



## A Word and a Staple

BY: ROCANA DASA



## "henceforward"

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In a recent thread of discussion from a Prabhupadanuga forum, a number of questions were posed by Yasodanandana dasa, and answered by Madhudvisa dasa, whose reply appears in today's Sun: "[The Truth is Very Powerful](#)". Yasodanandana appears to have pasted in the two numbered questions from an email he'd received, then expanded upon them with his own questions.

The first question in Yasodanandana's email was:

"1) Where is the recorded conversation with Srila Prabhupada where they [Srila Prabhupada and Tamal] discussed the drafting and signing of the July 9th 1977? Where is it?"

This question may have been inspired by a statement I made in a recent article, "[Evidence Tampering: Rtvik Sleight of Hand, Part 2](#)":

"As we know, the July 9th Letter was not written by Srila Prabhupada, it was only signed by him. There is no transcription available of any conversation in which Srila Prabhupada instructed Tamal Krishna Goswami to get on with composing this letter,

instructing him as to what the letter should say."

We were surprised to see these questions being put forward by Yasodanandana dasa, who is one of the foremost Rtvik pandits, and who we assumed was a master repository of Rtvik evidence. But we see here that he has approached Madhudvisa, another prominent Rtvik proponent, who responded to the questions on evidence in his 'The Truth is Very Powerful'. Madhudvisa wrote:

"There is so much evidence Prabhu and I don't see anyone presenting it very systematically."

And:

"There is the July conversation where Tamal and Prabhuapda and the other devotees talk about the July 9th letter and Prabhupada basically dictates it and Tamal just types it up. So to say that Prabhupada never read it or didn't know what was in it is such nonsense."

In Yasodanandana's query, we don't find an assertion that someone is saying Srila Prabhupada never read the July 9th Letter and didn't know what was in it. I certainly never said that. This is Madhudvisa thought-form. What I said in my article (above) was that there is no transcript of Srila Prabhupada instructing Tamal Krishna to compose this letter – THIS July 9th Letter, which includes the names of two devotees never mentioned in the July 7th Conversation; which includes the word "henceforward" – also not mentioned in the July 7th Conversation; and which includes neither the term "ritvik" nor "ritvik", which Srila Prabhupada also did not mention in the July 7th Conversation. Yet Madhudvisa prabhu states that on July 7th, "Prabhupada basically dictates it" [the July 9th Letter]. Clearly, this is an exaggerated weighting of the "evidence" in favor of the Rtvik conclusion.

What we generally hear from all the Rtvik camps is the trumpeting of absolutist positions, but a lack of systematic presentation of evidence. Madhudvisa writes:

"Neither side is really correct. Prabhupada is correct and we simply have to surrender to him and hear from him and understand all the points in their full detail from him. If we have our own idea and are only open to Prabhupada's words when they support our idea that is wrong."

Although Madhudvisa points this out, from his posting we can see that he makes the same mistake in asserting his own interpretations as absolute. In fact, this dynamic is endemic to the Great Rtvik Debate. The absence of a coherent presentation of evidence even applies to The Final Order, as we will be demonstrating in the days ahead.

Suggesting that all camps have it wrong and are bending Srila Prabhupada's words to suit themselves, when all you have to do is 'hear and understand', Madhudvisa summarizes his own proof that the July 9th Letter authorizes a post-samadhi diksa Rtvik system:

"There is the recording of Srila Prabhupada drafting it, there is the transcript of this in the folio...."

In fact, the 'recording and transcript' of Srila Prabhupada "drafting" the July 9th Letter doesn't exist. The transcript of the July 7th Conversation doesn't at all resemble the "drafting" of a mission critical, final letter of instruction and authorization. Rather, it resembles a conversation in which Srila Prabhupada is presented with a problem, and offers a solution.

On July 7th, Tamal Krishna Goswami informed Srila Prabhupada about a problem he was having as his secretary – that he's getting all these requests for both 1st and 2nd initiation. He's asking Srila Prabhupada what he should do about this? Srila Prabhupada essentially offers a general solution... let the senior sannyasis do it. This is a practical approach to an immediate problem – a hallmark of Srila Prabhupada's management style. Srila Prabhupada begins to name a few names: Tamal, Kirtanananda, Satsvarupa, etc. Over the course of the conversation, between them they come up with a list of names that

represented a regional solution to the problem Tamal had raised.

On July 7th, Srila Prabhupada does not mention the word "rittik" or "ritvik". "Rtvik" and "rittik" are words Tamal Krishna introduced in the May 28th Conversation and the July 9th Letter. Srila Prabhupada had used the word in the context of his preaching on Bhagavatam, which is undoubtedly where Tamal Krishna picked it up. (In the Bhagavatam instances, however, the word was **never** used to refer to a post-samadhi diksa initiation process.) Tamal Krishna picked this word when wanted to put a name on the particular arrangement of Srila Prabhupada having his senior men choose names and chant on beads. What preceded this had simply been Srila Prabhupada's siksa system, wherein Temple Presidents and other leaders were performing the agni hotra ceremony for initiates. This practice had been going on since the late 1960's.

Obviously, it's not that Srila Prabhupada (or even Tamal, for that matter) intended for this name to be put up in neon lights and have it become a movement in and of itself. No, it was simply a term that Tamal introduced into the equation. His use of the term on May 28th and later in the July 9th Letter weren't in accordance with the Bhagavatam references, although Srila Prabhupada didn't make an issue of that. "Rtvik" was one of numerous terms used in the May 28th Conversation, along with "officiating acaryas", "rtvik-acarya", "guru", and "regular guru".

On July 7th, Srila Prabhupada did not dictate what was to become the July 9th Letter. He had dictated probably thousands of letters prior to this, and they were actually "dictations". But this conversation, which Tamal Krishna later summarized and characterized by using his own terminology, was not a "dictation" by Prabhupada – not by any stretch of the word. Srila Prabhupada heard about a practical problem, and his response was, let's solve it, very simple.

Srila Prabhupada's only comment on July 7th that could be remotely construed as pertaining to the 'drafting of a formal letter' was: "You can note down these names." And his only comment pertaining to the distribution of this supposedly formal letter of authorization was, "That's nice. Now you distribute." This is how the Rtviks suggest Srila Prabhupada handled the instructions for what is a sea change in the mechanism for diksa initiation -- a method found nowhere in sastra – which is supposedly meant to be the sole and only final word on how diksa is to be carried out forever in ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada's branch of the disciplic succession.

According to Madhudvisa, this sweeping transformation to the eternal process for diksa is based on the July 9th Letter and the "evidence" of the July 7th Conversation that preceded it, in which Srila Prabhupada supposedly "dictated" the July 9th Letter, which names 11 men who are supposedly the sole and only means of getting diksa in Srila Prabhupada's line, forever after. Since no further instruction is given, according to the Rtviks, this means that when the eleven men die or become incapacitated (which they already have), the end of Prabhupada's branch will have been reached. No more diksa initiations can occur in ISKCON, ever. And this is what the Rtviks today put forward as the 'solution for initiations in ISKCON'.

Madhudvisa goes on to provide more "evidence" in support of the July 9th Letter:

"...there is an instruction from Srila Prabhupada to Ramesvara that he should immediately duplicate the July 9th letter and his final will and put them together and mail them to all the ISKCON centers and GBC members. This was done by Ramesvara and he wrote a covering letter which he sent to all temples and GBC members stating that the attached letter describes how initiations will be carried out in ISKCON in the future...

There is no other letter from Srila Prabhupada that I am aware of that he ever ordered that it be sent to every temple and every GBC member. So that means that Srila Prabhupada considered this July 9th letter to be very, very, very important. And the fact that he ordered that Ramesvara staple it together with his final will is very strong proof that Srila Prabhupada intended that the instructions in the July 9th

letter were to continue after his departure. Clearly Prabhupada's final will would be for after his disappearance from our mundane vision, and Prabhupada had Ramesvara attach the July 9th letter to this. So the two things are intimately related, the July 9th letter and Prabhupada's final will. They both describe how thing should go on in ISKCON after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance."

We asked Madhudvisa dasa to provide us with citations for the evidence he refers to above. His reply follows (in part):

"... if you have a copy Hansadutta's old "Srila Prabhupada, His Movement and You" that has got copies of the cover letter Ramesvara wrote and attached to Prabhupada's will and the July 9th letter and sent to all temples and GBCs and also there are copies of the three letters from Tamil on behalf of Srila Prabhupada and in those he is saying "you should continue to be ritvik..."

I will have a look also, maybe I have the scans and can send."

He included with his response a copy of the letter from *Srila Prabhupada, His Movement and You*, which is also in the Vedabase – it is a letter from Ramesvara dated July 21, 1977. The only reference in that letter to the July 9th Letter and Will is this one:

"I have just received some letters from Tamal Krishna Maharaja, and am enclosing herein two documents: 1) Srila Prabhupada's final version of his last will, and 2) Srila Prabhupada's initial list of disciples appointed to perform initiations for His Divine Grace. This initial list is also being sent to all centers."

Not only does Ramesvara not specifically mention the July 9th Letter, he does not say what the other letters are that Tamal Krishna sent him in this bundle of letters, or whether they have some bearing on the instructions contained in the July 9th Letter, the Will, or otherwise. Also note that the reference is to an "initial list" of appointed disciples. This clearly indicates that an amended version of the July 9th Letter was expected to follow – even though Tamal Krishna has included the magic word "henceforward" in this "initial letter".

What Madhudvisa did not supply is a citation or copy of the instruction that he says Srila Prabhupada gave to Ramesvara, that he should "immediately duplicate the July 9th letter and his final will and put them together and mail them to all the ISKCON centers and GBC members". We do not find such a letter in our version of the Folio, so we would appreciate Madhudvisa providing it.

Madhudvisa said (above):

"This was done by Ramesvara and he wrote a covering letter which he sent to all temples and GBC members stating that the attached letter describes how initiations will be carried out in ISKCON in the future..."

I was the Temple President of Seattle at the time the July 9th Letter came out. As I have written in the past about this episode, at the time, the arrival of the July 9th Letter was not taken as a particularly significant event. It simply stated what had already been going on, with a few additional names now on the list, and in writing. There was little or no discussion about it. The letter was simply put up on the bulletin board for all the devotees to read. No further attention was called to it. And the Letter **did not arrive in Seattle with a copy of Srila Prabhupada's Will stapled to it, or even included with it in the envelope.** I never even saw the Will until a year or two after Srila Prabhupada had departed, when the Zonal Acaryas produced it to support their new power structure.

Madhudvisa asserts that Ramesvara's cover letter characterizes the July 9th Letter he was distributing in this way: that it "*describes how initiations will be carried out in ISKCON in the future...*". But to be more precise, Ramesvara's letter actually said the July 9th Letter is: "*Srila Prabhupada's initial list of disciples appointed to perform initiations...*"

While Madhudvisa says that Srila Prabhupada instructed Ramesvara to "*immediately*

*duplicate the July 9th letter and his final will and put them together and mail them to all the ISKCON centers and GBC members",* what Ramesvara actually says in his cover letter is that *"This initial list is also being sent to all centers."*

Ramesvara does not say 'the Will is being sent' AND ALSO 'this initial list is being sent'. He actually says in the cover letter, which is addressed to GBC members only, that *"This initial list is also being sent to all centers."* The word ALSO does not refer to the Letter and the Will. It clearly refers to the fact that the Letter is being sent to the GBC (under this cover letter) and ALSO to all centers (who are not addressed as recipients of the cover letter).

So this does not at all support Madhudvisa's statement that:

"...there is an instruction from Srila Prabhupada to Ramesvara that he should immediately duplicate the July 9th letter and his final will and put them together and mail them to all the ISKCON centers and GBC members. This was done by Ramesvara and he wrote a covering letter which he sent to all temples and GBC members stating that the attached letter describes how initiations will be carried out in ISKCON in the future..."

Altogether, we find that Madhudvisa's presentation of the "evidence" thus far is either unsubstantiated or very inaccurate:

1. We have yet to see or hear the instruction from Srila Prabhupada to Ramesvara that Madhudvisa says exists.
2. Ramesvara's cover letter is addressed only to the GBC, not to all temples and GBCs.
3. The cover letter says Ramesvara is sending the July 9th Letter to all centers – not that he is sending the Letter and the Will.
4. As a Temple President, I received only the July 9th Letter, and there was not a copy of the Will attached to it or included with it.

Please note that what we are discussing here is a key portion of Madhudvisa's so-called evidence to prove that the July 9th Letter is what he says it is. He states that the formal, final, "henceforward" forever instruction for Rtvik diksa after Srila Prabhupada's departure (post-samadhi) is proved by the July 7th Conversation in which Srila Prabhupada "dictated it" (which he did not); and that the July 9th Letter is to be taken as an absolute final instruction because it was distributed, by Srila Prabhupada's specific instruction (which is not provided), stapled to a copy of his Will (which it was not, in Seattle).

What we really have is a July 7th Conversation in which Srila Prabhupada solved a problem Tamal was having by incrementally improving a practice that was already in place. His so-called "drafting" of the formal, final Letter – which represents a sea change in the eternal practice of diksa initiation -- really amounts to a conversation in which Srila Prabhupada says, *"You can note down these names"*, and instructs the distribution of the letter by saying, *"That's nice. Now you distribute."*

Even if Madhudvisa produces evidence that Srila Prabhupada actually instructed the stapling together of these two documents for distribution, that is not proof that the July 9th Letter is meant to be understood in tandem with, or as a part to, the Will. An instruction for stapling could mean any number of things – we can only speculate. It could simply mean, 'Here are two important documents. Keep them together and don't lose them.' Given the fact that the neophyte and ambitious disciples were clearly in process of strategizing for their own positions in an impending succession, as clearly evidenced by the mood and content of the May 28th Conversation, and as borne out by the Zonal Acarya takeover that followed, Srila Prabhupada could well have attached the July 9th Letter to the Will as a subtle way of saying: 'Here are all the answers you're wondering about; now please stop bothering me, and trying to get me to tell you what you're hoping to hear.' In other words, it might simply have been a way to stop further selfishly motivated inquiries. Madhudvisa acknowledges that *"these men were mad after power"*. Srila Prabhupada might simply

have wished them to stop wasting time speculating and scheming, and bothering him when he didn't feel well. But again, we can only speculate. Not only has the "staple them together" instruction not yet manifested, even if it did, where is the specific instruction as to how the two stapled documents relate?

If Srila Prabhupada had meant for there to be a legal tie between the July 9th Letter and the Will, one would expect to find that both documents contain a reference to the other, or that at least one refers to the other. But that is not the case. Madhudvisa doesn't say that Prabhupada mentioned any kind of legal connection that was intended between the two. A simple staple does not a binding connection make. The Will doesn't refer at all to initiations, so there is no obvious legal bridge between the two. Without some other specific statement tying the two documents together, one can only speculate about such a connection. **And this does not constitute "proof"**.

Again, let us consider Madhudvisa's statement of evidence (with our emphasis):

"There is no other letter from Srila Prabhupada that I am aware of that he ever ordered that it be sent to every temple and every GBC member. So that means that Srila Prabhupada considered this July 9th letter to be very, very, very important. And the fact that he ordered that Ramesvara staple it together with his final will is very strong proof that Srila Prabhupada intended that the instructions in the July 9th letter were to continue after his departure. Clearly Prabhupada's final will would be for after his disappearance from our mundane vision, and Prabhupada had Ramesvara attach the July 9th letter to this. So the two things are intimately related, the July 9th letter and Prabhupada's final will. They both describe how thing should go on in ISKCON after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance."

We have already debunked essentially every element of this statement of proof, except one: that there is no other letter from Srila Prabhupada that he ever ordered be sent to every temple and every GBC member". But that is also incorrect. Take, for example, the instruction given by Srila Prabhupada in his October 17, 1975 letter to Ramesvara:

"I have instructed Pusta Krishna Swami to issue one newsletter to the temple presidents, GBC, and sannyasis concerning the nefarious activities of Swami Bon. Kindly copy this and send out to all the temples accordingly that they should have no dealings with Swami Bon or others who ..."

In this instance, Pusta Krishna is acting as a secretary, in much the same way Ramesvara and Tamal Krishna served in distributing information for Srila Prabhupada. Now, one might try to say that a "newsletter" is different than a "letter", but that differentiation obviously doesn't apply. In this context, Srila Prabhupada is not asking for a "newsletter" full of happy current events. He is asking for a news announcement, or statement, about his instructions on a serious matter – that the disciples are to avoid associating with certain Gaudiya Matha godbrothers. Now whether or not Madhudvisa believes the matter of Bon Maharaja is also very, very, very important – as important as instructions for handling initiations -- the fact is that Srila Prabhupada requested a (news)letter be distributed to every temple and every GBC member – and every sannyasi, in this case. So the range of distribution of the July 9th Letter was not a singularly unique event.

We have demonstrated that Madhudvisa's asserted evidence is completely faulty, as is the illogical conclusion he arrives at: that the July 9th Letter and the Will 'are intimately related', and therefore they 'both describe how things should go on in ISKCON after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance'.

In his original letter to Yasodanandana, which we mentioned at the opening of this article, Madhudvisa mentioned several other pieces of evidence:

"at least 3 letters Srila Prabhupada had TKG send. Two to Hansadutta and one to Kirtananda."

We requested copies or citations of the above mentioned letters, but they have not yet

been provided. Madhudvisa offers this final advice regarding his evidence:

"There is no doubt in this, there is no questioning this at all. It is a fact."

But as we have clearly shown, there is actually a great deal to question about this so-called evidence. Some of the evidence provided remains without citation or copy, the rest of it has either been incorrectly described or characterized with great exaggeration and speculation. So it is not at all "a fact".

There is "no doubt" for Madhudvisa because he assumes his interpretation of the evidence is absolutely right. He says: "*Prabhupada is correct and we simply have to surrender to him and hear from him and understand all the points in their full detail from him.*" Of course, gaining such an understanding requires one to carefully consider the dynamics going on within ISKCON at the time, particularly with the senior men. The Rtviks do this to a degree, but they slant the context in the direction of their own conclusions. They don't admit that the dynamic involving the ambitious leaders lends itself equally – if not far better – to the scenario we're pointing out:

That the May 28th and July 7th Conversations demonstrate the eagerness of the senior men to secure the hoped-for instructions for a succession plan that would ensure their own power in ISKCON. Srila Prabhupada, dealing with ill health and knowing full well what their desires and intentions were, avoided being put in a corner. In some instances he spoke casually and generally about arrangements. In other instances he was, in our opinion, purposefully vague in response to their pressing for details. He did not name a successor acarya, or say that the men who had been acting (or who were supposed to have been acting) in a siksa role on his behalf would be specifically authorized as diksas after his departure. Nor did he "dictate" the July 9th Letter, or mention the term "henceforward". He simply gave some directions which, if followed, would have continued the program he'd already tried to implement in ISKCON during his presence, with a few additions. He did not state that it was to go on forever after, regardless of Tamal Krishna's inclusion of the term "henceforward" in the Letter.

In short, Srila Prabhupada did not authorize or instruct his disciples to implement what is a sea change in the eternal diksa initiation process memorialized throughout sastra, based on a single word or staple. No. He simply gave some instructions to those who – having their own ulterior motives -- were pressing him to do so. And with respect to the fine points of how things would go on after his departure, I conclude that he did exactly what his own Spiritual Master had done – he recognized the ambitious disciples for what they were, he avoided giving succession instructions to unqualified persons, and he relied upon the fact that sastra clearly describes how diksa initiations go on after the departure of the spiritual master. Just as his Spiritual Master had done.

It is only the ambitions of the followers that have resulted in the interpretations we find today – both in the post-samadhi Rtvik diksa camp and the ISKCON/GBC diksa rubber-stamp camp. But if one is honest and makes a careful study of all the evidence – not simply adopting exaggerated and inaccurately stated commentaries on what the evidence is, or what it means – then one will see that the context of the May 28th Conversation, the July 7th Conversation and the July 9th Letter gives us a clear indication as to how we should understand these things.

Madhudvisa writes:

This "ritvik" preaching has been damaged a lot by fanatical devotees who, instead of simply establishing that Prabhupada established a system to accept disciples via ritvik priests and intended that same system to continue after his apparent disappearance they spend all their time and energy trying to establish that Prabhupada did not intend any of his disciples to go on to become qualified diksa gurus. Which is a lie. Actually Prabhupada's very strong desire, his mission, is to create at least one and hopefully many pure devotees who can do what he has done, become acharya, initiate disciples, preach Krishna consciousness all over the world. If someone can actually do that that would be the most pleasing thing to Srila Prabhupada."

Madhudvisa is making what appear to be contradictory statements here. On one hand he says that Srila Prabhupada established a system for rtvik diksa initiations after his departure, for all time. On the other hand, he says the Rtviks are wrong to promote the notion that Prabhupada didn't intend any of his disciples to go on to become qualified diksa gurus. We wrote to Madhudvisa prabhu and asked him to explain this seeming contradiction, and he kindly replied with a detailed explanation. We agree with some elements of his explanation, and disagree with others. Our comments on his logic and the conclusions he has arrived at will be the subject of Part Two of this article. For today, we have simply focused on showing the degree to which his presentation of 'absolute proof' in support of his conclusions on the July 9th directive is flawed.

In closing his original article, Madhudvisa wrote:

"Desperate men who disagree with what Srila Prabhupada has done try so hard to cover up this fact so I am sure that if we simply honestly present this fact then the general devotee community will accept this. If we simply present this there is nothing anyone can say to defeat us or criticize us."

We certainly agree that there has been no shortage of desperate men trying to promote their own conclusions, as evidenced by the pattern of falsification of the July 9th Letter we [exposed in a recent article](#). We are not suggesting that Madhudvisa is such a 'desperate man'. We have all respect for Madhudvisa prabhu. He is one of Srila Prabhupada's most determined and successful followers, who has dedicated himself to distributing Prabhupada's original books for many years now. Even as a member of the Rtvik congregation, Madhudvisa has always been one of the most civil, cooperative and Vaisnava-like members of the entire community. We simply take exception to his presentation of the facts, the evidence, and the conclusions that flow from them.

As we look at the subject more closely in the days ahead, we will demonstrate that the entire foundation of Rtvik-vada is plagued with factual errors, evidential errors, errors of logic, contradictions in terms, and the propagation of intentional falsehoods. Many of these problems have been pointed out in the past by others, but as Madhudvisa says, "*There is so much evidence Prabhu and I don't see anyone presenting it very systematically.*"

And that is our current mission.

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