

Śikṣā outside ISKCON?

Śivarāma Svāmī



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Contents

Preface	7
Acknowledgement	9
Introduction	11
PART ONE	
The Tradition of Śikṣā-guru	15
What is Śikṣā?	15
What is a Śikṣā-guru?	19
There Are Many Śikṣā-gurus	21
The Śikṣā-guru's Relationship to Other Gurus	26
Selecting a Guru	30
PART TWO	
Application in ISKCON	35
Introduction	35
Śikṣā-gurus in Prabhupāda's Time	36
After Prabhupāda's Disappearance	41
PART THREE	
Doubts and Answers	45
Introduction	45
PART FOUR	
Summary and Conclusions	73
The Tradition of Śikṣā	73
Śikṣā for ISKCON	74

Final Questions	76
Last Words	77
Apologies	78
Appendix	79

Preface

Since ISKCON's turbulent early eighties, I had maintained what I saw to be an innocent and intermittent acquaintance with a Vaiṣṇava outside ISKCON. By the mid-nineties, though, that acquaintance became part of a controversy: should ISKCON leaders be taking guidance from a Vaiṣṇava outside ISKCON? Seeing the danger of setting such a precedent, I and others, at the request of the GBC, gave up the outside association.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda had warned, further ordeals were to follow: that apparently kindly Vaiṣṇava became ISKCON's antagonist; ISKCON's members went outside for *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā*; and even now devotees abandon ISKCON for the promise of a brighter spiritual future.

I am unhappy to have contributed to this scenario. ISKCON has been unnecessarily disturbed, and Śrīla Prabhupāda certainly has not been pleased. For that, I have offered my apologies to His Divine Grace and the assembled Vaiṣṇavas. I have learned much from the experience.

I have written this paper after due contemplation. May the reader take advantage. Follow my latter example, that of giving up *śikṣā* outside the Society. Śrīla Prabhupāda's written and spoken instructions clearly conclude: take *śikṣā* only within ISKCON.

Acknowledgement

I must thank His Grace Mahādyuti Prabhu, President of Rādhā-Londonīsvara's temple in London, for the many days, nay weeks he spent in editing both the spelling, grammar and presentation style of this paper. If there is merit in this work, he must receive first mention.

My thanks to Nalinī-kānta devī dāsī for proofreading this paper, and to Badrinārāyaṇa Prabhu for its conception.

Introduction

A few years ago, I compiled a book for members of ISKCON entitled *The Śikṣā-guru*. In it, I examined Śrīla Prabhupāda’s intention regarding *śikṣā-guru* in our Society and presented *tattva* according to my realisation. In this paper, I summarise that book’s contents. I address questions of its application in the Vaiṣṇava world, a world in which ISKCON is but one of many societies.

Some of these questions are: Who can be a *śikṣā-guru* for ISKCON’s members and what are that person’s qualifications? What is the *śikṣā-guru*’s relationship to the *dīkṣā-guru* and to Śrīla Prabhupāda? Can Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON act as its members’ *śikṣā-gurus*? If so, how? If not, why not? I address these concerns based upon the principles of *guru-tattva*, in light of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions, and considering the Society’s 35 years of experience.

While the primary doctrines of *guru-tattva*, like those of any spiritual science, are found in *śāstra*, many of its principles (and the details of their implementation) are not. These principles have descended through Vaiṣṇava tradition, a form of evidence rooted in the ways¹ of the *ācāryas*.

¹ While scripture is Vaiṣṇavas’ foremost evidence, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura declares that self-realised souls “... have already attained the perfect spiritual knowledge that is the root from which the scriptures

If understanding the principles of *guru-tattva* poses a challenge to some of ISKCON's members, the integration of these principles within an institution — a novel idea in the history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism — may pose an even greater challenge to the Society.

This paper is written in four parts. The first part describes the tradition of *śikṣā-guru*. The second part relates the history by which this tradition developed in ISKCON and concludes with Prabhupāda's directive prohibiting *śikṣā* outside the Society. The third part is a list of doubts challenging the thesis of this prohibition and my answers to those doubts — based on Part One and Part Two. Part Four is a summary of the first three parts.

At the outset of this paper, my submission is: the conclusions of both *sāstra* and the *guru-paramparā* must be seen through the eyes of Śrīla Prabhupāda.² In other words, Śrīla Prabhupāda best understands the teachings of Vyāsa and his representatives.³ Therefore, in all circumstances, on all subjects, we must defer to Śrīla Prabhupāda's conclusions. This, I believe, is in essence the constitution of ISKCON and the vision of Śrīla Prabhupāda's bona fide followers.

have grown" (*Tattva-sūtra* 5.42); therefore, the tradition they pass on is no less than Vedic evidence.

² As will be seen later, Śrīla Prabhupāda, as the founder-*ācārya*, is the ultimate authority for ISKCON. Prabhupāda writes, "In that trust ... my name is registered there as the founder-acarya and that I am to be the ultimate authority. In ... case of necessity of cancelling any decision ... my decision should over-rule all the other trustees combined." (Letter, Bombay, December 28, 1974)

³ Śrīla Prabhupāda often explained the process of seeing 'through' the sequence of one's predecessors. He quoted Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *rūpa-raghunātha-pade haibe ākuti/ kabe hāma bujhaba se yugala-pīriti* as the formulation of this principle, repeatedly emphasising that one should go "through the *paramparā* system." (Cc. *Madhya* 25.271, purport)

What is Śrīla Prabhupāda's understanding of *sīkṣā* for his followers? This paper offers the following answers:

1. The association of Vaiṣṇavas, and the instructions they impart, *sīkṣā*, are the assured means of success for spiritual practitioners. This is the injunction of *śāstra*.⁴
2. However, Śrīla Prabhupāda observed that when his followers received instructions outside ISKCON, their devotional practices, for various reasons, became impaired.
3. Therefore, Śrīla Prabhupāda directed his followers to take *sīkṣā* solely from ISKCON's members.

With conviction in my heart, I pray at the lotus feet of all Vaiṣṇavas, hoping this paper will be of value in their service to Caitanya Mahāprabhu's mission. I am sorely aware of my limitations; I write only to serve the Society Śrīla Prabhupāda loves so much and to maintain the dignity of our *guru-paramparā*.

⁴ Cc. *Madhya* 22.54.

The Tradition of Śikṣā-guru

What is Śikṣā?

1. Śikṣā is guidance that directs a devotee to Kṛṣṇa

According to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, one serious about true happiness should find a qualified *guru* and inquire from him about the ultimate goal of life.¹ The instructions imparted by the spiritual master, in response to submissive inquiry, are known as *śikṣā*. Caitanya Mahāprabhu directs devotees to accept such guidance at every stage of their spiritual development, up to and including *prema*.² Thus, *śikṣā* is the compass of knowledge that guides a devotee from *śraddhā* to *prema*.

2. Śikṣā is a most prominent item of bhakti

In *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī introduces the first five and most important items³ of *sādhana-*

¹ *Tasmād guruṁ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam. (Bhāg. 11.3.21)*

² “The root cause of devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa is association with advanced devotees. Even when one’s dormant love for Kṛṣṇa awakens, association with devotees is still most essential.” (Cc. *Madhya* 22.83)

³ In *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.97–117, the five items are (1) *guru-pādāśraya* — accepting a *guru*; (2) *śrī-kṛṣṇa-dīkṣādi-śikṣānam* — taking

bhakti, of which the first is *guru-pādāśraya* (taking shelter of a spiritual master), followed by *śrī-kṛṣṇa-dīkṣādi-śikṣānam* (accepting initiation in *kṛṣṇa-mantras* and receiving instruction from the spiritual master). This confirms *śikṣā* to be a pivotal item of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa, interconnected with service to the *guru* and fidelity to the *ācāryas*.

I reiterate that, in a devotee's spiritual progress, *śikṣā* is not limited to an inaugural role. In His instructions to Rūpa Gosvāmī, Caitanya Mahāprabhu confirms that *śikṣā* nurtures devotion throughout its every stage. The Lord likens devotion to a creeper,⁴ the seed of which is acquired by the mercy of *guru* and Kṛṣṇa. If the devotee-gardener properly applies himself to cultivating this *bhakti* seed by means of the watering process of hearing and chanting,⁵ the creeper grows luxuriantly, bearing leaves, flowers, and finally the fruit of love of Godhead.

In this watering process, hearing refers to systematically⁶ acquiring perfect knowledge⁷ from higher authority.⁸ It includes reading scripture, hearing the holy name, meditating on *dīkṣā-mantras* — all directed and perfected through the guidance of the *guru*. This is *śikṣā*. Because

initiation and *śikṣā* from him; (3) *viśrambheṇa guroḥ seva* — submissively inquiring from and intimately serving the *guru*; (4) *sādhu-vartmanu vartanam* — following the footsteps of predecessor *ācāryas*; (5) *sad-dharma-ṗrcchā* — inquiring about eternal religious principles. See also Cc. *Madhya* 22.115.

⁴ *Guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja*: “By the mercy of both Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master, such a person receives the seed of the creeper of devotional service.” (Cc. *Madhya* 19.151) See also Prabhu-pāda's purport.

⁵ See Cc. *Madhya* 19.152.

⁶ See *Bhāg.* 1.18.10, purport.

⁷ “Hearing means receiving the knowledge ...” (Bg. lecture, New York, December 1, 1966)

⁸ See Cc. *Madhya* 9.362, purport.

śikṣā nourishes the creeper of devotion, it is a⁹ most prominent item of *bhakti*. As the creeper of devotion is nourished by *śikṣā*, characteristics of devotion such as faith, knowledge,¹⁰ greed,¹¹ and attachment,¹² are also nourished.

3. Śikṣā harmonises the characteristics of devotion

By definition, *śikṣā* guides the spiritual aspirant toward Kṛṣṇa. Forward momentum will be visible when the items of devotion (*śikṣā* being the item presently under consideration) properly nourish the characteristics of devotion: faith, greed, knowledge, attachment, etc.

For instance, at higher stages of devotion, *śikṣā* must nurture the characteristics that complement those acquired at *bhakti*'s lower stages.¹³ Likewise, *śikṣā* must always be harmonious with, and produce a devotion harmonious with, such fundamental items as: surrender to the *dīkṣā-guru*, obedience to his instructions, esteem for the initiation received from him, reverence for the *mantras* received from him, and fidelity to the tradition set by the *ācāryas*.

If *śikṣā* does not harmonise the items of devotion, then it is *not śikṣā*; it is information that is a disturbance to the devotional creeper.¹⁴

⁹ Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is *the* most prominent item. See Cc. *Madhya* 6.241.

¹⁰ See Cc. *Madhya* 22.64–69 and *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.17–19.

¹¹ See Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta*, chapter 10, subsection entitled "Rāgānuga-bhakti."

¹² See Cc. *Madhya* 22.71.

¹³ The verse beginning with *ādau śraddhā* in Brs. 1.4.15–16 describes a 'chronological order' of qualitative and quantitative spiritual development. See Cc. *Madhya* 23.14–17.

¹⁴ Rūpa Gosvāmī writes in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.101, "Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorised Vedic literatures like the *Upaniṣads*, *Purāṇas* and *Nārada-pañcarātra* is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society." Śrīla Prabhupāda describes this extensively (see Bg. lecture, New York, October 9, 1966).

4. Śikṣā continues through all stages of devotion

As mentioned earlier, *śikṣā* maintains harmony at all levels of devotion, classified by Caitanya Mahāprabhu¹⁵ as *sambandha*, one's relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead; *abhidheya*, functional duties based on that relationship; and *prayojana*, the goal of life (love of God). Knowledge relating to each stage is known respectively as *sambandha-jñāna*, *abhidheya-jñāna*, and *prayojana-jñāna*.

The *dīkṣā-guru* initiates the disciple with *sambandha-jñāna*, and the *śikṣā-guru* trains that disciple in *abhidheya-jñāna*.¹⁶

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that worship of the Deity Madana-mohana re-establishes our forgotten relationship with Kṛṣṇa, worship of Govindajī develops transcendental service, and worship of Gopinātha is at the perfectional stage.¹⁷ Then he writes that Sanātana Gosvāmī is the ideal *dīkṣā-guru*, for he delivers the lotus feet of Madana-mohana, and Govinda-deva acts just like the ideal *śikṣā-guru*, by teaching Arjuna the *Bhagavad-gītā*. And in the eyes of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas, Rūpa Gosvāmī is the *śikṣā-guru*¹⁸ for the *sampradāya*.

Witness above the harmony among Deities and *ācāryas* alike in imparting *śikṣā* to the devotee: one Kṛṣṇa is appearing as different Deities and different *gurus* with one purpose — the deliverance of the fallen. Conclusion: there can be no conflict in *śikṣā*.¹⁹

¹⁵ See Cc. *Ādi* 7.146.

¹⁶ See Cc. *Ādi* 1.47, purport.

¹⁷ See Cc. *Ādi* 1.19.

¹⁸ In the purport to Cc. *Ādi* 1.47, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, regarding *dīkṣā-guru*, “Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī is the ideal spiritual master...” Speaking about Rūpa Gosvāmī, he says, “We Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas, we follow the instruction [of Rūpa Gosvāmī]...” (NoD. lecture, Bombay, October 26, 1972)

¹⁹ Even great *ācāryas* may differ on points of philosophy. In the same way, a *śikṣā-guru* may internally differ from the valid opinion of an-

5. Summary

In replying to what is *śikṣā*, I have highlighted its systematic and concordant nature. Why? Because it is the very lack of concord in the so-called *śikṣā* received from Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON that has created and fuelled controversy for over 30 years.

Now, to concisely define *śikṣā*, I would say: *śikṣā* is the ever-consistent instructions that guide a devotee to Kṛṣṇa.

What is a Śikṣā-guru?

1. A śikṣā-guru is one who gives śikṣā — according to tradition

In answering the question, what is a *śikṣā-guru*, I am hesitant to reply the obvious: “One who gives *śikṣā*.”

Why?

Because I want to emphasise the *process* of *śikṣā* as much as its content, its effect on the disciple as much as his right to receive it.

While Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “The spiritual master who instructs the disciple about spiritual matters is called the *śikṣā-guru*,”²⁰ he also explains the etiquette²¹ of *śikṣā*. Part of that etiquette has been included in my definition of *śikṣā*²² by the words “ever-consistent instructions;” other parts of the tradition will be described later.²³

other *guru*. Still, in instructing the disciple, either he will uphold the version of other *gurus* instructing that disciple, or he will explain his different view in a way that synthesises both views. In either case, there is no conflict in *śikṣā*.

²⁰ *Kṛṣṇa Book*, chapter 2, p. 245.

²¹ For instance, “*śikṣā-guru* does not mean he is speaking something against the teachings of the *dikṣā-guru*. He is not a *śikṣā-guru*. He is a rascal.” (Bg. lecture, Honolulu, July 4, 1974)

²² See the previous section.

²³ See the next section, “Who can be a *śikṣā-guru*?”

To summarise: adherence to the tradition of *śikṣā* is as integral to being a *śikṣā-guru* as giving instruction. I would therefore qualify the meaning of *śikṣā-guru* by saying: the *śikṣā-guru* is one who gives *śikṣā* — according to Vaiṣṇava tradition.²⁴

2. The *śikṣā-guru* should be given due respect

The *śikṣā-guru* may be either liberated or not liberated.²⁵ In either case, he who gives transcendental knowledge, should be respected as *guru*,²⁶ the best among *gurus*,²⁷ and non-different from the Lord.

Vaiṣṇavas are individuals. Therefore the quality and quantity of *gurus*' guidance²⁸ and commitment²⁹ to their disciples vary. In the same way, the quality and quantity of disciples' worship of, and commitment to, their *gurus* also vary. In any case, the instructor must always be seen as *guru*, a worshipable superior,³⁰ the external manifestation of the Supersoul.³¹ If he is not the *dīkṣā-guru*, still he must be seen as equal to him in *tattva*.³²

²⁴ In the following quote, Śrīla Prabhupāda indicates that there is etiquette in how *śikṣā* should be transmitted by a *śikṣā-guru*: "If K speaks what I speak, then he can be taken a *śikṣā-guru*." (Letter, July 20, 1974)

²⁵ "There are two kinds of instructing spiritual masters. One is the liberated person ... the other ... invokes the disciple's spiritual consciousness by means of relevant instructions." (Cc. *Ādi* 1.47, purport)

²⁶ "He who opens my eyes with transcendental knowledge is my master birth after birth." (*Prema-bhakti-candrikā* 1.3)

²⁷ "The person who bestows transcendental knowledge upon the members of all the spiritual orders of society is one's ultimate spiritual master. Indeed, he is as good as My own self." (*Bhāg.* 10.80.32)

²⁸ See *Bhāg.* 11.2.44–48.

²⁹ This subject is discussed in detail in *The Śikṣā-guru*, Part Three.

³⁰ See *Bhāg.* 11.17.27.

³¹ "One should know the instructing spiritual master to be the Personality of Kṛṣṇa. Lord Kṛṣṇa manifests Himself as the Supersoul and as the greatest devotee of the Lord." (Cc. *Ādi* 1.47)

There Are Many Śikṣā-gurus

1. The many kinds of śikṣā-guru

A devotee must have only one initiating spiritual master, but he may, though need not,³³ have more than one *śikṣā-guru*.³⁴

Among *śikṣā-gurus*, the first devotee who shows the path of devotion is known as the *vartma-pradarśaka-guru*.³⁵ Those Vaiṣṇavas who give guidance on the path are also *śikṣā-gurus*; among these, the one who gives the most regular guidance generally becomes the devotee's *dikṣā-guru*.³⁶ Thus, the *dikṣā-guru* is also an instructor.³⁷ Thus, up to and including initiation, there are three types of *śikṣā-guru*.³⁸

A fourth type of *śikṣā-guru* is the one most commonly identified with the name. His distinction is that he is the Vaiṣṇava selected by the *dikṣā-guru* to give his disciple continuing spiritual instruction. Why would the *dikṣā-guru* pass to someone else the responsibility of *śikṣā*? There

³² Prabhupāda writes, "There is no difference between the shelter-giving Supreme Lord and the initiating and instructing spiritual masters. If one foolishly discriminates between them, he commits an offence in the discharge of devotional service." (Cc. *Ādi* 1.47, purport)

³³ Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's comments: "... There are many similar verses in Vedic literature indicating that one must take shelter of a single bona fide spiritual master. We also have the examples of innumerable great saintly persons who did not accept more than one spiritual master ... I myself certainly follow this principle and worship my bona fide spiritual master." (*Bhāg.* 11.9.31, purport)

³⁴ "One may accept only one *dikṣā-guru*, but one may accept many *śikṣā-gurus*." (*Jaiva-dharma*, chapter 20)

³⁵ Literally means "the *guru* who illuminates the path." (*Bhāg.* 4.12.32, purport)

³⁶ "... generally the *śikṣā-guru* later on becomes the *dikṣā-guru*." (*Bhāg.* 4.12.32, purport)

³⁷ "The *dikṣā-guru* may also perform the duties of a *śikṣā-guru*." (*Jaiva-dharma*, chapter 20)

³⁸ They are (1) the *vartma-pradarśaka*, (2) other instructors, and (3) the most prominent instructor, the initiator.

may be a variety of reasons, including force of circumstance³⁹ or his feelings of spiritual inadequacy.⁴⁰

2. The founder-*ācārya*

Though *sāstra* repeatedly mentions *śikṣā-guru*, it says little of the founder-*ācārya*; though the tradition of *śikṣā-guru* is abundant, that of the founder-*ācārya* is not.

Yet there is a glorious culture of the worship of, and obedience to, leaders of *sampradāyas*, such as Brahmā,⁴¹ Vyāsadeva, Madhvācārya, Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and Rūpa Gosvāmī,⁴² as well as other *ācāryas* prominent by the recognition of their followers.⁴³ This traditional respect for *ācāryas* appears to be the basis upon which we now revere Śrīla Prabhupāda. Although tradition sometimes did define the *ācārya* within an institutional framework, that was rare.⁴⁴ And never did the framework parallel the sophisticated modern institutional structures of the Gauḍīya Maṭha and ISKCON.⁴⁵

³⁹ Prabhupāda says, “Sometimes a *dīkṣā-guru* is not present always. Therefore one can take learning, instruction, from an advanced devotee. That is called the *śikṣā-guru*.” (Bg. lecture, Honolulu, July 4, 1974)

⁴⁰ See *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* 46–61.

⁴¹ See *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, chapter 6.

⁴² “This is the process of the perfect way. One must take lessons from authorities like Nārada, Vyāsa and Asita, and follow their principles.” (*Bhāg.* 6.16.45, purport)

⁴³ Śrīla Prabhupāda often quotes *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.14.2, referring to *ācāryas* as particularly “great” spiritual teachers rather than spiritual masters, e.g., “great *ācāryas* like ... Śaṅkarācārya, Madhvācārya, Rāmanujācārya, Viṣṇu Svāmī — so many other *ācāryas* — Lord Caitanya.” (Bg. lecture, Bombay, April 1, 1971)

⁴⁴ Rāmanujācārya, Śaṅkarācārya, Madhvācārya and Jīva Gosvāmī all organised their followers and established systematic rules for Deity worship, preaching, and administration of *maṭhas*.

⁴⁵ My definition of founder-*ācārya* is restricted in this paper. It will not include the concept of the founder of a *sampradāya* like Lord Brahmā, or even one who revives a lost tradition as Kṛṣṇa mentions in Bg. 4.2. I

Following the example of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Śrīla Prabhupāda introduced to ISKCON the concept of an institutional *ācārya* and coined the title founder-*ācārya*. To the present day, ISKCON's leadership continues to develop the idea of founder-*ācārya* as it pertains to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The founder-*ācārya* is a *śikṣā-guru* of paramount importance; his role in the tradition of *śikṣā* is all-pervading in his line. This prominence is due to (1) the emphasis and direction he gives the *paramparā*'s teachings,⁴⁶ and (2) the institution he establishes to fulfil Lord Caitanya's mission.⁴⁷

Because of the indelible stamp the founder-*ācārya* places on the *śikṣā* of his line, all subsequent *gurus* and followers must execute their service and direct their dependents through the founder-*ācārya*'s teachings.⁴⁸ This is the pre-eminent *śikṣā* position of the founder-*ācārya*.

3. Śikṣā-gurus of varying characteristics

I have already mentioned⁴⁹ that instructors vary in spiritual strength and commitment to disciples. The degree to which spiritual potency manifests in a Vaiṣṇava *guru* is a

shall deal strictly within the modern realm of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, beginning with Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

⁴⁶ See *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, chapter 6, on "founder-*ācārya*."

⁴⁷ In a lecture, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "That was Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's first attempt. Before that, even the *ācāryas*, Rūpānuga Gosvāmī, they left literature, but they did not attempt to preach practically. And Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, he was very, very anxious to preach this Caitanya cult in the western countries. This is Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's special contribution." (Lecture, Los Angeles, December 13, 1973)

⁴⁸ One of the many times Prabhupāda repeated this principle: "This is *paramparā* system. You cannot jump over. You must go through the *paramparā* system." (Cc. lecture, Māyāpur, March 28, 1975)

⁴⁹ See section 2: *What is a śikṣā-guru?*

consequence of his service⁵⁰ and *bhajana*.⁵¹ And naturally, his advancement is reflected in his consciousness, which in turn determines the quality of his *śikṣā*. In this way, *śikṣā-gurus* vary in their ability to guide their disciples.⁵² *Śāstra* classifies them in two ways: either (1) beginner, intermediate, advanced, or (2) liberated or non-liberated.⁵³

As an adjunct to the paragraph above, Vaiṣṇavas also vary in their ability to direct their disciples in practical affairs—a quality independent of spiritual strength.⁵⁴ Good practical direction enlivens devotees in spiritual progress, and may enhance their ability for *bhajana*.

Instruction also can be categorised according to the extent of the *śikṣā-guru's* commitment to the disciple. A *śikṣā-guru* may give guidance that is

- (1) occasional (e.g., *Bhāgavatam* class);
- (2) limited (i.e., for a certain time or for a certain purpose);

⁵⁰ Here service refers to fulfilling Lord Caitanya's mission. This is an activity that invokes His mercy—the indispensable factor in spiritual advancement, which complements individual effort. See *Gīta-mālā* 18.2–3.

⁵¹ *Bhāg.* 11.2.44–48 describes the symptoms of three general categories of Vaiṣṇavas: *kaniṣṭha* (beginner), *madhyama* (intermediate), and *uttama* (advanced).

⁵² In his purport to *The Nectar of Instruction*, text 5, Prabhupāda explains how guidance varies according to the *guru's* advancement: “A neophyte Vaiṣṇava or a Vaiṣṇava situated on the intermediate platform can also accept disciples, but such disciples must be on the same platform, and it should be understood that they cannot advance very well toward the ultimate goal of life under his insufficient guidance.”

⁵³ “There are two kinds of instructing spiritual masters. One is the liberated person fully absorbed in meditation in devotional service, and the other is he who invokes the disciple's spiritual consciousness by means of relevant instructions.” (Cc. *Ādi* 1.47, purport)

⁵⁴ Satsvarūpa Mahārāja writes, “Our service to Kṛṣṇa should be guided by our spiritual master. He will help us to serve according to our psychophysical nature, in a way that is most effective for our purification.” (*Nārada-bhakti-sūtra* 82, purport)

- (3) uncommitted (i.e., not obliged to the disciple's liberation); or
- (4) committed (i.e., up to and beyond liberation).

Some instruction is merely educational; other goes beyond this world, having been secured for eternity by service and surrender.⁵⁵

4. Other śikṣā-gurus

A devotee may have an unlimited number of *śikṣā-gurus*. In recognising and respecting various *gurus* and their various qualities, spiritual sensitivity and theistic intelligence will serve one well. *The Śikṣā-guru* book was written to be a tool to help cultivate such sensitivity and intelligence.

A final category of *śikṣā-guru*, though not within the Vaiṣṇava community, is worth mentioning. It consists of those humans, non-humans, or inanimate objects that indirectly nurture one's spiritual life.⁵⁶ Even the physical body, evidence of the soul's entanglement, may be a source of illumination.⁵⁷ Yet the teachings acquired from such sources must be filtered through mature intelligence, for they are but an impetus for contemplation; in the ultimate issue, one's own spiritual intuition is one's *guru*.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See *The Śikṣā-guru*, Part Three, Chapter 9.

⁵⁶ In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto 11, chapter 7–9, Kṛṣṇa instructs Uddhava in the process of *sāṅkhyā*, a science that includes learning from non-devotee *śikṣā-gurus*.

⁵⁷ See *Bhāg.* 11.9.24–29.

⁵⁸ In *Bhāg.* 11.7.32, the words *santi me guravo rājan bahavo buddhy-upāśritaḥ* mean, "... with help of my intelligence I have taken shelter of many spiritual masters."

The Śikṣā-guru's Relationship to Other Gurus

To explain the relationships among the three main categories of Vaiṣṇava *guru* (*śikṣā*, *dīkṣā*, and the founder-*ācārya*), I shall use a metaphor found in the *Ādi-līlā* of Śrī Caitanya-*caritāmṛta*: the “Tree of Devotional Service.”⁵⁹ Lord Caitanya is the tree, and His followers the many branches and sub-branches of the tree. I suggest that the founder-*ācārya* of a Vaiṣṇava society is a branch, and his disciples and followers the sub-branches and twigs stemming from him.⁶⁰ The relationships between the *śikṣā-guru* and other Vaiṣṇavas can be understood by the relationships among branches of a tree.

My proposition is: the founder-*ācārya* is the branch; his *dīkṣā-guru* disciples are the sub-branches, and the *śikṣā-gurus* are the sub-sub-branches stemming from the *dīkṣā-guru* sub-branches. In other words, the founder-*ācārya* is the connection with the *sampradāya*, and he is the primary *śikṣā-guru*. Other *śikṣā-gurus* are connections to, and representatives of, the respective *dīkṣā-gurus*.⁶¹

1. The śikṣā-guru's relationship to the founder-ācārya

All *gurus* following in the line of the founder-*ācārya*, whose emphasis and mood are unique, must, by definition,

⁵⁹ See Cc. *Ādi* 9.19.

⁶⁰ In the purport to Cc. *Ādi* 9.19, Prabhupāda writes, “Our International Society for Krishna Consciousness is one of the branches of the Caitanya tree.” In our use of the metaphor, “one of the branches” refers to a set consisting of a branch from which stem many sub-branches, sub-sub-branches and twigs.

⁶¹ Only in the matter of instructing a disciple is the *śikṣā-guru* restricted to being an extension of that disciple's *dīkṣā-guru*. In all other matters, his direct relationship with his own *dīkṣā-guru* (who may be the founder-*ācārya*) must be honoured.

be faithful to him.⁶² And they must convey to their recruits, who encounter multiple Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava societies, that such exclusive allegiance is indispensable.

As the vitality of sub-branches depends upon the vitality of the branch from which they stem, the many *śikṣā-gurus* in a society depend upon the founder-*ācārya* for their spiritual nourishment. Thus, connection with and respect for the founder-*ācārya* are the primary concerns of all Vaiṣṇavas in that line.

So the relationship of the *śikṣā-guru* to the founder-*ācārya* is that the *śikṣā-guru*, as a humble servant of the founder-*ācārya*, faithfully represents his mission and teachings.

2. The śikṣā-guru's relationship to the dīkṣā-guru

Note that I refer to the *dīkṣā-guru* as that devotee from whom one has received the most *śikṣā*.⁶³ Since the greatest gift is that of transcendental knowledge, it stands to reason that the *dīkṣā-guru* is the most prominent person in a disciple's life. The role of the *śikṣā-guru* is to support that relationship. He therefore serves as the expansion of the *dīkṣā-guru*, and his instructions are the voice of the initiator.

⁶² I cite the example of Rūpa Gosvāmī's *praṇāma mantra*: "When will Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, who has established within this material world the mission to fulfil the desire of Lord Caitanya, give me shelter under his lotus feet?" So Rūpa Gosvāmī, as the founder of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, established as its mission the fulfilment of Lord Caitanya's desire. Following that line, Śrīla Prabhupāda, as the founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON, summarised its mission in the Seven Purposes of ISKCON's founding charter (New York, July 1966).

⁶³ In my opinion, the Zonal *Ācārya* and Guru Reform of 1986-87 was host to departures from Prabhupāda's instructions. One example is the still current practice of *gurus* initiating in non-contiguous zones, travelling widely, spending little time in any area, thus compromising their duty as the prominent *śikṣā-guru*. By this practice, in many cases, rather than being the prominent figure in a disciple's life, initiators have relegated themselves to a ritualistic function, their *dīkṣā* more or less a formality.

I quote below an excerpt from Professor N.K. Sanyal,⁶⁴ describing the relationship between the initiating and instructing spiritual master:

“*Upanayana* is the process of being conducted to the *guru*. This refers to the function of the *śikṣā-guru*. ... The *śikṣā-gurus* are the associated counterparts of the *dīkṣā-guru* who is the associated counter-whole of the divinity Himself. The *dīkṣā-guru* may, indeed, be also the *śikṣā-guru*, but not necessarily so. ... The process of initiation ... is as much a continued process as the process of being helped by the *śikṣā-guru* for approaching the *dīkṣā-guru*. ... They are eternally co-present in a relation that is progressive but without being hampered by the unwholesome imperfection of the principle of limitation.”⁶⁵

The main points I take from this quote, as well as from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own statements⁶⁶ are the following:

- (1) The *śikṣā-guru* is the representative of the *dīkṣā-guru*.
- (2) The *śikṣā-guru* continues the process of *dīkṣā* by expanding on the instructions of the *dīkṣā-guru*.

This short paper cannot feature all details of, or possible exceptions to, the relationship between *śikṣā-* and *dīkṣā-gurus*. The two points above, however, are points of *tattva*, or principle, which summarise the parameters of

⁶⁴ Dr. Sanyal was Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Godbrother, and his book *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya* was approved by His Divine Grace. See Letter, San Francisco, March 14, 1967.

⁶⁵ *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya*, pp. 676–77.

⁶⁶ Prabhupāda writes, “I am in [*sic*] the initiator *guru*, and you should be the instructor *guru* by teaching what I am teaching.” (Letter, Detroit, August 4, 1975), and “A *śikṣā-guru* who instructs against the instruction of spiritual [*sic*], he is not a *śikṣā-guru*.” (Bg. lecture, Honolulu, July 4, 1974)

the relationship. For instance, reality may be such that a particular *śikṣā-guru* is more important to a disciple than the initiator — everything is possible. Still, the *śikṣā-guru* will behave according to the two principles above.

I conclude with our metaphorical tree: the *śikṣā-guru* is that sub-sub-branch which connects the twig-disciples to the sub-branch of the *dīkṣā-guru*;⁶⁷ the disciples receive their nourishment from the initiator through the instructor.

3. The śikṣā-guru's relationship to other śikṣā-gurus

Though the *dīkṣā-guru* and the founder-*ācārya* play singular roles in a disciple's life, the disciple may seek shelter in multiple *śikṣā-gurus*. These *śikṣā-gurus* are united in their guidance, for they have in common: obedience to the founder-*ācārya*, support of the *dīkṣā-guru*, and concern for the welfare of the disciple.⁶⁸ Their interrelationship, like their *śikṣā*, enhances the items and characteristics of their disciple's devotion; they don't compete for the disciple's heart. This is the co-operative mood of Vaiṣṇavas.

4. Summary

The principles of conduct for a *śikṣā-guru* are determined by four factors:⁶⁹

- (1) spiritual well-being of the disciple;
- (2) obedience to the founder-*ācārya*;
- (3) support of the *dīkṣā-guru*;

⁶⁷ ... who in turn is connected to the most prominent branch of the founder-*ācārya*.

⁶⁸ Vaiṣṇava *pranāma* states, "I offer my respectful obeisances unto all the Vaiṣṇava devotees of the Lord. They are just like desire trees who can fulfil the desires of everyone, and they are full of compassion for the fallen conditioned souls."

⁶⁹ If the *śikṣā-guru* is also the initiator, factor number three becomes irrelevant.

(4) co-operation with other *śikṣā-gurus*.⁷⁰

While serving Kṛṣṇa in the capacity of *guru*, sincere and intelligent Vaiṣṇavas will find these principles of conduct sufficient to guide their relationships with other Vaiṣṇava *gurus*. But if a *guru* lacks spiritual integrity and is possessed of mundane motivation, a library of laws will not guarantee the disciple's well-being.

The twigs and branches of the tree of devotional service thrive when *gurus* follow Vaiṣṇava etiquette. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava etiquette in particular is defined by mutual support, and it is built upon selfless dedication to the mission and will of the founder-*ācārya*. Such conduct invokes the mercy of the Lord, who reveals from within the unwritten or unspoken details of *guru-tattva*.⁷¹

Selecting a Guru

In the beginning of his devotional journey, the devotee generally has little scope for selecting his *gurus*. They come to him. First, the *vartma-pradarśaka-guru* introduces the newcomer to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then, when the devotee commits himself to the institution's training, teachers are assigned to teach him and leaders to direct his service. Though all these guides are selected for him by the institution — no choice on his part — they are still *śikṣā-gurus*, understood to have been sent by Kṛṣṇa, no less so than those who seem to come fortuitously.

⁷⁰ This is a famous statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Your love for me will be shown by how much you cooperate to keep this institution together after I am gone." (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* 52)

⁷¹ Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "As soon as a devotee is regularly engaged in this way, always engaged in Krishna Consciousness, Krishna will reveal the whole spiritual science from within the heart of such sincere devotee." (Letter, Los Angeles, February 19, 1970)

By the association of these śikṣā-gurus, a devotee enters the realm of *bhakti*. Sincerely desiring to surrender, he prays for the association of those Vaiṣṇavas who can further inspire him.

This is the beginning of his own selection of śikṣā-gurus.

1. Selecting a śikṣā-guru prior to initiation

Faith is based upon hearing from a Vaiṣṇava and observing that he lives by what he preaches. But besides being inspiring, a Vaiṣṇava must be authorised. The *gurus* of an institution gain their authority from the founder-*ācārya*; they must represent him. As only those sub- and sub-sub-branches connected to the branch can nourish the twigs, so only those Vaiṣṇavas following the founder-*ācārya* can give śikṣā. And of course the śikṣā-guru must work in harmony with other *gurus*.

So a devotee may select one or more śikṣā-gurus from among Vaiṣṇavas

- (1) from whom he has regularly heard;
- (2) whose activities he has regularly observed;
- (3) who strictly follow the founder-*ācārya*;
- (4) who have been designated by the founder-*ācārya*;⁷² and
- (5) who work co-operatively with other *gurus*.

To ensure that a devotee does not err in his assessment of a śikṣā-guru, authorised Vaiṣṇavas must indicate those unqualified by the Society's standards.⁷³ But these Vaiṣṇavas will rarely attempt to certify an eligible *guru's*

⁷² For instance, Prabhupāda instructed the GBC secretaries to be śikṣā-gurus. See Letter, Detroit, August 4, 1975.

⁷³ This is the present standard of ISKCON. See GBC Resolutions, 2001, Action Order 301.

level of advancement. That means: from those who are already his *śikṣā-gurus*, a devotee is informed of those ineligible, beyond which he himself must take responsibility for his choices.

2. Selecting the *dīkṣā-guru*

After selecting one or more *śikṣā-gurus* and regularly taking instruction from them, the devotee will choose one to be the medium through whom all his service is offered: the *dīkṣā-guru*. Śrīla Prabhupāda clearly states that the *dīkṣā-guru* is generally he among a disciple's *śikṣā-gurus* who has been most instrumental in the training of the disciple.⁷⁴ And it makes sense for the disciple to offer his service through the Vaiṣṇava he knows best and with whom he has had the most extensive connection.

3. Selecting a *śikṣā-guru* after initiation

After initiation by the *dīkṣā-guru*, training the disciple may be continued by a *śikṣā-guru* (or *gurus*). This type of *śikṣā-guru* is different in function from those instructors who only engage one in service or give uncommitted guidance. As mentioned earlier, this instructor who continues to train the disciple is he who usually comes to mind when we hear the expression "*śikṣā-guru*."

The eligibility of this *śikṣā-guru* is the same as that of other *gurus* (enumerated above) — with one appendage: in all his dealings with the disciple, he represents the initiator. He is the extension of the *dīkṣā-guru*;⁷⁵ his teachings are the teachings of the initiator.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ "Generally a spiritual master who constantly instructs a disciple in spiritual science becomes his initiating spiritual master later on." (Cc. *Ādi* 1.35) However, this practice must conform to points of etiquette such as the "law of disciplic succession." This law states that a disciple may not initiate others in the physical presence of his *dīkṣā-guru*. (See Letter, Delhi, December 2, 1975) Even if that disciple is himself a prominent *śikṣā-guru*, he must direct aspirants to his initiator.

This criterion is readily met when the initiator directs his disciple to a specific *śikṣā-guru* in whom he himself has full faith in all respects.⁷⁷ In fact, unless the initiating *guru* is deceased, the etiquette is that the choice of *śikṣā-guru* is at least confirmed, if not recommended, by the *dīkṣā-guru*. In the absence of the *dīkṣā-guru*, other senior instructors may voice the suitability of a *śikṣā-guru*.

4. Summary

As the branches of a tree grow naturally one from another, a devotee's selection of *gurus*, whether *śikṣā* or *dīkṣā*, depends upon their natural connection to him. Both *śikṣā-* and *dīkṣā-gurus* must be chosen from among those who sprout from the founder-*ācārya*, and, after initiation, the *śikṣā-guru* must be chosen from among those whose connection with the *dīkṣā-guru* is beyond question.⁷⁸

Q. What happens if a disciple chooses a *guru* from Vaiṣṇavas not meeting the above stipulations?

A. Scripture and tradition prescribe a particular course of action for a particular end. If that prescription is not followed, one should not expect the same result achieved by following it.⁷⁹

This will be further discussed in Parts Three and Four of this paper.

⁷⁵ Professor Sanyal writes, "The *śikṣā-gurus* are the associated counterparts of the *dīkṣā-guru*." (*Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya*, pp. 676–77)

⁷⁶ *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* (48–55) elaborates on this principle of etiquette.

⁷⁷ An example of this is given in *Jaiva-dharma*, chapter 26, and *Śyāmānanda-prakāsa*, chapter 2.

⁷⁸ ... which means that the *śikṣā-guru's* connection with the founder-*ācārya* is also beyond question.

⁷⁹ In the verse beginning with *yaḥ śāstra-vidhim utsṛjya*, Lord Kṛṣṇa makes His opinion very clear: "He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination." (Bg. 16.23)

PART TWO

Application in ISKCON

Introduction

Part One describes the general principles of *śikṣā-guru-tattva* accepted in Vaiṣṇava tradition. In Part Two, I shall describe how Śrīla Prabhupāda introduced this tradition to ISKCON, and how, after Prabhupāda's disappearance, that tradition came under siege, sadly remaining so to this very day.

Prabhupāda first taught devotees respect for superiors and the value of transcendental knowledge. Later, he introduced the terminology of *śikṣā* and explained its principles. As Prabhupāda's Society reached India, interaction with other Vaiṣṇava groups led Prabhupāda to enumerate the guidelines restricting *śikṣā*, as well as those encouraging it.

With minor exceptions, these guidelines protected the Society. After Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance, however, ISKCON was beset with a battalion of Vaiṣṇavas from outside its boundaries, willing or wanting to advise and initiate its members. Some of these Vaiṣṇavas were well-meaning, others not so. In any case, Prabhupāda's warnings, when not heeded, turned to prophesy, and a unified ISKCON fractured.

My submission is this: The well-enunciated principles of *guru-tattva* left by Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *ācāryas* must not be compromised by attempts to be politically correct,¹ nor by the bullying of self-interested parties,² nor by our ignorance of Vaiṣṇava culture.³

Adhering to the eternal principles of *guru-tattva* preserves the integrity of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the Society. Such integrity calls upon the members of ISKCON to find spiritual guidance within its precincts. Should we not, a Pandora's box of anomalies awaits us, a box we have already more than peeped into.

Śikṣā-gurus in Prabhupāda's Time

In narrating this aspect of ISKCON's history, I am obliged to mention a less than laudatory role played by certain Vaiṣṇavas and Vaiṣṇava Societies (though I have attempted to maintain their anonymity). Where inference makes persons or parties known, I beg forgiveness for any offence taken by them.

1. Śikṣā-gurus within ISKCON

Devotees fortunate to be in ISKCON when Śrīla Prabhupāda was physically present will remember the high

¹ I refer to ISKCON's attempts to satisfy parties whose opinions on *guru-tattva* do not incorporate the version of either scripture or tradition, but are an emotional or circumstantial reaction to the Society's woes.

² I refer to the exploitative attitude by some Vaiṣṇava societies (and their members), which invokes seniority of age, or exemption by transcendence, as a justification to transgress both *śikṣā* tradition and Prabhupāda's instructions.

³ Śrīla Prabhupāda was ISKCON's only link with pure Vaiṣṇava culture. He has, however, described that culture within his books. But if ISKCON's members do not study them carefully, the Society will be successfully insulated from the assets of, as well as the threats to, its heritage.

level of respect shown to seniors at that time. Śrīla Prabhupāda engendered a culture of faith, not directed solely to himself, but to all devotees in general, seniors in particular.⁴

Śrīla Prabhupāda requested ISKCON devotees be trained⁵ in a way much resembling the *śikṣā-guru* tradition. As his disciples became more conversant with the concept of *guru*, Prabhupāda confirmed that “any senior devotee,” “anyone who can give spiritual advancement,”⁶ “an advanced devotee”⁷ who “speaks what I speak”⁸ could be respected as an instructing spiritual master.

What was a license for senior devotees in general, when applied to members of the GBC, became a mandate. By dint of the grave responsibility invested in them, they *should* be instructor *gurus*, acting as representatives of the *dīkṣā-guru*.⁹

By 1977, the culture of *śikṣā-guru*, without a doubt, was well established in ISKCON. After Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure, however, this culture declined, becoming obscure in both principle and practice.

⁴ Prabhupāda writes, “This position of our subordination should always be maintained and we should always give respect to our pure devotees who are engaged, in devotional service. ...” (Letter, Montreal, August 19, 1968) “[Prahāda] considered his teachers, spiritual masters and older Godbrothers to be as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” (*Bhāg.* 7.4.32)

⁵ Prabhupāda writes, “Now some of our leading boys, like you, Brahmananda, Tamala, etc. you should be very careful to train your other junior Godbrothers to the right type of preacher, keeping full faith in Krishna and the Spiritual Master.” (Letter, London, October 31, 1969)

⁶ Letter, Los Angeles, July 7, 1974.

⁷ Bg. lecture, Honolulu, July 4, 1974.

⁸ Letter, New Vṛndāvana, July 20, 1974.

⁹ Prabhupāda writes, “The GBC should all be the instructor *gurus*. I am in [*sic*] the initiator *guru*, and you should be the instructor *guru* by teaching what I am teaching and doing what I am doing.” (Letter, Detroit, August 4, 1975)

2. Śikṣā-gurus outside ISKCON

As liberally as Śrīla Prabhupāda shared his authority within ISKCON, equally reserved was he in sharing it with anyone outside ISKCON — especially with those who could, or would, exercise spiritual authority over his disciples. Though the history is a little convoluted, those who were close to Prabhupāda remember, without exception, his strong feelings against devotees taking instruction outside.

As early as 1967, before his first return to India, Śrīla Prabhupāda indicated that he was not in favour of Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON either replacing him or acting as his proxy. Why? His Divine Grace did not feel others could or would suitably represent him. He said clearly,¹⁰ “If this person speaks just one word different from what I am speaking, there will be great confusion among you.”¹¹

By the following year, ISKCON devotees had begun travelling to India with no place to stay other than the *maṭhas* of Prabhupāda’s Godbrothers. In 1969, when a disciple wanted to take *śikṣā* from one of Prabhupāda’s Vṛndāvana Godbrothers, Śrīla Prabhupāda disapproved.¹² Considering the circumstances,¹³ Śrīla Prabhupāda recommended another Godbrother, one he deemed more quali-

¹⁰ The following statement reiterates that the *śikṣā-guru* must be a transparent and knowledgeable representative of both the founder-*ācārya* and the *dīkṣā-guru*.

¹¹ *Prabhupāda-lilāmṛta* 26.

¹² Śrīla Prabhupāda considered him unqualified to be *guru*, being an offender to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. He writes, “I suspect that you have interest in taking instruction from some *sikṣa guru*, but ... it is my duty to refer you to someone who is competent to act as *sikṣa guru*. This B perhaps you do not know, has been rejected by Guru Maharaja. So I cannot recommend him as *sikṣa guru*.” (Letter, Los Angeles, January 31, 1969)

¹³ The circumstances were: while in India, his disciple required lodging; being impetuous, were he not given senior association, he would seek it anyway. Therefore Prabhupāda felt obliged to direct him.

fied.¹⁴ Though at the time Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote of this preferred Godbrother in glowing terms, later, in 1974, he wrote the contrary,¹⁵ indicating that the previous instruction had been circumstantial.

It is undeniable that the above instruction of 1969 was specific, while the later instruction of 1974 was general (“... my instruction to you all ...”) and included extensive background explanation. I reproduce relevant portions of the 1974 letter below:

“So it is better not to mix with my Godbrothers very intimately because instead of inspiring our students and disciples they may sometimes pollute them. ... This attempt was made previously by them, especially M and T and B but somehow or other I saved the situation. This is going on. We shall be very careful about them and not mix with them. This is my instruction to you all. They cannot help us in our movement, but they are very competent to harm our natural progress. So we must be very careful about them.”¹⁶ (Letter, April 28, 1974)¹⁷

¹⁴ In the same letter as above, Prabhupāda writes, “So if you are actually serious to take instructions from a *siksa guru*, I can refer you to one who is most highly competent of all my Godbrothers. This is S, whom I consider to be even my *siksa guru*, so what to speak of the benefit that you can have from his association.” (Letter, Los Angeles, January 31, 1969)

¹⁵ See Letter, Tirupati, April 28, 1974.

¹⁶ Śrīla Prabhupāda warns his followers to keep their distance from his Godbrothers. Since his Godbrothers’ disciples are faithful to and influenced by their *dikṣā-gurus*, “we must be [also] very careful” about associating with them, as well as with subsequent generations of their followers.

¹⁷ The preface to Prabhupāda’s instruction is, “You are right about S’s genuineness. But in my opinion he is the best of the lot. He is my old friend, at least he executes the regulative principles of devotional service. ... But S is responsible for disobeying this order of Guru Maharaja ... he and others ... thought that there must be one acarya. ... Guru

The conclusion from the letter above is that, except within the context of institutional formalities, devotees should not ‘mix’ with members of other Vaiṣṇava groups¹⁸ — which clearly excludes taking *śikṣā* from them. This is supported by other instructions from letters,¹⁹ conversations,²⁰ purports,²¹ — and by a lack of any later directive to the contrary.²²

Maharaja ... said openly you make a GBC and conduct the mission. ... who would come out successful and self effulgent acarya would be automatically selected. ... Actually amongst my Godbrothers no one is qualified to become acarya.”

¹⁸ In this letter Prabhupāda refers to taking *śikṣā* from the Gauḍīya Maṭha. What about the many other Vaiṣṇava groups outside the Gauḍīya Maṭha? It should be remembered that by dint of a common spiritual lineage — from Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura — the Gauḍīya Maṭha and ISKCON are in the same ‘Sarasvata’ spiritual family. Other Gauḍīya, or non-Gauḍīya, lines, by definition, have a different spiritual lineage, meaning: different founder-*ācārya*, differing philosophical views, different *sādhana*, etc. Based on the tradition of *śikṣā-guru*, it would be challenging to the extreme to formulate a cohesive argument how members of such *sampradāyas* could ever, even in theory, act as *śikṣā-guru* for members of ISKCON. For instance, of the ‘*bābāji*’ Gauḍīya line, Prabhupāda said, “Rascal. That is his bad association. Therefore I say don’t follow these so-called Radha-kunda babajis. Nara-kunda babaji.” (Letter, Vṛndāvana, September 6, 1976) Prabhupāda also wrote, “I have received information that some of our devotees are mixing with the babajis in Vrndavana. This has produced so many problems amongst our men and women who visit Vrndavana.” (Letter, Los Angeles, June 7, 1976) In other words, if Śrīla Prabhupāda did not envisage his Godbrothers being *śikṣā-gurus* for ISKCON’s members, then how much more disqualified are those outside the Sarasvata family.

¹⁹ See Letter, Bombay, November 9, 1975.

²⁰ See Conversation, Los Angeles, July 13, 1974.

²¹ See Cc. *Ādi* 12.9, 12.

²² While Prabhupāda instructed disciples to seek outside guidance on Deity worship, cosmology, performance of his *samādhi* ceremony, etc., such guidance was specific and isolated and solicited by him. However, Prabhupāda never gave any blanket instruction to take *śikṣā* from outside Vaiṣṇavas.

In Prabhupāda's mature estimation, other Vaiṣṇavas, from outside ISKCON, could not represent him. No doubt many Vaiṣṇavas had much to contribute, but experience had shown that their *śikṣā* could also "poison"²³ or "pollute"²⁴ his disciples, something he wanted to avoid at all costs.

3. Summary

ISKCON's policy in regard to accepting *śikṣā-gurus* was universally understood in Prabhupāda's time. For *śikṣā*, ISKCON devotees could approach their senior Godbrothers and Godsisters as Prabhupāda's representatives, but they could not approach Vaiṣṇavas outside the Society's membership.

Why?

Because Śrīla Prabhupāda had concluded that one not dedicated to his mission, and not trained by him, would not and could not properly represent him. Thus, great Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON, despite their erudition, could not be *śikṣā-gurus* for Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers.

After Prabhupāda's Disappearance

1. History

By comparison to Śrīla Prabhupāda's expressed desires, ISKCON's history after his disappearance has not been entirely successful. This paper, however, is not meant to detail ISKCON's successes or failures. Rather, it describes those pages of history, which, by their influence, diluted the principles of *guru-tattva* so well established by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

²³ See Letter, Calcutta, September 25, 1970.

²⁴ See Letter, Tirupati, April 28, 1974.

Almost immediately after Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure, devotees he had requested to give *dīkṣā* fell down. (Of the eleven he named, only four have not fallen.) Other senior devotees, including *sannyāsīs* and temple presidents, also compromised their vows or gave up devotional service altogether. These fall-downs by the Society's leaders, in the absence of Śrīla Prabhupāda's reassuring guidance, ushered in an era of uncertainty.

Adding to the confusion, ISKCON's official *śikṣā-gurus*, the GBC, made grievous mistakes about the continuation of *dīkṣā* and *śikṣā*.²⁵ Then, in the mid-eighties, attempting to rectify itself, the GBC submitted to a restructuring — with limited success. The GBC continues to 'reform' the understanding of *guru-tattva* with legislation, pleasing few critics and falling short of inspiring the Society.

The accumulated effect of the above has nurtured a widespread lack of faith in ISKCON's leading devotees. Do these devotees really possess the ability to serve as *śikṣā-* or *dīkṣā-gurus*?

As early as 1979, some members of ISKCON, lacking confidence in its leadership, began turning to *gurus* outside. This became a trend, which continued in varying degrees throughout the 1980's and early 1990's. By the mid-'90s, what had begun as a trickle, despite GBC legislation to stop it, gradually became a major exodus. Ex-members are now affiliated with at least half a dozen Vaiṣṇava *gurus* outside ISKCON. Since GBC laws prohibit such devotees serving in the Society, these exiles have staffed and fuelled its rivals.²⁶

That is the history in brief.

²⁵ In 1978, the GBC compromised its own authority by establishing a board of *gurus*, while simultaneously condoning an exploitative "zonal *ācārya*" system, making the bestowal of *dīkṣā* the inherited right of a few.

²⁶ In the past five years there has been a trend to turn to the *bābājis* Śrīla Prabhupāda so criticised (and who criticised him).

2. Complications with śikṣā taken from outside ISKCON

The principles of *guru-tattva* described earlier require that a *śikṣā-guru* properly represent the *dīkṣā-guru* and the founder-*ācārya*. As might be expected, devotees who have taken guidance outside ISKCON have met with contradictions to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings, his mission and indeed his spiritual position — though few admit it.

Here I feel obliged — though reluctantly, and only for the sake of clarity — to highlight two broad categories of Vaiṣṇavas who have canvassed ISKCON’s membership: (1) the Gauḍīya Maṭha,²⁷ and (2) all others.²⁸

Differences between ISKCON and the Gauḍīya Maṭha have been both philosophical and institutional. Philosophical differences have included the hotly contested origin of the *jīva*; institutional differences, the question of leadership by a GBC.

Perhaps such differences could be excused in the name of institutional diversity. But the Gauḍīya Maṭha’s unforgivable and unforgettable transgression has been the systematic minimisation of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s pre-eminence as a fully realised, self-effulgent *ācārya*.²⁹ Some charge that Prabhupāda’s teachings are incomplete; others, that his So-

²⁷ “Gauḍīya Maṭha” is used here to identify the many splinter groups that remain from Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura’s flagship institution of the same name.

²⁸ Other categories of Vaiṣṇavas include: the *bābājīs*, particularly of Rādhā-kuṇḍa; scholars in Vṛndāvana; and devotees of other *sampradāyas*.

²⁹ This was already a phenomenon during Śrīla Prabhupāda’s time, as Prabhupāda writes, “Perhaps you are my only Godbrother who has appreciated my humble service to the cause of Guru Gaurāṅga. All my other Godbrothers are very much envious, as I can understand from their behaviour.” (Letter, Bombay, December 2, 1970) And in his last year he said, “Just like our Godbrothers. They are envious. What I have done to them? I am doing my business, trying to serve my Guru Mahārāja. But they are envious because I am so opulent.” (Conversation, Bombay, January 8, 1977)

ciety lacks substance; and still others, that his knowledge of *rasa-tattva* is immature. And that is just part of it.

If the Gauḍīya Maṭha's critique sounds brutal, the accusations of some Vaiṣṇavas outside the Gauḍīya Maṭha are even more scathing.³⁰ They condemn both ISKCON and the Gauḍīya Maṭha as deviant sects, incapable of delivering Caitanya Mahāprabhu's message. In view of such absolute condemnation, there is little value in my pointing to differences between their teachings and ISKCON's. Suffice to say that they themselves deny being representatives of Prabhupāda; in fact, they would be offended by the idea.

Having heard the above, any honest member of ISKCON will conclude that accepting *śikṣā* from outside the Society is an insurmountable obstacle to his spiritual life.

3. Summary

While writing of ISKCON's detractors, I have avoided naming individuals; I have generalised. And, to be fair, the Society's grievance is not with everyone in the Gauḍīya Maṭha, nor with all other Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON.

However, many Vaiṣṇavas openly find exception with the current leadership of ISKCON, its *gurus*, and Śrīla Prabhupāda's legacy. And history has shown that whenever ISKCON's members take *śikṣā* outside the Society, there ensues, as Prabhupāda predicted, disruption of his mission.

Thus, to answer the question, Among which Vaiṣṇavas should members of ISKCON seek *śikṣā*? the answer remains, Only among those within the Society.

³⁰ Some *bābājīs* and *sādhus* argue that both ISKCON and the Gauḍīya Maṭha are dysfunctional in communicating the *siddhānta* and practices of the *sampradāya*. Among their objections, they argue that Bhakti-siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura deviated from the teachings of the *paramparā* by ignoring the process of *siddha-praṇālī* and exchanging Caitanya Mahāprabhu's gift of *rāgānugā-bhakti* with *vaiddhī-bhakti*.

Doubts and Answers

Introduction

Part One of this paper comprises the tradition of *śikṣā-guru*. Part Two recounts Śrīla Prabhupāda’s adapting that tradition to ISKCON, along with a brief history of its erosion after his departure. It concludes with a warning: “Do not take *śikṣā* outside the Society.”

Critics will argue, “To make such an absolute declaration in a Society wherein faith is at an all-time low; a Society in which the principles of *guru-tattva* are tailored to relative speculations; a Society from which many members are fleeing, others dying of apathy; a Society that is obviously in trouble and in serious need of help — is absurd.” This line of doubt is shared by many devotees, especially since, outside ISKCON, learned, senior, and respectable Vaiṣṇavas seem more than willing to help the Society — provided they get free access to its members.

This Part Three represents the doubts of those who believe that ISKCON should not be insular to the death, and my responses, which hold firm that ISKCON’s leadership must rise to the occasion. They must do so without compromising either Prabhupāda’s desires or Vaiṣṇava tradition — which together conclude that Vaiṣṇavas outside cannot be accepted as instructors for ISKCON’s members. This conclusion, sad as I am to record it, is the reality.

Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON do not and will not represent Śrīla Prabhupāda — what to speak of the Society’s *dīkṣā*- or *śikṣā-gurus*.

Doubt 1: Like all *śāstra*, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books recommend association with devotees, especially advanced devotees.¹ Why then should we restrict devotees from taking *śikṣā* outside ISKCON?

Answer: It is a fact: the primary element of spiritual life is *sādhu-saṅga*,² without which the members of ISKCON will perish.³

But the issue is not whether to associate with *sādhus*; rather, with which *sādhus* to associate.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us to associate with Vaiṣṇavas (some of whom he specified), he also taught us *not* to associate with *certain* Vaiṣṇavas.⁴ On *sādhu-saṅga*, then, Prabhupāda gave instructions both general and specific.

Therefore, a disciple should not select which instructions to follow and which not to follow.⁵ His duty is to meticulously reconcile all the instructions of Śrīla Prabhupāda, knowing them as his life and soul.

Thus, the resolution to the two instructions — seek advanced association, but not outside ISKCON — is to seek

¹ “If one desires his real welfare, he must associate with devotees and saintly persons and in this way rectify the material condition of his life.” (*Bhāg.* 10.4.44, purport)

² See *Cc. Madhya* 22.128.

³ In a conversation, Prabhupāda says, “Then chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*. Very simple method — but one cannot practice these things without association of devotees. Nobody can do it outside.” (Conversation, Melbourne, April 23, 1976)

⁴ Letter, Los Angeles, January 31, 1969.

⁵ Such selectivity leads to endless argumentation; for other, contradictory information is the basis of other eclectics’ equally relevant stand. Therefore conclusive judgement can be based only upon a process that resolves *all* information in a comprehensive way.

advanced association within ISKCON.⁶ Of course, this obliges ISKCON's leaders to provide a quality of association which meets the needs of sincere devotees. (For those who doubt such leaders exist in ISKCON, see the answer to Doubt 9.)

Doubt 2: But, even while present, Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed devotees to seek instruction outside ISKCON.⁷

Answer: There are two kinds of circumstance in which Prabhupāda directed his followers to go outside for instruction:

- (1) in the earliest days in India, when devotees had no facilities of their own;
- (2) when he or they required specific information that would benefit the Society.

Earlier I presented the first kind of circumstance,⁸ in which Śrīla Prabhupāda directed to a senior Vaiṣṇava a few devotees alone in India, one in especially bad association. The *śikṣā* they received, however, by Prabhupāda's own admission, proved counterproductive for the entire Society.⁹

⁶ Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Without the association of devotees, one cannot advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, we have established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Factually, whoever lives in this society automatically develops Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (*Bhāg.* 4.12.37, purport)

⁷ See Conversation, Vṛndāvana, October 8, 1977, in which Prabhupāda instructs devotees to get guidance on performing his *samādhi* ceremony.

⁸ See Part One, *After Prabhupāda's Disappearance*, section 2: Complications with *śikṣā* taken from outside ISKCON.

⁹ Prabhupāda writes, "Regarding the poisonous effect in our Society, it is a fact and I know where from this poison tree has sprung up and how it affected practically the whole Society in a very dangerous form." (Letter, Calcutta, September 2, 1970) "... and on this point they wanted to poison the whole Society — that is now clear." (Letter, Calcutta, September 25, 1970)

In Prabhupāda's estimation, even the Vaiṣṇavas he recommended were envious of his success and systematically schemed against him.¹⁰ Therefore, Prabhupāda gave his general directive, "do not mix with them," and never changed that instruction to the last — and so it remains as a standing order.

In the second kind of circumstance, Śrīla Prabhupāda sent disciples as messengers to acquire, on his behalf only, information or guidance on a certain subject.¹¹ But accepting limited guidance for a purpose authorised by Śrīla Prabhupāda is much different from accepting long-term, regular *śikṣā*, a result of which would surely be personal commitment to a *guru* who does not have full allegiance to Prabhupāda.

Examples of Prabhupāda's consent to outside instruction were restricted and specific.¹² Such limited endorsement can hardly be compared to an unrestricted license to accept *śikṣā-gurus* outside ISKCON.

Doubt 3: Both Śrīla Prabhupāda's general instruction to associate with Vaiṣṇavas and his specific warning to avoid certain Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON can be fulfilled without cutting off ISKCON from the rest of the Vaiṣṇava world. How? By associating only with those Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON who perfectly represent Prabhupāda.

¹⁰ Prabhupāda said, "Just like XX... They are envious. What I have done to them? I am doing my business, trying to serve my Guru Mahārāja." (Conversation, Bombay, January 8, 1977)

¹¹ For example, for the Māyāpura planetarium, Śrīla Prabhupāda directed devotees to gather information about the structure of the universe; and to prepare for his departure, he sought guidance about the process of performing his *samādhi* ceremony.

¹² Śrīla Prabhupāda cites the process of "how to catch the big fish without themselves [*sic*] getting wet." (Letter, Bombay, December 25, 1972) This seemed to be the logic of getting help: without being influenced by, or excessively obliged to, those helping.

Answer: This argument would seem a logical consequence of my answers to Doubts 1 and 2; indeed, Śrīla Prabhupāda did entertain this idea in the early days of the Society.¹³ But, I humbly submit, not later.¹⁴

Furthermore, upon his departure, Prabhupāda did not say, “Unfortunately there are many Vaiṣṇavas envious of me. Avoid them. But find those who are non-envious, those who share my missionary mood, those who have read my books, those who agree with our teachings, and those who have no agenda independent of serving ISKCON — these you may accept as *śikṣā-guru*.”

And had he said it, what would be the process to find, outside ISKCON, Vaiṣṇavas who are Prabhupāda’s representatives?

Vaiṣṇavas outside may claim to know Prabhupāda, but the history in dealing with them, their followers, or both, is testimony to the contrary. How will ISKCON’s members know a particular Vaiṣṇava without cultivating a relationship with him, and how, having cultivated the relationship, will they avoid compromise?

And, to Śrīla Prabhupāda, experience showed that the more his disciples involved themselves with other Vaiṣṇavas, the more his position was slighted, his disciples confused, and his ISKCON’s preaching jeopardised. That scenario has not changed to this day. The same phenom-

¹³ Śrīla Prabhupāda repeatedly invited other Vaiṣṇavas to join ISKCON or work co-operatively with him. For instance, “With this aim in view I tried my... to join together. ... first K, then B, and then T, but I have failed to get any cooperation.” (Letter, New York, May 16, 1966)

¹⁴ In time Prabhupāda became indifferent to working co-operatively: “So far as cooperating with my Godbrothers is concerned, that is not very urgent business. So far until now my Godbrothers have regularly not cooperated with me and by the grace of my Spiritual Master, things are still going ahead. So cooperation or non-cooperation ...” (Letter, Gorakhpur, February 23, 1971)

enon repeats itself, putting into doubt a chance that any outside Vaiṣṇava may be found to benefit ISKCON as *śikṣā-guru*.

Though I have disparaged the likelihood of finding a suitable *śikṣā-guru* outside ISKCON, I do not condemn any great soul engaged in Kṛṣṇa's service. Indeed, my understanding is that certain differences between

Prabhupāda and other Vaiṣṇavas may be of a transcendental nature.¹⁵ In any case, though, the fact remains that, in the past 35 years, neither Śrīla Prabhupāda nor his followers have managed to successfully bridge these differences.

The quest for suitable *śikṣā-gurus* outside the Society has thus far created enough damage to ISKCON and inter-Vaiṣṇava relationships to warrant the self-evident solution of simply following Prabhupāda's order.¹⁶ This will avoid offences to Śrīla Prabhupāda as well as offences to other Vaiṣṇavas.

Doubt 4: *Śāstra* says that the Godbrothers of the *guru* should be respected as much as the *guru*.¹⁷ Is this not evidence that, as in the past, members of ISKCON took instructions from Śrīla Prabhupāda, they should now take instructions from his Godbrothers (or other senior Vaiṣṇavas)?

Answer: No. The equal respect offered to the *guru's* Godbrothers must be reconciled with respect for the *guru's* order — in this case, Śrīla Prabhupāda's: "Do not mix with

¹⁵ Prabhupāda writes, "He holds a grudge against my Guru Maharaja and even if it is transcendental it will gradually appear mundane in our eyes." (Letter, Los Angeles, December 25, 1973)

¹⁶ "We shall be very careful about them and not mix with them. This is my instruction to you all." (Letter, Tirupati, April 28, 1974)

¹⁷ Prabhupāda writes, "... one should respect one's spiritual master's Godbrothers as one respects one's spiritual master." (Cc. *Ādi* 5.147, purport)

them.” Therefore, to the Godbrothers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, his followers should offer the respect due senior Vaiṣṇavas and should not speak of them disparagingly.¹⁸ But Prabhupādānugas should also not hear from such seniors. Respect for the *guru*’s Godbrother cannot mean disrespect for the *guru*’s order.

A *guru*’s Godbrother is not seen in every way as one’s own *guru*.¹⁹ There is difference as well as oneness. Equal respect does not mean equal importance in the disciple’s life. *Śāstra* states, “... in all circumstances all Vaiṣṇavas are offered respect like one offers respect to one’s spiritual master. However, with body, mind, and words one serves one’s own spiritual master.”²⁰

One may even offer twice the respect to the *guru* of one’s *guru*, but still one depends upon the mercy of one’s own *guru* for progress in spiritual life.²¹

Thus, while offering due respect to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Godbrothers and other senior Vaiṣṇavas, one will not hear from them.

Doubt 5: Śrīla Prabhupāda attempted to recruit other senior Vaiṣṇavas to work in or with ISKCON. How, then, could they not be qualified as *śikṣā-gurus*?

Answer: The question itself contains the answer. How? Because in actuality no such Vaiṣṇava came to Prabhupāda’s side. Therefore, none could qualify as *śikṣā-guru*.

¹⁸ Prabhupāda said, “You cannot criticize superiors ...” (*Bhāg. Lecture, Vṛndāvana, November 8, 1976*)

¹⁹ Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “My spiritual master was no ordinary spiritual master.’ Then he paused for some time, and wiping the tears from his cheeks, he said in an even more choked voice, ‘He saved me.’” (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* 26)

²⁰ *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* 50.

²¹ See *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* 54.

Had any senior Vaiṣṇavas accepted Prabhupāda's invitation to work in ISKCON, they would have had to accept him as founder-*ācārya*²² and represent him. That would have made them regular members, fully qualified to give *śikṣā*.

On the other hand, were such Vaiṣṇavas not to join ISKCON, yet work with it, Śrīla Prabhupāda envisaged that they would have authority only in proportion to their preaching.²³ That would have given Prabhupāda's disciples considerably more authority than those instructing them on Prabhupāda's behalf — hardly a relationship one might expect between *śikṣā-gurus* and their disciples.

But this doubt is theoretical, for the reality is that, despite Śrīla Prabhupāda's many kind overtures,²⁴ not one senior Vaiṣṇava took up his offer to work in or with ISKCON.

Doubt 6: In his last days, Śrīla Prabhupāda apologised to other Vaiṣṇavas for having offended them in the course of his preaching. He declared the war with his God-brothers over. These statements lead one to believe that Prabhupāda had finally ended ISKCON's isolationist policy and anticipated his disciples' harmonious interaction with senior Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON.

²² In response to a letter, Prabhupāda writes, "... you write to say, 'It is clear to me that you are great powerful acarya in the Vaiṣṇava world at present.' Sometimes S also says like that. So, actually if you are feeling like that let us work conjointly." (Letter, Vṛndāvana, November 9, 1976)

²³ In a conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda, a devotee recalls, "I remember a letter they wrote you in Los Angeles in 1969. You replied them, 'Yes, I will join, but since I have preached in eleven-twelfths of the world, eleven of my men will be representatives, and you can put one.'" (Conversation, Bombay, April 22, 1977)

²⁴ As late as 1976, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "So, actually if you are feel-

Answer: Who could really believe that Śrīla Prabhupāda actually committed offences? Even some of those to whom he apologised²⁵ rejected the idea.²⁶ Prabhupāda’s apologies, rather, symptomised the humble spirit of a true Vaiṣṇava, doing what all devotees do before leaving this world; his apologies did not contradict his earlier statements.²⁷

The doubt at hand cites a statement — “The war is over” — interpreting it to mean that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his disciples to take *śikṣā* from other Vaiṣṇavas. However, there are no instructions to support this argument. “The war is over,” rather, was a ceasefire on the verbal exchange between Prabhupāda and his Godbrothers. That is my understanding. *That* war was over.

An informal comment is a far cry from a direct instruction, such as: “I have said many things about Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON, often exaggerating for the sake of focusing you on my instructions. Now that I am leaving, you will need others to guide you. Forget the past. Forget what I said. The war is over. You may take *śikṣā* from others.”

And, had Śrīla Prabhupāda given the comprehensive instruction above — a directive to contradict years of training — he would not have left it to the memory of a few devotees. That was not the way Prabhupāda did things.

ing like that let us work conjointly.” (Letter, Vṛndāvana, November 9, 1976)

²⁵ Prabhupāda said, “My life is coming to an end. It is my desire that you all forgive me for my mistakes. ... when you are preaching at times there are some disputes, some misunderstandings. Maybe I also committed some offences like that. Please ask them to forgive me.” (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, 54)

²⁶ One such Vaiṣṇava told Prabhupāda at his bedside, “Mahārāja, you didn’t commit any offence.” (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, 54)

²⁷ For Prabhupāda says, “You can criticize, if you are right. You cannot criticize wrongly.” (Conversation, Vṛndāvana, March 16, 1974)

How *did* Prabhupāda communicate on issues of paramount importance? He would

- (1) write instructions in his books;²⁸
- (2) repeat himself many times;²⁹
- (3) write a general letter to the Society;³⁰
- (4) call a meeting of the GBC, *sannyāsīs*, and senior devotees.³¹

This was Śrīla Prabhupāda! He was not someone to leave major issues hanging for lack of information or communication. Had he intended members of ISKCON, after his departure, to take *śikṣā* from Vaiṣṇavas outside the movement, he would have made it abundantly clear. There would now be no argument.

Doubt 7: Jīva Gosvāmī states that a *guru*, who, out of envy, forbids his disciples to take *śikṣā* from a superior Vaiṣṇava, should be rejected.

Is this not evidence that ISKCON's *gurus* should allow their disciples to hear from superior Vaiṣṇavas at all costs? And, if they do not, does it not mean such *gurus* are envious, proving their disqualification? And if they are envious, then why should ISKCON devotees not turn to Vaiṣṇavas outside?

²⁸ Prabhupāda considered the history of the Gauḍīya Maṭha sufficiently important to record it in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. (See Cc. Ādi 12.8)

²⁹ In letters, lectures, conversations, especially on important things, Prabhupāda repeated himself, e.g., "I repeat my symptoms so that you can take necessary care." (Letter, New York, June 1, 1967)

³⁰ When Prabhupāda wanted *prasādam* available to all guests visiting temples, he wrote a letter to all temple presidents. See letter, Calcutta, January 18, 1977.

³¹ When, in the summer of 1977, Prabhupāda wanted direction whether to stay or leave (die) he instructed the senior devotees and GBC men to discuss. (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, 54)

³² The Sanskrit is *vaiṣṇava vidveṣī cet parityājya eva. "guror api avilīptasye" ti smaraṇāt, tasya-vaiṣṇava-bhāva-rāhityena avaiṣṇavatayā*

Answer: I assume this doubt refers to the *vaiṣṇava vidveṣī cet* passage of *Bhakti-sandarbhā* 238.³² Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura quotes this same verse in the *Prakṛta-jana-kaṇḍa* of his *Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava*, introducing it as follows: “If a so-called *guru* is envious of the Vaiṣṇavas, then one should reject him, remembering the *guror apy avaliptasya* verse.”³³ He quotes this to support his claim that a “so-called *guru*” who is envious of Vaiṣṇavas is a non-devotee: “for their own spiritual welfare his disciples should reject him without hesitation.”³⁴

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura translates the *vaiṣṇava vidveṣī cet* passage: “Such an envious *guru* lacks the mood and character of a Vaiṣṇava, and *sāstra* enjoins one not to accept initiation from a non-devotee (*avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena*).³⁵ Knowing these scriptural injunctions, a sincere devotee abandons such a false *guru*. If, after leaving one who lacks the qualities of a true *guru*, one is without spiritual guidance, his only hope is to seek out a *mahā-bhāgavata* Vaiṣṇava and serve him. By constantly rendering service to such a pure devotee, one will certainly attain the highest goal of life.”

Here Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī has emphasised the general quality of a *guru*: he is non-envious. Those who are envious of pure Vaiṣṇavas should be rejected without hesitation;

avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭeneti vacana-viṣaya tvācca. Yathokta lakṣaṇasya śrī-guror-avidyamānatāyastu tasyaiva mahā-bhāgavatasyaikasya nitya-sevanam paramam śreyaḥ. (Bhakti-sandarbhā 238)

³³ “A so-called *guru* addicted to sensual pleasure and polluted by vice, who is ignorant and has no power to discriminate between right and wrong, and who follows processes other than pure devotional service must be abandoned.” (*Mahābhārata, Udyoga-parva* 179.25)

³⁴ Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura writes, “If one fails to do so, one will incur sin and deviate from the path of devotion.”

³⁵ “One who gets his *mantra* from a *guru* who is a non-devotee or who is addicted to sensual pleasure is doomed to a life in hell. Such a person must immediately approach a genuine Vaiṣṇava *guru* and again accept the *mantra* from him.” (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 4.366)

they are neither Vaiṣṇavas nor *gurus* — quite a straightforward instruction.

But the interpretation upon which this doubt is based is different by far. It opines that “because *gurus* who are envious of pure Vaiṣṇavas forbid their disciples to take *śikṣā* from those Vaiṣṇavas, therefore every *guru* who forbids his disciple to take *śikṣā* from a pure Vaiṣṇava is necessarily envious and should be rejected.”

Such a creative rendition does not at all represent Jīva Gosvāmīpāda. It is tantamount to saying, “Dogs have four legs; anything with four legs is a dog.” Sorry, that is just bad logic.

Applied categorically to every ISKCON *guru* (which would include Śrīla Prabhupāda), it is worse than a dead argument. It demeans ISKCON *gurus* and Śrīla Prabhupāda, and, ironically, it is the very attitude, which, according to Jīva Gosvāmī, is offensive to Vaiṣṇavas.

It is the role of the founder-*ācārya* to define codes of behaviour for his followers and the duty of his follower-*gurus* to be faithful to those codes.

When experience has repeatedly proven the dubious integrity of certain Vaiṣṇavas, the founder-*ācārya* cannot be called envious, when, out of wisdom and love, he restrains his followers from taking shelter of them. And when a *dīkṣā-guru*, out of concern for his disciples and allegiance to the order of his own *guru*, also forbids his disciples from taking *śikṣā* from certain Vaiṣṇavas, he is simply dutiful, not envious.

In fact, Śrīla Prabhupāda — whom all those presenting these doubts profess to revere — considered not his disci-

³⁶ Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “So these rascals ... they are envious that ... What he has written? B. Just see what kind of men they are. They are not even ordinary human being. They are envious of me, and what to speak of make a judgment by estimation? They’re envious. Enviousness is immediately disqualification of Vaiṣṇava, immediate. He is not a human being.” (Conversation, Johannesburg, October 16, 1975)

ples, but many Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON, envious of himself,³⁶ a Vaiṣṇava of the highest order.³⁷

In keeping with the above teachings of Jīva Gosvāmī — that those envious of Vaiṣṇavas should be rejected — Śrīla Prabhupāda did exactly that: he rejected those envious of him. And he indicated that anyone of a like mentality should be similarly rejected. That, then, must be the mood of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s bona-fide followers: rather than run to such envious persons for *śikṣā* — regardless of their apparently high stature — reject their association. I marvel that this self-evident point seems to escape those who have raised such doubts.

Doubt 8: It appears that Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed at least some senior Vaiṣṇavas to help his disciples after his departure. Does this not indicate that they would be *śikṣā-gurus* for ISKCON’s members?

Also, is it not possible that one of them may be Śrīla Prabhupāda’s self-effulgent successor, as Prabhupāda was the self-effulgent successor to Bhaktisiddhānta Ṭhākura?

Answer: First-hand sources testify that Prabhupāda requested at least one senior Vaiṣṇava to care for his followers.³⁸ Those same sources, however, confirm that the request was brief and clearly not an invitation to be a *śikṣā-guru*, rather, a well-wisher.

That explanation is consistent with other evidence; Śrīla Prabhupāda gave no instruction that he had empowered any Vaiṣṇava from outside ISKCON to be a *śikṣā-guru* — what to speak of his successor.

³⁷ In his books Prabhupāda writes, “Unfortunately we are surrounded by neophyte Godbrothers who do not appreciate the extraordinary activities of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. They simply try to bring us to their platform, and they try to criticize us in every respect.” (*The Nectar of Instruction* 6, purport)

³⁸ Two devotees present heard the discussion.

³⁹ Prabhupāda modelled ISKCON according to Bhaktisiddhānta

The very idea of a successor is contrary to Prabhupāda's set-up of the Society.³⁹ Nor is there any written or verbal instruction indicating a successor; in fact, Śrīla Prabhupāda opined that among the Vaiṣṇavas he knew, none was qualified to be *ācārya*.⁴⁰

Those suggesting that a Vaiṣṇava from outside ISKCON could be its *ācārya* are obliged to provide irrefutable evidence of their claim. And that evidence must be of a superlative quality, as referred to in the previous answer (to Doubt 7). It is not the burden of ISKCON to disprove the successor theory. Until irrefutable evidence is provided in its favour, we will have to assume there is no successor *śikṣā-guru* to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Doubt 9: Considering the fall-down of so many ISKCON *gurus* and the disorganised state of the Society, can it really be said that members of ISKCON can give sufficient guidance?

Answer: This doubt argues “the logic of the remainder,”⁴¹ which translates as follows: ISKCON is in trouble, and since there are no qualified *gurus* in the Society, out of necessity devotees must take *śikṣā* (and *dīkṣā*) from Vaiṣṇavas outside.

This doubt is built on two wobbly fundamentals. The

Ṭhākura's will, which he explained in a letter: “... on the night before he passed away he talked of so many things, but never mentioned an *acarya*. His idea was *acarya* was not to be nominated amongst the governing body. He said openly you make a GBC and conduct the mission. So his idea was amongst the members of GBC who would come out successful and self-effulgent *acarya* would be automatically selected.” (Letter, Tirupati, April 28, 1974) Therefore, *if* there is to be an *ācārya*, he will not be self-appointed; he will come from members of the GBC, not elsewhere.

⁴⁰ In a letter Prabhupāda wrote, “Actually amongst my Godbrothers, no one is qualified to become *acarya*.” (Letter, Tirupati, April 28, 1974)

⁴¹ *Parīśeṣya-nyāyā*, means “the logic of the remainder,” or by elimination of unsatisfactory evidence, what is left is proof.

first is the misconception that disarray in certain areas of ISKCON is a sign of spiritual failure. The second extrapolates that because some ISKCON *gurus* have proven themselves disqualified, all ISKCON *gurus* are disqualified.

To argue that problems in the Society are a sign of its failure is naïve.⁴² For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that even the disorder that customarily accompanies the passing of the *ācārya* can be rectified by the efforts of his sincere followers.⁴³

It is paradoxical that some Vaiṣṇavas condemn ISKCON's struggles, their own societies having transited through similar problems in the past, nay, even experiencing such problems at present. And if these same Vaiṣṇavas, who, in Śrīla Prabhupāda's estimation, were responsible for chaos in their own organisation⁴⁴ are now qualified to be *gurus*, then why not value the devotees of ISKCON by the same standard?

⁴² Śrīla Prabhupāda scoffed at the idea of perfection even in ISKCON: "So we shall not expect that anywhere there is any Utopia. Rather, that is impersonalism. People should not expect that even in the Krishna Consciousness Society there will be Utopia. Because devotees are persons, therefore there will always be some lacking. ..." (Letter, Bombay, February 4, 1972)

⁴³ Commenting in the *Bhāgavatam*, Prabhupāda writes, "The *ācārya*, the authorized representative of the Supreme Lord, establishes these principles (religion), but when he disappears, things once again become disordered. The perfect disciples of the *ācārya* try to relieve the situation by sincerely following the instructions of the spiritual master." (*Bhāg.* 4.28.48, purport)

⁴⁴ Speaking about the turmoil caused in another Society, Prabhupāda wrote, "So S and his two associate gentlemen unauthorizedly selected one *acarya* and later it proved a failure." (Letter, Tirupati, April 28, 1974) Prabhupāda writes, "Despite the spiritual master's order to form a governing body and execute the missionary activities ... the two unauthorized factions began litigation that is still going on after forty years with no decision." (Cc. *Ādi* 12.8, purport) Prabhupāda says, "That T, unnecessarily he was envious, whole life fighting, fighting, fighting in the court and died. Simply planning." (Conversation, Bombay, January 8, 1977)

The second prong of the doubt is the assumption that all ISKCON *gurus* are fallen. Intellectual integrity begs those making such a claim to provide satisfactory evidence in its support, in the absence of which, such a statement merely burdens an already crowded ether. The argument is an overgeneralisation and not the type generally voiced among charitable Vaiṣṇavas. Śrīla Prabhupāda, as critical as he was of Vaiṣṇava groups, rarely questioned the right of others to be *guru*.

As institutional disorder is not the monopoly of ISKCON, nor are fallen *gurus*. Most Vaiṣṇava organisations have a history of deviation and fall-down; therefore it seems unfitting to single out ISKCON.⁴⁵

In addition, evidence supporting ISKCON's *gurus* cannot be ignored. That evidence is the satisfaction ISKCON's devotees world-wide experience in their *gurus'* guidance.

Then some may argue, "But these *gurus* also may fall down!"

To this Prabhupāda replied, "No, this argument is not very strong. Just like one foodstuff, freshly made, it is fresh. But if somebody argues that if it remains four days more, it will become bad, that is surmisation. Now it is fresh. We take it fresh. What will happen in future, that is no consideration. In future, everyone may fall and everyone may become elevated. But we have to take his present situation, what he is at present."⁴⁶

Is it rational to argue that Śrīla Prabhupāda was empowered to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world,

⁴⁵ In a conversation Prabhupāda says, "So this K ... There are many long histories ... So he died, his end was like this ... His wife was a regular prostitute, and she killed her child, and on this shock, he took poison and died. This was his spiritual realization. Just see. (laughs) And he was made the chief, and one of the supporter was S ..." (Conversation, Tokyo, June 18, 1976)

⁴⁶ Conversation, London, July 11, 1973.

⁴⁷ In a conversation Prabhupāda says, "Similarly, these so-called *svāmīs*, they are impotent. They could not produce any child of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is the proof." (Conversation, Melbourne, May 20, 1975)

but incapable of producing even one qualified disciple to carry on his legacy?⁴⁷ Hardly! Though the indictment is directed at Prabhupāda’s disciples, it discredits Śrīla Prabhupāda as well!

I would like to voice a note of caution about Vaiṣṇavas outside who pose themselves as *śikṣā-gurus* of ISKCON. Their followers contrast them to ISKCON *gurus*, promoting them as spiritual luminaries and panaceas for ISKCON’s ills. Yet these Vaiṣṇavas and their followers seem to do little else than canvas ISKCON’s already converted members. Why do they concentrate on ISKCON alone, neglecting the unlimited conditioned souls who have not heard of Kṛṣṇa?⁴⁸ After all, Śrīla Prabhupāda described the external sign of spiritual advancement as the ability to convert the fallen to Vaiṣṇavism.⁴⁹

Doubt 10: How can ISKCON, with its many fallen *gurus* and abandoned disciples, dictate *guru-tattva* to senior Vaiṣṇavas who are lifelong celibates, great scholars and realised devotees?

Answer: ISKCON does not, by declining their offer of *śikṣā*, dictate to them; rather, it affirms its allegiance to its own founder-*ācārya*.

Though ISKCON’s leaders have made mistakes, they must correct these mistakes by careful application of Prabhupāda’s instructions — avoiding the instructions of others. Once they have made such corrections, Śrīla

⁴⁸ Prabhupāda defines *uttama-adhikārī*: “Always thinking of Kṛṣṇa, devising means by which to spread the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, he understands that his only business is in spreading the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement all over the world.” (*The Nectar of Instruction* 5, purport) Not all over ISKCON.

⁴⁹ Prabhupāda writes, “Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has given some practical hints to the effect that an *uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇava can be recognized by his ability to convert many fallen souls to Vaiṣṇavism.” (*The Nectar of Instruction* 5, purport)

Prabhupāda's blessings will no doubt raise ISKCON to its full glory.

This complete and exclusive dependence on Prabhupāda's instructions may not find favour with other Vaiṣṇavas. That is not ISKCON's weakness but its strength. Furthermore, the mistakes of ISKCON's leaders are no reason to compromise Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions. Their mistakes do not nullify their understanding of *guru-tattva*, nor do they certify perfection for the non-ISKCONites.

Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON may be self-controlled, scholarly and realised; however, if their *śikṣā* is different from Śrīla Prabhupāda's — which by his estimation it is — their eloquent instructions contradict the very meaning of *śikṣā*⁵⁰ and will simply compound ISKCON's woes.

Prabhupāda wanted us to be convinced of his order, and like him, execute that order without concern for outside opinion; ISKCON should do its duty: "Envious we don't care for. We don't mind. Never care for them. I didn't care anyone, any times, even my G... Neither I care just now. I'll go on with my ... Why? We are doing our duty. That's all. Under higher authoritative order. Have no fear."⁵¹

Doubt 11: ISKCON policy not only forbids taking *śikṣā* outside, it also forbids other Vaiṣṇavas to lecture in its temples. Surely inviting guest Vaiṣṇavas to address ISKCON's members is basic Vaiṣṇava hospitality.

Answer: Ideally, if Vaiṣṇava guests follow the etiquette befitting a guest, the Vaiṣṇava host happily follows the eti-

⁵⁰ Prabhupāda said, "A *śikṣā-guru* who instructs against the instruction of spiritual [master], he is not a *śikṣā-guru*. He is a demon. ... *Śikṣā-guru* does not mean he is speaking something against the teachings of the *dīkṣā-guru*. He is not a *śikṣā-guru*. He is a rascal." (Bg. lecture, Honolulu, July 4, 1974)

⁵¹ Conversation, Māyāpura, February 20, 1977.

quette of a host — receiving visitors as representatives of the Lord. Because a respectful guest never exploits his host, the host offers a place to sit, nice *prasādam*, *darśana* of the Deities — and, possibly, an invitation to speak.

But guests who do not behave properly,⁵² even they be Vaiṣṇavas, may not be welcomed without restriction. The host society need not, in the name of etiquette, submit its resources for its own undoing. Such is the practice among Vaiṣṇava societies.⁵³

Śrīla Prabhupāda once banned his own senior Godbrother.⁵⁴ Later Prabhupāda relented, allowing the man to

⁵² This refers to the other Vaiṣṇavas cited throughout this paper, whose inability to represent Prabhupāda, and whose constant criticizing, direct or indirect, makes them less than well-behaved guests.

⁵³ Having passed through their own histories, Vaiṣṇava societies have evolved a system of inter-institutional rapport that avoids compromising the allegiance of their members and the values of their societies. On the other hand, to their own detriment, ISKCON's members often follow an all-or-nothing policy. In his last days, Prabhupāda formed the Bhaktivedanta Swami Charity Trust (see Conversation, Vṛndāvana, October 29, 1977) to help unite the Sarasvata family, while at the same time warning his disciples of the risks of close association. He expected ISKCON's members to learn the balance of association.

⁵⁴ When, by the instigation of a Godbrother, standing orders of Prabhupāda's books were cancelled, he instructed a letter be circulated in the Society, "Still, he is so envious, black snake. So one circular letter should be issued to all our center(s), that 'Any B or anyone, his representative, should not be received.' They are envious. Yes. Quoting that. We have got several complaints like that. S also complained. Sometimes our order was cancelled by B's propaganda." (Conversation, Johannesburg, October 16, 1975)

⁵⁵ Prabhupāda instructed, "On the whole, if his motive is to suppress me and that is why he has come here, how we can receive him? He has already given one Professor a wrong impression. He may be treated as a guest, if he comes to our center, give him prasadam, honour him as an elder Vaiṣṇava, but he cannot speak or lecture. If he wants to lecture, you can tell him that there is already another speaker scheduled. That's all." (Letter, Honolulu, June 4, 1975)

visit the temple, but still not lecture.⁵⁵ What to speak of outside Vaiṣṇavas lecturing, Prabhupāda was unwilling to even meet one “heinous” Godbrother, should that Godbrother come to visit him.⁵⁶ That is the history.

Unfortunately, ISKCON’s members, in general, are untrained in the intricacies of inter-society diplomacy (there is such a thing), and so are easily intimidated by unscrupulous guests, who take advantage for their own purposes — I am sorry to say. Therefore, Prabhupāda wanted the Society’s leaders “vigilant”⁵⁷ to protect the Society and its members.

Doubt 12: There may be many details of Vaiṣṇava etiquette, but the essence is to do the needful. In such troubled days, ISKCON should accept help from its well-wishers.

Answer: I agree that ISKCON should correct itself — but without help from outside. The first step of rectification should be to identify those factors contributing to ISKCON’s departure from the ideal.

One such factor, ironically, is the influence on ISKCON’s members from Vaiṣṇavas outside. How then, no matter how well-intentioned, can that which is part of the problem be part of the solution?

Instead, solutions to ISKCON’s problems should be consistent with, not contrary to, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s in-

⁵⁶ This is recorded in a letter: “Regarding the matter with P dasa, you immediately go and take back whatever books of ours that he has in his possession. You may inform him that we do not require his editing, neither should he correspond with our men in Los Angeles. He is a very heinous man. He wants to become more important. ... You take them back immediately. If this man comes to see me in Vrndavana, I do not wish to see him.” (Letter, Bombay, November 7, 1975)

⁵⁷ See Conversation, Vṛndāvana, May 27, 1977.

⁵⁸ Prabhupāda writes, “All of you are sincere devotees pledged to the missionary activities, so you should sit together and decide what to do and what not to do.” (Letter, Los Angeles, February 23, 1969)

structions. Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged devotees to work together⁵⁸ under the direction of the GBC,⁵⁹ following the abundant guidelines he had given,⁶⁰ while receiving further inspiration from his books.⁶¹ These are the ingredients for solving the problems that afflict ISKCON — not the *sikṣā* of outsiders.

Doubt 13: How can we depend on ISKCON's *gurus* to properly represent Śrīla Prabhupāda when we see, for example, that they radically diverge from one another on basic principles of *tattva*?

Answer: In his instructions to Uddhava, Lord Kṛṣṇa explains that, under shelter of the internal potency, Vaiṣṇavas can come to different conclusions about the truth.⁶² Such differences of perception disappear, however, and the very cause for argument is removed,⁶³ when devotees control their senses and fix their intelligence on Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the means to do this: serving in an institution unified under a GBC, and dynamically spreading Lord Caitanya's mission worldwide — two fac-

⁵⁹ Prabhupāda writes, "... this must be decided by the GBC and not myself. If they cannot solve this problem, then what is the meaning of GBC?" (Letter, Bombay, November 1, 1974) And in an official letter, "I have appointed 12 direct representatives to manage different sectors of the world, and they are known as Governing Board Commissioners ... M is my sole agent, my official representative, and he has supreme authority there in all matters." (Letter, Bombay, November 26, 1974)

⁶⁰ In a letter Prabhupāda writes, "... please try to follow my instructions & you shall never be unhappy." (Letter, Navadvīpa, October 29, 1967)

⁶¹ "Maintain your activities and increase gradually. I have instructed everything in my books." (Letter, Māyāpura, February 25, 1976)

⁶² "Lord Kṛṣṇa replied: Because all material elements are present everywhere, it is reasonable that different learned *brāhmaṇas* have analysed them in different ways. All such philosophers spoke under the shelter of My mystic potency, and thus they could say anything without contradicting the truth." (*Bhāg.* 11.22.4) See also Jīva Gosvāmī's commentary on the word *mayam*.

⁶³ See *Bhāg.* 11.22.6.

tors that distinguish ISKCON from other Vaiṣṇava organisations.

Together, these two provide a unique shelter under which devotees can work in harmony, accepting one another's differences⁶⁴ and ultimately resolving them. This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda called "unity in diversity,"⁶⁵ an ethos unknown to Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON. They accommodate individual diversity at the expense of unity, while completely missing the wonder of unity in diversity. Such Vaiṣṇavas, when diverging on points of philosophy (which they do), stand only on the strength of their individuality, failing to see answers that unify, seeing only answers that divide. They identify and criticise each other's (and ISKCON's) philosophical differences, further straining relationships already strained.

Yes, ISKCON's *gurus* have differences of opinion among themselves; but they are united in the service of widely spreading Lord Caitanya's mission under the direction of Śrīla Prabhupāda's representative, the GBC. Through such allegiance and by Kṛṣṇa's mercy, they will find the intelligence to resolve differences and achieve perfection as agents of His Divine Grace.

⁶⁴ Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Now if you want to unite the whole world again under one banner, then this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is the only ..." (Conversation, Delhi, November 25, 1971)

⁶⁵ In the *Bhāgavatam*, Prabhupāda writes, "The Supreme Personality of Godhead, the living entities, the material energy, the spiritual energy and the entire creation are all individual substances. In the ultimate analysis, however, together they constitute the supreme one, the Personality of Godhead. Therefore those who are advanced in spiritual knowledge see unity in diversity." (*Bhāg.* 6.8.32–33) And in a letter: "The materialist without being able to adjust the varieties and the disagreements makes everything zero. ... if we keep Kṛṣṇa in the center, then there will be agreement in varieties. This is called unity in diversity. ... if we fight on account of diversity, then it is simply the material platform." (Letter, Bombay, October 18, 1973)

Doubt 14: But surely, for so many mundane topics, members of ISKCON take instruction from non-devotees. How can that be better than taking spiritual instruction from advanced Vaiṣṇavas?

Answer: It is true that most members of ISKCON accept some kind of information from outside the Society. This includes: news of the mundane world; specialised, practical instruction;⁶⁶ Vedic history and culture;⁶⁷ as well as spiritual teachings⁶⁸ — in the absence of which, ISKCON would be insular to the extreme, ineffective in even maintaining its current status, and incapable of facing its remit to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this age of communication.

Śrīla Prabhupāda did approve such information in moderation.⁶⁹ He also sent his disciples on specific errands⁷⁰ — which included gathering limited counsel from senior Vaiṣṇavas.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Such as that about bookkeeping or legal matters.

⁶⁷ Information on *varṇāśrama* from *Manu-saṁhitā*, for example.

⁶⁸ Books not written by Śrīla Prabhupāda, but authorised by him, such as those of the Gosvāmī's.

⁶⁹ Examples are: (1) "So why should ... Of course, we are in touch in the newspaper, but as much as it is required. We are in touch with the material world as much as it is required." (Conversation, Melbourne, April 23, 1976) (2) "So far the accounts are concerned, it is a very important item. I am so glad to learn that you are taking assistance from a chartered accountant." (Letter, Nairobi, October 13, 1971) (3) When a devotee asked, "I thought you said that we should not read the previous *ācāryas'* books," Prabhupāda replied, "No you should read." (Walk, Perth, May 13, 1975)

⁷⁰ When Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to develop the birthplace of Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura, he sent a disciple to negotiate on his behalf. Devotee: "What is the use of talking with L?" Prabhupāda: "... I wanted that 'You have to consider that whatever portion you can spare, give us on lease. We develop.' That's all." (Walk, Māyāpura, March 21, 1976)

⁷¹ Such as information about his *samādhi* ceremony. Devotee: "N? Yes. We went to see him just to inquire about the necessary ceremony, and he gave us instruction. I sent B and B, and they wrote down everything." (Conversation, Vṛndāvana, October 8, 1977)

But, should Prabhupāda's disciples receive continual *śikṣā* from such senior Vaiṣṇavas, the disciples would develop allegiance to someone other than His Divine Grace. Thus, other Vaiṣṇavas would influence ISKCON, its policies and its members. To this scenario, Śrīla Prabhupāda decreed an unequivocal no! This order was one he did not rescind in his last days. Though Prabhupāda exhibited Vaiṣṇava humility, apologising even to many who had repeatedly minimised him,⁷² still he remained firm on this point.

In these fourteen doubts, as well as in other arguments in favour of outside *śikṣā*, there is a common methodology, known in Vedic logic as *jalpa*. It begins with the end in mind, and selects both evidence and arguments in support of its predetermined goal. In so doing, it rejects conflicting evidence and arguments. This is cheating.

And it is the methodology of the proponents of these doubts. They begin with the end in mind: "Take *śikṣā* from Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON"; and concoct arguments which circumvent or reinterpret the clear evidence — in this case, Prabhupāda's very explicit instructions: "Do not take *śikṣā* from Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON!"

Such logic lacks integrity and is not approved by the *ācāryas*. Valid logical argumentation examines all evidence at hand and reaches an unbiased conclusion.⁷³

Doubt 15: Are there historical precedents from among Caitanya Mahāprabhu's contemporaries illustrating restrictions in taking *śikṣā*? Were there really guidelines to

⁷² Prabhupāda: "That was the policy of M and S that 'Although Bhaktivedanta Swami is propagating throughout, he is subordinate to us, under our instruction.' So all these three ..." (Conversation, Māyāpura, January 19, 1976)

⁷³ *Vāda* is that process of argumentation whereby both parties are interested only in the truth, *tattva*, and have no self-interest. See Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary on *Bhagavad-gītā* 10.32, *vādaḥ pravada-tām aham*.

direct how and from whom devotees could take instruction?

Answer: Yes. To confirm my thesis in regard to the etiquette surrounding *śikṣā*, I cite the *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* of Narahari Sarakāra and the *Śyāmānanda Prakāśa* of Kṛṣṇa Carāṇa dāsa.

1. Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta

Under the order of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Narahari Sarakāra wrote what he had “heard ... from the great Vaiṣṇava authorities of the disciplic succession,”⁷⁴ part of which⁷⁵ I’ve condensed as follows:

- (1) Among all Vaiṣṇavas, the *dīkṣā*- and *śikṣā*-*gurus* are special. (43–45)
- (2) If the *dīkṣā-guru* is not very learned, a disciple, by the *guru*’s permission, may take instruction from a more learned Vaiṣṇava; having received such instruction, the disciple must confirm it with his *dīkṣā-guru*. (46–49)
- (3) Even in the presence of, or while taking instruction from, a superior Vaiṣṇava, a disciple must always remain fully dedicated to his own *dīkṣā-guru*, for that is the long-standing Vaiṣṇava tradition. (50–56)

To implement the principles above requires all parties involved — *dīkṣā-guru*, *śikṣā-guru* and disciple — to share a common understanding. If they do, the purpose of *śikṣā* — the disciple’s advancement — will be nicely achieved, preserving the disciple’s faith in the *dīkṣā-guru* and the founder-*ācārya*.

⁷⁴ *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* 16.

⁷⁵ *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* 17–58.

2. Śyāmānanda-prakāsa

When Śyāmānanda Prabhu (a.k.a. Dukhi-kṛṣṇa dāsa) received the mercy of Śrī Rādhā in Vraja, She changed his name and *tilaka*, a kindness known only to his *śikṣā-guru*, Jīva Gosvāmī. Gradually word got back to Śyāmānanda's *dikṣā-guru*, Hṛdayānanda Gosvāmī. Like everyone in Vṛndāvana, Hṛdayānanda Gosvāmī was outraged that Jīva Gosvāmī had apparently bestowed his own chosen signs of devotion (name and *tilaka*) upon a student entrusted to his care. In other words, it appeared (although it was not so) that the *śikṣā-guru* had taken prominence in the disciple's spiritual life, rather than remaining the humble representative of the *dikṣā-guru*.

Hṛdayānanda Gosvāmī and the other Vaiṣṇavas reacted strongly:

- (1) The Vaiṣṇavas of Vṛndāvana: "How can Śrī Jīva do this? He has accepted Śyāmānanda as his own disciple. Is there any law in the scriptures which allows such behaviour?" (2.2)
- (2) "Śrī Jīva has accepted my disciple as his disciple," [Hṛdayānanda] roared. "Neither Caitanya Mahāprabhu nor Nityānanda Prabhu has ever done such a thing, but now Śrī Jīva is proving himself superior to Them? I shall make him understand the mistake he has made. ... How dare [Śyāmānanda] ignore me and accept another *guru*? ... I have never heard of such behaviour among the disciples of Mahāprabhu. Even when Advaita Ācārya rejected his own sons, still Mahāprabhu refused to accept them. These topics are clearly explained in the scriptures." (2.6–7)
- (3) Finally, to resolve the issue, Hṛdayānanda decided to go to Vraja. He called upon the devo-

tees, saying, “Please be kind and accompany me to Vṛndāvana, as Kṛṣṇa dāsa [Śyāmānanda] has ruined my life. If you do not come, I shall commit suicide before you to save my prestige.” (3.7)

Of course, the accusations against Jīva Gosvāmī proved false. But the etiquette of *śikṣā* had been proclaimed.

The initiator had selected the instructor for his disciple, and that instructor was to remain the representative of the initiator. The *śikṣā-guru* was not supposed to put his mark on the disciple; rather, the disciple was always to be clearly identified as the servant and disciple of his *dīkṣā-guru*. This was the conduct of Lord Caitanya and His associates. Hṛdayānanda concluded that any other conduct was an insult to the initiator, the Vaiṣṇavas, and the scriptures.

Summary and Conclusions

The theme of this paper spotlights why Śrīla Prabhupāda forbade ISKCON devotees taking *śikṣā* outside the Society (what then to speak of *dīkṣā*).

The Tradition of Śikṣā

Vaiṣṇava tradition¹ maintains that a devotee can have only one *dīkṣā-guru*. But he can have many *śikṣā-gurus*, chosen, theoretically, from a broad Vaiṣṇava community.

Etiquette, however, compels *śikṣā-gurus* (regardless of their spiritual status compared to that of the *dīkṣā-guru*) to portray themselves as the representative of the *dīkṣā-guru*, the great *ācāryas*, and, in the case of an institution (such as ISKCON), the founder-*ācārya*. Like the branches of a tree, which are dependent for sustenance upon those greater branches to which they are connected, *śikṣā-gurus* see themselves as branches connecting a disciple to other larger branches — the initiator and the founder-*ācārya*.

This is the etiquette — an ideal that has become more obscure with each passing year of Kali-yuga. Why? Narahari Sarakāra writes:

¹ In *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* 6, the author writes, “Following in the footsteps of these great spiritual authorities I shall explain the clear transparent conclusions of the scriptures in their concise, condensed form, with some detailed explanations.”

“During this Kali-yuga, when the time of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Lord Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu’s transcendental pastimes become unmanifest, Their Lordships become the object of transcendental research and discussion. At that time all levels of devotees including *uttama-adhikārī*, *madhyama-adhikārī*, and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* shall always be in anxiety and it will be at all times. They shall almost feel uncertainty in their hearts regarding the correct understanding of the eternal truths of devotional service.”²

History shows that, in addition to this philosophical confusion, personal motivation, envy, politics and deviation from Lord Caitanya’s teachings enter the spiritual sphere,³ polluting relationships among Vaiṣṇavas.⁴

Śikṣā for ISKCON

When Śrīla Prabhupāda began preaching in the West in 1965, he was already aware of the dangers posed by other Vaiṣṇava and even Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava organizations. Yet out of respect for his spiritual master’s institution, Prabhupāda hoped that Vaiṣṇavas of the Gauḍīya Maṭha could be *śikṣā-gurus* for His disciples.⁵

Time and again his trust was betrayed. Śrīla Prabhupāda was disappointed in the lack of Vaiṣṇava spirit exhib-

² Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta 3–4.

³ Immediately following Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s disappearance, deviant Vaiṣṇava sects sprang up. By the time of Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had been eclipsed by the misbehaviour and deviations of these sects, a phenomenon that recurred in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s time. Other Vaiṣṇava *sampradāyas* share a similar history under the common influence of this age, Kali-yuga.

⁴ Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta (59–61) discusses these qualities in a bewildered Vaiṣṇava *guru*, who is not to be abandoned until he refuses to be rectified. In other words, these qualities may appear in Vaiṣṇavas.

⁵ I say this based upon Prabhupāda’s attempts, in the early years of ISKCON India, to secure with his Godbrothers suitable shelter for his disciples.

ited by his spiritual-family members.⁶ Prabhupāda noted that a *carte blanche* policy of *sikṣā* was counterproductive to its very purpose: spiritual advancement. Instead of his disciples becoming enlightened, faith in their *guru* fortified, Prabhupāda saw them confused, deviated and implicated in offences against him.

Thus, Śrīla Prabhupāda “built a wall”⁷ around ISKCON; he forbade his disciples to take instruction outside the Society.⁸ Though Prabhupāda considered some Vaiṣṇavas outside to be faultless,⁹ toward others he expressed affection,¹⁰ and still another he called his *sikṣā-guru*,¹¹ he did not change his policy restricting his disciples’ associating with them, a policy on which he insisted to his very last days.

It is truly unfortunate, and no doubt a loss for members of ISKCON, that they cannot benefit from outside association. However, experience has it, and Śrīla Prabhupāda rightly observed, that the liabilities of such contact much outweigh the benefit.

And the twenty-four years since Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure have only confirmed that experience. The situation has not improved, rather, has taken many turns for the worse. ISKCON is literally under siege, and the veiled

⁶ On a morning walk Prabhupāda said, “But they are not even Vaiṣṇava.” (Walk, Nellone, January 4, 1976)

⁷ There is an unrecorded though reliably witnessed statement that Prabhupāda said that he had “built a wall around ISKCON.”

⁸ About a son of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, “There is no need whatsoever for any outside instruction.” (Letter, Los Angeles, December 25, 1973) About the Gauḍīya Maṭha he wrote, “We shall be very careful about them and not mix with them. This is my instruction to you all.” (Letter, Tirupati, April 28, 1974) And about *bābājis* he said, “Therefore I say don’t follow these so-called Rādhā-kunḍa *bābājis*.” (Conversation, Vṛndāvana, September 6, 1976)

⁹ See Letter, Bombay, December 2, 1970.

¹⁰ Prabhupāda dealt affectionately with his Godbrother Niṣkiñcana Kṛṣṇa dāsa Bābāji. See Conversation, Vṛndāvana, November 10, 1977.

¹¹ See Letter, Los Angeles, January 31, 1969.

diplomacy of Prabhupāda's time has been replaced with open warfare. Godbrothers, *bābājīs*, and *sādhus* continue to besiege the Society for their own purposes, with no sign of a truce.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers, due to their isolation, may be slower to understand certain points of *siddhānta* and Vaiṣṇava culture. Still, the root of their spiritual success — unflinching faith in the words of *guru* — will stand them in good stead and prove to be the spiritual touchstone to transform their iron-like defects into gold-like perfection.

Some Vaiṣṇavas fault ISKCON's isolationist policy. I recommend a different perspective, one that reflects the unfortunate state of the general Vaiṣṇava community. By Kali's influence, devotees have turned against each other, and institutions that were established for serving Lord Caitanya's mission are now palisades to protect their members from marauding bands of *śikṣā/dīkṣā*-happy Vaiṣṇavas. How sad!

True, ISKCON, its leaders and members have, in their immaturity, made mistakes. Nonetheless, a benevolent, experienced, and mature Vaiṣṇava community should not have reacted to ISKCON's follies like predators, but like *sādhus*.

Final Questions

In this paper, I have generalised arguments and the behaviour of individuals. I know well that such generalisation is not always accurate. Not all Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON are unfit, not all are antagonistic, and some have shown restraint and even good will toward the Society.

This being the case, a Prabhupādānuga might reasonably argue, "Why not, then, guide ISKCON devotees to discriminate between those who are benevolent and those otherwise?"

It is better that ISKCON devotees not judge Vaiṣṇavas, especially when their experience in politico-spiritual intrigue is fortunately meagre.¹² As Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says:¹³ Offer obeisances to such devotees from a distance, show them utmost respect, but don't get close to them.

In other words, do not take *sikṣā* from them. Such a policy will avoid offences to Vaiṣṇavas in general and to Śrīla Prabhupāda in particular — for it was he who so directed us.

Last Words

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his followers to get their *sikṣā* within ISKCON. I say that to those seeking guidance as well as to those who must provide satisfactory, heart-pleasing, ever-realised direction to others. That type of *sikṣā* cannot be replaced by dogmatic regulation,¹⁴ administrative resolutions,¹⁵ or philosophical artifices.¹⁶ It is a matter of spiritual advancement — the clarion call for ISKCON's leaders regularly sounded by the Society.

The Vaiṣṇava world is in a sorry state. All over the planet, people are suffering for lack of transcendental knowledge, but those who possess the true panacea of enlightenment are distracted by conflict among themselves. Elevated Vaiṣṇavas are bent on instructing and re-instructing, initiating and re-initiating, those few fortunate souls,

¹² The letter reproduced in the Appendix reflects instances of such intrigue directed against Prabhupāda and his disciples, and summarily portrays other Vaiṣṇavas' attitudes toward Prabhupāda and his subsequent reaction.

¹³ See *Prema-bhakti-candrikā* 119.

¹⁴ Simply demanding that devotees not take outside *sikṣā*, with no positive alternative.

¹⁵ As are passed by the GBC.

¹⁶ Such as attempts to place ISKCON's *sikṣā* solely on Śrīla Prabhupāda, and demeaning senior devotees to the rank of insignificant.

who, by Śrīla Prabhupāda's grace, have already been touched by the mercy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu — while the rest of the world goes down the drain.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers did not create this situation. They were, and still are, innocents, all too ready to hear about spiritual topics, without sufficient discrimination. But Śrīla Prabhupāda, an "old Calcutta boy," saw what was best for members of ISKCON; in regard to Vaiṣṇavas outside the Society, he instructed his disciples to "not mix with them."

ISKCON's members should continue to follow this. Perhaps a day will come when all the anomalies will be resolved, and all Vaiṣṇavas will live in co-operative harmony. Until that day, they should plan to live in isolated harmony, a sight better than the spiritual cacophony that now disrupts their lives.

Apologies

I wrote this paper at the behest of ISKCON's leaders, taking shelter at Śrīla Prabhupāda's lotus feet. Knowing its contents to be controversial, I have tried my best to support my statements with Śrīla Prabhupāda's own. I have had no ill motive in composing this paper. With its completion, I offer it to the members of ISKCON. May they be pleased with my humble efforts.

My apologies to any Vaiṣṇava who may be offended by the contents of the paper. As much as possible, I have avoided blaming individuals, institutions and groups. Also, I have qualified my statements, recognising that not all Vaiṣṇavas outside ISKCON are of the same ilk.

Once again I offer my obeisances at the lotus feet of all Vaiṣṇavas. To Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, I pray for the dawning of a better day on the Vaiṣṇava horizon.

Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Appendix

His Holiness Tridandi Swami
Sri Srimad B.V. T. Goswami Maharaja
(Address)

The Holy Advent Day of Srila Prabhupada Bhakti-
siddhanta Sarasvati Thakura

ALL GLORIES TO SRI GURU AND
GAURANGA!!

My Dear Sripada T.M.

Please accept my humble dandabats. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your rubber-stamped circular letter of January 29, 1969 regarding the Golden Jubilee Festival of Sri Caitanya Math. Previous to this I heard about it from Sripada S.M. and Sripada Y.J., and expecting your invitation, I expressed my desire that during the ceremony a special home for the EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN BRAHMACARIS MAY BE ESTABLISHED AT MAYAPUR. Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura and Srila Prabhupada desired that such American and European devotees may live at Mayapura for studies of Sri Caitanya philosophy, and now the time is ripe when many American, European, and Japanese students working as my disciples are ready to go there for this purpose. In 1967, when I went to India, five American disciples were with me. One of them, Kirtanananda (Keith Ham, B.A.), was given sannyasa by me at Vrndavana. He was sent back to the

USA to organize my New Vrndavana scheme in West Virginia, and he is working there along with another of my disciples, Professor Howard Wheeler M.A., in cooperation with Dr. George Henderson M.A., Ph.D., and others. The remaining four disciples were entrusted to live at the Institute of Swami B.M., but on account of his canvassing them for becoming his disciples they left him, although one of them, Hrsikesa, is still living c/o B.M. as his re-initiated disciple (?) Two other of my disciples are still at Vrndavana in my place at Radha Damodara Temple, and B.M. is still after them to deviate their faith upon me.

I have therefore requested Sripada S.M. (because you have stopped correspondence with me and I don't know why) to give some place for my disciples at Mayapura. If I get some place at Mayapura, the disciples who are already in India and those who are willing to go there can live peacefully without being disturbed by Bon Maharaja. But on my proposing this scheme, S.M. in his letter of 24 January, 1969 writes as follows: "On hearing the news of Golden Jubilee of Caitanya Math, many people are coming daily to see the place. We can imagine even now how much big crowd will assemble when the actual fair will take place. Although we are constructing many temporary sheds under the circumstances, I do not think we will be able to give accommodations to your American and European students. Even after the ceremony I do not think it will be advisable to call for the American and European students here in Mayapura. Even though we make special arrangements for them, that will not be for many days. Even though you make payment for your students, the other students will feel inferiority complex. You know very well our standard of living, and therefore it will not be possible for us to accommodate your European and American students here in Mayapura. The best suggestion which I can give you is that you better rent one house in Vrndavana and accommodate them there for their education in Sanskrit and

Bengali. Srila Prabhupada is so kind upon you that he is causing you to act in such wonderful way, and by seeing your activities I am feeling very much proud of you.”

This is most discouraging and against the will of Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura and Srila Prabhupada Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. I therefore request you to give me a plot of land within the precincts of Sri Caitanya Math to construct a suitable building for my European and American students who are loitering in Vrndavana chased by B.M. and who may go in numbers to visit the site of the Birth place of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. I can take the responsibility of constructing such building at Sri Caitanya Math and bear all expenses for the boarding and lodging of such students who will go there. S.M. says that Sri Caitanya Math is not in a position to meet their standard of living. But that does not matter. If you simply give me a plot of land, I shall arrange everything at my responsibility.

Another thing is that I have read the pamphlet on the Golden Jubilee festival in which you have described very nicely about Swami B.M. in the matter of his preaching work in Europe more than 35 years ago, but you have not mentioned anything about my humble service right now going on in the Western world. There are hundreds of letters of appreciation, including some from you also, but you have not mentioned even a single line about me in the pamphlet. Why?? Personally I don't want any such advertisement, but why this mentality of suppressing the fact? Will you kindly let me know why you have suppressed so many facts? You have also not mentioned in the matter of B.M. preaching work why he was called back from this work in Europe, and why the Late G.M. was sent in his place. If his preaching was successful then why was he called back? Don't you know the history?

Anyway, if you have not mentioned anything about me for want of your proper knowledge about my preaching

work in Europe and America, you may kindly now do it and place it before the Patrons of the celebration. I am working single-handed without being supported by my countrymen or the government of my country. You know very well that Sir P.S. was ready to spend any amount for constructing a Radha-Krishna temple in New York, and you promised to get it sanctioned by the government through Dr. R. who was at that time President. But you could not do anything. The same Dr. R. is now Patron in this celebration. Sri V. Das knows me very well. Sri H.P.P. knows very well about my preaching work in this part of the world. Will you induce them to cooperate in my humble attempt? There are many friends in India who will be prepared to construct each a temple here, if the government sanctions exchange. But I don't think the government will sanction changing its policy, even though the retired Presidents or Governors might request this. If it is possible though, please try to do it now, and you will see that we have a center in each and every town and village of the world, as it was predicted by Lord Caitanya. You may please bring the following facts to the notice of the Patrons of the celebration when the session begins. I have already established the following centers:

(There follows a list of 15 temples)

Five thousand (5,000) copies of Back To Godhead Magazine are being published monthly now, and since the demand is increasing, we are arranging to print twenty thousand (20,000) copies starting from next April. You are regularly receiving these copies both in Calcutta and Madras, and I have also instructed to send copies to Sri Caitanya Math for S.M.. My books are being published by MacMillan Company, and the first publication is Bhagavad-gita As It Is. I am sending a copy of this book for your personal reading by separate mail. Please let me know of your opinion. Dr. H.C. the President of the Asiatic Studies Institute in San Francisco has opined as fol-

lows: “The book is without doubt the best presentation so far to the western public of the teachings of Lord Krishna from the standpoint of the Vaisnava tradition in India—the standpoint of devotional Hindu Mysticism.”

Besides the above book, my following books are also selling all over America and Europe: *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (6 volumes), *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, *Transcendental Meditation Explained*, *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, *Isopanisad*, *Brahma Samhita*, and *Nectar of Devotion*. I shall send you a copy of *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* as soon as I get copies from Japan in March, 1969. Also, Sripada S.S. has sent his congratulations to me through one of his disciples thinking of my successful preaching in America, Canada, and Europe.

Please, therefore, encourage me by your cooperation. Don't try to suppress me without mentioning anything about our efforts in your pamphlet. This will not satisfy Srila Prabhupada. Please, therefore, try to present the abovementioned facts before the Patrons in the session meeting, and induce them to cooperate with this movement in the Western World.

I am now Permanent Resident or Immigrant in the USA, so there is no need of my Visa, Passport, or P Form trouble for me. I can come and go from India without any formalities. If you simply cooperate with me, I can render some service to the fulfillment of the transcendental desire of Srila Prabhupada and Bhaktivinode Thakura.

The summary is that you may kindly give me a plot of land in the Sri Caitanya Math for the proposed building. If you want to lay down the foundation stone for this building during the Jubilee celebration, I am prepared to send you the required money for this special purpose. Or else, on your approval of this scheme, I may at once go to India along with some of my American and European disciples to do the needful. As a bona fide disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Goswami Maharaja, and be-

cause I am trying my best to fulfill His holy desire in the matter of preaching work in this part of the world, I have got the right to ask from you a plot of land for this purpose. Now it is up to you to cooperate with me.

I shall be very glad to receive your reply to this letter. On receipt of your favorable reply, I may start immediately for India to take part in the matter of the foundation stone of the building during the Jubilee celebration.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Affectionately yours,

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

(Letter, Los Angeles, February 9, 1969)