

Regarding Child Abuse

Transcript of a talk given by Bhakti Vikasa Swami on 27 August 2016 in Brno, Czech Republic.

<http://www.bvks.com/11818/>

Slightly edited for clarity.

...The whole world is full of so much contamination. Inevitably some of that comes into our Krsna consciousness movement. It is difficult to say what is the most horrible thing going on the world. Massive cow slaughter? The killing of even one cow is despicable, what to speak of massive, worldwide organized cow slaughter and meat sales. Maybe as bad as or even worse than...no one seems to care about it.

Practically every day nowadays there is a terrorist attack somewhere in the world. It comes up in the news, twenty people killed. But if you take all the living entities killed daily, there are literally millions; cows, pigs, birds, fish, goats, lamb all put together, must be millions. Cow slaughter, terrorism, these are the horrible things in the world today. Human trafficking, there are various kinds of human trafficking. Human trafficking means selling people, moving them around to sell them, especially girls are kidnapped and sold into prostitution. There are whole organized businesses going on with them.

There are many horrible things going on the world. One of them which is widespread in the modern world and has also severely impacted ISKCON is child abuse. Although within our society now there are all kinds of systems that are meant to prevent that, it seems that it is impossible to totally prevent. Even if the systems were to be fully followed, it would be difficult to prevent. There is one particular issue in this regard I wish to speak upon: Recently, a film was released on the internet, which highlighted some of the past and present child abuse cases in ISKCON.

One of the cases highlighted was involving HH Bhakti Vidya-purna Swami, who is behind the *gurukula* in Mayapur. There are many schools around the world in ISKCON that are called *gurukula*, but that's practically the only real *gurukula* inasmuch as its whole and sole focus is to train children to become devotees. Devotees under my guidance, in the last few years, have also started *gurukulas*. We can say *gurukula* but that (in Mayapura) is the only well established one.

This film highlighted how Bhakti Vidya-purna Swami is known to be or certified by the ISKCON Child Protection Office (CPO) to be a child abuser. For some things which happened many years ago, twenty five - thirty years ago. There is no record of him being engaged in pedophilia, but he was judged to have been very harsh in punishing some of the boys. And there was pedophilia going on; some of the boys were themselves engaging in homosex. And apparently he knew about this and didn't take steps to prevent it. So in this film it was said that why was he allowed to be engaged with children at all after this?

I don't want to be an apologist for child abuse in any way or any form. I saw that *gurukula* thirty or so years ago, in which Anirdesya-vapu Prabhu, the *brahmachari*, who later became known as Bhakti Vidya-purna Swami. He was there but he really didn't have any..., he had very little authority, practically no say in how the school was run, which boys were accepted, anything. So there was no

training, no oversight, no guidance. Just there are the boys, do something. When I say, no training, there was no training for him.

This all happened many years ago, and see what he has done in the meantime. Anyone who wants to blame him should go and see what he has done in Mayapur, and speak to the many young men who went there as young boys and are very very happy that they did so. Many boys who graduated from that school never want to leave it and want to stay in Mayapur for the rest of their life. Two of the older boys, they are not boys now, they are married and have children, they have taken up very responsible posts in the development of the Mayapur project. Your own Pritivardhana Prabhu, from Czech Republic, who you know very well, is overseeing the school there. With practically no support and nothing, even though he was under much blame, Bhakti Vidya-purna Swami has developed that *gurukula* and he has done something wonderful.

In that film the question is asked, why is he allowed to be involved with children? Well, there is the answer, go and see. We might also consider one statement of Krsna's in the Bhagavad-gita (9.30): *api cet su-duracaro, bhajate mam ananya-bhak / sadhur eva sa mantavyah, samyag vyavasito hi sah*. Even if one commits abominable activities, if his resolution is to serve Me only, such a person, Krsna says, must be considered a *sadhu*. Do we want to edit this out of Bhagavad-gita? Is there some crime which is unforgivable?

The reason I am particularly bringing this up here is because, so I am told, some of my disciples are disturbed that I don't want Bhakti Vidya-purna Swami shot or hanged or hung upside down or removed from the position or shamed or whatever. Apparently some of my disciples are disturbed that I have any sympathy whatsoever. I have stated my position in this regard and my disciples and anyone else can form their own opinion in this regard, as they like. So if you like you can hang or shoot me also.

Questions and Answers:

Q: Devotees would like to educate their children based on the teachings of Srila Prabhupada. CPO seems to have policies or norms which are coming from mundane world, which do not seem favorable in many cases. Please comment.

A: What are you referring to in particular? The CPO wants all children to recognize child molesters? By the way there is another thing in that film, the film that was made recently, they showed Indradyumna Swami with young girls. Alright, everyone knows that Indradyumna Swami likes kids and young girls but there has never been a case of him doing anything wrong. It seems, let's be frank, he is attractive to young women, it seems like that. He is a very colorful, heroic kind of preacher; he is out there all the time, on the frontline, preaching. But there has never been any record of him engaging in any illicit activity, so why blame him? He has done tremendous preaching throughout his life. So that's another point.

Q: How we should cooperate with the CPO office when we want to educate children, he heard from other devotees that there are some mundane approaches but he does not have any specific...

A: It seems to me that the CPO, a lot of what they recommend is based on recommendations from *karmis* who are trying to prevent this child abuse. What are the Vedic ways of child protection? I think in the world and what to speak of Vedic, everywhere in the world up until recently, it wasn't an issue. And probably in the Czech Republic it probably isn't nearly as much of a problem as it is in England or America, I don't know, I can guess like that. It is very widespread in India. No doubt one

reason for that is because lust is being promoted, more and more and more. People have overwhelming lusty desires and I guess some of them see children as easy victims.

I don't exactly know the psychology of pedophiles. But it is hypocritical that the whole society promotes sex so much and then they are shocked by child abuse which is an overspill of lusty desires which are being promoted. The point is that, if you want to put systems in place to try to protect children, what do you do? It is an issue. And to pretend it is not an issue; we might regret very much in future if we pretend it is not an issue. If, Krsna forbid, any of the children of the devotees present here were abused, what would you feel? Maybe it is best to take advice from people who have experience in this, even if their background is in mundane psychology. At least they have some experience, and hopefully they are able to prevent.

You don't want to expose children by saying "Be careful of everyone, they might do this or that to you," so their basic childish innocent trust is spoiled from the very beginning. But on the other hand if there are so many people around who are looking for opportunity to exploit that childish trust and innocence, we have to consider that also. What do you think?

Q: They have two categories, gross abuse and psychological abuse. When you force them to...for example there are some norms according to which you need to treat children...to force them to wake up early in the morning...

A: To get children up early in the morning is child abuse?

Q: They cannot recognize this, they say that this is mental abuse.

A: In that case we have to follow what Prabhupada says. You can't follow the *karmi* psychologists fully. Not all that they say. Srila Prabhupada said to not train children in austerity is one kind of cruelty to children. They would say that training children in austerity is child abuse, but Srila Prabhupada put it round the other way. Srila Prabhupada said that they have got this rare human form of life and to indulge them in sense gratification - *that* is spoiling their human life in the beginning. One thing I should say about this film, lest I be remiss, it is good that they are keeping the issue of child abuse alive so that we don't allow it to go on.

It seems to be vindictive. Vindictive means, you just want to find a fault, looking for revenge or something like this. In one part of the film they showed the boys in the so-called *gurukula* in ISKCON Vrindavan today. One of the boys said, "One of the teachers twisted my ear." Well, if you are not allowed to discipline the children even by twisting their ear, isn't it another form of child abuse that they can never be disciplined? It is part of training children, that they should learn some fear also. That if they do something wrong that they are punished. Not that it is done maliciously. But in most cultures throughout the world, children are given some form of physical punishment, it doesn't have to be very severe, just to train them to do the right thing and particularly not to do the wrong thing.

In Sri Lanka, there are shops that sell educational supplies. One of them is bamboo rods, and the parents tell the teachers, "If my child misbehaves, beat him." They expect it to be part of the job of the teacher to discipline the children. Maybe I will get suspended for child...they will find something to suspend me...having said all these things. Srila Prabhupada he said not to beat the children but he did also quote the English saying, spare the rod and spoil the child. This is another idea coming from pop-psychology that the children they should not know any fear but a little fear is good. It is good to be afraid of doing wrong. And until we become perfectly pure devotees, fear of punishment is a good incentive to not do the wrong thing. It's a quotable quote...note it down, put it on the internet with waterfalls and mountains in the background. Have you seen this? They put quotes on the internet with nice scenes of nature, maybe for this picture we can have a picture of Yamaraja. A

certain class of persons is always trying to think up some quote which can be put on the internet. They find pictures from nature...anyway here is a quote.

What I have said now, I know that at least some members of our movement will very strongly disagree with this. If any of you feel some disagreement, let it be known. Again, I am not at all condoning child abuse. One thing is, what is the definition of child abuse? I might disagree with some people on the definition of child abuse. Sexual violation of children is getting down as about as low as anyone in the human body can do anything - to sexually abuse children - no doubt about that. But twisting a boy's ear because he has misbehaved it is really not...to say someone is raping children and someone is twisting their ear when they misbehave is all child abuse and to put it in the same category is extremely unbalanced and unfair.

Those who...here is another quote you can put on the internet...those who are so adamant to prevent child abuse, in doing so they should see that they are not doing another kind of abuse. I heard a story, I don't know if it is true or not. There was an Indian working in America or maybe he immigrated to America. He got jailed because his son complained to the police after his father had beaten him. He was in jail for a few months, he came out and said we are going back to India. In India, he beat his son and said we are never going back to America again. I don't know if it is true or not or how badly he beat the son or whatever, an anecdote that I heard.

Q: It is said that it is not really good to tell these things to children how to recognize these situations or these persons. On the other side, we should tell them something. For example, he knows two cases here in Czech Republic, who had this experience when they were kids and they never told this to anybody. The general tendency according to modern statistics is that these children do not reveal what happened to them. How can we deal with our children in such a way that they will tell us if anything improper happens or is going on.

A: This is what I am saying that we don't like the idea of training the children in that way but maybe it is a good idea to do so. Naturally, if a child comes, even if you don't know the child you might want to give them a little hug or pat them on the head or something but nowadays you can't do that because you might get pulled up for being a child molester. I am absolutely serious in saying this. If you do that to an unknown child, the parents might call the police. That's the way the world is nowadays, it is insane but we can't escape in all respects this miserable world that we live in. I say the parents, most likely it will be the parent.

Q: He wants to confirm if he understood properly in regards to Bhakti Vidya-purna Maharaja if he is leading *gurukula*?

A: He is not officially leading the *gurukula*, he has no official position. But from behind he has been guiding Pritivardhana Prabhu and others for years. As far as I know, he has complied with the CPO laws. There is some injunction against him. He has been doing everything from behind. Like I said, he has done something unique and laudable.

Q: The situation is such that he is accused that...

A: He is not only accused, there is a whole case against him and he has been found guilty. Again, these are things that happened thirty years ago.

Q: He is asking if he understood it properly, that there is no record that he was a child abuser.

A: Yes, there is a record that he is a child abuser inasmuch as he severely beat some of the boys.

Q: Regarding the principle of *api-cet-suduracaro*, devotees who are on the side of Bhakti Vidya-

purna Maharaja, they are giving example of Lord Brahma who once ran after his daughter and then he was ashamed...

A: The example of Lord Brahma. Yes, he is still respected as Lord Brahma, even though he engaged in some *duracara*, *suduracara* - very bad activity.

Q: They are giving this example that the other demigods did not kick him out.

A: The other demigods did not kick him out and in fact, the sons of Marici who laughed at him, they took birth as demons and were killed by their father. They eventually became brothers of Krsna, they became sons of Kalanemi and then they became sons of Devaki and were killed by Kamsa, who was Kalanemi in a previous birth. There is a difference, of course, there is a difference. As far as I know, Bhakti Vidya-purna Maharaja is not Lord Brahma.

Q: He was just chasing the daughter but he did not abuse her physically. But there are cases in *gurukula*, little children were abused, and it was not only thirty years ago, but still sometimes it is going on *ingurukula*, not from Maharaja's side but from the side of others.

A: In Mayapur *gurukula*?

Q: I heard it from one boy who used to stay there he said he saw, and he also heard from other boys.

A: Still going on? I personally know of a case which very few people know about. This is recent, less than two years, one boy was there and he expressed some desire like that (homosex) and he was removed from the school. It may be that there are cases but as far as I know, especially given their experience, they are very strict not to indulge that.

I also heard what Pritivardhana Prabhu said in this case, from one of the parents of the boy. He said that this is very common in the modern world, nowadays. If we were given the opportunity, we could work with the boy, he is a good boy and help to rectify him. But the atmosphere in our movement is so frenzied about this issue that if anyone comes to know that we have kept a boy who has such an inclination, they will use it to close down our school or whatever. I also know a case of a very good devotee in India, very good means, he was practicing very well. Then it was discovered, that he was engaged in such activity...[END]