

Hearing: The real tradition

By Vidura Das

In the article by Vraja Vilasa Dasa from the Sampradaya Sun *Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right*, the author writes: "Real surrender to Srila Prabhupada means we should follow Srila Prabhupada's instructions on accepting a physically manifest guru..." I would like focus this article especially on this statement because this seems to be the central point from which the author makes his assertions. First and foremost, Srila Prabhupada has never instructed anywhere that we should approach a "physically manifest guru". Sure there are places where Srila Prabhupada says we must approach a spiritual master, hear from him, render service under him, and inquire from him - submissively. These are the general aspects of the guru-disciple relationship. However, these aspects do not necessitate the guru from whom one takes initiation being present in his physically manifest [spiritual] body. All of the above aspects of approaching a spiritual master can be done through Srila Prabhupada's transcendental books, as the following quotes by Srila Prabhupada prove:

HEARING FROM SRILA PRABHUPADA:

"The method by which the transcendental message is received is the method of submissive hearing."

(Teachings of Lord Caitanya - 23, Why Study the Vedanta-sutra?)

"These are not ordinary books. It is recorded chanting. Anyone who reads, he is hearing."

(Letter to: Rupanuga: -- Mayapur 19 October, 1974)

RENDERING SERVICE:

"As long as the Spiritual Master is physically present, the disciple should serve the physical body of the Spiritual Master, and when the Spiritual Master is no longer physically existing, the disciple should serve the instructions of the Spiritual Master." (S.B. 4:28:47, purport)

"As far as my blessing is concerned, it does not require my physical presence. If you are chanting Hare Krishna there, and following my instructions, reading the books, taking only Krishna prasadam etc., then there is no question of your not receiving the blessings of Lord Caitanya, whose mission I am humbly trying to push on." (Letter to Bala Krishna, 30/6/74)

"Just like I am working, so my Guru Maharaja is there, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. Physically he may not be, but in every action he is there. To serve master's word is more important than to serve physically." (Room Conversation, Vrindavan, 2/5/77)

Devotee: ...so sometimes the Spiritual Master is far away. He may be in Los Angeles. Somebody is coming to Hamburg Temple. He thinks "How will the Spiritual Master be pleased?"

Srila Prabhupada: Just follow his order, Spiritual Master is along with you by his words. Just like my Spiritual Master is not physically present, but I am associating with him by his words.

(Lecture - 18/08/71)

"If there is no chance to serve the spiritual master directly, a devotee should serve him by remembering his instructions. There is no difference between the spiritual masters instructions and the spiritual master himself. In the absence therefore, his words of direction should be pride of the disciple." (C.c. Adi 1.35, purport)

INQUIRY/RECIPROCATION:

Paramahansa: Śrīla Prabhupāda, when you are not present with us, how is it possible to receive instructions, for example, on questions that may arise?

Prabhupāda: Well, the questions... Answers are there in my books.

(Morning Walk, Los Angeles, CA 13/5/73)

"Every one of you must regularly read our books at least twice, in the morning and evening, and automatically all questions will be answered." (Letter to Randhira, 24/01/70)

"So utilise whatever time you find to make a thorough study of my books. Then all your questions will be answered."

(Letter to Upendra, 7/1/76)

Reporter: Who will succeed you when you die?

Srila Prabhupada: I will never die!

Devotees: Jaya! Haribol!

Srila Prabhupada: I will live forever from my books and you will utilize.

(Interview, Berkley, 17/7/75)

Satsvarūpa: Śrīla Prabhupāda, there's also a question of reciprocation. You have so many disciples, thousands, and one devotee was asking me yesterday, "How does... I want to please Śrīla Prabhupāda. How does he know my progress and my service because I'm..., when I'm so far away from him and if I don't write him?"

***Prabhupāda:** So his representatives are there, the president, the GBC. They will see.*

Mādhavānanda: The representatives.

Jayādvaita: The representative may be there, but what is my personal relationship?

***Prabhupāda:** Hm? To obey your spiritual master. Whatever he has said, you follow strictly.*

Follow the regulative principles. Chant sixteen rounds. That's all.

(Morning Walk -- April 8, 1975, Mayapur)

Clearly, there is no difficulty in approaching Srila Prabhupada today since all of the above aspects can be satisfied with Srila Prabhupada's books. We can hear from Him through His books, we can serve Him through the orders that He gives to us in His books, and we can reciprocate with Him through His books. We simply have to be determined in this approach:

"My touch is simply a formality. It is your determination, that is initiation."

("The Search for the Divine", Back To Godhead #49)

Srila Prabhupada's books are His sound representation. It is Srila Prabhupada manifested through vibration - His vani. It is certainly possible to approach this manifestation of Srila Prabhupada.

All of the aspects of the guru-disciple relationship can be present in this kind of approach, as shown above. It is this spiritual connection that we should be concerned with:

"So although a physical body is not present, the vibration should be accepted as the presence of the Spiritual Master, vibration. What we have heard from the Spiritual Master, that is living." (Letter, 13/01/69, Los Angeles)

"We are not separated actually. There are two - Vani or Vapuh - so Vapu is physical presence and Vani is presence by the vibration, but they are all the same." (Letter to Hamsadutta, 22/6/70)

"Krishna and his representative are the same. Similarly, the spiritual master can be present wherever the disciple wants. A spiritual master is the principle, not the body. (Letter to Malati, 28/5/68)

"So we should give more stress on the sound vibration, either of Krishna or Spiritual Master. Never think that I am absent from you, presence by message (or hearing) is the real touch." (Letter to students, 2/8/67)

"Although physically we are not together, we are not separated spiritually. So we should be concerned only with this spiritual connection." (Letter to Gaurasundara, 13/11/69)

What has been the general pattern in our sampradaya does not in itself become a law. Whatever rules we abide by are strictly instructed to us by Srila Prabhupada. We cannot just independently look over Srila Prabhupada and into our history, observing apparent patterns in on lineage, and then whimsically derive a spiritual law based on our own observation. Srila Prabhupada never stated anywhere that tradition is automatically law. It is the acharyas who set new precedents and thereby new traditions to begin with. Why is there all of a sudden a problem with Srila Prabhupada establishing a new precedent? In fact Srila Prabhupada says:

"Tradition is just temporary. You make your tradition; he makes your tradition. That is another thing. But the, fact is fact. That is not dependent on tradition." (Room Conversation -- February 13, 1975, Mexico)

(It is a fact that Srila Prabhupada ordered ritviks to act as His representatives in performing formal initiations from the time of His order onwards - new initiates being disciples of Srila Prabhupada.)

"That is called tradition. But that is not paramparā. Paramparā is different." (Lectures - Philosophy Discussions with Syamasundara dasa and Carl Gustav Jung)

"Our only tradition is how to satisfy Viṣṇu." (Lecture: Bhagavad-gita 1.43 -- London, July 30, 1973)

"Vaisnava who is preaching, it may be in a different way, according to time and place and the party--they have to change something, desa-kala-patra--but we have to see the essence." (S.B. Lecture 10/18/74)

Srila prabhupada's ritvik system does not change anything. Many of Srila Prabhupada's disciples were not formally initiated by him, nor had they even seen Him in person. But was there any question as to whose disciples they were? Of course not. So how come there is suddenly a problem with Srila Prabhupada remaining the current link in the disciplic succession today? Srila Prabhupada says that *"The potency of transcendental sound is never minimized because the vibrator is apparently absent."* (SB 2.9.8 : Purport) and *"Reception of spiritual knowledge is never checked by any material condition."* (SB 7.7.1 : Purport) Why, then, is there controversy over whether Srila Prabhupada can become one's Diksa guru today? Srila Prabhupada says *"Diksa actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all material contamination."* (C.c. Madhya, 4.111, Purport) It is very clear: Srila Prabhupada becoming one's Diksa guru can never be checked just because He is apparently absent. Srila Prabhupada says:

"To become disciple means to surrender, voluntarily accepting the instruction, the advice, the order of the spiritual master." (Lecture: Bhagavad-gita 2.10 -- London, August 16, 1973)

"Who is my disciple? First of all let him follow strictly the disciplined rules. (Morning walk, June 13, 1976, Detroit)

Srila Prabhupada is available for everyone to approach in the form of His books. The system of initiations goes on with the ritviks performing the simple formalities, and Srila Prabhupada giving the real initiation: the transcendental knowledge, which has been recorded in and is being vibrated through His transcendental books. The disciplic succession goes on perfectly just as it always has: with the disciple hearing from His spiritual master and acting according to that instruction. Srila Prabhupada says:

"...disciplic succession does not always mean that one has to be initiated officially. Disciplic succession means to accept the disciplic conclusion." (Letter – 1/10/69)

This is what the real tradition is in our disciplic succession, and this is the essence of Srila Prabhupada's representative system that we should all see.

*He reasons ill who tells that Vaisnavas die
When thou art living still in sound!
The Vaisnavas die to live, and living try
To spread the holy name around!*

(Poem by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura)