

Branches of Sri Chaitanya's Tree:

The Guru-Parampara

By Narasimha das

I have been reading in *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta (Madhya 10)* about the main branches of Lord Chaitanya's *sankirtana* movement. Srila KrishnadasKaviraja Gosvami describes nearly eighty main branches of the movement of Sri Chaitanya and then states at the end of the chapter that the branches and sub-branches of Lord Chaitanya's tree are unlimited and produce unlimited fruits and flowers. Lord Nityananda Himself forms the topmost, main branch of this tree, and in the next chapter (*Madhya 11*) KrishnadasKaviraja describes this branch and some of its sub-branches. Some branches and sub-branches are considered especially important but all are totally spiritual and full of potency. Each branch is connected to the Complete Whole, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, through the mercy of at least one of His *nitya-siddha* associates.

"Each and every branch of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's tree has unlimited spiritual power and glory. Even if one had thousands of mouths, it would be impossible to describe the limits of their activities."
(Cc. *Madhya* 10.162)

Many of Lord Chaitanya's personal associates are capable of liberating fallen conditioned souls simply by glancing at them or touching them. Lord Nityananda was such a great personality that by His desire even the most wretchedly fallen souls were liberated immediately-- by His sweet will alone. In this connection Srila Prabhupada comments that it is by Lord Chaitanya's mercy that so many western people have been able to take up the mission of Krishna consciousness. Because Srila Prabhupada received the full blessings of Lord Nityananda and Lord Chaitanya, he was able to spread the *sankirtana* mission worldwide, even in this most fallen age, within 11 years.

Some *nitya-siddha* devotees of Lord Chaitanya are considered most important and most merciful. Srila Vasudeva Datta, the nineteenth branch of the "Chaitanya Tree", is one of these great personalities. KrishnadasKaviraja concludes, **"One could not describe his qualities even with thousands of mouths."** (Cc. *Madhya* 10.41) Srila Prabhupada confirms Vasudeva Datta's glories as follows: **"He was the most exalted personality to ever show mercy to the conditioned souls. This is not an exaggeration of his transcendental qualities. It is perfectly true. Actually there cannot be any comparison to Vasudeva Datta... The entire world is purified simply by the appearance of such a great devotee. Indeed, by his transcendental presence the whole world is glorified and all conditioned souls are also glorified."** (Cc. *Madhya* 15.163, Purport)

Lord Chaitanya Himself fully agrees with Srila KrishnadasKaviraja and Srila Prabhupada regarding the glories of Vasudeva Datta. Lord Chaitanya proclaimed, **"I am Vasudeva Datta's man. My body is only meant to please Vasudeva Datta, and he can sell Me anywhere."** Srila Prabhupada comments, **"Thrice He vowed that this was a fact and that no one should disbelieve these statements."** Lord Chaitanya revealed that Vasudeva Datta is an incarnation of Sri Prahlada Maharaja. (Cc. *Madhya* 15.

165) Elsewhere, in the *Gaura-ganoddesa-dipika*, Sri Vasudeva Datta is identified as the singer Madhuvrata, one of Lord Krishna's most intimate friends in Krishna's Vrindaban pastimes.

Srila Vasudeva Datta was the spiritual master of Yadunandana Acharya, who was the spiritual master of Srila Raghunatha Das Gosvami. At a very young age, Rahunatha Das renounced his fabulously wealthy and aristocratic Vaisnava family and beautiful wife to become the most austere devotee. As a young newcomer to the mission of Lord Chaitanya, he served for fifteen years as the personal assistant of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu under the guidance of Srila Swarupa Damodara--until suddenly they both disappeared. At that time Raghunatha Das decided to commit suicide by jumping off Govardhana Hill, but he wanted to first see the lotus feet of Srila Rupa and Srila Sanatana. They convinced him to go on living, and these two senior leaders of all Vaisnavas used to hear from Raghunatha Das constantly about Lord Chaitanya's confidential pastimes in Jagannatha Puri.

Eventually Raghunatha Das gave up eating and sleeping almost entirely. He used to live by drinking a little buttermilk only. He offered obeisance to 2,000 Vaisnavas everyday, and he used to chant a minimum of one hundred thousand holy names daily. Although Krishnadas Kaviraja was initiated by Raghunath Bhatta Gosvami, the Kaviraja accepted Srila Rupa Gosvami and Srila Raghunatha das Gosvami as his main inspiration and guides. Thus he ends every chapter of *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta* begging for their mercy.

Srila Vasudeva Datta wanted to liberate all conditioned souls in the universe by volunteering to personally suffer for their sinful reactions so that Lord Chaitanya might deliver them all immediately. Apparently not all conditioned souls can be delivered immediately by the *sankirtana* mission alone. They need to first surrender and purify themselves by following regulations. Otherwise, they need the special mercy of a great Vaisnava. If we remain stubbornly addicted to sinful life, false prestige, *mayavad*, *sahajiyas*, pseudo-religion or atheism, we must wait to be gradually purified by a systematic process of preaching, loud *nagara kirtana* and *prasadam* distribution. This can take many lifetimes for most people. Lord Chaitanya asked Sri Nityananda Prabhu to begin this systematic preaching work in Bengal, and later, armed with the writings of the Six Gosvamis of Vrindaban, Srila Narottama, Srila Srinivasa Acharya, and Srila Syamananda established the Lord's mission in a big way all over Bengal, Orissa and many other places in India.

In the course of time many branches of the "Chaitanya Tree" appeared to dry up or disappear, but around the year 1866 A.D., Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura thought to create a cooperative worldwide mission of Krishna consciousness. Thus he prayed for a "Ray of Vishnu" to start this work of systematic, worldwide propagation of Lord Chaitanya's *sankirtana* mission. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura appeared as the son of Sri Bhaktivinoda and took up the work of reorganizing the global *sankirtana* mission of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He was successful in preserving the pure teachings and spreading the mission all over India through his Gaudiya Matha mission, as cited below. Furthermore, this great *acharya* is still preaching the mission of Lord Chaitanya all over the world through his bona fide disciples headed by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. (See *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.22.19, Purport)

Those who are fortunate enough to appreciate Lord Chaitanya's *snitya-siddha* devotees don't need to wait around for the *sankirtana* movement to become institutionalized all over the world or in a particular locality. As Srila Prabhupada has repeatedly confirmed, devotees who are factually advancing in Krishna consciousness don't need a certificate from any institution to prove their advancement in spiritual life. Those who are not envious or duplicitous can be immediately promoted to Goloka Vrindaban simply by understanding the glorious position of the eternally liberated associates of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

"Simply by accepting that the associates of Lord Chaitanya are eternally free, one is immediately promoted to the transcendental abode of Lord Krishna." (*Savarana-sri-gaura-mahima*, Purport)

Another *nitya-siddha* branch of the "Chaitanya Tree" is Thakura Sarangadasa. He is the seventy-seventh branch of this divine tree. This great devotee was a *babaji* who used to worship the Supreme Lord at a secluded spot on the bank of the Ganges. He was not part of an organized mission but wanted to remain secluded from the general mass of people. Unlike some other leading devotees in Lord Chaitanya's mission, he was not focused on extensive preaching programs. He had decided to not accept any disciples. In spite of his idea to not accept disciples, the Supreme Lord within his heart was constantly inspiring him to do so. At last he relented, and thus one morning he decided, "*Whomever I see today I will make my disciple.*"

The Thakura didn't jump on a *tonga* and head for the nearest town or village but went about his regular duties at his secluded location on the bank of the Ganges. He didn't see anyone that day, but when he went to take bath in the Ganges River, he saw a dead body floating by and happened to touch it with his feet. The dead body sprang to life, and Thakura Saranga das accepted him as his disciple.

Srila Prabhupada comments, "**The disciple later became famous as Thakura Murari, and his name is always associated with Sri Saranga. His disciplic succession still inhabits the village of Shar. There is a temple at Mamagachi that is said to have been started by Saranga Thakura. Not long ago a new temple was erected in front of the *bakula* tree there, and it is now managed by the members of the Gaudiya Matha. It is said the management of the temple is now far better than before. In the *Gauraganoddesa-dipika* (172) it is stated that Saranga Thakura was formerly a *gopi* named Nandimukhi.**" (*Cc. Madhya* 10.113, Purport)

Sometimes people ask, "*What became of all these many branches of Lord Chaitanya's mission? We find very little mention of these various missions while traveling in India or in regular historical accounts.*"

There are various points to consider in answering this question. First point is that these branches are branches of a **divine** tree. The fruits and flowers of these spiritual branches cannot be appreciated by persons still absorbed on the mundane plane. Many pure devotees retire completely from this world after receiving the mercy of one of Lord Chaitanya's *snitya-siddha* devotees. It is not that they all become famous preachers. But many of their descendants are still around, as cited above, performing *bhajana*, Deity worship, and *nagara-kirtana*. There are many stories of these great Vaisnavas and their followers, but such histories are ignored by materialists and materialistic devotees. The true followers of great Vaisnavas go back to Godhead quickly and easily and never return to this material world, as is confirmed

by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-gita*. It is not that all of Lord Chaitanya's great devotees build big temples with stone inscriptions and expect their followers to build them *samadhi* tombs at famous holy places.

It is misleading when neophyte preachers try to claim a monopoly on spiritual life based on a particular name, institution or mission according to their own limited vision of spiritual life. Srila Prabhupada specifically contradicts the notion that the spiritual movement of Lord Chaitanya can be monopolized through legal manipulations or institutional status and mandate. The mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is always more extensive, comprehensive, and glorious than what we tiny souls can imagine.

Devotees of Lord Chaitanya, specifically the followers of Srila Prabhupada, should spend more time hearing about, glorifying and praying to His *nitya-siddha* devotees. Hearing details of the scandalous behavior of infamous persons who tried to imitate the bona fide *acharya* may not help us much. In fact, such distractions may lead to further deviations. The best path for everyone serious about quick advancement in spiritual life is to glorify the eternal *parampara* of *nitya-siddha* Vaisnavas coming in the line of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Nityananda Prabhu.

“These great saintly Vaisnavas are all *paramahamsas*, devotees of the highest order, and they are all part of Lord Gauranga's own spiritual family. Their holy feet are my refuge. I have no real interest in devotional service, and I am a poor and lowly *tridandi sannyasi* named Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati.”
(*Sri Guru-parampara*, Verse 9)