

June 19th Version

Dynamics of ISKCON and its Gurus

Topic and Limitation:

This essay is limited to explaining the relationship between the managerial structure of ISKCON and the activities of its gurus. It is not a detailed, definitive analysis of the management system, nor a detailed analysis of guru-tattva, guru qualification, guru duties or how to choose a guru.

Necessity of the Topic:

ISKCON is the best vehicle for delivering the conditioned souls of this age. It is the fulfillment of the desires of the previous *äcäryas*, a boat carefully crafted by Srila Prabhupada to carry everyone across the ocean of Kali. Therefore management of this institution is of the utmost importance, for it must protect and nourish its members and spread the message of Godhead to all people, following the desires of Srila Prabhupada,

In executing Srila Prabhupada's vision of an international, multi-guru institution, managed by a GBC with its individual Commissioners or Zonal Secretaries, a system has been developed which includes regional bodies such as National or Continental Councils or RGBs, and affiliates such as Temples with Temple Presidents or projects such as Gurukulas with managers.

There are at present many gurus in ISKCON. Each guru has disciples. He exerts influence over them because of the submission of the disciples to guru. This spiritual authority or influence can create a separate managerial structure which is not part of the official managerial system and may come in conflict with the official managerial system. To avoid such conflicts and create harmony and spiritual growth, the relationship between ISKCON's managerial system and the guru's spiritual authority must be clearly established.

Is Management Necessary?

People may ask if management can be conducive to spiritual life. One is material and the other is spiritual. Management makes general rules and spiritual life is unique to the individual. How can a material system or any system be imposed upon spiritual life?

Even on an individual level, management is necessary. A person must organize his daily sādhanā and plan for observance of festivals. That cannot be called material since it is making favorable arrangements for spiritual life. On a group level, management is also necessary in spiritual life. If a devotee wants to build a temple or distribute books on a large scale, he has to organize other devotees and non-devotees to contribute service to the particular project. If a group of devotees live together, they must establish common rules of conduct in order that they live harmoniously, in pursuance of their spiritual development. Someone must formulate the rules and someone must enforce them. This leads to some sort of managerial structure. For instance, to ensure protection of properties Srila Prabhupada made specific arrangements.

I have created, developed and organized the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and as such I hereby will that none of the immovable properties standing in the name of ISKCON in India shall ever be mortgaged, borrowed against, sold, transferred, or in any way encumbered, disposed of, or alienated. This direction is irrevocable. Declaration of Will, Article 4, June, 1977

Do we have precedents in our sampradaya for management? Our previous acharyas had managerial vision concerning preaching, though specific managerial structures established by them cannot be authenticated at the present time. For instance, Lord Caitanya ordered the Goswamis of Vrindavana to write scriptures and ordered Nityananda to preach in Bengal. Jéva Gosvāmé arranged for the scriptures written by the devotees in Vāndāvana to be sent to Bengal to help establish the siddhānta and preaching efforts there. Srila Bhaktivinoda in Godruma Kalpa-tavi outlines a management system for spreading the Holy Name. At the top of his system is the chief proprietor of the Nama Hatta, Nityananda Prabhu, followed by deputy directors, sales director, treasurers, accountants and salesmen, all with specific duties regarding preaching. In this system, persons also require qualification for assuming the posts and those with posts must adhere to certain rules of conduct. Bhaktivinoda also warns about the positions:

No one should consider another as being less perfect than himself. Just as one does not consider tulasi

leaves purity based on the size of the leaves, so a pure Vaisnava should not to be considered higher or lower according to his health, physical strength, material learning, caste, physical appearance or age.

Similarly, Prabhupada made an organization to develop Krishna consciousness:

If you have got faith and if you try to engage yourself in Kåñëa consciousness with association of devotees, not alone... Alone is not possible. Therefore we have established this International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Society is required. Sådhu-saiga. Just to give opportunity to persons who have got little faith to develop that faith into Kåñëa consciousness. Lecture, Bhagavad-gétä 10.8, New York, January 7, 1967

Srila Prabhupada desired that this society would continue after his disappearance:

I am desiring now to turn the management of the Society over to my disciples, the temple presidents and GBC men especially, so co-operatively you may work out the management details.... Letter to Gunagrahi, Jan. 31, 1973

In his Declaration of Will made in June, 1977, Srila Prabhupada was most concerned about the continuation of management of ISKCON and its properties. The first two articles read as follows:

1. The Governing Body Commission (GBC) will be the ultimate managing authority of the entire International Society for Krishna Consciousness.
2. Each temple will be an ISKCON property and will be managed by three executive directors. The system of management will continue as it is now and there is no need of any change.

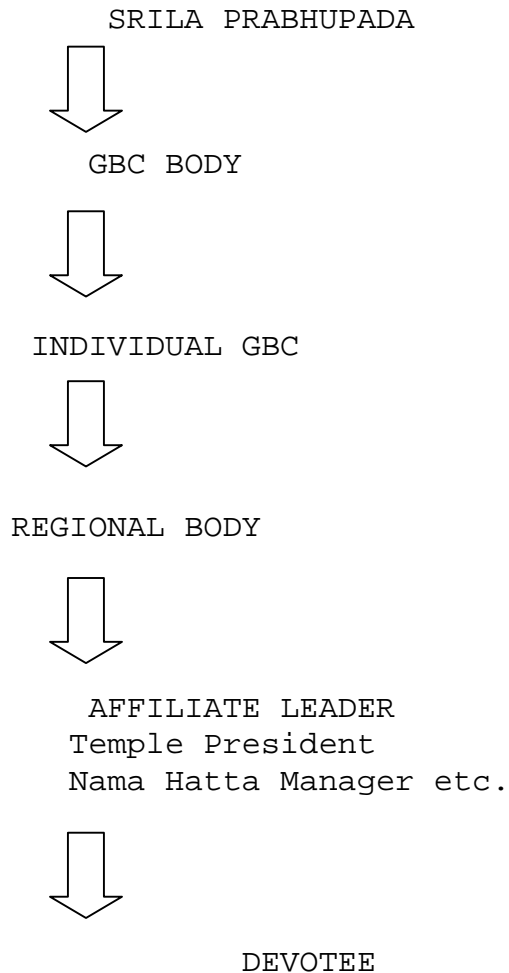
Srila Prabhupada gave instructions for GBC meetings:

I am therefore suggesting that all of our men meet in Mayapura every year during the birth anniversary of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. With our GBC and senior men

present we should discuss how to make unity in diversity. But, if we fight on account of diversity, then it is simply the material platform. Please try to maintain the philosophy of unity in diversity. That will make our movement successful. Letter to Jagadisha, Oct. 18, 1973

Managerial Structure:

There is a hierarchy of authority and responsibility. The line of authority or supervision and enforcement of rules proceeds from the GBC.



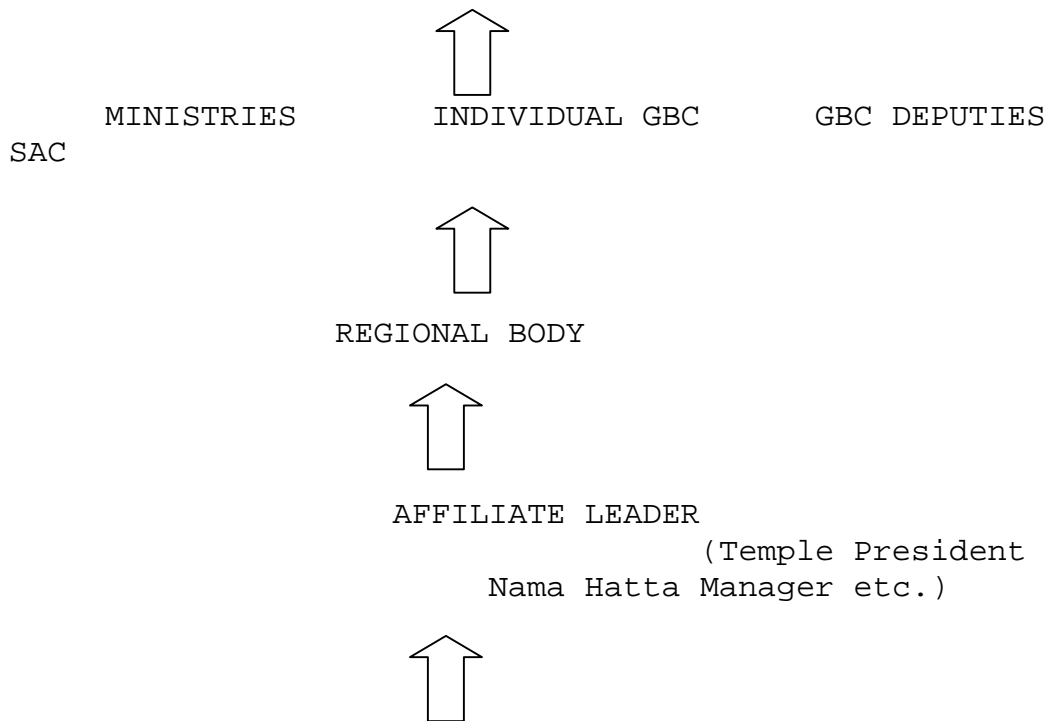
However, just as Bhaktivinoda warned, Prabhupada also cautioned us about management:

GBC does not mean to control a center. GBC means to see that the activities of a center go on nicely. Letter to Rupanuga, Bombay, Nov. 4, 1970

Our leaders shall be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual, spontaneous and voluntary. They should try always to generate some atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees, so that they will agree enthusiastically to rise and meet it. That is the art of management: to draw out spontaneous loving spirit of sacrificing some energy for Krishna. Letter to Karandhara, Bombay, Dec.22, 1972

Thus the managerial system is not one a one way control system from top down, but a system for implementation of policies formulated for the spiritual benefit of the devotees, respecting feedback and input from the devotees.

GBC BODY



Individuals with issues which are significant beyond local temple and which may be global in significance or individuals (such as certain congregational members) who have no relationship with a temple may approach the GBC body or regional body directly rather than starting at the bottom level.

From these quotations we can see that management in ISKCON refers to mechanisms for coordinating and developing Krishna consciousness of its members) and Krishna consciousness of the public at large, which Bhaktivinoda

Thakura describes as the two aspects of Lord Caitanya's mission: *name ruci* (taste for the name) and *jéve daya* (giving mercy to the public). Management of ISKCON should exert control to the extent that it facilitates the above two principles, without being overly dictatorial.

Necessity of Guru

Srila Prabhupada has indicated the structure of management of ISKCON. In his books he has also indicated the necessity of accepting a guru.

As King Pâthu has illustrated, one who is serious about receiving transcendental Vedic knowledge must accept a guru, or spiritual master, in one of these four disciplic successions. SB 4.17.5

guru-mukha-padma-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya,
āra nā kariha mane āçā

Narottama dasa Thakura advises everyone to stick to the principle of carrying out the orders of the spiritual master. One should not desire anything else. SB 4.29. 68

brahmäëòà bhramite kona bhägyavän jéva
guru-kâñëa-prasāde päya bhakti-latā-béja

The living entity wanders throughout different planets in different forms and bodies, but if by chance he comes in contact with a bona fide spiritual master, by the grace of the spiritual master he receives Lord Kâñëa's shelter, and his devotional life begins. Caitanya-caritāmāta Madhya 19.151

Spiritual Authority of Guru:

Does the position of guru possess any power or authority in itself? Srila Prabhupada explains that the guru has spiritual authority over the disciple:

Unless one has the help of spiritual authority, he cannot understand in what position he is actually situated. With the association of a bona fide spiritual master, he can see his real position, and by such an understanding he can become fixed in full Kâñëa consciousness. BG 14.19

The only way to obtain this devotional service is to take full shelter of the spiritual authority, the guru, who is coming in the line of a proper disciplic succession. Those who toil without worshipping the spiritual master will find that all their endeavors are futile. Renunciation Through Wisdom 4.5

The scriptures clearly say that a devotee should be loyal to and obedient to his guru. The guru thus exerts authority and influence over his disciples. By this authority he can order the disciples to perform certain types of service and can accrue funds.

GURU



DISCIPLE

However, if the guru acts as a member and representative of ISKCON, this operation of authority must synchronize with the authority of the organization.

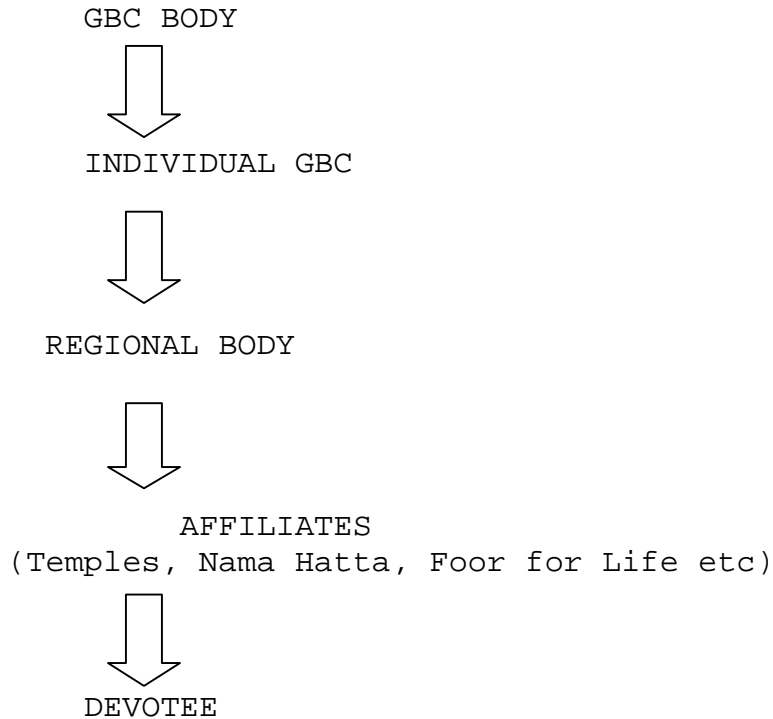
Srila Prabhupada and ISKCON

What is the position of guru in the managerial structure of ISKCON? In Srila Prabhupada's presence, he was the sole guru and the supreme managerial authority, superior to the GBC.

We are managing our Kãñëa consciousness movement by GBC. We have got about twenty GBC's for looking after the whole world affair, and above the GBC, I am there, and under the GBC's there are presidents, treasurers, secretaries in each and every center. So the president is responsible to the GBC. GBC is responsible to me. In this way we are managing. New Vrindavana, June 28, 1976

SRILA PRABHUPADA





Many Gurus in ISKCON

However, in Srila Prabhupada's physical absence, the structure is somewhat different, since he indicated that the GBC should be the final managerial authority for ISKCON, while at the same time he indicated that there should be multiple gurus in ISKCON:

Anyone following the order of Lord Caitanya under the guidance of His bona fide representative can become a spiritual master and I wish that in my absence all my disciples become the bona fide spiritual master to spread Krishna Consciousness throughout the whole world. Madhusudana, Navadvipa, Nov.2, 1967

Fragmentation Scenario

How do multiple gurus function in ISKCON? As mentioned previously, the guru has a spiritual authority over his disciple. If he uses this spiritual authority to manage his disciples without regard for the managerial system of ISKCON, the society fragments in several ways.

Confusion of Loyalty

The negative effects may take a mild form. The disciple should have loyalty both to his guru and the institution of our Founder-acharya, knowing in his heart that by serving

that institution (and its supportive managerial structure) he is serving the will and vision of Srila Prabhupada, the previous ācāryas, and Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu. However, if the instructions coming from a Temple President and the guru are contradictory, the disciple is placed in a predicament. For instance the Temple President tells the disciple to distribute books. The guru tells the disciple to go to college. If there is no coordination of instructions given by the temple President and the guru, the disciple will become confused. Because of loyalty to guru, the disciple may follow his order, giving frustration to the Temple President, who has lost his managerial authority, in spite of the fact that the Temple President has served as a significant çikñā guru for the disciple, with intimate knowledge of the discipye's needs.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT

GURU



DISCIPLE

????



????

The same situation may give rise, not only to a confusion of loyalty, but to a complete shift in loyalty. For instance, a Temple President trains a devotee. The devotee receives initiation and then ignores the Temple President completely, giving all respect to the guru. The managerial authority becomes secondary to the authority of guru.

Temple President

Guru 😊

Gurudev! Gurudeva!



Disciple Disciple Disciple

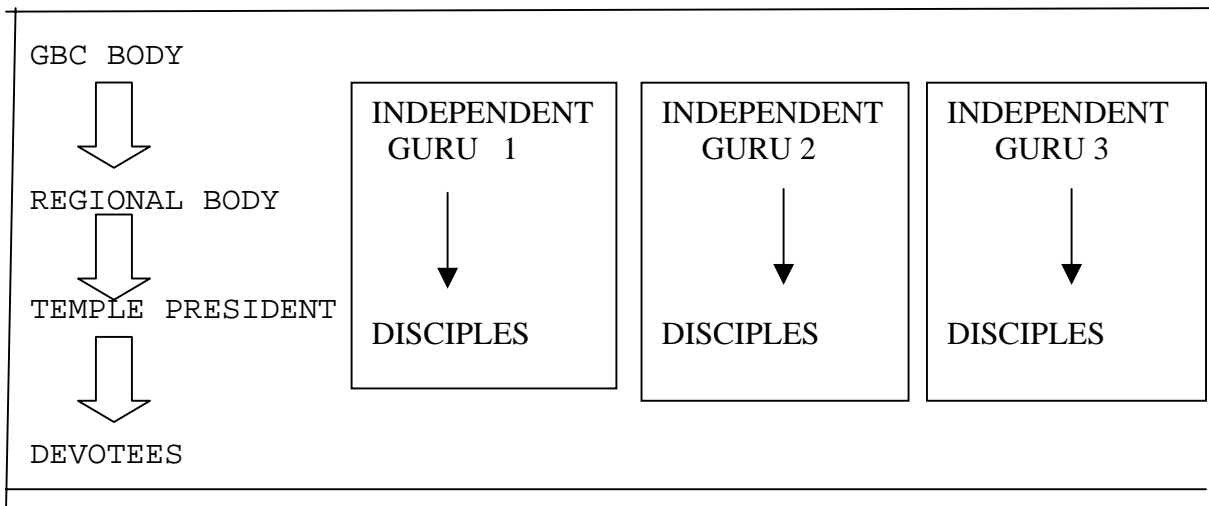
Mini-ISKCON

The negative effects may have a more destructive effect on the managerial structure. Because of the spiritual authority over the obedient disciple, the guru may utilize the disciple as a source of manpower and money for his personal projects. Even if he is nominally within ISKCON,

he can easily develop a power base of manpower and money separate from the managerial structure because of power over his disciples.

For instance a guru, by his own decision, without consulting the GBC of the area or the Temple President, may decide to start a new temple in the area for whatever reason. He withdraws his disciples from several other ISKCON temples to collect for this project even though there is an existing temple in the area. This new temple composed of his disciples, created by his disciples' money, falls totally under his control, outside the ISKCON management structure. Thus within ISKCON, there arises two authorities: the managerial structure established by Srila Prabhupada and the authority of the guru over his disciples, which acts more powerfully than or even independently of the managerial structure. It is an unofficial power base for the guru. This creates a danger for ISKCON, for eventually we end up with a situation which was certainly not envisioned by Srila Prabhupada

"ISKCON"



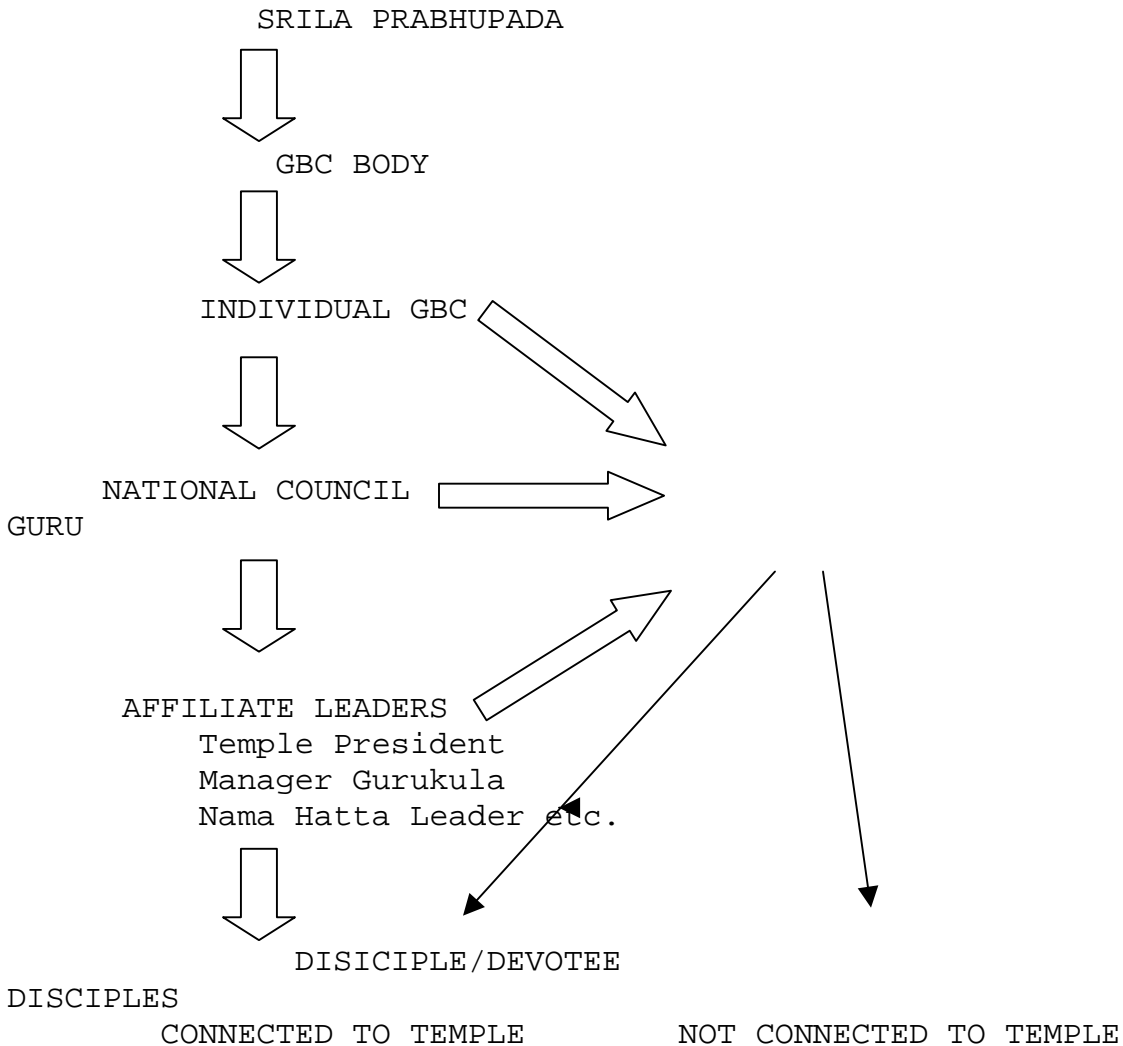
Solution—Working within the Structure

As an individual the guru has every right to instruct and inspire his disciple, but as a member of ISKCON and as a loyal follower of Srila Prabhupada, the guru has an obligation to maintain the unity of ISKCON by acting within the managerial structure established by Prabhupada.

The guru has to recognize as well that he is not delivering the disciple alone. The guru needs to recognize, respect, and appreciate that the local siksha gurus and the institution of ISKCON itself (via its standards, facilities,

festivals, books, etc.) are also integral elements for the individual disciple's advancement.

The spiritual master and disciple relationship as described in scripture is observed and respected within ISKCON, but the essence of being a guru is being an obedient disciple, which means being a strict follower of Srila Prabhupada, one's own guru, as well as the previous ācāryas and Lord Kāñēa. Therefore, because Srila Prabhupada desired that all devotees work together cooperatively within an institutional framework, the gurus of ISKCON must discharge their service as spiritual master in a way that does not compete with or weaken—but rather supports, fortifies and encourages—the authority structure of the Society as it was defined and established by Srila Prabhupada. In short, within ISKCON the traditional guru-disciple relationship is molded to harmonize with the functioning of the institution.



In the above diagram the arrows do not indicate absolute authority over the guru from all the concerned bodies (though the GBC has the power to chastise, correct, or even drop ISKCON's stamp of approval from a guru) but the line of authority regarding managerial decisions. Ideally there should be cooperative discussions between the managers and the guru, not one way edicts to the guru. Nor does this diagram suggest that the Temple President cannot make mistakes.

A case may arise where a guru may have to transfer his disciple from a temple for his spiritual survival. If no proper arrangements can be made with the local authorities after many sincere attempts, the guru then should consult with higher authorities and with their permission can make necessary arrangements for his disciples.

If that is not possible then after taking his own independent actions the guru should be prepared to defend his actions to higher authorities and may have to reverse his order moving the disciple if those higher authorities determine that he acted improperly.

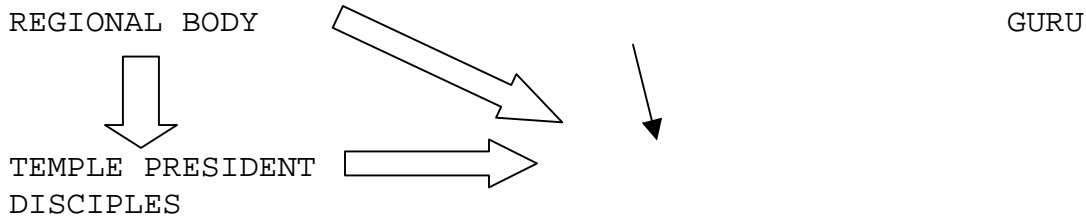
In general, the source of managerial decisions must lie within the managerial structure. These may also be voiced through the guru to his disciple, in addition to his spiritual advice to his disciple.

Case of Isolation

In the above diagram on the right is a group of disciples with little or no connection to a temple or any part of the ISKCON managerial structure, such as congregational members not living near a temple or for some reason not closely connected with a temple. The temple has no control over them. They have a strong connection with their guru and no one else. The only link between these disciples and ISKCON is the guru. It is incumbent on the guru therefore to establish their link with ISKCON. The guru must be educated to do so and the GBC representative or other managerial authorities must see that this is done. His performance can be measured by how well he established the link with ISKCON.

With the cooperation of the guru, a temple or other entity within the managerial structure could also establish friendly contact with those disciples and cultivate a relationship. Each devotee should understand what the lines

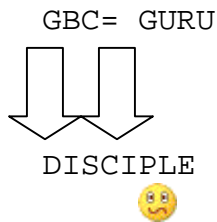
of authority are within ISKCON and should be encouraged to cooperate with those lines. For the healthy spiritual growth of the devotees it is preferable that a devotee have several links to ISKCON. If the guru is the only link and if the guru for some reason becomes incapable of rendering his service, his disciples are left with no shelter.



Hybrid Scenario:

In the above explanation of cooperation, the guru acts as a preacher within ISKCON. As an alternative, the guru may assume one of the managerial roles, such as Temple President, National Council Member or GBC if he is qualified for such managerial work. In fact, ISKCON presently has many gurus who function simultaneously as GBC's or other managers.

This can create a complication, since that person plays two roles: as guru and as, for instance, GBC. The disciple often cannot distinguish these roles, and simply plays the role of a disciple. When the guru orders, the disciple follows. Thus the GBC uses his authority as guru to implement his managerial decisions as GBC. This is an easy method for accomplishing tasks, but the danger lies in the fact that the obedience of the disciple limits his critical judgment and power to object to managerial decisions made by the guru.



As an example, the GBC/guru orders the Temple President/disciple to buy a certain piece of land for a farm. As an obedient disciple, the Temple President buys the land, because his guru likes mountains, though he knows

from local experience that the land, full of mountains, is useless for growing crops.

What is the solution for this? The guru must teach the disciple to act differently towards himself according to his two roles. What is the solution for the disciple? He must be trained to discern the different between an order given by the guru as a guru and as a GBC. When the guru gives spiritual advice, the disciple should act obediently and when the guru gives managerial advice as a GBC, he should respond with critical discernment of what is best for ISKCON, even if it is contrary to the advice of the guru. To confirm or dismiss his contrary discernment, he can discuss with other senior devotees.

Another danger is that since the role of guru and GBC are merged, it is easy for the guru to use loyalty of his disciples as the main mechanism for his accomplishing work. The disciple's identity as a member of ISKCON may weaken or become non-existent. Thus the zone becomes a guru zone rather than an ISKCON zone.

What is the solution? The guru must be trained to educate his disciples about their duties as members of ISKCON in addition to their duties as his disciples. Since sādhana and association with other devotees is also a powerful means of creating integrity, selflessness and purity, the guru must have strong sādhana and frequent association with senior devotees in order to prevent his influence over his disciples from eclipsing their link to ISKCON.

Disciple's Loyalty

As well as seeing his guru as his spiritual authority, the disciple should see the managers an instrument for preserving unity in ISKCON according to Srila Prabhupada's desire. The disciple should understand that the managers such as Temple Presidents are not solely managers, since they are operating within a spiritual organization. In many cases they have acted as sikña gurus of the disciple. The managerial system should not be viewed as a material structure, since its goal is preaching and nourishing devotees. Thus the managers, in managing devotees, are also acting as spiritual guides and should be respected by disciples of the guru and their guru.

This can be explained in another way. Usually when we speak of a guru we assume this means the dikña guru or

initiating spiritual master. However gurus are of several types. As well as the dikña guru there is the sikña guru. The dikña guru is the devotee who gives secret mantras to the disciple for worshipping the Lord. He may also give instructions but his distinguishing feature is the bestowal of mantra. The sikña guru is any devotee who gives significant spiritual instructions to the disciple. One should give respect to both types of guru. Since the devotees in the managerial structure are not only managers but also devotees dedicated to preaching, they give spiritual instructions and guidance to the devotees under their care, often on a daily basis. In many cases, the disciple is first inspired and trained by the manager and later introduced to a dikña guru, and after initiation the manager often continues to guide the disciple of the guru more often than the guru, since the guru is often traveling in far off lands. Thus they are sikña gurus and should be given due respect by the disciple of the dikña guru. Least of all he should not be shunned as some sort of inferior. (Ramai Swami's suggestion)

ISKCON Laws

In order to avoid confusing situations for disciple and to avoid gurus with separate areas of influence within ISKCON, the society has formulated laws defining the guru's relationship with the managerial structure.

For instance, in mentioning the qualifications of a guru in ISKCON, the ISKCON Laws state that he must have no loyalties that compete with or compromise his loyalty to Srila Prabhupada, to his teachings, and to ISKCON. He must recognize the GBC as the ultimate managing authority in ISKCON, support the GBC system, and follow the GBC.

(6.2.1.10 and 12) He must utter a vow to recognize the GBC as the ultimate managing authority in ISKCON, support the GBC system and follow the GBC as Srila Prabhupada desired.
(6.4.2.2)

The guru must connect with the various elements of the managerial structure of ISKCON as follows:

6.4.3.2 Standards in Relation to the GBC Body

1. Must respect the GBC as Srila Prabhupada's chosen successor as the ultimate managing authority of ISKCON and maintain a respectful serving attitude towards the GBC.

6.4.3.3 Standards in Relation to GBC Zonal Secretaries

1. Must act under the supervision of and in coordination with GBC Zonal Secretaries.
2. Must not change his residence without consulting the local GBC Zonal Secretary beforehand, since such a move may affect the temples and devotees.
3. Must disclose financial records to the GBC Zonal Secretary if the need arises.

6.4.3.4 Standards in Relation to ISKCON Spiritual Authorities

"ISKCON spiritual authority" refers to Temple Presidents, Regional Secretaries, local GBC Zonal Secretaries, and those of similar stature.

1. Must be accountable to the local ISKCON authorities for his actions.
2. Must cooperate with local ISKCON authorities.
3. Must not initiate any devotee who has not received proper recommendation from the appropriate ISKCON spiritual authority.
4. Must instruct disciples and other devotees to cooperate with ISKCON authorities.
5. Must avoid confrontation with ISKCON authorities and settle any misunderstandings amicably.
6. Must not undermine ISKCON authorities in any way.
7. Must not direct disciples to make changes in service or *āçrama* without first securing the consent of the disciple's local authority.
8. Must act according to his position of service in ISKCON and not merely his position as *guru*.

6.4.3.5 Standards in Relation to a Temple

1. Must work and preach for the interest of the temple.
2. Must coordinate any ceremonies or special programs with the temple schedule.
3. Must surrender the engagement in devotional service of his disciples who live in an ISKCON temple to the temple management.
4. Must not transfer disciples from a temple without permission of the Temple President. A *guru* may, however, request a disciple to leave a particular temple, without obtaining the president's consent, when the *guru* considers it a matter of "spiritual life and death" for the disciple, as for example, being regularly exposed to direct blasphemy of his *guru*, or being unable to follow

the four regulative principles. In this case the *guru* must consult with the local GBC Zonal Secretary.

Furthermore, to ensure that his power to collect funds does not create a separate financial base, the following regulation is found:

Since the *guru-dakñiëa* (donation) received by an ISKCON *guru* is the property of ISKCON, it must be used for the benefit of the Krishna consciousness movement. All *guru-daksina* must be kept in a special account, preferably an ISKCON account, with at least two signatures, and accurate account records must be kept. **6.4.3.1.9**

These laws should be clearly understood by both *guru* and disciple for the smooth functioning of ISKCON.

Implementation: Education and Training of *Guru* and Disciple
It can be seen from the above that ISKCON has laws for dealing with the *guru's* functions within ISKCON. However, the laws must be implemented and practiced in real life situations.

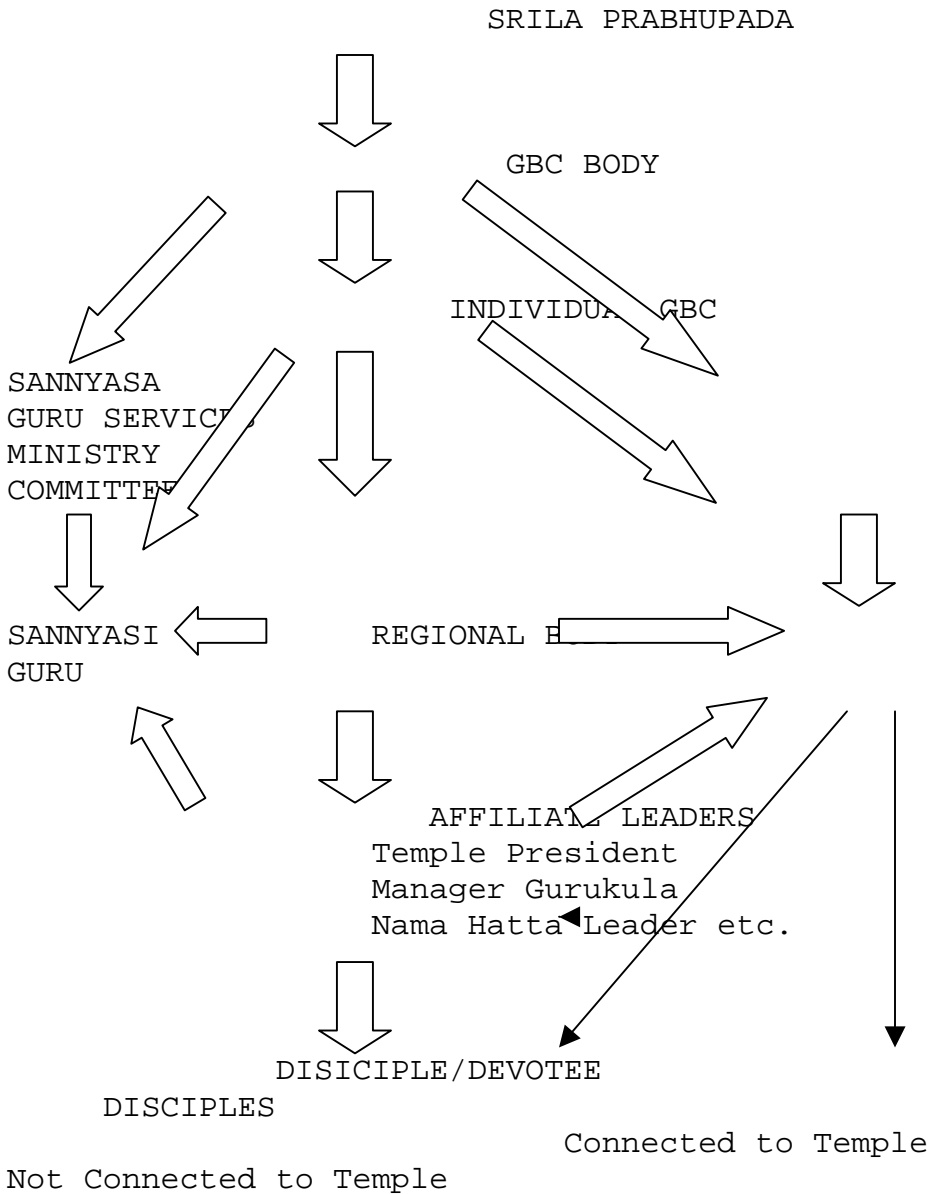
Though the *guru* exerts influence over his disciple, and the disciple is obedient to his *guru*, the *guru* must educate his disciple to be loyal to ISKCON and its managers, and he must himself be educated by ISKCON so that his instructions harmonize with the managerial considerations given by the GBC, the National Council, and the Affiliate Head such as Temple President within whose areas he preaches. If the *guru* connects at some point with the managerial structure and cooperates, then there will be harmony.

The GBC has formed the *Guru Services Committees* to assist in the education, training, monitoring and counseling *gurus* and their disciples regarding their relationships with management and to help resolve and conflicts in this area where necessary. Since knowledge of ISKCON laws is necessary for the managers, *gurus* and disciples, the *Guru Services Committee* can help with this education, as well as encourage *gurus* to have proper *sādhana* and association, which most important for maintaining purity of motives.

Sannyāsé Influence

Since *sannyāsés* hold a position quite similar to *gurus* regarding respect, influence and ability to control money and manpower, the principles regarding the relationship of

the guru and ISKCON apply to sannyāsé as well. One of the functions of Sannyāsa Ministry is to educate sannyāsis regarding this relationship. With the inclusion of the Sannyasa Ministry and the Guru Services Committee, the following is a more complete diagram of the authority line.



Summary

Srila Prabhupada has organized our spiritual life within a managerial structure called ISKCON with a line of authority. Every member of ISKCON must respect this structure. ISKCON also recognizes that every devotee needs a guru. Srila

Prabhupada is the preeminent sikña guru for all devotees in ISKCON and in addition all devotees who are not his direct disciples accept a guru for practical guidance. This guru functions as a spiritual authority for the disciple. At the same time, the guru and disciple should recognize the managerial authority created by Srila Prabhupada, which is also spiritual, and which includes çikñã gurus such as temple presidents and others who help guide and train them. All gurus and disciples within ISKCON should work cooperatively within the managerial system of ISKCON for their benefit and the society's unity, in order to please Srila Prabhupada and increase the growth of the saikértana mission.

Note

Since this is for general reading, I have not mentioned extreme cases such as gurus falling down and leaving disciples without a strong ISKCON bond, rebellious gurus who break away from ISKCON taking followers etc.