

ARTICLES SUPPLEMENTING SRILA PRABHUPADA: THE PROMINENT LINK

RESPONSE TO THE SAC

by Dhira Govinda dasa

Introduction

The ISKCON Governing Body Commission's (GBC) Sastric Advisory Committee (SAC) devoted extensive time to the study and critique of *Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link (PL)*. I acknowledge and appreciate this. For several months in 2002, I corresponded with SAC members. This exchange enriched my understanding of the subject matter addressed in *PL*, as well as other topics connected with guru-tattva in Srila Prabhupada's movement.

The SAC wrote, "We can agree without hesitation that Srila Prabhupada is the most prominent link to the sampradaya for all of his followers," and confirmed that Srila Prabhupada being the prominent link to the parampara "is something few will disagree with." With regard to worship practices within ISKCON, the SAC has requested the GBC to define the range of acceptable practices, and has recognized the need for guidelines in other matters for devotees who understand their primary guru relationship to be with Srila Prabhupada. Further, in connection with the Terms of Relegation section of *PL*, the SAC has suggested "changing the wording of the GBC statement to eliminate the words 'can' and 'may'." This step would establish what we understand to be the GBC's position that having Prabhupada as one's prominent guru is equally acceptable to any other situation." In these and other ways, the SAC has grasped the spirit and intention of *PL*.

This article will address some points that hopefully will assist in further elucidating Srila Prabhupada's relationship to those who contact his movement. These points include Srila Prabhupada's presence in his vani and murti, initiation as a process, understandings of the term diksa, and Srila Prabhupada as our medium to understand previous acaryas.

The Initiation Process

Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link asserts that the most essential aspect of the process of initiation is the delivery of divya-jnana, transcendental knowledge, from the spiritual master to the disciple. "Initiation means receiving the pure knowledge of spiritual consciousness" (CC Madhya 9:63 Purport). Understanding this clarifies Srila Prabhupada's role and relationship with the members of his movement.

The formal initiation ceremony is an important, transcendental component of the process of initiation. However, it is not the most fundamental element of initiation. Srila Prabhupada stated, "From 1922 to 1933 practically I was not initiated, but I got the impression of preaching Caitanya Mahaprabhu's cult. . . . And that was the initiation by my Guru Maharaja. Then officially I was initiated in 1933 . . ." (Lecture in Hyderabad, Dec. 10, 1970).

Our disciplic succession, as delineated by Srila Prabhupada, is characterized by transmission of divya-jnana. On the first page of an earlier edition of Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Srila Prabhupada even uses the term "initiated" to describe parampara relationships where no formal initiation ceremony occurred. "Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura accepted Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji, who initiated Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who in turn initiated Srila Gaurakisora dasa Babaji." (CC Adi, Page 1).

In the new edition of Sri Caitanya-caritamrta the words "initiated" in the above excerpt are deleted. According to a representative from the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, the main reason for this book change is that Srila Prabhupada's usage of the term implies something other than the usage of the term "as we know it in ISKCON". This, I believe, reflects a consciousness that may prevent fresh, unfiltered study of Srila Prabhupada's instructions, free from unexamined and perhaps unfounded assumptions that may have entered ISKCON and become part of its culture.

Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link devotes a chapter and an appendix to the above discussion. The paper of the Sastric Advisory Committee (SAC) did not address this change of Srila Prabhupada's words, the import and impact of that change, and the ramifications of that modification on the ethos of the organization and its members. I believe it would be fruitful for the GBC, through the SAC or otherwise, straightforwardly to discuss this topic.

In discussions about the process of initiation, Srila Prabhupada sometimes refers to the essential aspect of initiation, as on the first page of Sri-Caitanya-caritamrta, and sometimes to the formal ceremony of initiation. In the purport to Madhya-lila 15:111, for example, Srila Prabhupada employs both usages. When he writes, "An advanced devotee should respect a person who has been initiated by a bona fide spiritual master and who is situated on the transcendental platform," he refers to the essence of the process. When Srila Prabhupada writes, "Whether a Vaisnava is properly initiated or not is not a subject for consideration. One may be initiated and yet contaminated by the Mayavada philosophy," he refers to the official ceremony.

The SAC contests the claim that transmission of transcendental knowledge is the essence of the process of initiation. In correspondence with the SAC, I wrote that initiation is a process ordained by Sri Krsna, and that the initiation ceremony is a part of that process. I concluded, "[The official ceremony] contains transcendental potency. Still, it is not the most essential aspect of the process of initiation." A SAC member replied, "You are wrong about that." The SAC's paper describes divya-jnana as a "secondary characteristic" of the initiation process.

The disciplic succession as established by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's song Sri Guru Parampara and Srila Prabhupada's list at the end of the Introduction to Bhagavad-gita As It Is, describes a parampara based upon spiritual teachers giving spiritual knowledge to disciples, just as Sri Krsna describes in the Fourth Chapter of Bhagavad-gita. In Bhagavad-gita (4:34) the word upadeksyanti means "they will initiate", and this process of initiation consists of imparting spiritual knowledge. Similarly, Sri Krsna opens Chapter Four by declaring "I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvan, and Vivasvan instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikshvaku." Revealing divya-jnana to the student, rather than any formal element of the process, is the essence of the disciplic succession.

I suggest that the SAC's focus on the formal ceremony of initiation at the possible expense of realizing the primary role of delivery of transcendental knowledge, is a legitimate cause for concern, especially in light of the damage caused in recent decades by over-emphasis on the formalities of initiation. Srila Prabhupada presented a disciplic succession grounded in the essential principles of Krsna consciousness. We need to adjust the imbalance that has arisen since his disappearance to avoid degeneration to a hollow, ritualistic religion.

As part of its response to the section of PL entitled "Srila Prabhupada is Qualified to be Worshipped", the SAC wrote: "We do not make formal offerings to Sukadeva in our regular puja because he is not in the line of initiators of the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya sampradaya. The diksa-guru of a properly initiated devotee in ISKCON, however, is the immediate link in the diksa-parampara for his disciple." This seems to imply that being in the line of formal initiators is the criterion for being formally worshipped, in ways such as pictures on the altar and pranam mantras, in Srila Prabhupada's movement.

If we consider, however, the altar that Srila Prabhupada gave us, and the way he defined the parampara, we see that worship is not based on performance of initiation ceremonies. I cite the above example from the SAC paper as an instance where the organizational culture of accentuating the ceremonial aspects of the initiation process may cloud our understanding of the legacy that Srila Prabhupada has given. Srila Prabhupada did not emphasize the diksa-parampara. PL mentions Sukadeva Goswami to illustrate that lack of formal worship for a Vaisnava does not indicate neglect or disrespect.

As another instance of supposition that has perhaps been insufficiently questioned influencing the organizational culture, the SAC wrote, "Since this is the formal pancaratika method, the guru who is given the offering first is normally the pancaratika diksa-guru. There may be exceptions; the guru-parampara given to us by Srila Prabhupada for worship in ISKCON, for example, includes Bhaktivinoda Thakura's siksa-guru, Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji, rather than his diksa-guru. Nonetheless, offering puja first to one's diksa-guru is the norm practiced in all Vaisnava sampradayas."

This apparently suggests that it is an exception for links in the parampara not to include a relationship involving a formal initiation ceremony. From the time of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, however, most of the disciplic succession connections do not involve formal initiation. Thus, what we have come to accept in ISKCON as the "standard" parampara system is perhaps not actually standard.

Definitions of Diksa

Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link maintains that Srila Prabhupada is the direct link to the parampara for devotees who receive direct spiritual knowledge primarily from him. "Direct link" in the above sentence is defined as "the Vaisnava who directly gives transcendental knowledge more than any other devotee." This definition is consistent with the criterion by which Srila Prabhupada delineates the parampara in Bhagavad-gita As It Is.

This definition of the direct and primary link to the disciplic succession is not dependent on any particular definition of diksa. Whatever one's definition of diksa, Srila Prabhupada is the main and predominant connection to the disciplic succession for those who receive spiritual knowledge primarily from him.

That said, PL presents various perspectives on the term diksa, directly based on Srila Prabhupada's teachings. This is included in PL because there has been too much emphasis in the organization on the understanding of diksa as a formal ceremony. By presenting several quotes from Srila Prabhupada illustrating that diksa is a process for awakening transcendental knowledge, we hope to broaden the perspective of devotees and to inspire deep thought on the significance of spiritual life. Simultaneously, such alternative perspectives can be helpful in providing a synthesis for resolving ingrained conflicts amongst Srila Prabhupada's sincere followers.

Srila Prabhupada writes, "Diksa is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity." (CC Madhya 15.108 Purport). In the purport to Madhya-lila, 4.111, Srila Prabhupada states, "Diksa actually means initiating a disciple with transcendental knowledge by which he becomes freed from all material contamination." Srila Prabhupada's statements in the quotations above are, we believe, unambiguous, not requiring interpretation.

The SAC paper quotes PL as follows:

Srila Prabhupada described initiation as a process, with the essence of this process being the delivery of divya-jnana, or transcendental knowledge, from the spiritual master to the disciple. . . . Initiation, as described above, is a process. Components of this process include receiving and implementing the instructions to wear kanthi mala and Vaisnava tilaka, and receiving a Vaisnava name. The most essential aspect of initiation is receiving transcendental knowledge from a realized spiritual master. [excerpt from PL quoted in SAC paper].

The SAC paper then provides several pages of analysis on the quotes from the Madhya-lila references above, concluding with the paragraph that begins with the sentence, "Of course, the properly observed vows of initiation do lead to the gain of spiritual knowledge and defeat of ignorance, but these are secondary characteristics."

In that section the SAC cites authorities such as Sanatana Gosvami, Narahari Sarakara, and Jiva Gosvami. As a general principle we refer to Srila Prabhupada to understand previous acaryas, not vice versa. We suggest that Srila Prabhupada's meaning in the cited purports of Madhya-lila are clear, and do not demand reference elsewhere for understanding. The SAC's linguistic analysis of the Goswamis' literature may justify a reminder cited in the SAC paper. "The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it." (Bhag. 1:4:1 Purport).

Srila Prabhupada is Living and Present

Transmission of divya-jnana, and not physical presence, is the defining characteristic of the parampara. "Although a physical body is not present, the vibration should be accepted as the presence of the spiritual master." (Lecture by Srila Prabhupada, January 13, 1969). As a present and living guru, Srila Prabhupada is fully capable to perform the functions of the direct link to the parampara for his followers, regardless of when they received formal initiation.

This does not minimize the important roles played by Srila Prabhupada's followers in helping others to connect with him.

The SAC also accepts that Srila Prabhupada can be considered the direct and current link to the disciplic succession, though qualifying: "This makes sense if we understand 'current and direct link' to mean the universal, permanent Siksa-guru of ISKCON." Considering the defining characteristic of the parampara, Srila Prabhupada should be considered the current and direct link to the disciplic succession, without qualifying terms, by all who directly receive transcendental knowledge primarily from him.

The SAC wrote, "If there can only be one guru in ISKCON, and he cannot be categorized as guru in any specific sense, then yes, we should choose Srila Prabhupada."

The understanding of Srila Prabhupada as the guru, the spiritual master referred to when members of his movement refer to the singular spiritual master, has been obscured for many in ISKCON. When Srila Prabhupada writes, "Lord Krsna originally made Vivasvan His first disciple" (BG 4:1 Purport), we accept simply that Lord Krsna was Vivasvan's spiritual master. Our natural response is not to attempt to demarcate the limits of how and in what sense Lord Krsna is Vivasvan's spiritual master.

Similarly, with the listing of gurus in the parampara, it is not Srila Prabhupada's mood to be chiefly concerned with whether the preceding guru is the guru of the successive spiritual master in terms of diksa, siksa, pancaratrika marga or bhagavata marga. He lists gurus in terms of the most prominent spiritual master in the disciple's life. In that sense it is imperative that we educate all who contact Srila Prabhupada's movement that he is, or at least is available to be, their most prominent guru. This does not negate the fact that there are other spiritual teachers, as there were in the era of Vivasvan and in all ages.

From our perspective, the tenor of the SAC paper overly accentuates terms and concepts, such as siksa-guru, diksa-guru and pancaratrika, at the expense of focusing on Srila Prabhupada's primacy as the main guru who is personally available for members of his movement.

In listing the disciplic succession in Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Srila Prabhupada did not qualify Srila Narottama das Thakur's relationship with Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja Goswami, or Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji's relationship with Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur. If asked who is the link to the disciplic succession for Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur, we reply "Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji", without need to explain that Jagannatha dasa Babaji is only a certain type of guru for Srila Bhaktivinode. Such explanations of varieties of gurus and different margas of

devotional service may be helpful in some circumstances. However, such discussions should not obscure the plain understanding of Srila Prabhupada as the primary guru and main link to the parampara.

Srila Prabhupada, as a living, eternal spiritual master, is the guru in whom implicit faith must exist in order for the imports of Vedic knowledge to be revealed to the disciple. The disciple naturally will have other teachers, including the Vaisnava who conducts the initiation ceremony, whom he reveres and profoundly respects. He might not, however, have implicit, unconditional faith in these instructors. He may consider one or more of them infallible, on the absolute platform of realization, but that is not necessary. It is essential that a devotee have at least one guru in whom such implicit faith exists. Srila Prabhupada is fully capable to fulfill that role for all who take shelter in his movement.

Similarly, Srila Prabhupada is the primary guru in the sense that, without his mercy, members of his movement could not advance in Krsna consciousness. Thus, he is the spiritual master described in the verse, "By the mercy of the spiritual master one receives the benediction of Krsna. Without the grace of the spiritual master, one cannot make any advancement."

We have each received the mercy of many Vaisnavas. Some from whom we have received mercy and blessings are, for whatever reason, no longer active and present in our lives, and some may even have left the practice of Vaisnavism. Still, we are able to receive the benediction of Krsna because Srila Prabhupada's mercy is constantly available. This is another sense in which Srila Prabhupada, in a personal and living way, is the main spiritual master, in the most important sense of the term, for devotees in his mission.

Srila Prabhupada, as the spiritual master without whose mercy we do not receive the benediction of Krsna, the guru in whom we must have implicit faith, and the direct and prominent connection to the disciplic succession, is delivering his followers from material bondage, regardless of when they received formal initiation. To accomplish this necessitates that he is living and present.

He is present in his vani, and in his murti form. We believe that realization of the tenets of PL follows naturally from understanding his presence in these forms. The SAC wrote "[Srila Prabhupada] is alive in his instructions, in his murti. . . ." Still, we're not clear about their certainty on this point.

In correspondence between the SAC and this author, one SAC member quoted PL:

Just as Sri Krsna, Srimati Radharani, and Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu are non-different from Their Deity forms, and are fully capable to act and relate in Their Deity forms, the murtis and pictures of the parampara acaryas, such as Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, can similarly act non-differently from the acaryas. Obviously this requires special empowerment from the Supreme Lord. Ordinary persons, or even aspiring Vaisnavas, are not able to reciprocate in their picture form in the way that the great acaryas do. [excerpt from PL quoted by a member of the SAC in his correspondence with this author]

The SAC member replied, "This is a novel theory, or at least one I am not familiar with, that the murtis and pictures of specially empowered acaryas are equally potent to the murtis of the Supreme Lord and His internal potency, while the images of less empowered Vaisnavas are impotent. The arca-murti of the Personality of Godhead is a special incarnation, nondifferent from His original self, and manifests all His potencies to those who worship Him with love. The murti or picture of one's guru is recognized as the proper place to make offerings in worship, but as far as I know the Vaisnava sastras do not identify the guru's image as the same kind of arca-murti."

Many followers of Srila Prabhupada, including this author, believe that Srila Prabhupada is fully living and present in his murti form. It is important that the GBC and SAC clarify this issue for themselves and members of ISKCON.

We receive transcendental knowledge through sound. Srimad-Bhagavatam (3.26.33) states, "Persons who are learned and who have true knowledge define sound as that which conveys the idea of an object, indicates the presence of a speaker screened from our view and constitutes the subtle form of ether." Srila Prabhupada is present, though he is screened from our view, just as Lord Sri Krsna was screened from the view of Lord Brahma. Sri Krsna initiated Brahma with sound. Through transcendental service Brahma could perceive Krsna.

Knowledge given by Srila Prabhupada is apaurusa, "not spoken by any person materially created" (Bhag. 3.26.33 Purport). Srila Prabhupada, though screened from view due to our limitations, gives transcendental knowledge, just as Sri Krsna delivered spiritual truth to Brahma at the beginning of our disciplic succession. Thus, this understanding of the parampara, based on transcendental sound, and not on the formal initiation ceremony, exists from the start of the parampara. A person contacts Srila Prabhupada's movement and primarily hears from him, and therefore Srila Prabhupada is his direct link to the disciplic succession.

In correspondence, SAC members would refer to Srila Prabhupada as a "previous acarya", a term with which this author is not comfortable in reference to Srila Prabhupada. We maintain that Srila Prabhupada is living in his instructions and murti form, and is a present acarya.

Even with regard to the concept of "physical presence", we're not sure that we can support the SAC's contention that "he is not physically present." Srila Prabhupada installed his murti before his disappearance, and it will be valuable to consider the meaning of that action in terms of Srila Prabhupada's physical presence.

Clarification of PL Principles and Dialogue with SAC

We would like to clarify some points in PL that may not have been accurately represented in the SAC's paper. The Prologue to the Second Printing of PL explains that the principles of serving, honoring, and glorifying Vaisnavas, including the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony, are presented about twenty times in the PL essay. "Still," the Prologue continues, "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 Srila Prabhupada'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 Srila Prabhupada as the prominent link to the disciplic succession."

In some places the SAC paper gives an impression that PL is averse to respecting and venerating Vaisnavas other than Srila Prabhupada. The SAC states that the initiator should be allowed the honor of being considered one's guru. This is clearly stated in PL, though PL also emphasizes that Srila Prabhupada is, for many and perhaps most members of his movement, the main guru, directly, and this must be recognized. The SAC paper states that ISKCON gurus deserve "the respect of his disciples", apparently implying that PL opposes this idea. A reader of PL can ascertain that PL fully supports this concept.

The SAC writes, "Whatever may have been the actual relationship between Srila Bhaktivinoda and his diksa-guru (and we hear different stories about this from different sources), it is known that Srila Bhaktivinoda never behaved disrespectfully toward him." This seems to imply that PL advocates disrespectful behavior, which it doesn't. The SAC rhetorically asks, "If we think Srila Prabhupada cannot empower his disciples despite their imperfections, how strong is our faith in him?" Obviously Srila Prabhupada is empowering his followers in amazing ways. This is consistent with the principles in PL.

In correspondence with the SAC, this author wrote, "I, and probably each of us, have many gurus, in the sense of devotees who have inspired and guided us in Krsna consciousness. Srila Prabhupada is not my only guru, although, as described in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link, if I had to identify one person as my main spiritual master, that would certainly be Srila Prabhupada."

On the same topic of plurality of spiritual teachers, I expressed to the SAC,

There is the telescope analogy, wherein we understand that, just as the more finely crafted lenses possessed by a telescope, the more our eye has a direct relationship with the stellar bodies, so similarly, the more transparent servants between us and Krsna or the spiritual master, the more our direct relationship with Krsna and the spiritual master is enhanced. We all accept this important point about the acintya-bheda-bheda-tattva mystery of the disciplic succession.

Still, there is another point about our direct relationship with Srila Prabhupada. That is, all members of Srila Prabhupada's movement have, or should have, a direct relationship with him not mediated by other followers of Srila Prabhupada. That direct relationship is the prime focus of PL. This is not to minimize the extent to which the direct relationship with Srila Prabhupada is enriched and enhanced through the process of serving the servants of Srila Prabhupada. But there is also the unmediated direct relationship, and PL proposes that that unmediated direct relationship is for many, including those who did not receive formal initiation from Srila Prabhupada, the most prime and essential unmediated direct relationship in their spiritual life.

The SAC article states: "Dhira Govinda Prabhu himself is in the position of having received his initiations after Srila Prabhupada's departure. When asked by a SAC member to identify his one diksa-guru, Dhira Govinda Prabhu said that if he were to answer according to the PL understanding, he would have to say that Srila Prabhupada was his one diksa-guru."

What I wrote to the SAC is: "If initiator is defined in terms of the conductor of the first initiation ceremony, then my initiator is Bhagavan Prabhu. If initiator is defined in terms of the conductor of the second initiation ceremony, then my initiator is Danavir Maharaja. If initiator is defined in terms of the prime giver of transcendental knowledge (as Srila Prabhupada uses the term on the first page of the Sri Caitanya-caritamrta), then my initiator is Srila Prabhupada. Whatever definition you are comfortable with, that's okay with me (not that acceptance by me need be relevant for any of the recipients of this posting). . . . The assertions in the essay are not dependent on this discussion of terminology, which isn't to say that this discussion of terminology isn't important (it is important)."

Many concepts in this response article, about which readers may have questions, are addressed in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link, especially in the Questions and Answers chapter. Issues addressed include: Pure devotees in Srila Prabhupada's movement; discussion of how initiates will practically conduct their spiritual life in the PL model; the question of acceptance of acaryas such as Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura as the direct link to the parampara; and the topic of "Whose disciples are they?"

After the GBC meetings in 2002 I contacted the Chairman of the SAC, as the GBC requested. In Vrndavana we had a friendly conversation and touched on some of the points in PL. He said that the SAC would contact me when they were ready to discuss PL in detail. That took a few months, and, in July 2002, the SAC and I began email correspondence. We corresponded for more than three months.

After completing the day's Vaisnava Life Skills course that I was teaching in Radhadesa (Belgium) in early November 2002, a member of the GBC phoned. He had heard that I was planning to publish a second printing of PL. He asked whether it would be acceptable for me if I included the full correspondence between the SAC and I in that second printing. He was under the impression that the SAC would likely agree to this. I readily agreed, though I cautioned him I was doubtful that the SAC would consent.

When I returned to Alachua a few days later, I received correspondence from this GBC member and the SAC Chairman, confirming that the SAC wanted to keep our correspondence confidential and did not want it available to the devotee public. I remain eager for that correspondence to be made available, and for anything I've written therein to be scrutinized.

Regarding my cooperation with the SAC, I wrote to them on August 31, 2002:

I am appreciating and absorbing the comments and reflections of the members of the SAC, and, whatever further realizations you have to share, I'll be glad to hear and study. If the SAC would like me to contribute to some paper (probably primarily exploratory rather than conclusive) in collaboration with the committee members, that sounds like a productive, albeit long-term, project. For the more immediate future perhaps the SAC can make some specific recommendations and proposals to the GBC, based on our discussions. I'll help out with this if you'd like.

I remain open and enthusiastic to hear from and discuss with Vaisnavas, including members of the SAC, about elements in PL, as well as other topics of interest to them.

Conclusion

When a person contacts Srila Prabhupada's movement, he has found a spiritual master. He doesn't need to continue looking for a guru, in the sense of the guru who is his primary link to the parampara and main inspiration in spiritual life. By establishing a connection with Srila Prabhupada he has linked with a bona fide spiritual master on the absolute platform in whom he can place unconditional faith and to whom he can securely and completely surrender and render service.

Naturally, during the course of his devotional life, other Vaisnavas will inspire, guide and teach him. The relationships with and depth of faith in these devotees will be varied, though all will be characterized by respect and gratitude. The formal initiation ceremony is a transcendental event that officially acknowledges that the initiate has already connected with the parampara via a direct service relationship with Srila Prabhupada.

That relationship does not become indirect at the time of the official initiation, though of course the initiate's connection with Srila Prabhupada will continually be enriched by the mentoring of many devotees. We suggest that throughout Srila Prabhupada's movement initiations based on the understanding that Srila Prabhupada is the direct link to the disciplic succession for the initiate be made available.

The Weightiest Argument

May 17, 2006

by Dhira Govinda dasa

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

changing the passage" [Letter excerpt from BBT representative regarding the change on Sri-Caitanya-caritamrta page 1].

"The revision is small and in itself, we believe, of no great consequence" [Jayadvaita Swami, regarding the revision on Sri-Caitanya-caritamrta, page 1].

In May, 2005 I fortuitously encountered Jayadvaita Maharaja at a Sunday feast program in Alachua, and he shared with me about recent, somewhat extended deliberations, and conclusions, of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) directors concerning the revision on the first page of Sri-Caitanya-caritamrta. In July, 2005 I received the article that he wrote, on behalf of the BBT, about this matter. This article is now apparently receiving increased attention. Jayadvaita Maharaja wrote "In particular, Dhira Govinda Prabhu questioned it and asked us to reconsider it. We took his request seriously." The BBT directors did devote extended hours to this topic, and I sincerely appreciate their earnest attention to the matter.

My perspective is that the revision is of profound consequence. Perhaps of even greater moment is the fact that the BBT directors believe that the revision is "in itself,... of no great consequence."

On June 16, 2000, about half a year after he wrote the letter from which the excerpt at the start of this posting is taken, the BBT representative who had written "This last was the weightiest argument...", wrote to me as follows:

"Aside from the passage itself, I can easily see the following syllogism flowing from your notes on diksa: Diksa is really the imparting of transcendental knowledge. Srila Prabhupada is the pre-eminent impartor of transcendental knowledge for all generations of ISKCON devotees, now and in the future. So Srila Prabhupada is giving diksa to all who take knowledge from his books, tapes and other media. He who gives diksa is the diksa-guru.

One is enjoined to have only one diksa-guru because the acceptance of more than one is strictly forbidden in the sastra. Therefore Srila Prabhupada is the only diksa-guru for all ISKCON devotees for the next ten thousand years.

"I don't think I want to go down that road."

[end of letter excerpt from BBT representative]

I feel compelled to state that this article is not about whether "Srila Prabhupada is the only diksa-guru for all ISKCON devotees for the next ten thousand years." My views about Srila Prabhupada's relationship with the members of his movement are expressed in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link (available at <http://geocities.com/pointofsurrender/index.htm>) and other essays. My original correspondence with BBT representatives concerning the book change on the first page of Sri-Caitanya-caritamrta is available in Appendix C of the second printing of Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link, and a short chapter discussing ramifications of this change is included as Chapter Three in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link.

This article is about an apparent knowledge filter that is active in decisions regarding revisions to Srila Prabhupada's books. From what I am able to discern, the psychology underlying the emendation under discussion embraces *a priori* assumptions regarding which roads may be traversed. Rather than impartially presenting Srila Prabhupada's words with an eagerness to discover which roads open, there seems to be an attitude, albeit subconscious, of pre-determining which paths are permissible for visitation, and accordingly adjusting Srila Prabhupada's writings.

While recognizing the attempts of the BBT representatives to transparently represent Srila Prabhupada, it seems that in this instance Srila Prabhupada's clear intentions are obscured for the reader due to a filter composed of presuppositions. These assumptions perhaps have not been closely examined, or at least are not readily apparent to many current and future readers of Srila Prabhupada's books.

In an article dated May 6, 2006, Bala dasa Prabhu similarly addresses the topic. "This is a very troubling development for yet another reason. For this justification is laying the ground

for making ANY further change to Srila Prabhupada's teachings that the GBC deems fit." Notwithstanding the distinction between the GBC and BBT, Bala dasa's essential point seems to be a caution regarding the peril implied by application over time of this "weightiest argument" to revising Srila Prabhupada's books.

Apart from future considerations of damage caused by this gatekeeper mentality, I believe it relevant to contemplate present effects. The revision to the first page of Sri-Caitanya-caritamrta (CC) is one of thousands of changes to Srila Prabhupada's books. Perhaps the knowledge filter has been productive in more than this one case. Maybe it has had its effect in two or three, or perhaps dozens, of the changes to Srila Prabhupada's books. We might fruitfully deliberate on the influence this has had on the Vaisnava society.

I suggest that sober reflection on the substance of this one change, to CC page 1, and the paradigm of thought that engendered this change, would tremendously impact the philosophical, political, economic, social and spiritual culture of persons and groups that are influenced by the consciousness and determinations of the BBT and GBC. Acknowledgement of this "great consequence" by the BBT directors, or any one of them, would in itself provide momentum for this impact, and would launch torpedoes at embedded institutional structures.

In his Foreword to Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link Ambarisa dasa Prabhu quotes Herbert Spencer. "There is 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." Contemporary ISKCON policy and thought as a basis for changing Srila Prabhupada's books carries serious risk of "contempt prior to investigation." Such a strategy seems to be dedicated to institutional preservation more than to authentically representing Srila Prabhupada. I assert that we may trust that authentic representation of Srila Prabhupada is the strongest assurance of protection, integrity and healthy expansion that an organization may enjoy.

"GURU" IN THE SINGULAR AND CLARITY ABOUT "FALL DOWN"

by Dhira Govinda dasa

We need a guru in whom we have absolute faith and whom we are willing to follow unconditionally in order to spiritually progress to the realm of pure devotion to Sri Krsna. This statement is made with reference to the point that each of us has many gurus, with "gurus" used in the sense of "teacher", or "person who inspires and guides us". We have many gurus, and it is understood that we generally don't consider these many gurus to be on the absolute platform. That is fine, realistic, to be expected. That said, we need one guru, or at least one guru, who is on that absolute platform and in whom our trust is implicit and absolute. Sincere followers of Srila Prabhupada agree that Srila Prabhupada exists on that absolute platform and is fully qualified as a shelter for the unconditional surrender of conditioned souls. As we assert in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link, when a person contacts Srila Prabhupada's movement, that person has found a guru, in the sense of finding a Vaisnava who is completely worthy of their absolute faith. In that sense, the person no longer needs to seek a guru, because s/he has found one. Of course, that person will naturally have so many other devotees guide, instruct and mentor him/her during their spiritual lives. Although the person may consider one or more of these other devotees to be on the absolute platform, it is not necessary that s/he considers as such, or that those guides and mentors be on that platform, because Srila Prabhupada is perfectly serving in that capacity for the aspiring devotee. Thus, to reiterate, Srila Prabhupada flawlessly fills the role of guru, in the singular sense of the term, for all who contact his movement.

There is a game going on in the ISKCON organization. The game sounds something like "Now that you've been in the movement for six months, or twenty years, or whatever, you should find a guru." In the context of the presentation in the paragraph above, the absurdity of that game should be apparent. To justify the game the leadership of the ISKCON organization needs to dance in amusing ways. Essentially they seem to need to passively convince that Srila Prabhupada is not available to play that role. For example, they may say that one needs a living guru, implying that Srila Prabhupada is not living, despite so much evidence to the contrary. Or they may say that one needs a guru who is physically present on this planet, or something to that effect. Then one may wonder about the situation of those who received formal initiation from a devotee, such as Gaura Govinda Maharaja, who is no longer physically present on the planet. Do those initiates need to search for a guru, with "guru" used in the singular sense? If so, then supposing they find a guru in whom they have absolute faith, and that guru passes away the next day. Does the initiate then need to search for another guru, and then yet another when that one passes away? It may be asserted that the initiate doesn't need to search for another guru, because his guru who has physically departed continues to live in sound and instruction. Then, one may reflect that if this guru who has departed continues to live, inspire and serve as a guru, then it would seem that Srila Prabhupada could also do that. Thus, in looking for a guru in the absolute position, there seems to be no basis for searching for a Vaisnava other than Srila Prabhupada. Of course, at all stages of our devotional lives we seek devotees who will guide and inspire us, though, it seems to me, there is no reason, at any stage of our devotional lives after we've encountered Srila Prabhupada's vani, to search for a guru in the absolute position.

So, members of ISKCON leadership tend to obscure the issue by asserting things like "Srila Prabhupada can be the siksa guru, but not the diksa guru", and various similar statements. Essentially, they're attempting to assert that Srila Prabhupada is not available to be the guru in the absolute position. Herein we won't enter into the discussion of the meaning of "diksa". That

is addressed to some extent, though by no means fully, in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link (PL). Even if we consider "diksa" in terms of the formal ceremony of initiation, as ISKCON leadership is often inclined to do, our parampara teaches that the guru in the absolute position, who is the reservoir of implicit faith for the disciple, is not intrinsically the devotee who conducts the ceremony of initiation. This is clearly evident from the list of the parampara found at the end of the BG Introduction. This is separate though related to the discussion about the essence of the process of diksa being in no way dependent on the formal ceremony of initiation.

From what I am able to perceive, the position of the ISKCON leadership is that Srila Prabhupada, for some reason that I've not yet comprehended, is not available to be that guru in the absolute position, and thus a person who contacts Srila Prabhupada's movement must search for a guru from amongst members of the list of gurus approved by ISKCON leadership. Apart from the difficulties of establishing Srila Prabhupada's unavailability, this stance also encounters serious problems in relation to the concept of "fall down".

In the organization "fall down" connotes an obvious deviance from the regulative principles. This understanding of the term possesses value in our dealings and relationships with each other. However, if we are speaking of a guru who is the primary link to the parampara for disciples, who is the reservoir of absolute trust, and who is the point of absolute surrender for the disciple, then "fall down" has a meaning more profound. In the 12th Chapter of Bhagavad-gita, for example, Sri Krsna describes one who is equipoised in honor and dishonor, and happiness and distress, and who is free from false ego, etc. From that perspective, "fall down" indicates any departure from pure goodness. That is the standard of "fall down" if we're speaking about primary, current, and direct links to the disciplic succession such as Srila Prabhupada, Srila Rupa Goswami, and Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur. When "guru fall downs" are spoken about in ISKCON, that tends to focus on the person being caught in blatant violations of regulative principles. But that is not the standard to be applied if we're discussing gurus in the absolute position.

Sometimes the dance takes the form of stating "Well, he/I is/am not claiming to be absolute or infallible. He/I/We is/am/are simply doing our best..." We need to recognize the smokescreen surrounding the humble-sounding tap dance. A person aspiring to advance in spiritual life needs a guru who is the direct link to the parampara who is qualified to receive unconditional surrender. For the disciples of ISKCON gurus let us ask "Who is that guru in the absolute position?" If it is the Vaisnava who performed the formal initiation ceremony, then let that be clearly stated. And if so, then that conductor of the ceremony should be held to the standard of "fall down" that is there for the pillars of the parampara such as Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji, and Srila Prabhupada. If out of sincere or a show of humility they claim that they are not the direct link to the parampara who is the point of ultimate surrender, then let us ask, who is? Is it Srila Prabhupada? If so, then let's celebrate that and state it clearly. But they won't state it clearly, and least not consistently, or in writing, as far as my experience goes. Rather, the tendency of ISKCON leadership is to claim, albeit implicitly and with humble-sounding words, that the ISKCON gurus are the point of ultimate surrender for the disciple, while at the same time wanting to hold themselves to a shallow understanding of "fall down". If they are gurus in the sense that we each have so many gurus, then that conception of fall down has its place. If they are saying that they are the primary links to the parampara, as listed at the

end of the Introduction to Bhagavad-gita As It Is, then the standard of fall down is any deviation from pure goodness, including any personal ambition, any personally motivated thoughts or behavior, any tinge of attraction for profit, adoration, or distinction, etc. If they are saying that they are not the primary links, then let's openly ask who is the primary link, the guru in the absolute position, for the initiate.

At some level members of ISKCON leadership know that the standard for fall down for a guru at the level that they are claiming is the highest standard. For example, in the "Qualifications of the Candidate" section of a fairly recent nominating letter for someone to be an authorized ISKCON initiating guru, one of the qualifications is stated as:

"He is free from kamini-kancana, pratistha, nisiddhacara, kuti-nati, puja, and labha."

How such a thing is determined by the GBC is not clear for me. That such a statement is asserted indicates that they know, at some level, that they are claiming, despite humble-sounding smokescreens to the contrary, to be gurus at that absolute level.

Another dilemma of the system being promoted by the ISKCON leadership is the fact that if there is any fall down of any sort then that is a clear indication that the system is not authorized. For example in Nectar of Devotion Srila Prabhupada writes "...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. If a person is carried away by such achievements, then his devotional service becomes slackened. One should therefore strictly adhere to the principles of disciplic succession." Because at some level they know this, fall downs of gurus, even blatant ones, are routinely covered up and denied, unless and until it becomes futile to do so. They know that the fact that any one of them has deviated, even slightly from pure goodness, what to speak of blatantly from even ordinary standards, indicates that the guru system they are promoting and following, and which serves them personally, is not authorized. In recent months this has been taken to a new level. Now, there are gurus whose fall downs are blatant and exposed. Still, they remain ISKCON gurus. The reasoning behind this, as far as I am able to perceive, is simply that declaring them no longer ISKCON gurus will cause too much damage to the organization. Thus, as in many other instances, so-called philosophy is determined based on supposed needs for organizational preservation. For the guru who has blatantly fallen and been exposed (I state this explicitly because many have blatantly fallen and have not yet been widely exposed), he is still holding that position which implies absoluteness. So, for the disciples of that guru, should they consider this person to be the point of ultimate surrender? Should they consider Srila Prabhupada to be that guru in the absolute position? If Srila Prabhupada is available to them in that capacity, or to anyone in that capacity, then it seems he is available to everyone in that capacity- at least everyone who sincerely devotes their life to him and his mission.

It is commonly known throughout the movement that many in the position of "absolute guru" are blatantly fallen, though this has not yet been revealed, and thus they continue in their posts as "ISKCON guru". And each of us can determine for ourselves what percentage of "ISKCON gurus" are fallen with reference to the standard of being free from any tinges of the modes of material nature. This presentation is not about finding fault in those who are assuming the

position of "ISKCON gurus". Rather, I present this to generate deliberation about why someone who contacts Srila Prabhupada's movement should need in any way to take chances about the devotee they choose to be the guru who is the direct link to the parampara. It is 100% sure that Srila Prabhupada is qualified for this role. And, I and many others assert, he is fully available for that service. So, by connecting with Srila Prabhupada as the infallible guru, all members of Srila Prabhupada's movement for all generations are fully secure in their link to the disciplic succession. Even if there were some doubt that even one of the ISKCON gurus were influenced by some tinge of the lower modes, it would seem to me that it would not be responsible to set up a system where the potential initiate needs to take any chances whatsoever, considering that Srila Prabhupada is available to be the primary and current link to the parampara. Beyond that, and as described in PL, even if all who serve in the capacity of ISKCON initiating guru were to be mahabhagavatas, my conviction is that they would embrace the PL model. Srila Prabhupada is available to serve as the guru, in the singular sense. Therefore, why would anyone, especially an advanced Vaisnava, want to try to fill a position that is already filled by Srila Prabhupada?

SOUND AND PRESENCE

by Dhira Govinda dasa

April 21st, 2006

The disciplic succession in the line of Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta is based on sound vibration, not on the formal initiation ceremony. Through sound vibration transcendental knowledge is conveyed. This is the essential aspect of the process of initiation. And this essential aspect is not dependent on formal initiation, though the processes of formal initiation are meant to serve and support the essential component of the initiation process, receiving transcendental knowledge. This knowledge of course inspires and drives devotional service. The process of formal initiation is generally recommended for conditioned souls, and should not be minimized or avoided. At the same time we don't want to confuse the essence with externals that are meant to serve the spirit of the process.

We receive mercy from the parampara in the opportunity to hear from the members of the parampara. Hearing from the disciplic succession intrinsically implies transcendental sound vibration. Srila Prabhupada wrote to Rupanuga Prabhu "Anyone who reads the books that is also chanting and hearing. Why distinguish between chanting and book distribution? These books I have recorded and chanted, and they are transcribed. It is spoken kirtanas. So book distribution is also chanting. These are not ordinary books. It is recorded chanting. Anyone who reads, he is hearing." (Oct. 19, 1974)

In Vaisnava societies the question has arisen whether the relationship between spiritual master and disciple necessitates physical presence. Of course there are numerous quotes from Srila Prabhupada regarding the primary importance of vani compared to vapu. Still, the controversy is there, with regards to the continuation of the disciplic succession, regarding the role of physical presence.

Srimad-Bhagavatam explains "Persons who are learned and who have true knowledge define sound as that which conveys the idea of an object, indicates the presence of a speaker screened from our view and constitutes the subtle form of ether." (SB 3.26.33)

I invite us to consider this verse with respect to the question of presence. Sound vibration indicates the presence of a speaker screened from view. So, when we hear Srila Prabhupada's sound vibration, might we understand that he is, with reference to the above definition, present and screened from our view. This screening, of course, is a reflection of our limitations and not of Srila Prabhupada's lack of full presence.

Lord Brahma received knowledge, was initiated into knowledge, from a Speaker screened from view. Does that indicate that the initiation was not valid, because the speaker remained concealed? Did Lord Brahma not have a living spiritual master, because the Speaker was screened from view? We understand from Srila Prabhupada that Lord Brahma received knowledge from within the heart. I think it's important to realize that this is the case not just with Brahma. In any authentic relationship between guru and disciple, knowledge is received within the heart. "Divya jnan hrde prokoshito."

Genuine disciplic succession is based on sound, and it is also based on presence, though this presence is not mundane. My understanding is that even if the spiritual master, in the common sense of the term, is "physically present", still he is screened from the view of conditioned souls. That is, his transcendental position is not seen, or understood. And, transcendental knowledge is conveyed through the heart. In a consciousness of receiving this knowledge, we open a direct relationship with the guru. His presence is manifest, and the essential process of diksa is alive within us. This consciousness that allows us to enter this relationship entails a conscious choice to serve our spiritual master.

CLARIFICATION ABOUT THE PROMINENT LINK MODEL

by Dhira Govinda dasa

In "As Srila Prabhupada Said: 'Physician Heal Thyself'", Kaunteya Prabhu encourages me to examine my knowledge filters and biases. Certainly it is fair to ask me to turn the mirror on myself, *atmavan manyate jagat*, since in my article, *The Weightiest Argument*, I called attention to what I perceive to be a paradigm of a priori assumptions influencing decisions regarding the content of Srila Prabhupada's books. Also, I acknowledge that in *The Weightiest Argument* I neglected to mention that the recent revision to the first page of *Sri-Caitanya-caritamrta* demonstrates a humble willingness from the BBT to recognize mistakes and a dedication to the principle of editorial neutrality.

In reading *As Srila Prabhupada Said: 'Physician Heal Thyself'*, as well as other communications I've received, I sense that I have not been sufficiently clear in *Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link (PL)* and other writings, and I appreciate this opportunity for clarification. Kaunteya writes:

“The blatant omissions I am referring to concern direct, explicit statements by Srila Prabhupada himself on the specifics of disciplic succession in ISKCON, which Dhira Govinda appears to purposefully and consistently avoid or even discredit. When asked by an official delegation of GBCs, on 28th May 1977, about ‘initiations in the future, particularly at that time when you're no longer with us,’ Srila Prabhupada replied using expressions such as ‘regular gurus’ (to indicate the future initiating spiritual masters), as well as ‘granddisciple’ and ‘disciple of my disciple’ (indicating those who will take initiation from the future gurus).

“These instructions by Srila Prabhupada are highly disagreeable with the views Dhira Govinda expounds in his Prominent Link...”

The principles stated above are not contrary, or disagreeable, to the Prominent Link Model. Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link includes the following passage:

“Can someone be called ‘Srila Prabhupada’s disciple’ if he didn’t receive formal initiation from Srila Prabhupada?

“Suppose devotee B is a disciple of Srila Prabhupada who received formal initiation from him. Devotee A, who didn’t receive formal initiation from Srila Prabhupada, 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 Srila Prabhupada is his direct, current, and primary link to the parampara. Srila Prabhupada 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 Srila Prabhupada. Devotee A is also a disciple, directly, of Srila Prabhupada, by dint of the fact that Srila Prabhupada is the Vaisnava who is giving devotee A more direct transcendental knowledge than any other Vaisnava, including devotee B. Without contradiction, devotee A is a direct disciple of Srila Prabhupada, and a disciple of the disciple of Srila Prabhupada. Being directly linked with Srila Prabhupada does not negate, and in fact supports, the principle of being a servant of the servant of the Vaisnavas.”

Of course, the essence of discipleship is service and the transmission of transcendental knowledge. It is not based on a formal ceremony. To the extent that these elements exist, there is true discipleship. Such genuine discipleship can exist between, to utilize the example above, devotee A and devotee B, with the simultaneous realization that Srila Prabhupada is the primary link to the disciplic succession for both devotee A and devotee B, by dint of Srila Prabhupada being the primary, direct deliverer of divya-jnana for both of them.

In PL I mentioned neither the conversation of May 28th, 1977 nor the letter of July 9th, 1977. All of Srila Prabhupada's words are important, so of course the May 28th conversation and July 9th letter are very important. An implicit assertion in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link is: “Whatever your views regarding that conversation or that letter, here are sastrically-based, logical philosophical principles that stand, and that serve as a platform for synthesis and resolution in Srila Prabhupada's movement.” In this way PL endeavors to create a platform for synergistic resolution of this issue.

Regarding the conversation itself, Kaunteya asserts that it constitutes “weighty, conclusive documentation”. I assume that he means that this conversation represents conclusive documentation supporting the current guru and initiation system in ISKCON. I’ve studied the conversation, including the commentaries of several learned devotees on the conversation. Honestly, and this may reflect my shortcomings in discernment more than anything else, the content of the conversation in itself doesn’t appear definitive to me. The only section of it that, from my viewpoint, seems reasonably conclusive is the beginning, wherein Satsvarupa Maharaja expresses:

“...Then our next question concerns initiations in the future, particularly at that time when you're no longer with us. We want to know how first and second initiation would be conducted.”

And Srila Prabhupada responds: “Yes. I shall recommend some of you. After this is settled up, I shall recommend some of you to act as officiating acaryas.”

It seems clear from this conversation that Srila Prabhupada wanted the Vaisnavas in his movement who conduct formal initiation ceremonies after his disappearance to be referred to as “officiating acaryas”. I find it interesting that this term is not in wide usage within Srila Prabhupada’s movement, including the ISKCON organization, to designate the devotees who conduct initiation ceremonies.

Still, I can appreciate the perspectives of those who don’t accept the “officiating acarya” designation that Srila Prabhupada indicates on May 28th. In PL I utilize functionalist terminology, such as “...the Vaisnava who performs the initiation ceremony...” Again, similar to the discussion about discipleship above, the purpose is to convey that whatever terminology one prefers, the principles of PL consistently and solidly apply. Detailed exposition of those principles, in PL and several other essays, is available at www.divyajnana.org.

FOCUS ON SRILA PRABHUPADA

An email correspondence from Jan. 3, 2004.

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

In discussing issues of the continuation of the parampara in Srila Prabhupada's movement it is, I believe, of prime importance to focus on Srila Prabhupada's availability and qualifications. Specifically, this refers to his availability and qualifications to be, for anyone who contacts his movement, the current link to the parampara, the primary guru, the "guru in the singular", the direct link to the parampara, the prominent link to the parampara, the point of absolute faith, the ultimate shelter, the guru described in verses such as *yasya deve para bhaktir...* and *yasya prasada bhagavat-prasado...*, or whatever other terms conveying the same meaning one wishes to use.

By concentrating on Srila Prabhupada's availability and qualifications, those attempting to oppose the conceptions of Srila Prabhupada as the prominent link, current link, etc., need to demonstrate that Srila Prabhupada is not available or qualified to serve in that role. To portray Srila Prabhupada in

that light is of course an unenviable task, as it essentially means to assert that Srila Prabhupada is dead.

Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link (PL) focuses its assertions as described above, throughout the essay and very specifically in sections such as "Srila Prabhupada is Qualified to be Worshipped."

Some may assert that others are also qualified to fill the role of "absolute guru", "current link", etc. Fine. For now, let's simply acknowledge that Srila Prabhupada is available for that service. This simple and obvious stance is threatening for those who oppose it. If they allow the possibility that Srila Prabhupada is available as the current and direct link to the parampara, then they will need to make available the choice of Srila Prabhupada to potential initiates. That means that candidates for initiation will be able to choose Srila Prabhupada as their current link to the parampara. Once Srila Prabhupada is clearly available, then other choices may appear less appealing, or perhaps even absurd, in comparison. So, they need to maintain a position of Srila Prabhupada's lack of availability, and lack of qualification, as the guru in the absolute position for persons who come to his movement. Of course, they'll say things and sometimes even pass resolutions exclaiming how Srila Prabhupada is alive and present, how he is the siksa guru, etc. Still, they retain policies that prevent potential initiates from selecting Srila Prabhupada as the current and direct link to the parampara, and policies that put forward others as available and qualified to serve in this position. Thus, for practical purposes, institutional policies don't include Srila Prabhupada as a choice for being the current link to the parampara.

Presently I am in Christchurch, New Zealand. Yesterday we completed an exciting Satvatove Foundational Course, and in about 12 hours we'll begin the Advanced Seminar. About an hour ago I spoke with a devotee. He has been around the movement for about ten years. He is in his mid-forties. He has completely lost faith in the ISKCON institution, and specifically its guru system. He said that he is now becoming interested in one of the Gaudiya Matha movements. Within the Vaisnava world ISKCON is all he knows till now. He has applied his common sense and intelligence and rejected the ISKCON system. He has heard about Gaudiya Matha, and will check it out. Within ISKCON he hasn't been educated that Srila Prabhupada is available as his main guru, his current, living, and direct link to the disciplic succession.

It is important at this time that we make current link initiations available for those who are qualified and who recognize Srila Prabhupada as their direct and current link to the parampara. In these initiations both the initiate and the Vaisnava conducting the initiating ceremony are clear that Srila Prabhupada is the direct, primary and current link to the disciplic succession for the initiate, and that the initiate will chant Srila Prabhupada's pranam mantras and worship Srila Prabhupada. That is, the initiate will not worship the picture or chant pranams of the devotee conducting the ceremony, because the initiate has a primarily direct relationship with Srila Prabhupada. This direct relationship does not minimize the important guidance and assistance that the initiate receives from other Vaisnavas, including the devotee who performed the ceremony. Other philosophical points and points of practice that will be mutually understood by the initiate and the devotee conducting the ceremony are explained in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link.

I believe that it is time that we move forward this this project of making

available initiation ceremonies wherein Srila Prabhupada is recognized as the current link to the parampara for the initiate. This understanding must be fully reflected in the philosophical and practical manifestations surrounding the ceremony and the life of the initiate and the devotee conducting the initiation ceremony. If at this time we need to designate a title for the devotee conducting the ceremony, then I believe that, based on Srila Prabhupada's words, the best title is "officiating acarya."

In manifesting this project we are not asserting that other systems are invalid. Let the other systems continue for those who choose to participate in them. We are asserting Srila Prabhupada's availability and qualification.

Thank you for your attention in this matter. Hare Krsna.
Your servant,

Dhira Govinda dasa

The Direct Link

The following is an excerpt from a post made by Dhira Govinda dasa to the PL email conference, on Jan. 30th, 2005.

Here is another passage that I find illustrative.

". . . There was one doubt that was plaguing me . . . I had always been taught when I was first joining that the parampara 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 Prabhupada. I followed Srila Prabhupada from Rupa Gosvami's Samadhi back into the courtyard, and just before Srila Prabhupada 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 Prabhupada turned and looked at me right in the eyes and he said 'Just by reading my books they are initiated'" (From Memories of Srila Prabhupada Tape #31, Vaikunthanatha dasa Prabhu speaking about Srila Prabhupada in Vrndavana in 1972).

I believe it is important that the initiate and the Vaisnava performing the initiation ceremony have consistent understandings with respect to the philosophical underpinnings of the ceremony. Here are some points that I consider essential to an understanding harmonious with Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link:

1) The formal initiation ceremony is an official acknowledgment that the initiate has already linked with the parampara through direct connection with Srila Prabhupada. That is, the formal ceremony is not when the initiate becomes linked, and the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony does not become the main, direct and current link to the parampara for the initiate. The ceremony is recognition that the initiate has already directly linked to the parampara, through his/her current link to the disciplic succession, Srila Prabhupada. Of course, many Vaisnavas, including the devotee who performs the ceremony, assist the initiate, before, during and after the official ceremony, to enrich his/her personal relationship with Srila Prabhupada.

2) When the initiate refers to "guru" in the singular, Srila Prabhupada is definitively indicated. That is, the term "my guru", or "my spiritual master", refers to Srila Prabhupada. This is essential for a "Prominent Link understanding". The initiate will, for example, clearly refer to Srila Prabhupada when s/he references verses such as "yasya deve para bhaktir..." and "yasya prasada..." Such verses refer to "the spiritual master", and the initiate distinctly understands that Srila Prabhupada is "the spiritual master" in the life of the initiate. Naturally, this does not minimize the extent to which other devotees serve as teachers and guides in the life of the initiate.

3) There is no philosophical or practical need for worship of anyone else as a link to Srila Prabhupada. This understanding doesn't assume anything about the degree of spiritual advancement of the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony, or any other Vaisnava. It simply states that there is not need for worship, in terms of photos, pranam mantras, or in other forms, of anyone else as a link to Srila Prabhupada, because Srila Prabhupada provides the direct connection to the parampara for the initiate.

Srila Prabhupada established an altar for ISKCON and for his followers. As far as I'm aware, he did not give instructions to alter that altar. That altar consists of personalities such as Srimati Radharani, Lord Caitanya, Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur, and Srila Prabhupada. Even if the devotee performing the initiation ceremony is uncontaminated by the modes of material nature, as are the personalities mentioned above, Srila Prabhupada still did not give instructions to change the altar he established. Thus, to do so is at least questionable. And, if the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony is influenced by the gunas, then perhaps it is a serious mistake to worship him/her on the same altar as Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, Lord Nityananda, etc. As far as I'm aware Srila Prabhupada did not indicate that personalities about whom there is doubt regarding their complete transcendence to the modes should be on the altars in his movement, even if it is only for 25 minutes per day during an arati. I have doubts whether Srila Prabhupada would approve of the current system in ISKCON regarding worship of the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony. At least, there should be respect for the system wherein the initiate directly worships Srila Prabhupada. To further explain these points at the end of this posting I'm including the section Srila Prabhupada is Qualified to be Worshipped from Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link. Also, as an attached rtf file I'm including The Humble Guru, which also addresses this topic. Please note that in The Humble Guru, written in 1998, I don't address certain assumptions, such as the meaning of "diksa", that are addressed in Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link. In this letter and in the writings to which I refer, there may be relevant points that I'm missing, that I'm just not seeing, regarding this topic of worship, and I invite the members of this conference to share your views with me.

4) Srila Prabhupada is the direct and current link to the disciplic succession for the initiate. I state this here, even though it is already included above, because these terms are important, and do in some instances define who truly comprehends and supports this model and who makes claims about it because it is fashionable, but does not genuinely affirm the truth of the model. The first draft of Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link was entitled Srila Prabhupada: The Direct Link. Actually, I prefer "The Direct Link", though "The Prominent Link" is also valid, accurate and true. I chose "The Prominent Link" because in 2001 in Alachua I heard a devotee conducting an initiation ceremony refer during his initiation lecture to Srila Prabhupada as "the prominent link"

to the disciplic succession for the initiates. Therefore I sensed that this term would be more readily acceptable within some sectors of ISKCON. The Vaisnava who conducted the initiation ceremony and delivered the lecture described above is, generally speaking, not a supporter of the principles in the essay Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link.

LOOK OUT FOR THAT BANANA PEEL...

The following is an excerpt from email written by Dhira Govinda dasa, from Oct. 8th, 2006.

We've heard the position that asserts the necessity for a "physically present guru". This stance seems to be susceptible to the banana peel argument. That is, the physically present current link slips on a banana peel and thereby ends his manifest pastimes. Oh no, now I don't have a physically present guru. Let me go to Radha-kunda, or Oklahoma, or wherever, to find one. There, I did it. I found another physically present guru who is now my direct link. But look out for that banana peel...

Then of course an advocate of that position may assert that the physically present spiritual master can still impart knowledge after his manifest pastimes are completed, so there is no need to search again for another. But then it seems that this sort of transmission of knowledge, not dependent on physical presence, is possible for just about anyone, except Srila Prabhupada.

In presenting the above it is important to realize that as aspiring devotees we of course want to hear from physically present spiritual teachers to enrich and guide our spiritual lives. The banana peel presentation above refers to the "guru in the singular", the direct and prominent link to the parampara.

TERMINOLOGY

The following is an excerpt from a posting made by Dhira Govinda dasa to the PL email conference on November 3rd, 2005.

I've also appreciated the discussion in recent postings about terminology, its uses and potential pitfalls. Terminology, and all language, is ideally meant to enhance genuine dialogue, deepen understanding. It can be used, intentionally or otherwise, to obscure clarity and comprehension. Thus, in PL I made some endeavor to utilize somewhat functional, behavioral terms, rather than rely on terms which for some persons might be a barrier to lucidity. So, for example, since terms such as "siksa guru" and "diksa guru" have come to mean different things for different people, likely as a result of Srila Prabhupada's varying use of words such as "initiation" and "diksa", I used phrases such as "The devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony." Discussions about "Whose disciple is s/he?" can degenerate into hollow, perhaps politicized as opposed to philosophical, conversations about designations, upadhis, that may distract from profound grasp of essential

FIVE LEVELS OF ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE

The following are some slightly edited excerpts from an email correspondence from July 14th-17th, 2007.

Dhira Govinda dasa: Srila Prabhupada: The Prominent Link (PL) focuses on the transmission of divya-jnana as the essence of the process of initiation. In this regard we deliberately have not concentrated on distinctions between "siksa" and "diksa", because, it seemed to me, conversations over the years that centered on "siksa" and "diksa" often got diverted to assertions and claims about who is the "diksa-guru", and who is the "siksa-guru", that to me seemed to miss the essence, and in many instances were more political and territorial, rather than philosophical or theological, in nature.

So, my writing focused on behavioral terminology, and on principles such as transcendental knowledge being the essence of the process of initiation. In this way we endeavored to avoid misunderstanding based on differing assumptions about what terms such as "diksa" and "siksa" meant. With such principles, such as divya-jnana as the essence of the process of initiation, at the forefront, Srila Prabhupada's relationship with the members of his movement becomes clarified.

Still, the question of "diksa" and "siksa" is important, very important (...) Without clear understanding about the essence of the process of initiation, then such discussions, from my perspective, cloud the essential issue of Srila Prabhupada's role and relation with his followers of all generations. On the foundation of clear understanding about essential principles, though, a discussion about "siksa" and "diksa" becomes important, helping us towards deeper understanding about the process of parampara and reception of transcendental knowledge.

Suppose we hear from Srila Prabhupada, and based on this hearing we chant sixteen rounds per day, rise early, study his books, participate in Hari Nam kirtan and bhajan, etc. So, someone in such a situation might claim "I am receiving transcendental knowledge from Srila Prabhupada, and this is the essence of initiation, so I am initiated by Srila Prabhupada." I think, though, that this would be a shallow understanding, or a misunderstanding, of the process. To understand how and why, and to avoid a cheap sort of pseudo-PL model, it is important to grasp a distinction between siksa and diksa.

My understanding is that the person described in the paragraph above is receiving siksa from Srila Prabhupada. (...) It is knowledge received through the external senses, though not the essential divya-jnana, spiritual knowledge received in the heart of the soul, as Lord Brahma was initiated by Sri Krsna- *tene brahma hrda ya adi-kavaye*, or as described in the prayers to the spiritual master, *divya jnan hrde prokoshito*. So, as we receive siksa and follow the instructions and absorb the knowledge, then it becomes diksa, with divya-jnana received at the soul level, as the essence.

As we've discussed many times, initiation is a process. We connect with this process from the first time we encounter Srila Prabhupada's books, or hear the Maha Mantra in the line of the authentic parampara, etc. So it's a process, and at some point in the process we may say that initiation has actually taken place, just like we may say "The milk is boiling," though actually it's in the process of boiling. Then at some particular point the milk is actually at the boiling point, and that in itself can also be seen as just the beginning of the boiling process. So, as we live and

implement the model of Srila Prabhupada as the prominent link to the parampara, it will be increasingly important to define what we mean by "initiation", "siksa" and "diksa", and how and when a formal initiation ceremony becomes reasonably appropriate for those who are interested.

Transcendentally, it appears to me, there is no difference between siksa and diksa. However, from the perspective of the conditioned soul encountering the mercy of Krsna and guru, it seems that, in the general course of the process of initiation, siksa comes first, and develops into diksa. With this understanding Srila Prabhupada is the main and primary guru in the siksa and diksa process.

Alex: Something that's been on my mind for years is why did Srila Prabhupada conduct initiation ceremonies after only 6 months of chanting and following the 4 regs? This seems to me like such a short time. Are we to assume that most people who participated in these ceremonies after six months or so were initiated at this deeper level that you refer to?

I have been in contact with Krsna Consciousness for 11 years now, and not that I am the yardstick by which others should be judged, but I feel like I am at that first level you describe. I have read some of Srila Prabhupada's books, heard some lectures, and I'm endeavoring to put things into practice, and that's where I'm at, where I want to be. I haven't had any mystical experience where knowledge is revealed in my heart. The first level that you describe, which you call siksa, that's what I want. I don't feel ready for the other thing. I'm full of doubts, concerns, questions, etc. I don't want to pretend otherwise. I want the shallow thing. I like the shallow thing.

Dhira Govinda dasa: I appreciate your personal sharing. For myself, I could replace "11 years" with "27 years", and express much the same as you have. Certainly I couldn't say that by adherence to Srila Prabhupada's siksa, the essence of divya-jnana has congealed in my heart and thus I am receiving diksa in the true sense. My adherence is sporadic and shallow. For myself I wouldn't say that I haven't had any mystical experience, or knowledge revealed in my heart. Whatever my lack of qualifications and sincerity, I believe that something, some spark, has landed deeply, due to the mercy of Srila Prabhupada and Krsna. Otherwise I don't think I'd be able to continue steadily reading Srila Prabhupada's books and chanting sixteen rounds per day, however inattentively that may be. It seems to me that the siksa and diksa processes work spontaneously, interactively, not necessarily linearly, though the general process is that siksa, following instructions, leads to diksa, genuine divya-jnana revealed and received at the level of the soul.

The question raised is the point at which enough genuine divya-jnana, real diksa, is present so as to qualify for a formal initiation ceremony. The principles involving the distinctions and relationship between siksa and diksa are philosophical. The issue of what constitutes the precise "boiling point" and therefore the point at which formal initiation is appropriate, may be more managerial in nature. With that in mind, along with an understanding of the distinction between following and imitating, we might understand that Srila Prabhupada may have handled some situations in a particular way, though he may expect and want us to handle it in a different way.

In this context it is imperative that we grasp underlying principles to be able to maturely apply them according to time and circumstance. Of course, in stating this we also want to be aware of the danger of using the phrase "time and circumstance" as a weak and false justification for whimsically avoiding Srila Prabhupada's instructions and example. So, even within Srila Prabhupada's manifest pastimes he managed things in different ways at different times. For example, his instructions about Deity worship tended to be different in 1967 compared to 1976. Or, at some point in his movement's history he fairly liberally gave sannyas, and at another point he ceased to do this.

My general understanding is that Srila Prabhupada did some things to jump start the Krsna consciousness movement. For example, consider the emphasis on direct preaching. Surely Srila Prabhupada wants such direct preaching, in the form of kirtan and book distribution, to always be an integral and vital part of his movement. At the same time, he wants his followers to dedicate their efforts to creating structures- call it varnasrama, in whatever form that may take- to facilitate as many people as possible to be able to integrate their lives in a Krsna conscious lifestyle, or at least a lifestyle that moves towards Krsna consciousness. Through 1977 Srila Prabhupada wrote and spoke much about such structures, though his prime focus was on establishing temples, harinam sankirtan, book distribution, etc., to jump start the movement, so to speak. His expectation was that his followers would provide furnishings for the house he built, continually enriching his movement.

So, I believe that our management of what would constitute the "boiling point" with regards to appropriateness of the official initiation ceremony, would likely be far more conservative than Srila Prabhupada's. In implementing a PL model, I foresee formal initiations would be relatively rare, though relatively strong, deep and solid.

I am intrigued to further understand these discussions, about divya-jnana, siksa, diksa, and initiation, in the framework of Srila Prabhupada's purport below:

[SB 4:12:19](#)- Purport- *"There are different levels of acquired knowledge- direct knowledge, knowledge received from authorities, transcendental knowledge, knowledge beyond the senses, and finally spiritual knowledge. When one surpasses the stage of acquiring knowledge by the descending process, he is immediately situated on the transcendental platform. Dhruva Maharaja, being liberated from the material concept of life, was situated in transcendental knowledge and could perceive the presence of a transcendental airplane which was as brilliant as the full moonlight. This is not possible in the stages of direct or indirect perception of knowledge. Such knowledge is a special favor of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. One can, however, rise to this platform of knowledge by the gradual process of advancing in devotional service, or Krsna consciousness."*

I will be glad to hear any comments, insights or questions you may have.