

The Jan 16th 1999 LA RtVik Reform Show

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The Attendance

Based on the first reports that came out about the January 16th gathering of devotees in Los Angeles, one gets the impression that the meetings were a very successful. There was a great accomplishment on the weekend of January 16, but it was eclipsed by all propaganda that was reported about the LA Reform Show.

Having attended both the RtVik convention in Alachuha last fall 1998 and the one held on January 16, 1999 the LA gathering was less impressive and more disappointing. Instead of being two days long it was only one and less people attended. The sign in list did accumulate about 100 names but that represented all the devotees who attended any part of the program. Many came for prasadam or just a part of the day. Although several months had gone by since the Alachuha meetings, the ISKCON Reform Group (IRG) was still not clear about how they actually intended to "Reform" ISKCON nor were they any better organized.

When Sriman Krishnakanta prabhu presented his philosophical justification for *the "Final Order"*, (FO) there were about 75 people in the audience listening. The effective number was actually smaller then that considering how many of the seats were filled with the same RtVik groupies that attended the Alachuha meetings. I was quite aware of all these things because I made the nametags for all the attendees and greeted everyone as they came through the registration desk. I was particularly interested in counting, and noting, how many attended each part of the meeting because I was scheduled to give my presentation about [Srila Prabhupada's Legacy \(Hyperlink\)](#) stressing Vaishnava Etiquette in the evening.

When I compare the attendance of the IRG meeting to the potential of several hundred devotees that show up for other LA festivals, like Rathayatra, Gour Purnima, and Janmastami, I am surprised that this program had such a small turn out. Considering all the propaganda I have heard from the ISKCON FO group, about all the droves of devotees who support their work, I expected a much larger crowd. It's also interesting to report that several local RtVik sympathizers went out of their way to tell me they *intentionally boycotted the meeting because they were uncomfortable with the mood and reputation of the IRG.*

Highlights

During the course of the meeting it was implied more than once that the GBC was not following Srila Prabhupada's instruction and therefore *"the devotees who new the truth"* were not obliged to follow the GBC! Sriman Amogalila prabhu admonished the gathering for making such a spurious conclusion and gave the following illustration to demonstrate the flaw in their reasoning. He explained that even if a police officer is corrupt he is still a representative of the law. It was quite clear to all who were listening that until a misbehaving officer is properly disciplined for his illegal behavior he non-the-less remains empowered by the people to enforce the law. In this way Amogalila implored all the devotees to cooperate with the GBC because they were still Srila Prabhupada's representatives even though they have made mistakes. I appreciated his suggestion because it was consistent with what Lord Krishna explained so emphatically in the Bhagavad Gita:

"Even if one commits the most abominable action, if he is engaged in devotional service he is to be considered saintly." (Bg. 9.30)

But the words had barley gotten out of Amogalila's mouth before several devotees leaped to their feet obviously quite agitated. The highly emotional testimony that followed revealed that several of the attendees felt they had *"waited long enough"* and it was time to *overthrow* the authority of the GBC. The battle cry was consistent from one speaker to the next: *"If they do not follow Srila Prabhupada... we have no obligation to follow them!"* Of course the obvious problem with this reasoning is it opens the door for complete anarchy by allowing independent renegade interpretations from anyone who wishes to decide for themselves *who is following and who is not*.

Why No Debate?

One of the re-occurring complaints the RtVik's made was that they are not given a forum to properly debate how Srila Prabhupada's wanted initiations to be carried out. It becomes evident at events like this why there is reason not to do so. I find it fascinating to observe how devotees who are apparently well studied in the philosophy of Krishna *Consciousness loose their ability to control the desire to speak as soon as they hear something they don't understand or disagree with*. When a gathering of FO-Sastra groupies get together to *"discuss"* Prabhupada's instructions there does not seem to be a shortage of self proclaimed pontificators. Even a benign comment, spoken innocently from an impartial audience participant, could trigger several people to leap to the microphone. What follows is often an endless stream of personal commentary, antidotal experiences, and impassioned stories that would dazzle even the most ardent listener. This coercive conversational technique may be good for establishing who owns the block in the streets of South Central LA but it is hardly the environment for any type of intelligent sober discussion and not even remotely characteristic of Brahminical behavior.

Don't Get Mad.. Get Equally Flawed

At on point Krsnakanta made reference to the saying: *"Don't get mad, get even!"* and indicated without any reservation that was the underlying strategy of the IRG. After hearing his lecture how to understand the words that held the key for properly discerning Srila Prabhupada's *"Final Order"* the literal way of thinking begun to rub off on me. As I listened I began to consider what Krsnakanta meant by *"get even"*. Later I looked up the word *"even"* in the dictionary, and discovered that it meant: *"Being without variation", or "equal."* So considering how meticulous the FO Pujaries are in understanding the use of the English language, I then knew that the IRG aspires to be *"equal"* to the GBC *"without variation."* This was a little disappointing for me because I had thought the IRG was aspiring for something better then the current status quo. But having listened carefully, and properly heard from the right source, it was obvious I had arrived at the TRUE meaning of what KrsnaKanta meant. In stead of lament the mediocre goals of the IRG,

I chose instead to appreciate the education I had received in understanding how to comprehend the English language.

Lots of Hurt & Anger

One of the things that was quite apparent at both the Alachua and the LA meetings was the fact that there was a disproportional amount of ANGRY devotees in the audience. Needless to say these individuals all had a long list of things that had been “*Done To Them*” by some ISKCON authority and were quite willing to dwell on it. I found that any attempt to have even a casual conversation about the arduous task of reform often led quickly to a long diatribe about something a representative of ISKCON did that was not appropriate. Then, with the assistance of a big philosophical leap, the FO dasa I was conversing with would jump to the conclusion that these transgressions *prove the need for the RtVik system to be established!* I found this to be quite strange considering how much the RtVik’s flaunt their apparent learning and wish so much to convince the rest of us about their profound ability to reason logically.

To an objective observer it is easy to see the obvious link between the way many of the RtViks behave and the strong human emotions they carry like Anger, Hurt, Disgust, and Revenge etc. Although I am teasing probably too much, it really is understandable why so many of Srila Prabhupada’s students are upset. There have been many things done which were inappropriate, dishonest, and even illegal. But anger that manifests in the form of shouting, blasphemy of devotees, confrontational browbeating and generally immature behavior is just an impediment towards constructive reform. This is obvious by what Krishna clearly states in regards to the consequences of uncontrolled anger:

“From anger, complete delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost and when intelligence is lost one falls down again into the material pool.” – Bg 2. 63

The Supreme Lord provides an important explanation for why the hard core RtViks can’t comprehend the good reasons and logical arguments others have for not accepting the FO-Sastra. He clearly states that unresolved anger causes one *to lost their intelligence and leads to fall down*. This explains why these great devotees, who served so nicely in the past and clearly love Srila Prabhupada, would make the serious mistake of speaking harshly about other Vaishnavas. How else could those attracted to the mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu proclaim so arrogantly that *they alone know the TRUTH?* The way the FO-Folks carry on about reading the FO-Sastra one would think it contains the elixir of perfection! Are we to believe that when one finally tastes FO-Nectar one is mystically relieved of the four human defects that the rest of us struggle with? The absurdity of the whole thing becomes even more apparent when we consider the myriad other intelligent, qualified, and seasoned devotees that disagree with their conclusions... *even after reading the FO-Sastra numerous times!*

Apologies Long Over Due

Many devotees have encountered an angry RtVik more than once and recognized their hostility even though they attempt to mask it. This is unfortunate because to the degree that they are controlled by bitterness, to that degree they undermine their effectiveness in restoring ISKCON’s integrity. It’s ridiculous to expect anyone to believe a person who holds a gun to your brain and shouts: *“I love and care about you! Now do what I say because I am right... or else I will blow off your head!”*

It is understandable that many of the devotees who either moved out, or were forced out of the temple, have unresolved anger. It's easy to see why they have rallied behind the RtVik philosophy. The FO-Sastra is well presented and has the power to seduce a bleeding heart. There is no doubt that ISKCON needs a major overhaul to correct the serious failures we are all too familiar with. However it's hard for any aware person to understand how winding the clock back to 1977, by implementing the RtVik system like the IRG suggests, would magically fix everything.

We have already illustrated the veiling effect of anger and it's ability to cloud the intelligence. For that reason it would be appropriate for the GBC to apologize to the devotees who have been mistreated over the years. Many have suffered due to unfortunate circumstances, immature managers, ineffective communications, and even scandalously poor judgement or raw selfishness. Although a lot of the people responsible for these transgressions have long since gone away, they have left a path of hurt, alienation, abuse of power, and rejection in the hearts of many dedicated disciples. Even though these issues occurred in the past, they continue to accrue hard feelings and need to be put to rest. The best way to do that is with a comprehensive public apology that addresses *our* mistakes openly and honestly. Unfortunately we are all responsible not just one person, group, or administration. We have all fallen short in one way or another. Lets grow up and be honest enough to admit it and stop living in denial.

We know there have been some horrendous screw-ups that have left terrible scars on devotee children, empowered book distributors, dedicated women, scholarly devotees, life members, and many others who served Srila Prabhupada. It took the United States 50 years to apologize to the Japanese Americans who were abruptly incarcerated during World War II. Although late, the ceremony was necessary to put the issue behind us as a nation. When our government took ownership for that mess and apologized, it became a powerful expression of America's greatness.

If the good old beer drinking, steak eating, USA can get off it and do the right thing, it's appropriate that the guardians of Srila Prabhupada's legacy also do so. *We have a lot more in jeopardy and we don't have as much time to wait.* Our lawmakers must begin the process now. A genuine apology to all of those who have given so much would demonstrate the type of leadership and character that is essential in order for us to start the process of healing, rebuilding, and the badly needed reform. To be effective the reparation should be carried out on two levels.

Two Branches to Address

ISKCON management should compose a written statement to be distributed generously in-house throughout all of ISKCON. It should not dodge the issues but address them clearly and apologetically request the Vaishnava community to forgive the faux-pas that have been committed. This would serve to heal the devotee community at large.

There are also dedicated individuals who have been doing the best they can for several years, even from their place of exile, to distribute Krishna Consciousness the only way they know how. These are devotees who, in their own unique and often misunderstood way, are committed to the service of Srila Prabhupada but have had more then their share of bad breaks, reversals, and ahead of their time prophecies. It may be hard to distinguish, because their contribution is often tinted by the pain of accumulated hurt, *but these rare souls are also part of Srila Prabhupada,s congregation and they deserve to be embraced.* The time has long come to stop villainizing devotees and start understanding the rejection they have endured, apologize for it and change it.

If we alleviate the anger and hurt that has been understandably brewing in the minds of those who have been wronged, then we give them the freedom to start thinking clearly again. Krishna has diagnosed the symptoms for us and has indicated what we need to do. Antagonism will wane when we all take thoughtful responsibility for what has occurred. Then the heart will be ameliorated and we will all be able to hear the Supreme Lord who is anxious to help us find our way through the difficulties that seem so insurmountable at this time.

If we are either unable, or unwilling, to show compassion to those who have taken shelter of His Divine Grace then we have lost the most essential criteria necessary to call ourselves devotees of Krishna. This is where the real leadership begins and managers must earn the perks of their position. This is where the devotee congregation must also earn the privilege to decorate their forehead with the mark of Vishnu. What is required is an active willingness to go beyond the usual political posturing and into the source of the scourge fearlessly and confidently with the torchlight of knowledge. These suggestions should not be controversial for anyone who has truly understood the conclusion of the Gita and aspires to please the Supreme Lord:

“Fearlessness,...self control,...austerity, simplicity, nonviolence, truthfulness, freedom from anger,... tranquillity, aversion to faultfinding; compassion for ALL living entities; freedom from covetousness; gentleness,... forgiveness,... freedom from envy and the passion for honor—these transcendental qualities, O son of Bharata, belong to godly men endowed with divine nature.” -Bg. 16. 1-3

Reform is not dependent on whether the RtVik or the current initiation system prevails. It lies within a genuine willingness to understand the way paramatma is speaking and directing the actions of those whom appear to be our adversaries. We would be wise to realize that in the distribution of Lord Caitanya’s mercy, there are no adversaries... just unlimited varieties of creative effort.

The Real Success

New Dwarka has always been a caldron for controversy and confrontation because the community is large, diversified and often ahead of the rest of the movement in regards to social changes. In many ways it is a microcosm of the entire ISKCON society. In the past when adversarial personalities, events, circumstances and pent-up emotions have converged in LA the mixture led to antagonism and clash. Ugly confrontations and loud challenges are often worked out on the sidewalk of Watseka. It’s not unlike the showdowns of the old west where conflicts were resolved at high noon by the fastest moving marksman.

But despite the occasional moments of tension that were evident on January 16, there were no dead bodies to be buried on boot hill at the end of the day. When the sun came up on the next day, a different mood began to descend on New Dwarka. Some say it was because of a summit meeting held between the generals of the two superpowers, Adridarana of Calcutta and Bhadrinarayana of San Diego. I believe there was more to it than that. Devotees were becoming more aware of the fact that cooperation requires that we actually listen to each other and adopt a mature, sensitive, and cordial approach to problem resolution.

The Martin Luther King Parade was scheduled for Monday and many of the delegates who came to the seminar remained in New Dwarka to join in this temple-coordinated event. Despite the strong convictions that were shared over the weekend, everyone came together to chant, take prasadam, respect each other and fraternize! The result was a very large, diverse and powerful harinama sankritan party of over 200 devotees dancing side by side from both

camps. All the devotees gathered together and joined in the esthetic distribution of the Holy Name to the 750 thousand people who came from the most troubled parts of LA to see the parade. In the same place where riots broke out and businesses were burned just five years ago ISKCON managers and Hard Core RtViks united for the benediction of all conditioned souls! *This was the real success of the LA Reform meetings!* Under the auspicious glance of Sri Sri Rukmini and Dwarkadish Vaishnavas coming from all over the world gathered in LA and demonstrated that it was possible to set aside philosophical differences and cooperated nicely for everyone's benefit!

This is how we will find our way out of the current mess we are in. This is how we will once again attract the transcendental smile of His Divine Grace. The parade showed us that it was possible to cooperate with each other, despite our differences, if the desire to do so is strong enough. We are the ones who drew the line in the sand, and we are the ones who can remove it by honoring each other as the great personalities that Srila Prabhupada saw us as. We all wish for reform and we can all contribute to improving things if we remember that every devotee is a rare soul and we remember to treat them as such. This is the real perfection of association, not endless bickering, criticism, and faultfinding.

“The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are fully devoted to My service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss from always enlightening on another and conversing about me.” - Bg. 10.9

The Guru/Rtvik debate may appear to be of life and death importance to some, but no one should become so confused by the issue that they think it gives license to commit Vaishnava Aparada. There is never an excuse for all the vitriolic language and offenses that have been heard coming from both sides in this debate. Instead of becoming completely consumed by this controversial issue, *we should strive to follow those instructions that we all know, are very clear and we do not disagree about!* Then Srila Prabhupada will be pleased. Who will start a debate about that?

In time Krishna will reveal how to proceed through the issues that now appear to be so insurmountable. This is the only path we really have at this moment if we don't want to violate the foundation of everything that transcendence is based on. We must follow the fundamental instruction of true humility and respect if we expect there to be any reform at all. In due course the rest will become as clear as the sun rising in the morning. Krishna has promised to help us if we are willing to keep our focus on the right thing.

“But those who always worship me with exclusive devotion, meditation on my Transcendental Form, to them I carry what they lack and preserve what they have.”
Bg. 9-22

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Other Articles by This Author:

(Available on VNN under "USA" Archives)

<i>Guru Crisis – Personal Letter to GBC</i>	(October 15, 1998 - Two Pages)
<i>The Process of Vaishnava Initiation and ISKCON</i>	(October 3, 1998 - 28 pages)
<i>Drop the Bomb and End the War</i>	(December 1, 1998 - 5 Pages)
<i>Whoever Thinks They Can Manage ISKCON is Disqualified</i>	(December 15, 1998 - 4 Pages)
<i>Put The Extremists Where They Belong</i>	(December 27, 1998 - 6 Pages)
<i>"The Art Of War" in ISKCON</i>	(January 7, 1999 – 7 pages)
<i>Fail to Plan is a Plan to Fail</i>	(January 13, 1999 – 5 pages)
<i>Petition for Sanity and Maturity (Powerpoint Presentation)</i>	(January 16, 1999 – 17 slides)
<i>"12 Points Toward Unity & Respect" (Mission Statement)</i>	(January 16, 1999 – 2 Pages)
<i>The LA January 16 Reform Show</i>	(January 29, 1999 – 6 Pages)

(Available on VNN under "WORLD" Archives)

<i>Landmark Education and ISKCON</i>	(January 1, 1998 - 16 Pages)
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