

# The Prominent Link: A Response by the Çästric Advisory Council 18 March 2003

## Precis

Although some valid points and suggestions can be found in the booklet *Çréla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link (PL)* by Dhéra Govinda Prabhu, we have discovered that a number of its premises and conclusions oppose not only Çréla Prabhupāda's instructions for ISKCON but also the basic principles of the Gauòéya *sampradāya*, Vaiñëavism in general, and Vedic tradition. Therefore its conclusions are not acceptable.

A devotee may say that Çréla Prabhupāda is his prominent *guru*, and that he receives guidance from him in several ways. This claim needs to be tested, however, by the devotee's willingness to follow Çréla Prabhupāda's instructions, including instructions about the means and formalities of becoming a disciple and connecting with the Vaiñëava *paramparā*. Such following, in a humble spirit, with willingness to be corrected, is the true mark of discipleship. When a devotee has such a humble attitude, then he is a disciple not only of his own *dékñā*- and *çikñā-gurus* but of the whole disciplic succession.

To be fair, we should acknowledge that we found several useful ideas in the *PL* booklet. Some of these positive contributions are as follows: (1) The importance of devotees' accepting responsibility for the advancement of other devotees, especially those junior to themselves; (2) The need to have a realistic appreciation of one's *guru* based on how much the *guru* helps one progress on the path of *bhakti*, not just on his institutional position (despite the faults in its arguments, *PL* points towards a realistic approach: Someone is factually a *guru* to the degree that he properly functions as a *guru*); (3) The need for ISKCON leaders to make it known that all devotees can be inspired by Çréla Prabhupāda and thus attain enlightenment and spiritual strength; and (4) The advisability of having Çréla Prabhupāda's Vyasa-pūjā ceremony the primary Vyāsa-pūjā for all ISKCON members.

Nonetheless, the Çästric Advisory Council (SAC) found the *PL* booklet lacking in scriptural support and divergent from correct *siddhānta* on several important points. For example, its attempt at redefining the word *dékñā* is clearly unacceptable. Also, the booklet's suggestion that devotees forgo all worship of their *dékñā-gurus* contradicts standard teachings and practice. Such an innovation will not help anyone establish a better spiritual relationship with Çréla Prabhupāda. To properly connect with Çréla Prabhupāda or any *ācārya* in our *guru-paramparā*, devotees should follow the directions of Çréla Rūpa Gosvāmé in his *Bhakti-rasāmāta-sindhu*—beginning with the first step of taking shelter of the lotus feet of a bona fide *guru*—rather than following instead some artificially manufactured process. The SAC acknowledges the author for his attempt to search out ways to improve *guru-disciple* relationships in ISKCON, but we cannot endorse the overall premise expressed in the booklet and the means of rectification its author recommends.

## Introduction

Since Çréla Prabhupāda's physical departure the number of devotees accepting disciples has increased. Recently, some of Çréla Prabhupāda's grand-disciples have begun to accept disciples. And as we all know, some *gurus* have fallen. During these developments, ISKCON devotees have in general become more mature in their understanding of Çréla Prabhupāda's position. Now the author has presented *Çréla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link (PL)* to further explore these topics. The primary issue he raises is an important one—the question of Çréla Prabhupāda's position, influence, and responsibility in relation to each member of his Society. The GBC have given much attention to addressing philosophically and practically what it means that Prabhupāda is our founder-*ācārya*. The author's questions and his attempt to suggest solutions are welcome.

Although there is room for improvement and clarification in our present understanding of how Çréla Prabhupāda is the founder-*ācārya* for ISKCON and the foundational *guru* individually for all its members, our understanding has to remain within the boundaries of Prabhupāda's teaching. How can we claim him to be our prominent *guru* if we disregard his instructions and re-define his teachings? *Çréla Prabhupāda, the Prominent Link* oversteps the bounds of *guru, sādhu, and çāstra*.

Çréla Prabhupāda wrote in a letter to Jayagovinda, Los Angeles July 4, 1969, "You have inquired why Caitanya Mahāprabhu has not mentioned anything about accepting a Spiritual Master in His Siksastaka. But perhaps you have missed the point that He says *amanina manadena kirtaniya sada hari*. This means one has to chant the Holy Names of Kāñëa, becoming humbler than the straw, and more tolerant than the tree. So who can become humbler than the straw unless he accepts a Spiritual Master?...But if anyone becomes humbler than the grass and more tolerant than the tree, it is understood that he has accepted a Spiritual Master."

Certainly we are all linked to Çréla Prabhupāda, either directly as his *dékñā* disciples or through his representatives in the ISKCON *paramparā*. This is the mystery of *Vaiñëava paramparā*: while one goes "through" one's *guru*, one is also directly connected with the previous *gurus* and with Kāñëa Himself. Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Bhagavad-gétā* 18.75, "Vyāsa was the spiritual master of Saijaya, and Saijaya admits that it was by Vyāsa's mercy that he could understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This means that one has to understand Kāñëa not directly but through the medium of the spiritual master. The spiritual master is the transparent medium, although it is true that the experience is still direct. This is the mystery of the disciplic succession. When the spiritual master is bona fide, then one can hear *Bhagavad-gétā* directly, as Arjuna heard it... Nārada is the direct disciple of Kāñëa and the spiritual master of Vyāsa. Therefore Vyāsa is as bona fide as Arjuna because he comes in the disciplic succession, and Saijaya is the direct disciple of Vyāsa. Therefore by the grace of Vyāsa, Saijaya's senses were purified, and he could see and hear Kāñëa directly. One who directly hears Kāñëa can understand this confidential knowledge. If one does not come to the disciplic succession, he cannot hear Kāñëa."

Yet one cannot correctly call Çréla Prabhupāda, or Çré Kāñëa, the "current" link. We cannot approach Kāñëa without a mediator as did Arjuna, though the Lord is present in our heart, as the Deity, as His Holy names, and in every atom. The fact that Prabhupāda lives in his books and *mūrtis* does not mean devotees can avoid the

authorized process of linking with him, which includes, if one is not Prabhupāda's direct *dékñā* disciple, taking *dékñā* from one of his followers. At the same time, no matter who one's *dékñā*- and *çikñā-gurus* are, Prabhupāda's instructions remain the basis, the standard and foundation for all individual devotees and for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness as a whole. The GBC has already acknowledged the genuine desire and need of many devotees to have Prabhupāda as their prominent *guru*, whether or not they are his direct *dékñā* disciples, and we believe the GBC should continue to reconfirm and better clarify this.

But as the author asserts, and not without good reason, there are some devotees, including himself, who are not satisfied with the GBC's stand. They want to think of Çréla Prabhupāda as their main *guru*, feeling that in any case their inspiration and advancement is coming directly from their relationship with Prabhupāda. They wish this relationship to be acknowledged and formalized. In other words, they don't want to be denied being considered Prabhupāda's disciples.

These devotees will run into practical difficulties. For example, devotees generally consider the *dékñā-guru* "the" *guru* and expect the name of the *dékñā-guru* when they ask, "Who is your *guru*?" If someone answers "Prabhupāda" when he hasn't received *dékñā* from Çréla Prabhupāda, he may be considered a *ātvik* advocate, and his social and vocational positions may be jeopardized.

Furthermore, although the GBC has said that Çréla Prabhupāda may be considered one's main *guru* (as *çikñā-guru*), placing the *dékñā-guru* in a secondary or peripheral role, because the resolutions use words such as "can" and "may," to do so may be viewed as undesirable.

There are also those who want only Prabhupāda as their *guru* and do not want to identify others who gave them *dékñā* and *çikñā* with the name "*guru*." This tendency is notable in the *PL* booklet, where the author consistently refers to a *dékñā-guru* as "the devotee who performs the formal initiation ceremony."

The author of *PL* objects to what he perceives as a presumption prevalent in ISKCON that one's *dékñā-guru* is automatically one's prominent *guru*. He attempts to establish that one's *dékñā-guru* may have relatively less influence than does Çréla Prabhupāda. This much we can agree with. But he then proposes that Çréla Prabhupāda is every ISKCON devotee's *dékñā-guru* in the "transcendental sense," thus practicing in a different way the very methodology of assumption he sought to discredit.

The author's solution is to redefine *dékñā* so that Prabhupāda becomes his *dékñā-guru*. His idea is that since ISKCON devotees tend to identify one's *dékñā-guru* as *guru*, with the help of *The Prominent Link's* new definition of *dékñā*, his feelings and relationships will be acceptable according to ISKCON standards. The author and devotees of similar persuasion can then keep only Prabhupāda's pictures, worship only Prabhupāda, and so forth.

To solidify this position, the author wishes the GBC to declare his understanding as the standard, leaving those who define *dékñā* in the traditional way and think of the *guru* who gave them formal *dékñā* as primary to be tolerated but abnormal. He couches this presentation in inclusive and broad-minded terms, saying that many understandings of *guru* are possible, while simultaneously posing his understanding and position as superior to other understandings (see *PL* pages 9, 17 and 39).

We suggest that Srila Prabhupada's followers do not have the liberty of redefining *dékñā* and *dékñā-guru* or understanding them too narrowly. To define *dékñā*, as Çréla Prabhupāda sometimes does, as the transmission of transcendental knowledge does not mean that the formal aspects of *dékñā* can be neglected. We need to consider carefully what transcendental knowledge is and how it is transmitted. Such knowledge is not just information, or skills, or even values, as in ordinary learning, though in the course of *dékñā* and *çikñā* these are also taught. Rather, spiritual knowledge is realization and wisdom. This knowledge comes primarily through chanting Hare Kāñēa and the Gāyatrē *mantras*, as given by the initiating spiritual master, coupled with following a way of life that supports the chanting. As Çréla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatē Ōhākura writes, "The holy name will manifest in your heart as you go on serving the holy name with body, mind, and words. Hearing and reciting *çāstras* helps to confirm the realizations one attains by chanting the holy name. . . . Initiation by the spiritual master gives one enthusiasm and inspiration to chant the holy name." (excerpts from Bengali letters, appearing in *Çréla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatē*, pub. Shree Gopinatha Gaudiya Math, trans. B.S. Damodara Maharaja).

There are no two kinds of *dékñā*, one "transcendental" and the other a mere formality. *Dékñā* is always transcendental, except when the rituals are followed simply for show, like a marriage undergone just to acquire a visa.

To solve the real problems the author addresses, we need a complete understanding of the principle of *déksā*. There are also practical steps that will help us, including 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 Prabhupāda as one's prominent *guru* is equally acceptable to any other situation.

We also need practical guidelines for devotees who feel that Prabhupāda is their prominent *guru*, so they can answer in a bona fide and truthful way the question "Who is your *guru*?" There should be guidelines for worship of Deities and *gurus*' pictures, and so on, for devotees who understand their primary *guru* relationship to be with Çréla Prabhupāda as *çikñā-guru*. The GBC has delineated a number of specifics in this regard, but often without explanations. It would be helpful, for example, to explain why a devotee who accepts Prabhupāda as his prominent *guru* should have his *dékñā-guru*'s picture present when worshiping the Deity. And since the general guidance for one whose *dékñā-guru* has fallen is to simply "worship Prabhupāda," one whose *dékñā-guru* is in good standing but with whom he or she has little relationship may question why he can't also worship Çréla Prabhupāda exclusively.

Certainly the leaders of ISKCON need to support the GBC's conclusions about relationships to Çréla Prabhupāda and *dékñā* and *çikñā-gurus*. In public and in print, leaders should not denigrate existing policies, labeling them as demeaning to ISKCON *dékñā-gurus* or to Çréla Prabhupāda. Prominent members of the GBC as well as other leaders write and speak in public forums about the deficiencies in the GBC's *guru* policy. It is not, therefore, surprising, that ISKCON members are publishing calls for drastic reform.

Scripture, tradition, and ISKCON law indicate that *guru*-disciple relationships are individual and cannot be mandated, as long as they fall within the boundary of *guru*, *sādhu*, and *çāstra*. Whom an individual considers his prominent *guru* is a matter of the

heart. No individual or institution does well to attempt to dictate to a devotee what faith he must have in his *dēkñā-guru* simply on the basis of institutional status. There is etiquette to be maintained, but faith is ultimately a private matter.

After extensive discussion with our committee, the author remains unwilling to modify his position in *Çréla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link*, despite claiming that his ideas are exploratory, aimed only at sparking discussion, investigation, and understanding. We invited him to write this paper with us, to work with our team step by step in order to arrive at conclusions with which we all could agree. Unfortunately, he declined.

## Responses to Excerpts of *Çréla Prabhupāda, The Prominent Link*

(excerpts are in bold)

**Of central importance in this discussion is that Çréla Prabhupāda is, or at least is meant to be, the primary spiritual master for all members of his movement. In realizing this it is important not to become distracted by appellations such as “déknā guru”, “initiator”, and “officiating ācārya”, although for communicative purposes such designations are sometimes necessary. (p. 2)**

We cannot dispense with the distinction of *déknā-* and *çiknā-guru* without running into serious difficulty. Many of our *ācāryas* have gone out of their way to explain this distinction, including Çréla Kāñēadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmé in the first chapter of *Caitanya-caritāmāta* and Çréla Jéva Gosvāmé in his discussion of *guru-tattva* in *Çré Bhakti-sandarbha*. One’s “primary” spiritual master may sometimes be a *çiknā-guru* rather than the *déknā-guru*, the *Vaiñēava* who gives one initiation. Such is the case for many devotees in ISKCON who didn’t receive initiation from its founder-*ācārya*. Still, the role of *déknā-guru* is unique. The *déknā-guru* accepts responsibility for his disciples, and therefore his disciples owe him special gratitude, even if he is only a representative of the primary spiritual master.

Just what kind and how much worship the *déknā-guru* should be given may be debatable, but at least he should be allowed the honor of being considered one’s *guru*. As Kāñēadāsa Kavirāja has indicated in his *maigalācāraēa* verse *vande gurūn*—“I offer respect to my *gurus*”—a devotee can have more than one *Vaiñēava guru*, and he can and should worship them all. The *déknā-guru* may be the last and maybe least link in the *paramparā*, but isn’t such “indirect” connection to Kāñēa the very idea of *paramparā*? Kāñēa is eternally enjoying with His pure devotees and has nothing to do with the suffering of this material world. We are here suffering only because we chose to reject Kāñēa. We wanted to try to control and enjoy separately from Him, and Kāñēa respects this desire. He will never interfere with our misuse of free will. He will never force us to surrender to Him. But His representatives take the risk of interfering, and so the only practical way to regain our lost connection with Kāñēa is through the *paramparā*. One who claims a direct connection with Kāñēa is most likely ignored by Him. But a humble devotee who follows Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s example of considering Himself *dāsa-dāsānudāsa* has the best chance of attracting Kāñēa’s attention. If our *déknā-guru* is a servant of Kāñēa’s dearest devotee, we are all the more fortunate to be connected through that additional link.

The *déknā-guru* is his disciple’s immediate link, the one who takes personal responsibility for delivering the disciple to Kāñēa. He may be able to do this only on the strength of those he represents, those who empower him. Still, the personal responsibility is his. Personal responsibility is what makes *déknā* something more than just a formal ceremony. As a child’s parents are more personally responsible than are grandparents and more distant forefathers, so also the *déknā-guru* takes special trouble and risk for his disciples. For disciples not to honor him for this is indecent.

Çréla Jéva Gosvámé writes in *Bhakti-sandarbha* (207) about the obligation of respect for one's *dékñã-guru*:

*mantra-gurus tv eka evety äha,*

*labdhvãnu-graha äcãryät  
tena sandarçitãgamaù  
mahã-puruñam abhyarcen  
mürtyãbhimatayätmanaù*

*anugraho mantra-dékñã-rüpaù, ägamo mantra-vidhi-çãstram, asyaikatvam eka-  
vacanena bodhyate.*

*bodhaù kaluñitas tena  
daurätmyaà prakaöé-kãtam  
gurur yena parityaktas  
tena tyaktaù purã hariù*

*iti brahma-vaivartãdau tat-tyãga-niñedhät. tad-aparitoñeëaivãnyo guruù kriyate. tato  
'neka-guru-karaëe pürva-tyãga eva siddhaù.*

“The *mantra-guru*, however, is only one. As it is stated: ‘Having obtained the mercy of the spiritual master, who reveals to the disciple the injunctions of Vedic scriptures, the devotee should worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the particular personal form of the Lord the devotee finds most attractive.’ (*Bhäg.* 11.3.48) This mercy is in the form of initiation into the *mantra*. The *ägama* is the scripture giving the regulations of chanting the *mantra*. That this *guru* is one can be understood from the use of the singular number [in the word *äcãryãt*]. Indeed, the *Brahma-vaivarta* and other *Purãëas* forbid rejecting him: ‘One who rejects his *guru* must have polluted intelligence. He reveals his own wickedness by this act. Even before this, he has already rejected Lord Hari.’ Dissatisfied with his *guru*, he takes another one; his taking more than one *guru* proves that he has previously rejected [Kãñëa].”

**Çréla Prabhupãda described initiation as a process, with the essence of this process being the delivery of *dívya-jñãna*, or transcendental knowledge, from the spiritual master to the disciple. (p. 3)**

**Initiation, as described above, is a process. Components of this process include receiving and implementing the instructions to wear *kaëöhé mälã* and *Vaiñëava tilaka*, and receiving a *Vaiñëava* name. The most essential aspect of initiation is receiving transcendental knowledge from a realized spiritual master. (p. 5)**

The author here attempts to identify the essence of initiation as the transmission of spiritual knowledge rather than the mere ceremony of officially receiving one's *mantra* and new name. He cites (without the Sanskrit) a verse that has been given as

authoritative by Çréla Prabhupāda, and indeed was cited by the Gauḍeya Vaiṇēava ācāryas Sanātana Gosvāmé, Narahari Śārakāra, and Jēva Gosvāmé in their foundational explanations of *dékñā*:

*divyāà jīānaà yato dadyāt  
kuryāt pāpasya saikñāyam  
tasmād dékñēti sā proktā  
deçikais tattva kovidaiù*

“*Dékñā* is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as *dékñā*.” (Çréla Prabhupāda’s translation from *Caitanya-caritāmāta*, 2.15.108). But does this actually mean that the essential definition of “initiation” should be “the transmitting of transcendental knowledge”? If that were so, there would be no difference between *çikñā* and *dékñā*.

We should, however, look carefully at how our ācāryas present the context of the statement of this verse. The above verse is cited by Çréla Sanātana Gosvāmé in *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (second *vilāsa*), and Çréla Jēva Gosvāmé in *Bhakti-sandarbha* (283), and Çréla Prabhupāda in his purport of *Caitanya-caritāmātya*, as above. All three presentations of this verse are very similar. Let’s examine the passage of *Bhakti-sandarbha*:

*yady api çré-bhāgavata-mate paīcarātrādi-vad arcana-mārgasyāvaçyakatvaà nāsti, tad vināpi çaraēāpatty-ādēnām ekatareēāpi puruñārtha-siddher abhihitatvāt, tathāpi çré-nāradādi-varmānusaradbhiù çré-bhagavatā saha sambandha-viçeñāà dékñā-vidhānena çré-guru-caraēa-sampāditaà cikérñadbhiù kātāyāà dékñāyām arcanam avaçyāà kriyetaiva,*

“In the opinion of *Çrémad-Bhāgavatam* there is no absolute necessity of following the process of *arcana*, just as there is no need to follow the methods of the *Paīcarātra*, since it is specifically stated that one can achieve the full perfection of life even without them, just by practicing even one of the methods of *çaraēāpatti* [surrender] and so on. Nonetheless, if those who follow the paths of such authorities as Çré Nārada want their special relationship with the Personality of Godhead, which is to be achieved at the feet of their divine spiritual master by his giving them *dékñā*, they must necessarily take *dékñā* and then perform the process of *arcanam*. This is as is stated in the *Āgama* [*Paīcarātra*]:

*divyāà jīānaà yato dadyāt  
kuryāt pāpasya saikñāyam  
tasmād dékñēti sā proktā  
deçikais tattva kovidaiù*

*ato guruà praēamyaiiva  
sarva-svaà vinivedya ca  
gāhnéyād vaiñēavaà mantraà  
dékñā-pūrvaà vidhānataù*



*ity āgamāt. divyāà jīānāà hy atra çrémati mantre bhagavat-svarūpa-jīānam, tena bhagavatā sambandha-viçeñā-jīānāà ca, yathā pādmottara-khaëòādāv añöökñārādikam adhikātya vivātam asti.*

“ ‘Dékñā is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as *dékñā*. ”

“ ‘Therefore one should first bow down to his *guru*, offer everything he possesses to him, and should accept a Vaiñëava *mantra* by properly carrying out the process of *dékñā*. ’ ”

“ ‘Transcendental knowledge’ here means knowledge of the identity of the Personality of Godhead within one’s divine *mantra*, and also knowledge of one’s individual relationship with the Supreme Lord, as has been elaborately described in the *Uttara-khaëòā* of the *Padma Purāëa*, in the discussion of the eight-syllable and other *mantras*. ”

*dékñā yathāgame,*

*dvijānām anupanétānāà  
sva-karmādhyayanādiñu  
yathādhikāro nāstéha  
syāc copanayanād anu*

*tathātrādékñītānāà tu  
mantra-devārcanādiñu  
nādhikāro ’sty ataù kuryād  
ātmānāà çiva-saàstutam*

“*Dékñā* is as is described in the *Āgama*: ‘When they have not been initiated, *brāhmaëas* have no authorization to engage in their prescribed duties of studying the *Vedas* and so on, but after taking initiation they are authorized.’ ”

“ ‘Similarly those who have not taken *dékñā* are not authorized to perform such activities as chanting *mantras* and worshiping the Deity of the Lord. Therefore one should make oneself auspicious and reputable [by accepting initiation]. ’ ”

[end of the *Bhakti-sandarbhā* section]

Here *dékñā* is described as, basically, a process of receiving a Vaiñëava *mantra* so that one can begin the formal methods of *Pāicarātrika* devotional service such as Deity worship and the chanting of mantras. The identification of *dékñā* with the transmission of transcendental knowledge is only mentioned in a secondary way, and as part of a two-verse statement from an anonymous *Paicarātra* that goes on to define *dékñā* as the official receiving of a Vaiñëava *mantra*. Citing this verse out of context therefore fails as proof that the transmission of knowledge is the *svarūpa-lakñāëa* (essential definition) of *dékñā*, as the PL author postulates. It is rather only a *taöastha-lakñāëa* (secondary characteristic).

The same conclusion is also shown in Çréla Sanātana Gosvāmé’s equivalent presentation in *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. He cites the same two verses beginning *divyāà*

*jñanam*, preceding them with the heading: *atha dékñā-māhātmyam* (“Now the glories of *dékñā*.”) In other words, Çréla Sanātana cites the two verses to highlight the importance of *dékñā*, not to give its essential definition. As Çréla Prabhupāda also pointed out when he also cited and explained the first words of these verses in several different initiation lectures, the first two lines are giving a poetic analysis of the syllables *dé-kñā*. The syllable *dé* alludes to *divyā jñanam*, and *kñā* figuratively indicates *kñāpayati* (“it eliminates [ignorance]”). Such poetic explanations, known in the Vedic tradition as *artha-vāda*, are often given by scriptures and their commentators to evoke appreciation of facts that have been already established by more scientific methods. They are not meant to be taken as the essential definition or literal proof of anything, even according to the strict rules of grammar. The syllable *dé* in *dékñā* is not actually derived from the same root as *divyam*, nor is it necessarily connected with the noun *jñanam*. Nor does the bare syllable *kñā* necessarily mean *kñāpayati*, nor is the object of that verb necessarily “ignorance.”

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. Properly speaking, *dékñā* is a specific *Pāicarātrika* method of *mantra* initiation, which Çréla Rūpa Gosvāmé has stipulated as one of the required elements of *vaidhé sādhana-bhakti*.

**Çréla Prabhupāda is giving transcendental knowledge, and thus he is performing the most important element of the process of initiation. He is the main Vaiñēava doing this for members of his movement. (p.6)**

Yes, Çréla Prabhupāda is our prime source of transcendental knowledge. Whatever we may know about Kāñēa consciousness, Vedic civilization, and anything else worth knowing we know only by his divine grace and in terms of his understanding and attitudes. So yes, he is our most important link to the Gauḍeya Vaiñēava *sampradāya*, and without his blessings we will never be able to receive the full mercy of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Still there is the practical distinction of *dékñā* and *çikñā*, which we cannot ignore without falling into confusion. *Dékñā* is not exactly the same as *çikñā*. It is a specific function, which according to all *çāstras* and practice is always performed by a current representative of one’s *sampradāya*. Çréla Prabhupāda is the principal *çikñā-guru* for anyone who wants to accept him as such, but he is not the *dékñā-guru* of all of his followers, any more than he is their biological father. This fact does not diminish his supremacy in ISKCON. Nor is it a reason for his representatives to foolishly imitate him.

An authorized *dékñā-guru* in ISKCON should be considered Çréla Prabhupāda’s empowered representative, and deserves the respect of his disciples. If we think Çréla Prabhupāda cannot empower his disciples despite their imperfections, how strong is our faith in him?

**Someone may assert “If transcendental knowledge is given by someone other than the Vaiñēava who performs the initiation ceremony, then that transcendental knowledge can only be called *çikñā*, not *dékñā*. Therefore it cannot be rightly said that Çréla**

**Prabhupāda is giving *dékñā*. He is giving *çikñā*.” In the framework of The Prominent Link (PL), the essential focus is on the process of initiation, which is founded on the transmission of transcendental knowledge. Terminology and labeling is not a chief concern. Whomever is labeled “*çikñā guru*”, “initiator”, or “*dékñā guru*”, the heart of the PL understanding is that Çréla Prabhupāda is the primary Vaiñēava directly giving transcendental knowledge. For devotees who are receiving *divya-jīāna* directly from Çréla Prabhupāda, more than from any other Vaiñēava, it can rightly be said that Çréla Prabhupāda is their direct, current, and prominent link to the *paramparā*, with “direct, current, and prominent link” defined as “the Vaiñēava who directly gives transcendental knowledge more than any other devotee.” (p. 7)**

We can agree without hesitation that Çréla Prabhupāda is the most prominent link to the *sampradāya* for all of his followers, and that he is directly their *çikñā-guru*, at least to the extent that they are interested to hear from him. But he is not the last link in the chain for his grand-disciples. He is alive in his instructions, in his *mūrti*, and in the living institution ISKCON. Why be disappointed that his legacy “can only be called *çikñā*,” since history will show how his *çikñā* transformed the world? Unfortunately for all of us, he is not physically present and so is no longer giving *dékñā* to anyone. Instead he has taken the usual measure of authorizing his disciples to initiate in the *paramparā*. There is no definite evidence available that Çréla Prabhupāda ever gave instructions to contravene the age-old tradition of *paramparā*. In accordance with the ancient tradition, the devotees currently serving as the representatives of the founder-*ācārya* in giving *dékñā* are personally responsible for their disciples and have a special spiritual relationship with them.

**When someone first contacts ISKCON, at least in most parts of the organization, for a few months he is encouraged to directly accept Çréla Prabhupāda as his guru. We suggest that once someone has done this, as evidenced by accepting Çréla Prabhupāda in his heart as his spiritual master and following Çréla Prabhupāda’s instructions, the newcomer does not need to search for another Vaiñēava to connect him with Çréla Prabhupāda. (p. 9)**

This amounts to saying that newcomers to ISKCON do not need to take *dékñā*, or else that Çréla Prabhupāda is their *dékñā-guru*. One who is wary about accepting any current ISKCON *guru* is still preliminarily connected to Çréla Prabhupāda by whatever faith he has developed and by how well he can follow Prabhupāda’s instructions. If he wants, however, to become a full member of the *sampradāya* he needs to take *dékñā*. Some may elect to avoid *dékñā*; still, we should encourage newcomers to do what Çréla Rūpa Gosvāmé asked them to do. It is certainly appropriate for new *bhaktas* to worship Çréla Prabhupāda as their *guru*, since he is certainly their *guru*, and they should continue to worship him. But why should that mean they are never going to take *dékñā* from one of his representatives?

**The Vaiñëava conducting the initiation ceremony does not become the connection between the initiate and Çréla Prabhupäda. The direct link between the initiate and Çréla Prabhupäda already exists. The connection does not become indirect at the time of the ceremony. (p. 10)**

Is “the Vaiñëava conducting the initiation ceremony” the initiate’s *guru* or not? If so, then why not let him be called *guru*? If not, then the intended idea is that Çréla Prabhupäda must be the new disciple’s one and only *guru*, because anyone else standing between the Prabhupäda and the disciple would degrade the connection. The actual principle of *paramaparä* works in just the opposite way: The more a devotee becomes servant of the servant of the servant, the more likely it is that the *paramaparä* and Kåñëa will recognize him. In the Ädi Puräëa there is the following statement by Lord Kåñëa Himself, addressed to Arjuna: “My dear Pärtha, one who claims to be My devotee is not so. Only a person who claims to be the devotee of My devotee is actually My devotee.”

**Çréla Prabhupäda is transmitting transcendental knowledge, and we are confident that he will continue to do so for many generations. In this transcendental sense, Çréla Prabhupäda is initiating sincere followers. In fact, we propose that accepting *dívya-jñäna*, or initiation, from Çréla Prabhupäda, and thereby directly connecting with him, is the qualification for one to become formally initiated in Çréla Prabhupäda’s movement. Again, the official initiation ceremony is a formal acknowledgement that the devotee has directly connected with Çréla Prabhupäda. (p. 10)**

Granted, without accepting Çréla Prabhupäda as one’s *guru*, there is no meaning to thinking oneself a devotee in ISKCON. *Dékñä*, however, is not only a formality of acknowledging one’s already established connection with Çréla Prabhupäda. It is an act of *obeying* Çréla Prabhupäda and his predecessors by reposing one’s faith in one of his representatives. We show the extent of our trust in Çréla Prabhupäda and his ability to empower others by entrusting ourselves to his disciples.

**Çréla Prabhupäda’s followers who assist him in helping to connect a devotee directly to him, are not the point of unconditional surrender. (p. 17)**

When a devotee surrenders himself to any *guru*, that surrender is not “unconditional.” There are conditions, namely that the *guru* should be bona fide (literally, “in good faith”), a faithful representative of the *sampradäya*. It is not because of a *guru*’s own absolute status, because of his mystic powers, erudition, good looks or sweet voice, that one should surrender and become his disciple. The main qualification of a *guru* is his surrender to his *guru* and to the *paramaparä*. In that sense, surrender does have its conditions. The main strength of ISKCON is Çréla Prabhupäda’s power to attract faith.

That power, however, comes from Kāñëa through the *parampara*, and is still active even in Çréla Prabhupāda's physical absence. Those who could not take initiation directly from Prabhupāda can still become fortunate if they meet someone empowered by Prabhupāda to carry on the *paramparā*. If there are no such qualified *gurus* in ISKCON, then ISKCON is finished or will have to be dormant for some time, and declaring Çréla Prabhupāda to be everyone's initiator will not change the situation. On the other hand, if there *are* qualified *gurus*, the same mercy is available as much as it was in Prabhupāda's presence, without having to imagine that Prabhupāda is still giving *dékñā*.

Devotional service is not linear in the sense that when we surrender to a *guru* we are giving ourselves up only to a single "point." Initiation means joining the company of the *sampradāya*, which includes the founder-*ācārya*, his predecessors and his representatives. The *dékñā-guru* is not the only point of surrender, but he is the closest point with whom his disciple makes immediate contact, at least as far as the *dékñā* process goes. Even if connection with that point is disrupted, however, a devotee's connection with his *çikñā-gurus* can still easily save him. In some cases a disciple may receive little instruction from his *dékñā-guru* and have more faith in a *çikñā-guru*, but as long as the *dékñā-guru* is a faithful Vaiñëava his disciple should always show him respect.

**...for all members of Çréla Prabhupāda's movement the worship of Çréla Prabhupāda is sufficient. No one else needs to be worshiped as the link to the *paramparā*, because Çréla Prabhupāda completely fills this role, though of course he accepts assistance from his followers. (p. 19)**

Is it actually sufficient, or more to the point, is the Supreme Lord satisfied, by ISKCON devotees who worship Çréla Prabhupāda but do not want to worship their *dékñā-gurus*? To answer this we first have to decide what we mean by worship. Does worship mean acknowledging that one's *guru* is some sort of *guru*, not just an ordinary person, or the extreme fanaticism of being ready to reject Prabhupāda and Kāñëa in the name of following the so-called *guru*, or something in between? Starting at one end of the scale, it is clear from Kāñëa's instructions to Uddhava that He is not pleased by neglect of one's *guru*:

*ācāryaà mää vijānéyān  
nāvamanyeta karhicit  
na martya-budhyäsüyeta  
sarva-deva-mayo guruù*

"One should know the *ācārya* as Myself and never disrespect him in any way. One should not envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods." (*Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27)

Kāñëa here tells Uddhava unequivocally that considering one's *ācārya* an ordinary person, imperfect like everyone else, means to envy him (*asüyeta*), and He registers His disapproval of such an attitude. But who is an *ācārya*? Many are of the opinion that Çréla Prabhupāda is our only *ācārya* in ISKCON. Isn't it disrespectful to

Prabhupāda, they ask, to equate with him his disciples who are merely “performing the initiation ceremony”? Indeed, in the current atmosphere of ISKCON it is taboo to give the title *ācārya* to anyone else but Çréla Prabhupāda, even though he specified that he be designated the founder-*ācārya*., a particular kind of *ācārya*, implying that there may also be other *ācāryas* in his institution. In any case, here is the opinion on this question of one of our previous *ācāryas*, Çréla Jéva Gosvāmé:

*ataù çré-mantra-guror ävaçyakatvaà sutaräm eva. tad etat paramārtha-gurv-äçrayo vyavahārika-gurv-ädi-parityägenäpi kartavya ity äçayenäha,*

*gurur na sa syät sva-jano na sa syät  
pitä na sa syäj janané na sä syät  
daivaà na tat syän na patiç ca sa syän  
na mocayed yaù samupeta-mātyum*

*samupetaù samprāpto mātyuù saàsāro yena tam, ata uktaà çré-nāradena, ‘jugupsitaà dharma-kāte ‘nuçāsataù/ svabhāva-raktasya mahän vyatikramaù’ ity-ädi. tasmät tävad eva teñää gurv-ädi-vyavahāro yāvan mātyu-mocakaà çré-guru-caraëää näçrayata ity arthaù. çré-āñabha-devaù sva-putrān.*

“Thus the *mantra-guru* is all the more so required. One must take shelter of a transcendental *guru* even if it means rejecting a worldly *guru* or other authorities; with that idea in mind it is said: ‘One who cannot deliver his dependents from the path of repeated birth and death should never become a spiritual master, a father, a husband, a mother or a worshipable demigod.’ (*Bhäg.* 5.5.18) By whose help imminent death (material existence) [is avoided]. Thus Çré Nārada makes such statements as ‘The people in general are naturally inclined to enjoy, and you have encouraged them in that way in the name of religion. This is verily condemned and is quite unreasonable. Because they are guided under your instructions, they will accept such activities in the name of religion and will hardly care for prohibitions.’ (*Bhäg.* 1.5.15) In other words, therefore one should treat such persons as *gurus* and so on only until one can take shelter at the feet of a divine spiritual master who can deliver one from death. The verse under discussion was spoken by Çré Āñabhadeva to his sons.

*anyadä sva-gurau karmibhir api bhagavad-dāñöiù kartavyety äha,*

*ācāryaà mäà vijānéyän  
nāvamanyeta karhicit  
na martya-buddhyäsüyeta  
sarva-deva-mayo guruù*

*brahmacāri-dharmāntaù-paöhitam idam. çré-bhagavän.*

“In other circumstances even *karmés* should see their spiritual master as God, as is stated: ‘One should know the *ācārya* as Myself and never disrespect him in any way. One should not envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of

all the demigods.’ (*Bhāg.* 11.17.27) This statement is included in the description of a *brahmacāre*’s duties. It was spoken by the Personality of Godhead.” (*Bhakti-sandarbha* 210-11)

In other words, Çréla Jéva Gosvāmé here asserts that to enter the pure devotional service of Kåñëa one first needs to accept initiation from a bona fide *guru* in the line of pure devotion. If one was previously initiated by a “worldly *guru*” into something other than pure *kåñëa-bhakti*, one should find a proper Vaiñëava *guru* instead. But note that in the second section cited here, Çréla Jéva says that *karmés* who have not found a pure Vaiñëava *guru* should continue to honor their worldly *gurus*, and cites the same verse *ācāryaā mää vijānéyāt*. Even a materialistic initiator into an impure method of worship is to be considered and respected as *ācārya* and never neglected and disrespected. What then of an initiator who is a proper Vaiñëava in the line of pure devotion? Can a devotee expect to satisfy Kåñëa by considering his *guru* an ordinary person and refusing to even let him be called *guru*?

Moving toward the other end of the spectrum of worship, we reach a point where it becomes debatable how much and what kind of worship is suitable. This is not an easy controversy to settle, and cannot be safely solved by legislating a simplistic norm. But to begin the solution, we have to distinguish between public and private *pūjā*, and between *pūjā* and *bhajana*, and measure in each separately the appropriateness of various kinds of *guru* worship. The worship done in an ISKCON temple is in public view and should reflect the authorized position of the institution. A devotee’s Deity worship in his own home is another matter, and how a mature devotee worships in his heart is yet another.

**Some devotees may choose to worship a disciple of Çréla Prabhupāda, such as the Vaiñëava who performed the initiation ceremony, as the link to Çréla Prabhupāda, or in some other philosophical capacity. The PL framework does not directly address this, though it does contend that any member of Çréla Prabhupāda’s movement who accepts Çréla Prabhupāda as the guru to be worshiped as the current link to the *paramparā* must be permitted to do so. (p. 19)**

Given what we have discussed above, it is not advisable to recommend to devotees that they ignore their *dékñā-gurus*, unless the *gurus* were never proper Vaiñëavas or else have seriously deviated from Vaiñëava principles. Some ISKCON devotees may repose most of their faith only in Çréla Prabhupāda and little faith in their initiating *gurus*; still, to satisfy the *paramparā* and Kåñëa, the prescribed etiquette should be maintained. The *Pāicarātrika* methods of Deity worship prescribe that worship be offered with authorized *mantras*, and every item offered should first be offered to the *guru* who gave the worshiper his *mantras*. The etiquette in formal worship is that the disciple offers an item to his *guru*, the *guru* then gives the offering to his *guru*, and so on until the offering reaches the Lord Himself. Because the *guru* is a dear devotee of the Lord, the Lord does not refuse the offerings of imperfect disciples. Since this is the formal *pāicarātrika* method, the *guru* who is given the offering first is normally the *pāicarātrika dékñā-guru*. There may be exceptions; the *guru-paramparā* given to us by

Çréla Prabhupāda for worship in ISKCON, for example, includes Bhaktivinoda Ōhākura's *çikñā-guru*, Çréla Jagannātha dāsa Bābājé, rather than his *dékñā-guru*. Nonetheless, offering *pūjā* first to one's *dékñā-guru* is the norm practiced in all Vaiñēava *sampradāyas*. Whatever may have been the actual relationship between Çréla Bhaktivinoda and his *dékñā-guru* (and we hear different stories about this from different sources), it is known that Çréla Bhaktivinoda never behaved disrespectfully toward him.

**Many great Vaiñēavas are not formally worshipped. Consider the case of Çréla Çukadeva Gosvāmé, the speaker of the Çrémad-Bhāgavatam. Undoubtedly he is our guru. Clearly he is situated at the topmost platform of devotional service. We honor, glorify and revere him, though we don't formally worship him. For example, we don't recite his *pranam mantras* when we enter the temple room and his picture is not on the ISKCON altars. Are we minimizing the great saint Çréla Çukadeva Gosvāmé? No, because Çréla Prabhupāda instructed how to properly honor Çréla Çukadeva Gosvāmé according to our particular circumstance, and this does not include formal worship as described above. Similarly, to not formally worship the devotee who performs the initiating ceremony is not an inherent minimization of that devotee. The Prominent Link (PL) model contends that worship of Çréla Prabhupāda as the direct connection to the disciplic succession, without worship of anyone else as the link to Çréla Prabhupāda, should be accepted as a valid practice in Çréla Prabhupāda's movement, though the PL model does not maintain that worship of others as the connection to Çréla Prabhupāda should be prohibited in the movement. (p. 22)**

Çukadeva Gosvāmé is honored as *guruà munénām*, the spiritual master of the great sages. When he spoke to Parékñit, Çukadeva's own *guru* Vyāsadeva and *parama-guru* Nārada were happy to sit in the audience and listen. It is commendable that ISKCON devotees sometimes worship Çukadeva Gosvāmé in their personal chanting and meditation. But we do not make formal offerings to Çukadeva in our regular *pūjā* because he is not in the line of initiators of the Brahma-Mādhva-Gauòeya *sampradāya*. The *dékñā-guru* of a properly initiated devotee in ISKCON, however, is the immediate link in the *dékñā-paramparā* for his disciple. If the disciple wants to participate in the devotional method of *arcanam*, which in our line is practiced according to *pāicarātrika* principles, he should offer at least a minimum of worship to his *dékñā-guru*. In his heart he may spend day and night worshipping Çréla Prabhupāda, and he may spend hours every day reading Prabhupāda's books and speaking his glories, but still there are standards he should follow in showing appropriate respect, including worship to his *dékñā-guru*.

**Even if one conceives of the devotee who conducts the initiation ceremony to be in the absolute position and the current link to the *paramparā*, that devotee could legitimately instruct the initiate to worship Çréla Prabhupāda rather than himself. For the sake of unity**



**of the movement it would seem that such directives from devotees who perform initiations would be warranted. Many observers have commented that overemphasis by the initiate on the Vaiñëava performing the initiation ceremony, in terms of worship, celebration of Vyäsa-püjä, and other practices, at the expense of an appreciation of Çréla Prabhupäda's proper place in the life of the initiate, has caused the movement to degrade to a *matha* mentality. (p. 23)**

Fanatical *guru* worship does degrade ISKCON. It did in the past, when the Mäyäpura temple room was encumbered by eleven extra *vyäsäsanas* during the Gaura-pürëimä festivals. It continues to do so in defiance of ISKCON law in some places, including established ISKCON temples. But is it an act of fanaticism to have a picture of the *püjä*'s *dékñä-guru* temporarily on the altar, or to observe the *dékñä-gurus'* Vyäsa-püjä once a year? Does it have to be a question of worshiping either Prabhupäda or the *dékñä-guru*, or can both be accommodated fairly? In a healthy *guru*-disciple relationship in ISKCON, the representative of Prabhupäda (*dékñä-* or *çikñä-guru*) would constantly direct the disciple in serving Prabhupäda's instructions and his mission. In exchange for this, the disciple would naturally feel gratitude and want to express it. So the useful questions to ask are: How much is this healthy norm established in ISKCON? Where it isn't—why? And how to rectify the situation? On careful examination of what is actually going on in ISKCON we find the situation neither all black nor all white. However, we do not believe that the cause of all our problems is that disciples worship their *dékñä-gurus*.

**However, even if someone doesn't view Çréla Prabhupäda as the current link, whomever is regarded as the link can instruct the initiates to worship the same altar that Çréla Prabhupäda gave us, to recite only Çréla Prabhupäda's *pranam mantras*, and to celebrate Çréla Prabhupäda's Vyäsa-püjä ceremony as the primary Vyäsa-püjä ceremony.**

**By retaining the worship practices Çréla Prabhupäda established, no one in Çréla Prabhupäda's movement will ever experience that the Vaiñëava perceived and worshipped as the current link to the *paramparä* will experience difficulties in spiritual life. (p. 24)**

Although elsewhere the author claims his model is not meant to be adopted as the only allowable viewpoint in ISKCON, here he definitely implies that if a *guru* does not forbid his disciples to worship himself, he is deviant. It is proposed that no pictures of any *guru* after Prabhupäda should be on ISKCON altars, and that disciples should not recite *praëäma-mantras* for their *dékñä-gurus*. These proposals, as already discussed, are against the principles of *päicarätrika* worship and the practice of Vaiñëavas and others in all *sampradäyas*. There is merit in the suggestion that the most important observance of Vyäsa-püjä should be for the founder-*äcärya*, Çréla Prabhupäda, yet this does not mean that disciples should refrain from celebrating their *dékñä-gurus'* appearance days.

It is impractical to propose that retaining the external appearance of worship as it was in Çréla Prabhupāda's presence will prevent the tragedy of *guru* falldown in ISKCON. Naturally and unavoidably, new devotees will tend to place their trust in those who personally guide them and if the guides deviate, their followers will suffer. Artificially elevating Çréla Prabhupāda to the imaginary status of perpetual *dékñā-guru* is no substitute for fulfilling the actual need of his representatives to become pure in Kāñēa consciousness.

**Using qualifying terms, such as “preeminent çikñā guru”, to describe Çréla Prabhupāda's standing in his movement and the role he plays in the life of the members of his movement, distracts from Çréla Prabhupāda's status as “the spiritual master”, the guru who is referred to when we refer to the singular spiritual master. (p. 26)**

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 Çréla Prabhupāda. And, accepting this premise, we should furthermore correct his title to just *ācārya*, instead of founder-*ācārya* since this would clarify that no others could ever be called an *ācārya*. However, the premise that ISKCON can only have one *guru* is incorrect. Rather, Prabhupāda is the first among many *gurus*, which is one meaning of the epithet *prabhu-pāda*. He is pre-eminent, and he is *çikñā-guru* for everyone who wants to hear from and follow him. The fact that he can empower his disciples to also be *gurus* only adds to his glories.

**In 1999, just after the GBC passed a resolution designating Çréla Prabhupāda with terms such as “the preeminent çikñā guru for every member of the institution” and “the preeminent and compulsory çikñā-guru”, the GBC body was discussing aspects of worship. The idea that Çréla Prabhupāda would be the sole object of worship in ISKCON was mentioned and discussed. A prominent GBC who conducts initiation ceremonies emphatically declared “But disciples must be able to worship their guru! They have to be allowed to worship their guru!” Clear from his statement was that, despite the resolutions from moments before that all members of Çréla Prabhupāda's movement must place their faith, trust and allegiance first and foremost in Çréla Prabhupāda, who is the preeminent *çikñā* guru for every member of the institution, the conception that continued to be maintained by this GBC, and most of the leaders present, was that the *real* guru, notwithstanding whatever official glorification may be afforded to Çréla Prabhupāda in resolutions, is the Vaiñēava who performs the formal initiation ceremony. In support of this minimization of Çréla Prabhupāda's role in his movement, one of the themes of a keynote speech at the 1999 GBC meetings was specifically that Çréla Prabhupāda is not the direct and current link to the disciplic succession for devotees who did not receive formal initiation from him. (p. 27)**

Çréla Prabhupāda, his disciples who give initiation, and his many followers who give valuable instruction are all real *gurus*. Çréla Prabhupāda is the founding *ācārya* of ISKCON, the original light from which all other lights in ISKCON are lit, and of course he is the representative of the Gauḍeya *sampradāya* going back to Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Advising disciples to worship their *dékñā-gurus* does not diminish Çréla Prabhupāda's position but only glorifies it more, as long as the *dékñā-gurus* represent Prabhupāda faithfully and direct their disciples to his teachings.

**Çréla Prabhupāda continues to accept disciples who sincerely dedicate their lives to following his instructions and who willingly receive the transcendental knowledge that he imparts. Accepting these disciples means that Çréla Prabhupāda takes responsibility to guide these souls back to Godhead. (p. 30)**

The only way to make this statement compatible to actual Gauḍeya Vaiñēava *siddhānta* is to say that Çréla Prabhupāda is accepting as grand-disciples or *çikñā* disciples the devotees who take initiation from ISKCON *gurus* following in his line. Thus this statement is a thinly veiled declaration of the *ātvik* doctrine, which declares Çréla Prabhupāda to be the current *dékñā-guru* of ISKCON.

**Suppose a book distributor gives a book to someone. When that person visits the temple the book distributor, if he is in proper consciousness, will naturally be eager to serve the advancement of the newcomer in any way he can. Years later, when the former newcomer is now initiated and situated in service within Çréla Prabhupāda's movement, and has accepted guidance from any devotee mentors, the book distributor continues to be actively concerned about the progress of the devotee to whom he distributed a book. A similar mentality should exist in the temple president, the senior congregation member preached to the newcomer at the Sunday Feast, and the Vaiñēava selected by the new initiate to conduct the initiation ceremony. (p. 31)**

This explanation equates the role of the *dékñā-guru* with that of any preacher. In other words, it denies that *dékñā* is anything at all separate from *çikñā*. Yet according to Srila Prabhupada and the *ācāryas*, *dékñā* is a separate, special function.. It involves the acceptance of vows, the giving of mantras and the taking of special, personal responsibility that deserves special reciprocation from its recipients.

**For followers of Çréla Prabhupāda, for the duration of his movement, there is profound security in knowing that the *mahābhāgavata* A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Çréla Prabhupāda, a spiritual master at the topmost stage of Kāñēa conscious realization, is taking responsibility for their spiritual life, though this does not nullify the individual responsibility for one's advancement in Kāñēa consciousness. With this understanding of Çréla Prabhupāda's**

**absolute position and the relative position of other members of his movement, there will be less disturbance caused, on an individual and institutional level, when devotees who serve as guides and mentors have difficulty. (p. 33)**

Here it is proposed that in ISKCON Çréla Prabhupāda's position is absolute and everyone else's position is relative. But this is not exactly what our *ācāryas* teach us. Çréla Kāñēadāsa Kavirāja says, *ekale éçvara kāñēa, āra saba bhātya*: "Lord Kāñēa alone is the supreme controller, and all others are His servants." (*Caitanya-caritāmāta, Ādi 5.142*) Only the Supreme Lord is absolute. Çréla Prabhupāda's position as the founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON is based on his empowerment by his predecessor *ācāryas*. The position of an empowered representative of Çréla Prabhupāda is understood in the same way, even if the empowered disciple is nowhere near equal to Prabhupāda. The *dēkñā-guru* takes responsibility, and Prabhupāda and his predecessors kindly share that responsibility.

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

**Devotee A in the above scenario has brought devotee B to Kāñēa consciousness and is serving as his main spiritual master. From the viewpoint of the PL model, devotee B is not yet initiated in the essential, transcendental sense. He has not properly connected with the current link to the *paramparā*, because he is not receiving most of his direct *divya-jñāna* from Çréla Prabhupāda. (p. 35)**

Look at the situation of Çréla Prabhupāda's disciples. They are grand disciples of Çréla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvaté, but received their basic understanding of Kāñēa consciousness from Çréla Prabhupāda. Çréla Prabhupāda wanted it to be this way, and he wanted himself to be the *çikñā-guru* directly teaching future generations of ISKCON. Thus Çréla Bhaktisiddhānta has not been a directly accessible *çikñā-guru* for most of us.

But in the special case *The Prominent Link* presents above, devotee B apparently cannot understand Çréla Prabhupāda directly, and gets his teachings indirectly through devotee A. When despite Çréla Prabhupāda's efforts to make his teachings universally understandable such a case arises, the potency of the *paramparā* can nonetheless convey itself fully intact. Çréla Prabhupāda should be able to empower devotee A to pass on his teachings in devotee A's own words. So why can't devotee B be properly connected with the *paramparā* and its links, current and past? He can receive the knowledge he needs, if not directly from Prabhupāda, then indirectly from Prabhupāda's representative.

**Çré Kâñëa and Çréla Prabhupāda could arrange for another Vaiñëava to assume the role of the current and direct link at some time. What is clear is that Çréla Prabhupāda is doing this at present, and there is no need for others to aspire for this role. (p. 38)**

This makes sense if we understand “current and direct link” to mean the universal, permanent *çikñā-guru* of ISKCON. Just as our Çréla Prabhupāda is what his Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvaté Prabhupāda was for the Gauḍéya Maōha, and Çréla Jéva Gosvāmé Prabhupāda was for his generation, so theoretically someone else might become the Prabhupāda of a distant future. There is certainly no need, however, for anyone to aspire for that role yet within ISKCON.

**This paper describes devotees who genuinely experience Çréla Prabhupāda as the direct, current, and prominent link to the *paramparā*, by dint of Çréla Prabhupāda being the primary Vaiñëava who gives direct transcendental knowledge. Of course this can be misused by someone claiming “I’m directly connected with Çréla Prabhupāda, so I don’t listen to anything anyone else says,” and as an excuse for arrogance. If someone is actually connected with Çréla Prabhupāda then he won’t exhibit such behavior. (p. 45)**

Fanaticism tends to be endemic among neophytes in any religious tradition and can be focused on any authority, not just Çréla Prabhupāda. There are plenty of young devotees who take pride in their relationship with their *guru* and will not listen to what other Vaiñëavas say. Perhaps the problem is not only neglect of Prabhupāda, but also neglect of Vaiñëavas in general in the name of *guru* worship. How does declaring Çréla Prabhupāda the prominent link solve this problem? By reducing the possible objects of fanaticism to just one? The proposition “If someone is actually connected with Çréla Prabhupāda then he won’t exhibit such behavior” is logically troublesome. It implies that someone who exhibits fanaticism has no real connection with Çréla Prabhupāda, which isn’t true. A devotee may be sincerely trying to dedicate his life to Prabhupāda’s service, which must mean that he has some real spiritual connection with Prabhupāda, but at the same time he may still be immature. It’s possible to be connected to Prabhupāda but fanatic, or not properly connected to Prabhupāda and fanatic. Thus there is no causal relationship between being connected and avoiding fanaticism.

**We present this model as a valid way to conceive of Çréla Prabhupāda’s position. Though we don’t contend that it is the only legitimate view of Çréla Prabhupāda, we request that the ideas and proposals described herein be accepted and implemented. This does not necessarily mean supplanting other systems and conceptualizations, though it does mean that this model be allowed to at least coexist with other methods and systems for conceiving of and implementing the continuation of the *paramparā*. (p. 51)**

As members of the Gauḍeya *sampradāya*, we have to represent the *sampradāya*'s *siddhānta*, and so cannot endorse the erroneous opinion that Ṣréla Prabhupāda is the one current initiating *guru* of ISKCON. Ṣréla Prabhupāda himself did not favor the kind of philosophical pluralism *The Prominent Link* promotes. The Vaiṅḁava *sampradāya* is not meant to be a forum for alternative systems of belief, but rather the institution for preserving the unchanging philosophy of the *sampradāya*'s founder, Ṣré Caitanya Mahāprabhu. There is, however, much room for individual variety in relationships. Historically, there has been a great deal of such individual expression in our *sampradāya*, going back to the original associates of Lord Caitanya. A devotee's choice of spiritual guides is a matter of the heart, and should never be forced by legislation or intimidation. If such force and intimidation does exist somewhere in today's ISKCON, it needs to be identified and corrected. The author of *PL* has made a sincere attempt to address such problems, but unfortunately he has proposed a philosophically unsound solution.

## Conclusion

In 2001 Dhéra Govinda Prabhu asked the Governing Body Commission of ISKCON to consider the proposals that he made in his booklet *Ṣréla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link*. At its Māyāpur 2002 meeting, the Governing Body Commission issued a preliminary statement and then delegated the Ṣāstric Advisory Council (SAC) to carefully evaluate the booklet and proposals in light of *guru*, *sādhū* and *ṣāstra*. Although we SAC members were aware of the negative preliminary statement by the GBC, we were not bound by it. Our mandate was to search not only for any possible defects in the *PL* presentation but also for any good points. Over the past year, the SAC members devoted hundreds of hours to fulfilling their obligation to consider *Ṣréla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link*, with due Vaiṅḁava respect for both the work and its author. To this end, the author was made a party to SAC's deliberations for several weeks, and had a chance to extensively discuss his views with the SAC members.

All of the SAC members have a history of friendly relations with the author and all share a deep appreciation for his many contributions to our Society. We share many of his concerns about the *guru* question in ISKCON. In the introduction to this paper, we have mentioned some of the valid points in *PL*. But after much careful study, we concluded that the author's presentation of Ṣréla Prabhupāda's relationship to ISKCON members who took initiation after his physical departure significantly contradicts the understandings given to us by Ṣréla Prabhupāda and his predecessor *ācāryas*.

A surface reading of *PL* suggests that the author is just saying "let's put Ṣréla Prabhupāda in the center," which is, of course, something everyone in ISKCON will support. He talks about Ṣréla Prabhupāda being the prominent link to the *paramparā*. And that again is something few will disagree with. Perhaps this is why some ISKCON members have wondered, "Why the commotion? Why are they harassing Dhéra Govinda? All he is saying is that Prabhupada is everyone's topmost *guru*, and the other *gurus* should adopt a lower profile." If that were all he was saying, then, of course, few would object. After all, that is the meaning of the title Prabhupāda—among all *prabhus*

or masters (including spiritual masters), he is supreme, and these other masters, especially in his Society, exhibit their subordination to him by remaining at his feet.

Unfortunately, that is not all that the author is saying. This fact may not be apparent, however, to those who do not read *PL* carefully. In our deliberations, we found that because the author consciously avoided using the standard *çikñā-* and *dékñā-guru* terminology, a terminology given to us by Çréla Prabhupāda and the previous *ācāryas*, it was difficult to understand the full implications of his statements in *PL*. For example, by identifying Çréla Prabhupāda as a “link” and today’s *dékñā-gurus* as “the Vaiñēava who performs the formal initiation ceremony,” it was not easy to see exactly what he was saying in terms of the traditional Vaiñēava understanding of actual *guru-disciple* relationships.

Many questions arose. But here is the main one. According to *PL*, are the devotees who are now conducting initiation ceremonies the *dékñā-gurus* of their disciples or not? Is Çréla Prabhupāda the one *dékñā-guru* of those receiving their initiation ceremonies today or not? It took much questioning of the author to get a clear understanding of his intended meaning.

Dhéra Govinda Prabhu himself is in the position of having received his initiations after Çréla Prabhupāda’s departure. When asked by a SAC member to identify his one *dékñā-guru*, Dhéra Govinda Prabhu said that if he were to answer according to the *PL* understanding, he would have to say that Çréla Prabhupāda was his one *dékñā-guru*. We assume the same would be true for all ISKCON members who received initiation after Prabhupāda’s departure and who agree with the *PL* position.

Nowhere, however, is this conclusion prominently and clearly stated in *PL*. Occasionally, this implicit conclusion does come close to being stated explicitly. It is there in statements such as, “Çréla Prabhupāda continues to accept disciples who sincerely dedicate their lives to following his instructions and who willingly receive the transcendental knowledge that he imparts.” (*PL*, p. 30)

This conclusion can also be found in the practical proposal that Dhéra Govinda Prabhu sent to the GBC in advance of its 2002 Mayapur meeting, wherein he suggests the GBC should endorse the statement that “it is legitimate to consider that Çréla Prabhupāda is initiating devotees who genuinely, directly connect with him by serving his *vāëë* and accepting that *vāëë* as the guiding force of their life. This understanding is applicable regardless of who conducted the formal initiation ceremony for the devotee.”

So members of ISKCON should ask themselves, “Do I agree with the *PL* understanding that Çréla Prabhupāda is the one *dékñā-guru* for all members of ISKCON, including those who took initiation after his departure?” If any ISKCON devotees do agree with that statement, then they have to seriously consider why Çréla Prabhupāda himself did not promote this understanding. They have to seriously consider why Çréla Prabhupāda established another system, whereby his disciples would give *harinama-* and *gāyatri mantra-dékñā*.

For the reasons given in the body of this paper, SAC does not agree with the *PL* understanding that Çréla Prabhupāda is the one *dékñā-guru* for all members of ISKCON, including those who took initiation after his departure.

If the conclusion of *PL* is indeed wrong, it is possible that the method of arriving at the conclusion was also wrong. In his purport to *Çrémad Bhāgavatam* (1.4.1), Çréla Prabhupāda gives some guidelines for one presenting conclusions to the society of

devotees according to one's realization: "The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it." In attempting to explain *dékñä*, *PL* fails this test. In his presentation, the *PL* author fails to maintain Çréla Prabhupāda's original intention, stated in the texts of his books, lectures, conversations and letters, that his disciples would one day become *dékñä-gurus*, initiating spiritual masters. Instead, he manufactures another system from his interpretations of some statements Çréla Prabhupāda made about *divya-jñāna* and *dékñä*.

The author of *PL* concludes that the essence of initiation (*dékñä*) is the transmission of transcendental knowledge (*divya-jñāna*). Although the transmission of transcendental knowledge is connected with *dékñä*, it is not its defining characteristic, as this would eliminate the distinction between *çikñä* and *dékñä*. Çréla Prabhupāda had another idea. This is readily apparent when we look at how Çréla Prabhupāda himself discusses *divya-jñāna* and initiation, in the context of an actual initiation ceremony (Auckland, February 22, 1973):

Devotee (2): How important is formal initiation?

Prabhupāda: Formal initiation means to accept, officially, to abide by the orders of Kāñëa and His representative. That is formal initiation. Officially accept, "Yes, sir, I shall accept. I shall do whatever you say." This is initiation, official acceptance of the job. That's all. Now, you formally accept, and if you do not do the duties, then where is the question of other function? There is no question. Initiation means this is the beginning of accepting the orders of Kāñëa and His representative to carry out. This is the beginning. That is initiation. Just like if you enter in an office establishment, so you accept the terms of service. That is initiation. Then you go on serving, you become promoted, you get salary increase. You become recognized. You become officer. You become big officer, like that. That very word initiation suggests, "This is the beginning." *Dékñä*, *dékñä*. *Dé... divya*. There are two words, *divya-jñāna*. *Divya-jñāna* means transcendental, spiritual knowledge. So *divya* is *dé*, and *jñānam*, *kñāpayati*, explaining, that is *kñä*, *dé-kñä*. This is called *dékñä*, *dékñä*, the combination. So *dékñä* means the initiation to begin transcendental activities. That is called initiation. Therefore we take promise from the disciple that "You chant so many times," "Yes, sir." "You observe these rules and regulations," "Yes, sir." That is initiation. He has to observe; he has to chant. Then everything comes automatically. In the beginning he is faulty; then how he can make progress?"

In terms of practical understandings spoken in connection with the practices he established, Çréla Prabhupāda indicated that the formal agreement between *guru* and disciple ratified by the initiation ceremony is the substance of *dékñä*. By this formal acceptance one is linked to the disciplic succession, one becomes qualified to get the full benefit of chanting the holy name, one becomes qualified to receive the full benefit of *divya-jñāna*, one gets a second birth, one is freed from previous sinful reactions, and one is accepted as a bona fide servant of Kāñëa. In short, connecting the disciple properly with the disciplic succession is the distinguishing characteristic of *dékñä* and the *dékñä-guru*.



In his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmāta* (Ādi 1.47): Srila Prabhupada gives the correct understanding of the *dékñā* function as distinct from the *çikñā* function: "Çréla Sanātana Gosvāmé is the ideal spiritual master [*dékñā-guru*], for he delivers one the shelter of the lotus feet of Madana-mohana. . . Çré Govindajé acts exactly like the *çikñā-guru* [instructing spiritual master] by teaching Arjuna the *Bhagavad-gétā*. He is the original preceptor, for He gives us instructions and an opportunity to serve Him. The initiating spiritual master is a personal manifestation of Çréla Madana-mohana *vigraha*, whereas the instructing spiritual master is a personal representative of Çréla Govindadeva *vigraha*. Both of these Deities are worshiped at Våndāvana. Çréla Gopinātha is the ultimate attraction in spiritual realization."

Thus after one has through some initial faith attained the association of devotees, the next important step in devotional life is to formally accept the shelter of Kåñëa. This happens in our Society at the time of *harināma-dékñā*. And the *guru* who gives us that formal shelter is the *dékñā-guru*. The *dékñā-guru* is here defined not as the one who over time gives us a certain quantity or quality of transcendental knowledge relative to others, but as the one who on behalf of Kåñëa grants us His shelter, thus establishing our actual connection with Kåñëa, with His service, and with the disciplic succession. Once this connection has been established the disciple can properly receive and benefit from the transmission of instructions, i.e. transcendental knowledge (*çikñā*), about how to function as a servant of Kåñëa.

If we subtract the incorrect doctrine that Çréla Prabhupāda is still giving *dékñā* today, what is left in *PL*? The other principal point is the recommendation that no one except Çréla Prabhupāda should receive any formal worship or respect as *guru*.

Of course, this recommendation contradicts the many statements in Çréla Prabhupāda's books that a disciple should offer worship to his *gurus*. Some will say that those statements do not necessarily apply to Prabhupāda's disciples who are functioning as *gurus*. But Çréla Prabhupāda never said that his disciples should not accept any worship when the time would come for them to become *gurus*. In fact, he gave indications that he did expect that they would receive formal worship. The topic comes up in the following exchange between Mr. Malhotra and Çréla Prabhupāda (Room Conversation, December 22, 1976):

Prabhupāda: These, my disciples they are part and parcel of me. Whole mission is going on with their cooperation. But if he says that I am equal to my Guru Mahārāja, then that is offense. . . . They will never say that they have become equal to me. "I have advanced to be my *guru*." Never say. Just like this boy, he is offering obeisances. He may be expert in preaching more than me, but he knows that "I am subordinate." Otherwise how he shall offer obeisances? He can think, "Oh, now I am so learned. I am so advanced. Why shall I accept him as superior?" No. That continues. Even after my death, after my disappearance, he will offer obeisances to my picture.

Mr. Malhotra: But amongst his disciples he will be worshiped...

Prabhupāda: That's all right, but he remains a disciple of his *guru*. He will never say that "Now I have become *guru*, so I don't care for my *guru*." He will never say. Just like I am

doing, but I am worshiping my *guru* still. So I remain subordinate to my *guru*, always. Even though I have become *guru*, still I am subordinate to my *guru*.

This is just one instance indicating that Çréla Prabhupāda expected that his disciples would someday become *gurus* and receive worship from their disciples. But he also expected that all of these *gurus* would continue to remain subordinate to him. It is up to the GBC to decide what levels of worship will maintain the two things that Prabhupāda expected: (1) that *gurus* would accept worship from their disciples and (2) that simultaneously they would continue to worship him in such a way that their subordination to him would be clear to both them and their disciples. If there is some further adjustment required in today's ISKCON practices, the GBC should give attention to that. But the adjustment cannot be that today's *gurus* should accept no worship from their disciples, as doing this would violate Çréla Prabhupāda's expectation.

Once we have subtracted from *PL* not only the incorrect idea that Çréla Prabhupāda should be the one *dékñā-guru* for all members of ISKCON but also the idea that no one except Prabhupāda should receive any worship or public recognition as *guru*, are there any further points remaining?

What remains is an appeal to the desires of devotees who wish to feel that somehow or other Çréla Prabhupāda is their *guru*, and that they have some connection with him. Is it acceptable for a devotee not initiated by Prabhupāda to feel that Prabhupāda is his or her *guru*? The answer is yes; by disciplic connection such disciples do have a real connection with Çréla Prabhupāda. The GBC has already recognized this fact. Çréla Prabhupāda himself characterized his relationship with such devotees by saying they are his grand-disciples. To be a grand-disciple of Çréla Prabhupāda is no less a position than being a direct disciple. It is said that a grandfather is always more merciful to his grandson than a father is to his son. Grand-disciples have just as much opportunity to receive the instructions, mercy, and love of Çréla Prabhupāda as any of his directly initiated disciples. But they also have an obligation to assist Çréla Prabhupāda in propagating the disciplic succession by accepting *dékñā-gurus* in the line coming from Çréla Prabhupāda and giving proper respect to those *gurus* in harmony with the principles established in the Society he created.

In short, we conclude that:

(1) The proposal in *Çréla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link* that Çréla Prabhupāda is the one *dékñā-guru* for all members of ISKCON, including those who underwent initiation ceremonies after his departure, is incorrect because (a) it is based on an incomplete definition of *dékñā*, (b) it confuses the distinct functions of *dékñā-* and *çikñā-gurus*, and (c) it contradicts the expressed intention of Çréla Prabhupāda who, following Vedic tradition, generally expected that his disciples would in turn become initiating (*dékñā*) *gurus*.

(2) The proposal in *Çréla Prabhupāda: The Prominent Link* that no one except Çréla Prabhupāda receive worship as *guru* is incorrect because it (a) goes against directions given by Lord Caitanya's prominent followers such as Çréla Jéva Gosvāmé in his *Bhakti-sandarbha* and (b) contradicts Çréla Prabhupāda's expectation that his disciples would accept appropriate worship when it became time for them to become *gurus*.

(3) It is legitimate for a disciple of a current ISKCON *guru* to also feel that he or she is a disciple of Çréla Prabhupāda, but only if this feeling is expressed in such a way that does not confuse the function of *dékñā-* and *çikñā-gurus*.

Finally, we hope that that Dhéra Govinda Prabhu will consider the points we have made herein.

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