

Minutes

of a set of Meetings of an Advisory Board

provisionally called

The Bhaktivedanta Advisory Board



16–18 June 2005

Nirguna Prabhu's home, Badger, United States

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LIST OF DEVOTEES PRESENT

Sannyasis present:

Sripad B. V. Aranya Maharaja, Swami B. V. Bhaktisar Maharaja, Swami B. V. Nemi Maharaja, Sripad B. V. Padmanabha Maharaja, Sripad B. V. Sajjana Maharaja, Swami B. V. Srauti Maharaja, Sripad B. V. Tridandi Maharaja

Other devotees present:

This list of attendees was compiled from a notepad that was circulated at different times during the meeting. If we have omitted your name, we apologise.

b

Bhagavat Prabhu, Bhavatarini dasi, Bhudhara Prabhu, Brajanath Prabhu, Brajendranandana Prabhu, Brajesh Prabhu

d

Dayanidhi Prabhu

g

Gopanandini dasi, Gopinath Prabhu

h

Harernamananda Prabhu, Haridas Prabhu, Hladdini-shakti dasi

i

Isha Prabhu

j

Jalakara Prabhu, Jayanta Krishna Prabhu, Jayanta Prabhu

k

Krishna-bhamini dasi

m

Madhavananda Prabhu, Mahaprabhu, Manju dasi

n

Nanda Gopal Prabhu, Narayan Prabhu, Nishchintya Prabhu, Nrihari Prabhu

r

Radhakanta Prabhu, Ratikala dasi, Rishabdeva Prabhu

s

**Shilpakarini dasi, Shyamala dasi, Syamarani dasi, Sugata Prabhu, Sundar Gopal
das**

t

Tungavidya dasi

v

**Vinay Krishna Prabhu, Vishwambhar Prabhu, Vrinda dasi, Vrindavan Prabhu
(Hawaii)**

y

Yashodanandan Prabhu

MINUTES

Acting chairman Bhudhara Prabhu called the Meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, 15th June 2005. This was the first official set of Meetings of the Advisory Body.

1. THE NEED FOR, AND OBJECTIVES OF, THIS ADVISORY BOARD

Sundar Gopal das made a short presentation, in which he outlined the various trusts and companies currently furthering Gurudeva's worldwide preaching mission. They include the following:

<u>Name of organisation</u>	<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Assets</u>
(i) Bhaktivedanta Trust International (BHAKTI)	India	• Nominal funds only
(ii) Vishnurata Seva Trust	India	• Shri Gopinath Bhavan
(iii) Gaudiya Vedanta Samiti Trust	India	• Shri Giridhari Gaudiya Math (Govardhan), • Mayapur land
(iv) International Gaudiya Vedanta Trust (IGVT)	India	• Shri Raman-Bihari Gaudiya Math (Delhi), • Shri Keshavaji Gaudiya Math (Navadwip)
(v) Venu	England	• Funds only
(vi) Bhakti Projects, Inc.	California	• Funds only

For a schematic overview of these various organisations, turn to the “Diagram of the Organisational Structure” in [Appendix A](#), on p. 32.

These various organisations are entirely separate from each other. None controls any other, and any collaboration between them is entirely voluntary. Gurudeva has directed the trustees of BHAKTI to help steer and facilitate his preaching activities throughout the world. Thus, to help Gurudeva's organisations better coordinate their activities, as well as to assist the devotees in general in their various individual preaching initiatives, the trustees of BHAKTI will also meet regularly with the senior devotees as an advisory board, provisionally called "The Bhaktivedanta Advisory Board".

Needless to say, the Bhaktivedanta Advisory Board is an advisory board only. It will not dictate or govern the affairs of any trust or legal entity. It can, however, help to coordinate the efforts of Gurudeva's various organisations and offer strategic advice. It will do so only for those trusts, companies, temples and devotees who wish to take advantage of this service, such as the five principal organisations listed in the table on p. 4.

Brajanath Prabhu pointed out that Gurudeva has often expressed the wish that as the *sanga* grows, the senior devotees sit together to discuss the best way to help him tend to the various areas that require special attention. The main concern of the Board must be to represent Gurudeva's own angle of vision. Bhudhara Prabhu mentioned that the Advisory Board will deal with all areas of interest or concern, but that it has no executive role. The Board has been set up specifically with the mood of not telling devotees what to do and not handing down mandates, and this applies equally to their spiritual lives.

Bhagavat Prabhu pointed out that this is very akin to Shrila Prabhupada's mood when he first set up the structure of the Governing Body Commission (GBC) and made a number of *sannyasis*. He laid out a multilevel structure, but wanted the temples in each zone to act independently. The temple president was to be free to manage the temple, and the GBC would visit the temples in their zone only to see that things were going on nicely. They were not to impose a

unilateral management structure on all temples in their zones, but to allow everyone the freedom to conduct their business on a local level as they deemed best. Furthermore, Shрила Prabhupada wanted the *sannyasis* to focus their efforts on studying *shastra*, realising the philosophy, and travelling and preaching, without becoming embroiled in politics and management.

Bhudhara Prabhu emphasised again that the Advisory Board will not seek to control what others are doing. It will merely offer the best advice it can give, based on its understanding of Gurudeva's teachings and what he desires. The Advisory Board is not a Governing Body, but exactly the opposite: in a non-executive, hands-off way, it will simply try to serve the devotees, as opposed to control or direct them. Moreover, all formal advice given, and initiatives taken, by the Board will be ratified by Gurudeva.

Manju dasi asked whether we had considered if there is any risk of legal liability for the members of the Advisory Board when they are not sheltered by a legal entity. Sundar Gopal das pointed out that if the members of the Advisory Board were to represent themselves to devotees as experts in a particular field (e.g. legal or property specialists), then there would be a risk of personal liability for loss suffered by someone who has relied upon that advice. But if the Advisory Board is offering general advice that is not binding, aimed at helping organisations and individuals to integrate their activities and work together, then the risk of legal liability is remote. The Board should make it very clear in presenting any advice that it is leaving it entirely up to the organisations or individuals involved to make their own decisions after taking appropriate independent steps to ensure that the advice proffered is in their best interests.

Sundar Gopal das also confirmed that the Advisory Board would not present an avenue to "pierce the corporate veil" and endanger Gurudeva's organisations throughout the world. This is principally because the Advisory Board merely offers advice and cannot be said to control or direct in any way the

affairs of any of these organisations. “Piercing the veil” is where two organisations are so closely tied together that the courts choose to disregard their separate corporate identities where not to do so would lead to manifest injustice.

Bhagavat Prabhu confirmed this by pointing out the structural similarities between the Advisory Board and the Catholic Church. The College of Cardinals headed by the Pope is an advisory board only, and by their ecclesiastical structure it offers advice to the bishops, and the bishops to the monsignors, and so on. None of the properties are in fact held by the Church proper, which remains but an advisory body.

Sundar Gopal das stressed that the Advisory Board would run into difficulties if it called itself an advisory body but then went on to actually hand down directives and control the workings of other organisations. In other words, there should at no time be a gap between how the Board describes itself and how it operates in reality. Mahaprabhu suggested that the Advisory Board draft a memorandum or mission statement for itself clearly outlining its remit and aims, perhaps with a legal notice to protect it from any potential liability.

2. NAME FOR THE ADVISORY BOARD

RESOLVED that the Advisory Board shall not at this stage be given a name. There is a pressing need for a society name for Gurudeva’s *sanga* (see [point 4](#) of the Minutes, on p. 8), and the name of the Advisory Board shall follow the society name, once it has been decided (e.g. if the society name were to be “The Bhaktivedanta Society”, then the Advisory Board’s name would remain “The Bhaktivedanta Advisory Board”).

3. THE RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THIS BOARD

Sundar Gopal das pointed out that rules of procedure, while generally important for avoiding chaos, are not as critical for the Advisory Board, as the Board is not a legal entity and does not deal with funds or administer property or make executive decisions.

RESOLVED that all senior Vaishnavas shall be invited to attend meetings of the Advisory Board, to represent various geographical and service areas. The meeting shall be kept fairly informal, without the need to immediately tie up rules of procedure, such as voting rules. The Advisory Board requires a steering committee to collect agenda points, issue notice of meetings and so on, and this steering committee shall be the trustees of Bhaktivedanta Trust International, who are generally aware of the various issues that require discussion in meetings.

4. SOCIETY NAME AND IDENTITY

It was noted that the devotees in Gurudeva's *sanga* lack a group identity – a simple name, even. Ask them where they are from or what organisation they belong to, and they are usually a little lost for words. They do not belong to ISKCON, nor are they affiliated with Shri Gaudiya Vedanta Samiti (Regd.). Who are they, then? Members of Bhaktivedanta Trust International? But a trust does not have members, only trustees. Creating an identity may help to engender a sense of unity and belonging among devotees, and help tie together Gurudeva's global preaching efforts.

Sundar Gopal das mentioned in his search for a name for his main trust, Gurudeva had three criteria: the name should contain "Bhaktivedanta", it should state that it is an international organisation, and it should have a good acronym,

like ISKCON. Sripad B. V. Bhaktisar Maharaja mentioned that Shrila Prabhupada had insisted on the word “International” forming a part of his society name.

Sripad B. V Padmanabha Maharaja said that the words *bhakti* and *vedanta* have quite some currency today, especially with anyone associated with any kind of Indian culture or philosophy. Vedanta is universally respected, even if people don not always know what it means, and the word *bhakti* gives us an opportunity to explain exactly what our philosophy is.

The devotees present at the meeting suggested the following possible names for the society, as a starting point:

- The Bhaktivedanta Society
- Bhakti Sanga
- International Bhaktivedanta Association
- Bhaktivedanta International Organisation
- Bhaktivedanta International Society
- Bhaktivedanta Sanga
- Bhaktivedanta International Gaudiya Society

Sripad B. V. Bhaktisar Maharaja pointed out that we should avoid a society name that abbreviates to BS, and Manju dasi pointed out that BIO is a well-known biological company. Sripad B. V. Padmanabha Maharaja cautioned against employing needless Sanskrit words.

RESOLVED that the initial list of names shall be circulated to all devotees in the *sanga* with an open invitation to email further suggestions to Bhudhara Prabhu or Sundar Gopal das. This full list shall then be culled to remove any suggestions that are clearly inadequate for any reason, such as because they carry an inappropriate acronym, that is, if we intend to use the acronym. Manju dasi shall assist in making any web or database searches, if required. A manageable shortlist shall then be presented to Gurudeva for his final choice.

5. PREACHING CENTRES AROUND THE GLOBE, AND HOW BEST TO ENCOURAGE AND FACILITATE THEM

Brajanath Prabhu explained that Gurudeva is always keenly interested in and concerned about the various temples around the world. This raises the issue of what is the best model, and what can we do to inspire local devotees and communities? How can we make our temples functional and financially viable? He praised the Gangamatas in London, who have strong focus on *harinam* and distributing books and live very austere, without having to worry about any big encumbrances.

Bhagavat Prabhu said that Shrila Prabhupada generally liked to keep things simple. “Small is beautiful” should be the motto. Devotees only need a little preaching centre or store front, from which to distribute *prasadam*, do *kirtan* and encourage people to practise Krishna consciousness. There is no need to make it complicated. Isha Prabhu emphasised the importance of the energy that travelling preachers bring to communities of devotees.

Mahaprabhu pointed out that often communities are conflict-bound, and it takes someone with spiritual strength and perhaps some expertise in conflict resolution to come and do some major surgery. This has been the case in Murwillumbah.

Brajanath Prabhu pointed out that when devotees focus on *kirtan* and book distribution and are genuinely happy, then all necessities automatically fall into place. In Bangalore, for instance, the devotees did not even have enough money to pay for the cost of books, but they are happy and inspired devotees, and now someone wants to donate a complete *ashram* for their use. In Los Angeles, Gurudeva instructed the devotees to go out every single day to distribute books and perform *nagar-sankirtan*, and to form a relationship with the local community.

Bhagavat Prabhu said that Shrila Prabhupada emphasised *prasadam*. He even taught devotees how to make an arrangement so that *prasadam* could be made immediately upon the arrival of any guest. No one should leave a temple without honouring *prasadam*.

Bhudhara Prabhu listed several key principles, such as the need to keep the operation simple and manageable, the need to celebrate individual initiative, the need to create a personal experience for people coming to the temple, the need for people to feel at home in the temple, and the need for devotees to have simple economic model they can sustain without great effort. Bhudhara Prabhu said that he has conceived an interesting model based upon these principles, which devotees might like to explore. The idea is to find a way to help devotees with ability and initiative to secure funding to buy property and set up a bed-and-breakfast operation. Each B&B would have its own temple room, deities and reading room, with a normal temple programme. Visitors can get *prasad* in the morning and evening. It is a special opportunity for people to live for a few days in spiritual environment, a small spiritual oasis, and associate with devotees leading spiritual lives. Eventually, we can create a network of such B&Bs throughout the United States or the world.

Bhagavat Prabhu mentioned that after Sripad Bhakti-tirtha Swami left ISKCON, this essentially what he did: he had two or three homes, and when you visited the devotees made you feel so loved and welcome. Making people feel welcome is the main ingredient. Radhakanta Prabhu mentioned that BhaktiProjects.Org currently lists all of Gurudeva's projects around the world, but can also include a presentation of all of the temples, preaching centres and devotee homes around the world as a franchise concept, with full details of daily schedules, *prasadam* times, etc.

Bhagavat Prabhu pointed out that we need to strike a balance between making people feel welcome, loved and cared for in Krishna consciousness and

at same time not offering people the false expectation of a “free ride”. People should not join temples with the idea that the institution, like the Church, will maintain them for the rest of their life. The facilities are there to serve Shri Guru and Krishna, and not for anyone’s personal enjoyment. It often happens that devotees use a temple as a facility to make money for their own travelling and personal needs, without offering anything to the temple itself.

Sripad B. V. Bhaktisar Maharaja mentioned a few specific concerns relating to China and New Zealand. Dinanath Prabhu and the Chinese devotees are requesting for a *sannyasi* or senior *vanaprastha* who does not have other obligations to come and stay for a longer period of the year in China, after the visiting *sannyasis* leave. They would like to take their preaching to the next level, but lack the support of a dedicated senior preacher. Sripad B. V. Bhaktisar Maharaja also pointed out that devotees throughout the world are requesting travelling preachers to stay in one place for a little longer. It is also, of course, very expensive for devotees to pay flight tickets for one travelling preacher after another to come and visit their country or city.

Sripad B. V. Bhatisar Maharaja mentioned that Damodar Prabhu (Dhansukha) in New Zealand has acquired a sixty-seven acre property with an eight-bedroom house and a lake, and is offering it to us for free as an *ashram* for five years on condition that it is run properly. This is an opportunity we should think about, whether or not we can take advantage of it.

RESOLVED that a committee shall be formed to fully explore the issue of temples and preaching centres around the world, and how to support and facilitate them. This committee shall be made up of Sripad B. V. Padmanabha Maharaja, Sripad B. V. Aranya Maharaja, Sripad B. V. Shrauti Maharaja, Bhagavat Prabhu and any other devotees they may select, and it shall in due course report back to the Advisory Board with its findings and

recommendations. The Chairman of this committee shall be Sripad B. V. Padmanabha Maharaja.

6. SHRILA GURUDEVA'S TRAVEL SCHEDULE

Brajanath Prabhu explained that Gurudeva is gradually scaling down his worldwide preaching. Last winter he stayed in Hawaii for a full three months and focused on his writing, and the same is planned for the coming winter. The stop-over to Hawaii will most likely be in Japan, as other routes from India entail more than a single stop-over. Gurudeva wants to focus more on his writing, and has said that he would like to begin, among other works, the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Cantos of *Shrimad-Bhagavatam*.

Sripad B. V. Bhaktisar Maharaja said that devotees need to know Gurudeva's schedule further in advance, as this will help them secure cheap flight tickets and properly organise festivals, such as the large Vyasa-puja festival planned for Hawaii early next year. The devotees there have put down a non-refundable US \$50,000 on a beautiful two-hundred acre resort near the ocean, complete with two pools and camping grounds with shower facilities for two-thousand people. To not lose money, they need to fill two-hundred beds, and are offering a 50% discount to devotees who book now. If Gurudeva's schedule is fixed now, it will allow devotees to plan ahead.

Brajanath Prabhu assured the devotees organising the festival, especially Nrihari Prabhu, that the Hawaii festival would be the only one Gurudeva will be attending this winter, and that all devotees should therefore make their way there.

Brajanath Prabhu further said that it is somewhat irresponsible to have Gurudeva travel extensively against the advice of his doctors. Shrila Bhakti Rakshak Shridhar Goswami Maharaja had so much influence simply by

remaining fixed in one place, and it is our duty now to encourage all devotees to come to that single location where Gurudeva is, rather than make Gurudeva come to the place where they happen to be.

RESOLVED that since Gurudeva has repeatedly expressed his wish to travel less and since he now has many qualified *sannyasis* to represent him, devotees throughout the world are humbly requested to give Gurudeva the full freedom to cut back his travel schedule. Public festivals with Gurudeva should gradually be limited to Hawaii in the winter and perhaps only Badger in the summer.

Acting Chairman Bhudhara Prabhu adjourned the Meeting at 1:15 p.m. He reconvened the Meeting at 8:00 a.m. on Thursday, 16th June 2005.

7. BOOK PUBLISHING IN ALL ITS ASPECTS, FROM EDITING TO DISTRIBUTION

Brajanath Prabhu gave a brief presentation on the current state of book publishing. Gaudiya Vedanta Publications (GVP), he explained, does not as yet have any fixed teams, either in translating, editing, printing or distribution. It is founded upon individual initiative and a desire on the part of devotees to make a personal offering to Gurudeva. While we need to encourage cooperation and unity among devotees, it is highly likely that books will continue to be published and distributed on the basis of personal initiative. That said, it will be important now to set up a basic framework in which devotees may operate, so as to ensure a minimum standard for GVP publications in which all copyright issues are properly dealt with. Books cannot be allowed to carry the GVP logo if they do not meet this standard, in order not to endanger GVP or Gurudeva's other organisations.

Manju dasi, an intellectual property lawyer from Maryland, thereupon made a detailed presentation to the Advisory Board on the issue of copyright. In

past years, devotees in Gurudeva's *sanga* have published books carrying material owned by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT), such as large extracts from BBT books, photos of Shrila Prabhupada belonging to the BBT and BBT art work, without prior written permission from the BBT. This has strained relations between this *sanga* and the BBT. GVP, currently the publishing division of Bhaktivedanta Trust International (BHAKTI), has requested Manju dasi to step in and put the house in order. This does not mean imposing any rules, but presenting what ideally the rules should be. If a book carries the GVP logo, then there is a certain legal standard the book should meet. For instance, if the book carries BBT photos or artwork, then we need to request permission from the BBT *ahead of time*. This extends to flyers, brochures, magazines and websites. If the piece of literature carries any of Syamarani dasi's artwork, then we must request her permission also.

Certain devotees have, on behalf of GVP, entered into negotiations with the BBT, and it appears that we now have a "clean slate" with them: in other words, they have agreed to overlook past infringements on the agreement that from now on we will be "good citizens". We want to create a better relationship with the BBT, as this will be to our long-term advantage.

Manju dasi explained that to help devotees involved in publishing to meet basic copyright law, she is in the process of drawing up a "clearance check-list". This will guide devotees through all the necessary steps to ensure that their publication meets the requirements of copyright law. Without meeting the standard set out in "clearance check-list", the GVP logo may not be placed on the book or publication. It becomes a personal initiative separate from GVP, with personal liability attached.

Manju dasi pointed out that we should be copyrighting our own books too, as well as our photographs and art work. This includes Syamarani dasi's artwork, which we are taking steps to police, to avoid copyright infringements.

There may well be a royalty stream here, which can be used for any of Gurudeva's projects. Manju dasi said she is creating easy-to-understand standard contracts to make the permission process simple. She also said that she will be holding on to all the contracts relating to GVP, so that they may be referred to in future in the event of any dispute.

Brajanath Prabhu explained that GVP, currently owned by BHAKTI, has allowed devotees to undertake their own publishing efforts and use the GVP logo with little supervision. The Board of Trustees of BHAKTI are legally obliged to set up a framework to protect itself from liability. It is also looking to restructure GVP, the broad objectives of which are to be able to operate in the United States as a non-profit with federal exempt status, to create a central office for GVP with better accounting and record-keeping, to take advantage of United States copyright laws, to gain and maintain better control of the quality of production, and to gain and maintain better control of copyright issues.

Syamarani dasi said that devotees bringing out a publication, especially if it contains Gurudeva's spoken words, should not only apply Manju dasi's "clearance check-list", but also present the book to senior Vaishnavas for feedback, to make sure it does not misrepresent Gurudeva.

Bhudhara Prabhu pointed out that we are looking to copyright Gurudeva's books, photographs and spoken words not to make a business out of it or to restrict its flow, but to protect it and ensure it is not misrepresented. It is common knowledge, he said, that in the former Soviet Union in the early 1980s when devotees were imprisoned in psychiatric wards by the KGB, one of the main forms of disinformation the KGB used against the Krishna consciousness movement was to actually publish Prabhupada's books but to corrupt the book by changing major portions of it.

Brajanath Prabhu said that Gurudeva wants his words to be published freely. The main concern here is not the free flow of his words but the legal

protection of GVP. Any devotees using the GVP logo must meet certain basic legal requirements. Devotees who do not meet this standard can always publish independently and at their own legal risk.

Isha Prabhu announced that he has access to vast website hosting space at almost no charge, so any devotees who have projects relating to Gurudeva can take advantage of this by contacting him. He is also building a collection of uncopyrighted pictures of Shrila Prabhupada, which may be used without seeking permission from the BBT. Subala-sakha Prabhu announced that devotees who wish to use in any of Gurudeva's books any pictures of Gurudeva that he has taken may do so freely. Manju dasi requested Subala-sakha Prabhu to put this in writing.

RESOLVED that all devotees in our *sanga*, particularly those involved in publishing, shall be made aware of these copyright issues through the web, by word-of-mouth and by direct communication to the key devotees involved in publishing. Manju dasi's "clearance check-list" shall be posted on the web and also emailed to these devotees.

8. NEW BRAJA SCHOOL

Shrila Gurudeva has described the New Braja School as "ideal" and "exemplary, Brajanath Prabhu said. He takes a keen interest in it, and has often praised Brajendranandan Prabhu, Gopanandini dasi and the other members of the team. He knows that it is facing certain hardships, principally financial, and is requesting the senior devotees to sit together and formulate a plan to support the School.

FUNDING

Brajendranandan Prabhu thereupon made a presentation to the Advisory Board, in which he stressed the pressing need for funding. The School's total monthly expenditure, especially during the winter, is about US \$5500 while its total income is only about US \$5250. Thankfully, certain devotees have given donations to help the School through some very difficult periods. After looking after and teaching the children during the week, Brajendranandan Prabhu has been obliged to raise money in car-parks on the weekend, simply to make ends meet.

Brajendranandan Prabhu said that almost all parents pay the tuition and boarding fees for their children. The fee for a child who boards is US \$300 per month, and the fee for a child who lives locally is US \$125 per month. If parents have more than one child who attends the School, then he offers them a concession. All the devotees at the Meeting felt that US \$300 to educate, spiritually guide, house, clothe, feed, maintain and protect a child for a month is unbelievably low.

Bhagavat Prabhu mentioned that Hero Scholarships are paying for his daughter to attend the *gurukula* in Alachua. It might be a good idea to investigate what scholarships are available to parents in California.

Several devotees in the Meeting pointed out that regular pledges by devotees, even if only US \$5 to \$10 each month, could soon provide enough money to support the School. Radhakanta Prabhu pointed out that Subala-sakha Prabhu's programme of pledges by credit card, which was announced at the Badger Festival two days earlier, might well solve the problem within a few months. He suggested that all the devotees present at the Meeting get behind this initiative. Isha Prabhu kindly promised to pledge US \$50 a month.

Viswambhar Prabhu pointed out that Gurudeva has a Californian non-profit in place called Bhakti Projects, Inc., used for raising funds for the Navadwip and Govardhan construction projects, for book publishing and now

for Gaura Sundar Prabhu's care. He suggested that people be made aware that they can give tax deductible donations to Bhakti Projects, earmarked for the New Braja School, for which they will be receive tax deductible receipts.

Ratikala dasi suggested that we look for someone to own the responsibility of fund-raising specifically for the New Braja School.

ACCOMMODATION

Brajendranandan Prabhu and Gopanandini dasi outlined the School's very serious accommodation problems. There are now sixteen boys boarding in their old family home, which is meant for a medium sized family, and some children are even living in the garage and laundry room. The house also functions as a classroom, so during the day these children are joined by an additional seven or eight boys who live locally and by five teachers. Sometimes the house is so busy that lessons take place outside. The situation is intolerable, with the children hardly having enough room to even think.

Moreover, new boys have come to the School and they are somewhat less refined and developed than the others, a mixture that has created some conflict. Gurudeva has instructed the new boys to board and be taught separately, but this is impossible with the School's current housing problem.

The girls in the School were able to live in the front house on Nirguna Prabhu's property for a few months this year, which the School rented. But they were able to stay only for a certain time because Nirguna Prabhu needed the house for the festival. They now live in a trailer in the trailer park, which is not a wholesome place for them.

There are a few options: The first is to immediately cut back the number of students. One idea is to look for various small houses in the area, though there is

very little to rent in Badger and this would fragment the School, making it difficult to meet up for *kirtan* and classes.

There is a 375-acre property called Badger Creek, owned by a quasi-religious group that embraces all religions. They have a five-year plan to construct a model city, and are building hotels, installing computer facilities, and even reopening the old airstrip. The development would provide good apprentice programme opportunities, but the question is whether the School would be given enough room to educate the children spiritually, in the manner it is doing now. There is also a property adjacent to Badger Creek available for purchase. Of course, both these options require serious funding.

If Nirguna Prabhu decides to move to Hawaii, another idea might be to set up the School on his property in Badger, subject of course to his agreement. The property has all the facilities for a school, and Nirguna Prabhu currently has to spend US \$2,000 a month to maintain the place, even if he does not live there. Nanda-gopal Prabhu pointed out that if this was an option, the School would have to find a caretaker to protect the property and maintain it to its current standard. Nirguna Prabhu was not present to comment.

Many devotees in the Meeting agreed that ideally the School should purchase land and construct a purpose-built school. Bhagavat Prabhu said that when they set up charter schools in Florida, such as the Alachua Learning Center, the mobile home companies construct modular school buildings up to the school code. These are built stronger and more durable than usual. It would be easy to purchase three or four modular school buildings and put them out on a plot of land. They even have such mobile homes specially adapted as living quarters. Bhagavat Prabhu offered to contact Toshana Krishna Prabhu, the principal of the Alachua Learning Center, to find out about these homes, as well as to talk to Shesha Prabhu from Philadelphia, who conducts all of the legal work for both the New Raman-Reti Gurukula and the Alachua Learning Center, to see if he is

willing to work with Brajendranandan Prabhu. Jalakar Prabhu pointed out that the school secretary and school guidance counsellor are disciples of Gurudeva and present at the Badger Festival.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Brajendranandan Prabhu mentioned that the School requires legal assistance also. Currently, children from outside the United States can only come over on and attend the School on a tourist visa, obliging them to leave the United States every three months, which is disruptive and expensive for the parents. The New Braja School should therefore look to either establish itself as a private school able to take on foreign students or come under the umbrella of an already existing private school that is able to take on foreign students. This would allow the children to apply for and obtain long-term student visas.

Hladdini-shakti dasi commented that the School needs the advice of a number of different types of attorneys. If the School decides to open its doors to foreign students, then it will need to seek the help of an immigration attorney. Often, attorneys will provide many consultations for free, charging only when you actually instruct them to begin some work.

REMUNERATION FOR TEACHERS

The New Braja School now has a good team of qualified teachers; but with the exception of Nitya-manjari dasi, who has to maintain her own house, they are all unpaid. If the School does not offer its teachers even a basic salary, it will be unable to keep them.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

Brajendranandan Prabhu explained that it is very distracting for him and his wife to have to get caught up in administration, fund-raising and resolving legal matters. Also, if the teacher has to collect fees from parents, or negotiate terms of payment, it can easily interfere with his relationship with the child. These are duties for an administrator. Brajendranandan Prabhu said he would be very happy to simply focus on teaching the children, and leave the management and administrative work for someone else.

Several devotees in the Meeting suggested that Aniruddha Prabhu, who is very competent in this area and recently moved to Badger from Hawaii, be asked if he would like to take on this responsibility.

INSURANCE

Hladdini-shakti dasi pointed out that whether the School is run in one's own family home or in a purpose built facility, it is necessary to take out liability insurance. The School does not have this insurance.

Jalakar Prabhu said that "Florida Healthy Kids" is a programme in Florida that provides health insurance at just US \$5 or \$10 a month to all children who are not insured. It may be worth investigating whether such a scheme exists in California.

PLAN OF ACTION

Hladdini-shakti dasi stressed the need for an immediate plan and a projected plan that is timed out. The School also needs a base of professional consultants, who will either not charge the School or charge only when they begin working for the School. It would be appropriate and helpful to find a consultant who is a principal or ex-principal of a school, perhaps both of a

private and a chartered school, as different laws apply to each. In Hawaii, for instance, chartered schools get a certain amount of money from the federal government and a certain amount from the state. If you add up all the income available from the government and from school fees and set this off against expenditure, you will find that not even private schools are able to handle the cost of yearly care of one child. Their standard income streams are supplemented by private donations, grants from different corporations, etc. It will therefore be important for the projected plan to consider carefully what options are available for each type of school, and then make an informed decision. The question is what set up will offer the most choices to get grants and outside help.

Hladdini-shakti dasi pointed out that the School does not even have a budget, so a “wish list” of needs, suggested by Vrindavan Prabhu, is very apt. There is no need to be humble in drawing up this list. If Brajendranandan Prabhu is not the right person to estimate costs, then we should approach a business consultant.

Krishna-bhamini dasi suggested that we look closely at some of the devotee schools that have been at least moderately successful, such as in Alachua, as this may provide us with a suitable model. Jalakar Prabhu said that Alachua has four devotee schools: There is a boarding school for girls, called the Vaishnava Academy for Girls, on five acres of land with two buildings. It is separate from ISKCON, privately managed and registered as a charity, and has existed for at least ten years. There is an ISKCON temple *gurukula* in a triple-wide trailer that is a fee school. Then there is a boys’ *ashram* or residential school. Then is also a charter school that is supervised by the Alachua County School Board, which has school bus access and over one hundred students. The taxes devotees pay go to support this school, and teachers receive a salary in the US \$20,000 to 25,000 per year bracket.

In connection to the charter school, Bhagavat Prabhu warned the Advisory Board that when you make this level of commitment to work with the Government, it will denude the entire curriculum of any religious teaching. When the charter school in Alachua considered making this compromise, it led to a big dispute in community.

RESOLVED that a committee shall be set up to carefully study the circumstances and options of the New Braja School, and to create both an immediate and a long-term plan to present to Gurudeva and the Advisory Board. This committee shall be made up of Brajendranandan Prabhu, Nanda-gopal Prabhu, Nirguna Prabhu, Brajanath Prabhu, Subala-sakha Prabhu and Hladdini-shakti dasi.

RESOLVED that this committee shall speak to Aniruddha Prabhu to find out if he is willing to take on the responsibility of administrator of the New Braja School.

RESOLVED that Bhudhara Prabhu and the new committee will begin raising funds for the School immediate at the festival, focusing on securing monthly commitments rather than one-off donations. Donations may be made through the Bhakti Projects account, for which Vishwambhar Prabhu will issue tax deductible receipts.

Acting chairman Bhudhara Prabhu adjourned the Meeting at 12:50 p.m. He reconvened the Meeting at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, 18th June 2005.

9. SHRI KESHAVAJI GAUDIYA MATH PROJECT IN NAVADWIP

Gopinath Prabhu, who has extensive experience in construction in India, both in Mayapur with the *samadhi-mandir* of Shrila Prabhupada and with various projects in Vrindavan, made a short presentation. Shrila Gurudeva has

empowered him to head up the construction in Navadwip, and he informed the Advisory Board that he has found an outstanding architect who has already built many giant constructions, such as temples, office blocks, assembly halls and movie theatres. The drawings are now completed, and the process of requesting for Government permits is about to begin. Gopinath Prabhu said that Yashodanandan Prabhu has pledged a huge amount of money to kick-start the project and cover most, and possibly all, of the expense.

Gopinath Prabhu thereupon laid out a provisional plan of the temple for all the devotees in the Meeting to look over. He explained that as you enter Navadwip over the large bridge that descends upon an elevated road, you will behold a magnificent temple with steps cascading down to the lake, which will resemble a *ghat*. The property is in a flood area, and therefore water levels will simply be allowed to rise and subside back into the lake. International gaudiya Vedanta Trust (IGVT) does not own the lake, but it will do everything it can to clean it and eventually, subject to obtaining permission from the various owners, construct steps on all sides of the lake. The access road to the land will also be resurfaced and improved.

The temple itself will be three storeys high, about the same size as the temple in Govardhan except with no walls. It will be quite a statement in Navadwip, and will hold a *goshala*, dispensary, library and school. The temple will have two kitchens, one for the Deities and the other for the devotees. At the time of *parikrama* there will be room for ten-thousand pilgrims. The projected cost of construction is somewhere around US \$1 million, provided we budget with great care.

Gopinath Prabhu said that the corner-stone for the temple has already been laid on an auspicious day. Devotees with energy or ideas for the project are invited to communicate with him, as is anyone with specific questions relating to the project.

10. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SHRI GOUDIYA VEDANTA SAMITI (REGD.)

Brajanath Prabhu outlined the recent history of Shrila Gurudeva's separation from Shri Goudiya Vedanta Samiti (Regd.), a spiritual society set up in 1941. Shrila Prabhupada was an original founding member. After the disappearance of Shri Shrimad Bhakti Pragyana Keshava Goswami Maharaja, the Samiti was managed by Shri Shrimad Bhaktivedanta Vaman Goswami Maharaja, Shri Shrimad Bhaktivedanta Trivikram Maharaja and Shrila Gurudeva: the three pillars that supported the Samiti and gave it life. At that time there were no struggles for power, and the devotees were simply immersed in *guru-seva* and *nama-bhajan*.

In 1996, Gurudeva began to preach internationally, and the Western devotees who made their way to Navadwip to join the annual Parikrama were charmed by the experience. As Gurudeva's global preaching reached new heights, differences of opinion began to emerge in the Samiti, as many of Gurudeva's Godbrothers who had little association with him could not adjust to changing circumstances, especially the growing influx of Westerners. After the disappearance from this world of Shrila Trivikram Goswami Maharaja and then Shrila Vaman Goswami Maharaja, the rift gradually widened, and it became clear that the majority in the Goudiya Vedanta Samiti were not interested in accepting and respecting Gurudeva as an initiating *guru* and *acharya*. A small minority also emerged who began to openly criticise the way Gurudeva managed and conducted his preaching. This minority was able to implicate others in *vaishnava-aparadha*, to the point where they went so far as to level and publish false allegations against Gurudeva.

While Gurudeva has simply tolerated this, it has been very painful for his disciples. Gurudeva has commented that this rift has been occasioned by the inexorable movement of Time, which sometimes makes enemies of friends and friends of enemies. When Shrila Prabhupada established ISKCON, many of his

Godbrothers could similarly not appreciate what he was doing; and while Shrila Prabhupada was sometimes quite forceful in his statements about his Godbrothers, he warned his disciples not to criticise them. Gurudeva has also advised us not to criticise his Godbrothers in Shri Goudiya Vedanta Samiti. It is best to give proper respect to them as Vaishnavas, especially as it is only a minority who are actively and deliberately set against Gurudeva. In Navadwip this Gaura-purnima, many of members of the Samiti came to see Gurudeva and offer their homage to him. They told him that they disagree with the minority group, but are bound to the Samiti because their area of service lies there. Brajanath Prabhu finished by reiterating that we should be careful to respect everyone.

11. SYSTEM FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS IN OUR SOCIETY AND SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF MALTREATMENT AND ABUSE

Bhagavat Prabhu presented to the Advisory Board the recommendations of a committee set up by Bhaktivedanta Trust International after Karttika last year to set up a system for dealing with complaints in our *sanga* and supporting victims of maltreatment and abuse. This committee was made up initially of Sripad Bhaktivedanta Aranya Maharaja, Yashodanandan Prabhu and Sundar Gopal das. Bhagavat Prabhu was asked to join the group because of his considerable experience in this field: he has been a licensed foster parent for nine years and dealt with over seventy children who have been either physically, sexually or emotional abused.

Bhagavat Prabhu explained that in a spiritual society both the perpetrator and the victim are Vaishnavas, and both need to get due respect and have due recourse to justice. There are two broad levels of abuse, which must be treated differently: abuse by an adult to a minor (to someone under 18 years) and abuse by an adult to another adult (to someone 18 years or over). The infrastructure for

dealing with any complaint will have three fairly distinct categories, namely, “Investigation”, “Rectification” and “Support”, which will be treated in turn.

INVESTIGATION

The first step is, of course, to properly investigate the complaint of maltreatment, wrongdoing or abuse. The committee recommends that a “Panel of Investigators” be set up made up of devotees in our *sanga* from different parts of the world who can take charge of forming a committee to lead any investigation in their region. Ideally, members of this Panel will have some qualifications in psychotherapy or experience with social work. They should be unbiased in their approach, and able to distinguish clearly between primary evidence, secondary evidence and mere hearsay.

Any committee leading an investigation should report back to Gurudeva. Confidentiality during and after the investigative process is paramount, as the matter is private. It may be that an incident has been misrepresented or exaggerated, and a breach of confidentiality can leave a lasting mark on name of the accused, giving rise to legal liability in defamation. Such a breach is also a violation of the victim’s right to privacy.

If anyone who has experience in this field feels qualified to sit on the “Panel of Investigators”, they should contact Bhagavat Prabhu.

RECTIFICATION

Bhagavat Prabhu explained that an investigative committee will presents its findings to Gurudeva with recommendations, and Gurudeva will then deal with the matter as he sees fit. It is Gurudeva’s express wish that he be the sole person with the power to reprimand or punish within the *sanga* anyone who behaves inappropriately, at least while Gurudeva remains in this world. If the wrongdoer has violated the law of the land, the victim can always notify the police or bring

an action against the alleged wrongdoer, a personal choice in which the victim should never be discouraged.

Bhagavat Prabhu mentioned that Shrila Prabhupada was especially severe with child molesters. Bhagavat Prabhu informed the Advisory Board that he was personally present when the most prolific child molestor in Vrindavan was brought before Shrila Prabhupada in Allahabad in January 1977. Shrila Prabhupada immediately banned him from ever stepping foot in any temple anywhere in the world. Only after much pleading was he permitted on very rare occasions to attend the Sunday feast, though he would have to leave directly afterwards. Had ISKCON followed Shrila Prabhupada's policy of banning child molesters, it would never have reached the present position of a *gurukula* lawsuit. Within three months of Shrila Prabhupada's departure from this world, that man was back in a temple preaching, and he remains there to this day.

Bhagavat Prabhu also said that there are several conversations in which Shrila Prabhupada makes it very clear, in one case over and over again, that children should never be beaten if they are disobedient. Teachers may show them the stick but should never use it. The ISKCON *gurukula* teachers failed to follow this instruction also.

Narayan Prabhu from Gainesville, who ran the ISKCON legal office from Los Angeles for six years and received training at the St. John's Child Study Clinic in Santa Monica, expressed some concern regarding Gurudeva's involvement. The law has expanded in this area in the past five years, following a series of cases involving the Catholic Church. Placing Gurudeva so squarely in the centre could have legal implications that should be investigated. The present environment in the United States is increasingly eroding legal protections and trampling on human rights. Bhudhara Prabhu asked Narayan Prabhu if he would lend his knowledge and expertise to the Advisory Board, and Narayan Prabhu kindly agreed.

Brajanath Prabhu pointed out that we are not looking to evade the system of justice in any country. A victim is at all times free to bring a complaint to the police or to file a civil action. Generally, Gurudeva will intervene in cases of wrongdoing only when it involves a *sannyasi* or a long-standing disciple. Gurudeva will be less concerned to personally get involved where an incident takes place far away with a disciple who has just been initiated.

Hladdini-shakti dasi emphasised that we must always work in close cooperation with outside agencies and the police in cases of serious incidents. Otherwise it may very likely harm Gurudeva and his mission.

Brajanath Prabhu pointed out that when a devotee receives initiation, it does not follow that the *sanga* takes responsibility for every aspect of his or her life. We take responsibility to teach them about spiritual life. Gurudeva encourages people to solve their own material problems. He is here to help us with our spiritual life. We are a teaching organisation and nothing more. Bhagavat Prabhu supported this by saying that the more we try to be good devotees, the better people we become. We're a society for teaching *bhakti-yoga*. We must protect ourselves from legal liability, but our emphasis should be on becoming a Vaishnava.

SUPPORT

Not only should there be a “Panel of Investigators”, but also a “Support Panel”, so that victims can have immediate recourse to help with problems they are experiencing or suffering. This Panel should work with existing agencies and crisis hotlines in every country to provide a extensive and professional support mechanism. Devotees throughout the *sanga* should be made aware that this “Support Panel” exists, and if anyone with some experience in this field would like to participate, they should contact Bhagavat Prabhu. Sripad B. V. Tridandi

Maharaja said that he is willing to help. He also recommended Vaijayanti Mala dasi, who has a similar background.

Krishna-bhamini dasi said that we should educate the children to speak out without fear. Also, at the beginning of a festival there should be an announcement welcoming devotees and guests and telling them whom they can contact in the event of any problem or emergency. Krishna-bhamini dasi said that as a senior devotee with a background in counselling she is willing to help devotees with personal issues or difficulties they may have. Devotees should know not to burden Gurudeva with all their material difficulties, which can often be resolved by visiting a specialist like a counsellor.

12. OTHER BUSINESS

RESOLVED that the next Meeting of the Advisory Board shall take place later this year directly after Karttika at Shri Giridhari Gaudiya Math in Govardhan. All senior devotees are encouraged to attend and participate. Agenda items should be emailed to Sundar Gopal das at sundargopal@purebhakti.com. Sundar Gopal das will make sure to post at least one month before the Meeting a notice on PureBhakti.Com giving the confirmed dates of the Meeting and the agenda.

Bhudhara Prabhu concluded the Meeting by requesting the devotees present to tell others about the success of the present set of Meetings and to encourage them to get involved.

Acting chairman Bhudhara Prabhu adjourned the Meeting at 10:30 a.m.

APPENDIX A: DIAGRAM OF THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The diagram on the following page provides a schematic overview of the structure of Gurudeva's worldwide mission. It should be noted that each legal entity, designated by a square, is fully independent and autonomous, and is not controlled by BHAKTI, the Bhaktivedanta Advisory Board or any other entity. The names of the society (marked as "The Bhaktivedanta Society") and the advisory body (marked as "The Bhaktivedanta Advisory Board") are provisional only, and await further discussion and a final decision by Gurudeva.

The Bhaktivedanta Society
(unregistered, no governing body)

LEGAL ENTITIES

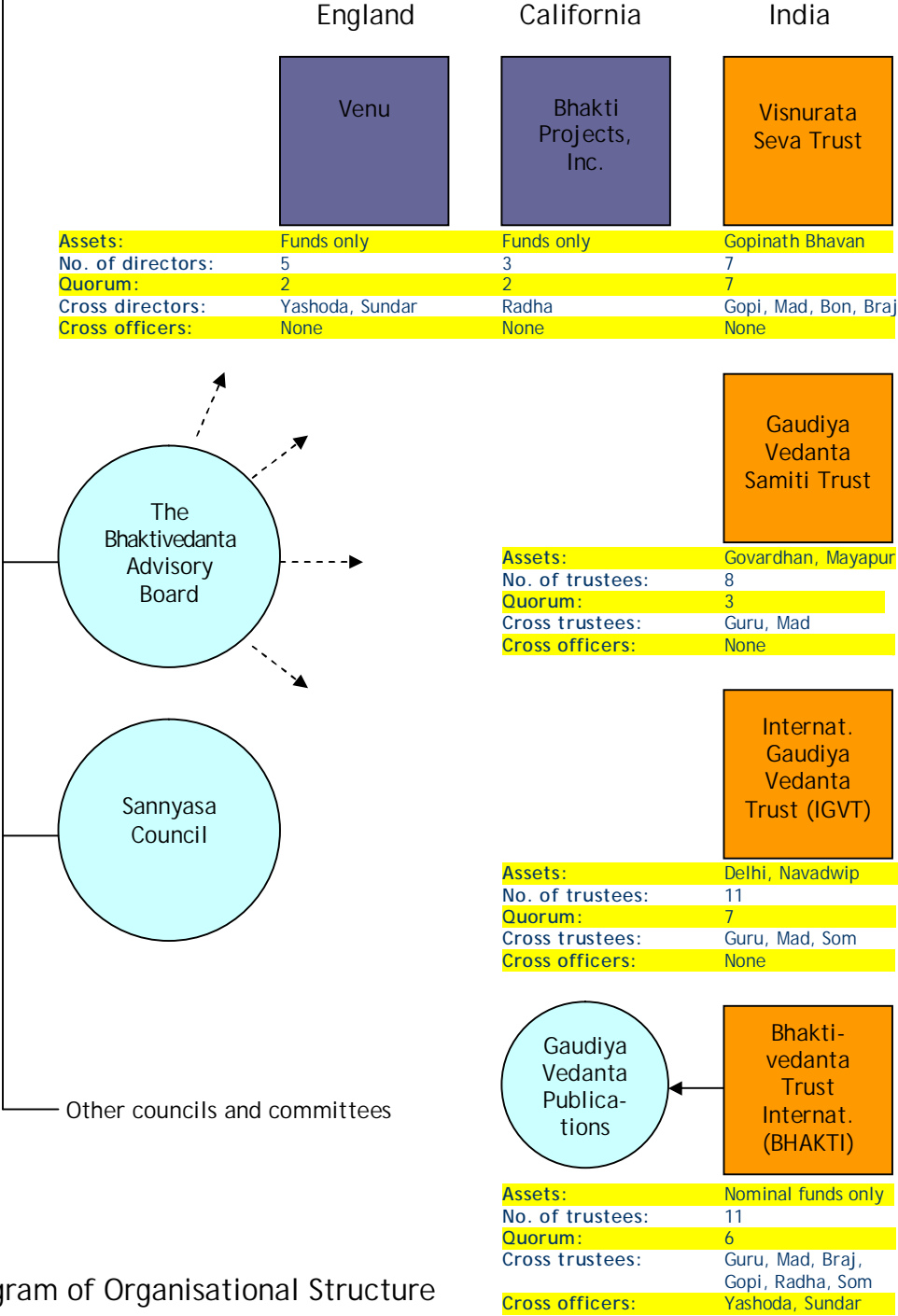


Diagram of Organisational Structure

KEY

- Incorporated charitable company
- Registered charitable trust
- Unincorporated body
- Direct control
- Proposals and advice

APPENDIX B: LIST OF PERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY BOARD

On Sunday, 19th June 2005, Shrila Gurudeva appointed forty-five senior devotees from different parts of the world as permanent members of the Bhaktivedanta Advisory Board. Bhudhara Prabhu, the acting chairman of the Advisory Board, hereby extends Gurudeva's invitation to these devotees to help coordinate and push forward his worldwide preaching mission. Thus, if any of these devotees listed on the following page are unable, for whatever reason, to accept Gurudeva's invitation, please would they inform Bhudhara Prabhu of their decision at [bd at panchang.com](mailto:bd@panchang.com).

All the senior devotees are encouraged to attend and participate in meetings of the Advisory Board, which will generally be held biannually. Meetings will be carefully chaired by the acting chairman, but will otherwise be held with little needless formality. The permanent members of the Advisory Board present at any meeting will be entitled to vote, should any issue arise that requires such formality, although matters will generally be resolved by informal consensus. It must be emphasised that the Advisory Board does not issue directives or seek to manage or control; it's function is restricted merely to offering guidance and advice.

This list of permanent members of the Advisory Board should not in any way preclude your active participation in meetings. Moreover, it is provisional only, and Gurudeva may at any time add further members to the Board. Indeed, if you wish to make any suggestions to him, please send your email to [bhaktivedantanarayana at purebhakti.com](mailto:bhaktivedantanarayana@purebhakti.com).

Acharya and Chairman:

Shri Shrimad Bhaktivedanta Narayan Goswami Maharaja

a

Sripad B. V. Aranya Maharaja, Ananga Mohini dasi (England)

b

Swami B. V. Bon Maharaja, Bhagavat Prabhu, Bhudhara Prabhu, Brajanath Prabhu, Brajavallabha Prabhu (Australia), Brajendranandan Prabhu

g

Gopinath Prabhu

h

Harernamananda Prabhu, Hladdini-shakti dasi

i

Isha Prabhu

j

Jalakara Prabhu, Jayanta Krishna Prabhu (France)

k

Krishna-bhamini dasi

l

Lila-purushottama Prabhu (Italy)

m

Swami B. V. Madhava Maharaja, Madhavananda Prabhu, Mahabuddhi Prabhu, Manju dasi (legal expert from Maryland)

n

Swami B. V. Nemi Maharaja, Nanda Gopal Prabhu, Nirguna Prabhu, Nishchintya Prabhu, Nrihari Prabhu

p

Swami B. V. Padmanabha Maharaja, Shriman Premananda Prabhu (Mathura)

r

Shriman Rasananda Prabhu (Vrindavan), Radhakanta Prabhu

s

Swami B. V. Sajjana Maharaja, Swami B. V. Shrauti Maharaja, Syamarani dasi, Shilpakarini dasi, Somnath Prabhu, Sushil Agarwal (Houston)

t

Swami B. V. Tirtha Maharaja, Swami B. V. Tridandi Maharaja, Tamopaha Prabhu

v

Mr. and Mrs. Verma (Houston), Vijaya Prabhu (Malaysia), Vishnu Prabhu (Houston), Vrindavan Prabhu (Hawaii)

y

Yashodanandan Prabhu