

# Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link

Readers interested in the subject matter of this booklet may write to the following address:

**Dhīra Govinda dāsa**  
P.O. Box 1694  
Alachua, Florida  
USA 32616-1694

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## Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link

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## Why A Second Printing?

This second printing of Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link (PL) includes contributions from several Vaiṣṇavas, from diverse sectors of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. These pieces represent the widespread support for the ideas in PL, or at least support for open, straightforward discussion of the issues raised by PL, that is felt throughout the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. This second printing provides a forum for presentation of perspectives on those issues. I believe that this forum is a viable means to contribute to a productive and sober conversation on this vital topic. The author of PL has written the Prologue to this second edition, and he stands behind and welcomes comments on PL and the Prologue. Contributions from others are presented in the mood of a journal that provides opportunity for expression of views. The convictions and opinions of those contributions are not necessarily fully shared by the author of PL, though he does encourage their expression.

Issuances from the GBC body may have created some confusion regarding the actual content of PL, and in the matter of assurances by the author concerning future printings. As described in the Prologue, in March 2002, the author agreed not to reprint PL for four months, if the GBC agreed to issue a letter with a particular tone and content, in response to PL. Instead the GBC wrote A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Body Commission, the tenor of which is substantially different from the proposed letter. Thus, even if the GBC had issued the proposed letter, the agreement from the author not to print would extend only through July 2002. The GBC didn't issue such a letter, and thus no such agreement was ever in effect for any time period.

As described in the Prologue and other contributions, the GBC's Preliminary Statement tends to misrepresent or distort the ideas in PL. Therefore, this second printing is presented in the hope of clarifying and reinforcing the messages of PL. Establishing the primacy of Śrīla Prabhupāda's position in the lives of all members of his movement is essential, and I believe that the concepts in PL provide sound principles for this endeavor.

For the past three months the author has been discussing points related to the guru issue in ISKCON with the GBC's Sastriic Advisory Committee (SAC). These discussions have been helpful and edifying, and I welcome their continuation. I regard these discussions as complementary to the presentations in this second printing, and it is my hope that such colloquiums amongst learned and sincere devotees on key issues will continue in amiable conjunction with each other. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

A servant of the servant of the Vaiṣṇavas,

Dhīra Govinda dāsa

Written on October 14, 2002

## Foreword

I have to honestly admit that when Dhīra Govinda prabhu approached me to write a foreword to

this document, I was hesitant. I am not a scholar, nor am I well-versed in *śāstric* injunction. Also, it is easy in this age of quarrel, especially within ISKCON, to be labeled as belonging to one camp or another, or to ignite controversy and hostility.

It is clear to me that this is not the intent or spirit behind this paper, and it is surely not my purpose. I have many friends and associates throughout this movement, many of whom are ISKCON gurus or disciples of ISKCON gurus. I do not believe that any of the proposals in this document in any way diminish the respected position of these Godbrothers. On the contrary, by establishing the preeminent position of the father, all faithful sons are honored.

There are many members of ISKCON, including myself, who are interested in trying to heal the rifts that have injured our society since 1977. In some instances, the mistakes of the past have not adequately been addressed or explained. Many are unsure about the resolution of certain issues, and are seeking clarity to increase their faith. I believe that ISKCON is going through a process of purification after which we will emerge more unified and effective.

Many of us have no axes to grind or causes to champion. Our only concern and responsibility is to strengthen and preserve what Śrīla Prabhupāda struggled so hard to establish. By addressing problems and controversies now, within the purview of Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct presence, we are laying the groundwork for the far-flung future of ISKCON.

That Śrīla Prabhupāda holds a unique, preeminent, and prominent position within ISKCON and our *paramparā* is beyond dispute. This will always be so. The farther we recede from the physical departure of Śrīla Prabhupāda, the more his irreplaceable position will rise in prominence. As I told Dhīra Govinda prabhu when I first read this paper, it just seems like "common sense" to me.

The principal definition of the word "initiate" in the dictionary is "to begin or set going". Is there any question that the primary personality who initiated our reception of transcendental knowledge is Śrīla Prabhupāda? Will this position of Śrīla Prabhupāda ever change for ISKCON devotees? We think not.

My humble request to those who read this booklet is to do so with an open mind, and readiness for investigation and discussion. We have to ask ourselves honestly as we say over and over, "All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda", are we understanding the meaning? Are we meaning what we are saying? Are we willing to put this into practice? Please do not take any offense. The only intention is to further honor Śrīla Prabhupāda's unique position.

In the spirit of accepting wisdom wherever we may find it, here is a relevant quote from the British philosopher Herbert Spencer. "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all information, which is proof against all arguments, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance. That is contempt prior to investigation."

Ambarīṣa dāsa  
December 30, 2001

## Preface

The question may be asked: Why another paper on the process of initiation when the GBC has already spoken definitively on the matter? Isn't this now a non-issue in ISKCON? The answer is that the GBC has spoken definitively on the process of initiation on so many occasions that we cannot rationally conclude that its voice on such matters is absolute. The GBC is a managerial body. Spiritual matters of the Society must be resolved by conscious consensus of conscience by reference to Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. This is accomplished only by broad-based, open and frank discussions amongst mature devotees whose voices are not suppressed.

Perhaps no single question has disturbed ISKCON in the last twenty some years more than how initiations are to be conducted. That a sober devotee such as Dhīra Govinda prabhu has seen fit to put his energy into such a paper attests to the fact that the issue is indeed alive and well, i.e. not fully

resolved. If a spiritual matter is not resolved, it must be discussed, not only by those members of the society currently on the GBC, but by all concerned.

ISKCON will not flourish unless it attracts intelligent people. We won't attract intelligent people by asking them to discard their intelligence once in the Society. Intelligence is for reaching transcendence. It is used in the beginning to find the path. Finding the path means finding the person who can show the path. Thus intelligence is essential in the matter of accepting initiation. Faith is required, but not blind faith. Intelligence means free thought and open discussion. If this is suppressed then intelligence is suppressed. If intelligence is suppressed, then ISKCON will not attract intelligent people and will not flourish.

I, for one, as neither a "ritvik" or an "absolutist", welcome Dhīra Govinda's paper. He has obviously put a great deal of thought and soul-searching into it. The product is a position that cannot be ignored. There are clearly people making spiritual advancement in ISKCON without being formally initiated. They utter the holy name, they read about the glories of Kṛṣṇa in the books, they take *prasādam*. In this way they advance. There are others making advancement even after the person by whom they have been formally initiated has ceased the practices of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. How is this possible? Clearly, such persons are in contact with Kṛṣṇa in some fashion. However, Kṛṣṇa cannot be approached by the conditioned soul directly. Only through Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee can He be reached. Thus, they have contacted Kṛṣṇa through the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda who expertly brought Lord Caitanya's mission to the modern West. This is a simple and somewhat obvious point, but we need to hear it openly. Sometimes, intelligence means to state the obvious clearly.

How can we forget that *vāṇī* and *vapuḥ* are the same? "He reasons ill who says that Vaiṣṇavas die, when thou are living still in sound .." Śrīla Prabhupāda often said he was never alone, because his spiritual master was always with him. How was that possible when Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī apparently passed away in 1936? Śrīla Prabhupāda persistently reminded us that he was in his books. Who will deny that Śrīla Prabhupāda is still present spiritually?

But, how can those who are not formally initiated by him take advantage of his spiritual presence? One obvious way is through his books. Kṛṣṇa spoke to Arjuna long ago. We still take advantage of that conversation as Kṛṣṇa exists in His instructions. Śrīla Prabhupāda, being pure, is also absolute and thus also exists in his instructions.

Recently I was transcendently amused to see Śrīla Prabhupāda's reference to George Harrison as his "uninitiated disciple". If this was true then, why not now? Real initiation is to tread the path that Śrīla Prabhupāda has laid out. One may follow Śrīla Prabhupāda by taking formal initiation from one of his disciples. This is a formality. The substantial connection is to accept Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings and follow them. Then one is a disciple, whether formally initiated or not.

I am always struck by the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not give much stress or detail to the matter of how initiation was to be conducted after his physical departure. In fact, he never initiated such discussions. He only replied to questions raised by the then members of the GBC, such as "What will we do for initiation if you leave?" He then answered but did not go on and on in detailed elaboration. Could the reason have been that the process and application of it is really very simple, sweet and pure? Could it be that we have unnecessarily blown the whole thing into an unrecognizable, controversial fog by missing the obvious? We are all followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, who is still present in his transcendental books and teachings. Formal initiations are conducted as a matter of course as convenient and reasonable, but Śrīla Prabhupāda lives eternally as our *ācārya* and transcendental shelter. "He lives forever and his disciple lives with him." As he used to frequently say, "What is the difficulty?" Actually, there is no difficulty. Merely, the need is for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

Whatever one's position on the issue of initiation, we may all thank Dhīra Govinda Prabhu for bringing some good old-fashioned common sense to the discussion.

## Invocation

*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale  
śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine*

I offer my respectful obeisances unto His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Çréla Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa, having taken shelter at his lotus feet.

*namas te sārāsvate devam gaura-vāṇī-pracāriṇe  
nirviśeṣa-śūnyavādi pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe*

Our respectful obeisances are unto you, O spiritual master, servant of Sarasvatī Gosvāmī. You are kindly preaching the message of Lord Caitanyadeva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled with impersonalism and voidism.

*vāñchā-kalpatarubhyaś ca kṛpā-sindhubhya eva ca  
patitānām pāvanebhyo vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ*

I offer my respectfully obeisances unto all the Vaiñēava devotees of the Lord. They are just like desire trees who can fulfill the desires of everyone, and they are full of compassion for the fallen conditioned souls.

*jaya śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda  
śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda*

*Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare  
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare*

Dear Vaiñēavas,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Çréla Prabhupāda.

With whatever sincerity I have for the prosperity of Çréla Prabhupāda’s movement, I offer this essay for the consideration and pleasure of Çréla Prabhupāda’s followers. At all levels my many disqualifications for this project are apparent. Still, I am making the attempt because many fine and erudite devotees have encouraged me to write on this topic of Çréla Prabhupāda’s personal and direct relationship with all members of his movement. Most of the ideas in this composition have come from others, shared with me in the course of dialogue. A common response from the devotees to the principles presented herein was “You’ve expressed just what many of us have been thinking for many years.” I felt impelled to formulate these thoughts in writing and present them to the Vaiñēava community.

Gathering all the devotion I am able, I beg the blessings of the Vaiñēavas that this article will please Çréla Prabhupāda and will enhance his society. This paper is meant as an offering to Çréla Prabhupāda, and I know that this intent can only be successful with the benedictions of his sincere followers. There are many, many devotees who are senior to me in every way, and far more elevated than I in their Kāñēa consciousness and understanding of Çréla Prabhupāda and the philosophy of *guru-tattva*. I pray that this humble attempt to glorify Çréla Prabhupāda will be satisfying for those many great souls who have molded their life solely for the service of the *saikértana* mission.

Your servant,

Dhéra Govinda dāsa

## Prologue to the Second Printing of Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link

". . . There was one doubt that was plaguing me . . . I had always been taught when I was first joining that the paramparā is like a link, a chain. If you don't have the perfect link, if you are not initiated- You really cannot go back to Godhead . . . I presented this question to Prabhupāda. I followed Śrīla Prabhupāda from Rūpa Gosvāmī's Samādhi back into the courtyard, and just before Śrīla Prabhupāda took the steps, in the courtyard, I said 'We are distributing so many books but if people who read them aren't initiated then they can't go back to Godhead.' And Prabhupāda turned and looked at me right in the eyes and he said 'Just by reading my books they are initiated'" (From Memories of Śrīla Prabhupāda Tape #31, Vaikuṅṭhanātha dāsa Prabhu speaking about Śrīla Prabhupāda in Vṛndāvana in 1972).

Let us celebrate the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda can and is giving initiation in the essential sense of the term. We'd like this reality to be proclaimed and publicized throughout Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link emphasizes the essential component of initiation and the *paramparā*, which is transmission of transcendental knowledge. With this focus, described in The Prominent Link (PL) with relation to Śrīla Prabhupāda's description of his own initiation from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja, Śrīla Prabhupāda's usage of the term "initiation" on the first page of Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, and many other references from *śāstra* and Śrīla Prabhupāda's writings and statements, it is clear that Śrīla Prabhupāda is capable of giving initiation in the fundamental sense and is doing so. This is very wonderful and should in no way be minimized or concealed from anyone who contacts Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement.

### Serving the Vaiṣṇavas

Concerning the relationship between the initiate and the Vaiṣṇava conducting the initiation ceremony, PL states: "As we practically experience in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, there is an expansive range of healthy, spiritually productive relationships between the devotee who performs the initiation ceremony and the initiate. The PL framework supports a wide latitude of relationships, the litmus test being whether the relationship assists the initiate to strengthen his direct link with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla Prabhupāda, not the devotee who conducted the initiation ceremony, should be the center of the relationship. While not minimizing the importance of the relationship between the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony and the initiate, this paper does not primarily address that topic. The Prominent Link concentrates on Śrīla Prabhupāda's position and role in his movement, and most importantly, Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct and personal relationship with all members of his movement."

Throughout PL there are many references to the importance of service and teacher-student relationships between Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers. The principles of serving, honoring, and glorifying Vaiṣṇavas are presented about twenty times in PL. Still, some readers perceived that this point was not sufficiently emphasized in the essay, or even that the PL model is opposed to these principles. Herein we reiterate the essentiality for devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement to submissively and cooperatively serve other devotees, and to learn from and take shelter in senior and advanced devotees. These principles are completely consistent with accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the prominent link to the disciplic succession.

It is natural that Vaiṣṇavas who are inspired by a potent devotee may form a sort of family with

that devotee as the leader. PL supports such spiritual families, as sub-families within Śrīla Prabhupāda's family of followers, although participation in such a sub-family is not required for constructive involvement in Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission and personal progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Sometimes the leader of a sub-family will be the devotee who performed the initiation ceremony for the family members. In some instances it will be someone else. In some cases a devotee will find strong inspiration, throughout his lifetime, from the Vaiṣṇava who performed his initiation ceremony, and sometimes the strongest inspiration might come from a different Vaiṣṇava, at least for some periods of the initiate's life. From the PL perspective, all of these scenarios are fine, provided they enhance the devotee's relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda and encourage the devotee's progress in bhakti-yoga.

As described in PL and above, there is a broad continuum of helpful relationships between the Vaiṣṇava who performed the initiation ceremony and the initiate. The topic of the nature of this relationship is not the focus of PL. It is an important topic, and we encourage devotees to expound on it, as well as on other relevant issues, some of which are mentioned in the Summary and Conclusion section of PL.

The gist of PL is Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal relationship with all members of his movement. We believe this issue to be primary and fundamental, and thus it is our point of concentration. Without properly understanding Śrīla Prabhupāda's role and relationship, it will be difficult if not impossible to grasp the role and relationship of others.

## **Integration and Accommodation of Diverse Views and Experiences**

PL describes an experience that many members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement are having. This experience is supported by *śāstra*, philosophy and precedent. In describing this experience as well as its supporting evidence, we feel secure. Thus it is with full confidence that we beseech the leaders of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement to honor and accept the PL model, and the PL experience, as valid and legitimate within Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. Please make a place in ISKCON for this understanding.

We are almost equally confident that the PL model should be embraced as the preferred model for Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. However, there are many sincere devotees who are apparently not experiencing reality as described in PL, and who are doing well in their spiritual lives and making valuable contributions to Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission. We believe that their position would be more secure if they came to the PL realization. But we may rightly be accused of presumptuousness in this belief, and thus we are open to the possibility that their experience is as valid and healthy as if they were consistent with the PL model. Therefore, in PL the PL model is presented, theoretically, as the preferred model, while acknowledging that we need to be open to the potential for other understandings being equally legitimate.

The tangible issue at present is that the PL model is not even officially tolerated or accepted by managerial entities within ISKCON. Despite the widespread, albeit unspoken support for the ideas in Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, such ideas are rejected and banned in the ISKCON organization. This is unfortunate. Whether or not the PL model is adopted as the dominant paradigm, we urge that it must at least be respected and allowed.

## **Support for PL and Apprehension to Express It**

Typical comments that I've received, at places like ISKCON leadership meetings and Sunday Feast programs, from devotees serving in all capacities within Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, including top-level leaders in ISKCON, include statements, delivered in hushed tones, such as "I really liked your paper, The Prominent Link. You wrote just what I've been thinking for many years." Concurring with the statements of Ambarīṣa Prabhu and Balavanta Prabhu in the Foreword and Preface, many Vaiṣṇavas emphasize the straightforward common sense of the concepts in PL. These concepts include realization of Śrīla Prabhupāda as the prime transcendental initiator, and the practical efficiency for spreading the

movement of the practice of all members of the movement accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the object of worship as the prominent and direct link to the *paramparā*. Many devotees have expressed disappointment and sadness that these principles have been neglected and overlooked by the leadership of ISKCON.

Tones tend to be hushed in such conversations due to an apprehension that expression of such views is discouraged in the organization, and that such expressions would incur the disfavor of members and leaders of the institution. There is a perceived culture of fear and repression in the ISKCON organization, masked by a pretense of openness to frank discussion of issues.

Ostensibly ISKCON wants innovative, thoughtful members who boldly apply their intelligence, within the framework of guru, *śāstra* and *sadhu*, for gaining a deeper understanding of devotional principles. In practice, as experienced by many, if one does not conform to the organizational line on issues such as those addressed in PL, then the institutional leadership, without rational discussion or genuine attempt at understanding, often condemns the dissenter and discourages members of the organization to honestly look at issues from unorthodox perspectives. The implied message is "We have already thoroughly considered these issues. So you needn't apply your intelligence here, because we've thought it through for you." Such a stance is unlikely to attract and retain independently thoughtful members. There is in the organization a veneration of broad-mindedness, accompanied by an implicit assertion that views such as those espoused in Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link are not to be found amongst persons in good-standing in the organization. If someone in the organization advocates such convictions, they are then branded and condemned, and pressured to leave the institution. Once they have left, it is again safe for the leadership to declare to the members that no one in good-standing would hold such views as expressed in essays such as The Prominent Link, and anyone who thinks that way is deviant, and so you'd do better to not even consider thinking in that way.

Authoritarian dynamics, wherein the leadership is fearful of permitting subordinates to analyze and discern for themselves, may be somewhat prevalent in today's religious institutions, but they are not conducive for Vaiṣṇava society or relationships. Such reluctance to allow members to fully utilize their cognitive faculties may stem to a substantial degree from a benevolent desire to protect. The ISKCON organization may also benefit, however, from introspectively looking at other motivations for this authoritarianism, such as fear that members, upon analysis of facts from an alternative perspective, may realize that they are being, in some ways, misled.

We understand that this imperious leadership style is not extant throughout the organization, but it is manifest with sufficient regularity and pervasiveness that many, perhaps most, of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers, both inside and outside the institution, feel alienated and stifled. Thus, for the purpose of attracting and maintaining satisfied, intelligent members, it is, we believe, imperative for ISKCON leadership, especially at the top levels, to seriously assess its mode of addressing issues and concerns. As Balavanta writes in the Preface to PL, spiritual matters in Śrīla Prabhupāda's society must be resolved through "open and frank discussion amongst mature devotees whose voices are not suppressed."

Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link provides an opportunity for the movement to integrate and incorporate a new, attractive, and *śāstrically* sound paradigm for carrying Srila Prabhupada's legacy deep into the future. It is the opinion of many, including this author, that ISKCON needs to reexamine its paradigms, with fearless detachment, on issues including the guru issue, to avoid remaining a relatively insignificant cult, and to become a substantial player in the institutions of society at large. We understand that there are many fears, ranging from loss of important personal relationships to loss of legal battles, associated with implementation of the PL model. We contend with confidence that Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement possesses the strength to handle the challenges that will arise with the PL paradigm, and that the movement will undoubtedly be strengthened by accommodating and encouraging the PL model.

## History of Dialogue with the Governing Body Commission (GBC)

On March 7th, 2002, four members of the GBC body met with this author and discussed with him



some of the contents of Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, as well as the effect that the essay is having and may continue to have on members of the ISKCON organization. During the meeting they presented a preliminary draft of A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Body Commission.

During the next few days Dhīra Govinda dāsa spoke with a representative of the GBC, who was one of the four members at the meeting of March 7th, regarding Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, especially concerning how the issue of the paper can most efficaciously be handled by the GBC body. To help clarify matters I wrote the following letter on March 10th, and gave it to the GBC representative:

[Letter dated March 10, 2002, from Dhīra Govinda dāsa to the GBC body]

March 10, 2002

Dear Members of the ISKCON GBC,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I would like to clarify a few points regarding the booklet Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link. I am not in any ritvik camp and the essay was not written to support any ritvik agenda. One hope I had in presenting the essay was that the ideas therein would serve as a platform for resolving the ongoing conflict between advocates of the GBC position and advocates of ritvik ideas.

In presenting the ideas of The Prominent Link I have no intention of disrespecting or encouraging others to disrespect the Vaiṣṇavas who serve as initiating gurus in ISKCON. I understand and fully support the prime importance of properly respecting all members of our Vaiṣṇava family. Also, by describing Śrīla Prabhupāda as the prominent link to the paramparā for members of his movement, I am in no way minimizing the fundamental principle of being a servant of the servant of the devotees.

Concerning terminology, in the essay I decided not to employ some of the usual terms that are commonly used in discussions on these topics, because these terms, from my perception, have tended to cloud issues more than clarify them in the current environment of the movement. Instead, I used terms that describe observable behaviors, such as "the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony", for purposes of precision and to assist in extracting and identifying essential concepts, such as the transmission of transcendental knowledge from guru to disciple. The approach is that after clarifying essential concepts, we can then apply appropriate terminology.

All of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers have a mandate to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others, and in this way to expand the sankirtana movement and continue the disciplic succession. We are all meant to be instruments in carrying on the paramparā, and I am not advocating that the paramparā ends with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

There is a section in Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link entitled Terms of Relegation. In that section I point out what appears to me to be apparently contradictory connotations in GBC resolutions from 1999 and 2000. I did this because I believe that it is important for GBC statements to be clear and consistent. I humbly ask that the GBC takes the opportunity to elucidate their meaning in a way that explains the relationship between those resolutions.

I did discuss the ideas in the booklet with many devotees, including many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's granddisciples. In essence the essay is a description of the experience of many members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. My humble request is that this experience, which I believe is supported by śāstra and philosophy, be validated by the GBC body, in a spirit of seeking to bring in and welcome to the ISKCON organization all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's sincere followers.

I regret and take responsibility for any misunderstandings and disturbances caused by this essay. I am glad if it has stimulated productive discussion on the issue of Śrīla Prabhupāda's relationship with the members of his movement. Also, I am eager to hear from and engage in dialogue with the GBC body regarding any of the ideas in Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, as well as other topics related to guru-tattva.

Thank you for your attention in this matter. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Your servant,  
Dhīra Govinda dāsa

[End of letter from Dhīra Govinda dāsa to the GBC body]

The representative of the GBC, on behalf of the GBC, was concerned about further printing and distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, with regards to a potentially disrupting effect it could have on members of the movement and on members of the GBC body. I agreed that, under certain conditions, I would be willing not to distribute or reprint Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, at least for four months. I was and continue to be genuinely interested in meaningful discussion on the ideas addressed in PL. Thus, I offered that if the GBC body would like to engage in such discussion, I'd postpone plans for further distribution of the essay. My thinking was that, through such discussion my thoughts on the matters might be enriched, and thus I didn't object to holding off distributing my views on the matter for the sake of a few months of productive discussion. Also, as part of this agreement, I asked that the GBC body write a letter of response to me, stating something similar to the following:

[Letter drafted by Dhīra Govinda dāsa and given to the GBC representative, as a suggested letter for the GBC to write to Dhīra Govinda dāsa, to fulfill the agreement described above.]

March 11, 2002

The GBC body expresses its appreciation to Dhīra Govinda dāsa for his contribution to the understanding of the guru issue through his essay entitled Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link. We look forward to further discussions with him on the ideas in his booklet and on other topics connected with guru-tattva.

[signed by the members of the GBC Executive Committee]

The purpose of the proposed letter was for the GBC to honor and welcome the contribution of the ideas in PL. With such a mood from the GBC, I'd have been glad to postpone further distribution of PL, in favor of ongoing, reasonably timely, discussion with the GBC, on topics actually raised in PL (as opposed to topics ascribed to PL, but not actually contained therein). After receiving my letter dated March 10, 2002, the GBC responded with A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Body Commission, which is included below:

A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Body Commission

"Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link" written by Dhīra Govinda Prabhu has fundamental inconsistencies with Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings. Although the work encourages Śrīla Prabhupāda's pre-eminence in ISKCON, it does so in a concocted way. As disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, we cannot endorse anything different from what he taught, no matter how it may appeal to sentiment.

Out of respect for the author, the GBC Body requests its Sastric Advisory Council to review the paper and comment on it more deeply. For now, to protect devotees from being misled, the GBC Body offers these specific examples of how "The Prominent Link" deviates from Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings and instructions.

- The paper begins by improperly dismissing the standard terminology of śikṣā and dīkṣā guru - terminology established by Lord Caitanya Himself and followed by all prominent acharyas. Śrīla Prabhupāda uses śikṣā and dīkṣā as essential words to define functions of specific gurus. The author, by contrast, calls them "appellations" and "labels" and discards them.

- Having discarded the terms, the author attempts to merge the functions of śikṣā and dīkṣā gurus. Noting that Śrīla Prabhupāda is ISKCON's pre-eminent instructing guru, he writes, "it is questionable whether the devotee performing the initiation ceremony can unambiguously be termed 'the dīkṣā guru.'" Śrīla Prabhupāda, by contrast, states unambiguously in the Krishna book, Chapter 80, (and elsewhere): "śikṣā gurus may be many, but dīkṣā guru is always one."

- Śrīla Prabhupāda exhorted his disciples hundreds of times to be the next gurus in disciplic succession by simply repeating what they heard and avoiding concoctions. Why would he do so if he intended to be directly responsible for initiating future generations? Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, "One's guide must be a spiritual master who is . . . strictly following the instructions of the previous ācārya . . . ." (CC Madhya 10.17, purport).

- "The Prominent Link" specifically contradicts Śrīla Prabhupāda's own description of his relationship with initiates of those he initiated. On May 28, 1977, in a conversation with the GBC in Vrindavan, he said those devotees would be his "grand disciples" and "the disciples of my disciples." Disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are in fact directly connected to him through initiation as his grand-disciples. Śrīla Prabhupāda commented that the grandfather is more kind to his grandchildren than is their father. There is nothing lacking in the connection between Śrīla Prabhupāda and his grand disciples. Some may choose to emphasize their dīkṣā guru and others their śikṣā guru. Such affairs of the heart cannot be legislated by anyone.

- In the same conversation Śrīla Prabhupāda described those who would be taking on the service of initiating disciples as "regular gurus." The "Prominent Link" terms them "Vaishnavas who perform the initiation ceremony." Further, the work fails to offer a single statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda in support of the implication that His Divine Grace would serve - in any respect - as a dīkṣā guru in posthumous initiations.

- "The Prominent Link" suggests that if every member of ISKCON makes Śrīla Prabhupāda the "sole object of unconditional surrender," ISKCON will be more united. Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings suggest that ISKCON will be more united - and Śrīla Prabhupāda more pleased - if every member of ISKCON serves the servants of the servants of Śrīla Prabhupāda: "This is called paramparā system. You have to learn how to become servant of the servant of Kṛṣṇa. The more you become in the lower position -- servant, servant, servant, servant, servant, hundreds times servant, servant -- the more you are advanced. Here in this material world everyone is trying to be master of the master. Just opposite. And the spiritual world, the endeavor is to become servant's servant. This is the secret. yasya deve para bhaktir yatha deve tatha gurau/ tasyaite kathita hy arthah prakasante mahatmanah. This is Vedic instruction" (London, 8/3/73).

ISKCON Law establishes Śrīla Prabhupāda as the "pre-eminent and compulsory śikṣā guru for all members of ISKCON." Further, it says that any grand disciple may find more inspiration from Śrīla Prabhupāda than from their dīkṣā guru. "The Prominent Link" asserts that such understandings of Śrīla

Prabhupāda are offensive to His Divine Grace (p. 26). The GBC Body finds such remarks and their public circulation wanting in scholarship, philosophy, and Vaishnava etiquette.

Since Śrīla Prabhupāda entered samadhi, his disciples have struggled to properly establish guru-tattva in ISKCON, and there is more to be done. In that respect the GBC Body acknowledges the overt intent of "The Prominent Link." Unfortunately, the paper fails in its attempt to glorify Śrīla Prabhupāda owing to an incomplete consideration of his teachings or, worse, a willingness to take a little from here, and little from there, and create something new. The result is aviddhi-purvakam - an improper method of worshiping Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The GBC Body acknowledges with appreciation the clarification offered by Dhīra Govinda Prabhu in a letter (March 2002) in which he states that he did not intend to teach ritvikism nor support the ritvik agenda through "The Prominent Link." He also expressed his eagerness to enter into further discussion with the GBC and its Sastric Advisory Council.

Thus the GBC Body encourages Dhīra Govinda Prabhu to give serious consideration to the discrepancies mentioned here - and others that can be raised - and discuss them with its Sastric Advisory Council.

Contributing to this paper: Drutakarma dāsa, Hṛdayānanda dāsa Gosvāmī, Kalakanṭha dāsa, and Ravindra-svarūpa dāsa.

[End of A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Body Commission]

Clearly, the letter of the GBC conveyed a mood different from that proposed in the suggested letter drafted by this author. Thus, the conditions of the proposed agreement were not met. Still, I was and am eager to converse with the Sastric Advisory Council (SAC). The SAC began discussions with this author in July, 2002, and such discussions are ongoing.

Although the statement is entitled A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Commission, we wonder how many and which members of the GBC actually endorse the statement. We'd appreciate hearing personally from the members of the GBC body regarding their views on the ideas expressed in PL. Based on what we've already heard from some of them, there is far from agreement with the mood and content of the official GBC statement. We suggest that the culture of organizational fear and repression, as contrasted with a Vaiṣṇava culture of civil, open discourse, is active here, and we encourage ISKCON leaders to voice their genuine views on the issues raised in PL.

## Comments on A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Body Commission

Herein I will make a few comments regarding A Preliminary Statement from ISKCON's Governing Body Commission. The issue of whether a devotee is Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple or the disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple is addressed in the Questions and Answers section of PL, in the response to the question "Can someone be called 'Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple' if he didn't receive formal initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda?" The GBC response to this, based on its policy that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the preeminent *śikṣā guru* for every member of the institution (GBC resolutions, 1999), would seem to be "yes". As far as I understand GBC position statements, the GBC would qualify this "yes" by stating that everyone is Śrīla Prabhupāda's *śikṣā* disciple, but not his *dīkṣā* disciple. Still, the GBC would agree that all members are meant to be Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct disciple, in some sense, (a *śikṣā* sense), of the term. In the above-mentioned section of PL, the essay presents a "this and that" perspective, rather than a "this or that" perspective, regarding this issue of terminology. We suggest that such a perspective as described in PL can synthesize diverse views in the movement and thus contribute towards harmonious understanding amongst Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers. If we focus on delivery of transcendental knowledge from guru to

disciple, then all members of the movement may be considered direct disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and if we focus on the formal initiation ceremony, then perhaps the terminology "disciple of the disciple" is applicable.

PL states "Without contradiction, devotee A is a direct disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and a disciple of the disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Being directly linked with Śrīla Prabhupāda does not negate, and in fact supports, the principle of being a servant of the servant of the Vaiṣṇavas." As described towards the beginning of this Prologue, PL strongly encourages and emphasizes the importance of all members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement to cultivate the mood of being a servant of the servant of the servant of Śrīla Prabhupāda. This mood is completely consistent with perceiving Śrīla Prabhupāda as one's prominent link to the *paramparā*.

We ask all members of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement to read PL without contempt prior to investigation, to borrow a phrase from Ambarīṣa dāsa's Foreword to PL. There are many misconceptions circulating about the contents of PL, and we request that the article be evaluated on what is actually stated in the essay.

It would be a relatively simple matter if the issue at hand were whether to support the cultivation of a service mood towards Vaiṣṇavas. But all resoundingly agree that we must, so there is no debate on that cornerstone of Vaiṣṇava practice. Let us not be sidetracked by such non-issues. A substantial issue is whether Śrīla Prabhupāda can and is giving initiation in the fundamental sense of the term. The PL model unequivocally asserts that Śrīla Prabhupāda can and is initiating in the essential sense of the term "initiate". Another substantial issue raised in PL that we believe thoughtful devotees ought to gravely consider is a change to the first page of Sri-Caitanya-caritamṛta. This change carries philosophical implications related to *guru-tattva* and the principle of initiation.

In its letter the GBC has written, "Some may choose to emphasize their dīkṣā guru and others their śikṣā guru. Such affairs of the heart cannot be legislated by anyone." Thus, to reiterate a major point in PL, if Śrīla Prabhupāda is the Vaiṣṇava from whom a devotee directly receives the most transcendental knowledge, then for that devotee, regardless of who conducted his initiation ceremony, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the direct and prominent link to the disciplic succession. The GBC seems to recognize that such an arrangement is a valid choice. This valid choice should not be delegitimized, as it currently is within the ISKCON organization. That is, that choice should be acknowledged and honored as legitimate, albeit not the only legitimate option.

### Some Proposals Related to The Prominent Link

Herein are some proposals for managerial entities within Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. These proposals serve to legitimize the PL understanding, while not invalidating other conceptions:

Proposal: The ideas and practices described in the paper Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link are a valid way to understand Śrīla Prabhupāda and his personal, direct relationship with his followers, regardless of when or from whom these followers received formal initiation.

Proposal: It is legitimate for followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, regardless of when or from whom they received formal initiation, to consider Śrīla Prabhupāda to be their prominent, direct link to the disciplic succession, by virtue of Śrīla Prabhupāda imparting more direct transcendental knowledge to them than does any other Vaiṣṇava. [Optional: This type of relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda is the preferred model of relationship with the Founder/Ācārya for all members of his movement.]

Proposal: It is a legitimate worship practice for all members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement to worship Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture as the link to the *paramparā*. No pictures need be worshipped as the link to Śrīla Prabhupāda. [Optional: This does not mean that other pictures can't be worshipped as the link to Śrīla Prabhupāda.]

Proposal: It is a legitimate worship practice for all members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement to recite Śrīla Prabhupāda's *pranam mantras* in recognition that Śrīla Prabhupāda is serving as the devotee's prominent and current link to the *paramparā*. *Pranam mantras* for others need not be recited in order to

connect one with Śrīla Prabhupāda. [Optional: This does not mean that other *pranam mantras* can't be recited to connect one with Śrīla Prabhupāda.]

Proposal: It is an acceptable understanding of the process of initiation for the devotee performing the initiation ceremony and the devotee receiving initiation to consider that the initiate is qualified to participate in the ceremony due to the fact that he has already directly connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda, and that the initiation ceremony is an official acknowledgment of this fact, and that Śrīla Prabhupāda continues, after the initiation ceremony, to be the prominent, direct link to the *paramparā* for the initiate.

Proposal: Consistent with Śrīla Prabhupāda's delineation, in places such as the first page of the Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā, of the essential understanding of initiation, it is legitimate to consider that Śrīla Prabhupada is initiating devotees who genuinely, directly connect with him by serving his *vāṇī* and accepting that *vāṇī* as the guiding force of their life. This understanding is applicable regardless of who conducted the formal initiation ceremony for the devotee.

Concerning the Terms of Relegation section of PL, our intended mood is one of humble inquiry, and we apologize if we have conveyed a different impression. There are GBC policies, some of which are described in PL, that, to this author, appear inconsistent. Essentially we are saying, "We don't understand. Please explain and clarify." I believe the pronoun "we" is particularly appropriate here, because, from our experience, many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's sincere followers are similarly unclear about GBC positions on these and other related issues.

Regarding terminology, we herein reemphasize that PL utilizes the methodology of concentrating on functional descriptions rather than on terms that have somehow or other served to obscure understanding, due in no part to lack of clarity in *śāstra* or the writings of Śrīla Prabhupāda. This method helps to clarify our understanding of the essence of Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct and personal relationship with the members of his movement.

PL devotes a section, entitled Responsibility, to the importance of devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement taking responsibility for the progress of others, such as junior devotees, in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. One purpose of that section is to counter the misconception that the PL model uses the idea of Śrīla Prabhupāda as the primary link to the *paramparā* as an excuse not to be responsible members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission in actively caring for one's own spiritual advancement as well as the advancement of others.

## Focus on the Essence

Much of the discussion on the topic of guru-tattva has centered on the formal aspect of the initiation process. As described in the Questions and Answers section of PL, this formal component is important, though the most essential aspect of the process is the transmission of *divya-jñāna*. Let us close with a moving and relevant verse and purport from the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (SB: 10:2:18), which indicates that this fundamental ingredient of the process of *dīkṣā*, or initiation, is where our energies may most fruitfully be focused in these discussions. Concentrating our deliberative aptitude thereupon, let us pray for Śrīla Prabhupāda's guidance in understanding his unique relationship with each of us:

Verse- "Thereafter, accompanied by plenary expansions, the fully opulent Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is all-auspicious for the entire universe, was transferred from the mind of Vasudeva to the mind of Devakī. Devakī, having thus been initiated by Vasudeva, became beautiful by carrying Lord Kṛṣṇa, the original consciousness for everyone, the cause of all causes, within the core of her heart, just as the east becomes beautiful by carrying the rising moon."

Purport- "As indicated here by the word *manastah*, the Supreme Personality of Godhead was transferred from the core of Vasudeva's mind or heart to the core of the heart of Devakī. We should note carefully that the Lord was transferred to Devakī not by the ordinary way for a human being, but by

*dīkṣā*, initiation. Thus the importance of initiation is mentioned here. Unless one is initiated by the right person, who always carries within his heart the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one cannot acquire the power to carry the Supreme Godhead within the core of one's own heart."

## Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link

*Abstract:* Many members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement who did not receive formal initiation from him experience Śrīla Prabhupāda as the primary giver of direct transcendental knowledge. This empirical reality forms the basis of recognizing Śrīla Prabhupāda as the prominent link to the *paramparā*. Such a conception is supported by *śāstric* descriptions of the essence of the initiation process, and by the delineation of the *paramparā* described by Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

### Introduction

This paper presents a framework for understanding Śrīla Prabhupāda's position that is derived from a comprehension of Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct and personal relationship with the members of his movement. The central idea is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the prominent link to the *paramparā* by virtue of being the prime deliverer of transcendental knowledge. We present these ideas in a mood of open-minded discussion and ask that the reader approach the material with a fresh perspective and a willingness to reexamine the issues.

While we maintain that this model should be accepted in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, it is not necessarily the only model that is *śāstrically* and philosophically valid. Many of the contentions herein, in regards to Śrīla Prabhupāda's relationship with members of his movement, may not apply to everyone in Śrīla Prabhupāda's society. They do, however, apply to many and are, we will demonstrate, legitimate in terms of *śāstra*, philosophy and precedent. Thus, we ask that the principles presented be honored and respected in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. Though we suggest that these conceptualizations are the preferred model for his movement, our firm recommendation is simply that the ideas and practices be validated and accepted, perhaps alongside other systems and understandings.

It is important to recognize that Śrīla Prabhupāda is serving as the primary guru for his followers, including many who received formal initiation after Śrīla Prabhupāda physically departed. Those who don't experience Śrīla Prabhupāda as the direct and primary guru may reference the above paragraph. The fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda is factually serving as the direct and preeminent spiritual master obviates the need to establish that he is capable of performing this function. Still, herein we will philosophically support the assertion that he is the primary link to the *paramparā* for those who contact his movement.

Of central importance in this discussion is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is, or at least is meant to be, the primary spiritual master for all members of his movement. In realizing this it is important not to become distracted by appellations such as "*dīkṣā guru*", "initiator", and "officiating *ācārya*", though of course for communicative purposes such designations are sometimes necessary.

In establishing Śrīla Prabhupāda's position we do not wish to imply that no one other than Śrīla Prabhupāda is serving as spiritual teacher. All who instruct others in the tenets of *bhakti-yoga* are spiritual teachers. In this sense each devotee has many gurus who are inspiring him to progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. These gurus are directly guiding devotees and establishing important, direct relationships with them that are invaluable in helping the devotees on their path back to Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda is the main spiritual master for devotees to whom he gives more direct transcendental knowledge than they receive from any other Vaiṣṇava.

### The Process of Initiation

Śrīla Prabhupāda described initiation as a process, with the essence of this process being the delivery of *divya-jñāna*, or transcendental knowledge, from the spiritual master to the disciple. When we refer to the spiritual master giving transcendental knowledge to the disciple, it is understood that transcendental knowledge originates with Śrī Kṛṣṇa and comes through the guru.

*yathā kāñcanatām yāti  
kāmsyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ  
tathā dīkṣā-vidhānena  
dvijatvaṁ jāyate nṛṇām*

“As bell metal, when mixed with mercury, is transformed to gold, a person, even though not golden pure, can be transformed into a *brāhmaṇa*, or *dvija*, simply by the initiation process” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4:31:10 Purport, quoting Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 2.12). On June 17, 1976, during an initiation lecture in Toronto, Śrīla Prabhupāda described initiation as follows: “So initiation means, the Sanskrit word is *dīkṣā*. *Dīkṣā*, *divya jñānaṁ kṣapayati iti dīkṣā*. *Divya-jñāna*.”

Though in the following quotes Śrīla Prabhupāda describes “*dīkṣā*”, the fundamental premise of this paper is not dependent on terminologies such as “*dīkṣā*”, “*śikṣā*”, and “*dīkṣā guru*”. This will be further explained later in this section.

In the purport of *Madhya-līla*, 15:108, Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes Śrīla Jīva Goswami as follows. “*Dīkṣā* is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as *dīkṣā*.” Also, in the purport to *Madhya-līla*, 4:111, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes “*Dīkṣā* actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all material contamination.”

In a lecture on July 29, 1968, Śrīla Prabhupāda said “This is called initiation. Or initiation from the very beginning. This is called *dīkṣā*. The Sanskrit term is called *dīkṣā*. *Dīkṣā* means... Di, *divya-jñānaṁ*, transcendental knowledge, and *kṣā*, *ikṣā*. *Ikṣā* means *darśana*, to see, or *kṣapayati*, explain. That is called *dīkṣā*.” In a lecture on February 22, 1973, in Auckland, Śrīla Prabhupāda stated “There are two words, *divya-jñāna*. *Divya-jñāna* means transcendental, spiritual knowledge. So *divya* is di, and *jñānaṁ*, *kṣapayati*, explaining, that is *kṣā*, *dī-kṣā*. This is called *dīkṣā*,...So *dīkṣā* means the initiation to begin transcendental activities. That is called initiation.” Similarly, on December 29, 1973, during a lecture in Los Angeles, Śrīla Prabhupāda confirmed “*Dīkṣā* means initiation.” From Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lecture in New York, on July 11, 1976: “*Divya-jñāna ḥṛde prokāsito*. What is that *divya-jñāna*? *Divya-jñāna* is that we are all servant of Kṛṣṇa, and our only business is to serve Kṛṣṇa...This is *divya-jñāna*. *Dīkṣā*. *Dīkṣā* means from this *divya-jñāna*.”

Initiation, as described above, is a process. Components of this process include receiving and implementing the instructions to wear *kānti mala* and Vaiṣṇava *tilak*, and receiving a Vaiṣṇava name. The most essential aspect of initiation is receiving transcendental knowledge from a realized spiritual master. Chapter Four of the *Bhagavad-gītā* begins “I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvān, and Vivasvān instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikṣvāku.” Clearly, instructing the disciple in transcendental knowledge, rather than any formal element of the process of initiation, is the essence of the disciplic succession. Further, in *Bhagavad-gītā* (4:34), the meaning of the word “*upadeksyanti*” is given as “they will initiate”, and in the verse this process of initiation consists of imparting knowledge from the spiritual master to the disciple.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is giving transcendental knowledge, and thus he is performing the most important element of the process of initiation. He is the main Vaiṣṇava doing this for members of his movement. While it may be asserted that others are also imparting *divya-jñāna*, even this *divya-jñāna* may be understood as coming indirectly from Śrīla Prabhupāda, though some may opine that that transcendental knowledge is also Śrīla Prabhupāda’s direct mercy. Leaving aside that issue, it is incontestably true that many devotees, including many who were officially initiated after Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure, and many for whom the Vaiṣṇava who performed the initiation ceremony is in good standing in ISKCON, receive more direct *divya-jñāna*, even by the most narrow definition of the term “direct”, from Śrīla Prabhupāda than from any other Vaiṣṇava, in the form of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, tapes, and *mūrti* form. For these devotees Śrīla Prabhupāda is performing the most essential part of the initiation process, as he is the primary giver of *divya-jñāna*.



Someone may assert "If transcendental knowledge is given by someone other than the Vaiṣṇava who performs the initiation ceremony, then that transcendental knowledge can only be called *śikṣā*, not *dīkṣā*. Therefore, it cannot rightly be said that Śrīla Prabhupāda is giving *dīkṣā*. He is giving *śikṣā*." In the framework of The Prominent Link (PL), the essential focus is on the process of initiation, which is founded on the transmission of transcendental knowledge. Terminology and labeling is not a chief concern. Whomever is labeled "*śikṣā guru*", "initiator", or "*dīkṣā guru*", the heart of the PL understanding is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary Vaiṣṇava directly giving transcendental knowledge. For devotees who are receiving *divya-jñāna* directly from Śrīla Prabhupāda, more than from any other Vaiṣṇava, it can rightly be said that Śrīla Prabhupāda is their direct, current, and prominent link to the *paramparā*, with "direct, current, and prominent link" defined as "the Vaiṣṇava who directly gives transcendental knowledge more than any other devotee".

Many Vaiṣṇavas transmit transcendental knowledge to others. Śrīla Prabhupāda, however, is the main giver of transcendental knowledge, and thus the main giver of *divya-jñāna*. If we examine a typical scenario in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement we find that many of the aspects of the initiation process, such as the instructions to wear *tilak* and neck beads, and to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahā-Mantra a prescribed number of times every day, are often provided by a devotee other than the Vaiṣṇava who conducts the initiation ceremony. The Vaiṣṇava who conducts the initiation ceremony gives the spiritual name, and at the ceremony the initiate declares vows. These are important aspects of the initiation process, though they are by no means the entire process, and therefore in many instances it is questionable whether the devotee performing the initiation ceremony can unambiguously be termed the "*dīkṣā guru*".

Even if "*dīkṣā guru*" is defined solely in terms of the performance of the initiation ceremony, one's prominent and current link to the disciplic succession, as delineated by Śrīla Prabhupāda at the beginning of Bhagavad-gītā As It Is, is understood in terms of reception of transcendental knowledge. To summarize this point, the most important aspect of the initiation process is the transmission of *divya-jñāna*, transcendental knowledge, and this function is performed for many, if not most, members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement primarily by Śrīla Prabhupāda. For those members of his movement, regardless of when they received formal initiation, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary and direct link to the *paramparā*.

We contend that Śrīla Prabhupāda will continue to serve as the prominent link at least for the duration of his movement. Also, we suggest that all who contact his movement should arrive at the point where they do experience Śrīla Prabhupāda as the primary giver of direct *divya-jñāna* in their spiritual lives. If someone has not come to this point then, we propose, he is not ready to be formally initiated.

When someone first contacts ISKCON, at least in most parts of the organization, for a few months he is encouraged to directly accept Śrīla Prabhupāda as his guru. We suggest that once someone has done this, as evidenced by accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda in his heart as his spiritual master and following Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions, the newcomer does not need to search for another Vaiṣṇava to connect him with Śrīla Prabhupāda. The newcomer is already directly connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda, who is his current link to the *paramparā*. Of course, many Vaiṣṇavas have inspired the devotee, and will continue to do so. These Vaiṣṇavas are also serving as his guru because they are helping him to understand Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions, and to apply those instructions to his life. Still, by virtue of being the main giver of direct *divya-jñāna*, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the devotee's prominent link to the disciplic succession.

The formal initiation ceremony is an official acknowledgement that the devotee has established a direct link with Śrīla Prabhupāda. The devotee does not make the link with Śrīla Prabhupāda at the time of the ceremony. If the devotee has not already directly linked with Śrīla Prabhupāda at the time of the formal initiation, then he shouldn't be participating in the initiation ceremony. The Vaiṣṇava conducting the initiation ceremony does not become the connection between the initiate and Śrīla Prabhupāda. The direct link between the initiate and Śrīla Prabhupāda already exists. The connection does not become indirect at the time of the ceremony.

In a lecture in Hyderabad on December 10, 1976, Śrīla Prabhupāda said "...from 1922 to 1933 practically I was not initiated, but I got the impression of preaching Caitanya Mahāprabhu's cult. That I was thinking. And that was the initiation by my Guru Mahārāja. Then officially I was initiated in 1933

because in 1923 I left Calcutta.” Thus, it seems that the essence of initiation is the acceptance of *divya-jñāna*, and not the formal ceremony. In the Introduction to The Nectar of Devotion Śrīla Prabhupāda explains “The connection with the spiritual master is called initiation.” This connection is what links the disciple with the *paramparā* and with Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is transmitting transcendental knowledge, and we are confident that he will continue to do so for many generations. In this essential sense, Śrīla Prabhupāda is initiating sincere followers. In fact, we propose that accepting *divya-jñāna*, or initiation, from Śrīla Prabhupāda, and thereby directly connecting with him, is the qualification for one to become formally initiated in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement. Again, the official initiation ceremony is a formal acknowledgement that the devotee has directly connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

In the essential sense of the term “initiated”, Śrīla Prabhupāda is initiating the devotee by directly delivering to him transcendental knowledge. The initiate is primarily a student and disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, in that he is embracing and assisting to spread the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Through submissive service to Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s followers the devotee receives transcendental knowledge. The devotee may also simultaneously be a student of other Vaiṣṇavas to the extent that these other Vaiṣṇavas are instrumental in the Kṛṣṇa conscious educational process of the initiate.

## Caitanya-caritamṛta- Page 1

On the first page of the Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote "The direct disciple of Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī was Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, who accepted Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī as his servitor. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura accepted Śrīla Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī, who initiated Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who in turn initiated Śrīla Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī, the spiritual master of Om Viṣṇupāda Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja, the divine master of our humble self."

It is of course noteworthy that Śrīla Prabhupāda, following Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī’s song *Śrī Guru-paramparā*, lists a disciplic succession wherein several of the spiritual masters did not receive formal initiation from their spiritual masters. Perhaps even more noteworthy is that Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the word “initiated” to describe *paramparā* relationships where no official initiation occurred, in reference to the relationships between Śrīla Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī and Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and between Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Śrīla Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī.

In the recently published edition of Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta the editors deleted the words “initiated” in the two cases cited above. A representative of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust explained that the weightiest argument in making this change to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words was the following: “Leaving one or both ‘initiated’s will strongly imply that the use of the phrases ‘direct disciple’ and even ‘accepted [as his disciple]’ indicate formal initiation as we know it in ISKCON, which is far from the truth.”

Of concern is that the explanation for deleting the word “initiated” seems to be largely based on the understanding of the word “initiated”, “as we know it in ISKCON”. Perhaps when Śrīla Prabhupāda used the word “initiated”, he did so deliberately, and the meaning of the term as it has come to be understood in ISKCON is incomplete. That is, instead of making changes in this passage based on what we think Śrīla Prabhupāda may have meant, it may be fruitful to consider that the current conception in the organization of the word “initiated” is not perfectly consistent with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s understanding of the concept.

One way that this could be true is by referring to the definitions of initiation provided above. Perhaps Śrīla Prabhupāda was referring to initiation in the sense of “transmitting transcendental knowledge” when he used the word “initiated” to describe the relationship between Śrīla Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī and Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

## Additional Perspectives on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Position

Śrīla Prabhupāda is of course present and living through his *vāṇī*. “The potency of transcendental sound is never minimized because the vibrator is apparently absent” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2:9:8 Purport). “However, the disciple and spiritual master are never separated because the spiritual master always keeps company with the disciple as long as the disciple follows strictly the instructions of the spiritual master. This is called the association of *vāṇī* (words)” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4:28:47 Purport). “...[A]lthough a physical body is not present, the vibration should be accepted as the presence of the spiritual master...” (Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda, January 13, 1969). “So we should associate by vibration, and not by the physical presence. That is real association” (Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda, August 18, 1968). “Therefore we should take advantage of the *vāṇī*, not the physical presence, because the *vāṇī* continues to exist eternally” (Letter from Śrīla Prabhupāda, November 4, 1975). “Although according to material vision His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda passed away from this material world on the last day of December, 1936, I still consider His Divine Grace to be always present with me by his *vāṇī*, his words” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līla, Concluding Words).

Sometimes it is asserted that one needs a “living guru”. This is true, and Śrīla Prabhupāda is a living guru. He lives through his *vāṇī*. Even with regards to his body, Śrīla Prabhupāda never had a material body (The Nectar of Instruction, Text 6). “...[T]he spiritual master, those who are *ācāryas*, their body is not considered as material” (Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda, January 13, 1969). Śrīla Prabhupāda is available to fully and directly reciprocate with his sincere followers through his *vāṇī* and *mūrti*. Transmission of *divya-jñāna*, and not physical presence, is the defining characteristic of the *paramparā*, as described in Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura’s song *Sri Guru Paramparā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda stated “I shall never die, I shall live forever in my books” (Science of Self-Realization, Foreword). Thus, *śāstrically* and philosophically it is possible for a devotee to directly connect with Śrīla Prabhupāda as the link to the disciplic succession, and this is factually happening for devotees who contact the *saṅkīrtana* movement.

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura wrote “*yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo yasyā prasādān na gatiḥ kuto ’pi...*”, which translates as “By the mercy of the spiritual master one receives the benediction of Kṛṣṇa. Without the grace of the spiritual master, one cannot make any advancement.” Devotees have many gurus, or teachers on the path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. For a devotee who comes to the movement Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary spiritual master, the Vaiṣṇava to whom the devotee fully and unconditionally devotes his life. This can be understood in terms of the “*yasya prasādā...*” verse.

Devotees receive mercy from many Vaiṣṇavas, who all, in a sense, are serving as his guru. “*Gurūn* is plural in number because anyone who gives spiritual instructions based on the revealed scriptures is accepted as a spiritual master” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā 1:34 Purport). For devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement, however, the Vaiṣṇava whose mercy without which we would not receive the benediction of Kṛṣṇa and would not make advancement is Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is evidenced by the fact that the mercy and grace of other Vaiṣṇavas may be withdrawn, and the former recipient of that mercy continues to make advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and to receive benedictions from Kṛṣṇa. This is possible because Śrīla Prabhupāda continues to bestow his mercy and grace.

This can also be appreciated in relation to the verse:

*yasya deve parā bhaktir  
yathā deve tathā gurau  
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ  
prakāśante mahātmanah*

“Unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master, all the imports of Vedic knowledge are automatically revealed” (Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.23).

Of all the gurus in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the one in whom implicit faith must exist in order for the imports of Vedic knowledge to be automatically revealed. As the direct link, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the person to whom the devotee surrenders absolutely. Many devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement, including many who were formally initiated after Śrīla Prabhupāda’s physical

departure, experience him in this capacity, as the primary guru who inspires full surrender. Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers who assist him by helping to connect a devotee directly to him, are not the point of unconditional surrender. From the model that is commonly practiced in the movement we can understand that not all gurus are expected to be the Vaiṣṇava to whom the newcomer fully surrenders. For example, the book distributor is serving as a type of guru for the newcomer, as is the senior devotee giving Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam class and the *bhakta* leader. We don't expect, however, that the newcomer will fully surrender his life to all of these Vaiṣṇavas, though of course they should always have a place in his heart. Śrīla Prabhupāda, as the Vaiṣṇava who is the devotee to whom all members of his movement are expected to unconditionally surrender, is the guru center as described in the verse *yasya deve...*

Śrīla Prabhupāda is serving as the primary guru and point of unconditional surrender for many Vaiṣṇavas. This demonstrates that he is capable of doing this although he is not physically present. When a new devotee joins Śrīla Prabhupāda's society he is expected to take direct shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Many Vaiṣṇavas who did not receive formal initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda take direct and primary shelter of him. We maintain that Śrīla Prabhupāda will continue to be the direct link to the *paramparā* for his sincere followers for the duration of his movement.

Thus far it has been established that for many devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, regardless of when or whether they have taken formal initiation, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary deliverer of *divya-jñāna*, both directly and indirectly. He is the Vaiṣṇava whose mercy is essential to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and he is the guru center in the two-center model described in the verse *yasya deve parā bhaktir...* . These attributes also establish Śrīla Prabhupāda as the Vaiṣṇava to whom the initiate must absolutely, unconditionally, and directly surrender. In this sense Śrīla Prabhupāda serves as the direct and current link to the *paramparā*. With this understanding we can appreciate that Śrīla Prabhupāda can be the object of worship as the prominent link to the disciplic succession.

## Śrīla Prabhupāda is Qualified to be Worshipped

The title of this section surely seems obvious, and one might wonder why it needs to be stated. It has been chosen to illustrate that when discussing a guru's qualification and position, the focus often turns to the qualifications and status of devotees who conduct initiation ceremonies in ISKCON. For the purpose of this model, discussion of that point is not relevant. Of importance are Śrīla Prabhupāda's qualifications, position, and relationship with the members of his institution.

Specifically, just as Śrīla Prabhupāda is qualified to be the object of absolute surrender, and to directly give *divya-jñāna* for the duration of his movement, he is similarly fully capable to be the Vaiṣṇava to be worshipped as the primary link to the *paramparā* by all of his movement's devotees for the duration of his movement. This statement does not imply that some followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda are not qualified to be worshipped. Rather, it expresses that for all members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement the worship of Śrīla Prabhupāda as the prominent link to the *paramparā* is sufficient. No one else needs to be worshipped as the link to the *paramparā*, because Śrīla Prabhupāda completely fills this role, though of course he accepts assistance from his followers.

Some devotees may choose to worship a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, such as the Vaiṣṇava who performed the initiation ceremony, as the link to Śrīla Prabhupāda, or in some other philosophical capacity. The PL framework does not directly address this, though it does contend that any member of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement who accepts Śrīla Prabhupāda as the guru to be worshipped as the current link to the *paramparā* must be permitted to do so. As the main connection with the *paramparā*, the prime giver of transcendental knowledge, and the Vaiṣṇava whose mercy is essential to progress in spiritual life, Śrīla Prabhupāda is naturally the spiritual master to be worshipped as the link to the disciplic succession.

Accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda in this role may have many benefits in terms of unity for the movement and parsimony, in regards to future worship practices in the organization. Consider, for example, the following hypothetical dialogue, in which Devotee A advocates a system wherein Śrīla Prabhupāda is recognized as the guru to be worshipped as the direct and prominent link to the *paramparā*, and Devotee B believes that the Vaiṣṇava who conducted the initiation ceremony must be

worshipped in that capacity:

Devotee A: Your view, it seems, is that you should be worshipped and your spiritual master should not be worshipped.

Devotee B: What do you mean?

Devotee A: When your spiritual master passes away, then your disciples, or the disciples of some of the disciples of the devotee who conducted your initiation ceremony, will be worshipped. When your picture is worshipped, the picture of your spiritual master will be removed from the altar. Thus you will be worshipped and your spiritual master will not be worshipped. That doesn't seem like a very humble position.

Devotee B: No. The picture of my spiritual master will remain on the altar.

Devotee A: Consider the scenario thirty generations from now. Every time an ISKCON pujari goes on the altar he'll need a wheelbarrow to cart all the pictures of the links to the *paramparā*. This seems very impractical. Why not just stick with the ISKCON altar that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us?

A similar analysis could be presented in relation to *pranam mantras* and other aspects of worship. Devotee A's paradigm is that Śrīla Prabhupāda, as the prime deliverer of *divya-jñāna* for all members of his movement, is naturally the object of worship as the primary connection to the *paramparā*. As our main spiritual guide and the guru from whom we directly receive most of our transcendental knowledge, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the correct person to be worshipped as the direct link to the *paramparā*.

This is not a position of negativity. There may be Vaiṣṇavas in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement who are pure devotees, *mahābhāgavatas*, and worthy of worship. Regardless of the level of advancement of others, it is legitimate for Śrīla Prabhupāda to serve as the object of worship as the current link to the *paramparā*. Worship of him in this capacity, regardless of when or by whom the worshipper was officially initiated, should be honored and respected within Śrīla Prabhupāda's institution.

Many great Vaiṣṇavas are not formally worshipped. Consider the case of Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the speaker of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Undoubtedly he is our guru. Clearly he is situated at the topmost platform of devotional service. We honor, glorify and revere him, though we don't formally worship him. For example, we don't recite his *pranam mantras* when we enter the temple room and his picture is not on ISKCON altars. Are we minimizing the great saint Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī? No, because Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed how to properly honor Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī according to our particular circumstance, and this does not include formal worship as described above. Similarly, to not formally worship the devotee who performs the initiation ceremony is not an inherent minimization of that devotee. The Prominent Link (PL) model contends that worship of Śrīla Prabhupāda as the direct connection to the disciplic succession, without worship of anyone else as the link to Śrīla Prabhupāda, should be accepted as a valid practice in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, though the PL model does not maintain that worship of others as the connection to Śrīla Prabhupāda should be prohibited in the movement.

Even if one conceives of the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony to be in the absolute position and the current link to the *paramparā*, that devotee could legitimately instruct the initiate to worship Śrīla Prabhupāda rather than himself. For the sake of unity of the movement it would seem that such directives from devotees who perform initiations would be warranted. Many observers have commented that overemphasis by the initiate on the Vaiṣṇava performing the initiation ceremony, in terms of worship, celebration of Vyāsa-pūjā, and other practices, at the expense of an appreciation of Śrīla Prabhupāda's proper place in the life of the initiate, has caused the movement to degrade to a *matha* mentality. If worship practices were returned to the form they assumed when Śrīla Prabhupāda was present, this may help restore unity to the *saṅkīrtana* movement. Such practices include restoring the ISKCON altar, for offerings and *āratis*, to include only those pictures that Śrīla Prabhupāda established, and ensuring that Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vyāsa-pūjā celebration is more prominent in the life of all members of his movement than any celebration honoring any of the followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, as the direct and current link to the *paramparā* by dint of being the prime

deliverer of *divya-jñāna*, is the natural guru to be worshipped as the connection to the disciplic succession. No other Vaiṣṇava need be worshipped as a link to Śrīla Prabhupāda. However, even if someone doesn't view Śrīla Prabhupāda as the current link, whomever is regarded as the link can instruct initiates to worship the same altar that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us, to recite only Śrīla Prabhupāda's *pranam mantras*, and to celebrate Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony as the primary Vyāsa-pūjā celebration.

By retaining the worship practices that Śrīla Prabhupāda established, no one in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement will ever experience that the Vaiṣṇava perceived and worshipped as the current link to the *paramparā* will experience difficulties in spiritual life. Such difficulties have caused much disturbance, and to reestablish Śrīla Prabhupāda's system of worship, with regards to the altar he instituted in his movement, and to recognize Śrīla Prabhupāda as the point of unconditional surrender and the current link to the disciplic succession, would avert the possibility of such disturbances in the future. This will be a great burden lifted from the institution. Of course it is a loss and disappointment when any Vaiṣṇava, especially one who has mentored others in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, deviates from the path of *bhakti-yoga*, but if that Vaiṣṇava is perceived to be the link to the *paramparā* and the object of absolute surrender, then the effects can be devastating. There is no need for any devotee to experience such calamitous effects. Śrīla Prabhupāda is qualified to receive worship through his picture and *mūrti* from all followers who have received transcendental knowledge from him. He is already doing this, in the capacity of prominent link to the disciplic succession, for many devotees who did not receive formal initiation from him. This confirms that he can do it, and we recommend that the movement establishes Śrīla Prabhupāda as the guru to be worshipped as the current link to the *paramparā*.

Some comments regarding worship of pictures and *mūrtis* are appropriate herein. Just as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu are non-different from Their Deity forms, and are fully capable to act and relate in Their Deity forms, the *mūrtis* and pictures of the *paramparā ācāryas*, such as Śrīla Prabhupāda and Srīla Bhaktisiddhanta, can similarly act non-differently from the *ācāryas*. Obviously this requires special empowerment from the Supreme Lord. Ordinary persons, or even ordinary aspiring Vaiṣṇavas, are not able to reciprocate in their picture form in the way that the great *ācāryas* do. We are not claiming that there are no Vaiṣṇavas in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement capable of doing this, though we are mentioning this important point for consideration.

By retaining the ISKCON altar that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave, without adding other pictures, we can be assured that all Vaiṣṇavas whose worship is institutionally approved are fully on the transcendental platform. A caveat in presenting this is that all devotees should be honored, glorified and respected in accord with their position. As described with regards to Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī, to not formally worship a Vaiṣṇava does not intrinsically minimize him.

## Terms of Relegation

In Governing Body Commission (GBC) resolutions of recent years the body has described Śrīla Prabhupāda with expressions such as “foundational śikṣā guru for all ISKCON devotees” (1994), “preeminent śikṣā guru for every member of the institution” (1999), and “preeminent and compulsory śikṣā-guru for all Vaiṣṇavas (gurus and disciples) in the Society” (1999). We suggest that terms such as these actually depreciate Śrīla Prabhupāda's position, rather than genuinely acknowledge and glorify it.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary guru for everyone in his movement. If one Vaiṣṇava needs to be identified as “*the* spiritual master”, then that Vaiṣṇava is clearly Śrīla Prabhupāda. The scriptures sometimes refer to “gurus” in the plural, substantiating that we have many spiritual masters, and they also sometimes refer to “guru” in the singular. Using qualifying terms, such as “preeminent śikṣā guru”, to describe Śrīla Prabhupāda's standing in his movement and the role he plays in the life of the members of his movement, distracts from Śrīla Prabhupāda's status as “*the* spiritual master”, the guru who is referred to when we refer to the singular spiritual master. It also muddles the understanding of the direct and primary role that Śrīla Prabhupāda plays in the life of all members of his society. There are many definitions of “guru” and “spiritual master” and, by some definitions, all members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement have many gurus and spiritual masters. Qualifying appellations for Śrīla Prabhupāda convey

the perception of relegating him to something less than the main guru for all ISKCON members. This is illustrated below.

In 1999, just after the GBC passed a resolution designating Śrīla Prabhupāda with terms such as “the preeminent śikṣā guru for every member of the institution” and “the preeminent and compulsory śikṣā-guru”, the GBC body was discussing aspects of worship. The idea that Śrīla Prabhupāda would be the sole object of worship in ISKCON was mentioned and discussed. A prominent GBC who conducts initiation ceremonies emphatically declared “But disciples must be able to worship their guru! They have to be allowed to worship their guru!” Clear from his statement was that, despite the resolutions from moments before that all members of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement must place their faith, trust and allegiance first and foremost in Śrīla Prabhupāda, who is the preeminent śikṣā guru for every member of the institution, the conception that continued to be maintained by this GBC, and most of the leaders present, was that the *real* guru, notwithstanding whatever official glorification may be afforded to Śrīla Prabhupāda in resolutions, is the Vaiṣṇava who performs the formal initiation ceremony. In support of this minimization of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s role in his movement, one of the themes of a keynote speech at the 1999 GBC meetings was specifically that Śrīla Prabhupāda is not the direct and current link to the disciplic succession for devotees who did not receive formal initiation from him.

In another instance in 1999, a few weeks after the GBC meetings, a prominent GBC who conducts initiation ceremonies was giving Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam class. A discussion about the guru issue and recent GBC resolutions arose. A question was posed about various aspects of guru worship that, according to the 1999 resolutions, continue to be permitted for the follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda who conducts formal initiations. The speaker exclaimed, “Yes, in ISKCON it is still permissible to worship one’s guru!” It was clear that, despite whatever qualified position statements were formally applied by the GBC body to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s status, the unquestioned conception of the formal initiator as the predominant and *actual* guru remained.

It is important that Śrīla Prabhupāda is recognized as the prominent, direct and current link to the *paramparā* for all members of his movement, or at least those who do receive their primary, direct *divya-jñāna* from him. By not acknowledging Śrīla Prabhupāda’s role as the direct link, his relationship with many members of his movement is organizationally invalidated. This will cause many of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s followers to distance themselves from the institution.

At its year 2000 meetings the GBC resolved “A duly initiated disciple in ISKCON can accept Śrīla Prabhupāda, the founder-ācārya of ISKCON, as his principal śikṣā-guru. During his devotional life, he may experience that he derives more spiritual inspiration from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and *vāṇī* than from his own *dikṣā-guru*.”

The wording of this resolution implies that the default position for a duly initiated disciple is to derive more spiritual inspiration from “his own *dikṣā-guru*” than from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and *vāṇī*, though it is acknowledged that the disciple “can” accept Śrīla Prabhupāda as his principle *śikṣā-guru*, and “may” experience more spiritual inspiration from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and *vāṇī* than from his *dikṣā-guru*. This resolution appears to be a regression from the 1999 GBC descriptions of Śrīla Prabhupāda as “the preeminent and compulsory śikṣā-guru for all Vaiṣṇavas (gurus and disciples) in the Society”, “the preeminent śikṣā guru for every member of the institution”, and the first and foremost object of faith, trust and allegiance for every member of ISKCON.

Thus, we can see that describing Śrīla Prabhupāda with qualifying terms such as “preeminent śikṣā guru” obfuscates his position as the primary guru and the most essential, active spiritual force for all members of his movement. This relegation of Śrīla Prabhupāda is conspicuous in the contradictory connotations of the 1999 and 2000 resolutions. As a result, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s rightful and natural place in the society of Vaiṣṇavas is arrogated by others, as evidenced in the practices and conceptualizations of devotees in many sectors of the organization.

## Responsibility

Śrīla Prabhupāda continues to accept disciples who sincerely dedicate their lives to following his

instructions and who willingly receive the transcendental knowledge that he imparts. Accepting these disciples means that Śrīla Prabhupāda takes responsibility to guide these souls back to Godhead.

There may be concern that if Śrīla Prabhupāda accepts this responsibility, then others, including those who conduct initiation ceremonies, could be disinclined to take responsibility for the spiritual advancement of the new initiate. The model presented in this article encourages all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers to demonstrate impeccable Vaiṣṇava behavior and to take full responsibility for the spiritual advancement of others. Assuming responsibility does not negate the understanding that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Controller.

Ideally, anyone in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement who contacts a newly aspiring devotee should accept responsibility, regardless of the position or title of the mentor, for the advancement of the newcomer. Suppose a book distributor gives a book to someone. When that person visits the temple the book distributor, if he is in proper consciousness, will naturally be eager to serve the advancement of the newcomer in any way he can. Years later, when the former newcomer is now initiated and situated in service within Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, and has accepted guidance from many devotee mentors, the book distributor continues to be actively concerned about the progress of the devotee to whom he distributed a book. A similar mentality should exist in the temple president, the senior congregation member who preached to the newcomer at the Sunday Feast, and the Vaiṣṇava selected by the new initiate to conduct the initiation ceremony.

A supremely glorious example, albeit not to be imitated, is Vasudeva Datta, who took full responsibility to ensure that all living entities in the universe would perfect their lives, although he was not formally their *dīkṣā guru*, temple president, or *bhakta* leader. Knowing that Śrīla Prabhupāda takes responsibility for a sincere newcomer should increase our determination to help persons in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness throughout their devotional lives, to constantly be attentive in our personal practice of *bhakti-yoga*, and to set an inspiring example. Additionally, each devotee is responsible to feel and demonstrate proper gratitude towards all the Vaiṣṇavas who have assisted him in developing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the eternal gift of the soul.

Devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement who conduct initiation ceremonies have made tremendous sacrifices to guide and direct others in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. These devotees deserve great commendation for their efforts to take responsibility for the spiritual advancement of others. All members of our Vaiṣṇava communities, according to their capacity, should make similar efforts in the service of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Without such endeavors to take responsibility for others on Śrīla Prabhupāda's behalf, instituting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the direct and current link to the *paramparā* can become an excuse for neglecting our own responsibilities to care for and nourish the Kṛṣṇa consciousness of others.

We are not concerned with titles and designations. Our interest is in understanding the process of advancement for members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. By accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as his prime spiritual authority and serving in Śrīla Prabhupāda's society, a devotee advances in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Even within the model currently popular in ISKCON, when an initiating guru has difficulties, the society directs the initiate to take direct shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Also, when a devotee first contacts the movement he is encouraged to directly connect with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Clearly there already is an understanding that Śrīla Prabhupāda can and does take responsibility for sincere followers, although Śrīla Prabhupāda physically departed more than two decades ago.

For followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, for the duration of his movement, there is profound security in knowing that the *mahābhāgavata* A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Śrīla Prabhupāda, a spiritual master at the topmost stage of Kṛṣṇa conscious realization, is taking responsibility for their spiritual life, though this does not nullify the individual responsibility for one's advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. With this understanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda's absolute position and the relative position of other members of his movement, there will be less disturbance caused, on an individual and institutional level, when devotees who serve as guides and mentors have difficulties. Such disturbances will be decreased because it will be clearly understood that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the direct link to the disciplic succession, and thus to Kṛṣṇa, and this fact has not been altered by anyone's deviation.



## Scenarios

In the Prominent Link (PL) model, a devotee contacts the movement and directly connects with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla Prabhupāda imparts *divya-jñāna* to him, and the devotee accepts Śrīla Prabhupāda as his spiritual master. This relationship is formalized with an initiation ceremony, which acknowledges that the initiate has directly connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda and the disciplic succession. Throughout his devotional life the devotee develops close relationships with many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers who assist the devotee to deepen his direct relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. In this section we analyze other scenarios in relation to this model.

A devotee adheres to the beginning part of the scenario described in the paragraph above. After the formal initiation ceremony, however, the initiate regards the devotee who conducted the initiation, who has been Śrīla Prabhupāda's primary assistant for the initiate, as the link to Śrīla Prabhupāda, and as the absolute point of surrender. This seems a bit peculiar for the initiate, because for more than a year he had cultivated a direct relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda, worshiping Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture and reciting Śrīla Prabhupāda's *pranam mantras*, and celebrating Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vyāsa-pūjā as the Appearance Day of his, the initiate's, spiritual master. Now, the initiate no longer directly worships Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture, and Śrīla Prabhupāda is no longer considered his direct connection to the *paramparā*.

From the perspective of the PL model, the initiate in the above scenario may actually be connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *paramparā*, and thus initiated in the essential sense. That is, despite post-formal initiation external manifestations, the link with Śrīla Prabhupāda may be established. Effective, albeit unfortunate, means by which this could be determined would be if the Vaiṣṇava who conducted the official initiation manifested deviations from the path of *bhakti-yoga*, and the initiate was required to again take direct shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda. The extent to which the initiate is successful in this, as evidenced by continuing in devotional service, would determine the degree to which direct connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda had occurred.

In another scenario, devotee A mentors devotee B, and devotee B receives formal initiation from devotee A. Devotee B is truly dependent on devotee A for his spiritual life. Devotee B does not have much direct understanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions. His knowledge about Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Śrīla Prabhupāda is almost entirely through devotee A.

Devotee A, in the above scenario, has brought devotee B to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and is serving as his main spiritual master. From the viewpoint of the PL model, devotee B is not yet initiated in the essential, transcendental sense. He has not properly connected with the current link to the *paramparā*, because he is not receiving most of his direct *divya-jñāna* from Śrīla Prabhupāda. Devotee A's responsibility is to bring devotee B to the point of directly linking with Śrīla Prabhupāda. When devotee B has achieved this, then the actual connection with the disciplic succession and Śrī Kṛṣṇa has taken place.

For devotee B to directly connect with Śrīla Prabhupāda would not be "jumping over". That is, it would not be an offense to devotee A for devotee B to seek to directly know Śrīla Prabhupāda by studying Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and following Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions. Naturally devotee B is deeply and eternally indebted to devotee A for introducing him to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

This is a different relationship than, for example, the relationship between Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers and Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers know Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī primarily through Śrīla Prabhupāda. To try to make too much endeavor to know Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta directly, without Śrīla Prabhupāda's guidance, is precarious for the spiritual lives of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers. Devotee A, however, if he is properly situated, encourages devotee B to hear Śrīla Prabhupāda's tapes and read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books as much as possible, because devotee A wants devotee B to become directly linked with Śrīla Prabhupāda, the current link to the disciplic succession.

As further explication, a follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda may read the books of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta

Sarasvatī Ṭhākura or Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, but if they read only those books, and not Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, for an extended period of more than a year, then we’d consider that devotee to be remiss in his relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Conversely, if a follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda, at present or at any point in the future, regardless of who performed his initiation ceremony, were to dedicate 90%-100% of his study to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, letters, conversations, and lectures, that follower would not be considered to be remiss because of his absorption in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mood and teachings. This illustrates a qualitative difference in the “jumping over” principle in regards to the personal relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda that all members of his movement should cultivate, compared with the relationship of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s followers with other *sampradāya ācāryas*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda serves as the link between his followers and Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta. The prime responsibility of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s followers towards their students is to assist them to directly link with Śrīla Prabhupāda. These students, such as devotee B in the example above, may also know Śrīla Prabhupāda through Vaiṣṇavas such as devotee A, though devotee B’s relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda should, ideally and primarily, be directly with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

## Questions and Answers

*Does the PL model assume that there are no pure devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement?*

No. There may be hundreds of pure devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement. Being a pure devotee does not necessarily mean that one is the current link to the *paramparā*. Regardless of the level of spiritual advancement of any member of the movement, the tenets of the PL model stand. Specifically, Śrīla Prabhupāda is, or at least, ideally, should be, the direct and current link to the *paramparā* and the prime deliverer of *divya-jñāna* for all devotees in his society. Pure devotees will naturally be very pleased to help establish others in their direct relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

*Will there be no further current links to the paramparā?*

The PL model asserts that Śrīla Prabhupāda is qualified to be the current and prominent link to the disciplic succession for the duration of his movement. Apart from philosophic and *śāstric* justification for this, the prime evidence is that he is doing it, even for devotees whom he did not officially initiate. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda could arrange for another Vaiṣṇava to assume the role of the current and direct link at some time. What is clear is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is doing this at present, and there is no need for others to aspire for this role.

*What if someone receives direct transcendental knowledge from another Vaiṣṇava, more than from Śrīla Prabhupāda?*

Then that Vaiṣṇava should guide and instruct his charge so that the dependent becomes directly linked to Śrīla Prabhupāda. Till the ward has directly connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda as his current link to the disciplic succession, he is not yet properly situated in the *paramparā*, and shouldn’t accept formal initiation in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement.

We ask that managerial entities in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement accept the PL model as valid. Anyone who joins Śrīla Prabhupāda’s movement should be encouraged to accept Śrīla Prabhupāda as the link to the *paramparā*. While we claim that this is the preferred model for the movement, we do not maintain that other understandings, such as the understanding that the devotee who performs the formal initiation ceremony is automatically the primary direct link to the *paramparā*, must be rejected. If necessary, a plurality of models may coexist. However, we find no basis for the denial of the PL model, and we believe that it is important for the PL model to be accepted and honored.

*Surely it’s accurate to say that Śrīla Prabhupāda is giving śikṣā to all devotees, but is it correct to say that he is giving dīkṣā?*

In the purport to Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līla, 4:111, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes “Dīkṣā actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all

material contamination.” Also, in the purport to Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līla 15:108, Śrīla Prabhupāda defines *dīkṣā* as a “...process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as *dīkṣā*.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda is directly giving transcendental knowledge to members of his movement, regardless of when they joined or who performed their initiation ceremony. Therefore, it may be asserted that he is giving *dīkṣā*, in the essential sense of the term. Still, the PL framework accommodates definitions of “*dīkṣā*” that rely on the formal component of the initiation process. With regards to the formal element of the initiation process, it might be said that Śrīla Prabhupāda is not giving *dīkṣā*.

Whether the transcendental knowledge that Śrīla Prabhupāda gives is called *dīkṣā* or not, and whether Śrīla Prabhupāda is referred to as the *dīkṣā guru*, is immaterial in relation to the gist of the PL understanding. This essential understanding is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the direct, primary, and current link to the disciplic succession by virtue of being the main Vaiṣṇava through whom Śrī Kṛṣṇa imparts transcendental knowledge to the initiate.

The process of initiation, which is driven by transmission of *divya-jñāna*, is the focus of The Prominent Link. The PL model is not primarily concerned with titles or labels.

*Does the PL model assert that the formal initiation ceremony is unimportant, or unnecessary?*

The process of initiation is given to us by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Thus, all components of that process contain potency and are transcendental. The most essential part of the process is the transmission of *divya-jñāna*, transcendental knowledge. Śrīla Prabhupāda is performing the most important part of the initiation process.

*Aren't the Vaiṣṇavas in the movement other than Śrīla Prabhupāda also giving divya-jñāna?*

Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers serve as his assistants. In this capacity they give transcendental knowledge to others. Transmission of transcendental knowledge is the essence of being a guru. Śrīla Prabhupāda, by being the prime deliverer of transcendental knowledge, is everyone's main guru.

A devotee may be inspired by and receive transcendental knowledge from many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's assistants. The Vaiṣṇava who is most influential in this respect may be considered Śrīla Prabhupāda's primary assistant for the devotee. He, along with other assistants, helps the devotee to directly link with Śrīla Prabhupāda. This does not negate the fact that the devotee in the role of student also has an important, direct relationship with the follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda who is serving in the role of teacher.

*Isn't the devotee who performs the initiation ceremony the link to the paramparā?*

Conducting the formal initiation ceremony is not a necessary qualification to be the link to the *paramparā*. There are many examples in our *paramparā* where a Vaiṣṇava who did not conduct the initiation ceremony is the point of absolute surrender and the link to the disciplic succession. Such examples include Śrīla Vyāsadeva who, as far as we are aware, did not conduct the initiation ceremony for Śrīla Madhvācārya. Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura did not perform an initiation ceremony for Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. Śrīla Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī did not formally initiate Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura did not officially initiate Śrīla Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī.

*In the PL model, how will the initiate know how to manage his devotional life?*

Śrīla Prabhupāda is his main guide, as his primary guru. Also, there are the *sādhus* in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement from whom the initiate will naturally accept guidance. The initiate can choose where in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement he wants to serve. He is then expected to cooperatively and submissively serve within the authority structure established by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Consider the situation in the mid-1970s, when Śrīla Prabhupāda was physically present. A devotee who joined at that time accepted Śrīla Prabhupāda as his spiritual master and link to the *paramparā*, though he did not expect to receive personal training from Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla

Prabhupāda's assistants personally guided and instructed the new devotee. Upon joining ISKCON the devotee chose where in Śrīla Prabhupāda's organization to serve. Once choosing, he was expected to cooperate with the authority structure that Śrīla Prabhupāda set up in that particular temple and to appropriately respect and serve all the devotees with whom he associated. Many of these devotees actively assisted him in spiritual life. In a sense they were his gurus, though he understood that Śrīla Prabhupāda was his connection to the *paramparā* and primary guru. Perhaps one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's assistants served as a primary assistant for the new devotee, though it was understood that Śrīla Prabhupāda, and not the primary assistant, was the point of absolute surrender. In fact, the devotee may have had different primary assistants throughout his devotional career, though Śrīla Prabhupāda as the main guru and primary deliverer of *divya-jñāna* was constant.

With the PL model the management would be handled as described above. Many devotees and groups of devotees have commented over the years how the present system, with the devotee who performs the initiation ceremony intrinsically involved in the managerial mix, has caused much disturbance. The PL model proposes that we return to the system of management that was in effect when Śrīla Prabhupāda was physically present on the planet. A devotee will naturally consult senior devotees whom he respects when making important decisions such as which temple to serve in and what service to perform. In the PL model there is no managerial control explicitly or implicitly assumed by the Vaiṣṇava conducting the initiation ceremony over the Vaiṣṇava being formally initiated, though there may be a managerial relationship, depending on the volition of the involved parties.

The PL model encourages devotees to serve and accept guidance and shelter from Vaiṣṇavas who are physically present. These Vaiṣṇavas to whom the devotee subordinates himself, and with whom the devotee develops close relationships, are spiritual teachers, though none of them replace Śrīla Prabhupāda as the most prominent direct link to the disciplic succession.

This paper describes devotees who genuinely experience Śrīla Prabhupāda as the direct, current, and prominent link to the *paramparā*, by dint of Śrīla Prabhupāda being the primary Vaiṣṇava who gives direct transcendental knowledge. Of course this can be misused by someone claiming "I'm directly connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda, so I don't listen to anything anyone else says," and as an excuse for arrogance. If someone is actually connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda then he won't exhibit such behavior. Śrīla Prabhupāda wants us to serve submissively under the hierarchical structure that he created, in loving cooperation with his followers. This doesn't conflict with Śrīla Prabhupāda being the direct link to the *paramparā* for the members of his movement.

*Śrīla Prabhupāda is not physically present and the PL model claims that he can be the direct link to the paramparā. Would it be acceptable, then, if a devotee accepted Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura as the direct link to the paramparā?*

In the verse *yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanah*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa specifies a two-center system, with the Lord as one center and the spiritual master as the other center. The spiritual master center must be the current link to the *paramparā*. We maintain that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the current link and suggest that he can remain in that role for the duration of his movement. As described at the end of the Scenarios section, Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers know Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and the other personalities who constitute the *paramparā* primarily through Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers, however, notwithstanding when they joined his movement, are expected and encouraged to develop a primarily direct relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. This direct relationship is naturally enhanced by the guidance and realizations provided by Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers.

All members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement do have direct relationships with Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and other transcendental personalities. These relationships, however, are not primarily direct, but are primarily through Śrīla Prabhupāda.

"Direct, current, and primary link to the *paramparā*" is defined as the Vaiṣṇava through whom Śrī Kṛṣṇa is giving the most direct transcendental knowledge. For many devotees, regardless of who

performed the initiation ceremony, Śrīla Prabhupāda fulfills the definition of direct, current and primary link. It is important for the institution to acknowledge that Śrīla Prabhupāda is playing this role, and will continue to play it for many, perhaps even most, members of his movement, for the lifetime of his movement.

What if someone claims "By the definition given above, the direct link for me is Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī [or Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, or Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura]"? The view of the PL model is that if someone did originally connect with the *saṅkīrtana* movement through the books of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura or Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, then Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura or Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī would arrange to connect that person to Śrīla Prabhupāda, because Śrīla Prabhupāda is the current link for the present time. Still, we are open to hear and observe the experiences of others, and adjust our perspective accordingly. If someone claims to be directly connected with someone other than Śrīla Prabhupāda, in the primary sense as enunciated in PL, we recognize that possibility, though we are cautious about accepting such claims.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's organization is for those who are directly connected with the *paramparā* through Śrīla Prabhupāda. Someone may be primarily linked to the *paramparā* through someone else, and that is appreciated. However, that linkage is not necessarily part of Śrīla Prabhupāda's institution. For example, if someone is in the line of the Śrī-sampradāya, Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers honor that, while recognizing that it's not in Śrīla Prabhupāda's line.

*Can someone be called "Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple" if he didn't receive formal initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda?*

Suppose devotee B is a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who received formal initiation from him. Devotee A, who didn't receive formal initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda, takes shelter of and serves under the guidance of devotee B. They develop a close teacher-student relationship that continues for years, perhaps even the duration of this lifetime. Devotee A certainly can be said to be a disciple, or student, of devotee B. This scenario is consistent with the principles of The Prominent Link. In the scenario, devotee A has the PL understanding, and he has no doubt that Śrīla Prabhupāda is his direct, current, and primary link to the *paramparā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda is his primary guru. Devotee A is a student, or disciple, of devotee B, and thus devotee A is the disciple of the disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Devotee A is also a disciple, directly, of Śrīla Prabhupāda, by dint of the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the Vaiṣṇava who is giving devotee A more direct transcendental knowledge than any other Vaiṣṇava, including devotee B. Without contradiction, devotee A is a direct disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and a disciple of the disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Being directly linked with Śrīla Prabhupāda does not negate, and in fact supports, the principle of being a servant of the servant of the Vaiṣṇavas.

*What about the relationship between the Vaiṣṇava who performs the initiation ceremony and the initiate?*

As we practically experience in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, there is an expansive range of healthy, spiritually productive relationships between the devotee who performs the initiation ceremony and the initiate. The PL framework supports a wide latitude of relationships, the litmus test being whether the relationship assists the initiate to strengthen his direct link with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla Prabhupāda, not the devotee who conducted the initiation ceremony, should be the center of the relationship. While not minimizing the importance of the relationship between the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony and the initiate, this paper does not primarily address that topic. The Prominent Link concentrates on Śrīla Prabhupāda's position and role in his movement, and most importantly, Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct and personal relationship with all members of his movement.

*Isn't it sufficient to acknowledge that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the Founder-Ācārya of ISKCON?*

"Founder/Ācārya" describes Śrīla Prabhupāda's position, role and title in his institution. The Prominent Link emphasizes the personal relationship that exists between Śrīla Prabhupāda and all of his followers. In this context, it is important to understand Śrīla Prabhupāda not only as the Founder/Ācārya

of his organization, but also as the active, primary spiritual master and the current and prominent link to the disciplic succession for his followers, regardless of when and from whom they formally received initiation.

## Summary and Conclusion

The fundamental thesis of this paper is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the prominent link to the *paramparā* for members of his movement. In this capacity he is the primary spiritual master and the point of unconditional submission. Many members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, irrespective of who conducted their initiation ceremony, experience Śrīla Prabhupāda as their primary guru and direct link to the *paramparā*. This experience is philosophically supported by *sāstra* as valid and consistent with the principles of disciplic succession.

As the primary guru for all Vaiṣṇavas who join his society, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the guru without whose mercy we cannot advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. With this understanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda's position, it is reasonable to conclude that Śrīla Prabhupāda should be the Vaiṣṇava to be worshipped as the current link to the *paramparā* for members of his movement. This includes worship of pictures and recitation of *pranam mantras*. We suggest that the altar for ISKCON temples should remain as Śrīla Prabhupāda established it, without the addition of other pictures.

We present this model as a valid way to conceive of Śrīla Prabhupāda's position. Though we don't contend that it is the only legitimate view of Śrīla Prabhupāda, we request that the ideas and proposals described herein be accepted and implemented. This does not necessarily mean supplanting other systems and conceptualizations, though it does mean that this model be allowed to at least coexist with other methods and systems for conceiving of and implementing the continuation of the *paramparā*. Understanding and experiencing Śrīla Prabhupāda as the most prominent direct link to the *paramparā* is a viable approach to the relationship between Śrīla Prabhupāda, the devotee who performs the formal initiation ceremony, the initiate, and Śrīla Prabhupāda's institution.

Clearly there are additional topics for study related to *guru-tattva*. Such topics include further explication of the criteria for the delineation of the *paramparā* presented by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in *Śrī Guru-paramparā*, explication and differentiation of terms such as “guru” and “teacher”, and “disciplic succession” and “*paramparā*”, and philosophical exploration of various levels and methods of knowledge acquisition. For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes “There are different levels of acquired knowledge—direct knowledge, knowledge received from authorities, transcendental knowledge, knowledge beyond the senses, and finally spiritual knowledge” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4:12:19 Purport). Deeper understanding of these types of knowledge could enhance our appreciation of the kinds of *pramāṇas* potentially available from spiritual masters at differing levels of realization. Also, it may be fruitful to examine the meaning, with regards to the continuation of the *paramparā*, of Śrīla Prabhupāda installing his *mūrti* while he was physically present.

Our purpose in this philosophical project is to gain a deeper and more precise understanding of the essence of the guru-disciple relationship, and a better grasp on Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal relationship, in practice and ideal, with all members of his movement. We pray that this presentation represents a positive contribution to the discussion of these important topics. Further, we humbly request the Vaiṣṇava community to consider the philosophy and recommendations herein, to instruct us where our understanding is incomplete or faulty, and to accept the ideas where they are consistent with Śrīla Prabhupāda's desires and the good of his movement.

## Ne'er A Pretender Nor A Proxy Be

An Open Letter- For the contributors to the GBC's Preliminary Response to Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link:

My Dear Godbrothers,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Like yourselves, I had some serious misgivings when I read Dhīra Govinda Prabhu's booklet Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link.

First of all, he appears to "damn with faint praise" our dedicated and saintly people currently serving as spiritual masters in Śrīla Prabhupāda's ISKCON. Is a current master in the line of Śrīla Prabhupāda simply the one "conducting the initiation ceremony?" Is that really his only "observable behavior"? Even without the facility of traveling and speaking with devotees, all one has to do is read things like Indradyumna Swami's Diary of a Traveling Preacher or Satsvarūpa Mahārāja's Among Friends to understand that the personal guru/disciple dynamic is alive and well in ISKCON. Despite Dhīra Govinda's disclaimer that Prominent Link "is not an in-depth look at the relationship between the initiator and the initiate," he appears to disempower the initiating guru, reducing him to a ritualistic functionary--in a word, a ritvik.

Second, by referring to Śrīla Prabhupāda as the ultimate, essential, "transcendental initiator," Dhīra Govinda appears to preclude our participation in what His Divine Grace calls "the mystery of the disciplic succession." The original guru, of course, is Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Original Person, and all transcendental knowledge descends from Him through the *paramparā*. "This means that one has to understand Kṛṣṇa not directly but through the medium of the bona fide spiritual master. The spiritual master is the transparent via medium, although it is true that the experience is still direct. This is the mystery of the disciplic succession" (Gita 18.75 purport). Yes, Prabhupāda's *śikṣā*, or instructions, are the essence of all *dikṣā*, or initiation, in ISKCON. But when a senior Vaiṣṇava faithfully imparts those instructions to a junior Vaiṣṇava, he is a real guru really imparting transcendental knowledge, just as a clear window gives us a clear picture of what's outside. While claiming that he is "not advocating that the disciplic succession ends with Śrīla Prabhupāda," when Dhīra Govinda questions whether we can say unequivocally that anyone but His Divine Grace is actually imparting transcendental knowledge, he appears to be doing just that.

Third, on the issue of becoming "the servant of the servant" of Śrīla Prabhupāda, Dhīra Govinda appears to equivocate. On the one hand, he upholds the principle of cooperatively serving together as "essential"; on the other, he writes that to participate with a group of devotees--like an initiator and his initiates--is nice but not necessary. "One can always serve Śrīla Prabhupāda directly." While perhaps true in a theoretical or abstract way, the practical effect of his presentation appears to minimize the value of serving together cooperatively in ISKCON, Prabhupāda's famous measure of our love for him once he would disappear.

Fourth, Dhīra Govinda appears to damn *as* faint praise our Governing Body's acclamation of Śrīla Prabhupāda as "the foundational *śikṣā-guru* for all ISKCON devotees." At the same time, he hopes that the principles presented in Prominent Link may harmonize all the disparate and disenchanting folks in and around ISKCON. But again, since Prabhupāda's *śikṣā*, his instructions, are the essence of all *dikṣā*, or initiation, in ISKCON, what greater harmonizing principle to proclaim than His Divine Grace as the foundational *śikṣā-guru* for all devotees? How is this proclamation offensive, and his criticism not?

That said, now comes the irony: It was your "Preliminary Response" to Prominent Link that made me read the booklet again—and discover its virtue. A virtue so true that it exposed my misgivings about it as simply prejudice, as fear of how things appear to be.

That you opened your rejection of Prominent Link by complaining that Dhīra Govinda discarded

the terms of *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā gurus*, then tried to "merge" their respective functions, was very telling, and, to my mind, goes to the heart of our struggle to apply *guru-tattva* in ISKCON "post-Prabhupāda." When His Divine Grace walked among us, he was everything-founding spiritual master, initiating spiritual master, instructing spiritual master, father, mother, and so on. And when he disappeared, each "zonal *ācārya*"--with our naive cooperation--tried to assume all of those merged identities within himself. And the zonal *ācārya* became a madman, our Dr. Frankenstein. And ritvikism, still afoot wherever devotees' foundational relationship with our *founder-ācārya* remains in any way obscured, became our doctor's monster.

For me, our struggle to understand and apply *guru-tattva* is largely the story of our gradually realizing how Śrīla Prabhupāda, as ISKCON'S *founder-ācārya*, is categorically superior to all the other kinds of guru he is, as well as to those who initiate and instruct in his line. To say that Dhīra Govinda has simply discarded terms and merged their functions is to deny, or at least ignore, the seminal and more insidious merge from which our Society is still recovering: that of the regular guru with the *founder-ācārya*. Rather than discarding and merging, a closer reading showed me that Dhīra Govinda was simply setting aside terms that had become politicized beyond meaning, to rediscover their essence. Were my service to protect ISKCON from every ritvik that roars, every swami that preys-as it has been for some of you-I likely would have done just what you did: circled the wagons, folded my arms, and utterly missed the virtue of this little booklet. For me, Dhīra Govinda has finally raised our discussion of *guru-tattva* beyond the Rabid Ritviks vs. The Galloping Gurus, beyond the culture of pretense and suppression, and into the real world of people and relationships, of love and trust, where all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers would like to live. And the virtue of his achievement has allowed me to see my misgivings in a new light.

In his introduction to Śrīla Prabhupāda's Centennial Vyāsa-pūjā Book, Lokanātha Mahārāja wrote that "some or maybe all of the problems that arose in our movement after Śrīla Prabhupāda left have their origin in our not properly understanding this position of *founder-ācārya*. A scripture from the Śrīsampradāya called Prappanamṛta Tapana explains that a *founder-ācārya* is known by five symptoms: First, he is *udharika*, which means that he is the savior of everyone. The Prappanamṛta Tapana goes on to explain that those who come after the *founder-ācārya* in the disciplic succession, who act as spiritual masters, are *upakarika*, his helpers. They are never to be equated, even after hundreds of generations, with the *founder-ācārya*...Establishing a relationship with a spiritual master in the line of Śrīla Prabhupāda first of all means establishing a relationship with him as *founder-ācārya*."

By focusing exclusively on our *founder-ācārya's* relationship with everyone in his movement, it was probably inevitable that Dhīra Govinda would appear to be "damning with faint praise" our regular gurus who are selflessly serving His Divine Grace. But why would the ritvik specter continue to haunt us unless our Dr. Frankenstein, the Galloping Guru, was not still out prancing somewhere in our midst, subtly or blatantly obscuring people's foundational relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda? Yes, that relationship can never be legislated; it must be educated! At various times over the years our Governing Body has declared that everyone's relationship with our *founder-ācārya* is "main," "primary," "direct," and "foundational." Is everyone being educated like that? Are some new hearts still left as prey for other core identities? While few if any would dispute that Prabhupāda is our prominent link to the *paramparā*, Dhīra Govinda's research as to how he is the prominent link cuts to the heart of our institution's long-standing malaise on this fundamental issue. His cutting is surgical, not damning, but it can still hurt, especially if we can't admit the truth of what he's saying.

About Dhīra Govinda apparently precluding our participation in the *paramparā*, and thereby effectively ending it, the real issue, as Rūpānuga Prabhu pointed out a few years back in *Prīti-lakṣaṇam*, is transparency. The mystery of the disciplic succession is its transparency. "The spiritual master is the transparent medium, although it is true that the experience is still direct. This is the mystery of the disciplic succession." The transparency of the *paramparā* makes the mystery wonderful. When the transparency becomes translucent or even opaque, the mystery turns to farce and finally tragedy.

In the mid-90s, I had a powerful experience while living near Udipi, South India, the seat of the Madhva-sampradāya. For centuries, gurus and disciples have been carrying on Madhva's teachings, and



it was very clear to me that everyone there identifies himself--mainly, primarily, directly, and foundationally--as a Madhvaite. His commanding image, sitting in his famous śuddha-dvaita pose, is displayed and worshiped both inside and outside the temple, the seat from which he spoke is preserved in a sacred room and daily offered puja, and his life and teachings are continually recited by the *sannyāsīs* at "Shri Krishna Mutt."

Many of these *sannyāsīs* are "*bala-sannyāsīs*"; that is, based on strong *sannyāsa-yogas* appearing in their horoscope, they were awarded *sannyāsīs* as boys and groomed to be spiritual leaders in the *sampradāya* as they grew up. In recent times, though, some of these *bala-sannyāsīs* have fallen from the standard and gotten married. Our ISKCON history, of course, has many similar examples with adult converts. But so powerful and pernicious is the influence of the modern age that even saintly persons born and bred in Vedic culture may sometimes come to disappoint their disciples. Yet because the disciples, Madhvaitees in this case, are absolutely grounded in the life and teachings of their *founder-ācārya*, they don't feel devastated and betrayed, their faith in guru and Kṛṣṇa remains solid, and they don't sue their mathas for millions of dollars or write books like *Betrayal of the Spirit*.

Observing how absolute faith in the life and teachings of Madhva had kept the relationships between gurus and disciples vital, intimate, and dynamic, and kept that *sampradāya* cohesive and alive for some 800 years now, I couldn't help but think of our Society, struggling to understand and apply *guru-tattva* globally, and how to realize enough of Prabhupāda's ideal of love and trust to continue as a united Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. What Prabhupāda inherited was timeless, but what he gave us was, in many ways, unprecedented. For example, where in Vedic history do we find the sacred and sovereign guru-disciple relationship deferring to a higher principle of cooperating within a worldwide spiritual movement? To become a servant of the servant in Prabhupāda's ISKCON is possible when all gurus and disciples accept the *founder-ācārya* as the prominent link to the *paramparā* and cooperate to perpetuate his mission.

How do we accept His Divine Grace as our prominent link? When I first read Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, I thought Dhīra Govinda was dissembling when he asked that the thesis of his booklet--that our *founder-ācārya* can be anyone's sole object of absolute surrender--be validated by the GBC and thereby allowed to comfortably coexist with other understandings and applications of *guru-tattva*. What he really wanted, it seemed to me, was to get his foot in the door, then gradually go for domination. One tyranny of thought would replace another--same old same old. But rereading Prabhupāda's purport to CC Madhya 23.105, I've come to think that Dhīra Govinda understands very well our *founder-ācārya's* spirit of unity in diversity: "What is possible in one country may not be possible in another...A Vaiṣṇava is immediately purified, provided he follows the rules and regulations of his bona fide spiritual master. It is not necessary that the rules and regulations in India be exactly the same as in Europe, America, and other Western countries. ...We should not follow regulative principles without an effect, nor should we fail to accept the regulative principles. What is required is a special technique according to country, time, and candidate."

For me, Dhīra Govinda Prabhu's booklet, Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, is a direct descendant of Ravindra-svarūpa Prabhu's 1984 paper *Ending the Fratricidal War*, the landmark essay that precipitated the first wave of guru reform in ISKCON. A later forefather was Dhruva Mahārāja Prabhu's 1994 booklet *śikṣā/dīkṣā*, a sweet breeze after the Vedic Village vitriol that showed up unsolicited in many of our mailboxes in the late 80s and early 90s. Yet there was some gold even in that filthy place, as acknowledged by Jayādvaita Mahārāja in "Where the Ritvik People are Right."

In that 1996 essay, which also pointed out where the ritviks were wrong, Mahārāja wrote: "On the one hand the GBC encourages you to be initiated by a bona fide, authorized ISKCON guru and worship him like God. On the other, it has an elaborate system of laws to invoke from time to time when your ISKCON authorized guru falls down. One might perhaps be forgiven for thinking that for all the laws and resolutions the role of guru is still a perplexity even for the GBC. Some devotees have no problem with any of this. They have their guru. They trust him. They are making advancement. They are happy. But others can only lament the passing of the days when Śrīla Prabhupāda was the only guru and the position of guru was sure. Merely to 'smash' the theories of the post-samadhi ritvik people, then, will

not make such theories go away. We must honestly face the underlying issues. Who is a bona fide spiritual master? What qualifications must he have? Are the gurus in ISKCON factually qualified—all of them, some of them, or any of them? If all or any of them are less than fully fit, what implications does this have for their disciples and for ISKCON? In ISKCON today, how can one be sure that the spiritual master to whom one is surrendering is genuine and infallible? Above all, how can every member of ISKCON be connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda as his disciple, his follower, in a true and legitimate sense? The spiritual leaders of ISKCON ought to recognize the importance of these questions and deal with them honestly, openly, sincerely, and deeply."

Bravo, Mahārāja. Your challenge rings truer than ever. And bravo, Dhīra Govinda Prabhu, for "honestly, openly, sincerely, and deeply" trying to help us meet that challenge.

The challenge of understanding ISKCON Founder-ācārya Śrīla Prabhupāda's relationship with everyone in his movement starts with looking deeply into our own heart. If the 25 years since Prabhupāda's passing has taught me anything about my own relationship with His Divine Grace, it is this: that my core identity is not so much as his "initiated disciple" as it is his "instructed follower"; because "He lives forever by his divine instructions, and the follower lives with him." And that that core identity is and must be available to everyone in ISKCON, especially if we hope to find enough unity in diversity to sustain and invigorate the Hare Krishna movement in the generations, and millenia, to come. And finally, that the best advice I can offer to myself or any putative guru descending from Śrīla Prabhupāda is this: "Ne'er a pretender nor a proxy be/All masters and disciples--seize his feet!"

As I write, it's been many months since you signed as contributors to the GBC's Preliminary Response to Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link. Perhaps your thoughts, like mine, have evolved over time regarding Dhīra Govinda's presentation. I am aware that the GBC's Sastriic Advisory Committee has been in dialogue with him about the ideas in Prominent Link and at least one of you is on that committee. You are all wise and sincere servants of Śrīla Prabhupāda, as are the devotees who contributed the realizations presented in Prominent Link. I have every hope that we are at last ready to resolve the "mother of all issues" in ISKCON—or at least to celebrate our unity in diversity—for it is within the well-rounded *saṅga* of faithful devotees that Śrīla Prabhupāda's full mercy appears.

Hope you are all well and thank you for reading. Hare Krishna.

Yours in the service of Śrīla Prabhupāda,  
Sureśvarā dāsa.

### Contribution from Mālinī dāsī Prabhu

I am grateful for this opportunity to express myself on the topic of Śrīla Prabhupāda's position and presence in our life. From the time that I received formal initiation I have denied myself the right to express, or even accept, my experience regarding gurus. Pressures have been so strong that I've felt inadequate, deficient, and isolated. Now I feel at liberty to acknowledge and connect with my experience and live blissfully with it. I tried hard to fit in the generally accepted ISKCON model of the guru-disciple relationship, but I failed. In endeavoring to conform to this model I felt fake. You may reject or label me, and thereby strengthen your convictions in the status quo. Or, as is my hope and prayer, you may recognize that I'm genuinely sharing insights and realizations that are important for me, and that are relevant for the progressive development of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement.

When I joined I was given to the care of a senior mātājī. She introduced me to Śrīla Prabhupāda the way people do when they want two persons to have a relationship. She was expert at bringing Śrīla Prabhupāda alive in my life. She taught me how truly and comfortably I could go to Śrīla Prabhupāda in any of his manifested forms for shelter. I brought anything to him; mental problems and speculation, shame and desire. He taught me and cared for me from the very beginning. He has been present in my life ever since and I can always count on him. He won't disappoint me.

My attachment for Śrīla Prabhupāda and for following his instructions grew and I had no particular desire to take initiation from anyone, although I understood that it was part of the protocol.

When the external pressure to be initiated became strong I approached Śrīla Prabhupāda on the topic and prayed for his guidance. I believe that his answer was that I needed to take initiation. Although I was asked and somewhat pushed to take shelter from a particular influential "ISKCON guru", I listened to my heart and asked someone else, from whom I was getting the most inspiration, to give me formal initiation. At the time of my request for initiation this pure Vaiṣṇava acknowledged that he and I did not have a deep relationship but that he was confident giving me formal initiation because of my attachment for Śrīla Prabhupāda. For the three following years I mainly stayed under the shelter of my mātājī well-wisher and continued hearing from and about Śrīla Prabhupāda. I thank her and she will always hold a special place in my heart.

As years passed I learned to understand and follow this Vaiṣṇava Guru who gave me initiation. His mood in service, attitude towards other Vaiṣṇavas, and his genuine compassion are a great inspiration for me. I thank him very much for his guidance and for having placed Śrīla Prabhupāda in the center of our relationship. All his letters give me direct quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda and the instruction to follow what Śrīla Prabhupāda gives. Basically my perception is that he trained me to see Śrīla Prabhupāda as the prominent link to the *paramparā*. This is the greatest gift one can give, and it demands a great deal of humility and advancement to take this position.

From the time I joined the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, my ultimate point of surrender has been Śrīla Prabhupāda. This understanding has not negated for me the importance of surrender to other Vaiṣṇavas. For example, when I was a *bhaktin*, I fully submitted myself to the temple president. Simultaneously I was submissive to the spiritual authority and shelter of the senior mātājī mentioned above. A person who is sincere about advancement in spiritual life will naturally seek the shelter and guidance of others who are more advanced on the path, and who can cut the bonds of material entanglement. In the one who gave me initiation I found a person whom I could trust to guide me in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Naturally I submitted to him and surrendered to his compassionate guidance. This does not conflict with my realization that Śrīla Prabhupāda is my ultimate point of surrender, and my primary connection to the disciplic succession.

That Śrīla Prabhupāda is my main guru and direct link to the *paramparā* does not minimize my love and connection with the Vaiṣṇava who performed my initiation ceremony. The advancement and glory of this Vaiṣṇava is in no way minimized by Śrīla Prabhupāda's preeminent position in my life.

When in contact with other "second generation devotees" who were manifesting a different experience from mine, some doubts developed. What they seemed to express through their actions or words was that the most important relationship is the one with the initiating guru. How that could be, I did not know, but I felt alienated because I did not fit in. I tried and even faked it at times, and then I would find myself performing painful mental gymnastics at *guru-puja*. I would be looking at Śrīla Prabhupāda's *mūrti* and saying "The lotus feet of our spiritual master are the only way by which we can attain pure devotional service. . . ." and my mind would be doing acrobatics, attempting to adapt the meaning of this offering to the model I was thinking I needed to follow. I would think: "It must be that I'm not supposed to be saying the prayer directly to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I must say it to my initiating guru. I need to bring a picture inside my head and sing to my initiating guru." But then doubts came again. "If I'm here in front of Śrīla Prabhupāda, then am I a hypocrite, or impersonal, if I'm speaking those words of praise to someone else? It doesn't make any sense!" Certainly something was wrong with me to think like this. Either I was deceptive or I was truly, personally speaking those words to Śrīla Prabhupāda, and acknowledging his position as my spiritual master above all spiritual masters, and as the Vaiṣṇava who is directly giving me the most transcendental knowledge. If the Prominent Link Model is not acceptable, then I suggest that we be true to ourselves and remove *guru-puja* to Śrīla Prabhupāda from the morning program.

Reading the essay Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link helped me to put everything in place and become faithful to my experience and to myself. It helped me understand my relationship with my Guru Mahārāja and with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Before that I had doubts and I had to constantly adjust my mind to fit into the generally accepted model. It wasn't complete or realistic to me. I remember years of

mental exercises at *guru-puja* and *maṅgala-ārati*. Now I'm peaceful in my practice and genuinely grateful for the one special Vaiṣṇava who performed my initiation. I deeply appreciate his dedication to helping other Vaiṣṇavas and I on the path back to Godhead. My realization of his position in my life seems more authentic since I have read *The Prominent Link*.

Initiation is a process (e.g., SB3:33:6 purport; 4:12:48 purport) that begins when one contacts with the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa, given by the spiritual master directly or through his devotees. In my case Śrīla Prabhupāda made the arrangement that I met some devotees in a remote, tiny island in the Caribbean. One continues the process by hearing through lectures, association, and reading. Naturally one gets a taste and the desire to take shelter of a bona fide spiritual master. I desired to take shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda and his representatives. This stage is manifest by the need to follow the instructions of the spiritual master, and I became increasingly enthusiastic to follow Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions. By continuing hearing and following instructions one may come to be ready to receive formal initiation. The formal initiation ceremony is an important event that is a part of the process of initiation. At the initiation ceremony the initiate commits to following vows and to adhere to the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and this is done in front of the Deities, Śrīla Prabhupāda, an *officiating ācārya* who acknowledges the vows, and the assembled Vaiṣṇavas. Initiation is not merely a ceremony or an event, it's a process. With this understanding we can clearly see who is the spiritual master. The main spiritual master is the Vaiṣṇava in whom we take primary and direct shelter, and for me that has always been Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The main person from whom I receive transcendental knowledge is Śrīla Prabhupāda. He is my ultimate point of surrender. If this is not so, then, I ask, "What am I doing at 7:20 AM, singing in front of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *mūrti*?" I sing "He opens my darkened eyes and fills my heart with transcendental knowledge. He is my Lord birth after birth. ..." An essential, tangible reality for me is the knowledge that, if I again take birth, Śrīla Prabhupāda will be available to continue to directly guide me in spiritual life. I will have the opportunity to again take shelter at his lotus feet and continue to serve him.

Please look inside, beyond your accepting and rejecting mind, beyond your social status and philosophical conditioning. Look in your heart, where you, Kṛṣṇa and all knowledge reside. See if you have the knowingness of Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct and primary presence in your life. Do you experience Śrīla Prabhupāda as the spiritual master who is your ultimate shelter, the ultimate point to resolve your doubts and direct you on your path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? If so, then let's agree that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the prominent link to the *paramparā*. And let's accept that the model proposed by *The Prominent Link* compensates the instituted model that may even be burdening the movement.

## Reply to the GBC's Preliminary Response to Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link

By Bhaktin Miriam Prabhu

On March 12, 2002, the GBC wrote a "Preliminary Statement" concerning a newly published book entitled *Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link*, written by Dhīra Govinda dāsa. It seems to me that the GBC has interpreted the book in a way that is erroneous on many accounts. Also, I sense that the GBC expects all members of ISKCON to accept its perspective, and is discouraging devotees from discerning for themselves the possible merit of *The Prominent Link*.

I did something that probably the GBC would frown upon. Instead of having the GBC read the book for me and tell me what the book is about and how to understand it, I bought the book and read it myself. Thereby I became "unprotected", and ran the risk of relying on my own intelligence to consider things for myself. Likely I will be labeled as "un-humble," or worse. Well, that is the price I am willing to pay to find the truth for myself. By reading the book I found that, from what I can perceive, the GBC is misleading devotees, whether deliberately or not, concerning the actual messages of Śrīla Prabhupāda: *The Prominent Link*.

The book *Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link* never says that our initiating gurus are not

"regular gurus". Neither does it say that Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are not initiating spiritual masters. It does not say that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the only initiator. It does not say that the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are not Śrīla Prabhupāda's granddisciples. It does not say that every member of ISKCON is not or should not be the servant of the servant of the servant of Śrīla Prabhupāda. It does not say that our gurus are not our link to the disciplic succession. It does not say that Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are not qualified to initiate. It does not say that one should not formally worship the initiating guru. It does not say that our initiating gurus are initiating on behalf of Śrīla Prabhupāda. And it never says that Śrīla Prabhupāda serves as our *dīkṣā guru*. In fact, contrary to what the GBC would like devotees to believe, Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link is not about the initiation ceremony, nor about our initiating gurus. It is about Śrīla Prabhupāda and his relationship with all members of his movement.

The GBC's preliminary statement on Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link is misrepresentative. There are devotees who, out of humility, accept whatever they are told without question. Most of them would not read the book and even if they do read the book, would still accept the understanding of their authorities rather than their own. In the hope of reaching some devotees and providing an opportunity for them to open their eyes, I present this reply.

The GBC offers seven reasons why they reject the book, and they say they are doing this "...to protect the devotees from being misled." With all due respect, who is misleading whom? I will list the seven specific reasons that the GBC offers to demonstrate that the book deviates from Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings and instructions, followed by what the book really says.

**GBC reason #1:** "The paper begins by improperly dismissing the standard terminology of *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā guru* - terminology established by Lord Caitanya Himself and followed by all prominent *acharyas*. Śrīla Prabhupāda uses *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā* as essential words to define functions of specific gurus. The author, by contrast, calls them 'appellations' and 'labels' and discards them."

**My response #1:** The author does not dismiss or discard the "*śikṣā*" and "*dīkṣā*" terminology that ISKCON uses. Rather, he explains that Śrīla Prabhupāda gives other definitions of the word "*dīkṣā*" besides the common usage connected to functions of specific gurus. So, for the meantime he asks the readers to put aside the definitions as we know them in ISKCON, and listen to another important definition that Śrīla Prabhupāda gives. Dhīra Govinda Prabhu then goes on to offer several direct quotations from Śrīla Prabhupāda where *dīkṣā* is described as the transmission of transcendental knowledge.

Here are three such examples in Śrīla Prabhupāda's words, cited in the book: "*Dīkṣā* actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all material contamination" (Madhya-līla, 4:111, Purport). In a lecture on July 29, 1968, Śrīla Prabhupāda said "There are two words, *divya-jñāna*. *Divya-jñāna* means transcendental, spiritual knowledge. So *divya* is *di*, and *jnanam*, *ksapayati*, explaining, that is *ksa*, *di-ksa*. This is called *dīkṣā*,....So *dīkṣā* means the initiation to begin transcendental activities. That is called initiation." (pg. 5). In a lecture on July 29, 1968, Śrīla Prabhupāda said "This is called initiation. Or initiation from the very beginning. This is called *dīkṣā*. The Sanskrit term is called *dīkṣā*. *Dīkṣā* means... *Di divya-jñānam*, transcendental knowledge, and *ksa*, *ikṣa*. *Ikṣa* means *darsana*, to see or *ksapayati*, explain. That is called *dīkṣā*" (pg. 5). From these three examples one can see that Śrīla Prabhupāda had a broader definition of the word "*dīkṣā*" than what ISKCON teaches us.

The GBC would apparently have us believe that Śrīla Prabhupāda uses "*śikṣā*" and "*dīkṣā*" only to define functions of specific gurus. *Dīkṣā* is not an event. It is not only the initiation ceremony. *Dīkṣā* is a process. If this simple statement confuses you, then for sure you will fail to understand the book. As Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link states: "Initiation, as described above, is a process. Components of this process include receiving and implementing the instructions to wear *kanti mala* and Vaiṣṇava *tilak*, and receiving a Vaiṣṇava name. The most essential aspect of initiation is receiving transcendental knowledge from a realized spiritual master" (pg 5). The main ingredient of the *dīkṣā* process is the transmission of transcendental knowledge or *divya-jñāna*. There are many devotees who give us transcendental knowledge, thus many are involved in our *dīkṣā* process. But of all the persons who are involved in our

*dīkṣā* process, Śrīla Prabhupāda's influence is much greater than all others. The *dīkṣā guru* in the essential sense of the term is the guru who imparts transcendental knowledge. Imparting transcendental knowledge is the essence of initiation.

Thus, Śrīla Prabhupāda, the primary giver of transcendental knowledge for everyone who comes into the movement, may be considered to be the *dīkṣā guru*, at least in the essential sense, though not necessarily in the formal sense. Śrīla Prabhupāda is our primary *śikṣā guru*. But in the transcendental sense he is also our *dīkṣā guru* because he is giving us transcendental knowledge. In the formal sense, the guru who performs the initiation ceremony is the *dīkṣā guru*.

Because there is so much misconception in ISKCON concerning the word "*dīkṣā*", the author of Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link emphasizes: "Śrīla Prabhupāda described initiation as a process, with the essence of this process being the delivery of *divya-jñāna*, or transcendental knowledge, from the spiritual master to the disciple." The author further states: "It is incontestably true that many devotees, including many who were officially initiated after Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure, and many for whom the Vaiṣṇava who performed the initiation ceremony is in good standing in ISKCON, receive more direct *divya-jñāna*, even by the most narrow definition of the term 'direct', from Śrīla Prabhupāda than from any other Vaiṣṇava, in the form of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, tapes, and *mūrti* form. For these devotees Śrīla Prabhupāda is performing the most essential part of the initiation process, as he is the primary giver of *divya-jñāna*" (pgs. 6-7).

**GBC reason #2:** "Having discarded the terms, the author attempts to merge the functions of *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā* gurus. Noting that Śrīla Prabhupāda is ISKCON's pre-eminent instructing guru, he writes, 'it is questionable whether the devotee performing the initiation ceremony can unambiguously be termed 'the *dīkṣā guru*.' Śrīla Prabhupāda, by contrast, states unambiguously in the Krishna book, Chapter 80, (and elsewhere): '*śikṣā gurus* may be many, but *dīkṣā guru* is always one.'"

**My response #2:** The GBC response inaccurately states that PL merges functions of *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā* gurus. Yes, Śrīla Prabhupāda did say that there are many *śikṣā gurus* and only one *dīkṣā guru* in order to differentiate guru functions. Nevertheless, Śrīla Prabhupāda's definition of "*dīkṣā*" is also much broader than ISKCON devotees are taught. Consequently, the author gives more examples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings on this: "In a lecture in Hyderabad on December 10, 1976, Śrīla Prabhupāda said '...from 1922 to 1933 practically I was not initiated, but I got the impression of preaching Caitanya Mahāprabhu's cult. That I was thinking. And that was the initiation by my Guru Mahārāja. Then officially I was initiated in 1933 because in 1923 I left Calcutta.' Thus, it seems that the essence of initiation is the acceptance of *divya-jñāna*, and not the formal ceremony" (pg. 10).

On page 40, the author writes: "Śrīla Prabhupāda is directly giving transcendental knowledge to members of his movement, regardless of when they joined or who performed their initiation ceremony. Therefore, it may be asserted that he is giving *dīkṣā*, in the essential sense of the term. Still, the PL framework accommodates definitions of '*dīkṣā*' that rely on the formal component of the initiation process. With regards to the formal element of the initiation process, it might be said that Śrīla Prabhupāda is not giving *dīkṣā*." On pages 40-41 the author states: "Whether the transcendental knowledge that Śrīla Prabhupāda gives is called *dīkṣā* or not, and whether Śrīla Prabhupāda is referred to as the *dīkṣā guru*, is immaterial in relation to the gist of the PL understanding. This essential understanding is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the direct, primary, and current link to the disciplic succession by virtue of being the main Vaiṣṇava through whom Sri Kṛṣṇa imparts transcendental knowledge to the initiate."

Furthermore, the author states: "Some may assert 'If transcendental knowledge is given by someone other than the Vaiṣṇava who performs the initiation ceremony, then that transcendental knowledge can only be called *śikṣā*, not *dīkṣā*. Therefore, it cannot rightly be said that Śrīla Prabhupāda is giving *dīkṣā*.' He is giving *śikṣā*.' In the framework of The Prominent Link (PL), the essential focus is on the process of initiation, which is founded on the transmission of transcendental knowledge" (pg7). "For devotees who are receiving *divya-jñāna* directly from Śrīla Prabhupāda, more than from any other Vaiṣṇava, it can be rightly be said that Śrīla Prabhupāda is their direct, current, and prominent link to the *paramparā*, with 'direct, current, and prominent link' defined as "the Vaiṣṇava who directly gives

transcendental knowledge more than any other devotee" (pg 7). In other words, "The central idea is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the prominent link to the *paramparā* by virtue of being the prime deliverer of transcendental knowledge" (pg. 1). He further states: "Even if 'dīkṣā guru' is defined solely in terms of the performance of the initiation ceremony, one's prominent and current link to the disciplic succession, as delineated by Śrīla Prabhupāda at the beginning of the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, is understood in terms of reception of transcendental knowledge" (pg 8).

Now, what does the author mean when he says "as delineated by Śrīla Prabhupāda at the beginning of the Bhagavad-gita As It is?" What he means is that if we check the end of the Introduction to the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Śrīla Prabhupāda lists our disciplic succession, which is comprised of 32 members, starting with Lord Kṛṣṇa. Not every member in that disciplic succession list was the initiating guru. Several were *śikṣā gurus*. The criteria for appearing on that disciplic succession list is not performance of formal initiation ceremonies, but rather that those Vaiṣṇavas were the main deliverers of transcendental knowledge to the Vaiṣṇava following them on the list.

As the author explains in the section entitled: Caitanya-caritāmṛta- Page 1, "It is of course noteworthy that Śrīla Prabhupāda, following Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī's song *Śrī Guru-paramparā*, lists a disciplic succession wherein several of the spiritual masters did not receive formal initiation from their spiritual masters. Perhaps even more noteworthy is that Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the word 'initiated' to describe *paramparā* relationships where no official initiation occurred, in reference to the relationships between Śrīla Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī and Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and between Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Śrīla Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī." So, the GBC would have us believe that the author is irresponsibly discarding terms and then merging them, but it is Śrīla Prabhupāda who gave us the broader definition of *dīkṣā*, and PL helpfully points this out. And, it is Śrīla Prabhupāda that listed Vaiṣṇavas that were not initiating gurus as part of our disciplic succession.

**GBC reason #3:** "Śrīla Prabhupāda exhorted his disciples hundreds of times to be the next gurus in disciplic succession by simply repeating what they heard and avoiding concoctions. Why would he do so if he intended to be directly responsible for initiating future generations? Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, 'One's guide must be a spiritual master who is . . . strictly following the instructions of the previous *ācārya* . . .' (CC Madhya 10.17, Purport)."

**My response #3:** The GBC is again inaccurately depicting the content of the book. Nowhere in the book does it say that Śrīla Prabhupāda will be "directly responsible for initiating future generations." In fact, in the whole book there are only two instances where the word "initiation" is made in connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda. On page 11, the book states: "Śrīla Prabhupāda is transmitting transcendental knowledge, and we are confident that he will continue to do so for many generations. In this essential sense, Śrīla Prabhupāda is initiating sincere followers. In fact, we propose that accepting *divya-jñāna*, or initiation, from Śrīla Prabhupāda, and thereby directly connecting with him, is the qualification for one to become formally initiated in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. Again, the official initiation ceremony is a formal acknowledgment that the devotee has directly connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda." On the same page, it says: "In the essential sense of the term 'initiated', Śrīla Prabhupāda is initiating the devotee by directly delivering to him transcendental knowledge." In both instances cited, the word "initiate" is used strictly in the essential sense.

Clearly the author is not saying that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the only link to the *paramparā*, but rather that he is the primary link to the *paramparā*. In Spanish, the word link is translated as "connection." In that sense whoever teaches us about Kṛṣṇa is connecting us to the *paramparā*. But without Śrīla Prabhupāda we would not be linked to the *paramparā* because he is the one who has brought the science of Krishna Consciousness to the Western World. If our initiating gurus somehow were to discontinue helping us in our Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we would still be linked to the *paramparā* through Śrīla Prabhupāda, because without him we could not have the connection or link to the *paramparā*.

**GBC reason #4:** "'The Prominent Link' specifically contradicts Śrīla Prabhupāda's own description of his relationship with initiates of those he initiated. On May 28, 1977, in a conversation with the GBC in Vrindavan, he said those devotees would be his 'grand disciples' and 'the disciples of my disciples'. Disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are in fact directly connected to him through initiation

as his grand-disciples. Śrīla Prabhupāda commented that the grandfather is more kind to his grandchildren than is their father. There is nothing lacking in the connection between Śrīla Prabhupāda and his grand disciples. Some may choose to emphasize their *dīkṣā guru* and others their *śikṣā guru*. Such affairs of the heart cannot be legislated by anyone."

**My response #4:** Nowhere in *The Prominent Link* does it say that disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are not Śrīla Prabhupāda's granddisciples. The book states: "For devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, however, the Vaiṣṇava whose mercy without which we would not receive the benediction of Kṛṣṇa and would not make advancement is Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is evidenced by the fact that the mercy and grace of other Vaiṣṇavas may be withdrawn, and the former recipient of that mercy continues to make advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and to receive benedictions from Kṛṣṇa. This is possible because Śrīla Prabhupāda continues to bestow his mercy and grace" (pg. 16).

Śrīla Prabhupāda is our link to the *paramparā* because he is giving us *divya-jñāna*. Anyone who give us transcendental knowledge is essentially connecting us to the *paramparā*. Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda is not our only link to the *paramparā*, but he is our primary link.

Yes, the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are his grand disciples, but the grand disciples are also directly connected to Śrīla Prabhupāda through the process of initiation. As stated previously, initiation is a process, not an event. When a devotee first enters the movement, the newcomer becomes linked to Śrīla Prabhupāda by the reception of transcendental knowledge from him. At the time of the initiation ceremony, this link is not broken nor does it become indirect. In other words, as the book states: "The devotee does not make the link with Śrīla Prabhupāda at the time of the ceremony. If the devotee has not already directly linked with Śrīla Prabhupāda at the time of the formal initiation, then he shouldn't be participating in the initiation ceremony. The Vaiṣṇava conducting the initiation ceremony does not become the connection between the initiate and Śrīla Prabhupāda. The direct link between the initiate and Śrīla Prabhupāda already exists. The connection does not become indirect at the time of the ceremony" (p. 10).

The GBC says that "some may choose to emphasize their *dīkṣā guru* and others their *śikṣā guru*. Such affairs of the heart cannot be legislated by anyone." Well, that is nice to hear, so why are they rejecting the concepts expounded in Śrīla Prabhupāda: *The Prominent Link*? The book simply says that for many members of his movement, including those for whom he did not perform a formal initiation ceremony, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary deliverer of direct transcendental knowledge. Therefore it can rightly be said that he is the direct and prominent link to the *paramparā* for those devotees. If those devotees choose to worship Śrīla Prabhupāda in such a capacity, why is the GBC rejecting it? After all, the GBC states that "such affairs of the heart cannot be legislated by anyone."

It seems to me that as long as one is willing to make someone other than Śrīla Prabhupāda their primary *śikṣā* or *dīkṣā guru* it is OK with the GBC and they will not interfere. But as soon as one says that Śrīla Prabhupāda is his/her primary guru, and his/her primary link to the *paramparā*, then they will step in with legislation. In this case they are rejecting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the main giver of transcendental knowledge and it doesn't matter whether that is called *śikṣā* or *dīkṣā*. They categorize this rejection as "protecting" devotees. Protecting devotees from what? From the fact that devotees will realize that Śrīla Prabhupāda is everyone's main guru because he is the main deliverer of transcendental knowledge? From the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda will be the prime deliverer of *divya-jñāna* for the duration of his movement? From the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda will naturally be the direct link to the *paramparā* for the duration of his movement by virtue of being the primary deliverer of transcendental knowledge for the duration of his movement? That is what the book *Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link* is expressing, and the GBC does not like that. My advice to devotees is to read the book by yourselves. You don't need anybody to protect you from the truth, and you don't need someone else to interpret the book for you.

**GBC reason #5:** "In the same conversation Śrīla Prabhupāda described those who would be taking on the service of initiating disciples as 'regular gurus.' The 'Prominent Link' terms them 'Vaishnavas who perform the initiation ceremony.' Further, the work fails to offer a single statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda in support of the implication that His Divine Grace would serve -in any respect - as a *dīkṣā guru* in posthumous initiations."



**My response #5:** Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link does not say or imply that those who would be taking the service of initiating disciples are not "regular gurus." What it does say is that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the main guru for ISKCON. He is the primary link to the *paramparā* because he is the main giver of transcendental knowledge for ISKCON. According to Śrīla Prabhupāda, to give "*dīkṣā*" means to give transcendental knowledge. So, according to Śrīla Prabhupāda's definition of the word "*dīkṣā*", he (Śrīla Prabhupāda) is the main "*dīkṣā*" guru for ISKCON. And there are many quotations from Śrīla Prabhupāda that support this.

And yes, Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link does not offer a single statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda in support of the implication that His Divine Grace would serve as the *dīkṣā guru* (as we know it in ISKCON) in posthumous initiations. And do you know why? Because the book does not say that Śrīla Prabhupāda is our *dīkṣā guru*, in the sense that we understand the term in ISKCON.

**GBC reason #6:** "The Prominent Link' suggests that if every member of ISKCON makes Śrīla Prabhupāda the 'sole object of unconditional surrender,' ISKCON will be more united. Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings suggest that ISKCON will be more united- and Śrīla Prabhupāda more pleased - if every member of ISKCON serves the servants of the servants of Śrīla Prabhupāda: 'This is called *paramparā* system. You have to learn how to become servant of the servant of Kṛṣṇa. The more you become in the lower position -- servant, servant, servant, servant, servant, hundreds times servant, servant -- the more you are advanced. Here in this material world everyone is trying to be master of the master. Just opposite. And the spiritual world, the endeavor is to become servant's servant. This is the secret. *yasya deve parā bhaktiryathā deve tathā gurau tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanaḥ*. This is Vedic instruction" (London, 8/3/73).

**My response #6:** Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link does not discourage anyone from serving the servant of the servant of Śrīla Prabhupāda. To the contrary, the book states: "All who instruct others in the tenets of *bhakti-yoga* are spiritual teachers. In this sense each devotee has many gurus who are inspiring him to progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. These gurus are directly guiding devotees and establishing important, direct relationships with them that are invaluable in helping the devotees on their path back to Godhead" (pg. 3). "Through submissive service to Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers the devotee receives transcendental knowledge" (pg. 11). "This is not a position of negativity. There may be Vaiṣṇavas in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement who are pure devotees, *mahabhagavatas*, and worthy of worship" (pg. 21). "A caveat in presenting this is that all devotees should be honored, glorified and respected in accord with their position" (pg. 25). "Additionally, each devotee is responsible to feel and demonstrate proper gratitude towards all the Vaiṣṇavas who have assisted him in developing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the eternal gift of the soul" (pg. 32). "Devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement who conduct initiation ceremonies have made tremendous sacrifices to guide and direct others in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. These devotees deserve great commendation for their efforts to take responsibility for the spiritual advancement of others" (pg. 32). "The Pl [Prominent Link] model encourages devotees to serve and accept guidance and shelter from Vaiṣṇavas who are physically present. These Vaiṣṇavas to whom the devotee subordinates himself, and with whom the devotee develops close relationships, are spiritual teachers, though none of them replace Śrīla Prabhupāda as the most prominent direct link to the disciplic succession" (pg. 45). "Without contradiction, devotee A is a direct disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and a disciple of the disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Being directly linked with Śrīla Prabhupāda does not negate, and in fact supports, the principle of being a servant of the servant of the Vaiṣṇava" (pg. 48).

That phrase, "sole object of unconditional surrender" does not exist anywhere in the book. Thus, the GBC should not have used it as a direct quotation from the book. What the book does say is the following: "Thus far it has been established that for many devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, regardless of when or whether they have taken formal initiation, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary deliverer of *divya-jñāna*, both directly and indirectly. He is the Vaiṣṇava whose mercy is essential to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and he is the guru center in the two-center model described in the verse *yasya devepara bhaktir...* These attributes also establish Śrīla Prabhupāda as the Vaiṣṇava to whom the initiate must absolutely, unconditionally, and directly surrender. In this sense Śrīla Prabhupāda serves as the direct and current link to the *paramparā*. With this understanding we can appreciate that Śrīla

Prabhupāda can be the object of worship as the prominent link to the disciplic succession" (pg 18).

"Of all the gurus in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the one in whom implicit faith must exist in order for the imports of Vedic knowledge to be automatically revealed. As the direct link, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the person to whom the devotee surrenders absolutely. Many devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, including many who were formally initiated after Śrīla Prabhupāda's physical departure, experience him in this capacity, as the primary guru who inspires full surrender...From the model that is commonly practiced in the movement we can understand that not all gurus are expected to be the Vaiṣṇava to whom the newcomer fully surrenders. For example, the book distributor is serving as a type of guru for the newcomer, as is the senior devotee giving Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam class and the *bhakta* leader. We don't expect, however, that the newcomer will fully surrender his life to all of these Vaiṣṇavas, though of course they should always have a place in his heart. Śrīla Prabhupāda, as the Vaiṣṇava who is the devotee to whom all members of his movement are expected to unconditionally surrender, is the guru center as described in the verse *yasya deve...*" (pg. 16-17).

We have many gurus in ISKCON, but of all our gurus, the one that should assume the absolute position in our lives is Śrīla Prabhupāda. He is the driving force of the movement, and he will always be the driving force. Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary guru guiding us back to Godhead and he is the primary deliverer of direct transcendental knowledge. Therefore he is the most important link (prominent link) to the *paramparā*. After all, Śrīla Prabhupāda lives in his *vāṇī* not only for those he initiated, but also for those that came after he passed away. In essence, this is what the book is about. The GBC does not want ISKCON devotees to have this understanding; therefore, they misrepresent the book to discourage devotees from reading it.

Further, the GBC attempts to portray the author as unilaterally imposing the PL model. But The Prominent Link states: "While we maintain that this model should be accepted in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, it is not necessarily the only model that is *sastrically* and philosophically valid. Many of the contentions herein, in regards to Śrīla Prabhupāda's relationship with members of his movement, may not apply to everyone in Śrīla Prabhupāda's society. They do, however, apply to many and are, we will demonstrate, legitimate in terms of *śāstra*, philosophy and precedent. Thus, we ask that the principles presented be honored and respected in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. Though we suggest that these conceptualizations are the preferred model for his movement, our firm recommendation is simply that the ideas and practices be validated and accepted, perhaps alongside other systems and understandings" (second paragraph of pg. 1). "While we claim that this is the preferred model for the movement, we do not maintain that other understandings, such as the understanding that the devotee who performs the formal initiation ceremony is automatically the primary direct link to the *paramparā*, must be rejected. If necessary, a plurality of models may coexist. However, we find no basis for the denial of the PL model, and we believe that it is important for the PL model to be accepted and honored" (pg. 39).

**GBC reason #7:** "ISKCON law establishes Śrīla Prabhupāda as the 'pre-eminent and compulsory *śikṣā guru* for all members of ISKCON.' Further, it says that any grand disciple may find more inspiration from Śrīla Prabhupāda than from their *dīkṣā guru*. 'The Prominent Link' asserts that such understandings of Śrīla Prabhupāda are offensive to His Divine Grace (p. 26). The GBC Body finds such remarks and their public circulation wanting in scholarship, philosophy, and Vaishnava etiquette."

**My response #7:** The 1999 GBC resolutions state that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the "preeminent and compulsory *śikṣā-guru* for all Vaiṣṇavas (gurus and disciples) in the Society." But, the 2000 GBC resolutions changed Śrīla Prabhupāda's 1999 status in ISKCON as follows: "A duly initiated disciple in ISKCON can accept Śrīla Prabhupāda, the *founder ācārya* of ISKCON, as his principal *śikṣā-guru*. During his devotional life, he may experience that he derives more spiritual inspiration from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and *vāṇī* than from his own *dīkṣā-guru*."

According to Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link: "The wording of the 2000 GBC resolution implies that the default position for a duly initiated disciple is to derive more spiritual inspiration from 'his own *dīkṣā-guru*' than from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and *vāṇī*, though it is acknowledged that the disciple 'can' accept Śrīla Prabhupāda as his principle *śikṣā-guru*, and 'may' experience more spiritual

inspiration from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and *vani* than from his *dīkṣā-guru*. This resolution appears to be a regression from the 1999 GBC descriptions of Śrīla Prabhupāda as 'the preeminent and compulsory *śikṣā-guru* for all Vaiṣṇavas (gurus and disciples) in the Society', 'the preeminent *śikṣā guru* for every member of the institution', and the first and foremost object of faith, trust and allegiance for every member of ISKCON.

"Thus, we can see that describing Śrīla Prabhupāda with qualifying terms such as 'preeminent *śikṣā guru*' obfuscates his position as the primary guru and the most essential, active spiritual force for all members of his movement. This relegation of Śrīla Prabhupāda is conspicuous in the contradictory connotations of the 1999 and 2000 resolutions. As a result, Śrīla Prabhupāda's rightful and natural place in the society of Vaiṣṇavas is arrogated by others, as evidenced in the practices and conceptualizations of devotees in many sectors of the organization" (pg. 30).

Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Primary Link further states: "In support of this minimization of Śrīla Prabhupāda's role in his movement, one of the themes of a keynote speech at the 1999 GBC meetings was specifically that Śrīla Prabhupāda is not the direct and current link to the disciplic succession for devotees who did not receive formal initiation from him" (pg. 28).

PL presents Śrīla Prabhupāda's words without changing or adding to them. Śrīla Prabhupāda's words are clear and to the point. The GBC creates a false impression of the book Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link by making misrepresentative statements of what the book is really about, by using quotes out of context for the purpose of evoking emotions of anger and fear in the reader, and by discouraging devotees from reading the book by themselves with the pretext that they only want to "protect" them.

The GBC Body says that they acknowledge "with appreciation the clarification offered by Dhīra Govinda Prabhu in a letter (March 2002) in which he states that he did not intend to teach ritvikism nor support the ritvik agenda through 'The Prominent Link,'" and that "he also expressed his eagerness to enter into further discussion with the GBC and its Sastriic Advisory Council." That sounds nice, but chronology of events may lead one to question the sincerity of those words. After all, that letter of clarification from Dhīra Govinda Prabhu was given to the GBC before they wrote the "preliminary statement." The GBC, makes it sound as though Dhīra Govinda Prabhu offered a letter of clarification to the GBC after reading the preliminary statement, when in fact Dhīra Govinda Prabhu's letter was dated March 10, 2002, two days before the date of the GBC's preliminary statement. Even though the GBC read Dhīra Govinda prabhu's letter of clarification, they still wrote the preliminary statement accusing him (indirectly) of teaching ritvik philosophy, encouraging disrespect for our initiating gurus, discarding and merging *dīkṣā* and *śikṣā* terminology, discouraging devotees from being the servant of the servant of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and saying that the book Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link is claiming that Śrīla Prabhupāda will be "directly responsible for initiating (as we know it in ISKCON) future generations."

Here is an excerpt from Dhīra Govinda prabhu's letter that he sent two days before the GBC's preliminary statement: "In presenting the ideas of The Prominent Link I have no intention of disrespecting or encouraging others to disrespect the Vaiṣṇavas who serve as initiating gurus in ISKCON. I understand and fully support the prime importance of properly respecting all members of our Vaiṣṇava family. Also, by describing Śrīla Prabhupāda as the prominent link to the *paramparā* for members of his movement, I am in no way minimizing the fundamental principle of being a servant of the servant of the servant of the devotees.

"Concerning terminology, in the essay I decided not to employ some of the usual terms that are commonly used in discussions on these topics, because these terms, from my perception, have tended to cloud issues more than clarify them in the current environment of the movement. Instead, I used terms that describe observable behaviors, such as 'the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony', for purposes of precision and to assist in extracting and identifying essential concepts, such as the transmission of transcendental knowledge from guru to disciple. The approach is that after clarifying essential concepts, we can then apply appropriate terminology.

"All of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers have a mandate to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others, and in

this way to expand the sankirtana movement and continue the disciplic succession. We are all meant to be instruments in carrying on the *paramparā*, and I am not advocating that the *paramparā* ends with Śrīla Prabhupāda."

Yes, Dhīra Govinda prabhu did express his eagerness to enter into further discussion with the GBC and its Sastric Advisory Council. But the GBC did not enter into discussion with him. Instead they issue a preliminary statement rejecting the book. The book is about Śrīla Prabhupāda and his relationship with all members of his movement. I believe it would have been healthier and more productive to focus on this, rather than attempt to mislead devotees about the import and content of the book.

It is time for the members of the GBC to wake up and realize that it is up to the community of devotees, as is their natural right, to decide for themselves what kind of role Śrīla Prabhupāda plays in their lives. It is time to wake up and realize that it is the responsibility of the community of devotees to decide for themselves what role Śrīla Prabhupāda plays in their lives. As Balavanta Prabhu says in the Preface to PL: "The question may be asked: Why another paper on the process of initiation when the GBC has already spoken definitively on the matter? Isn't this now a non-issue in ISKCON? The answer is that the GBC has spoken definitively on the process of initiation on so many occasions that we cannot rationally conclude that its voice on such matters is absolute. The GBC is a managerial body. Spiritual matters of the Society must be resolved by conscious consensus of conscience by reference to open and frank discussions amongst mature devotees whose voices are not suppressed."

### Statement from Kṛṣṇadas Kaviraj dāsa Prabhu

Many devotees around the world feel that ISKCON's position on the issue of *guru-tattva* is a work in progress. And we must "PROGRESS" to establish the ISKCON that Śrīla Prabhupāda desired. In my conversations with devotees, including initiating gurus and their disciples, they've stated that the present system does not properly emphasize Śrīla Prabhupāda's position in ISKCON. ISKCON cannot continue to ignore the problem and hope to please Śrīla Prabhupāda. He will be pleased when all devotees feel enlivened to cooperate and serve together. Dhīra Govinda's treatise is a great beginning to the open and unmotivated discussions that should take place amongst all thoughtful devotees.

All too often when someone presents something that appears to be contradictory to the GBC's present position, the GBC, or a committee thereof, attempts to dismantle the paper point by point without adequate efforts to understand the overall intent. The GBC should not try to quickly label and dismiss, but attempt to have ongoing open, unmotivated discussion amongst Vaiṣṇavas. Only this will help to resolve the issue. Śrīla Prabhupāda, The Prominent Link should be accepted in such a mood. I'd like to see it received as an overture to dialogue. It is an important document that hopefully will inspire us to become more familiar with all sides of the issue.

Kṛṣṇadas Kaviraj dāsa  
Chairman- ISKCON of Toronto Board of Directors

### Contribution from Govinda dāsa Prabhu (A Vaiṣṇava Youth)

My first response to the Prominent Link paper was "This just makes plain sense." Myself, along with many other youth, have grown up in this movement being taught this wonderful philosophy. Yet we also watched the movement, great devotees, and gurus themselves, fall, causing great harm, and losing focus on the real goal of simply being Krishna conscious. There have been so many different reforms or alternative gurus or ideas that have tried to compensate for this serious problem, but the movement continues to fragment largely due to this issue. In many cases devotees have become so disturbed that they give up their Krishna consciousness entirely. This brings me to the realization that I initially had many years ago. Śrīla Prabhupāda simply wants us to be Krishna conscious. That was his main goal and

he took many risks to accomplish it. He gave us his teachings by which we can become Krishna conscious. We must make Śrīla Prabhupāda our primary link to Krishna, and pass it on from one generation to the next. It is common sense that if we want to do this successfully we must put the focus on Śrīla Prabhupāda and his teachings. Having observed what has happened in the last twenty-five years, we can only imagine what will happen in fifty and one hundred years, when there is no one around who had Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal association. I believe Dhīra Govinda Prabhu has given us a very sensible solution to solving the guru issue and ensuring that Śrīla Prabhupāda's Krishna conscious movement will stay intact.

## Contribution from Bhūṣāya dāsa Prabhu

I sincerely thank and commend Dhīra Govinda prabhu for his enlightening and courageous work, **Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link**. His presentation is honest, non-offensive and well-documented. His approach is positive and hopeful- not negative and faultfinding. He gives respect and appreciation for the contributions of all Vaiṣṇavas.

For several years I've worked with Dhīra Govinda as a judge under the auspices of the Office of Child Protection where he serves as director. His leadership and vision were essential to develop a program to protect and help the abused, and to punish and keep the perpetrators away from ISKCON's children. His Child Protection Training programs are being used worldwide throughout ISKCON. His loyal dedication, a godsend to our society, has helped countless children recover from past abuse.

I believe Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link has great value for our spiritual society, now and into the future. Dhīra Govinda builds a strong case that Śrīla Prabhupāda continues to be the person directly giving *divya-jñāna* (transcendental knowledge) to his followers, and therefore is still initiating conditioned souls into the transcendental science of Krishna Consciousness.

In my humble opinion, Dhīra Govinda has accurately described the point and time of *actual initiation* into the line of *bhakti*- as that time when the spiritual aspirant receives *divya-jñāna* from his or her guru. The guru is the person transferring spiritual realization to the new devotee, who then becomes the guru's disciple. As Dhīra Govinda points out, Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to this exchange of giving and receiving transcendental knowledge as the actual time of initiation. The fire sacrifice and initiation ceremony are an important formality that come later.

We've all heard of people who read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, become devotees and follow his teachings of *sādhana-bhakti* without ever physically coming into contact with Śrīla Prabhupāda or another devotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "I will live forever in my books." For the past 25 years, we see he has continued to transmit transcendental knowledge through his books and instructions. He always stressed his *vāṇī* (words) as much more important than his *vapu* (physical presence). He said he would always remain present in his teachings, and his sincere follower would live with him.

Just months after Śrīla Prabhupāda physically left us in November 1977, there was a GBC/Zonal Acharya meeting in Detroit. One morning, Jayatirtha told us how the previous day Harikesh had joked, "Now, what's going to happen to a disciple when his guru bleeps?" Sadly, this became a new dilemma for our movement. Our society can resolve this situation, however, when every new disciple who experiences Śrīla Prabhupāda as his prominent link to transcendental knowledge, is officially encouraged to accept him directly as his eternal guru.

Several years later in Detroit, three of our "zonal *acharyas*" fell down and left ISKCON in rapid succession. Some of the newer devotees had the bewildering experience of being initiated and reinitiated by all three! Many left ISKCON, disappointed and heartbroken. Yet others have continued their *sādhana* and service to this day, years after their "guru" left them. What is the force that kept them advancing on the path of *bhakti*?

Certainly, the "guru" who left was not the link who kept the disciple spiritually enthused and connected to the *paramparā*. Obviously the disciple was anchored in devotional service by a greater, more prominent link- Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is the foundation of Dhīra Govinda prabhu's writing.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is the unifying central figure for all members of the Hare Krishna Movement.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda is given his rightful place in the center, the rest of his spiritual family automatically flourishes. Just like watering the root of the tree! We cannot begin to measure the confidence and enthusiasm all devotees would experience by being able to bring the conditioned souls directly to Śrīla Prabhupāda's shelter.

Time and again, we have seen that when we connect with Śrīla Prabhupāda, transcendental bliss and realization follow. Devotees experience their natural brotherhood and sisterhood under the shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda, their eternal spiritual father. As the astrologer said, "He built a house in which the whole world can live." We, as his followers, have the awesome responsibility to present Śrīla Prabhupāda to the rest of the world *as he is*.

I have great respect for all devotees who have taken on the burden of preserving and pushing forward the Hare Krishna Movement. Our society has been blessed with many advanced, sincere devotees who are dedicating their lives to help Śrīla Prabhupāda spread the holy names of the Lord throughout the world. **Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link** is favorable to all devotees presently serving ISKCON in spiritual or managerial positions. Nothing would have to change – except our society officially acknowledging that Śrīla Prabhupāda continues to be directly available to guide generations back to Godhead.

**Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link** is a workable model that could rejuvenate ISKCON by having Śrīla Prabhupāda directly accessible to spiritual seekers for the duration of the movement. As a spiritual family, I humbly request ISKCON to study Dhīra Govinda's presentation to determine its merit and long-term value to our society. As disciples, it is our duty to investigate how best to directly link the conditioned souls to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I doubt there is anyone who can say with complete confidence that the "guru issue" has been resolved within ISKCON. To become devotees of Krishna, we all had to have open minds. Now we need to *keep* our minds open. We all knew Śrīla Prabhupāda's position when he was physically present. There was no question that he was our eternal guru, the source of our spiritual realization and enthusiasm. Now, we need to come to a clear understanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda's actual position within ISKCON since his physical departure. What is Śrīla Prabhupāda's actual relationship with new initiates?

Before we die, we *must* work together to get this right. Our spiritual advancement requires our heads (jñāna) and our hearts (*bhakti*). I humbly plea that we open our heads and hearts to Dhīra Govinda prabhu's presentation. All glories to Jagat Guru, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda!

Yours in the service of Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Bhūṣāya dāsa

(Bhūṣāya Prabhu was initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1973, and at various times from the late 1980s through 2000 served as Regional Secretary, Temple President, and Director of the Bhaktivedanta Cultural Center at the Fisher Mansion)

### Letter from Bhakti Marg Swami

Dear Dhira Govinda prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

I would like to thank you Dhira Govinda Prabhu for continuing a healthy discussion on *guru tattva*. I understand that the GBC-appointed Sastra Advisory Council is now communicating with you on this topic. The outcome of this practice should bring about a greater clarification. We all stand to gain when implementing Brahminical functions such as discussing philosophical issues. Oppressing them leaves people disheartened, fearful and unfulfilled, which is somewhat symptomatic of our situation today. But that can change. I applaud my godbrothers/sisters for empowering a Sastric Advisory Council that can dialogue with you.

Hare Krishna!  
Your servant,  
Bhaktimarga Swami

## Letters from Partha dasa Prabhu:

Letter from Partha dasa dated 1/18/02:

The Prominent Link proposal, well what can I say. As Krsna says:

*Pratyaksavagamam dharmyam/susukham kartum avyayam.* It is directly experienced and understood, and to execute it makes one happy....One important thing to note is that this “proposal is”, and has been for some time, a reality for many devotees initiated by current ISKCON gurus. I guess we could call them closet PL devotees. By calling it a proposal you are giving the GBC an opportunity to save face.

When I did that survey in 1998 many devotees, of current gurus, revealed to me, in confidence, that this was their feeling, and there are many who offer their food to Srila Prabhupada. At the time I wasn't expecting it but all these devotees just opened up and poured their hearts out. Today, looking at those devotees, they have all progressed in Krsna consciousness.

A brilliant point you brought out is that if one is not able to understand and make that connection with Srila Prabhupada as the prominent link, then he or she is not fit for initiation (and not fit to initiate, if this essential understanding is not understood).

...Regarding the change to the first page of Caitanya-caritamrita, the individuals responsible should be given a gallon of white out and put to work. In our youth study sessions there have been four instances where an individual read a reedited passage and became confused. Another youth who had an original edition would read the passage and the point would be immediately clear...May Krsna bless you for this work...By Krsna's arrangement I was asked to give SB class in Vancouver the day before Janmastami. The verse and purport are amazing. The verse describes the transference of Krsna from the mind of Vasudeva to the mind of Devaki as “initiation”. I see the definition of diksa as not being static, but dynamic and spiritual. To many people the discussion of *diksa* in your paper will seem paradoxical due to the conditioning of material definitions and perceptions...I hope the PL concept can be fully embraced before it is too late...If Srila Prabhupada's position is not fully appreciated his movement could be eclipsed in a few generations.

Letter from Partha dasa, dated 8/28/98, to a member of the GBC:

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada! I am a Prabhupada disciple of 26 years and was head pujari in the Vancouver temple for 19 years, currently residing at Saranagati. I am writing this out of a sincere concern for the welfare of Prabhupada's movement and I am not in favor of *ritvik*....We have a system that is facilitating our “guru” godbrothers degrading themselves. I decided to do a survey of the devotees' perspectives on the guru issue and how they rated the GBC in dealing with the guru issue.

I spent a day and a half at Rathayatra interviewing 54 devotees. It was quite an experience! Interviewed were: 29 Srila Prabhupada disciples, 6 gurukulis, and 19 new disciples or eternal *bhaktas*. I asked the year joined as I wanted to calculate the total number of years experience in devotional service this poll represented. One could poll only very new devotees and likely obtain substantially different results, but what would be the experience behind that opinion? The total experience of devotional service represented by those polled was 1,168 years.

The first question was, “Regarding the current state of the guru system are you satisfied, very

satisfied, no opinion, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied?”

Zero were very satisfied, 6 were satisfied, 5 had no opinion, 22 were dissatisfied, and 21 were very dissatisfied.

Could you imagine asking this question when Srila Prabhupada was on the planet?

The second question was, “How would you rate the GBC body in its handling of the *guru tattva* issue and related problems, on a scale of 0-10, 10 being the top score?” Out of a total of 540 possible points the GBC scored a total of 102. That is an average of 1.89 out of 10. There were 24 zeros, some coming from new disciples very much active in Prabhupada’s movement.

Devotees have lost faith in the GBC. Something has to be done immediately. Srila Prabhupada’s movement is being turned into a laughingstock. Many devotees feel that the entire GBC should be dissolved and reformed.

At several *ista gosthis* the following suggestions were common- no more *pada* names, no more “*srilas*”, no more pictures on altars, all food offered to Srila Prabhupada...Devotees feel emphasis should be put on new devotees taking shelter of temple authorities and local devotees in their area. That was, after all, how Prabhupada taught us...Devotees are wondering if anyone is home at the GBC...The devotees have had it with the current state of affairs!

...Never mind the *ritvik* issue! Srila Prabhupada never appointed anyone to become *acarya*! But after Prabhupada left these unqualified devotees declared themselves “zonal *acaryas*” and pushed Srila Prabhupada into the background. They have done so much damage to themselves and Srila Prabhupada’s movement. An attempt was made to improve the situation by allowing so many more devotees to become guru, but all that has done is to decentralize the corruption. Now, instead of big zonal *acaryas* we have so many little *acaryas*.

Is the GBC so dull that they think that the devotees do not know all that is going on? Do they think that they can dismiss and cover up these falldowns? Even worse is the attempt to muzzle complaints about these horrific abuses of position as fault-finding...We cannot tolerate a situation where innocent people are legislated to worship a “guru” as good as God, as assisting the gopis...and the guru has sex with his disciples, molests children, engages in homosexual activities, does not chant his rounds, has a mental breakdown, takes drugs, etc. What is it going to take for the GBC to wake up? How many governments would stand with an approval rating of 1.89 out of 10?

If you think this survey targeted *ritviks* and fault-finders, then go around and look your Godbrothers and Godsisters in the eye and listen to their hearts...For God’s sake, and Srila Prabhupada’s, do something! If our guru Godbrothers are reluctant to make a change out of fear their standard of living will be jeopardized, how will history view them? Your servant, Partha dasa

## Letter from Madhuha dasa Prabhu

Dear Dhira Govinda Prabhu,

HARE KRISHNA.

I want to thank you for presenting your essay Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link. I appreciate all the concepts you've presented in it. I'd be much more enthusiastic about performing devotional service in ISKCON if the leaders would fully embrace and actually apply the principles presented in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link. Here in Prabhupada Village, in Sandy Ridge, North Carolina, we have a small farm community, and I see that if we would implement the principles in The Prominent Link, things would go much smoother. It seems like any honest devotee, who has learned about Krishna consciousness from Srila Prabhupada's books, would have to agree that Srila Prabhupada is their main source of *divya jnana*, and therefore he is the most direct or prominent link to the *parampara*. Thank you very much for your effort to straighten out some of the deceptions and cheating that has gone on for 25 years in ISKCON.



Your servant,

Madhuha dasa  
Director- Festival of India

### Letter from Naveen Krsna dasa Prabhu:

Dear Dhira Govinda Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

By way of introduction, let me say that I first met Srila Prabhupada in this life, at the University of Illinois by way of his books in 1972. At that time I was completing my graduate work to earn the Master of Science, as well as the Master of Business Administration, both of which I completed in 1973. I physically met His Divine Grace in 1974 in Chicago, and although I had already recognized him as my eternal spiritual master, he graciously officially accepted me, by way of official initiation in 1975. The ceremony and chanting on beads were conducted by one of his representatives, as was the procedure for numerous initiation ceremonies at that time. Just as a note, Srila Prabhupada painstakingly established this system of using representatives to initiate on his behalf for years during the 1970's, just as he established deity worship, prasadam distribution, book publishing, life membership, gurukulas, farms, morning and evening temple programs, Sunday feasts, festivals, and so on.

Although I have numerous disqualifications, before his departure, Srila Prabhupada asked me to help in the management of his society when I was in Detroit in 1976. Over the years, therefore, I have tried to fulfill that order of Srila Prabhupada by serving in various management and leadership capacities within ISKCON, including as a GBC member, GBC minister, Regional Secretary, Temple President, and ISKCON Foundation CEO. I have also assisted in facilitating numerous projects and programs, including the Mayapur Project, Srila Prabhupada's Centennial Celebrations, ISKCON Training Conventions, etc. In the year 2000, after years of seeing first-hand the general ineptitude of the management of ISKCON, after years of trying to assist those in management to come to commonly acceptable standards of responsibility and accountability, after seeing repeated attempts at covering up deviant behaviors by leaders and 'gurus', and because of what many devotees considered an effort by the GBC body to grievously mislead the general body of devotees and ISKCON supporters regarding some very serious matters, I resigned as a GBC member and gave up all my positions of management within ISKCON.

Thus I joined the vast majority of Srila Prabhupada's followers that no longer have faith in the leadership of ISKCON and its policies and procedures. For years now, perhaps even since the late 1970's and early 1980's, an increasing number of ISKCON's loyal supporters are feeling anguish at the state of affairs within Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON. Below I offer to you and the readers of Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link some observations, realizations, and most importantly, exact quotations from Srila Prabhupada's teachings and directives. These may help shed light on the depleted condition of Srila Prabhupada's mission and what needs to be rectified to help Srila Prabhupada save that mission.

Before his disappearance, we heard Srila Prabhupada implore his deputed leaders to at least maintain what he had established, even if they could not expand it. Yet somehow, since the late 1970s and the few years of growth thereafter, that swelling tide has shrunk, and now it is evident that Srila Prabhupada's glorious mission has dwindled and suffered grave damage. As Srila Prabhupada often says, *phalena pariciyate*. "Judge a thing by the results."

As many of us fondly recall, from the mid-1960s till the late 1970s, Srila Prabhupada's mission flourished in miraculous ways, sweeping across the planet and swelling the tide of his mercy, nurturing thirsty conditioned souls everywhere. Although short-lived, the momentum from the late 1970s continued for several years, peaking in different parts of the world at different times. Inspired by Srila

Prabhupada and his teachings, thousands of devotees were initiated after November 1977, having been led to believe, like most older devotees, that the ISKCON guru and management system had been authorized by Srila Prabhupada, and that ISKCON gurus were indeed bona fide *diksa-gurus* as described by Srila Prabhupada in his teachings—pure devotees, liberated souls, free from the four defects of conditioned life. So over the years, pre- and post-1977, you and countless others of us have become Srila Prabhupada's family, overflowing with pride in one another and with confidence in our shared commitment to serve our beloved Srila Prabhupada forever.

Sadly, the story began to change shortly after the GBC introduced their system of initiations. The dwindling of Srila Prabhupada's mission began soon thereafter, with the unprecedented fall downs of so called liberated, bonafide, as good as God *diksa gurus*. The spiritual lives of trusting souls began to suffer irreparable damage as one guru fell after the other. Though the *sastras* clearly state that a bonafide and authorized guru can never fall down, the GBC conveniently ignored whatever scripture did not suit their purposes. Three of the original Iskcon gurus, prior to their leaving Iskcon after having fallen down, told me that they doubted greatly that Srila Prabhupada had set up this system of initiations. Devotees began to leave in vast numbers and the joining of new devotees slowed to a trickle.

Now, 25 years later, it is estimated that more than ninety percent of Srila Prabhupada's followers, pre- and post- 1977, including hundreds of former leaders, have little faith in the remaining leaders of the ISKCON institution, now a corporate good old boys' club that is a small and shrinking part of Srila Prabhupada's vast mission. *Sastra-caksus*—those who have scrutinizingly studied Srila Prabhupada's teachings and directives know why we have lost our faith in these leaders. We have seen the devastations caused by the ISKCON guru system, the utterly scandalous fall downs and cover-ups of various ISKCON leaders and especially the 'gurus', their highly questionable changes to Srila Prabhupada's sacred original books, their brazen abuses of our children and other innocent devotees, and their repeated stone-hearted betrayals of our love and trust.

These leaders have failed miserably to command the respect of the majority of Srila Prabhupada's followers. Thus, most temples have a very reduced number of devotees, all manner of preaching activities have greatly diminished, and there is a great struggle to keep things going, even at a much-reduced level. There are dozens of failed projects, including *gurukulas*, farm communities, cow-protection and *varnasrama* programs, and so forth. Worldwide book distribution peaked at 45 to 50 million volumes a year in the late 1970's but was barely 3 million in 2001—down more than 90%.

Though they are our future hope, our first generation of children has been damaged by countless abuses-betrayals whose consequences, both legal and spiritual, are still not fully understood or manifest. In addition, few new persons are joining the ISKCON institution and making full- or part-time commitments as in the past.

Our greatest allies, our life members, have expressed, in various discussions and surveys, their disappointment and utter embarrassment at the institution's scandals, fall downs, illegal practices, and fundamental lack of integrity. Thus, their support is much reduced, although during the past quarter-century their capacity to assist Srila Prabhupada has increased many times over. As a result, non-Krishna-conscious Hindu temples are springing up all over the world, from the same base of support that was once dedicated to Srila Prabhupada's mission.

Of course there are always some bright and inspiring exceptions, as a result of the dedicated and sincere efforts of devotees who still remain within the ISKCON institution, steeling themselves to all the corruption and degradation for the sake of their services to Srila Prabhupada.

At the same time, a majority of this ninety percent of initiated devotees as well as a great many life members remain just as devoted, just as loyal to Srila Prabhupada as we were in previous days. So we are like the Pandavas in exile, driven out by the forces of a deviant and corrupt corporate clique that Srila Prabhupada never intended. Though we are still devoted members of Srila Prabhupada's family, we are scattered all over the planet, largely disunited and unable to serve Srila Prabhupada as we would love to.

Because we are Srila Prabhupada's family, we naturally agonize over the condition of his mission, and we search for a true understanding of what has caused this degradation to come about. We know many of the answers already. After all, the answers are there in the sacred teachings and divine orders

that Srila Prabhupada has kindly left for us. Further, as we experience daily, Srila Prabhupada continues to direct and guide all who follow him without deviation or personal motivation.

After years of studying and following Srila Prabhupada's teachings and orders and discussing them with many Godbrothers and Godsisters like you, a number of Srila Prabhupada's followers have gathered together to come to an understanding of the reasons for this utter devastation. It thus became clear that the degradation in Srila Prabhupada's mission has come about because the leaders of the official institution have introduced devastating deviations--concoctions and offenses virtually identical to those that Srila Prabhupada describes as having rendered the Gaudiya Matha lost and *asara*, or useless. The crux of these deviations is introduction of a system of initiations that is not authorized or supported by guru, *sadhu* and *sastra*, but is based on personal ambition. You may know that in several meetings when newer GBC members asked for clear proof that the system of initiations, reinitiations, gurus by vote, gurus on suspension, as well as other details that the GBC has set up was authorized by Srila Prabhupada, no person could offer proof that supported this system. But nobody at the GBC level wanted to disturb the status quo that was already in place.

Did Srila Prabhupada leave such important matters of initiations in the hands of his young, immature disciples, who could not even follow the regulative principles and deviated in other dangerous manners as we saw in the years after his physical disappearance? Yet, at the same time he established with such care and detail every other aspect of his society. Was Srila Prabhupada so inept and inconsistent? Did he want conditioned souls to be bonafide *diksa gurus*, that would cause serious damage to the spiritual lives of those that took shelter of his society, as they began to fall and leave? That is not the Srila Prabhupada that we knew. Any intelligent person will know otherwise and look for truth behind the deceptions introduced by the GBC.

Intelligent and sincere devotees, those whose first loyalty is to Srila Prabhupada, should be asking some serious questions. What are the qualifications of a bonafide *diksa guru*? How is he authorized to accept disciples of his own? Can a bonafide *diksa guru* fall down? These questions and others need to be answered with reference to Srila Prabhupada's teachings and directives. Here are just a few references from Srila Prabhupada's vani that shed light on this matter.

#### A) No Possibility a Genuine Vaisnava Acarya or Diksa-Guru Will Fall Down.

Comment: An *acarya* or *diksa-guru* in the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya Sampradaya is, by definition, a fully self-realized pure devotee, or *uttama-adhikari*, free from all defects or imperfections. In other words, such a guru is a fully liberated soul. A bona fide Vaisnava *acarya*, or *diksa-guru*, being liberated and self-realized, is never deluded or confused in any circumstance and never forgets Krishna even for a moment. The idea that a Vaisnava *acarya* or *diksa-guru* may become fallen and degraded is *apasiddhanta*, a total deviation from *siddhanta*. Such offensive ideas run contrary to Srila Prabhupada's teachings and the conclusions of the Vedic scriptures.

#### References:

"A bona fide spiritual master is in the disciplic succession from time eternal, and he does not deviate at all from the instructions of the Supreme Lord...."  
(Bhagavad-gita As It Is 4.42, Purport)

"The spiritual master must never be carried away by an accumulation of wealth or a large number of followers. A bona fide spiritual master will never become like that. But sometimes, if a spiritual master is not properly authorized and only on his own initiative becomes a spiritual master, he may be carried away by an accumulation of wealth and large numbers of disciples. His is not a very high grade of devotional service."

(Nectar of Devotion, Chapter 14)

"A first-class devotee never deviates from the principles of higher authority..."  
(Nectar of Devotion, Chapter 3)

"There is no possibility that a first-class devotee will fall down...."  
(Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 22.71, Purport)

B) Self-Styled, Self-Appointed, Unauthorized Gurus Should Be Neglected.

Comment: Persons who insist on posing themselves as *acaryas* or *diksa-gurus* and who thus neglect Srila Prabhupada's clear instructions on this matter are, in truth, imitators who lack substantial connection to Srila Prabhupada's mission. Serious devotees should neglect such self-styled gurus, their foolish promoters, and other materially contaminated individuals.

References:

"A jealous person in the dress of a Vaisnava is not at all happy to see the success of another Vaisnava in receiving the Lord's mercy. Unfortunately in this Age of Kali there are many mundane persons in the dress of Vaisnavas, and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has described them as disciples of Kali. He says, *kali-cela*. He indicates that there is another Vaisnava, a pseudo-Vaisnava with *tilaka* on his nose and *kanthi* beads around his neck. Such a pseudo-Vaisnava associates with money and women and is jealous of successful Vaisnavas. Although passing for a Vaisnava, his only business is earning money in the dress of a Vaisnava. Bhaktivinoda Thakura therefore says that such a pseudo-Vaisnava is not a Vaisnava at all but a disciple of Kali-yuga. A disciple of Kali cannot become an *acarya* by the decision of some high court. Mundane votes have no jurisdiction to elect a Vaisnava *acarya*. A Vaisnava *acarya* is self-effulgent, and there is no need for any court judgment. A false *acarya* may try to override a Vaisnava by a high-court decision, but Bhaktivinoda Thakura says that he is nothing but a disciple of Kali-yuga."  
(Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 1.220, Purport)

"As soon as a foolish disciple tries to overtake his spiritual master and becomes ambitious to occupy his post, he immediately falls down."  
(Srimad-Bhagavatam 5.12.14, Purport)

"Presently people are so fallen that they cannot distinguish between a liberated soul and a conditioned soul."  
(Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.18.5, Purport)

"If one tries to mingle the worship of *yogamaya* with *mahamaya*, considering them one and the same, he does not really show very high intelligence."  
(Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 8.90, Purport)

"Intermingling the spiritual with the material causes one to look on transcendence as material and the mundane as spiritual. This is all due to a poor fund of knowledge."  
(Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 16.72, Purport)

"...one may try to support his philosophy by joining some caste or identifying himself with a certain dynasty, claiming a monopoly on spiritual advancement. Thus with the support of family tradition, one may become a pseudo guru or so-called spiritual master.... All these are pitfalls of personal sense gratification. Just to cheat some innocent people, one makes a show of advanced spiritual life and becomes known as a *sadhu*, *mahatma*, or religious person."  
(Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 19.160, Purport)

C) Srila Prabhupada, as a Bona Fide Diksa Guru, is Worshiped on the Same Level as Lord Krishna.

Comment: Because Srila Prabhupada is the most confidential and empowered servitor of the Lord, all learned devotees or Gaudiya Vaisnavas in this age worship Srila Prabhupada on the same level as Krishna Himself. All Hare Krishna temples conduct daily worship of Srila Prabhupada, both at *mangal-arati* while worshipping the Deity and again separately during the daily *guru-puja* program, as per the principles of *sadhana* ordained by Srila Prabhupada. They do not worship conditioned souls or unauthorized persons as bona fide *diksa gurus*.

References:

*saksad-dharitvena samasta-sastrair, uktas tatha bhavyata eva sadbhih:*

"The spiritual master is to be honored as much as the Supreme Lord, because he is the most confidential servant of the Lord. This is acknowledged in all revealed scriptures and followed by all authorities."

(Sri Sri Gurv-astaka, Verse 7)

"Just like Krishna can be present simultaneously in millions of places, similarly the spiritual master also can be present wherever the disciple wants. A spiritual master is the principle, not the body. Just like a television can be seen in thousands of places by the principle of relay monitoring."

(Letter, May 28, 1968)

D) Unauthorized Successor Acaryas or Diksa-Gurus:

Comments: Srila Prabhupada did not practice a system of nominating or appointing successor *acaryas* or *diksa-gurus*. Nor did Srila Prabhupada authorize any person, any group, or any organization to nominate or appoint successor *acaryas* or *diksa-gurus*. Nor did Srila Prabhupada indicate that one may appoint himself as *diksa-guru* or *acarya* simply by adopting the role or status. Such ideas are insidious concoctions, unsubstantiated anywhere in Srila Prabhupada's teachings or directives for *sadhana*.

References:

"Why did this Gaudiya Matha fail? Because they tried to become more than the guru. He-before passing away-he gave all direction and never said that 'This man should be the next *acarya*.' But these people--just after his passing away, they began to fight: 'Who shall be *acarya*?' That is the failure. They never thought, 'Why-Guru Maharaja gave us instruction on so many things-why did he not say that this man should be *acarya*?' They wanted to create artificially somebody as *acarya*, and everything failed. They did not consider even with common sense-that 'If Guru Maharaja wanted to appoint somebody as *acarya*, why did he not say? He said so many things, and this point he missed? The real point?' And they insisted upon it. They declared some unfit person to become *acarya*. Then another man came. And then another-'*Acarya*!' Another-'*Acarya*!' So better remain a foolish person perpetually to be directed by Guru Maharaja. That is perfection. And as soon as he learns that Guru Maharaja is dead, 'Now I am so advanced that I can kill my guru and I become guru.' Then he's finished."

(Conversation, August 16, 1976, Bombay)

Srila Prabhupada: "Only Lord Caitanya can take my place. He will take care of the movement."  
(Conversation, November 2, 1977, Vrndavana)

Guest: "When did you become the spiritual leader of Krishna consciousness?" Srila Prabhupada: "When my Guru Maharaja ordered me. This is the *guru-parampara*. Try to understand. Don't go very speedily. A guru can become a guru when he's ordered by his guru. That's all. Otherwise, nobody can

become guru."

(Conversation, October 28, 1975, Nairobi)

#### E) Disobedient, Unauthorized Ideas about Initiation

Comments: Persons posing as gurus often propagate the following deviations:

- a) Vaisnava gurus or *acaryas* may be authorized by ecclesiastical arrangements (*acarya* boards, two-thirds-majority votes, and so forth) or appointed from among immature devotees.
- b) Vaisnava gurus are self-made or nominated by their friends and followers.
- c) Vaisnava gurus are ordinary men who sometimes make common mistakes, and even great devotees (*mahajanas*) sometimes become degraded under the Lord's external maya-sakti.
- d) The bona fide spiritual master may sometimes become a demon.
- e) Sadhana-bhaktas, neophyte Vaisnavas, may accept special instructions and special siddha-pranali "initiation" from an unauthorized, self-styled guru if he claims to be augmenting the teachings of the bona fide Vaisnava acarya.
- f) Neophyte Vaisnavas, although sincerely engaged in the service of the bona fide acarya, require "reinitiation" by an ecclesiastical "guru" when their former ecclesiastical "guru" deviates.

The idea of "reinitiating" devotees who have already earnestly begun serving Srila Prabhupada, having received the bhakti-lata-bija or seed of devotion, is against Vaisnava principles.

Sincere students reject all these unauthorized ideas and never accept imitators as substitutes for the genuine Vaisnava *acarya*.

#### References:

"There is no possibility that a first-class devotee will fall down...."  
(Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Madhya 22.71, Purport)

"One should take initiation from a bona fide spiritual master coming in the disciplic succession, who is authorized by his predecessor spiritual master. This is called *diksa-vidhana*. Lord Krishna states in Bhagavad-gita, *vyapasrita*: one should accept a spiritual master. By this process the entire world can be converted to Krishna consciousness."  
(Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.8.54, Purport)

It is also very interesting to study some additional writings of His Divine Grace. Let us reflect on a poem Srila Prabhupada wrote in 1958-nearly a quarter-century after Srila Bhaktisiddanta's disappearance--about Srila Bhaktisiddanta's official institution. Also, let us take another look at Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.28.48, a passage we always find uplifting.

#### Viraha-Astaka: Eight Prayers in Separation from My Spiritual Master

##### Fourth Octet-The Essential Purport Neglected

Stanza 3: Those disciples who were irresolute in performing devotional service according to your instructions have divided your mission into many factions. It appears that the tigris of ambition for material name and fame appeared and personally provoked this upheaval.

##### Fifth Octet-The Disciple's Empowerment is Lost

Stanza 2: Your so-called disciple, the jackal named Ananta Vasudeva, disobeyed your final instructions to keep the mission united, and thereby created a scandalous fiasco. The result of this philosophical deviation is evident to this day as imitative *sahajiyas* are being worshiped as gurus in your temples.

Stanza 3: Is there a single temple to be found where your instructions are still being followed? As it is said: "*punar musiko bhava*"- Everyone has "again become a mouse."

Stanza 4: The lion's food has been stolen away the deceptive tricks of the Jackal. Now caught in Maya's mighty clutches, everyone is reduced to wailing and weeping.

#### Sixth Octet-The Preaching Mission is Scattered

Stanza 5: The Vaisnavas were famous as "*patita pavana*" (deliverers of the fallen), but now this title has fallen into disgrace. Countless numbers of your disciples have been forced to leave your movement.

Stanza 6: At such an inauspicious time, O Master, what can be done to repair the damage that is done? The beautiful garden that you had so planted is now parched and withered away.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.28.48:

O best of kings, please get up! Get up! Just see this world surrounded by water and infested with rogues and so-called kings. This world is very much afraid, and it is your duty to protect her.

Purport:

Whenever an acarya comes, following the superior orders of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or His representative, he establishes the principles of religion, as enunciated in Bhagavad-gita. Religion means abiding by the orders of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Religious principles begin from the time one surrenders to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It is the acarya's duty to spread a bona fide religious system and induce everyone to bow down before the Supreme Lord. One executes the religious principles by rendering devotional service, specifically the nine items like hearing, chanting, and remembering. Unfortunately, when the acarya disappears, rogues and nondevotees take advantage and immediately begin to introduce unauthorized principles in the name of so-called svamis, yogis, philanthropists, welfare workers, and so on. Actually, human life is meant for executing the orders of the Supreme Lord, and this is stated in Bhagavad-gita (9.34):

*man-mana bhava mad-bhakto  
mad-yaji mam namaskuru  
mam evaisyasi yuktvaivam  
atmanam mat-parayanah*

"Engage your mind always in thinking of Me and become My devotee. Offer obeisances and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me." The main business of human society is to think of the Supreme Personality of Godhead at all times, to become His devotees, to worship the Supreme Lord, and to bow down before Him. The *acarya*, the authorized representative of the Supreme Lord, establishes these principles, but when he disappears, things once again become disordered. The perfect disciples of the *acarya* try to relieve the situation by sincerely following the instructions of the spiritual master. At the present moment, practically the entire world is afraid of rogues and nondevotees; therefore this Krishna consciousness movement is started to save the world from

irreligious principles. Everyone should cooperate with this movement in order to bring about actual peace and happiness in the world.

.....

Now what is needed are the valuable contributions of the readers of this book, and ALL of Srila Prabhupada's followers, especially that majority that has distanced themselves from the official ISKCON, in the mood of an *istagosthi* or open discussion based on Srila Prabhupada's teachings and directives, so that together we may help Srila Prabhupada save his mission and bring all of Srila Prabhupada's followers to a united platform of understanding. Casting aside all deviations and various concoctions, offenses, and material trappings, we can then reestablish love and trust among ourselves, and we cooperate again to help Srila Prabhupada restore his mission and build it to the heights of success and glory that are its destiny.

Even though in exile, as together we reaffirm Srila Prabhupada's family, we can feel heartened that we already have thousands of temples in our own homes and other places, where Deities are being nicely worshipped, *prasada* is being offered and honored, Srila Prabhupada's original books are being studied, and the superpotent chanting of the holy names of the Lord is taking place. We are already part of Prabhupada's Krishna consciousness movement, already part of the majority of Prabhupada's followers who have remained faithful to him and who will continue to assist him in expanding his glorious mission.

We can be confident, as we saw during the glory days not so long ago, that there is immense strength and power in the directives, desires, and pure teachings of Srila Prabhupada. As we again draw together to cooperate and assist him, this time it must be under his unadulterated, undiluted directives, free of misdirection by deviant so called leaders and their shrinking, minority institution. In this way, the miracles of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His great pure devotee and Acarya, Srila Prabhupada, will potently and joyfully become manifest again. The myriad ways in which we can serve him will become revealed and confirmed by Prabhupada's grace. So over the next several months and years, I pray that we will continue to sacrifice our lives in this most noble and personally gratifying and fulfilling endeavor of helping Srila Prabhupada rebuild his mission to new heights of success and glory. Our future and the future of Srila Prabhupada's mission are in our hands, as his trusted and loyal servants.

Yours in the service of Srila Prabhupada,  
Naveen Krsna dasa

### Comments from Other Vaisnavas:

**From Ganapati Swami:**

I would like to thank you for your courage in proposing these ideas for the consideration of all responsible inheritors of the legacy of Srila Prabhupada.

From Bhaktin Jo Ana Prabhu:

Dear honest and thoughtful devotees!

All mercy is here for one who associates with Srila Prabhupada by following his guidance. Actually I knew that in my heart all along, but naturally I wanted to take vows and commit myself fully. To get initiated we had to choose an ISKCON-approved guru and worship him. To bow down and show respect to him was easy and natural for me, but when it came to worshipping him "as good as God", my



heart would not comply.

I am not advanced, nor am I very intelligent. I am a fool who became fortunate only by Srila Prabhupada's grace. Due to my indebtedness to him I am boldly standing up and speaking the truth to glorify His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada, the guru who deserves to be praised by all men for all time. I am only able to do this after being inspired by works that stand up for the truth, like Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link (PL).

Articles like PL help us realize that His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada is very much present, and should always be the most important spiritual personality in the Hare Krishna movement. All devotees should be encouraged to worship the Supreme Lord and His dear devotee Srila Prabhupada, not diverting our attention elsewhere. When our attention is diverted elsewhere things become artificial, confusing and burdensome.

With calm conviction Dhira Govinda prabhu puts forth clear Vaisnava principles. Honest souls are not offended by it. This presentation has helped me in my spiritual growth. Let us not allow fear or feelings of unworthiness to silence us. I pray that not one of us leaves our body at the end of our life with regrets that we did not stand up and defend Prabhupada's rightful position when we could have and should have.

Prabhupada! Krsna!  
Help us remember Your Names  
And not be blinded by petty games.  
Games of power, games of wealth  
False Guru's charms do not bring health.  
We must go to the feet of the Master  
Thus avoiding a serious disaster.

An insignificant follower of Srila Prabhupada,

Bhaktin Jo Ana  
(New York)

**From Ekabuddhi Prabhu, regarding Miriam Prabhu's piece on the GBC's Response to PL:**

I read the Prominent Link and do not understand what the hoopla is about. There are some points that "technically" could raise an eyebrow or two, but basically it is a fairly simple, undemanding presentation of a possible way to look at disciplic succession...Bhaktin Miriam suggests that devotees read it and judge for themselves. I agree with this summation.

Obeisances. Eka Buddhi (North Carolina).

**From Yamala Arjuna dasa Prabhu (Saranagati Vaisnava Community, Canada):**

Just a few days ago Partha and Mother Uttama gave my wife Lilamrta a copy of "Prominent Link". I've read it twice and I felt a "breath of hope", in a more mature way in ISKCON. What you're saying is also the way we've thought and felt for many years. There has been so much pain from a false conception taught to the masses, only making it worse. In the end, no one benefits, unless we come to the point about which you've written, truly understanding Srila Prabhupada's position in his movement.

## **Letters of Clarification and Explanation**

Several devotees have expressed that my letters to them were especially helpful in facilitating their understanding of the principles in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link. They've suggested that some of these letters could be included in the second printing, to augment the presentation in the PL essay

itself. Below are some letter excerpts, with the letters of Dhira Govinda dasa in brackets, and comments or questions from others in parentheses. At the end of this section is a letter that describes some of the author's history in the Hare Krsna movement, as well as his relationship with the Vaisnavas who performed his initiation ceremony. This is included to dispel misunderstandings regarding the motivations behind the writing of Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link. Specifically, in response to misconceptions that The Prominent Link was written because of acrimony held by the author, the letter explains that this is not the case. The author has been treated very well by the ISKCON organization, and holds respect and high regard for the devotees who conducted his initiation ceremonies, and for the many devotees who have guided him in Krsna consciousness. He feels fortunate to have had the opportunity to perform a variety of services for the Hare Krsna movement during the past twenty years.

[My stance is that whatever one's understanding of the May 28th conversation or the July 9th letter, the philosophy of PL stands. In this way the paper can bridge gaps and resolve deep conflicts in our Vaisnava society...]

(One gets the impression from PL that by worshiping my guru I am taking away from Srila Prabhupada.)

[. . . The point above is addressed in the book, in the example about Srila Sukadeva Goswami. We don't formally worship him in ISKCON. That doesn't mean we are disrespecting him in any way. In any event, one can continue to formally worship the Vaisnava who performed the initiation ceremony. Others, who choose to formally worship Srila Prabhupada as their direct link to the parampara should also be respected. Those who worship Srila Prabhupada in this capacity are not inherently disrespecting the devotee who performed the initiation ceremony.]

(We are taught that our initiating guru is as good as God and that he should be worshiped and that we must surrender to him unconditionally and that his instructions are absolute. Now, are you telling us that all those things are not true? If that is the case, then is he just a person that merely conducts an initiation ceremony and gives siksa? Then in that case his importance is negligible.)

[As described on page 49 of Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link, there is an expansive range of healthy, spiritually productive relationships between the devotee who conducts the initiation and the initiate. The Prominent Link (PL) framework supports a wide latitude of these relationships. We have many gurus. It's understood that not all of them are absolute in their position and transcendental stature. The point is that Srila Prabhupada is available as the direct and current link to the parampara. This doesn't negate the understanding that other gurus may also be pure and elevated souls.]

(Initiation is more than a name giving ceremony. It is when you are formally linked to the parampara. But if you are already linked to the parampara through Srila Prabhupada, then why do you need to go through the initiation ceremony in the first place?)

[Sri Krsna set up a system that includes a formal initiation ceremony. Therefore it is important. But it is true that it is not the most important part of the initiation process. The most essential aspect of the process is reception of transcendental knowledge. This is described throughout PL, such as on page 41. A devotee hopefully is linked to the parampara through Srila Prabhupada, before the formal ceremony. This doesn't mean that the formal ceremony is unimportant, but the most essential aspect of the process of initiation has, hopefully, occurred, or at least has substantially begun to occur, before the ceremony.]

(If Srila Prabhupada is more important in my life, then it goes to say that my initiating guru is less important.)

[We each can determine who is (are) the most important Vaisnava(s) in our spiritual lives. For some, Srila Prabhupada is the primary direct influence in their spiritual life. This should be respected and it doesn't mean that they are minimizing any devotee.]

(How can you say that you are not minimizing the guru if you are saying that his picture should not be in the altar, you should not chant his pranam-mantra, etc?)

[Please refer to the Sukadeva Goswami example referred to above. The pictures of many exalted Vaisnavas are not on our altars. This doesn't mean that we are minimizing them. In any event, one may worship as is the current standard in ISKCON. I believe that if some choose to worship the altar that Srila Prabhupada gave us, without change, that should be honored in Srila Prabhupada's organization.]

[If we acknowledge that Srila Prabhupada can continue to give transcendental knowledge to those whom he formally initiated despite the fact that he is not present in his physical form (though he is present in his murti form), then what prevents Srila Prabhupada from directly giving transcendental knowledge, and thus "initiating" in the essential sense of the term, to those who have accepted him as their spiritual master and who did not receive formal initiation from him? If someone is fully surrendered to Srila Prabhupada as his/her direct link to the parampara, and manifests this surrender by humbly serving the Vaisnavas and the mission of Srila Prabhupada, what is the problem there?]

(Guru is as good as Krsna, so Vysa Puja should be grand because it is on HIS behalf.)

[I am suggesting that for sake of unity in Srila Prabhupada's movement, that the most important Vyasa-puja ceremony of the year for all members of the movement should be the Vyasa-puja ceremony for Srila Prabhupada.]

(The book is implying that I should not follow my initiating guru's taylor-made instructions for my particular situation- instead I should go to Srila Prabhupada's books for guidance.)

[Of course we should take guidance from Vaisnavas whom we respect and admire. Also it should be respected if someone's primary guidance is from Srila Prabhupada's books.]

(What authority does the initiating guru have in a disciple's life, then?)

[That will depend on their personal relationship.]

(What I mean to ask (verify) is if a devotee takes initiation from someone who is not very advanced, can he still (the disciple) make great progress in his spiritual life since Srila Prabhupada is his main guru?)

[My understanding is that if someone is fully connected to Srila Prabhupada, and is receiving transcendental knowledge (whether that transcendental knowledge is called diksa or siksa is not relevant for this discussion) from him, and is thus "initiated" by Srila Prabhupada in the essential sense of the word "initiated" (as used in the original version of CC Adi-lila page 1), then that person can progress in spiritual life and return back to Godhead, regardless of who performed his formal initiation ceremony.]

(I understand that Srila Prabhupada is the primary giver of transcendental knowledge. And the giving of transcendental knowledge is the most important part of the initiation process. I also understand that the giving of transcendental knowledge is the essence of disciplic succession. Where I start getting confused is the part where you make the connection between Srila Prabhupada being the

main giver of transcendental knowledge and being the direct link to the parampara. Does one necessarily lead to the other?)

[Inherent in assertions are axiomatic assumptions. An assumption of The Prominent Link, and it could be questioned, and this would form the basis for an interesting discussion, is that Srila Prabhupada would use the words "direct link", "primary link", "prominent link", and "current link" to describe the relationships of the Vaisnavas listed consecutively at the end of the Introduction to Bhagavad-gita As It Is. That is, Srila Prabhupada would describe Narottama dasa Thakur as the direct, primary, current, and prominent link to the disciplic succession for Visvanatha Cakravarti, who is the direct, primary, current, and prominent link for Jagannatha dasa Babaji, etc. If someone asserts that, even though Srila Prabhupada lists those names successively in his list of the disciplic succession, he would not use terms such as "direct" and "current" to describe those relationships, then the usage of terminology in The Prominent Link is questioned. Natural issues to pursue would be the determination of who Srila Prabhupada would describe as the prominent, direct, current, and primary link to the parampara for Visvanatha Cakravarti, for Bhaktivinode Thakur, for Gaurakisore dasa Babaji, etc., if not the Vaisnava acarya listed in the BG Intro.

I am making the assumption that Srila Prabhupada would describe the Vaisnava listed in the preceding number of that list as the direct, current, and prominent link to the parampara for the Vaisnava listed in the following number on the list. Based on that assumption I then ask "What is the criteria for appearing on this list?" We can understand through historical fact related to the personalities on that list that the criteria isn't the performance of a formal initiation ceremony, and it isn't even simultaneous physical existence on the same planet. So what is the criteria? The criterion, as best I can perceive, and I'm open to alternative suggestions, is that the Vaisnava in the preceding number is the main deliverer of direct transcendental knowledge to the Vaisnava in the following number. With that criterion understood as being the determinant of who is the direct and prominent link to the parampara, we can then assess Srila Prabhupada's position in relation to the members of his movement. For those members of his movement for whom he is the main deliverer of direct transcendental knowledge, Srila Prabhupada is the current and primary link to the parampara. (But Srila Prabhupada didn't perform the formal initiation ceremony for that person. But Srila Prabhupada isn't physically present on the planet Earth.) Neither of those attributes are criteria for determining who is the prominent and current link to the parampara, based on the rationale described above.

You asked "Does one necessarily lead to the other?" It does, if the terminological assumptions of The Prominent Link are accepted. If they're not accepted, then one would need to present alternative terminology as to who Srila Prabhupada would describe as "direct", "prominent", and "current", if not the Vaisnavas listed in the preceding numbers in the list at the end of the BG Intro. Or, one could try to refute the essay's asserted criteria for being listed in that list- namely, being the Vaisnava who gives the most direct transcendental knowledge. If there is some criteria that fit better than that one, then let's hear it and discuss it, and apply it to our current situation.

The Prominent Link asserts that the criteria for being on the list is to be the Vaisnava who primarily delivers direct transcendental knowledge to the initiate. A further assertion is that the members of the list, who meet this criteria, can naturally be termed the direct and current links to the parampara. For many members of his movement, including those for whom he did not perform a formal initiation ceremony, Srila Prabhupada is the primary deliverer of direct transcendental knowledge, and therefore it is right and natural to refer to him as the prominent and direct link to the parampara for those devotees. If there is an argument that being the prime deliverer of direct transcendental knowledge does not lead to being the direct link to the parampara, then I'm interested to hear that argument. What is the rationale of that argument? Even if some rationale can be conceived, what is the basis on which the argument that "the giver of direct transcendental knowledge is the direct link to the parampara" can be refuted, such that the idea is not even given legitimacy (perhaps alongside other conceptualizations) in Srila Prabhupada's organization?]

(You rightly point out that in our parampara there are many instances of disciplic successions where no official initiation had taken place. But is there another explanation for this, except that it has been done before?)

[There is the evidence of sastra, philosophy, and logic. What more do we need to accept that such an understanding is legitimate? If we need more, we have it. Experience. Many devotees experience Srila Prabhupada as the direct giver of transcendental knowledge, and thus the link to the parampara. This experience is backed by precedent, sastra, and philosophy. What then is the argument that such experiences should be invalidated in Srila Prabhupada's movement? Please note, as I know you are already aware, we are not seeking to invalidate the experiences of others, who may experience some Vaisnava other than Srila Prabhupada as the prime giver of direct transcendental knowledge. But at least Srila Prabhupada should not be categorically closed out of serving in this role in his movement.]

(I want Srila Prabhupada to be the direct link only because I am sick and tired of guru fall downs.)

[It's really not a matter of wanting or not wanting Srila Prabhupada to be the direct link. The Prominent Link primarily describes an experience that many devotees are having in relationship to Srila Prabhupada. The fact that that experience can exist is supported by sastra and logic, but apart from any arguments or wants or desires, the experience is a reality. This is one reason why the ideas in The Prominent Link are so difficult to refute, or even to attempt to refute- because the essay primarily describes an experience, and that is difficult to counter.

If there were 1,000 mahabhagavatas in Srila Prabhupada's movement performing initiation ceremonies, the principles of The Prominent Link still stand. They are not dependent on the advancement or lack of it of any of the members of Srila Prabhupada's movement. Let's say that those 1,000 mahabhagavatas had thousands of disciples who experience them as the primary deliverers of transcendental knowledge, and thus the direct links to the parampara. Let's say there are a few others, or millions of others, who experience Srila Prabhupada in that capacity. I think that the reality for those few or millions ought to be legitimized in Srila Prabhupada's movement.

Further, apart from the accommodation described in the above paragraph, the mahabhagavatas in Srila Prabhupada's movement might act to connect the members of his movement directly with Srila Prabhupada. That is, the pure devotees in Srila Prabhupada's movement may naturally opt to establish Srila Prabhupada as the direct link for all members of his movement. But even if not, then Srila Prabhupada should still be recognized as serving in this role for those who genuinely experience him in that relationship.

It is not a strong position to base one's conviction of Srila Prabhupada as the direct link on the fact that some in the role of initiating guru have had difficulties. A devotee may say that that argument is negated because his guru and so many others in the movement are pure devotees, and they'll never fall down, and newcomers should simply take primary direct shelter of them as the links to Srila Prabhupada. Some may say that they are naive and gullible, but these devotees may retort that persons like you are simply cynical and jaded. It's important to realize that the principles of The Prominent Link stand, regardless of the purity or lack of it of anyone in Srila Prabhupada's movement. The fact that many devotees in leadership positions have had spiritual difficulties adds to and supports the argument that Srila Prabhupada should be established and promoted as the direct link, for the unification of Srila Prabhupada's movement and for the protection of all participants in his society. But even if these reasons of unification and protection weren't there, the experience of Srila Prabhupada as the current and primary link to the parampara is valid in itself and must be recognized.]

(I thought that disciplic succession has to be an ongoing process, from guru to disciple and so on without any interruptions. Srila Prabhupada is passing on transcendental knowledge to his disciples and his disciples are passing that transcendental knowledge to their own disciples.)

[Yes, Srila Prabhupada taught and is teaching, and those who learn from him teach others, and in this way the disciplic succession continues. This is explained in The Prominent Link, in places such as page 48, in the Questions and Answers section. Devotee A learns from Devotee B, who learned directly from Srila Prabhupada. Thus it can rightly be said that Devotee A is a disciple of the disciple of Srila Prabhupada. Devotee A also learns directly from Srila Prabhupada, and thus Devotee A can also be said to be a disciple of Srila Prabhupada directly, because Srila Prabhupada is directly giving him transcendental knowledge. Devotee A may have many Vaisnavas that he learns from, and thus he has many spiritual masters. So who, for Devotee A, is his prominent link to the parampara? It is, from what I understand, the Vaisnava from whom he receives the most direct transcendental knowledge. If that Vaisnava is Srila Prabhupada, then Srila Prabhupada should be recognized as the prominent link to the parampara for Devotee A.]

(Prabhu, on page #9, you said that Srila Prabhupada will continue to serve as the prominent link at least for the duration of his movement. Are you saying this because there will be no others who can give more divya-jnana than Srila Prabhupada? Or is it because no one should take his place?)

[I'm saying that Srila Prabhupada will continue to be available to serve in this role as prominent link for the duration of his movement. We also acknowledge that some may not experience him in this capacity- they may experience one of Srila Prabhupada's followers in this capacity. That's okay. We accept that experience as legitimate. But in the next breath we express our opinion that the preferred model is for all members of Srila Prabhupada's movement to be connected directly and primarily with Srila Prabhupada. Ideally, in my opinion, no one should take Srila Prabhupada's place as serving as the primary link, even if there are Vaisnavas who may, theoretically, be as spiritually advanced as Srila Prabhupada. But we concede that others may give, to some members of the movement, more direct divya-jnana than Srila Prabhupada. Still, the experience of those who experience Srila Prabhupada in this capacity should be honored. Srila Prabhupada should never be excluded as a potential direct link for members of his movement at any time during his movement. As far as others giving divya-jnana, this is addressed in The Prominent Link on page 41. Other sections in the essay that closely relate to your questions are on pages 38 and 39.]

[If the devotee who performs the initiation ceremony has actually given divya-jnana, then he is giving diksa, and it's okay with me if he is called the diksa guru. Still, I believe that, ideally, Srila Prabhupada is the Vaisnava who is giving more divya-jnana, and thus diksa, than anyone else, and thus Srila Prabhupada is the main guru. I've had ISKCON initiating gurus tell me that they have many "disciples" whom they never instructed before initiation and have never instructed since initiation. That is, they have no relationship with them. In such an instance it is probable that some devotees other than the initiator are giving more divya-jnana to the initiate than the initiating spiritual master (since the initiator is providing none at all). And hopefully the initiates are taking shelter of Srila Prabhupada. In any event, it seems to me that solely by virtue of performing the initiation ceremony one cannot be called a spiritual master. But if one is actually giving divya-jnana, whether performing the ceremony or not, then he is giving diksa. He then could be called the diksa guru, though Srila Prabhupada is the main giver of diksa, and thus the main guru.]

(Srila Prabhupada is giving us initiation through the transmission of divya-jnana, but it is also recommended to ask another devotee to perform the initiation ceremony. Is it really necessary to do that? In other words, it is recommended but not necessary to go through an initiation ceremony since Srila Prabhupada is already giving us initiation through divya-jnana. Is this the PL understanding?)

[It is accepted that one who accepts Srila Prabhupada as the main spiritual master will, in most

cases, want to formalize this through an official initiation ceremony. Such a ceremony is not essential for perfecting one's life, though it is the customary way to do things. Such customs are a Vedic tradition coming from Krsna, and thus should not be minimized, but neither should they obscure the essential principle of initiation, which is connecting with a genuine link to the parampara by receiving divya jnana from him and dedicating one's life to him.]

[Whether we designate the devotee who performs the ceremony as officiating acarya, diksa guru, or any other term, the important point to remember is that Srila Prabhupada remains the primary spiritual master for the devotee receiving initiation. In the model described herein, the devotee conducting the initiation is not the link between Srila Prabhupada and the devotee taking initiation.]

[What potency does the initiator have? Is he just a "primary assistant" that gives a name?]

[There is potency in everything performed in proper Krsna consciousness. Therefore the initiation ceremony and the initiator have potency, as they are performing a Krsna conscious function (assuming that they are Krsna conscious when they do the service). One who performs a Vaisnava marriage ceremony has a special potency to conduct that service and to create an auspicious atmosphere, for the moment and for the life of the marriage. Giving the name is an important part of the diksa process and one needs to be empowered by Krsna to do it well. This is not the most essential part of the diksa process, but it should not be minimized.]

[Diksa is a process, and any Vaisnava who takes part in the process can be considered a guru in some respect. The one who gives the book is part of the process, the one who gives the name is part of the process, the temple president who inspires the initiate is part of the process, etc. But the guru role of "the main spiritual master", the "point of absolute surrender", is already taken. Srila Prabhupada has that role for his movement. This doesn't mean necessarily that no one else in the movement is qualified to take that role. It's just that the position is already taken. If, theoretically, someone is advanced enough to take that role, they won't take it, and they will have no problem with this. Their natural humility will make it abhorrent for them to even consider usurping Srila Prabhupada's position. There is nothing denigrating about being Srila Prabhupada's assistant. In 1975 when Srila Prabhupada's followers brought new devotees to him for initiation, did these assistants feel humiliated because they were only assistants? No. If they were in right consciousness they felt wonderful to assist Srila Prabhupada. And the same applies now. We should all feel that it is a glorious position to be Srila Prabhupada's assistant.]

[For some devotees the guru who performed the initiation ceremony goes way beyond any other assistant, and for some devotees the devotee who performed the initiation ceremony plays practically no role in his life, and in fact there are many other Vaisnavas who do a lot more for the devotee's spiritual life than the initiator. And for many devotees the relationship with the initiator is somewhere in between. Regarding who the initiator can be, that's a managerial, as opposed to philosophical, question. Just as for all services there are guidelines for qualifications as to who can perform it, and these guidelines are established by some ISKCON entity or other, such as the GBC or the temple president, the same would apply for the initiator.]

[There might be someone, or many Vaisnavas, currently in the movement, who are at the topmost platform of purity and devotional service. This isn't the issue in question. The paper is not an argument of negativity. That is, the paper does not assert that there are no pure devotees in the movement and therefore Srila Prabhupada must be the direct link. The paper is asserting that Srila Prabhupada is qualified to be the direct link and he is performing that role quite nicely. There is no need for someone else to do it. Even if a devotee claims "For me the direct link to the disciplic succession is my initiating spiritual master, and that is not Srila Prabhupada", that's fine. We don't object. But we say that if someone experiences Srila Prabhupada as the direct link, what is your objection to that? Why should

that understanding not be permitted? We are stating that Srila Prabhupada is fully qualified to be the direct link for the duration of his movement. If someone has a different understanding of who is the direct link for them, that's okay, but what is the sastric or philosophical argument that refutes the understanding that Srila Prabhupada can be the direct link? If there is no such rational argument, then let us accept it as a legitimate perspective.]

[The principle of pleasing a "living" Vaisnava remains with the PL model. When we are inspired by a Vaisnava we want to please him or her, regardless of whether s/he has a title such as "diksa guru". To be an assistant to Srila Prabhupada is glorious and satisfying, not empty and hollow. Of course anything can become superficial if not accompanied by the proper consciousness. If someone is feeling some sort of degradation or humiliation at being Srila Prabhupada's assistant, there is something drastically wrong with his or her consciousness. If this is the case then of course they should not pose themselves as gurus of any sort. Our drive and inspiration should come from serving Srila Prabhupada's mission. When we see someone blissfully doing this, then naturally we become inspired by that Vaisnava and want to associate with and serve him. Change begins in the world of ideas. Due to persons being attached to a particular paradigm, there may be expected to be substantial resistance. But we must put out these ideas in order to genuinely establish Srila Prabhupada as the main spiritual master for his movement. Again, there are some sectors of the movement that are ripe to accept these ideas, and for others it may take some years, or even generations.

Further elaboration on the "living guru" idea: Srila Prabhupada is living. If it is maintained that he is not physically present, then the same argument can be applied, or will be able to be applied, to all the current initiating gurus in the near future. These gurus, say, will initiate disciples and die when they're 80 years old or so. When a guru is 79 he initiates 18-year-old disciples. These disciples live the next 65 years without a "living guru". How will they be inspired? How are those who took formal initiation from Srila Prabhupada inspired now, although they don't have a "living guru"? Guru is eternal. If we are properly connected we will never feel uninspired.]

[In the essential sense, Srila Prabhupada is the actual initiator and the initiate is Srila Prabhupada disciple. If the initiate is also to be considered the disciple of some other Vaisnava, then it is most appropriate to consider the Vaisnava who is serving as Srila Prabhupada primary assistant for this newcomer as the secondary spiritual master, whether or not this secondary spiritual master is the Vaisnava who performs the initiation ceremony. That is, the essence is the transmission of spiritual knowledge, and the Vaisnava conducting the initiation can only be considered a spiritual master, in any genuine sense, if he is actually imparting spiritual knowledge to the initiate.]

[The listings of the pillars of the parampara, as listed at the start of Bhagavad-gita, may stop with Srila Prabhupada for the duration of his movement. But the parampara continues. When you explain to someone transcendental knowledge about Krsna and the soul, as learned from the Bhagavad-gita and the Vaisnavas, you are continuing the parampara. When that person absorbs the knowledge and explains it to someone else, then that person is continuing the parampara. Simultaneously, Srila Prabhupada is the direct and current link to the parampara for all who receive the knowledge within the umbrella of his movement and his teachings. Srila Prabhupada is alive through his teachings and instructions and he can continue to personally give knowledge through his books and his teachings.]

[Once someone has genuinely accepted Srila Prabhupada as his/her main spiritual master, and has become situated in the transcendental process of initiation with Srila Prabhupada as the primary link to the parampara, then that person need not look for another devotee to be the prime link to the parampara, or to be the infallible spiritual master described in the scriptures. The person may find someone, or many people, who are truly mahabhagavatas at the topmost stage of spiritual realization. And these devotees will naturally guide the person for their highest welfare. But, assuming that this takes place within Srila Prabhupada's movement, then Srila Prabhupada will remain that person's direct and prominent link to



the disciplic succession, and the other devotees, including the mahabhagavatas amongst them, will support and serve this understanding and reality. As described in PL, we have many spiritual masters, and they are not all expected to be purely Krsna conscious. Devotees who inspire us with their classes, or their example, or their record of dedicated service, or their compassion, etc., are all our gurus in some sense. But it's not that we expect each of them to be free from defects, devoid of any motivation other than to serve Krsna. But, in Krsna's two-centered system (PL pgs. 16-18), we do need one Vaisnava to be that infallible spiritual master. For anyone who comes to the movement, that guru-center, topmost Vaisnava spiritual master, is Srila Prabhupada. Other devotees who serve in the capacity of spiritual teacher may or may not be at that highest platform of devotional realization, and they don't need to be, with regard to the teacher function they serve in our lives. Once one has established connection with Srila Prabhupada, one needn't look for anyone else to be the guru-center, which isn't to say that one may not meet and be guided by other Vaisnavas who are pure devotees.]

[Becoming firmly situated in the process of initiation, in the transcendental and philosophical sense, is sufficient to perfect our lives and take us back to Godhead. This process of course includes associating properly with devotees, serving them with humility, taking guidance from them, etc. Part of the process of initiation is the initiation ceremony. The devotee who performs that ceremony is part of the initiation process. It is all one process, and Srila Prabhupada, and the devotee who conducts the ceremony, and the devotee who first gave you a book, and the devotees who guide you in Krsna consciousness, etc., are all part of that process. Srila Prabhupada is the most important part of that process, and thus he can be called the initiator. If one prefers to define initiator in some other way, that can also be accommodated. This topic of terminology (e.g., diksa guru, officiating acarya, initiator) is discussed above. . . So, it's not that we need another initiator, but we need someone to serve the function of conducting the initiation ceremony, which is part of the process of initiation. As described above, our relationship with that person will vary in depth and richness, according to how relationships amongst devotees naturally differ.

Actually, the phrase "we need someone to serve the function of conducting the initiation ceremony. . ." is not quite accurate. We need to connect with Srila Prabhupada as our main guru in order to advance back to Godhead. The formal initiation ceremony is not an absolute necessity, and thus the term "need" doesn't quite apply. The formal initiation ceremony is an expected, standard part of the process that Sri Krsna established. However, it is possible to attain pure devotional service without it. It is not possible to attain pure devotional service without becoming transcendently initiated by Srila Prabhupada, in the sense of being fixed in the transcendental knowledge being mercifully given by him. If we become fixed in that way, but for some reason or another do not participate in a formal initiation ceremony, we can still perfect our lives. However, if we participate in a formal initiation ceremony, but do not become essentially initiated by Srila Prabhupada, then we will not become pure devotees of Krsna. The formal ceremony has an important function to play, but it is not an absolute necessity.]

(A you saying that Srila Prabhupada is our only link to the parampara? Isn't the Diksa Guru also our link to Srila Prabhupada, and therefore indirectly he (the Diksa Guru) is also the link to the parampara?)

[My understanding is that whoever helps us to remember Krsna and to understand and practice the process of bhakti-yoga is assisting us to link with the parampara. In that sense Srila Prabhupada is not our only link to the parampara. I would say that, for anyone who comes to Srila Prabhupada's movement, Srila Prabhupada is, or at least is supposed to be, in the vast majority of cases, the primary link to the parampara. This means that without Srila Prabhupada we would not be connected to the parampara. Many other Vaisnavas are assisting Srila Prabhupada to solidify and continue this connection that we have with the parampara, but Srila Prabhupada's potency to connect us to the parampara is essential. If the other Vaisnavas were to discontinue their efforts we could still be linked through Srila Prabhupada, but without Srila Prabhupada we would not be connected. Many Vaisnavas help to connect

us with the parampara, but their function is secondary, while Srila Prabhupada's role is primary.]

(Is it necessary to formalize our link to Srila Prabhupada through an initiation ceremony? Can we just follow his instructions with the help of a Siksa Guru without ever making it formal?)

[Generally speaking the process is to formalize the initiation. Still, Srila Prabhupada did write "Regarding the disciplic succession coming from Arjuna, disciplic succession does not always mean that one has to be initiated officially. Disciplic succession means to accept the disciplic conclusion" (Letter Oct. 31, 1969).]

[I was introduced to the movement in 1980 in State College, Pennsylvania, by Stambha Prabhu. For about three years I attended fairly regularly evening programs at the preaching center he ran, and also began reading Srila Prabhupada's books during that time. After graduating college I backpacked around Europe and visited some Hare Krsna temples there, including large festivals in England and Italy. In Italy I met the devotees from Israel. My plan when I left the USA was, after a few months in Europe, to spend a year in Israel. I traveled from Europe to Israel, and resided in a small town in the Negev. During this period I visited the devotees near Tel-Aviv every few weeks. After about 6 months in the country, in April, 1984, I moved into the temple. Danavir Maharaja was regional secretary for Israel and spent a lot of time in the country. In Dec., 1985, I received first initiation from Bhagavan Prabhu. By that time I had been studying Srila Prabhupada's books for more than four years. I had first met Bhagavan in Italy in the summer of 1983. He and I had a very nice relationship- close, humorous, respectful. At the time when I received formal initiation, and for years after, I didn't think about "guru issues", or anything of the sort. Still, if at that time I would have crystallized my thoughts on the topic, they would have been the same as, or very similar to, the ideas expressed in The Prominent Link. I served intensely under Bhagavan's direction, and Danavir Maharaja's direction, doing temple service, collecting, distributing books, etc. If asked at that time who is my primary guru and prominent link to the parampara, my answer would have been Srila Prabhupada. Of course, such questions weren't asked in those days. When Bhagavan officially fell down in the later half of 1986, it had little to no effect on me personally. I just went on with my service. I felt bad for him, of course, and I witnessed all sorts of commotion going on around me as a result of his actions. But his actions did not affect me spiritually or materially. Bhagavan's falldown has never caused me any bitterness or frustration, or any other negative emotions that were deleterious to my emotional or spiritual life (I'm not saying that I'm emotionally or spiritually healthy- just that Bhagavan's situation had nothing to do with my emotional or spiritual state).

The nature of my service changed- I became sankirtana leader, then Tel-Aviv temple president, then I went up to north Israel and discovered the Druze. Late in 1988 some senior devotees in the yatra recommended that I ought to take second initiation. I thought, well, if that's the program, then I have no problem with it. They gave me a list of initiators. Danavir Maharaja was the only one on the list who I knew with any intimacy, so I said I'll take him. And shortly thereafter Danavir Maharaja performed my second initiation (technically, I wasn't reinitiated). Just as Stambha Prabhu guided me in Krsna consciousness from the time I encountered the movement for about three years thereafter, Danavir Maharaja was my primary guide and teacher, other than Srila Prabhupada, from about 1983 till the late 80s. Even during the period when I was initiated by Bhagavan, Danavir Maharaja was much more influential for me than Bhagavan. It is clear to me that Srila Prabhupada has always been my primary guru. If asked who have been my other gurus who have assisted Srila Prabhupada in teaching me Krsna consciousness, I've had many, and I continue to have many. Regarding Danavir Maharaja, for the past twelve years or so he has not been as influential in my spiritual life and thought as for the few years prior to that. This is not due to any sort of frustration or bitterness with him. I have full respect for Danavir Maharaja, and his staunch example continues to inspire me. I have no anger or resentment towards him. My feelings for him, and for Bhagavan for that matter, are gratitude for how they've helped me in Krsna consciousness.

The ideas in "The Direct Link" do not stem from negative feelings on my part towards any of my

formal initiators. Rather, they derive from an acknowledgment of my relationship with Srila Prabhupada, as well as, I believe, logic, common sense, sastra, and the experiential reality of many. I believe, based on hundreds of discussions over the years, that many second-generation devotees experience a similar relationship with Srila Prabhupada. The Direct Link is suggesting that this model of relationship be acknowledged as valid. I'm not suggesting (and if it seems that I am, then I need to adjust the presentation in the paper) that one should not or cannot have a close, intimate, surrendered relationship with the physically-present Vaisnava who performs the initiation. I'm in favor of as many close, devotional, and surrendered relationships that one can have with physically present Vaisnavas (not just the initiator), provided these relationships genuinely connect one with Srila Prabhupada. In fact, even if devotee A considers that his direct link with the parampara is physically present devotee B, and not with Srila Prabhupada, I'm not against that. It's a model that may work for some. I'm simply asking that the model wherein Srila Prabhupada is understood and experienced as the direct, current, and prominent link to the parampara be accepted as a valid understanding by the GBC and other entities in the movement. If devotee A accepts and experiences Srila Prabhupada in that capacity, it does not negate close and surrendered relationships with physically present Vaisnavas. For example, someone who joined the movement in 1977, if trained properly, developed a close, personal relationship of submission with the sankirtana leader, or the sannyasi leading the travelling party, or the temple president. Still, the devotee knew and experienced Srila Prabhupada as his link to the parampara. The same can be and is true now.]

[The research and writing that led to Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link is not connected with my relationship with Danavir Maharaja. (Of course it is connected in the sense that that relationship, as well as other relationships and my observations, have informed my writing, but it's not that that relationship has been a driving force leading me to write PL.) Danavir Maharaja and I served closely on many projects from 1983 through 1992. From 1992 through 1998 we kept in close contact with each other and discussed various services, such as Druze and college preaching, though we didn't directly work on the same projects as much as in the years prior to that. Late in 1998 I came out with the paper The Humble Guru. Danavir Maharaja didn't appreciate that paper and for a few months he didn't speak with me. However, by the late spring/early summer of 1998, he and I were again having long phone conversations about various projects, such as the Druze preaching in Israel. This isn't to say that he grew to appreciate The Humble Guru paper, but somehow he got to the point where he did not let it interfere with relating with me about other devotional topics and projects. The last time Danavir Maharaja visited Alachua, late in 2000, he stayed at my home for several days and I greatly appreciated his association. Since around January, 2002, around the time when Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link was issued, Danavir Maharaja, apparently, isn't inclined to speak or be on friendly terms with me, and thus we have not had much contact for the past half-year or so. I do hope that we reestablish our closer relationship, as my relationship with him is one that I deeply value.

Danavir Maharaja became upset with me when I wrote The Humble Guru, and then again when I wrote Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link. Before The Humble Guru he was not upset with me. There was nothing that could remotely be called a "falling out" prior to The Humble Guru. From my side I can say that I have not had any sort of falling out with Danavir Maharaja, at any time including the present, although his perspective might be different. I have great respect and admiration for Danavir Maharaja, while acknowledging that he is unfavorable towards PL.]

## The Humble Guru

The Humble Guru was written in the later half of 1998. In this essay, terms, such as "*dīkṣā guru*", are used in the sense that they are standardly accepted in ISKCON. Concepts such as the essence of

initiation or the validity of reinitiation are not addressed. Rather, accepting hypothetically that the GBC's conceptualizations are legitimate, the paper focuses on the range of choices available to devotees serving in the role of *dīkṣā guru*. Many devotees from all sectors of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement supported the concepts in *The Humble Guru*. In New Raman-reti, in Alachua, Florida, the Board of Directors adopted the essay as a position paper, and at the ISKCON North American reform meetings held in New York, in November, 1998, the group of devotees, as described in the letter following the essay, also accepted the paper.

## The Humble Guru

by Dhīra Govinda dāsa

### Abstract

Gurus who choose to instruct their disciples to concentrate on Śrīla Prabhupāda in ways such as reciting Śrīla Prabhupāda's *pranam mantras* and offering *bhoga* and *ārati* to Śrīla Prabhupāda, are presented as a model for the ISKCON *dīkṣā guru*. Stress is given to the self-determination of the guru, as opposed to legislative force, as a foundation for this system, and to counter arguments that this approach inherently diminishes the position of *dīkṣā guru*. Predominance of *dīkṣā gurus* on the GBC is discussed in relation to the goals of the reform movement of the 1980s, including the dismantling of the zonal *ācārya* system, increased GBC authority over *dīkṣā gurus*, and a more responsive and accountable GBC body. The author concludes that these goals remain largely unmet, and points to continued misunderstanding of the proper position of the *dīkṣā guru* as a significant factor in the dissatisfaction of ISKCON membership and in impeding ISKCON from progressing as a unified entity.

### Introduction

Consider an ISKCON *dīkṣā guru* who prefers that his disciples recite Śrīla Prabhupāda's *pranam mantras* instead of *pranam mantras* for himself. This guru also prefers that his disciples perform *ārati* and offer *bhoga* to pictures of Śrīla Prabhupāda. While this guru allows his disciples to perform a Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony with a special feast on his appearance day, he trains his disciples that for them the most important Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony of the year, and the most important Vyāsa-pūjā offering that they write each year, is for Śrīla Prabhupāda. Would ISKCON forbid this guru to act in this way? That is, would ISKCON demand that the guru train his disciples to recite *pranam mantras* for him, and offer *ārati* and *bhoga* to his picture, and teach that the most important Vyāsa-pūjā offering in the year is for him?

If ISKCON would restrict the guru as described above, then the institution would be limiting the guru by diminishing his self-determination. Of course, by deciding to be a guru in ISKCON an individual agrees to be limited by the institution. Since Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure the GBC has placed many restrictions on *dīkṣā gurus* in the attempt to find the balance between autonomy of the *dīkṣā guru* and the best interest of the ISKCON society. The above presentation is provided to illustrate that demanding that a guru accept various externals of worship is restrictive in the same way as dictating that a guru cannot accept such externals. Either sort of restriction diminishes, within the framework of the institution, and not necessarily ontologically, the independence of the *dīkṣā guru*. This paper proposes encouragement and establishment of *dīkṣā gurus* in ISKCON who make choices as described in the first paragraph.

Considering ISKCON history for the past 21 years, it's safe to say that the worship received by some ISKCON *dīkṣā gurus* is not completely transferred to Śrīla Prabhupāda as it is supposed to be. This doesn't imply that pure *dīkṣā gurus* who are completely transparent do not exist in ISKCON. Rather, it asserts that practically no experienced devotee in ISKCON would agree with the position that every ISKCON *dīkṣā guru* is completely pure and transparent, and that difficulties and falldowns amongst *dīkṣā gurus* are finished. This author has immense appreciation for the dedicated service rendered by ISKCON

*dīkṣā gurus* to Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission. Their personal sacrifice is exemplary, and these suggestions for a reevaluation of the position of *dīkṣā guru* are in no way meant to minimize the glory and achievements of these surrendered Vaiṣṇavas.

Preferences as formulated in the first paragraph can be termed "Prabhupāda-centered choices". *Dīkṣā gurus* regularly make decisions, with possible choices being Prabhupāda-centered or non-Prabhupāda-centered. If a *dīkṣā guru* who is free from personal ambition and all forms of material desire makes a non-Prabhupāda-centered choice, such as training his disciples to focus on his Vyasa-puja rather than Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vyasa-puja, there is no harm, because the endeavor is totally passed on to Śrīla Prabhupāda. However, as argued above, it is reasonable to conclude that not all of the worship by the granddisciples is being properly utilized by the ISKCON *dīkṣā gurus*. Therefore, it is safer, in terms of ISKCON procedure, for *dīkṣā gurus* to make Prabhupāda-centered choices.

A pure *dīkṣā guru* will not mind, and I suspect would be pleased, to see his disciples concentrate more on Śrīla Prabhupāda. In the case of a *dīkṣā guru* who still has some impurity, ISKCON, and also the *dīkṣā guru*, should be very pleased that the granddisciples are protected from having their worshipful propensities misused, because these inclinations are now directed towards Śrīla Prabhupāda. Therefore, it is proposed that Prabhupāda-centered choices are the best option for the ISKCON society, and that ISKCON *dīkṣā gurus* should make Prabhupāda-centered choices whenever possible. Of course, we who are not on an elevated platform do not know *a priori* who is pure and impure, but a course of action that maximizes Prabhupāda-centered choices is the best strategy for ISKCON in any case, even if only one percent of the *dīkṣā gurus* still retain some impurity. Otherwise, ISKCON is, to some degree, institutionalizing exploitation.

Making Prabhupāda-centered choices is an act of free will. By exercising free will in this way, the *dīkṣā guru* is in no way diminished, but rather is exalted for making decisions that are in the best interest of Śrīla Prabhupāda's institution. It is important to understand that it's not that *dīkṣā gurus can't* have pranams, honorific titles, and other external manifestations of worship, but they *choose* not to have them. By encouraging its *dīkṣā gurus* to make Prabhupāda-centered choices, ISKCON is not making assertions about the spiritual level of any particular guru. Even if a *dīkṣā guru* is a *mahābhāgavataa*, if he wants to be a *dīkṣā guru* in ISKCON it already means not accepting externals such as a special seat in the temple, and not accepting titles such as "zonal *ācārya*". These restrictions are accepted as beneficial for Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission and the unity of ISKCON. I suggest that Prabhupāda-centered choices by *dīkṣā gurus* should be increasingly adopted as part of ISKCON culture, because Śrīla Prabhupāda is the attractive principle in ISKCON.

This paper promotes an ISKCON that is more Prabhupada-centered. To accomplish this, it is suggested that *dīkṣā gurus* must consider ISKCON first, putting aside individual benefit and aspirations. Creating a society that is more Prabhupāda-centered will involve genuinely valuing all devotees, as opposed to excessive focus, relative to the entire membership of the movement, on *dīkṣā gurus*. Further, this article asserts that greater accountability on the part of *dīkṣā gurus* and GBCs is a necessity for ISKCON reform, and that to achieve this the institution must reassess the position and function of the *dīkṣā guru*. These topics will now be discussed in greater detail.

### Imitation and an ISKCON-First Perspective

In the domain of *dīkṣā guru*, the principle of imitation, at the expense of discriminatingly following Śrīla Prabhupāda's principle, continues in ISKCON. Just as in the past temple furniture and the concept of zonal *ācārya* reflected imitation at the expense of genuine understanding, it seems that many of the current practices of *dīkṣā gurus* reflect similar misunderstandings. Practices described in the first paragraph are only a few of the elements that could be examined, as there may be many more. Perhaps some of the elements will be found, upon philosophical and historical examination, to be essential and beyond debate. In such cases, ISKCON would be obliged to demand its *dīkṣā gurus* to accept such externals, whatever their preference may be. However, if the organization becomes introspective about the institution of *dīkṣā guru*, it may discover that much imitation continues, resulting in Śrīla Prabhupāda

being deemphasized. Regarding philosophical investigation, the burden of proof should probably be on demonstrating that proposed Prabhupāda-centered choices are not legitimate, in which case an ISKCON *dīkṣā guru* would be prohibited from making such choices. Until such choices are shown to be philosophically unacceptable, they should be encouraged. This approach is contrary to the approach of prohibiting Prabhupāda-centered choices until they're proven to be legitimate. With the former strategy, if we err, we do so with Śrīla Prabhupāda at the center.

This perspective may be difficult to appreciate for many granddisciples and *dīkṣā gurus*. Presently, it is common that disciples worship their guru with honorific titles, *pranam mantras*, and other externals. The guru passes on this worship to Śrīla Prabhupāda, and the disciples advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. All these activities may be legitimate, and the system works for the disciples and the *dīkṣā guru*. To perceive the need for adjustment, one must adopt an ISKCON-first perspective, which transcends the unit of disciples and *dīkṣā guru*. When one embraces an ISKCON-first perspective, it can be understood that by establishing a culture of Prabhupāda-centered choices, nothing is lost and much is gained. For instance, granddisciples whose spiritual master becomes manifestly unqualified often experience a difficult time. In such instances the GBC instructs them to take shelter, at least till they become reinitiated, of Śrīla Prabhupāda. If these devotees have already been trained to find shelter in Śrīla Prabhupāda, due to a culture of Prabhupāda-centered choices, then they will experience less confusion and pain if their *dīkṣā guru* has difficulties.

Also, it is likely, almost inevitable, that Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples who are not serving as *dīkṣā gurus*, especially those who feel disenfranchised and marginalized, will feel more comfortable in the ISKCON family when Prabhupāda-centered choices are more common. Of course, such marginalization is commonly, and in my opinion, often unjustifiably, attributed to envy on the part of the devotee who has left the society. Herein it is suggested that many devotees have been distanced from ISKCON because of a culture that systematically encourages *dīkṣā gurus* to make non-Prabhupāda-centered choices. This pervasive culture is obvious, though largely unspoken, and repulses and alienates those who have dedicated their life to Śrīla Prabhupāda. By promoting Prabhupāda-centered choices, many who have taken shelter of other movements and philosophies will again feel attracted to the ISKCON community.

For instance, consider the following scenario, which currently can be found in ISKCON. In front of the ISKCON temple, which theoretically is Śrīla Prabhupāda's temple, is a large banner glorifying by honorific title the local *dīkṣā guru*, who is apparently regarded by the temple devotees as the "local *ācārya*". That is, he is considered to be the *founder-ācārya* of that temple, just as Śrīla Prabhupāda is the *founder-ācārya* of ISKCON. Inside the temple, on the altar, is the picture of the local ISKCON *ācārya*. An estranged disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda visits the temple. Though he hasn't been in contact with ISKCON for many years, he's heard that the zonal *ācārya* system is no longer extant. Upon seeing the banner and altar and listening to the talk of the granddisciples, however, he does not feel that this is Śrīla Prabhupāda's temple, and goes away disappointed and resentful, feeling uncomfortable with the excessive attention given to the local *dīkṣā guru*. It is not that the visitor feels personal animosity towards the local *dīkṣā guru*. Rather, the visitor hoped for a Prabhupāda-centered experience, and feels deprived of this, due to the non-Prabhupāda-centered culture that has developed at this temple. All ISKCON temples and projects are meant to be Śrīla Prabhupāda's projects, and visitors should sense a Prabhupāda-centered atmosphere when they encounter ISKCON. Aside from veteran devotees, newcomers will also be more attracted to ISKCON as the movement institutes a culture of Prabhupāda-centered choices.

While the concept of "jumping over" applies to granddisciples, due to Śrīla Prabhupāda's unique position in ISKCON the concept does not apply in the same way, or to the same degree, as in the relationship between Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples and Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Śrīla Prabhupāda was displeased when a disciple chanted intensely before a picture of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta. I would think, however, that for any member of ISKCON, now or in the future, to similarly chant in front of a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda would be appropriate. Again, in redefining the practical meaning of *dīkṣā guru* in ISKCON, there needs to be caution to avoid blind imitation.

Devotees throughout ISKCON have expressed, especially during the past year, that the current

*dīkṣā guru* system suffers from unrealized imitation of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and that lack of an ISKCON-first attitude amongst *dīkṣā gurus* is causing the movement to deteriorate into a *matha* mentality. The Bombay Proposals of the GBC, as well as conclusions from the meetings on ISKCON leadership held in Belgium and Alachua, Florida, stress that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the primary guru for all ISKCON members, and specific ideological and practical proposals were offered to reflect Śrīla Prabhupāda's preeminent position. These proposals included reduction of some external forms of worship, such as *guru-pujas* in temples and prohibition of honorific titles, for present *dīkṣā gurus*, as well as clarification that a granddisciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda is not "jumping over" by taking shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda. The Bombay Proposals plainly assert that the duty of ISKCON *dīkṣā guru* is to insure that the master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, is more prominent than the *dīkṣā guru* in the life of the disciple. Clearly this is not the case for many granddisciples in ISKCON, and such proposals from the GBC are welcome. For many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's granddisciples, the *dīkṣā guru*, rather than Śrīla Prabhupāda, is the primary person in their spiritual life. For instance, they are accustomed to regularly hear the lecture tapes of their *dīkṣā guru*, and they hardly ever hear tapes of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Such practices are to some extent the result of non-Prabhupāda-centered choices on the part of *dīkṣā gurus* in their training of disciples, and it is encouraging that the GBC seeks to alter this trend.

## Respect

Some argue that change as described herein will further deprecate the atmosphere of respect in ISKCON. This Prabhupāda-centered proposal should in no way minimize the importance of respect for superiors as delineated in Vedic culture. Propensity for offering respect will be reapportioned, however, and this is healthy for the movement.

For more than twenty years there has been a disproportionate amount of attention accorded to *dīkṣā gurus*, at the expense of Śrīla Prabhupāda and his disciples who are not serving as *dīkṣā gurus*. The point regarding Śrīla Prabhupāda is described above, and it's difficult to imagine an argument that asserts that more respect, in the form of externals, for Śrīla Prabhupāda by granddisciples will be harmful for the individual or the society. Scriptures enjoin that the godbrothers and godsisters of the spiritual master are to be respected on the level of the spiritual master (e.g., *Adi-lila* 17.68 purport). This injunction has been neglected in ISKCON, and a discussion of the meaning of this directive is necessary, though it is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately examine the matter.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that there is no difference between the *dīkṣā guru* and *śikṣā guru* (e.g., SB 4.12.32 purport; NOD lecture 10/29/72 in Vṛndāvana; Room Conversation on 1/31/77 in Bhubanesvara). Granddisciples have been trained to offer Vyasa-puja to their *dīkṣā guru*. If the godbrother washing the pots is supposed to be treated on an equal level, then should the granddisciples also offer Vyasa-puja to him? Should they compose a special pranam mantra for him, and offer arati to his picture? And what about the senior mātājī who has been serving Srimati Tulasi Devi for 25 years? What does it mean that she should be respected on the same level as the spiritual master? Obviously, there are many gurus, and each is greatly respected, though the external manifestations of that respect vary according to roles and functions. From the pages of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, persons such as Śukadeva Gosvāmī and Vidura are accepted as our gurus, and no Vaiṣṇava would doubt that they are on the highest platform of devotional service. However, devotees in ISKCON don't worship their picture, offer them *pranams*, or celebrate their Vyasa-puja, and this is not regarded as a sign of disrespect.

Herein it is proposed that ISKCON develops a culture that embodies the similarity between the *dīkṣā gurus* and other disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and that accentuates, more than the present system, the difference between the *dīkṣā gurus* and Śrīla Prabhupāda. By focusing their respect in this way, disciples for thousands of years to come will be fully trained in the Vedic principles of respecting seniors, and the ISKCON family will assume a more well-rounded, healthy balance, with Śrīla Prabhupāda as the center of the family.

It is widely accepted in ISKCON that each of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers embodies some of Śrīla

Prabhupāda's qualities, though none of them fully represents all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's transcendental characteristics. By establishing systems and procedures that increase the exposure of Śrīla Prabhupāda's granddisciples and future ISKCON generations directly to Śrīla Prabhupāda, and also to Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers other than the *dīkṣā guru* of the member, ISKCON Vaiṣṇavas will imbibe a greater diversity of spiritual attributes. Armed with such heterogeneity of devotional character, ISKCON members can effectively transmit Kṛṣṇa conscious culture and philosophy by multiple methods and to variegated audiences. Alternatively, by perpetuating an inordinate predominance of the *dīkṣā guru*, we face further descent to a narrow, *matha* mentality, wherein an idiosyncratic method of transmission is protracted through generations, at the expense of a cooperative, unified mission.

A *dīkṣā guru* who makes Prabhupāda-centered choices is encouraged to preach vigorously. Such a guru may distribute millions of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, open dozens of temples, and make thousands of disciples, though another issue is that accountability for those disciples needs to be established. The point is that this humble guru system encourages dynamic preaching activity, as concentrating on Śrīla Prabhupāda will naturally foster a preaching mood. Disciples will glorify their *dīkṣā guru* for his preaching achievements, and they'll be inspired to follow in his footsteps. It is the natural quality of a Vaiṣṇava to be humble, and it is also natural for a devotee to dedicate himself to sharing Kṛṣṇa consciousness with others. With such a constellation of qualities, disciples and others will spontaneously offer all respects to such an exalted servant of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

To avoid change towards a humble guru system, a false dichotomy is sometimes presented. Specifically, it is suggested that decreasing external manifestations of worship for the *dīkṣā guru* creates a new species of guru that is not condoned in the Vedas. Hence, it is argued, since ISKCON does not want a concocted type of guru, it must stay with the current system and its trappings. In response, as explained from several angles earlier in this paper, the humble guru is in no way diminished, for his deflection of worship to Śrīla Prabhupāda flows from his free will, and is consistent with the highest aims of Śrīla Prabhupāda's ISKCON and the truest concerns for his disciples. Such a guru is ennobled more than any guru in ISKCON except Śrīla Prabhupāda, because such a *dīkṣā guru* has fully understood the meaning of sacrifice for Śrīla Prabhupāda and his society.

### Honorific Titles

As Śrīla Prabhupāda describes in his books, spiritual masters can accept honorific titles, though in this humble guru system they would choose not to accept them. The propensity of the disciple to use honorific titles should be reserved for Śrīla Prabhupāda. There are *dīkṣā gurus* that find it difficult to imagine by what name their disciples would refer to them if not the honorific title. In response, it may be pointed out that the name bestowed upon the disciple by Śrīla Prabhupāda is glorious, and this name may be suitable for the term of address used by granddisciples. By not using the name conferred by Śrīla Prabhupāda, the *dīkṣā guru* may send the message that this name is not adequate. By making the Prabhupāda-centered choice of teaching disciples to refer to him by the name given at initiation by Śrīla Prabhupāda, the humble guru sends the message that no title of respect could be greater than the name chosen by Śrīla Prabhupāda, which signifies that the spirit soul is a servant of Kṛṣṇa. With such a choice, granddisciples absorb the feeling of love that their *dīkṣā guru* has for Śrīla Prabhupāda. Most *dīkṣā gurus* don't have honorific titles, and this system seems to work fine, which causes one to further question the necessity of other *dīkṣā gurus* to train their disciples to use honorific titles.

To reiterate, it is understood that gurus can accept these titles, but the question is whether accepting them is consistent with the highest welfare of Śrīla Prabhupāda's institution. Moreover, there are already ISKCON laws against using honorific titles. By continuing to use them, the *dīkṣā guru* conveys the message that he doesn't adequately respect ISKCON to follow its laws. Disciples naturally discern this mentality of disregard for the institution. For senior members of the movement, especially when the *dīkṣā guru* with illegitimate honorific title speaks on the importance of following the GBC, the contradictory behavior may rightly be perceived as hypocrisy, further alienating sincere devotees from Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. ISKCON laws regarding guruship are routinely flouted by ISKCON *dīkṣā*



*gurus*, diminishing the integrity and credibility of the institution.

Though it may be convenient for a *dīkṣā guru* to claim that he doesn't want the honorific title, or *pranam mantras*, or other externals, but that his disciples insist, a *dīkṣā guru* who genuinely appreciates the importance of Prabhupāda-centered choices will ensure that his disciples follow his instructions to implement Prabhupāda-centered choices. By fulfilling these Prabhupāda-centered desires of the *dīkṣā guru*, the granddisciple advances because he will be satisfying the essential principle of spiritual life, which is to follow the instructions of the spiritual master. The humble *dīkṣā guru* feels great bliss seeing his disciple worshiping and respecting Śrīla Prabhupāda, and the granddisciple feels pleasure to see his *dīkṣā guru* pleased. The term "humble guru" is used to designate as humble those *dīkṣā gurus* who make Prabhupāda-centered choices whenever possible, though it does not denote that bona fide *dīkṣā gurus* who make other choices are not humble.

### Dīkṣā Gurus and the GBC

While the idea of *dīkṣā gurus* serving on the GBC is not inherently unworkable, there is doubt whether the GBC, approximately 90% of whose members are *dīkṣā gurus*, can visualize and implement appropriate reforms. All devotees should strive to become qualified to be gurus, so to forbid GBCs from being gurus may not be a desirable long-term solution. However, there are serious problems in the current culture of the ISKCON *dīkṣā guru*, and unless these are repaired, it is debatable whether the GBC and the society can properly function.

The idea, instilled in the minds of many leaders, that ISKCON was reformed about a dozen years ago often hinders genuine reforms that are greatly needed. As an example, though I was introduced to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the United States, I joined and grew up in the movement in Israel in the mid-1980s. At the time, I understood that I could take initiation from any authorized *dīkṣā guru* in ISKCON, though I also palpably felt that, if I stayed in that zone, I was implicitly expected to take initiation from the devotee that was regarded as the zonal *ācārya* for that area. The import is that, technically speaking, there was no zonal *ācārya* system because I could have chosen any *dīkṣā guru*, regardless of my geographical location. Practically, however, there was a zonal *ācārya* system, due to the pressure applied to take initiation from the local *ācārya*. From my experience of ISKCON in the late 1990s, zonal *ācāryas* persist. There are places in the movement, not scarce, where a newcomer will feel at least as much pressure to take initiation from a particular *dīkṣā guru* as I did in the mid-1980s. Devotees in ISKCON know it's true, but changes are not made, partly because leaders are convinced that the problem was addressed a decade ago. On the general issue of accountability for gurus, it is sometimes expressed by leaders that ISKCON gurus are now fully accountable to the GBC, though devotees with some experience would laugh, or perhaps cry, at the assertion.

As described above, rules meant to regulate gurus are routinely defied, and GBCs are aware of this. Such ineffectiveness may be connected with the managerial arrangement of a body of *dīkṣā gurus* having the mandate to monitor and reform themselves. At the Alachua leadership meetings, as well as in other gatherings of devotees concerned about ISKCON, the idea of separation of management and initiation was favored. Currently the system resembles the *ācārya* Board of the early 1980s, and conflicts of interest abound, often resulting in a *matha-like* structure.

Apart from disbanding the zonal *ācārya* system and establishing gurus as subordinate to the GBC, the reform movement of the 1980s sought to institute a more brahminical and accountable managerial style, with leaders being more sensitive and tolerant to the needs and views of the membership. From extensive discussions with many devotees, I'd conclude that if there has been progress in this area, it is so minimal as to be irrelevant, and continued lack of sensitivity, competence and accountability has made the GBC irrelevant for most followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Still, there endures an attitude amongst leaders that the skepticism, resentment and apathy towards the GBC is a result of the pre-1987 culture. The implication is that the present GBC is doing an admirable job, and the cynicism of the devotees is due to the behaviors of the pre-1987 GBC. Such a mentality may have been passable in 1988, but not a

decade later.

I personally have many experiences of GBC members acting hostilely, even ruthlessly, towards devotees, often for no apparent or even vaguely justified reason. Also, I've frequently experienced GBC members who demonstrate little or no interest, over a period of many years, in fulfilling the basic functions of their post. Further, my general experience is that attempts to discuss and resolve such apparent flagrancys with the GBC member and with the post-reform GBC body are met with apathy, incivility, derision, and most importantly, a blatant unwillingness to be accountable.

Though my experience is not necessarily representative, many ISKCON members with whom I've spoken have experienced, on a regular basis, ISKCON leaders who callously mistreat devotees, and who are deficient in basic human decency and lack even a minimal sense of responsibility. Also, it should be noted that most devotees with whom I speak are dedicated ISKCON people, not devotees on the outskirts or persons who feel so disenchanting that they've left the movement. Though it may be difficult, it is healthy for ISKCON leaders to hear what the membership is actually thinking and feeling about the leadership of the society. A major protest is that the GBC is remarkably out of touch with the concerns of devotees.

Clearly there are members of the GBC body who are competent, sincere, and attuned to the goals of Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission and the needs of a diverse contingent of devotees. Still, the overriding disposition of devotees towards the GBC as a whole is one of mistrust and cynicism. This attitude amongst devotees may at least partly be due to continued misunderstanding amongst the leadership of the role of the *dīkṣā guru* relative to the GBC. This of course was the crux of the reform attempts of the 1980s, with the result being not so much a change in the conception of *dīkṣā guru*, but an expanded inclusion of *dīkṣā gurus* on the GBC body. This is not inherently deleterious, but has prevented genuine change in the ISKCON culture. In essence, the culture is the same, though the perceived and perhaps real hypocrisy has increased.

Previously ISKCON had a zonal *ācārya* system and admitted it. Now there are zonal *ācāryas* who are impervious to the dictates of the GBC, and the institution pretends that there aren't. Though the GBC is often not willing to monitor, evaluate or discipline gurus, ISKCON advertises that the *dīkṣā gurus* are fully accountable to the GBC. Fifteen years ago ISKCON perhaps didn't talk much about accountability and responsiveness in its leaders. Now the organization bandies about such buzzwords, with leaders often assuming that they manifest such attributes, and increasing numbers of devotees feeling appalled by the hypocrisy and lack of integrity they perceive in the leadership, with no real avenue of redress for iniquities. Much of the effort spent in reform is used to convince others that reform has happened, with little actual progress.

These words are not meant as disrespect for the GBC, but reflect great respect for what Śrīla Prabhupāda envisioned for the GBC. He said that GBC is for life, and I consider this to mean that a member of the GBC should ardently strive to be qualified for the service for the duration of this lifetime. That is, the meaning is not that any level of performance qualifies for remaining on the body. Fortunately, the GBC has demonstrated awareness of many of these concerns. In the Bombay proposals, the GBC recommends more stringent qualifications for *dīkṣā gurus*, establishment of a Guru Review Board, and training for gurus in areas such as interpersonal skills and ISKCON laws and standards.

### Time for Introspection

By not genuinely reforming the institution of ISKCON *dīkṣā guru* to a substantially more Prabhupāda-centered conception, the movement drives sincere Vaiṣṇavas away from ISKCON. If the leadership has the courage to create authentic transformation of the *dīkṣā guru*, veteran devotees and newcomers will again be attracted to ISKCON. While on an individual and local level ISKCON needs to establish the *Vaiṣṇava siddhantha* against threats from *apasiddhanthas*, the best image to project as a worldwide movement at this time is not one of bashing oppositional parties. That is, if a new devotee in a temple is becoming bewildered due to exposure to a deviant philosophy, naturally local devotees should explain things to him in the proper context of Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions. However, as an

international institution, the predominant focus should be introspective. There's too much internal corruption, in the form of hypocrisy and discrediting practices, to concentrate much energy on external criticism. If ISKCON is willing to do the arduous labor of internal rectification, then many if not most external problems, such as devotees leaving for other movements and philosophies, will resolve themselves. ISKCON is where Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers really want to be, and the organization needs to seriously consider how to make ISKCON a more attractive place. Devotees are disappointed with ISKCON, and with the leadership's failure to reform the organization. ISKCON should see this failure as a major reason for devotees leaving and taking shelter elsewhere.

Recently I heard a prominent ISKCON *dīkṣā guru* express, in a public forum, that he doesn't understand the commotion about putting Śrīla Prabhupāda in the center, because, from his stated perception, Śrīla Prabhupāda is already in the center of ISKCON. Such apparent unwillingness for critical assessment of the movement on behalf of the leaders should leave no surprise when devotees are attracted elsewhere.

## Conclusions

This generation of *dīkṣā gurus* knows only Śrīla Prabhupāda as an example of a guru, so some imitation is expected, and perhaps excusable. Still, ISKCON is challenged to develop a model of *dīkṣā guru* that is suitable for carrying the movement into the next millennium, serving an enormous diversity of membership and bringing credibility and pride to Śrīla Prabhupāda's institution.

ISKCON is accustomed to a particular model for *dīkṣā gurus*, and transitioning to a new model may be difficult. Perhaps for some gurus and disciples a major change will not be possible, and ISKCON may need to grandfather some individuals to prevent defections. That is, the organization, in its attempts at reform, may need to recognize that change may need to be gradual, as some *dīkṣā gurus* and granddisciples may not be willing to relinquish old ways of doing things. Rather than lose these devotees, it may be preferable to accommodate them, while simultaneously setting up systems to ensure that Prabhupāda-centered choices are established for posterity.

Generally, disciples who are raised in an atmosphere that resembles a zonal *ācārya* system feel secure and protected, more so than in other places in ISKCON, because such a system provides a strong paternal figure and a family group of godbrothers and godsisters. It is not the intention of this proposal to impede the natural expression of disciples for their *dīkṣā guru*, or to remove shelter for granddisciples without providing a replacement. It is proposed that by maximizing Śrīla Prabhupāda's centrality in ISKCON, all members will feel greater shelter and protection. Further, the current *dīkṣā guru* system is a result of a process of acculturation for the past 21 years, and not all components of this culture are natural and self-evident. Therefore, it can be inferred that we don't necessarily and fully know what constitutes natural expression for Śrīla Prabhupāda's granddisciples towards their *dīkṣā guru*. Choices were made about the institution of *dīkṣā guru* when Śrīla Prabhupāda departed, and some of these choices were not Prabhupāda-centered. I suggest that the society will learn a lot about natural expression between disciple and guru when ISKCON maximizes Prabhupāda-centered choices. Such maximization will require substantial change, which entails a sincere desire on the part of leaders to effect change, despite convenient excuses militating against it.

Another important consideration is that the ISKCON society must organize itself to properly care for those who have dedicated themselves to the service of being *dīkṣā gurus*. Otherwise, qualified people may be reluctant to accept this service, and, to compensate for inadequate systems of material and spiritual care, *dīkṣā gurus* and their disciples may be impelled towards non-Prabhupāda-centered choices.

This paper has focused on cultural change and conscious choice, rather than legislation. While legislation may be integral to a new cultural paradigm, in itself it is not effective, as evidenced by current ISKCON laws meant to regulate *dīkṣā gurus* that are blatantly transgressed by those gurus. The Bombay Proposals and the results from the Alachua and Belgium meetings reveal consensus amongst many levels of ISKCON membership that substantial changes in the interpretation and implementation of the *dīkṣā*

*guru* are needed. For the ISKCON constituency to be satisfied, modifications must entail more than a few resolutions passed at the Mayapur meetings. Real transformation is required. Ideas such as *pranam mantras* only for Śrīla Prabhupāda, proscription against honorific titles for *dīkṣā gurus*, and granddisciples offering *arati* and bhoga to a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda are examples of possible changes. For legislation to result in meaningful cultural change, leaders must genuinely endorse the resolutions. The preponderance of *dīkṣā gurus* on the GBC raises questions about whether ISKCON is positioned for true guru reform. Though this author understands that comprehensive reform involves many more issues than addressed here, these ideas on the cornerstone issues of initiating gurus and the integrity of the GBC are presented in a mood of discussion for the betterment of ISKCON.

Dear Maharajas and Prabhus,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Regarding various suggestions in the paper entitled "The Humble Guru" concerning elements of guru worship such as *pranam mantras*, Vyasa-puja celebrations, pictures of diksa gurus, and tapes of diksa gurus, the paper does not attempt to assess the sastric validity of such suggestions. Rather, the paper recommends that practices in the current institution of the ISKCON diksa guru be open for discussion, with a view to strengthening the relationship between Srila Prabhupada and all members of ISKCON. If current practices are determined, after philosophical and historical analysis, to be the best, or perhaps the only, options available to diksa gurus, then by all means they should be supported.

Let's apply, for example, this approach to the issue of *pranam mantras*. I suggest that the idea that all members of ISKCON be trained to recite both of Srila Prabhupada's *pranam mantras* should be assessed according to sastra and historical precedent. If it's determined that this idea is contrary to Vaisnava siddhantha, then the concept should be rejected, and ISKCON diksa gurus should be forbidden to train their disciples to recite both of Srila Prabhupada's *pranam mantras* when offering obeisances. If it's concluded that the idea is *śāstrically* acceptable, then ISKCON should consider whether to encourage its diksa gurus to train their disciples in this way, as it may strengthen the relationship with Srila Prabhupada. Even if it's determined that the practice is acceptable, it may be concluded that it's not wise to implement it. Still, the idea should be considered and discussed.

Moving to the idea that all members of ISKCON recite at least one of Srila Prabhupada's *pranam mantras* when offering obeisances, this would seem to be *śāstrically* acceptable, since many diksa gurus already train their disciples to do this. Given that it's philosophically acceptable, I suggest that we encourage all diksa gurus to train their disciples to chant at least one of Srila Prabhupada's *pranam mantras*, as this would strengthen the relationship with Srila Prabhupada. Currently, thousands of members of ISKCON don't chant any of Srila Prabhupada's *pranam mantras* when offering obeisances, and perhaps this situation needs to be reconsidered. There seems to be strong support for this, as the group at the recent New York meetings unanimously (21 generally agree; 0 generally disagree; 8 need more information) passed a resolution that all members of ISKCON should be trained to chant at least one of Srila Prabhupada's *pranam mantras*.

Applying the same reasoning to vyasa-puja celebrations, it probably would be *śāstrically* acceptable for all members of ISKCON to celebrate Srila Prabhupada's vyasa-puja in a grander style than any other vyasa puja. If it's found to not be *śāstrically* acceptable, then this author would of course be against the idea. At present, thousands of ISKCON members do not celebrate Srila Prabhupada's vyasa-puja as the most important vyasa-puja of the year, and I suggest that this practice should be properly assessed and reevaluated. At the New York meetings the proposal that Srila Prabhupada's Vyasa-puja be the most important vyasa-puja for all members of ISKCON passed unanimously (32 generally agree). The idea that Srila Prabhupada's books and tapes be the most prominent books and tapes for all ISKCON members also passed unanimously. Since many ISKCON members hardly ever listen to Srila Prabhupada's tapes, this would be a significant change if implemented.

More controversial issues, such as granddisciples offering *arati* to Srila Prabhupada, were also mentioned in "The Humble Guru". Again, the sastric validity of this idea was not discussed. If sastric

analysis determines that the idea is bogus, then of course it should be rejected. If it is determined that the idea is philosophically acceptable, then it should be considered as a means to reinforce the relationship with Srila Prabhupada. At the New York meetings, the idea of all ISKCON members offering arati to a picture of Srila Prabhupada, as opposed to a picture of the diksa guru, was passed by the group of devotees (15 generally agree; 10 generally disagree). The proposal that bhoga be offered by all ISKCON members to a picture of Srila Prabhupada was also passed (15 generally agree; 10 generally disagree). This of course reflects devotee opinion, and not necessarily Vaisnava siddhanta. The proposal that honorific titles in ISKCON be reserved for Srila Prabhupada passed unanimously (20 generally agree; 0 generally disagree; 8 need more information). Also, the group of devotees in New York passed a proposal that "endorses the paper entitled 'The Humble Guru', and requests the ISKCON Governing Body Commission to endorse this paper and to implement its suggestions." (14 generally agree; 1 generally disagree; 16 need more information).

I would like to clarify that none of these suggestions are meant to minimize the great souls serving as diksa gurus. Rather, the recommendations are meant to help ISKCON unify around Srila Prabhupada. Currently, some ISKCON gurus exercise the option to train their disciples to chant one of Srila Prabhupada's pranam mantras, and some diksa gurus train their disciples not to chant Srila Prabhupada's pranams when offering obeisances. We don't consider either diksa guru as inferior or superior to the other. Each is simply exercising a valid option. To conclude, it is suggested that we explore and define the range of options available to diksa gurus, and that we encourage options that will maximize a vibrant ISKCON centered around Srila Prabhupada.

Perhaps these principles and issues were not sufficiently clear in "The Humble Guru", and for this I apologize. Also, it is likely that, due to my nature, I've offended many Vaisnavas with the paper, and for this I also apologize. Hare Krsna.

Your servant,

Dhira Govinda dasa

## **Caitanya-caritāmṛta- Page 1, and Conflict Resolution in ISKCON**

Below is an exchange of correspondence, referred to in the Caitanya-caritamṛta-Page 1 section of Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link, between Dhīra Govinda dāsa and a BBT representative. The topic is a change that was made on the first page of the most recent edition of Sri-Caitanya-caritamṛta. Following the correspondence I make some comments.

Dec. 19, 1999

Dear ... Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Below is the letter I sent to ... with the BBT question that he has referred to you. Thank for your attention in this matter. Hare Krsna.

Your servant,

Dhira Govinda dasa

December 13, 1999

Dear ...,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.  
I have a BBT-related question.

On my Prabhupada Vedabase, which I obtained from the BBT archives in 1996, a paragraph from the introduction to Chapter One of the Caitanya-caritamrta reads:

"The direct disciple of Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami was Srila Narottama dasa Thakura, who accepted Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti as his servitor. Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura accepted Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji, who initiated Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who in turn initiated Srila Gaurakisora dasa Babaji, the spiritual master of Om Visnupada Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami Maharaja, the divine master of our humble self."

In the recent edition of Caitanya-caritamrta (9-volume edition) the passage reads:

"The direct disciple of Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami was Srila Narottama dasa Thakura, who accepted Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti as his servitor. Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura accepted Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji, the spiritual master of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who in turn accepted Srila Gaurakisora dasa Babaji, the spiritual master of Om Visnupada Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami Maharaja, the divine master of our humble self."

On the Vedabase edition, which I assume is the original version dating back to the 1970s, it is stated that Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji initiated Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who in turn initiated Srila Gaurakisora dasa Babaji. In the 9-volume edition it is stated "...Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji, the spiritual master of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who in turn accepted Srila Gaurakisora dasa Babaji..."

I'm curious about the reason for the change. Did the original editors make a mistake- e.g., not properly hearing Srila Prabhupada's voice on tape? Or is it assumed that Srila Prabhupada made a historical mistake when he stated that Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji initiated Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, and the 9-volume editors corrected this mistake? Or for some other reason?

Thank you for your attention in this matter. Hare Krsna.

Your servant,

Dhira Govinda dasa

[end of letter written by Dhira Govinda dasa]

Haribol Dhira Govinda Prabhu

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada!

Thank you for your inquiry concerning the Caitanya-caritamrta changes. I agonized over this one for some time, consulting several senior devotees before making this change. Here was my thinking: First of all, there is no tape of this passage. Rather, it derives from an excerpt of the CC Srila Prabhupada published in March of 1960 in the BTG. Here is how the passage read there (from the latest VedaBase):

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Viswanath Chakrabarty accepted Jagannath Das Babajee from whom Srila Bhaktivinode Thakore was initiated and Srila Gour Kishore Das Babajee the spiritual master of Om Vishnupada Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupad-the Divine spiritual Master of our humble self.

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Notice that while Srila Prabhupada does say that Bhaktivinode Thakura was initiated by Jagannatha das Babaji, he doesn't say that Gaura Kishora das Babaji was initiated by Bhaktivinode, which was added in the 1975 edition of the CC. Historically, neither is accurate if we accept the usual sense in which Srila Prabhupada used the word "initiated." So just on the grounds of bringing the new edition closer to the original words Srila Prabhupada wrote, no longer having Bhaktivinode initiating Gaura-kisora is justified. But we are still left with Jagannatha das initiating Bhaktivinode.

Before we proceed, I tracked down the source upon which Srila Prabhupada based this passage in his BTG and CC, and that is the song by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati called "Sri Guru-parampara". You'll find it in the latest edition of the Songs of the Vaisnava Acaryas, and it is included in the supplementary literature on the latest Vedabase. The actual relationship among all the principals is illuminated there.

The final bit of research that went into my decision was finding support for Srila Prabhupada's strict use of the word "initiated". I found this at Adil1.13:

Among his many disciples, Sriman Srinivasa Acarya was the most famous and the most dear, but it is doubtful that he was his initiated disciple.

This indicates that in this very book (CC) Srila Prabhupada reserved the phrase "initiated disciple" for a formal initiation, and that he felt that the word "disciple" is perfectly appropriate for someone who receives siksa but not diksa from a superior.

So now we have these considerations:

On the side of not changing the "initiated" phrases we have the strong bias against changing the books unless absolutely necessary and the fact that Srila Prabhupada did indeed say that Jagannatha das Babaji initiated Bhaktivinode.

On the side of changing we have this:

How the parampara is listed and perceived is very significant for all devotees. Many devotees know, and soon all devotees will know, that Jagannatha das Babaji did not initiate Bhaktivinode Thakur in any way that is normally understood from Srila Prabhupada's books, other statements, or practice.

Removing the idea that Bhaktivinode initiated Gaura-kisora (a removal supported by the ms) but leaving the other "initiated" will seem to be a gross oversight, since neither initiation is historically accurate.

Leaving one or both "initiated"s will strongly imply that the use of the phrases "direct disciple" and even "accepted [as his disciple]" indicate formal initiation as we know it in ISKCON, which is far from the truth. (Narottama may have "accepted" Visvanatha as his servitor, but it wasn't on the physical plane, since there is a gap between their lifetimes; likewise between Visvanath and Jagannatha das.)

This last was the weightiest argument, in my view, for changing the passage.

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So, after weighing these arguments carefully and consulting with several learned Godbrothers (who came out in favor of change, but not unanimously) and agonizing for several days, I decided to remove the "initiated"s.

Hoping this meets you well, I remain  
Your servant,

...

[end of letter written by the BBT representative]

Of concern is that the explanation for deleting the word “initiated” seems to be largely based on the understanding of the word “initiated”, “as we know it in ISKCON”. Perhaps when Srila Prabhupada used the word “initiated”, he did so deliberately, and the meaning of the term as it has come to be understood in ISKCON is faulty. That is, instead of making changes in this passage based on what we think Srila Prabhupada may have meant, it may be fruitful to consider that the current conception in the organization of the word “initiated” is not perfectly consistent with Srila Prabhupada’s understanding of the concept.

One possible way that this could be true is by referring to one of the definitions that Srila Prabhupada often gave for diksa, or initiation. Namely, Srila Prabhupada frequently equated diksa with the process of imparting transcendental knowledge, or divya-jnana. In the purport of Madhya-līla, 15:108, Srila Prabhupada quotes Srila Jiva Goswami as follows. “Diksa is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as diksa.” Also, in the purport to Madhya-līla, 4:112, Srila Prabhupada writes “Diksa actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all material contamination.” In a lecture on July 29, 1968, Srila Prabhupada said “This is called initiation. Or initiation from the very beginning. This is called diksa. The Sanskrit term is called diksa. Diksa means... Di, divya-jnanam, transcendental knowledge, and ksa, iksa. Iksa means darsana, to see, or ksapayati, explain. That is called diksa.” This is similarly confirmed in several lectures and conversations (e.g., June 17, 1976 initiation lecture; July 11, 1976 lecture; February 22, 1973 lecture; December 29, 1973 lecture; January 27, 1977 conversation).

Perhaps Srila Prabhupada was referring to diksa, or initiation, in the sense of “transmitting transcendental knowledge” when he used the word “initiated” to describe the relationship between Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji and Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur. The ISKCON Governing Body Commission has asserted that Srila Prabhupada is the “preeminent siksa guru” for all ISKCON members and that “ISKCON members shall be trained to place their faith, trust and allegiance first and foremost in the Founder-Acarya who is the preeminent siksa guru for every member of ISKCON.” The Vaisnava who is the preeminent instructor, or siksa guru, and who, more than any other Vaisnava, is worthy of faith, trust and allegiance, may also be considered to be the primary deliverer of transcendental knowledge. Imparting transcendental knowledge, or divya-jnana, is the essence of initiation, and thus the primary deliverer of transcendental knowledge may be considered to be the diksa guru, at least in a transcendental sense, though not necessarily in a formal sense.

In expounding these thoughts my hope is that, with a clearer, deeper, and perhaps synthetic understanding of initiation, or diksa, our Vaisnava society may be able to bridge some gaps and resolve some divisive conflicts. This paper makes no pretense to resolve issues, though I believe that the points described herein are important for discussion. Srila Prabhupada wrote (CC Adi 1:35 purport) "A devotee must have only one initiating spiritual master because in the scriptures acceptance of more than one is always forbidden." We know that Vipina Vihari Goswami initiated Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur, but Srila Prabhupada also wrote, in the original version of Caitanya-Caritamrita, that Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji initiated Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur. Perhaps changing Srila Prabhupada’s words is the appropriate solution to resolve this, though perhaps it may also be fruitful to consider other solutions by looking more closely at various definitions of “diksa” and “initiation”. Hare Krsna.

**The Author**



Dhīra Govinda dāsa was introduced to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in 1980 in State College, Pennsylvania. In 1984 he entered temple life in Israel, where he preached Kṛṣṇa consciousness till the end of 1990. There, his services included Temple President in Tel Aviv, and *saṅkīrtana* leader for a group of devotees who preached and distributed Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in Arab and Druze villages. Dhīra Govinda dāsa holds a Ph.D. in Social Work, and his doctoral dissertation is entitled Effects of the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahā-Mantra on Stress, Depression, and the Three Guṇas. His writings include a book entitled Kṛṣṇa, Israel, and the Druze- An Interreligious Odyssey, and several publications on Vedic social and mental health science in leading journals in the fields of psychology and social work, such as Psychological Reports and Social Work. Since 1992 Dhīra Govinda dāsa has resided with his wife and children in Alachua, Florida, where he served from 1995-2001 on the Board of Directors of the ISKCON New Rāmaṅ-reti Vaiṣṇava community, including chairman for four of those years. Since 1998 he has served as director of the ISKCON Child Protection Office, and has conducted courses and seminars on counseling skills and leadership in devotional communities around the world. He also works as a Social Work Services Program Consultant for the State of Florida, and serves on the board of directors for several educational and social service agencies in north Florida.