

## **The Editorial Review Panel Shares Its “Editorial Principles”**

Over the years, devotees have expressed interest in knowing more about The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust’s book editing policies and practices, especially in making corrections to Srila Prabhupada’s books after his physical departure.

To address the devotees’ concerns and to ensure the fidelity of Srila Prabhupada’s published works, on October 17, 2019, the BBT and the GBC conjointly selected and assembled an independent panel of devotees qualified by their devotional standing and deep study of Srila Prabhupada’s books. A number of the panel members are also experienced in editing and editorial processes. This panel is called the Editorial Review Panel (ERP [previously known as the RRP]).

The ERP’s first order of business was to define the editorial principles they would use to evaluate the editing the BBT has done, especially since 1977. Their paper, “Editorial Principles,” (ratified by the Global BBT on July 13, 2021) follows. Aside from a description of the editorial principles themselves, you will also find the list of ERP members, information on how the editorial principles were formulated, more about the ERP’s mandate, and what will be done with the ERP’s work.

This paper is intended to be a “living document” – that is, it may be amended whenever the review work requires that a principle be added or made clearer or expanded upon to encompass examples the reviewers encounter. Both editing and the reviewing of it are dynamic processes, and inevitably not everything will fit neatly into one category or another; so we’ve left room for this paper to develop, as needed. An amendment will be made when it helps the ERP to more closely align with Srila Prabhupada’s instructions. For this reason, the BBT may approve and publish an occasional revision of the “Editorial Principles” to keep the ERP’s process transparent.

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Global BBT

## **Editorial Principles for the Editorial Review Panel**

### **About the Editorial Review Panel (ERP)**

From a group of 40 prospects put forward by the BBT, GBC, and SABHA, a shortlist of possible members of the Editorial Review Panel was voted on at the GBC midterm meeting held in October 2019. The final resolution creating the ERP, using this shortlist for members, was made by the BBT shortly thereafter. The ERP has met approximately every two weeks since January 2020.

The panel comprises devotee scholars and experienced editors: Bhakti Vijnana Goswami, Bhanu Swami, Kalachandji dasa, Kesava Bharati dasa Goswami, Krishna Kshetra Swami, Krishnarupa devi dasi, and Radhika Ramana dasa. ERP members will serve one-year terms and will be reviewed and recertified annually by BBT Global.

The ERP's mandate is to review proposed and previously published edits to Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in the English language, with a focus on edits that were made after Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure. The panel will not review images or content written by the publishers, such as the publisher's introductory material, image captions, or cover copy.

The ERP's recommendations will be by consensus, based on the following set of principles formulated by the panel. If the BBT Editorial Board disagrees with an ERP assessment, the issue will be arbitrated by the Global BBT Trustees/Directors and the GBC. The final arbitration process is still being worked out in collaboration with the GBC.

ERP members are free to confer with experts outside the panel.

### **About This Document**

The Editorial Review Panel (ERP) decided in early 2020 that our work should be guided by a set of principles grounded in Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions for editing his books and the experience of Śrīla Prabhupāda's editors and publishers. Thus we convened a subcommittee to research Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions on editing, and another subcommittee to formulate principles based on those instructions. Our hope is that these principles will provide a shared, transparent basis for our discussions and assessments. We should note that the purpose of this document is neither to approve nor to disapprove the work of the BBT editors, but only to provide guidelines for the ERP in its review of the revisions of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books after his departure. Furthermore, the document is meant to be read and applied as a whole, for the principles are interrelated and no principle should be applied in isolation.

Similarly, every statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda on the matter of editing should be understood not in isolation, but in relation to his other statements on the subject and in relation to the experience of his editors. Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed his editors not to make needless changes to his writing, but he also asked them to edit it for grammar and for "phrasing for force and clarity," and there are numerous examples of both types of instructions (see Principles). Statements that encourage editing and those that discourage needless changes are both essential for understanding Śrīla Prabhupāda's desires for the editing of his books.

On July 22, 1977, just a few months before his departure and shortly after the well-known “rascal editors” conversation, Śrīla Prabhupāda conveyed his instructions on the editing of his books via his personal secretary, Tamal Krishna Goswami, who wrote to Ramesvara dasa that in regard to “the many mistakes due to [using Ramesvara dasa’s categories] 1) typographical errors, 2) mistakes made by [previous] English and Sanskrit editors because of maya or poor fund of knowledge, and 3) transcendental mistakes dictated by His Divine Grace Himself . . . it is the duty of the editor to right the situation.” He followed, “Your suggestion that in the future any mistakes which are found can be reported to Satsvarupa Maharaja, Jayadvaita Prabhu, Radha Ballabha Prabhu, or yourself, and after sufficient investigation and confirmation these mistakes can be rectified is accepted.”

“Although [Śrīla Prabhupāda] has certain doubts in regard to the perfectness of our service,” Maharaja continued, “He is quite confident that you will do the needful to make any corrections that are required.” Clarifying that these instructions came from Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, he added by hand, “I explained the contents of your letter and Satsvarupa’s, and Radha Ballabha and He [Śrīla Prabhupāda] seemed satisfied that things were not being unauthorizedly changed, while at the same time whatever corrections needed to be done were being made.”

Later that day, having acknowledged that devotees’ (including editors’) service wasn’t perfect in an absolute sense, Tamal Krishna Goswami wrote to Radha Ballabha dasa, “[A]ll of the mistakes should be corrected. . . Please just try to make all the corrections in the new editions and everything will be alright, and of course don’t make any unnecessary changes.”

Although there is no explicit evidence that Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed devotees to edit his books after his departure, there is also no evidence that he stated that the editing should *not* continue as he had instructed or that devotees should not continue to follow his instructions on this matter as they did on others.

Still, due to the lack of direct, specific instruction and to the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda often consulted with his editors but is no longer physically present to do so, any editing done after his lifetime should be especially conservative and cautious.

Among the challenges for this panel are to identify and understand His Divine Grace’s instructions in regard to editing his books, to reconcile and/or find a proper balance between those instructions that might seem to conflict, to determine how—or whether—those instructions should be applied posthumously (post-samadhi), and to treat all proposals for change with appropriate care.

## **Part 1: Principles that Limit Editorial Changes**

### **Principle 1**

Any editing done after Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lifetime should be especially conservative and cautious. When in doubt, we should leave things as they are, and make changes only when necessary. (For criteria for changes, see principles 8–13).

#### Justification

- Śrīla Prabhupāda is no longer present physically to approve or disapprove substantive changes, something that is the prerogative of the author. As he wrote in a 1976 letter, “I will have to see personally what are the mistakes in the synonyms and also how you intend to correct them. I was not satisfied with the corrections that were made before. . . the corrected material must be sent to

me for the final approval.” Similarly, he wrote in 1968, “Regarding Srimad-Bhagavatam, please send me the chapters which you have already revised. I want to see it, how it is being done.” In 1967, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in regard to *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, “While typing the records after your editing make it in duplicate and send me one copy to see how you are doing it.”

- Indeed, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s editors repeatedly asked for his approval of various changes, and he was always willing to give feedback by letter or in person, as is documented in the next principle. At times, Śrīla Prabhupāda invited his editors to join him wherever he might be, to consult face to face, or paused his travels to be accessible to them. None of this consultation is possible today.
- To ascertain Śrīla Prabhupāda’s desires for posthumous editing, we must try to understand what he wanted based on the instructions for editing that he gave during his presence and the testimonials of those who were close to him at the time.
- If posthumous editing is done without clear principles, it can become a process of endless change to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, based on personal opinion, which Śrīla Prabhupāda warned us against repeatedly. “Too much editing is not required” (letter, 1967); “I also do not like too much editorial work” (letter, 1967).
- It is the editors’ task to understand the author’s intent and work in accordance with it. At the same time, the ERP members recognize the limits of even a sincere disciple’s ability to fully understand the author’s intent when the author is a pure devotee. As stated in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Madhya* 23.39) and often quoted by Śrīla Prabhupāda: “Even the most learned man cannot understand the words, activities and symptoms of a person situated in love of Godhead.”
- The ERP takes its work of assessing revisions in the same spirit that Ramesvara Swami expressed in his 1977 letter to Tamāl Krishna Goswami: “If the editors, like Jayadvaita, keep firm faith that Srila Prabhupada is infallible and edit only as a sacred act of devotion, trying to be Prabhupāda’s instrument, then the results we all want are achieved.”

## Principle 2

When there are variant readings between two versions of a book produced during Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lifetime and both readings are reasonable, the reading found in the latest version is given preference. (See principles 12 and 13 for exceptions.)

### Justification

- Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes requested specific changes to published books that were then incorporated into later editions. For example, in several conversations in 1975 and 1976 he corrected the translation of *go-rakṣya* in the *Bhagavad-gītā* from “cattle-raising” to “cow

protection.” Besides correcting mistakes, Śrīla Prabhupāda also occasionally changed his mind about how something should be written. For example, in a lecture on SB 6.1.28–29, Śrīla Prabhupāda clarified that Ajāmila called out the name of Nārāyaṇa only once, not three times. (The dictation transcript states that Ajāmila called out three times.) Since a particular change (or particular type of change) found in a later edition might have been specifically requested or approved by Śrīla Prabhupāda, it is risky to reverse editorial changes.

- Śrīla Prabhupāda’s editors regularly consulted with him about specific changes and about editing in general. Here are a few of the many examples of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s close involvement in the editing of his books: Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in a 1976 letter, “Your changes which I have seen of the Sanskrit synonyms is also approved by me. Tanmayatraya [*sic*] refers to the fact that the trees and the father were absorbed in the same feelings.” In 1969, Śrīla Prabhupāda had a conversation with his editors discussing, among other things, the capitalization of nouns and pronouns connected to Krishna and His avatars. In no fewer than four letters, Śrīla Prabhupāda requested to see the edited version of *Easy Journey to Other Planets*: “Regarding your seeking publication of *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, I am very glad to hear this, and I understand that Kirtanananda Swami has a nicely edited copy of this. I have already asked him to send me this copy, and when I examine it, I will send it immediately to you” (1969). Ramesvara Swami, in his 1977 letter, recalls how Śrīla Prabhupāda spent hours considering changes suggested by his editors during the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* publication marathon. Jayādvaīta Swami also recalls, “The second edition of *First Canto* appeared during Śrīla Prabhupāda’s physical presence. Before it came out, I personally brought to him my revisions of the verses for the first one or two chapters. He at once had me begin to read them aloud in his presence, as he listened with attention. After I had read the first few verses, he interrupted and asked me: ‘So, what have you done?’ I replied that I had revised the verses to make them closer to what he himself had originally said. Śrīla Prabhupāda responded, ‘What I have said?’ I replied yes. His Divine Grace then said, ‘Then it is all right.’ And that was that. The work was approved” (*Responsible Publishing*, p. 2).
- Śrīla Prabhupāda repeatedly spoke with pride about the editions published in his presence and made authorial claims upon them. He often had his books read out loud—to benefit visitors, to teach his disciples, and/or for his own pleasure. In one instance among many, Prabhupāda showed his books to the Irish poet Desmond O’Grady, told him about the great numbers being printed and distributed around the world, and had his disciple read out loud the translation and purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 14.26. Similarly, in *The Great Transcendental Adventure* Kurma dasa recalls, “Prabhupāda’s chastisement went on for some minutes more. Then he suggested that someone bring a book and begin reading. As the devotees read aloud, they felt their ignorance dissipate” (“10 Days in Perth, 1975”). And, of course, Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed his disciples to distribute his books widely and took great joy in hearing of the results.
- As the author, Śrīla Prabhupāda was ultimately responsible for the editing quality of his books—a responsibility he took very seriously, as evidenced by numerous letters and conversations. Depending on what was needed, Prabhupāda praised his editors or reprimanded them, became closely involved in the minutiae of editing or stayed aloof, bestowed editorial responsibility on

an individual or took it away. There is ample recorded evidence for each of the above actions. As such, we accept the editorial changes made during Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lifetime, unless there is a specific reason (of the kind outlined in principles 8–12) to question a particular change.

### Principle 3

There are sometimes inconsistencies in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, such as inconsistencies between the Sanskrit, word-for-word translations, full translations, and purports, or between one section of a book and another section of the same book or a different one. There should be no attempt to make Śrīla Prabhupāda consistent—in language or ideas—with himself or with other acharyas, unless the inconsistency ought to be corrected based on principles 8–12.

#### Justification

- Śrīla Prabhupāda often gave different instructions or emphasized different points depending on context. Such variations offer multiple benefits to the reader, such as demonstrating how the philosophy of Krishna consciousness can be applied in various situations and how shastra can have multiple layers of meaning. On more than one occasion, Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed his followers to study his books from many angles of vision. For example: “I am very much stressing nowadays that my students shall increase their reading of my books and try to understand them from different angles of vision. Each sloka can be seen from many, many angles of vision, so become practiced in seeing things like this” (letter, 1972).
- Historically in our *sampradāya*, it has been the role of commentators to resolve apparent inconsistencies in sacred texts, and they do so through explanation, not by changing the *mūla* (root or base) text.
- When inconsistencies are introduced by obvious editorial error, they should be changed. “If there are discrepancies in your editing techniques between the beginning and later chapters, please inform me what they are so we can make the corrections here” (letter, 1976). See principles 11 and 12 for further discussion of this exception.

### Principle 4

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s language should not be updated solely to match contemporary English usage.

#### Justification

- Language is constantly changing, and so updating Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books to match contemporary English usage or social standards would require an endless process of editing.
- While editing, we should preserve Śrīla Prabhupāda’s voice, including his unique manner of using the English language. Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed, “I have received back the edited papers on Srimad-Bhagavatam. Brahmananda & others cannot change the style” (letter, 1968). Similarly: “The style of Srimad-Bhagavatam just as I had printed earlier in the First Canto

editions is very nice. Go on with this style for all our Bhagavatam editions” (letter, 1970).

- Although Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books need not be updated to match the latest English usage, they must be grammatically correct and clear in meaning. We discuss this further in principles 8 and 10.

## Principle 5

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements should not be modified in response to current scientific views or social standards.

### Justification

- It is the role of commentators and annotators, not editors, to explain Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books in relation to current scientific or social views. Clearly, therefore, it is also not the role of editors to leave things out from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books that they consider against current scientific or social views.
- There may be more than one way to respond to current scientific and social views based on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings. By modifying Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements on such matters, editors may inadvertently choose one response over another.
- Scientific consensus and social standards are constantly in flux, and they vary from one part of the world to another. Thus, changing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words in response to such concerns would result in an endless process of revision that would likely introduce the editors’ views into Prabhupāda’s books. In a letter to one of his editors, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, “Regarding the scientists, they will always find something new because their knowledge is not yet standardized. They will go on making new discoveries, on account of their imperfect knowledge” (1975). Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed in regard to *Back to Godhead* magazine, “I like your ‘topical articles’ also. Keep them simple and Krishna Conscious, avoiding too much bending to the public taste, but if they are appropriate to current problems, then it is nice proposal” (letter, 1971).
- A possible exception to this principle may be in regard to statements that could cause significant social or political damage to the Krishna consciousness movement. We allow for this rare exception on the basis of the following conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda, which took place in 1976:

**Pusta Krishna:** It might be necessary to edit the books because in these countries when they start reading about God and how we say this government is rascal, rascal, this and that, that . . .

**Prabhupāda:** Yes.

**Pusta Krishna:** Do you think it is necessary?

**Prabhupāda:** It will be necessary when there will be criticism.

**Gopal Krishna:** Later on, but at the present moment they have shown interest in our books, so we'll give it the way it is.

**Prabhupāda:** Yes. That we can correct. There is no . . . [break]

- Although the above statement provides a possibility to amend difficult statements that may have grave consequences, any such changes should be made only rarely—with the utmost hesitation, with broad consultation, and as minimally as possible—and each should be archived in BBT records. Another way to treat such statements would be to include an editorial annotation within the book. All these measures are necessary because we can no longer consult with Śrīla Prabhupāda on the appropriateness of such a change, as per principle 1.

## Principle 6

“Transcendental” errors—or apparent errors—by the author, such as narrative details or Sanskrit translations that differ from the standard understanding, should not be changed. (This does not include errors of the kind discussed in principles 8–12 below.)

### Justification

- In his purports, Śrīla Prabhupāda occasionally seems to misremember details of narrative sequence. Sometimes his retelling of a narrative differs from the traditional account. For example, he states that the Rājasūya sacrifice was performed *after* the Battle of Kurukṣetra (SB. 1.9.41, purport), and that Nakula and Sahadeva were begotten by Pandu himself (SB. 1.13.3–4, purport), and that *arat* means “due to fear” (in the synonyms and translation of SB. 1.14.11). In its “Guidance for Future Editors,” the BBT directs its editors to preserve such statements on the basis of the following statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda: “You’ll find, therefore, in the comments of *Bhāgavatam* by different acharyas even there are some discrepancies, they are accepted as *ārṣa-prayoga*. It should remain as it is” (lecture, 1976).
- The principle of *ārṣa-prayoga* (“the usage of the sages”) is traditionally employed to protect the words of the Vedas from criticisms of improper grammar or understanding. For example, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* explains the word order in the verse *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam* as intentional and perfect on the basis of *ārṣa-prayoga*: “Mistakes, illusions, cheating and defective perception do not occur in the sayings of the authoritative sages [*ārṣa*].”
- There are occasions when shastra contains apparent metrical flaws, grammatical mistakes, or inconsistencies in narrative. The acharyas note such discrepancies in their commentaries and explain them by various methods, such as *kalpa-bheda* (i.e., the *līlā* happens differently in different *yuga* cycles), rather than regarding the discrepancies as faults.
- Similarly, Śrīla Prabhupāda asked us to take any “discrepancies” in the writings of the acharyas in the spirit of *ārṣa-prayoga*, as seen in the quote above. In the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* (*Ādi* 11.100–22), Īśvara Purī requests Caitanya Mahāprabhu to check his book, *Kṛṣṇa-līlāmṛta*, for any flaws. Mahāprabhu refuses, stating that only a sinful person seeks faults in a devotee’s words, because Krishna is pleased with a devotee’s poetry, even if it contains basic grammatical mistakes.

- Śrīla Prabhupāda applied the principle of *ārṣa-prayoga* to mistakes in his own writings: “So far your telling me that some devotees consider that because there may be some grammatical discrepancies in my Srimad-Bhagavatam, first canto, then they may also be allowed to translate with errors accepted, that is just like imitating Raslila. When you do all other things like Krishna, they (sic) you can do Raslila. So if these other writers can do like me and spread Krishna Consciousness all over the world by becoming big Vedic scholars, then they can do. If one is too big, there is no mistake. Arsapreyaya means there may be discrepancies but it is all right. Just like Shakespeare, sometimes there are odd usages of language, but he is accepted as authority. I have explained all these things in my Preface to First Canto” (letter, 1972). In the Preface to the First Canto (and on many other occasions), Śrīla Prabhupāda quoted the famous verse by Nārada Muni (SB 1.5.11) to request the reader to overlook any shortcomings in his presentation of the book.
- Furthermore, the acharyas often give esoteric or creative interpretations to Sanskrit words, in accord with their realization. Such interpretation is the prerogative of an acharya. What appears to be a mistake may in fact be an esoteric understanding that is inaccessible to us.
- Nevertheless, Śrīla Prabhupāda placed clear limits on the principle of *ārṣa-prayoga* in regard to the work of his own editors. He repeatedly insisted that his books should be free of grammatical and spelling mistakes (as seen in Principle 8 below), just as Īśvara Purī insisted that Śrī Caitanya edit his book, despite Mahāprabhu’s resistance. Śrīla Prabhupāda resolved the apparent contradiction between *ārṣa-prayoga* and the duties of an editor as follows:

“It is not that we may present anything crude translation and that is acceptable. No, even though the transcendental subject matter of Vedic literature is still spiritually potent despite the crudest translation, still, because we have got facility to make it perfect, that is our philosophy. When I translated Srimad-Bhagavatam I had not the facility so you may notice grammatical discrepancies” (letter, 1972).

“It is not our philosophy to print errors. Of course, our spiritual subject matter is transcendental and therefore it remains potent despite mistakes in grammar, spelling, etc. But this type of translation may only be allowed if there is no other way to correct it, then it is all right. But if you know the correct order, then you must make it perfect. That is our philosophy: everything perfect for Krishna” (letter, 1972).

In other words, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books should be considered flawless due to their perfect message, even if mistakes remain, but it is still the editors’ duty to correct errors according to the guidelines given by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

- Thus, the principle of *ārṣa-prayoga*, although powerful, is not all-encompassing, and we attempt to outline the limits of *ārṣa-prayoga* in principles 8–13 below.

## Principle 7

Repetition and redundancy should be preserved, unless an edit is supported by principles 8–13.

### Justification

- Repetition is found throughout our scriptures to encourage meditation, to emphasize important points, and to aid memorization, among other reasons. The presence of repetition is often an opportunity for commentators to explain the same word or phrase with different meanings.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda often repeated his instructions. In numerous purports, lectures, and letters, he mentions the fact that he has already stated something previously, and then goes on to state it again. “That I have explained many times” (lecture, 1972). “As previously stated . . .” (*Gītā* 7.14 purport).
- Selective reduction of repetition by editors would place them in the untenable position of determining whether a repetition does or does not have devotional or instructional value. Śrīla Prabhupāda expressed his satisfaction that his editor was “not omitting anything” (letter, 1968).

## Part 2: Principles that Permit Editorial Changes

### Principle 8

Straightforward errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling (in English and Sanskrit) should be corrected, with as little disruption to the text as possible.

### Justification

- Śrīla Prabhupāda repeatedly asked for his books to be edited for spelling and grammar, both in English and Sanskrit, as seen in numerous letters. “In every publication house all printing matters are edited at least three times. So we should be very much careful about grammatical and printing mistakes. That will mar the prestige of the Press and the Institution” (letter, 1969). “I wish that all copies, before finally going to the press, must be thoroughly revised and edited so that there may not be any mistakes especially of spelling and grammar or of the Sanskrit names” (letter, 1970). “But you must see that all work is thoroughly correct by mutual checking so that errors of spelling and grammar will not appear in the printing” (letter, 1970). “The spelling should also be standard, and based on his work. So far the word ‘Ksatriya’, this is the correct spelling” (letter, 1968). “Now here [the actual meaning] is ‘O sages,’ and the word meaning [given in the book] is ‘of the *munis*.’ Just see. Such a rascal Sanskrit scholar. Here it is addressed, *sambodhana* [vocative], and they touch [make?] it ‘*munayah*—of the *munis*’ ” (conversation, 1977).
- We should be particularly careful about changing punctuation, as small changes in punctuation can have significant effects on meaning.

## Principle 9

Minor, straightforward errors of fact relating to names, places, and so on ought to be corrected with as little disruption to the text as possible. By “straightforward errors of fact” we mean those things that are not matters of interpretation or realization.

### Justification

- Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his books to be free of mistakes and worthy of being presented to learned persons. “We have to do things now very dexterously, simply we have to see that in our book there is no spelling or grammatical mistake. We do not mind for any good style, our style is Hare Krishna, but, still, we should not present a shabby thing” (letter, 1970). “So your efforts in the matter of our Sanskrit editing are effectively improving our books more and more with scholarly standards. . . . Regarding the missing verse #13 from the manuscript of second chapter, Second Canto, I give you the following: . . .” (letter, 1970).
- Śrīla Prabhupāda himself corrected straightforward matters of fact. For example, in a 1970 letter, he wrote, “Regarding the Topmost Yoga, in the blueprint there are many mistakes. I am pointing to out some of them as follows: Page 2 ‘decided to kill his sister.’ not sisters, because only Devaki was there. . . . Then on page 48: ‘on the bank of the Ganges near Didbee’. This is not ‘Didbee’, it is ‘Delhi’.”
- Preferably, the mistake should be corrected based on another statement in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, so that there is internal evidence to support the change.
- When an apparent mistake is repeated by Śrīla Prabhupāda multiple times in different contexts, or if there is ambiguity in the verse upon which Prabhupāda is commenting, or if there is room for multiple interpretations, we should not make a change, since such a change would be neither minor nor straightforward.

## Principle 10

Edits to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are sometimes required in order to remedy a lack of clarity, but they must be kept as minimal as possible. There is a difference between remedying a lack of clarity and adding substance to make things “more clear.” The former lies within the bounds of editorial work, whereas the latter can open the floodgates to interpolation.

### Justification

- Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed his editors not to make needless changes, but he also asked them to edit for grammar and force and clarity. There are numerous examples of both types of instructions, and some are quite forceful. This one instruction encapsulates both aspects: “Regarding Srimad-Bhagavatam, please send me the chapters which you have already revised. I want to see it, how it is being done. I am glad that you are not omitting anything, but just making grammatical correction, and phrasing for force and clarity, and adding Pradyumna's transliteration” (letter, 1968).

- For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda corrected lack of clarity in a 1970 letter: “ ‘The Lord’s compromise was that He had Vasudeva propose to the brother-in-law . . .’ This sentence is obscure. The actual fact is Vasudeva made a compromise and said to his brother-in-law, ‘such and such.’ ”

## Principle 11

When a mistake is introduced into Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books by a prior editor, proofreader, transcriber, typist, or designer as a result of mechanical causes (e.g., mishearing, eye-skip, lost manuscript pages, etc.), such a mistake should be corrected.

### Justification

- Śrīla Prabhupāda relied on his editors in order to ensure that his books were free of mistakes, but the editors sometimes introduced mistakes as a result of inexperience or rushed publishing deadlines. Śrīla Prabhupāda had high standards for his publishing team; he often gave them tight deadlines (e.g., “one month for one book,” “finish the job quickly”) or a specific quota of pages to edit (“thirty pages daily”), while also asking for high quality (“do it slowly and surely,” “everything sound but slow”).
- Some of the most obvious errors in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are a result of the kinds of mechanical mistakes that are common when editors are rushed or inexperienced. For example, during the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* marathon, the “impossible” task of editing, proofreading, typesetting, laying out, illustrating, and printing seventeen books in two months meant that many mistakes were still printed in the 1975 version. Śrīla Prabhupāda was aware of such mistakes introduced by his editors, and he consistently asked for them to be corrected. In a 1968 letter, he wrote about his editors’ lack of Sanskrit knowledge: “All these discrepancies are happening on account of my students being unaware of Sanskrit language. Therefore, I requested Pradyumna to learn Sanskrit very seriously.” In a 1969 conversation, Śrīla Prabhupāda addressed the problem of transcribers not being able to understand his English accent:

**Satsvarupa:** There’s one thing. . . . It seems to be easy, but it’s very difficult to hear your voice.

**Prabhupāda:** That will require practice. He may commit some mistake in the beginning, but when he is practiced, he will do the right thing. So that you cannot avoid. You cannot change my voice.

**Satsvarupa:** No. But I can hear it. I can understand it.

**Kirtanananda:** Yes, but you can’t go on forever, doing typing.

**Brahmananda:** We’ve learned, so someone else can.

**Satsvarupa:** So, just now you’ve sent a Kṛṣṇa tape. Should I, rather than do that, give it to Bhagavan?

**Prabhupāda:** No. First of all test him, who will do that. Test him here, whether he can understand.

In a 1970 letter, Prabhupāda points out “negligences” by his editors: “In KRSNA chapter #87, on page 4, the last line, it is said, ‘known as budbuvasa, which is manifested by Govinda.’ I do not know what is this editing. The correct word is Bhurbhuvasvah as it is in the Gayatri mantra and

everybody knows it. This ‘budbuvasa’ is an extraordinary word, neither it is Sanskrit nor English, so how it has avoided the vigilance of so many editors? So if none of the editors knew this word, why was it pushed? There should be no such negligences like this, nothing uncertain should be pushed. Now what other discrepancies there may be like this? Or what is the use of such editing? Everything must be done very carefully and attentively.”

- There does not seem to be any good reason to preserve mistakes that are clearly caused by inexperienced or rushed editors and typists. While traveling with Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1972, Pradyumna dasa wrote the following to Jayadvaita dasa: “Here’s an important point: Srila Prabhupada was looking at the new edition of Second Canto the other day and he called me up because he had found some mistakes. The first mistake was in the first verse of the Third Chapter. There the first line of the Devanagari script is placed last, and the last line is placed first. I don't know how this mistake has occurred; . . . Prabhupada said that if there is one mistake in one book, then you spoil the whole book. Murder the whole book. So also besides Sanskrit errors, there have been many, many English errors also, which; [*sic*] are very obvious, just like these two above-mentioned errors, so Prabhupada has been emphasizing lately about the great need for making our books free from errors. ‘What’s done has been done’ but now we should try to do two things: make sure that errors like these won’t occur again, and start a listing of past mistakes in each book so that we can correct them when they are reprinted.”
- While the decisions to correct such mistakes are always subjective to some degree, there are well-established methods, such as the comparison of manuscripts, to determine whether a change has been introduced due to mechanical errors.

## Principle 12

Corrections are sometimes required after Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lifetime to correct errors made by editors during his lifetime, such as when changes were made unnecessarily, when changes were made incorrectly, or when changes should have been made but were not—altering or losing the intended meaning or content. This should be done cautiously, respecting Principle 2.

### Justification

- As seen in his letters and conversations, Śrīla Prabhupāda entrusted his editors with the task of putting his words into proper English, but he lost faith in some of them because of moral failings or editorial overreach. This is evident, for example, in conversations held on February 27 and June 22, 1977.
- The process Śrīla Prabhupāda used to publish his books was unlike the typical process used by authors and publishers today. He rarely revised his work after the initial dictation and rarely read the edited manuscripts minutely before publication, instead entrusting his editors with both tasks. He wrote in a 1970 letter, “Regarding the Topmost Yoga, in the blueprint there are many mistakes. I am pointing out some of them as follows: [Śrīla Prabhupāda lists half a dozen corrections.] . . . In this way I have read the book sporadically, not very minutely. I think it should be gone through once more very carefully and all the mistakes that are still existing there

should be corrected. If the books are printed with spelling mistakes and other mistakes, that will be a discredit for our publication. So please see that editorial work is done very nicely.”

- As such, there are occasional unjustified edits that made their way into Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books without his knowledge or approval. Such editorial overreach is not protected by the principle *ārṣa-prayoga* and can be reversed. For example, editors sometimes removed repetitive or unclear sentences, but inadvertently lost valuable content in the process. Before approving any restorations, the ERP should verify that the change was indeed introduced by an editor, by comparing the questionable phrase with prior versions of the work or by other means.
- The ERP’s mandate is not to re-edit Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, and the latitude given to editors in the author’s absence is much narrower than in his presence. As such, the reversal of changes made during Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lifetime should be done sparingly and only when the prior editor’s work is clearly out of bounds. Whether or not there is good reason for a prior editor’s change is of course a subjective decision, which should be made only after giving due consideration to the other principles in this document.

### **Principle 13**

When a revision is warranted (based on the principles given above), earlier versions (e.g., a transcript or earlier published edition) can be used to revise the text and bring it closer to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words.

#### Justification

- This principle provides an exception to Principle 2. When it becomes necessary to make a change (based on principles 8–12), such a change should bring the text closer to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words in earlier versions or manuscripts (if such versions are available), rather than introduce words of the editors’ composition. Śrīla Prabhupāda allowed his editors to consult earlier versions when an issue needed to be resolved: “[I]f you like to use the original manuscript, then if it is possible, you can use it” (letter, 1975).

### **Coda**

The panelists recognize that editing (and editorial review) is a subjective process and that there is an inherent tension between preservation and correction. Therefore, the intention, devotion, and fidelity of the editor (or reviewer) are paramount. As Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in 1968, “Rayarama may not be as qualified as you are, but his one qualification, that he is fully surrendered to Krishna and his Spiritual Master, is the first class recommendation for his editing any one of our literatures, because editing of Vedic literatures does not depend on academic education. It is clearly stated in the Upanisads that one who has implicit faith in God as well as in the Spiritual Master, to him only the import of Vedic literature is revealed.”

End