Feb. 3, 2010
Dear ....., Greetings,

On Feb. 1st, 2010 you wrote: "To Dhira Govinda: If I accept one guru and after his physical departure I mainly rely on associating with him through his instructions, who corrects me when I make mistakes? And does it mean that after 30 years or so of practicing spiritual life I don`t need to be corrected anymore? Or my direct question would be, who corrects you Dhira Govinda?"

At the start of Bhagavad-gita there is a list of 32 Vaisnavas. My understanding is that the Vaisnava preceding is the current, direct and primary link to the parampara for the Vaisnava succeeding. So, for example, #26, Srila Narottama dasa Thakur is the current, direct and primary link to the parampara for #27, Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur.

A study of the history of this parampara reveals that not all of the current and direct links were on the planet at the same time as their successors. Also, we'll find that in several instances no formal initiation ceremony happened between these links.

Therefore, based on the disciplic succession as given to us by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, neither a formal initiation ceremony nor simultaneous presence on the same planet is required for one Vaisnava to serve as the current, direct and primary link to the parampara for another Vaisnava.

Based on the above references to logic and parampara precedent, my understanding is that A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami is available as the direct, current and primary link to the parampara for those who sincerely follow his guidance. There is, as I know you are aware, an abundance of additional sastric evidence to support this. In addition there are the experiences of thousands of Vaisnavas to support this.

Can this model, of accepting Srila Prabhupada as one's current and direct link to the parampara, be misused? Yes, of course it could. And certainly it has been used to avoid spiritual responsibility, and to avoid genuine surrender ("Srila Prabhupada is my guru so I don't have to listen to anyone, …") I believe that any model can be misapplied and abused, and this one is no exception. That, though, is a discussion of psychology, sincerity and personal character. Herein I wish to focus on siddhanta, a deepening of our understanding of philosophical truth.

When I use terms such as "direct, current and primary link", I am referring to the spiritual master- the singular guru in whom we have absolute faith, and to whom we aspire to surrender unconditionally. This is, for example, the spiritual master on whom we meditate when singing the Samsara prayers from Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti- one line of which is "yasya prasadad bhagavat-prasado yasya prasadan na gatih kuto 'pi...", which translates as "By the mercy of the spiritual master one receives the benediction of Krsna. Without the grace of the spiritual master, one cannot make any advancement." This singular guru is the spiritual master referred to in

verses such as: yasya deve para bhaktir yatha deve tatha gurau tasyaite kathita hy artha prakasante mahatmanah.

"Unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master, all the imports of Vedic knowledge are automatically revealed" (Svetasvatara Upanisada 6.23).

This singular guru is the one to whom we recite special pranam mantras, and the one to whom we offer bhoga.

Apart from *the* guru, in the singular, each of us has many gurus. To demystify the word "guru"- each of us has many teachers. Many persons, including for example, everyone in this course, has inspired me in my spiritual life. They are all my teachers, gurus. I'm sure that you consider that you too have and have had many gurus, in that plural sense. Also I'm sure that you don't consider all of these "gurus in the plural" to be living on the absolute platform, beyond any tinge of the modes of material nature, worthy of your unconditional surrender. Maybe there is one or more of these "gurus in the plural" whom you do regard to be on that absolute platform. That's wonderful. However, it's not necessary.

It is necessary, based on the system that Sri Krsna established for us, to have one guru, such as those on the list of 32, who is genuinely on that absolute platform, and who is worthy to receive complete surrender on behalf of Krsna. As established above, that guru does not need to be the person who conducts the ceremony of formal initiation, and neither does that Vaisnava

need to be physically present on the same planet as you.

Regarding "gurus in the plural", I believe that as we advance in spiritual life, our eagerness to invite and receive guidance from such gurus naturally increases. We naturally deepen our inspiration to hear from them, associate with them, accept rectification from them, maybe set up coaching-like accountability check systems with them, etc. For some of us "them" might look like one primary person in particular throughout our life, for others it might look like receiving guidance and spiritual inspiration from various persons at different phases of our life. Whatever it looks like, in this "Direct link" (DL) model, Srila Prabhupada is 32, and none of the gurus in the plural serve or want to serve in the capacity of 33. Rather, they support, assist and challenge us to enrich our connection with Srila Prabhupada as 32.

With regard to the specifics of determining from whom to receive guidance, when, for which challenges, that requires careful and steady cultivation of the science and art of bhakti-yoga, especially with regard to the science of Vaisnava relationships. Also it entails independent thoughtfulness, a quality that Srila Prabhupada wanted all of his aspiring followers to abundantly evince.

On February 1st, 2010, ... prabhu wrote:

"Based on my understanding, separation from the guru appears when there was presence beforehand, association with the guru. I can't honestly claim that I'm a Prabhupada's disciple if I

had no direct contact with him, nor if I didn't receive initiation from him. And to receive initiation, there must be some contact. As you write: ‘Physical presence is immaterial. Presence of the transcendental sound received from the Spiritual Master should be the guidance of life.' It is received from the spiritual master. Here, the letters you quote emanate from disciples who had a connection with Prabhupada, they were physically initiated by him."

Based on my understanding of history, ...'s understanding is inaccurate. While Srila Prabhupada was physically present he established a system wherein he had no contact with disciples who received initiation from him. That is, there are many persons who received initiation from Srila Prabhupada who never saw him, never received a letter from him, and never spoke with him on the phone. Also, Srila Prabhupada did not conduct their initiation ceremony. These disciples without a doubt consider Srila Prabhupada their current and direct link to the disciplic succession, and it was perfectly clear that Srila Prabhupada considered himself to be serving in that role for them.

So, please consider someone who connected with Srila Prabhupada's movement in, say, 1976. This devotee received initiation from Srila Prabhupada, though he never saw him or received a letter from him. In many instances Srila Prabhupada didn't even select the spiritually initiated name, nor did Srila Prabhupada chant on the japa beads of this person. Still, there is no question in the mind of this devotee that Srila Prabhupada is his direct, current and primary link to the parampara.

Simultaneously, the devotee described above served in Srila Prabhupada's movement. In that service and capacity he accepted others, such as, for example, the temple president, the visiting sannyasi, and the bhakta leader, as his "gurus in the plural". Maybe one or more of these gurus in the plural were, or are, pure devotees of Krsna. Maybe not. In any case, Srila Prabhupada is the current and direct link to the parampara for this person. These gurus in the

plural represented Srila Prabhupada, though they, regardless of their level of spiritual advancement, did not serve in the capacity of "33".

As for myself, I aspire to follow the system that Srila Prabhupada established, as described above. On both accounts- following Srila Prabhupada as "32", and receiving wisdom and guidance from other Vaisnavas as "gurus in the plural"- my endeavors are admittedly pretty lame.

With regard to the phrase "living guru", in my study of Srila Prabhupada's books, letters, conversations and lectures, I don't recall him using that phrase (though maybe he did). There is a well-known conversation referencing the phrase "living spiritual master", wherein Srila Prabhupada comments on Jesus and the principle of disciplic succession. I include that below.

Madhudvisa: Is there any way for a Christian to, without the help of a Spiritual Master, to reach the spiritual sky through believing the words of Jesus Christ and trying to follow his teachings?

Srila Prabhupada: I don't follow.

Tamal Krsna Goswami: Can a Christian in this age, without a Spiritual Master, but by reading the Bible, and following Jesus's words, reach the...

Srila Prabhupada: When you read the Bible, you follow Spiritual Master. How can you say without? As soon as you read the Bible, that means you are following the instruction of Lord Jesus Christ. That means that you are following Spiritual Master. So where is the opportunity of being without Spiritual Master?

Madhudvisa: I was referring to a living Spiritual Master.

Srila Prabhupada: Spiritual Master is not question of...Spiritual Master is eternal. Spiritual Master is eternal...

(Seattle, Feb. 10, 1968)

I agree that one needs a "living guru". Srila Prabhupada is, without any doubt, a living guru.

I understand that you are considering these issues with respect to your personal spiritual life, and I appreciate your sincerity in this regard. I'm interested to hear your view of what I have presented, and any questions or comments you may have. Please note that I'm not saying that this "Direct link" (DL) model is the only possible alternative. I am saying that Srila Prabhupada is available, as described in the DL model, and I am not in agreement with the claim that he is not. Do you consider it a viable model to choose Srila Prabhupada as 32, your direct and current link to the parampara? Is your view that you consider this "Direct link" (DL) model to be valid, though you personally choose to continue to search for a "33"? Or, do you consider that the DL model, as I've presented it, is invalid (that is, your stance is that Srila Prabhupada is not available as the direct and current link to the parampara, for you or others)? If so, on what basis?

And of course, this presentation and these questions are not intended just for ..... I'd like to hear from everyone in the course your views on the above, with regard to what I've presented, and my way of presenting it.

I hope this meets you well.

Respectfully,

Dhira Govinda dasa (David Wolf)