetics, mini-skirts, and so many other things. Formerly, the girl would be married to a suitable boy at a very early age, say six years old. But although a girl married early she did not stay with her husband immediately but was gradually trained in so many ways how to cook, clean, and serve her husband in so many ways – up until the time of her puberty. So all the time there was no anxiety because a girl would know 'I have got a husband' and the boy would know 'I have got this girl as my wife.' Therefore when the boy and girl would come of age, there was no chance of illicit sex-life.

--- end quote ---

As seen here, in criticizing modern society, which he did frequently, Srila Prabhupada typically compared and contrasted modern society with Vedic society. The purpose of his criticism is clear: modern society must be reformed according to Vedic principles. Otherwise, the people will be unhappy, always disturbed, and will find it very difficult to make spiritual advancement even if offered a genuine opportunity.

Because the contamination in modern society is strong, Srila Prabhupada was unsparing in criticism of it. It was the "chopping technique" he imbibed from his own spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. This was typical of Srila Prabhupada in his books and lectures, so "opposition to modern society," as you put it, is not a legitimate objection to WMM.

Our next concern is with your allegation that "the author has encouraged his followers to go against the laws of the country in, for instance, marrying one's daughter at what appears to be at an illegal age."

Maharaja is not insensitive to the laws of other countries or the general sentiment of their peoples. On page 148 in WMM, for example, Maharaja says, "However, although Srila Prabhupada was overall 'in favor of polygamy,' he forbade it within ISKCON for several reasons, including 'the possibility of becoming scandalized in the public for breaking their laws in this way. . .'" As shown here, Maharaja himself, like Srila Prabhupada, is sensitive to us being perceived as law breakers. So, if there is some specific passage that gives you cause for concern, Maharaja is open to considering a request for recasting it.

However, it is incorrect to say that WMM calls for unlawful rebellion. It does not explicitly invite people to break their countries' laws. It rather invites the people to consider the Vedic alternative and make a civilized shift. It was not that long ago, for example, that we were smuggling Bhagavad-gita As It Is and other books into the Soviet Union without regard for their laws and without any changes to the books themselves. There is nothing in WMM that incites people to break the laws of their respective countries, but it does advocate for a transformation of society nonetheless.

This observation about book distribution in the former Soviet Union has caused us to become very concerned over this next statement of yours:

--- begin quote ---

2. There are countries around the world where ISKCON's activities are on a large scale, such as Russia, in which Srila Prabhupada's books have been attacked for some of the concepts presented. Only due to the intervention by the Indian government was ISKCON's work in Russia not put into difficulty. Given such history, it would seem irresponsible for a representative of ISKCON to put out an internationally distributed book which contains concepts which might put ISKCON's activities at risk in countries such as Russia.

--- end quote ---

Attempting to put this in plainer language, this is what we think you are saying:

"In some countries ISKCON by now has large scale activities, and we do not want to unnecessarily put those activities at risk by prematurely advocating concepts that the populations of those countries generally oppose. In Russia, for example, Srila Prabhupada's books have been attacked for some of the concepts he presents, and we have only barely overcome a recent challenge because of the Government of India's intervention. We feel that another book that presents these same concepts will unnecessarily jeopardize our hard-fought victories in those places and thus imperil ISKCON's activities there."

A few very important points to note in this connection:

a) Although we appreciate the Government of India's intervention and note that they are greatly benefited spiritually by their actions, we nonetheless don't depend on them or anyone else when faced with such opposition. We depend on Krishna. Indeed, such intervention should be seen as the arrangement of Krishna. If for some reason they do not come forward, Krishna will make some other arrangement.

b) When Srila Prabhupada was faced with situations in which the movement was challenged on its teachings and practices, he didn't back down but rather pushed ahead and faced the law or governments directly.

As recorded in the Lilamrita (Ch. 51, Chant Hare Krsna and Fight), when the movement was sued in America for brainwashing, "Prabhupada told him [Adi-kesava Swami] face to face to bring all of the books into court and introduce them as evidence. He should boldly preach." In a letter to Tamal Krishna Goswami (30 Oct 1976), Srila Prabhupada made these suggestions for arguments to use in the court: "Do the parents like that their children become hippies? Why don't they stop it? Do the parents like their children to become involved in prostitution and intoxication? Why don't they stop this?" As seen here, when in such situations as you have outlined in your letter, Srila Prabhupada was explicit, confrontational, and uncompromising when facing such challenges.

From points a) and b) and the above historical account a third point follows:

c) When a genuine Krishna conscious principle is at stake, we don't back down, we fight, and we fight by openly preaching the truth.

The implications of this last point are that ISKCON's legitimacy as an institution is based on its principles. To defend ISKCON's spiritual principles is to defend the institution. But the reverse is not necessarily true. Defending the institution by distancing itself from those principles will necessarily have an inauspicious result. You might preserve the institution and your activities, but you will have done so at the cost of breaking its connection to our parampara.

As you have described the challenge in Russia with regard to WMM, we think that you may be trying to protect the movement by distancing it from its principles. It appears you are worried that in Russia, the prosecutors will pick up WMM, read some section about child marriage, and say, "Aha! They believe that women should be married as early as six years old!! Their spiritual master Srila Prabhupada says it right here. Let us ban them." And then we lose the case and we get banned in Russia, or experience some other such reversal. Is that not what you are afraid of?

But if you want a society that adequately curbs illicit sex in society, then women will eventually have to generally be married at such an early age, as Srila Prabhupada has described it. That will be true of ISKCON, and that will be true of Russia, too. If the people of Russia don't want their daughters to become prostitutes, then this is the alternative they must eventually embrace, and we have to inform them that there is indeed an alternative and explain why they should embrace it.

As quoted in WMM (129), in a Nov. 7, 1972 letter to Mr. Loy, a Westerner and parent of a daughter who had joined the Movement and is about to get married, Srila Prabhupada addresses his concerns by explaining the concept of marriage in Vedic society. Therein he says,

--- begin quote ---

To protect them, woman must have husband. And it is recommended they should be married at very early age, then the wife will remain always chaste and devoted to her husband. At such young age, from the first night onwards, she can never for a moment forget him, being still child and unspoiled, therefore she becomes the perfect chaste wife, and in those times the wife was so much devoted to her husband that she would voluntarily die in the fire of his cremation, unable to live without him. Myself, I was very young when I got married, and my wife was 11 years only. But there is no question of separation in our marriage belief, neither your daughter will ever be separated from that boy, that is their vow. Rather, it is when people are a little grown-up, when they have got little independence and their own ways of doing things, then if they marry there is often difficulty to adjust, just as it is more difficult to bend the bamboo when it is yellow.

--- end quote ---

So, here is the fundamental problem we see with your objections to WMM. This is how Srila Prabhupada preaches, to a Westerner no less, on the matter of women, sex, and marriage, and it appears that you want to publicly distance yourself from that.

As regards to further objections raised by you about WMM, you said: "3. There are references in the book which imply that women who have reached a certain age, such as 30, and are not yet married have been unchaste during their devotional lives, or that mature women who are traveling and preaching are doing something other than devotional service." There are far-reaching problems with your objection.

The fact is that not everyone will like everything that Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja says, and it is inevitable that some will try to superimpose some meaning on his words that he never intended. Srila Prabhupada called that "word jugglery", and that is a tactic the Mayavadis rely on to avoid accepting the conventional meaning of the shastra when they want to present some other idea. That is why we insist that if you have to make such allegations that you actually quote that passage that makes that has given you cause for objection.

What to speak of the displeasure some people have with some of Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja's statements in his books, it is a fact that not everyone in our movement likes everything that Srila Prabhupada says. If you recall in 2008, the GBC requested the BBT to add end notes or appendices to Srila Prabhupada's books to explain certain of Srila Prabhupada's statements in relation to women. Your list of example statements in resolution 311 happened to include one from a book that is rarely read outside of ISKCON. "Generally, when a woman is attacked by a man—whether her husband or some other man—she enjoys the attack, being too lusty" (SB 4.26.26, p.). How many outside of ISKCON come upon this statement in the 4th Canto of the Bhagavatam? That is, the unease expressed by the GBC over this statement was not made purely out of concern for preaching to the non-devotees.

This brings us to an important point: Because the kinds of concerns you have expressed about some of Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja's statements in WMM have been made in the past by the GBC about some of Srila Prabhupada's statements in his own books, your concerns about what Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja has written are confounded with concerns about what Srila Prabhupada has written. If you are objecting to something in WMM, it is likely that you are actually objecting to something Srila Prabhupada said.

There is evidence for this. As reported by E Burke Rochford Jr in his book Hare Krishna Transformed (2007, pg 157),

--- quote ---

There also is evidence suggesting that at least some of ISKCON's North American leaders tried to quietly disassociate themselves from Prabhupada's controversial writings about women, given the movement's past history of abuse. As one GBC member acknowledged, Prabhupada's statements are "under currently established norms of business, government, and academics, labeled 'sexist,' and regarded as on the same moral level as anti-Semitic or racist utterances" (com 2001a). Another suggested that the leaders, though "not wanting to talk about Prabhupada's mistakes," also found it important to "distinguish between what Prabhupada says about the tradition and what he said about contemporary issues. To say that Prabhupada is a pure devotee, which I believe he is, doesn't mean that he is materially omniscient. What Prabhupada said about World War II or women's intelligence, he himself didn't represent as absolute truth. He had a human side; he gave his opinions that go beyond quoting and commenting on the scripture itself. We have to place these opinions in a different box from his commentaries directly addressing matters of scripture. . . . Let's face it, twenty years ago what the GHQ is saying was accepted. It was the way we thought. But there has been a gradual, steady, historical transformation. There has been a gradual and peaceful shift in ISKCON, in the Prabhupada hermeneutic. Given the extreme sensitivity of some of these issues, I think the GBC is relieved that this shift has occurred." (interview October 2005)

--- end quote ---

Given these statements made by GBC members, we do not think it is implausible that your unease with some of Srila Prabhupada's statements is instead being expressed as opprobrium towards Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja for having written WMM.

Regarding your mistakes in this matter, as you have acknowledged them, there is some distance between your words and your ongoing actions that concern us. On the one hand you have said that your "efforts in handling this entire matter have been faulty." But on the other hand, you have not followed through on sending a timely notice to devotees around the world that you had in fact retracted the ban. You are willing to admit to having made mistakes but apparently are unwilling to correct them. How are we supposed to understand that?

By publicly banning Maharaja's book, ISKCON's highest managerial authority sent a message to the general body of devotees that he has deviated. This is the impression in most people's minds. The second fault was that the ban was revoked silently without informing the author. Thirdly, after banning the author, no public apology was made, thus keeping in people's minds the fact that Maharaja's book is still under a ban.

In your defense, you said, "Errors followed by correction does not automatically equate with dubious intentions," but the problem is correction has not followed. Hence, your continued hesitation to make a public apology and notify the general body of devotees of your ban's withdrawal causes us to think that your mistakes may never have been mistakes in the first place.

Suspicion is natural when circumstantial evidence accumulates. Before resolution 313 was published, it was sent to Maharaja in its entirety, as we know from the correspondence between GBC EC and Maharaja. You were one of the signatories of those emails. You say now that it was by published mistake, as it was not properly voted. But weren't you aware at the time of writing to Maharaja that it was not properly voted? Maybe you were inattentive when the resolution was being discussed in the meeting. But were the other two (HH BCS and Praghosh Prabhu) also inattentive? If there had been only one person who had "spaced out" on this, we could believe it was a mistake. Two people? Possibly, but unlikely. Three? Most unlikely.

Maharaja even begged and pleaded in the same correspondence that there isn't so much emergency to ban the book before discussing the points with him. He particularly wanted you to respond in an email that you were copied in but you didn't bother to reply and didn't even confirm whether you had read the book. Nevertheless you went ahead to publish the ban.

But you should have already announced to devotees that you have removed the passage. Consequently, devotees remain generally under the impression that a ban is in place. We shouldn't have had to ask you to

announce this. But here we are, yet again, requesting this. At this point, the delay has turned into a matter of “justice delayed is justice denied.”

With regard to our request that the GBC directs their sub-institutions to withdraw their bans, you have correctly pointed out that “the GBC rules have for decades given the authority to individual GBC members to determine whether particular gurus, sannyasis, and other devotees may visit the temples or geographic areas the individual GBC member is responsible for. This rule also gives authority to individual GBC members with respect to literature distributed at or through temples in their zone.” We acknowledge that this has been a long-standing rule.

However, regardless of the existence of this rule, the NA GBC in particular, of which you are a long-standing member, sent a letter dated January 16th, 2016 to Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja, not only informing him of the ban within North America but also stating that WMM “presents wrongly interpreted conclusions based on Srila Prabhupada’s teachings that are harmful and hurtful to members of ISKCON” and “misrepresents Srila Prabhupada’s teachings, examples, and mood.” And you provided no evidence according to the standards of our parampara to support your judgment. That is very dangerous because if you are wrong, then you are guilty of committing sruti-sastra-nindanam, blasphemy of Vedic literature or literature in pursuance of the Vedic version.

Therefore regardless of whether this rule has been in existence for the past several decades, and regardless of whether it has been applied to Maharaja or someone else, banning transcendental literature constitutes the fourth offense against the Lord’s Holy Names. You yourself at least tacitly recognize that you can’t just ban literature without justification. Otherwise, why would you say (in the NA GBC communication, for example) that WMM misrepresents Srila Prabhupada? The answer is that you can’t just go around banning transcendental literature, even if you made up some law that says you can. That is why you went to the trouble of stating that the book is not up to the standard of transcendental literature. Therefore your “law” is contrary to religious principles.

You and your colleagues may feel that Maharaja’s book misrepresents Srila Prabhupada, but our parampara gives us higher standards for settling the question as to whether it represents him or not. We have already explained what those standards are. If you continue to disregard them, as you have been in the present case, then your authority and authenticity as Srila Prabhupada’s representatives will be called into question at every step—and not just by us. It is therefore in your best interest to start following these standards, starting with the case of WMM. Otherwise, you will be following a policy of niyamagraha, acting independently or whimsically. That will be against everyone’s interests.

Given that as a member of the NA GBC you have already stated that you think Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja’s book misrepresents Srila Prabhupada, this statement of yours—“saying the opinions stated in the book are solely those of the author both correctly identifies the opinions as being based on the author’s realizations, and allows for differing opinions amongst sincere followers of Srila Prabhupada”—is made in bad faith. The current version of the resolution, which states that his realizations “do not necessarily reflect” the views and practices of ISKCON or Srila Prabhupada is plainly meant to convey your belief that Maharaja’s book does not represent Srila Prabhupada.

The second part of 313 says, “The opinions expressed by Bhakti Vikasa Swami in his book ‘Women: Masters or Mothers’ are solely those of the author in his private capacity and do not necessarily reflect the views and practices of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), or its Founder-Acarya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.”

While it may be true that the views Maharaja expresses in WMM “do not necessarily reflect the views and practices of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness,” there are also many views that Srila Prabhupada expressed that also do not reflect the views of present day ISKCON. Some of those are presented in WMM. For example, we publicly support polygamy but do not follow it. But we support it because it is a necessary part of the marriage institution for protecting women in society. And when commenting on or critiquing social issues to the general public it is inevitable that we will have to discuss this point, as Srila Prabhupada sometimes did.

But to say that Maharaja’s book “does not necessarily reflect the views” of ISKCON’s “Founder-Acarya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada,” is to suggest that the book is not necessarily in line with

our guru parampara. The fact is that you have used your office to spread doubt about the authenticity of Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja as a representative of Srila Prabhupada. In the absence of adequate evidence that this is indeed the case, it is an offense to say this to a genuine follower or disciple of Srila Prabhupada. As we have already pointed out, this was not a responsible action given that many initiated and uninitiated devotees are under the spiritual guidance of Maharaja.

Under these circumstances, how could the GBC publicly question his philosophical standing in such a resolution without any firm basis? If you recall we wrote in the first letter:

--- begin quote ---

a) Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja's book is a transcendental work that represents the will of Krishna. Yes, we know you disagree that it is, but to be fair, in writing his book he has followed the standard process prescribed by our acaryas whereas in criticizing it you have not. The example of Sri Svarupa Damodara Gosvami in CC Antya chapter 5, in which he extensively quoted sastra to show the disqualification of a work purporting to be transcendental, is the standard that should be followed-especially by the GBC, whose members are supposed to be exemplary in matters such as this.

--- end quote ---

Even in this letter, you have failed to explain sastrically according to standard methods why the book doesn't represent the teachings of Srila Prabhupada. This is what we referred to as the nama-aparadha of sruti-sastra-nindanam, blasphemy of Vedic literature or literature in pursuance of the Vedic version. Therefore you either need to explain why it is deviated or apologize.

The present, amended resolution 313 creates doubts in the mind of devotees as to whether Maharaja's book is based on guru, sadhu, and sastra. Devotees will unfortunately conclude that GBC has spoken against Maharaja's book.

If you want to correct this, you could amend it along the following lines: "Maharaja's book is based on guru, sadhu, and sastra. It is indeed transcendental literature which is suitable for reading of all members of ISKCON. However please do not consider that the views presented in the book are necessarily ISKCON's future policy."

Finally, please consider the email below:

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Vasudeva Datta Das <srilanka.help108@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Sep 2, 2016 at 1:54 PM

Subject: Re: Letter from HHBVKKS Disciples to the GBC

To:

Another point:

Because of the ban we are facing practical difficulties in preaching mission.

For example, Guru Maharaja supposed to come to Sri Lanka by the end of this month. One of our well-wishers from Colombo wants to organize a big preaching program for Guru Maharaja. Today he approached the ISKCON Colombo TP and expressed his desire to invite Maharaja for the Bhagavad-gita awareness program. TP said to him that Maharaja is not well situated in ISKCON and it is better not to invite him.

So these kinds of difficulties we have to face because of GBC's not clearly and publicly removing the ban and apologize.

ys vdd

----- Forwarded message -----

a) The letter from Vasudeva Datta Prabhu above in Colombo is one example showing how resolution 313, Harmonizing Our Preaching Efforts, has given Maharaja a bad name and is impeding his preaching. Therefore the GBC should minimally make a statement to clarify his position. Is he a sannyasi in good standing, or not?

Has there been any censure? Is there reason to doubt his ability to properly represent Srila Prabhupada?

b) The GBC's professing no mal-intent rings hollow considering that many GBC members from North America are on record for saying Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja has misrepresented Srila Prabhupada. Clearly, there was intent to damage his standing in ISKCON.

Let me make one final point in response to your letter. You said that the GBC EC is currently in dialogue with Bhakti Vikasa Swami through Prahladananda Swami to cooperatively work toward resolution of this matter." We checked with Maharaja whether he was indeed in dialogue with GBC EC, and this was his response:

----- Forwarded message -----
From: Bhakti Vikasa Swami <Bhakti.Vikasa.Swami@pamho.net>
Date: Tue, Aug 30, 2016 at 4:11 PM
Subject: Corroborating GBC claims about correspondence with you about WMM.
To: Krishna Kirti Das <krishnakirti@gmail.com>
Cc: Murari Das <muraridas.bvks@gmail.com>

> The GBC EC
> is currently in dialogue with Bhakti Vikasa Swami through Prahladananda
> Swami to cooperatively work toward resolution of this matter

it's news to me

We would like close our correspondence by reiterating our requests from our initial letter and provide some further comments on them:

1) An unconditional, public apology to Sri Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaja for besmirching his character.

Irrespective of whether GBC made an error or it was vindictive decision, Maharaja's image was tarnished by the resolution. The GBC is responsible for that. Therefore they still owe a public apology to Maharaja.

2) An unconditional, public apology for misleading devotees to believe that Maharaja's book Women: Masters or Mothers? (or its other titles, such as Mothers and Masters) does not represent the guru-parampara coming in the line of His Divine Grace, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-Acarya of ISKCON.

The GBC shouldn't have a problem in acknowledging the above as your concern was about the non-PC statements in the book and not their fidelity to guru-sadhu-sastra (at least you have not been able to make a case of it). Therefore you still owe public apology to devotees.

3) An unconditional, public apology and retraction of bans enacted by ISKCON sub-institutions under your direct or indirect authority-specifically the North American GBC, the GBC of the United Kingdom, and ISKCON Vrindavan.

You (GBC EC) wrote that the GBC has given freedom to local GBCs to make decisions on various matters independently in their designated zones. You also wrote that GBC body is careful not to rise to the level of nama-aparadha of sruti-sastra-nindanam. Does that mean individual GBC members are allowed for sruti-sastra-nindanam and not the whole body? As the parent GBC body it is your duty to guard against any such actions and therefore a retraction of the regional bans is in order. If you let it pass without objection, then you are just as culpable as they are. Maunam sammati laksanam, "silence implies consent."

In this regard, we hope you will consider these points and concerns of ours before your next decision.

Your servants,

Swami B.A. Tirtha, initiated 1996, TP ISKCON San Diego, California (USA)
Krishna Kirti Das, initiated 1990, Accepted as siksa disciple of HH BVKS May 2014, Editor, Author, Statistician.

(USA)

Gokul Candra Das , initiated 1994, TP ISKCON Salem ,Tamil Nadu, Author, (India)

Akincana Krsna Das, initiated 1997, TP ISKCON Vellore Tamil Nadu, (India)

Caitanya Mahaprabhu Dasa, initiated 1997, BTG Gujarati Publishing , Preacher for 24 Namhatta Programs, ISKCON Vallabh Vidya Nagar Vice-president, Gujarat (India)

Savyasaci Das(JPS), initiated 1999, Head of Steering committee, Nandagram Farm project, Gujarat and Preaching Coordinator for ISKCON Bhopal (India)

Vasudeva-datta Das, initiated 1999, TP ISKCON Batticaloa (Sri Lanka)

Kisora Das, initiated 1999, Sanskrit Editor (India)

Nityananda Das, initiated 2001, Sanskrit translator, BBT (India)

Radhesh Das, initiated 2002, BTG Gujarati Preacher, Congregational Preacher - Surat, Book Distribution cocordinator, Gujarat (India)

Aravindaksha Das, initiated 2002, Congregational Preacher, Bhakti Vikasa Trust official, Surat (India)

Sri Giridhari Das, initiated 2002, BTG Tamil Editor, Translator and Editor for BBT Tamil (India)

Sankirtan Das, initiated 2003, TP ISKCON Brno (Czech Republic)

Nateswar Narottam Das(JPS), initiated 2004, Sankirtan Leader and Youth preacher (India)

Nitai Pada Kamala Das, initiated 2004, General Manager, ISKCON Mayapur, West Bengal (India)

Priya Govinda Das, initiated 2005, Youth preacher, (India)

Gopalacarya Das, initiated 2005, TP ISKCON Inis Rath Island (Ireland)

Sridhara Srinivas Das, initiated 2006, Fulltime Grhastha Book Distributor and Preacher.

Damodar Das, initiated 2006, BVKS media ministry, Vedic culture research, Nandagram Farm project, Gujarat (India)

Damodara Nityananda Das, initiated June 2006, (Phd, Prof) Author (India)

Murari Das, initiated 2007, TP ISKCON Blantyre (Malawi)

Vrindavana Candra Das, initiated 2010, Book production, Former Secretary to HH BVKS (India)

Jagannatha Das, initiated 2013, Manager of ISKCON Bhopal (India)