

# Where the R̥tvik People Are Wrong



by Jayādvaīta Swami

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*If Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't clearly and definitely say it,  
and if it first came up after 1977,  
whatever it is, don't trust it.*

—*Rule of Thumb*

The purpose of this paper is to deal with a particular theory of how Śrīla Prabhupāda intended devotees in ISKCON to receive initiation after his physical departure.

We'll come to the controversies shortly, but first let's look at what we all agree on.

## What all of us agree on

Forget for a moment that Śrīla Prabhupāda has physically disappeared. Put aside questions of what should happen in modern-day ISKCON. For the moment, let's just look at the standard teaching Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us about the disciplic succession.

I apologize for presenting a piece of my own writing from *Back to Godhead*, but I think it gives a reasonably concise summary that any ISKCON devotee would agree with. Here it is.

## From Master to Disciple

The paramparā is the chain of spiritual masters and disciples through which Kṛṣṇa consciousness is taught and received. In *Bhagavad-gītā* Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "I taught this ancient science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvān. Vivasvān taught it to his son Manu. And Manu taught it to his son Ikṣvāku. In this way, through the system of paramparā, disciplic succession, the science was understood by the saintly kings."

In the paramparā system, then, the original teacher, the original spiritual master, is Lord Kṛṣṇa, God Himself. The Lord gives perfect knowledge, and that knowledge is handed down from master to disciple. It's like a ripe fruit handed down from person to person, from the top of the tree to the ground.

In the chain of paramparā, each spiritual master has the duty to transmit the knowledge of Kṛṣṇa consciousness as it is. He is not to add anything, subtract anything, or change anything. He simply has to deliver the message, just as a postman delivers a letter, contents fully intact.

According to the Vedic scriptures, one who is serious about attaining self-realization or God realization or the ultimate goal in life must approach such a bona fide spiritual master. It is not optional; accepting a bona fide spiritual master is essential.

The method of accepting the spiritual master is explained in Bhagavad-gītā: one must surrender to him, inquire from him, and serve him. Inquiry alone is not enough. One must humbly submit oneself before the spiritual master, accepting him as a representative of God.

The spiritual master is not God, and any so-called master who claims to be God should at once be rejected as bogus. But the spiritual master is honored as much as God because he intimately serves God through the disciplic chain. Because each spiritual master serves his own spiritual master, all the members of the chain are ultimately servants of God and therefore very dear to God. More precisely, the bona fide spiritual master is the servant of the servant of the servant of God, or Kṛṣṇa.

This is one of the secrets of the paramparā system: to be a genuine master, one must be a genuine servant. The student, therefore, surrenders to the spiritual master as a disciple and serves him, and the master responds by answering the disciple's questions, enlightening him with transcendental knowledge. For the sincere disciple who has full faith in Kṛṣṇa and equal faith in the bona fide spiritual master, all the truths of spiritual realization are factually revealed.

The genuine disciple feels everlastingly indebted to the spiritual master and continues to serve him forever. In this way, even when the spiritual master leaves this world, the master and disciple are connected. The disciple continues to serve the spiritual master by following what the master has taught him, and by teaching it to others. Thus the bona fide disciple becomes a bona fide spiritual master, and the chain of succession continues.

Leave aside, for the moment, further questions about the credentials of the bona fide spiritual master. Leave aside whether he must be an *uttama adhikārī* or whether a *madhyama adhikārī* is good enough, whether to serve as guru one must receive an explicit personal order from the spiritual master or whether a standing general order is in effect. We can talk about these matters later. For now, we are looking only at the fundamentals, at the broad principles everyone agrees on.

I feel confident that every reasonable disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda would be with me on these principles so far. This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught to all of us, from 1966 through 1977. It's what all of us learned and accepted and repeated to others. It's "plain vanilla."<sup>1</sup>

On this much, then, we should all be in agreement.

Now, let's move on to something else that everyone agrees on.

Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, in 1977, appointed eleven disciples to serve as ṛtvik gurus, or "officiating spiritual masters." He authorized these ṛtviks to decide which candidates to accept, and to chant on the candidates' beads and give the new disciples spiritual names. The ṛtviks

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<sup>1</sup> Note for non-Americans: Ice cream is sold in dozens of elaborate flavors, but the most simple and commonplace is vanilla. So "plain vanilla" is an idiomatic term for anything that is simple, basic, unadorned, and standard.

were to do this on Śrīla Prabhupāda's behalf, and the new disciples were to be not those of the ṛtviks but of Śrīla Prabhupāda himself.

On July 9, 1977, Śrīla Prabhupāda signed a document that makes these facts unmistakably clear.

I hope we all agree so far. If not, we're in deeper trouble than I thought. But if so—if we all do agree—we can now put these issues aside and move on.

### What is the post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru doctrine?

We now come to the question to be decided:

Did Śrīla Prabhupāda intend that, *even after his physical departure*, his disciples would continue to serve as ṛtvik gurus by initiating devotees who would be not their disciples but his?

On November 14, 1977, Śrīla Prabhupāda ended his manifest physical pastimes and, as the traditional language puts it, "entered samādhi." The assertion that his disciples should continue to serve as ṛtviks, then, is what we may call the "post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru doctrine."

I trust you will accept that my statement of the question has been accurate and fair and my language neutral.

Now, moving on, I should next make clear that the post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru doctrine comes in two forms, which we may call "hard" and "soft."

The "hard" doctrine says this:

Śrīla Prabhupāda is the only initiating spiritual master for all ISKCON devotees, and he shall continue to be so forever. Acting as ṛtviks on his behalf, certain disciples may initiate new devotees, who then become not their disciples but his. ISKCON shall follow this system, and only this system, forever.

Differing on certain points is the "soft" doctrine:

Śrīla Prabhupāda is the only initiating spiritual master for all ISKCON devotees. Acting as ṛtviks on his behalf, certain disciples may initiate new devotees, who then become not their disciples but his. This system shall continue until the appearance within ISKCON of pure devotees fit to initiate disciples of their own. The ṛtvik system will then come to an end.

It should be instantly clear that these two doctrines are incompatible and mutually exclusive. If the hard doctrine is right, the soft doctrine is wrong, and vice versa. Just as a man cannot be both living and dead, or a woman both pregnant and sterile, we cannot have a ṛtvik system that is both permanent and temporary. It's either one or the other—not both.

(I am leaving aside here appeals to "inconceivability." By arguing that something is "inconceivably true," one can make a case for literally anything. We accept, of course, that

certain scripturally endorsed contradictions are “inconceivably true.” But if we were therefore willing to accept “It’s inconceivable” as a valid argument for everything, nothing could ever be shown false. We would then be obliged to accept the truth of even the most ridiculous nonsense.)

For the sake of thoroughness, we may also note that some people have put forward a hybrid “soft/hard” doctrine, in which pure devotees initiate their own disciples and yet the ṛtvik system continues side by side. This doctrine, of course, is incompatible with the other two. If it is right, both of the others must be wrong, and if either of the others is right, this one must be wrong.

Now, therefore, we have what I think is a fair and accurate statement of what for the sake of brevity we may call the “p.s. ṛtvik-guru doctrines.” (We’ve seen that there are more than one of them.) I’ve considered dropping the “p.s.” (“post-samādhi”), but I’ve retained it to avoid later confusion. To keep our thinking clear, we will need to remember that what’s at issue is only what system Śrīla Prabhupāda intended for *after* his physical departure.

So the doctrines are now before us, and we’ve seen that only one of them, at the most, could be true. The question now, therefore, is whether any of these doctrines truly represents what Śrīla Prabhupāda intended, and if so which one.

### What are the arguments in favor of the doctrines?

So now let us look at the arguments and evidence put forward in favor of the post-samādhi ṛtvik doctrines.

From devotees I’ve spoken with and papers I’ve read, the arguments seem to take the following forms:

1. Argument from restatement of what’s accepted.
2. Argument from personal testimony.
3. Argument from logical necessity.
4. Argument from the virtues of the doctrines.
5. Argument from a lack of counter-evidence.
6. Linguistic arguments.

Let’s examine these arguments one by one.

#### 1. Argument from restatement of what’s accepted.

Devotees have sometimes announced that they have “irrefutable proof” of the ṛtvik-guru system. They then offer into evidence various quotes in which Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks of appointing ṛtviks. Next comes the document in which Śrīla Prabhupāda actually appoints them, and then letters in which Śrīla Prabhupāda makes clear to the ṛtviks their duties. Then further evidence: testimony from senior devotees that Śrīla Prabhupāda did indeed appoint ṛtvik gurus.

On top of this we are offered a careful tracing of history: Śrīla Prabhupāda gradually handed things over—first the performance of fire yajnas, then the chanting on beads, and finally the actual acceptance of candidates and giving of spiritual names. Yet through all of this, we are reminded, the new initiates were always disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and no one else.

And then comes the conclusion: In the face of such an overwhelming body of evidence, how can one deny that Śrīla Prabhupāda did indeed establish the ṛtvik-guru system?

The answer, of course, is simple: What the argument succeeds in proving is what everyone already accepts. That Śrīla Prabhupāda appointed ṛtvik gurus and established a “ṛtvik-guru system” is not in dispute. Everyone agrees about it.

The argument, therefore, entirely misses the issue.

What’s at issue is whether Śrīla Prabhupāda intended some form of ṛtvik-guru system to continue *after his physical departure*.

Some people seem to think that merely offering more and more evidence that Śrīla Prabhupāda set up a ṛtvik-guru system somehow makes the case for a post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru system stronger and stronger. It doesn’t. If one wanted to prove the existence of two-headed pigeons, no amount of evidence that there are pigeons would be enough. That pigeons exist is something we already know. What would need to be shown is that some of them have two heads.

Arguments proving again and again what’s already accepted do nothing to settle the issue at hand. When used knowingly and deliberately, such arguments are a form of cheating. When used innocently, they are merely irrelevant.

So let’s leave this behind and go on.

#### 2. Argument from personal testimony.

We now come to an argument that is relevant: the personal testimony of devotees who say they heard before Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure that Śrīla Prabhupāda had set up a post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru system.

Gaurī Dāsa Paṇḍit, one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples, tells us that while serving as an assistant to His Holiness Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami in Vrindaban, on or about May 23, 1977, he directly heard Śrīla Prabhupāda tell Tamāl Krishna Goswami that the appointed ṛtviks should continue to serve as ṛtviks even after Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure. This conversation, he tells us, was even recorded on tape.

In addition, Yaśodānandana Dāsa tells us that in May 1977 Tamāl Krishna Goswami and Bhavānanda Goswami indicated to him that Śrīla Prabhupāda had endorsed a post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru system. Yaśodānandana Prabhu offers a diary in which he noted this at the time.

When we come to this sort of testimony, several questions are naturally relevant: How many witnesses are testifying? How reliable are their accounts? How well do they agree with one another?

From the beginning, then, this argument is in trouble. How many people claim to have heard directly from Śrīla Prabhupāda that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted this system? Only one. He was a junior man, not a leading devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda was not confiding in him directly, and though we have nothing bad we wish to say of him he has not especially distinguished himself by his record of devotional service. Moreover, for some reason he held back his testimony until many years after Śrīla Prabhupāda left.

Most important, Gaurī Dāsa Pandit, for all his good qualities, may still be subject to the four frailties common to all conditioned souls: imperfect senses, a tendency to make mistakes, a tendency to fall into illusion, and a propensity to cheat.

Yaśodānandana Dāsa, of course, is presumably subject to the same four shortcomings. And apart from this, a serious concern is that his testimony is second hand.

If the tape recording Gaurī Dāsa speaks of has ever existed, it has never been found. One may obliquely suggest that someone must have deliberately erased it. But in any case, evidence that doesn't exist is no evidence at all.

What we are left with, then, is mainly Gaurī Dāsa's lone report. And according to Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami, the other person allegedly present, what Gaurī Dāsa tells us is wrong.

At best, then, the evidence from personal testimony is equivocal and weak.

Here, perhaps is the place to bring forward a point made by Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja and approvingly quoted in several papers by proponents of post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru doctrines.

At a meeting in Topanga Canyon in 1980, Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja stated that Śrīla Prabhupāda had never appointed the eleven ṛtviks to be anything more than ṛtviks. "If it had been more than that," he said, "you can bet your bottom dollar that Prabhupāda would have spoken for days and hours and weeks on end about about how to set up this thing with the gurus, but he didn't. . ."

The same point about how Śrīla Prabhupāda let us know what he wanted is relevant here. If he had wanted a ṛtvik-guru system to continue after his departure, would we have expected him to have said so merely once in private to his secretary, or would he have spoken about it with his leading devotees "for days and hours and weeks on end"?

For those familiar with how Śrīla Prabhupāda did things, the answer should be easy.

This is a point we shall return to later. But for now let us move on.

### 3. Argument from logical necessity.

Another line of reasoning begins with a critique—much of it valid—of Śrīla Prabhupāda's leading disciples and their failings after his departure. None of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples, it is argued, is now fit to serve as a bona fide spiritual master. And scriptural arguments are offered to support this point of view.

Therefore, the argument continues, since no one else is fit, the only person of whom we can safely take shelter is Śrīla Prabhupāda himself.

Śrīla Prabhupāda knew the limitations of his disciples, and he must have known what would happen. Therefore, the argument concludes, he *must have* set up the ṛtvik-guru system.

The response to this argument is simple: It is speculative and should therefore be rejected. A speculation may be reasonable or unreasonable, but Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us to rely on authority, not on speculation.

Moreover, this speculation is logically defective. To dispose of it, we need not decide whether Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are fit or unfit, or whether they "received the order" to become guru or not. Nor do we need to discuss what the credentials of a bona fide spiritual master should be. (These are important topics, but they are not the topic at hand.)

Suppose for the moment that Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples are all indeed unfit. It does not therefore logically follow that Śrīla Prabhupāda *must have* (note the speculative language) set up a post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru system.

Instead, if he found his disciples all unfit he could have blessed one or more to quickly attain spiritual perfection. Or he could have declared that henceforward Kṛṣṇa Himself, or the *Bhāgavatam* itself, or the holy name itself would be the spiritual master. Or he could have simply left everything up to Kṛṣṇa.

The point is that it's not enough to talk about what Śrīla Prabhupāda could have done or must have done. We have to see what Śrīla Prabhupāda actually did.

To argue that Śrīla Prabhupāda *must have* set up a ṛtvik-guru system and that the evidence for this is so scanty only because it *must have* been suppressed and covered up is merely to take the speculation one step further.

And speculating is not the way Śrīla Prabhupāda told us to do things. One who wants to take shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda, therefore, should avoid taking shelter of speculations.

Coming back to a point on which all agree, we should all take shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda and his instructions. Śrīla Prabhupāda is the exalted pure devotee who gave us the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. We can all be completely confident of his instructions and his example. And we can be sure that by strictly and sincerely following Śrīla Prabhupāda we will always be safe and secure.

But we must follow Śrīla Prabhupāda as he himself instructed us to follow. We must follow Śrīla Prabhupāda and those who follow Śrīla Prabhupāda, not the speculations of others.

This brings us to the next argument.

### 4. Argument from the virtues of the doctrines.

The next argument is really just an extension of the previous one: Śrīla Prabhupāda *must have* set up a ṛtvik-guru system, because the system has so many advantages.

"Just see all the benefits of this system," declare the advocates of this point of view. "How much better it would be than the alternatives."

Or the same argument is put in negative form: We are in trouble and perplexity only because we have failed to take up this wonderful system.

To make it all clear to us, the advocates sometimes offer charts showing us the benefits their system would bring, compared to the bad points of what's going on now.

But those who have learned from history will refuse to be lured. The one-appointed-ācārya

system of the Gauḍīya Math, the zonal-ācārya system of ISKCON—both looked so good. They seemed to offer so many advantages. Or the alternatives seemed so bleak. For many, only in retrospect could those fine-looking systems be recognized as deviations and therefore causes of disaster.

But, again, what Śrīla Prabhupāda trained us to do was not to evaluate all the possibilities, choose what seems to us to have the most points going for it, and then conclude that this *must* have been what he wanted. What he trained us to do was to strictly follow what he taught us. If there's one lesson we should have learned from history it should be this: However good a path of action may seem, if it's against what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us, forget it.

## 5. Argument from a lack of counter-evidence.

We now come to another argument we can deal with quickly.

Where, it is demanded, has the śāstra or Śrīla Prabhupāda said that one can't approach an ācārya for initiation merely because he has physically departed? Where do the authorities tell us that a post-samādhi ṛtvik system is no good? Can you show me a verse? Can you point to a purport? How then can you say it's not valid?

This is simply a classic argumentative blunder, a textbook fallacy.

“How do we know that you don't beat your wife?” demands the rumor-monger. And then you're stuck there, trying to come up with evidence to counter a groundless accusation.

How do you know there's not a celestial planet controlled by a three-legged grasshopper with seven heads and superhuman intelligence? Can you show me a verse that refutes it? Can you point to a purport?

How can you prove it's not bona fide to take initiation from the ghost of Aristotle's mother or a picture of a self-realized boa constrictor?

One must support one's views by evidence, not by assertions that a lack of counter-evidence makes them true. Enough said.

## 6. Linguistic arguments.

Last, we come to arguments based on linguistics.

One may ask, “If Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted a post-samādhi ṛtvik system, where does so he say so in black and white?” The proponents of the p.s. ṛtvik doctrines have an answer: The black-and-white evidence is to be found in two places—in the letter in which Śrīla Prabhupāda appoints the eleven ṛtviks and in Śrīla Prabhupāda's last will.

The appointment letter is dated July 9th, 1977. It is signed by Tamāl Krishna Goswami and countersigned “Approved A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.” Its authority is beyond question.

The letter explains that Śrīla Prabhupāda has appointed some senior disciples to act as ṛtviks, and it lists eleven disciples Śrīla Prabhupāda has so far named to act in that capacity. The letter then says:

Now that Srila Prabhupada has named these representatives, Temple Presidents may henceforward send recommendations for first and second initiation to whichever of these eleven representatives are nearest their temple. After considering the recommendation, these representatives may accept the devotee as an initiated disciple of Srila Prabhupad by giving a spiritual name, or in the case of second initiation, by chanting on the Gayatri thread, just as Srila Prabhupad has done. The newly initiated devotees are disciples of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the above eleven senior devotees acting as His representative. After the Temple President receives a letter from these representatives giving the spiritual name or the thread, he can perform the fire yajna in the temple as was being done before. The name of a newly initiated disciple should be sent by the representative who has accepted him or her to Srila Prabhupad, to be included in His Divine Grace's “Initiated Disciples” book.

Clearly, this letter establishes a ṛtvik-guru system. But one may ask where it says that such a system should continue even after Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure. The answer given is that this is clear from the word “henceforward.”

The next source of evidence, Śrīla Prabhupāda's last will, is dated June 4, 1977. In the will, Śrīla Prabhupāda declares that the Governing Body Commission “will be the ultimate managing authority of the entire International Society for Krishna Consciousness.” He says, “Each temple will be an ISKCON property and will be managed by three executive directors. The system of management will continue as it is now and there is no need of any change.”

The rest of the will deals almost entirely with provisions for safeguarding ISKCON's properties. Śrīla Prabhupāda names the executive directors for them. Then he provides that in the event that a director dies or fails to act, the remaining directors may appoint a new one, “provided the new director is my initiated disciple following strictly all the rules and regulations of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness as detailed in my books, and provided that there are never less than three (3) or more than five (5) executive directors acting at one time.”

How is this black-and-white evidence of a post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru system? Proponents explain that since Śrīla Prabhupāda certainly intended his will to be in force for generations after his departure, and since he stipulated that each successor director would have to be “my initiated disciple,” it follows that Śrīla Prabhupāda would continue to initiate, long after his physical departure, through a ṛtvik-guru system.

Now, what are we to make of these two points of evidence?

The first thing we note is that they're weak. What would strong evidence look like? Something like this:

Acting on my behalf, my disciples serving as ṛtvik gurus shall continue to initiate even after my physical departure. The new disciples initiated shall not be disciples of the ṛtviks. They shall be my own.

A statement like that, either in the appointment letter or in Śrīla Prabhupāda's will, or anywhere else, would have settled the matter once and for all. Of course, no such statement exists.

In the absence of such a clear, unequivocal statement, proponents of ṛtvik-guru doctrines have to rely on inference and build their case on more slippery ground. Let's look more closely.

Let us start with the word “henceforward.” In the appointment letter, Śrīla Prabhupāda's desire that the ṛtvik-guru system last forever is supposedly set forth to the world in this one highly significant word. The meaning, we are reminded, is clear: “from now on.” And so Śrīla Prabhupāda desired that the ṛtvik-guru system continue even after his physical departure.

Now, the first thing to note about this argument is that it works only for the “hard” version of the post-samādhi ṛtvik doctrine, in which only ṛtviks initiate forever—or perhaps for the hybrid “hard/soft” version. The “soft” version, in which the ṛtvik system runs till some qualified gurus come along, is ruled out.

Taking “henceforward” to mean literally forever, never will the ṛtvik-guru system come to an end. By this “hard” version of the doctrine, even should an *uttama-adhikārī* someday appear, he will never initiate disciples of his own. At most, he will serve merely as a ṛtvik. For according to this hard version of the doctrine, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the final member of the disciplic succession. The succession has come to an end. Śrīla Prabhupāda is the only guru forever after. *Henceforward*, all new devotees will be his disciples, through his appointed ṛtviks.

And since we're insisting that “henceforward” must mean literally forever, we must apply it not merely to a selected portion of what Śrīla Prabhupāda's appointment letter says but to the letter in its entirety.

Temple presidents may henceforward send recommendation for first and second initiation to whichever of these eleven representatives are nearest their temple. After considering the recommendation, these representatives may accept the devotee. . .  
The newly initiated devotees are disciples of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the above eleven senior devotees acting as his representative.

If we're being literal, as the argument says we must, then let's be literal. Though the letter says that Śrīla Prabhupāda has “so far” given a list of eleven ṛtviks, he never added to the list. So this is it. The *only* authorized ṛtviks are *these eleven*. There is no mention that any of them may ever be removed or replaced, nor is there any mention of any successor. Nor does Śrīla Prabhupāda provide that the list may be altered by the GBC. Henceforward, *these eleven*.

Of these, one—Jayatīrtha Dāsa—fell into intoxication and illicit sex and is now dead. How he will continue to serve as ṛtvik henceforward is unclear. But presumably he must, provided we can find out where he is so we can send him requests for initiation from the temples nearest.

And then we have Kīrtanānanda Swami, Bhavānanda Goswami, Rameśvara Swami, and Bhagavān Dāsa Adhikārī, all fallen from their spiritual vows but serving eternally as ṛtviks nonetheless.

Or Hamsadūta Swami. His falldowns have become the stuff of literature, yet now that he has become humble, perhaps he is available to serve as a ṛtvik guru from now till the end of time. For some, perhaps, once again, Hamsadūta is the only way.

If these choices somehow don't suit you, you're left with Harikeśa Swami, Jayapatāka Swami, Hṛdayānanda Goswami, Tamāl Krishna Goswami, or Satsvarūpa Dāsa Goswami. The problem here, of course (aside from the possibility that you may not like them), is that all of them are

sure they were supposed to serve as ṛtviks only until Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure. As far as they're concerned, the post-samādhi ṛtvik doctrines are bunk. Now these devotees wouldn't serve as ṛtviks for love or money. So if you're looking for an authorized ṛtvik, go back to the other names on the list. And remember, *henceforward*—from now till the end of time—these are the only authorized ṛtviks.

My apologies for the sarcasm, but a person who puts forward an argument is obliged to live with its consequences. And if the consequences are absurd, so is the argument.

So let's suppose you go for the “hard/soft” version of the doctrine, in which self-effulgent *ācāryas* come along to initiate yet still the ṛtviks continue side by side. When those self-effulgent *ācāryas* show up, what's the need of them? You can still become Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple through the ṛtviks, and that's a safer bet, just in case the effulgence might wear off. And when it comes to ṛtviks, you're still stuck with these eleven—and only these eleven. Good luck.

Of course, one could take “henceforward” in a more elastic and informal sense. For example, I might say, “Henceforward I shall take my walk on Juhu Beach every day.” Must that mean literally from now till the end of my life? Or, still more literally, from now through eternity, even after I'm physically gone? Or could it simply mean from now till I leave Bombay?

Take the word super-literally if you like—but then be prepared to embrace all the consequences.

Unfortunately, proponents of ṛtvik doctrines rarely do this. Instead, most often they'll start out with insisting on a literal meaning of “henceforward”—an insistence that fits only with “hard” or “hard/soft” versions of the doctrine. Then, having put forward their proof, they switch over to embracing the “soft” version, with which the literal meaning entirely clashes. This, in a word, is cheating. Not a good sign.

So now we come to the second piece of evidence, that phrase from Śrīla Prabhupāda's will in which he stipulates that each new executive director for the ISKCON properties must be “my initiated disciple.”

The logic, again, is that since Śrīla Prabhupāda must have wanted to protect these properties forever, he must forever have direct disciples, initiated through a ṛtvik system.

Again, please note that this logic works only for the “hard” form of *rtvik* doctrine (or for the “hard/soft” version), in which the ṛtvik system lasts forever. The “soft” version, in which the ṛtvik system lasts only until the appearance of qualified gurus, is ruled out: for the will to be followed, Śrīla Prabhupāda must have direct disciples forever, through the agency of his ṛtviks (again, “these eleven”).

Even if one wants to go with a “hard/soft” ṛtvik doctrine, in which ṛtviks and pure devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's line initiate side by side, one might wonder why the disciples of those pure devotees are to be excluded from serving as executive directors. Is their initiation somehow less effective? Are they not equally connected with Śrīla Prabhupāda? But this is a small point. Let us go on.

Before we accept this phrase from Śrīla Prabhupāda's will as a clear sign of Śrīla Prabhupāda's intention for an eternally existing system of ṛtvik gurus, let us pause for a moment to see how that phrase got in there. Doing so won't tip the scales one way or the other, but the history is interesting.

It appears that the theme for the will arises in Vrindaban on May 27, 1977. That day, Girirāja Swami says to Śrīla Prabhupāda: “This morning you gave the hint that there might be envious persons coming to take away our properties, so in the GBC meeting we discussed this point.” He then relates how a committee of devotees has come up with a “model trust deed” to protect the properties.

Introducing the text, Rameśvara Swami says, “This is based on the BBT Trust document that you wrote many years ago.” He then begins reading the new document.

In the course of reading, he comes to the list of trustees for various temples, and gradually to those for Vrindavana. “The proposed trustees are Akṣayānanda Swami, Gopāla Kṛṣṇa and Viśvambhara.” Viśvambhara Dayal (known as “Bhagaṭī”) was a devoted friend of ISKCON who rendered much service to Śrīla Prabhupāda in Vrindaban.

The following conversation ensues:

Prabhupāda: Viśvambhara is not our regular disciple.

Jayapatāka: Shouldn’t be included.

Prabhupāda: Then he has to accept sannyāsa from me.

Jayatīrtha: Jaya.

Prabhupāda: He should know. . .

Tamāl Kṛṣṇa: Become initiated.

Jayapatāka: Trustee must be initiated disciple.

Prabhupāda: Oh, yes.

Rameśvara: If he is seen. . . He could be on the advisory board.

Prabhupāda: No, you can say that “If you take sannyāsa, you become on this.”

Tamāl Kṛṣṇa: So we’ll talk to him, and if he says no, then we’ll select another person and come back and tell you who our choice is.

A few days later, on June 2, devotees present Śrīla Prabhupāda a revised draft.

Girirāja: So we drafted a will, including the trust for the properties of India and some of the other. . .

Prabhupāda: Will? Will, there will be direction that “Management should be done like this.” That’s all.

Girirāja: Yes.

Prabhupāda: Nobody can say in court case that “This temple will be in charge of this person, this temple. . .”

Rameśvara: Yes, just like you said.

Girirāja: So we’ve included those points. . .

In the original draft, the successor trustees are simply “never less than three or more than five.” But in the second draft the devotees working on the document have added that the trustees, in this draft called “executive directors,” are to be “initiated disciples” following the regulative principles.

Śrīla Prabhupāda signs the will two days later.

If after Śrīla Prabhupāda disappeared he would cease to initiate, why did the devotees working on the document use the phrase “my initiated disciple”? Why not language that took into account that both Śrīla Prabhupāda and his disciples would soon disappear?

“We weren’t used to thinking like that,” says Girirāja Swami. “In retrospect it’s very naive.”<sup>2</sup>

But however the language came to be there, the will is signed by Śrīla Prabhupāda, and it clearly says that each successor director should be Śrīla Prabhupāda’s initiated disciple.

So the argument still stands: How could a director generations from now be Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciple unless initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda’s ṛtvik?

Here opponents of p.s. ṛtvik doctrines might argue that we cannot accept the dictionary meaning of “disciple” but instead must offer an interpretation. When the dictionary meaning is clear, no interpretation is needed. But when the meaning is equivocal, an interpretation may be warranted.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives this example: One may say, “There is a residential quarter on the Ganges.” But then a question arises: “The Ganges is water, so how could there be houses on the water?” The answer offered is that “on the Ganges” doesn’t mean literally on the water of the Ganges but rather “on the bank of the Ganges.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives this as an example of a legitimate interpretation, offered when there is a legitimate need.

One might argue, then, that since accepting the dictionary meaning of “disciple” would have the unexpected result of requiring the entire system of guru-paramparā to be put aside, here an interpretation is legitimately called for.

In fact, however, no such interpretation is required. The dictionary does fine.

Going to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we find that a disciple is “one who follows or attends upon another for the purpose of learning from him; a pupil or scholar.” More explicitly: “A personal pupil or follower of any religious or (in more recent use) other teacher or master.” This is the definition we’re most used to, and it’s the one the ṛtvik people have in mind.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview, January 26, 1996.



But there's more. Here's the next definition, equally valid: "One who follows or is influenced by the doctrine or example of another; one who belongs to the 'school' of any leader of thought."<sup>3</sup>

This is the sense in which anyone who wants to can, beyond a doubt, become Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple. Any sincere person can follow Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings and example. Anyone can join his school of thought, or, still further, his International Society for Krishna Consciousness. And ultimately one can become not only his disciple in spirit but his "initiated disciple" through the guru-paramparā system.

In this sense, by the grace of Śrīla Prabhupāda, one can become not only his disciple but at the same time the disciple of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, the six Gosvāmīs, and all the other ācāryas in Śrīla Prabhupāda's line.

"This," as Śrīla Prabhupāda writes (Bg. 18.75), "is the mystery of the disciplic succession." One is linked through the transparent medium of the bona fide spiritual master, but at the same time "the experience is still direct."

We might envision the day when those who believe they have become directly "initiated disciples" of Śrīla Prabhupāda through a ṛtvik—or from a picture, or in a dream—might challenge in court that they alone have the right to serve as executive directors for ISKCON properties. Only the direct disciples are bona fide, they might claim, not those who profess to be merely disciples of his disciples in succession. We leave it for you to decide how well this would conform—legally and spiritually—to the intention of Śrīla Prabhupāda's will.

### Questions that matter—or do they?

We've now pretty well exhausted, as far as I can tell, the arguments put forward in favor of post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru doctrines. Whatever we haven't dealt with are merely variations on the same themes.

If we're now nearly convinced that none of these doctrines is valid, we're nearly ready to get on with the questions we should have been dealing with all along: What are the credentials of a bona fide spiritual master? Do any of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples fit the bill? Before I surrender, how can I be assured that the person I'm approaching is legitimate?

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<sup>3</sup> In the following passage, Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the word "disciple" in precisely the sense I have mentioned. ". . . because modern civilization is misled, householders want to remain in family life until death, and therefore they are suffering. In such cases, the disciples of Nārada Muni advise all the members of the younger generation to join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement immediately." (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.5.36, purport) —JS, November 1997

As further evidence: In Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Ādi 10.17 purport) Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions both Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī and that Gosvāmī's spiritual master as "disciples of Vakreśvara Paṇḍita." "There are many disciples of Vakreśvara Paṇḍita in Orissa. . . Among these disciples are Śrī Gopālaguru and his disciple Śrī Dhyānacandra Gosvāmī." I am grateful to my godbrother His Grace Śrīmān Locanānanda Dāsa Adhikārī for pointing out to me this quotation.  
—JS, 27 August 2003

But for those who subscribe to the "hard" version of the ṛtvik doctrine, such questions no longer matter. For it's Śrīla Prabhupāda forever. The disciplic succession is finished.

For the advocates of the "hard/soft" version, too, the questions hardly ought to matter. For Śrīla Prabhupāda will initiate eternally through his ṛtviks. And even if new gurus come along, they will merely be needless appendages. After all, who could be a greater guru than Śrīla Prabhupāda? And why be initiated by anyone else? For the "hard/soft" people, too, "the eternal system of disciplic succession" is essentially over.

Those who stick to the "soft" version, in which the ṛtvik system runs until the appearance of pure devotees, have their special problems. Either they have to "wait for the messiah." Or else they will have to persuade the world that the messiah is already with us.

For when the pure devotee arrives, the ṛtvik system will cease. And who is to decide when he arrives? Will he need the unanimous approval of all ISKCON devotees? Or will a 2/3 majority be enough? Will he need to be recognized by a vote of the Governing Body Commission? Or should a panel of experts be appointed to certify we've got the genuine merchandise? If we need a panel, who should be on it?

Till he comes, of course, the credentials of a bona fide spiritual master don't matter. For again the only guru is Śrīla Prabhupāda, and by his order the system of disciplic succession has been indefinitely suspended.

And then there are those who might believe that the next pure devotee, the self-effulgent ācārya, is already with us. Some devotees may hold this belief even now. The problem is, the effulgence is apparent only to them. The rest of the world doesn't see it. And after he has come and gone, if he leaves no pure devotees behind him, what happens then? Will his ṛtviks be the only bona fide gurus? Or will it then be his ṛtviks and Śrīla Prabhupāda's?

All right, enough. The time has come to leave the ṛtvik doctrines behind us.

### Sealing the Case:

#### What's Wrong with the P.S. Ṛtvik Doctrines?

Before we finally do turn our backs to the post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru doctrines, let us look briefly at the additional reasons for rejecting them.

We could place those reasons into six categories:

1. Argument from a need for evidence.
2. Argument from a need to show precedent.
3. Argument from a need for good logic
4. Argument from the consistency of Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings.
5. Argument from Śrīla Prabhupāda's final instruction.
6. Argument from how Śrīla Prabhupāda expressed his desires.
7. Argument from the need to reject new doctrines.

Now let us look at these briefly.

## 1. Argument from a need for evidence.

This argument is simple. As Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us, the process of speaking in spiritual circles is to say something upheld by authorities.

Our authorities are guru, sādhu, and śāstra. For us to accept that post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru theories are right, we should see statements in which guru, sādhu, and śāstra directly endorse them. We don't. Therefore the theories should be rejected.

A first-class appeal to authority does not consist of authoritative statements linked with a line of logic: "Therefore he could have. . . Therefore he must have. . ." It consists of a clear, unequivocal statement that directly supports what you're trying to show.

What statements of this kind are available to support the p.s. ṛtvik-guru doctrines? None. Therefore the doctrines should be discarded.

Please note that the argument here is different from the "argument from a lack of counter-evidence" rejected before. We are not saying, "X is true. Prove that it isn't." It's not "You beat your wife. Prove that you don't." Rather, it's "If you believe that X is true, please show that it is." "Oh, do I beat my wife? All right, what's the evidence?"

Neither from guru nor sādhu nor śāstra do the post-samādhi rittvik-guru doctrines have any evidence going for them. Therefore we should reject them.

## 2. Argument from a need to show precedent.

Again, a simple argument.

Śrīla Prabhupāda usually did what was done by the predecessor ācāryas. And never in the history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, nor any other form of Vaiṣṇavism, have we found any instance of a post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru system.

Yes, Śrīla Prabhupāda could have put in place an unprecedented system. He could have done anything. But the lack of precedent gives a good reason to doubt that he did.

## 3. Argument from a need for good logic

The reasons given for accepting the p.s. ṛtvik-guru doctrines are poor. And why should we accept doctrines backed by poor reasons? We shouldn't.

## 4. Argument from a need for consistency with Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings.

The p.s. ṛtvik doctrines require us to accept that Śrīla Prabhupāda, in his last few months, reversed what he'd taught for the previous ten years.

One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master.  
—Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 2.9.43, purport

Every student is expected to become acarya. Acarya means one who knows the scriptural injunctions and follows them practically in life, and teaches them to his disciples. . . Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle. But as a matter of etiquette it is the custom that during the lifetime of the spiritual master you bring the prospective disciples to him and in his absence or disappearance you can accept disciples without any limitation. *This is the law of disciplic succession.*

—letter to Tuṣṭa Kṛṣṇa Swami, December 2, 1975  
(emphasis supplied)

So we have got this message from Kṛṣṇa, from Caitanya Mahāprabhu, from the six Gosvāmīs, later on Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Bhaktisiddhānta Ṭhākura. And we are trying our bit also to distribute this knowledge. Now, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. . . My Guru Mahārāja is tenth from Caitanya Mahāprabhu, I am eleventh, you are the twelfth. So distribute this knowledge.

—Los Angeles arrival lecture, May 18, 1972

Commenting on the letter to Tuṣṭa Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja, a treatise advocating a p.s. ṛtvik doctrine says, "All the letter states is the normal process of disciplic succession: Guru departs and a *qualified* disciple continues initiating." (emphasis in original) The treatise then argues that because no one was qualified, Śrīla Prabhupāda set up a p.s. ṛtvik system.

The faulty argument that since no one was qualified Śrīla Prabhupāda "must have" set up a new system has been previously disposed of. What I want to focus on here is a simple point: That a spiritual master initiates until his departure and then his disciples initiate next is the *normal* system. On this we are all in agreement. This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught the entire time he was with us.<sup>4</sup>

The p.s. ṛtvik doctrines require us to accept that Śrīla Prabhupāda—in contradiction to more than ten years of his own consistent teaching—suddenly put aside the normal system and replaced it with a new innovation.

Asking us to accept this is simply asking too much.

## 5. Argument from Śrīla Prabhupāda's final instruction.

On May 28, 1977, when a deputation of GBC members asked Śrīla Prabhupāda how initiations would go on after Śrīla Prabhupāda's physical departure, his last words on the subject were these:

When I order you become guru, he becomes regular guru. That's all. He becomes disciple of my disciple. Just see.

"Disciple of my disciple." The meaning is clear, and it's consistent with Śrīla Prabhupāda always taught us.

For those who refuse to see it, no amount of argument will help. For the rest of us, there it is.

<sup>4</sup> I'm skipping here the opportunity to offer many more quotes. For a point that everyone agrees on, to multiply the quotes seems needless.

## 6. Argument from how Śrīla Prabhupāda expressed his desires.

Here is the place to recall, one last time, that when Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to do something different and new, he spared no pains to make himself clear. As his disciples will remember, when His Divine Grace had an important point to make, he would drive it into our thick heads again and again and again.

If Śrīla Prabhupāda had wanted to initiate even after his physical departure, he wouldn't have merely disclosed this privately to only one conspiratorially minded disciple. Or packed it all into one pregnant word. Or left it for us to infer from a phrase about property directors.

Had Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to revolutionize the entire paramparā system, you can bet your bottom dollar he would have spoken about it for days and hours and weeks on end. But he didn't, because he simply expected us to follow the normal system he had taught us for the past ten years.

Asking us to believe anything to the contrary is, again, simply asking too much.

## 7. Argument from the need to reject new doctrines.

Śrīla Prabhupāda entered samādhi in 1977. Post-samādhi ṛtvik-guru doctrines began appearing only in the mid-1980's.

After all the troubles we've been through since Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure, after all the concoctions, after all the disasters, now we are supposed to put our faith in a truth that came to light only years after Śrīla Prabhupāda physically left us.

The teaching about paramparā we all understood and repeated and agreed about till 1977, and for years after—out the window it goes.

Now, with no precedent from śāstra, no example from previous ācāryas, no clear and public instruction from Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, we are supposed to set aside the normal system Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us the whole time he was physically here. And we're supposed to buy into something entirely opposite, a new doctrine that has sprung up, amidst a swirl of controversy, half a decade or more after His Divine Grace has physically left.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say, "And I have to believe it?"

Please—that's asking far too much.

We remind you of the rule of thumb put forth at the head of this essay:

*If Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't clearly and definitely say it,  
and if it first came up after 1977,  
whatever it is, don't trust it.*

## So where does that leave us?

It's now time to put the post-samādhi ṛtvik theories themselves into samādhi. And let us get on with genuine spiritual life.

What are the signs of a bona fide spiritual master? What qualifications must he have? How is such a guru to be found?

Such are the questions that should now concern us. Let us put wrong theories aside and move forward.

## “Plain Vanilla” Made Plainer

(March 1998)

[T]he ‘regular vanilla paramparā system’ . . . is itself another fiction created from your own imagination, with no basis in reality.

—letter to Jayādvaita Swami from Krishnakant Desai,  
author of “The Final Order,” etc., 1/4/96

In my paper “Where the R̥tvik People Are Wrong,” I began with what I thought was clear and basic enough for all of us to agree on. I wrote:

This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught to all of us, from 1966 through 1977. It’s what all of us learned and accepted and repeated to others. It’s “plain vanilla.”

For non-Americans, I explained that “plain vanilla” is an idiomatic term for anything that is simple, basic, unadorned, and standard.

I wrote this introduction:

Forget for a moment that Śrīla Prabhupāda has physically disappeared. Put aside questions of what should happen in modern-day ISKCON. For the moment, let’s just look at the standard teaching Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us about the disciplic succession.

I apologize for presenting a piece of my own writing from *Back To Godhead*, but I think it gives a reasonably concise summary that any ISKCON devotee would agree with.

But for some people, it seems, “plain vanilla” needs to be made plainer. So I here offer that BTG essay again, this time with footnotes indicating the authenticity of these basic teachings.

Hare Kṛṣṇa.

## From Master to Disciple

The *paramparā* is the chain of spiritual masters and disciples through which Kṛṣṇa consciousness is taught and received.<sup>1</sup> In *Bhagavad-gītā* Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “I taught this ancient science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvān. Vivasvān taught it to his son Manu. And Manu taught it to his son Ikṣvāku. In this way, through the system of *paramparā*, disciplic succession, the science was understood by the saintly kings.”<sup>2</sup>

In the *paramparā* system, then, the original teacher, the original spiritual master, is Lord Kṛṣṇa, God Himself.<sup>3</sup> The Lord gives perfect knowledge, and that knowledge is handed down from master to disciple.<sup>4</sup> It’s like a ripe fruit handed down from person to person, from the top of the tree to the ground.<sup>5</sup>

In the chain of *paramparā*, each spiritual master has the duty to transmit the knowledge of Kṛṣṇa consciousness as it is.<sup>6</sup> He is not to add anything, subtract anything, or change anything.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “We have to accept perfect knowledge which comes down, as is stated in *Bhagavad-gītā*, by the *paramparā* (disciplic succession). We have to receive knowledge from the proper source in disciplic succession beginning with the supreme spiritual master, the Lord Himself, and handed down to a succession of spiritual masters.” *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.1-2

<sup>3</sup> “We have to receive knowledge from the proper source in disciplic succession beginning with the supreme spiritual master, the Lord Himself, . . .” *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Introduction

<sup>4</sup> “. . . and handed down to a succession of spiritual masters.” *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Introduction

“The Lord is the original spiritual master, and a person in the disciplic succession can convey the message of the Lord as it is to his disciple.” *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 4.34, purport

<sup>5</sup> “The ripened fruit is not dropped all of a sudden from the highest planet of Kṛṣṇaloka. Rather, it has come down carefully through the chain of disciplic succession without change or disturbance.” *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1.3 (*nigama-kalpa-taror galitam phalam*, etc.), purport

<sup>6</sup> “From a bona fide spiritual master you receive knowledge, because he will present as he has received from his spiritual master. He’ll not adulterate or manufacture something. That is the bona fide spiritual master.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, Vyāsa-pūjā lecture, London, 22 August 1973

<sup>7</sup> “Guru is the representative of Vyāsadeva because he does not change anything. What Vyāsadeva said, your guru will also say the same thing. Not that “So many hundreds of thousands of years have passed away. Therefore I will give you a new formula.” No. There is no new formula. The same Vyāsa-pūjā, the same philosophy. Simply we have to accept it.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, lecture on the disappearance day of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Hyderabad, 10 December 1976.

He simply has to deliver the message, just as a postman delivers a letter, contents fully intact.<sup>8</sup> According to the Vedic scriptures, one who is serious about attaining self-realization or God realization or the ultimate goal in life must approach such a bona fide spiritual master.<sup>9</sup> It is not optional; accepting a bona fide spiritual master is essential.<sup>10</sup>

The method of accepting the spiritual master is explained in *Bhagavad-gītā*: one must surrender to him, inquire from him, and serve him.<sup>11</sup> Inquiry alone is not enough.<sup>12</sup> One must humbly submit oneself before the spiritual master,<sup>13</sup> accepting him as a representative of God.<sup>14</sup>

The spiritual master is not God, and any so-called master who claims to be God should at once be rejected as bogus.<sup>15</sup> But the spiritual master is honored as much as God because he intimately

<sup>8</sup> “A post peon, when he delivers you some large amount of money, it is not his own money. The money is sent by somebody else. But he honestly delivers you: ‘Sir, here is your money. Take it.’ . . . Similarly, . . . The spiritual master brings the message from the Supreme Lord and delivers you. And if you kindly accept, then you’ll be satisfied. This is the business of the spiritual master.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, lecture on Gurvāṣṭakam, Stockholm, 9 September 1973. Obviously, as throughout this essay, multiple citations could be provided.

<sup>9</sup> *Tasmād gurum prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam. Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.3.21. (Cited in the Folio database more than 130 times.)

*Tad vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 11.2.12. (Cited in the Folio database more than 300 times.)

<sup>10</sup> “*Gurum evābhigacchet*—one must; it is not optional. It is imperative that one approach the spiritual master, . . .” *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.21.35, purport.

<sup>11</sup> *Tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā, etc. Bhagavad-gītā* 4.34

<sup>12</sup> “Inquiries and submission constitute the proper combination for spiritual understanding. Unless there is submission and service, inquiries from the learned spiritual master will not be effective.” *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 4.34, purport.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Sākṣād-dharitvena samasta-śāstrair. (Śrī Gurvāṣṭakam, 7)*

“Sage Prabuddha continued to speak to the King as follows: ‘My dear King, a disciple has to accept the spiritual master not only as spiritual master, but also as the representative of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the Supersoul. In other words, the disciple should accept the spiritual master as God, because he is the external manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. This is confirmed in every scripture, and a disciple should accept the spiritual master as such. . . .’” *The Nectar of Devotion*, Chapter Seven, “Evidence Regarding Devotional Principles—Accepting Initiation from the Spiritual Master and Receiving Instructions from Him”) Cf. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.3.21-22.

<sup>15</sup> “The disciple’s duty is to offer respect to guru as he offers respect to God. But guru will never say that “I am—because my disciples are offering me respect as God, therefore I have become God.” As soon as he thinks so, he becomes dog.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, Vyāsa-pūjā lecture, London, 22 August 1973.

serves God through the disciplic chain.<sup>16</sup>

Because each spiritual master serves his own spiritual master, all the members of the chain are ultimately servants of God and therefore very dear to God.<sup>17</sup> More precisely, the bona fide spiritual master is the servant of the servant of the servant of God, or Kṛṣṇa.<sup>18</sup>

This is one of the secrets of the *paramparā* system: to be a genuine master, one must be a genuine servant.<sup>19</sup> The student, therefore, surrenders to the spiritual master as a disciple and serves him, and the master responds by answering the disciple’s questions, enlightening him with transcendental knowledge.<sup>20</sup> For the sincere disciple who has full faith in Kṛṣṇa

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<sup>16</sup> *sākṣād-dharitvena samasta-śāstrair  
uktas tathā bhāvayata eva sadbhiḥ  
kintu prabhor yaḥ priya eva tasya  
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*

“The spiritual master is to be honored as much as the Supreme Lord because he is the most confidential servitor of the Lord. This is acknowledged in all revealed scriptures and followed by all authorities. Therefore I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of such a spiritual master, who is a bona fide representative of Śrī Hari [Kṛṣṇa].’ (Gurvāṣṭaka 7) This is the verdict of all śāstras. The guru never says, ‘I am Kṛṣṇa, I am God, I am Bhagavān.’ Rather, the guru says, ‘I am the most humble servant of the servant of the servant of God.’ He does not even say that he is the direct servant. Rather, he is the servant one hundred times removed. *Gopī-bhartuḥ pada-kamalayor dāsa-dāsānudāsa*. We should not try to become direct servants, for that is not possible. First of all we must become the servant of the servant. The guru is the servant of Kṛṣṇa, and if we become his servant, we become an actual bona fide servant. That is our real position.” —*Teachings of Lord Kapila*, Chapter Seventeen

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

“Regardless of which stage one is in, when I see that one is engaged seriously and sincerely in discharging the duties ordered by the spiritual master and is thus dedicating his life to the service of the spiritual master, that person becomes most dear to Me.” —Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in *Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, Chapter Seventy-nine, “Meeting of Lord Kṛṣṇa with Sudāma Brāhmaṇa.”

<sup>18</sup> “[O]ne must accept a spiritual master who comes in the disciplic succession and is a servant of the servant of the Lord.” —*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 6.11.24, purport

<sup>19</sup> “And one cannot be a bona fide and authorized spiritual master unless one has been strictly obedient to his spiritual master.” —*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.9.43, purport

<sup>20</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.34.

“*Tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena*. If you have surrendered, then you can ask some question. And *sevayā*. That *paripraśna* should not be challenge. By *sevā*, by service. This is our process. We must find out guru, we must satisfy him by service and surrender unto him. Then guru will explain. *Upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ*. He knows everything. He’ll explain. This is our program.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, morning walk, Los Angeles, 10 December 1973

and equal faith in the bona fide spiritual master, all the truths of spiritual realization are factually revealed.<sup>21</sup>

The genuine disciple feels everlastingly indebted to the spiritual master and continues to serve him forever.<sup>22</sup> In this way, even when the spiritual master leaves this world, the master and disciple are connected.<sup>23</sup> The disciple continues to serve the spiritual master by

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<sup>21</sup> *yasya deve parā bhaktir  
yathā deve tathā gurau  
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ  
prakāśante mahātmanāḥ*

“Unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master, all the imports of Vedic knowledge are automatically revealed.” *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.23

<sup>22</sup> *evam janam nipatitam prabhavāhi-kūpe  
kāmābhikāmam anu yaḥ prapatan prasaṅgāt  
kṛtvātmasāt surarṣiṇā bhagavan grhītaḥ  
so 'ham katham nu visrje tava bhṛtya-sevām*

“My dear Lord, O Supreme Personality of Godhead, because of my association with material desires, one after another, I was gradually falling into a blind well full of snakes, following the general populace. But Your servant Nārada Muni kindly accepted me as his disciple and instructed me how to achieve this transcendental position. Therefore, my first duty is to serve him. How could I leave his service?” *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.9.28

“[I]t is not possible for the disciple to repay the debt to the spiritual master. Therefore the disciple remains eternally indebted to the spiritual master and continually works in such a way that the spiritual master may become pleased upon him for such sincere services rendered.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, letter to Mantriṇī Devī Dāsi, 29 July 1976

<sup>23</sup> “[T]he disciple and spiritual master are never separated because the spiritual master always keeps company with the disciple as long as the disciple follows strictly the instructions of the spiritual master.” —*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.28.47, purport

“Please always try to remember me by my teachings and we shall always be together. Just like I have written in the first publications of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, ‘The spiritual Master lives forever by His divine instruction and the disciple lives with him.’, because I have always served my Guru Maharaja and followed His teachings I am now even never separated from Him. Sometimes Maya may come and try to interfere but we must not falter, we must always follow the chalked out path layed down by the great acharya’s and in the end you will see.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, letter to Cidānanda, 25 November 1973

following what the master has taught him,<sup>24</sup> and by teaching it to others.<sup>25</sup> Thus the bona fide disciple becomes a bona fide spiritual master<sup>26</sup>, and the chain of succession continues.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “As long as the spiritual master is physically present, the disciple should serve the physical body of the spiritual master, and when the spiritual master is no longer physically existing, the disciple should serve the instructions of the spiritual master.” —*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.28.47, purport

<sup>25</sup> After receiving the spiritual master’s mercy, one must repeat his instructions, and this is called *śravaṇa-kīrtana*—hearing and chanting. —*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 19.152, purport

<sup>26</sup> “Lord Caitanya gave a plain order that anywhere we go, simply talk of Krishna Consciousness, and you will become a spiritual master.” —Śrīla Prabhupāda, letter to Rūpānuga, 7 March 1968

<sup>27</sup> “One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master.” —*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.9.43, purport

