

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

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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?