

# Where the Rtvik People are Wrong

by Jayadvaita Swami

(January 1996)

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

—Rule of Thumb

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

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

## What all of us agree on

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

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

## From Master to Disciple

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

1

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

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

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

Srila Prabhupada himself, in 1977, appointed eleven disciples to serve as *rtvik* gurus, or “officiating spiritual masters.” He authorized these *rtviks* to decide which candidates to accept, and to chant on the candidates’ beads and give the new disciples spiritual names. The *rtviks* were to do this on Srila Prabhupada’s behalf, and the new disciples were to be not those of the *rtviks* but of Srila Prabhupada himself.

On July 9, 1977, Srila Prabhupada signed a document that makes these facts unmistakably clear.

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

### **What is the post-samadhi *rtvik*-guru doctrine?**

We now come to the question to be decided:

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

On November 14, 1977, Srila Prabhupada ended his manifest physical pastimes and, as the traditional language puts it, “entered samadhi.” The assertion that his disciples should continue to serve as *rtviks*, then, is what we may call the “post-samadhi *rtvik*-guru doctrine.”

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

Now, moving on, I should next make clear that the post-samadhi *rtvik*-guru doctrine comes in two forms, which we may call “hard” and “soft.”

The “hard” doctrine says this:

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

Differing on certain points is the “soft” doctrine:

Srila Prabhupada is the only initiating spiritual master for all ISKCON devotees. Acting as *rtviks* on his behalf, certain disciples may initiate new devotees, who then become not their disciples

---

unadorned, and standard.

but his. This system shall continue until the appearance within ISKCON of pure devotees fit to initiate disciples of their own. The rtvik system will then come to an end.

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

(I am leaving aside here appeals to “inconceivability.” By arguing that something is “inconceivably true,” one can make a case for literally anything. We accept, of course, that certain scripturally endorsed contradictions are “inconceivably true.” But if we were therefore willing to accept “It's inconceivable” as a valid argument for everything, nothing could ever be shown false. We would then be obliged to accept the truth of even the most ridiculous nonsense.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let's examine these arguments one by one.

## **1. Argument from restatement of what's accepted.**

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

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

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

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

The argument, therefore, entirely misses the issue.

What's at issue is whether Srila Prabhupada intended some form of rtvik-guru system to continue *after his physical departure*.

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

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

So let's leave this behind and go on.

## **2. Argument from personal testimony.**

We now come to an argument that *is* relevant: the personal testimony of devotees who say they heard before Srila Prabhupada's departure that Srila Prabhupada had set up a *post-samadhi* rtvik-guru system.

Gauri Dasa Pandit, one of Srila Prabhupada's disciples, tells us that while serving as an assistant to His Holiness Tamal Krsna Goswami in Vrindaban, on or about May 23, 1977, he directly heard Srila

Prabhupada tell Tamal Krishna Goswami that the appointed rtviks should continue to serve as rtviks even after Srila Prabhupada's departure. This conversation, he tells us, was even recorded on tape. In addition, Yasodanandana Dasa tells us that in May 1977 Tamal Krishna Goswami and Bhavananda Goswami indicated to him that Srila Prabhupada had endorsed a post-samadhi rtvik-guru system. Yasodanandana Prabhu offers a diary in which he noted this at the time.

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

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

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

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

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

What we are left with, then, is mainly Gauri Dasa's lone report. And according to Tamal Krsna Goswami, the other person allegedly present, what Gauri Dasa tells us is wrong.

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

Here, perhaps is the place to bring forward a point made by Tamal Krishna Maharaja and approvingly quoted in several papers by proponents of post-samadhi rtvik-guru doctrines.

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

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

For those familiar with how Srila Prabhupada did things, the answer should be easy.

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

### 3. Argument from logical necessity.

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

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

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

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

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

Suppose for the moment that Srila Prabhupada’s disciples are all indeed unfit. It does not therefore logically follow that Srila Prabhupada *must have* (note the speculative language) set up a post-samadhi rtvik-guru system.

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

The point is that it’s not enough to talk about what Srila Prabhupada could have done or must have done. We have to see what Srila Prabhupada actually did.

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

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

Coming back to a point on which all agree, we should all take shelter of Srila Prabhupada and his instructions. Srila Prabhupada is the exalted pure devotee who gave us the Krsna consciousness movement. We can all be completely confident of his instructions and his example. And we can be sure

that by strictly and sincerely following Srila Prabhupada we will always be safe and secure.

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

This brings us to the next argument.

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

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

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

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

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

But those who have learned from history will refuse to be lured. The one-appointed-acarya system of the Gaudiya Math, the zonal-acarya system of ISKCON—both looked so good. They seemed to offer so many advantages. Or the alternatives seemed so bleak.

For many, only in retrospect could those fine-looking systems be recognized as deviations and therefore causes of disaster.

But, again, what Srila Prabhupada trained us to do was not to evaluate all the possibilities, choose what seems to us to have the most points going for it, and then conclude that this *must have* been what he wanted. What he trained us to do was to strictly follow what he taught us.

If there’s one lesson we should have learned from history it should be this: However good a path of action may seem, if it’s against what Srila Prabhupada taught us, forget it.

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

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

Where, it is demanded, has the sastra or Srila Prabhupada said that one can’t approach an acarya for initiation merely because he has physically departed? Where do the authorities tell us that a post-samadhi rtvik system is no good? Can you show me a verse? Can you point to a purport? How then can you say it’s not valid?



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

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

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

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

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

## **6. Linguistic arguments.**

Last, we come to arguments based on linguistics.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Taking "henceforward" to mean literally forever, never will the rtvik-guru system come to an end. By this "hard" version of the doctrine, even should an uttama-adhikari someday appear, he will never initiate disciples of his own. At most, he will serve merely as a rtvik. For according to this hard version of the

doctrine, Srila Prabhupada is the final member of the disciplic succession. The succession has come to an end. Srila Prabhupada is the only guru forever after. *Henceforward*, all new devotees will be his disciples, through his appointed rtviks.

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

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

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

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

And then we have Kirtanananda Swami, Bhavananda Goswami, Ramesvara Swami, and Bhagavan Dasa Adhikari, all fallen from their spiritual vows but serving eternally as rtviks nonetheless.

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

If these choices somehow don't suit you, you're left with Harikesa Swami, Jayapataka Swami, Hrdayananda Goswami, Tamal Krishna Goswami, or Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami. The problem here, of course (aside from the possibility that you may not like them), is that all of them are sure they were supposed to serve as rtviks only until Srila Prabhupada's departure. As far as they're concerned, the post-samadhi rtvik doctrines are bunk. Now these devotees wouldn't serve as rtviks for love or money. So if you're looking for an authorized rtvik, go back to the other names on the list.

And remember, *henceforward*—from now till the end of time—these are the only authorized rtviks.

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

So let's suppose you go for the "hard/soft" version of the doctrine, in which self-effulgent acaryas come along to initiate yet still the rtviks continue side by side. When those self-effulgent acaryas show up, what's the need of them? You can still become Srila Prabhupada's disciple through the rtviks, and that's a safer bet, just in case the effulgence might wear off. And when it comes to rtviks, you're still stuck with

these eleven—and only these eleven. Good luck.

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

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

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

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

The logic, again, is that since Srila Prabhupada must have wanted to protect these properties forever, he must forever have direct disciples, initiated through a rtvik system.

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

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

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

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

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

In the course of reading, he comes to the list of trustees for various temples, and gradually to those for Vrindavana. “The proposed trustees are Aksayananda Swami, Gopala Krsna and Visvambhara.” Visvambhara Dayal (known as “Bhagatji”) was a devoted friend of ISKCON who rendered much service to Srila Prabhupada in Vrindaban.

The following conversation ensues:

Prabhupada: Visvambhara is not our regular disciple.

Jayapataka: Shouldn't be included.

Prabhupada: Then he has to accept sannyasa from me.

Jayatirtha: Jaya.

Prabhupada: He should know...

Tamal Krsna: Become initiated.

Jayapataka: Trustee must be initiated disciple.

Prabhupada: Oh, yes.

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

Prabhupada: No, you can say that "If you take sannyasa, you become on this."

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

A few days later, on June 2, devotees present Srila Prabhupada a revised draft.

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

Prabhupada: Will? Will, there will be direction that "Management should be done like this." That's all.

Giriraja: Yes.

Prabhupada: Nobody can say in court case that "This temple will be in charge of this person, this temple. . ."

Ramesvara: Yes, just like you said.

Giriraja: So we've included those points. . .

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

Srila Prabhupada signs the will two days later.

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

"We weren't used to thinking like that," says Giriraja Swami. "In retrospect it's very naive."<sup>2</sup>

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

---

2

Personal interview, January 26, 1996.

So the argument still stands: How could a director generations from now be Srila Prabhupada's disciple unless initiated by Srila Prabhupada's rtvik?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this sense, by the grace of Srila Prabhupada, one can become not only his disciple but at the same time the disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, the six Gosvamis,

---

3

(Adi 10.17 purport) In the following passage, Srila Prabhupada uses the word "disciple" in precisely the sense I have mentioned. ". . . because modern civilization is misled, householders want to remain in family life until death, and therefore they are suffering. In such cases, the disciples of Narada Muni advise all the members of the younger generation to join the Krsna consciousness movement immediately." (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 6.5.36, purport) —JS, November 1997

and all the other acaryas in Srila Prabhupada's line.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

### **Questions that matter—or do they?**

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

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

But for those who subscribe to the “hard” version of the rtvik doctrine, such questions no longer matter. For it's Srila Prabhupada forever. The disciplic succession is finished.

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

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

For when the pure devotee arrives, the rtvik system will cease. And who is to decide when he arrives? Will he need the unanimous approval of all ISKCON devotees? Or will a 2/3 majority be enough? Will

---

4

As further evidence: In *Caitanya-caritamrta* (Adi 10.17 purport) Srila Prabhupada mentions both Dhyanaçandra Goswami and that Goswami's spiritual master as “disciples of Vakresvara Pandit.” “There are many disciples of Vakresvara Pandita in Orissa. . . Among these disciples are Sri Gopalaguru and his disciple Sri Dhyanaçandra Goswami.” I am grateful to my godbrother His Grace Sriman Locanananda Dasa Adhikari for pointing out to me this quotation. –JS, 27 August 2003

he need to be recognized by a vote of the Governing Body Commission? Or should a panel of experts be appointed to certify we've got the genuine merchandise? If we need a panel, who should be on it?

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

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

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

### **Sealing the Case: What's Wrong with the P.S. Rtvik Doctrines?**

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

We could place those reasons into six categories:

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

Now let us look at these briefly.

#### **1. Argument from a need for evidence.**

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

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

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



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

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

Neither from guru nor sadhu nor sastra do the post-samadhi rittvik-guru doctrines have any evidence going for them. Therefore we should reject them.

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

Again, a simple argument.

Srila Prabhupada usually did what was done by the predecessor acaryas. And never in the history of Gaudiya Vaisnavism, nor any other form of Vaisnavism, have we found any instance of a post-samadhi rtvik-guru system.

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

## **3. Argument from a need for good logic**

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

## **4. Argument from a need for consistency with Srila Prabhupada’s teachings.**

The p.s. rtvik doctrines require us to accept that Srila Prabhupada, in his last few months, reversed what he’d taught for the previous ten years.

One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master.  
—Srimad Bhagavatam 2.9.43, purport

Every student is expected to become acarya. Acarya means one who knows the scriptural injunctions and follows them practically in life, and teaches them to his disciples. . . . Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle. But as a matter of etiquette it is the custom that during the lifetime of the spiritual master you bring the prospective disciples to him and in his absence or disappearance you can accept

disciples without any limitation. *This is the law of disciplic succession.*  
—letter to Tusta Krsna Swami, December 2, 1975  
(emphasis supplied)

So we have got this message from Krsna, from Caitanya Mahaprabhu, from the six Gosvamis, later on Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Bhaktisiddhanta Thakura. And we are trying our bit also to distribute this knowledge. Now, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. . . My Guru Maharaja is tenth from Caitanya Mahaprabhu, I am eleventh, you are the twelfth. So distribute this knowledge.  
—Los Angeles arrival lecture, May 18, 1972

Commenting on the letter to Tusta Krsna Maharaja, a treatise advocating a p.s. rtvik doctrine says, “All the letter states is the normal process of disciplic succession: Guru departs and a *qualified* disciple continues initiating.” (emphasis in original) The treatise then argues that because no one was qualified, Srila Prabhupada set up a p.s. rtvik system.

The faulty argument that since no one was qualified Srila Prabhupada “must have” set up a new system has been previously disposed of. What I want to focus on here is a simple point: That a spiritual master initiates until his departure and then his disciples initiate next is the *normal* system. On this we are all in agreement. This is what Srila Prabhupada taught the entire time he was with us.<sup>5</sup>

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

Asking us to accept this is simply asking too much.

### **5. Argument from Srila Prabhupada’s final instruction.**

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

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

“Disciple of my disciple.” The meaning is clear, and it’s consistent with Srila Prabhupada always taught us.

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

---

5

I’m skipping here the opportunity to offer many more quotes. For a point that everyone agrees on, to multiply the quotes seems needless.

## **6. Argument from how Srila Prabhupada expressed his desires.**

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

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

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

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

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

Srila Prabhupada entered samadhi in 1977. Post-samadhi rtvik-guru doctrines began appearing only in the mid-1980's.

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

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

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

As Srila Prabhupada used to say, "And I have to believe it?"

Please—that's asking far too much.

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

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

### **So where does that leave us?**

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

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

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

[end]