**Chapter 10: Your Srila Prabhupada**

*Before we look at some ways to access and nourish our personal, foundational relationship with Srila Prabhupada, let’s consider how our founder-*acarya *is for everyone.*

**Universal Teacher**

The year was 1935. In February Abhaya Caranaravinda Dasa spoke at the Vyasa-puja1 celebration of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura in Bombay. Not only was the Thakura Abhaya’s spiritual master, he was the founder-*acarya* of the entire Gaudiya Mission,2 which had ignited a renaissance of Krsna consciousness throughout the Indian subcontinent. Addressing the assembly, Abhaya declared:

 The Acaryadeva to whom we have assembled tonight to offer our humble homage is not the guru of a sectarian institution or one out of many differing exponents of the truth. On the contrary, he is the Jagad-guru, the guru of all of us; the only difference is that some obey him whole- heartedly, while others do not obey him directly.

In 1971, after Prabupada had become ISKCON’s founder-*acarya*, a reporter asked him how many followers he had. “Unlimited,” Prabhupada replied, echoing his earlier homage to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta. “Some admit and some don’t admit. Admit you are a servant of Lord Krsna, and your life will be a success.3

**Global Preacher**

Between 1965 and 1977 Srila Prabhupada circled the globe fourteen times, establishing the Krsna consciousness movement on every major continent. He initiated nearly five thousand disciples and inspired countless more people to accept Krsna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. At an age when most people wish to comfortably retire, Prabhupada kept up a nonstop preaching

pace, tirelessly responding to his mission’s demands. As he wrote one disciple:

 Regarding your invitation that I attend the Rathayatra festival in San Francisco, on July 7th, it is possible that I may attend depending on when I finish my European tour. I am due to arrive in Rome on May 23, then after a week Geneva, then Paris and possibly Stockholm, Germany and England. If there is time I can fly directly from Europe to Los Angeles and go to the festival, then as you suggest, go to Australia Rathayatra via Hawaii. This is known as jet-age parivrajakacarya.”4 (Letter to Jayatirtha Dasa, 5 May 1974, Bombay)

Astonishingly, jet-age Prabhupada never knew jet-lag, or ignored it if he did, instantly adapting to the time at his latest destination. And though most of his disciples were young enough to be his grandchildren, they couldn’t keep up with him. As Prabhupada once told a personal assistant, “My desire is to spread Krsna consciousness everywhere at once.”5

**Matchless Giver**

That Srila Prabhupada founded over one hundred Hare Krsna temples, schools, farms, and restaurants, all while writing and publishing dozens of translations and commentaries on foundational Vaisnava scriptures, is simply superhuman. How did he do it? For one thing, Prabhupada didn’t sleep much. After going to bed at ten, he would usually rise at midnight or 1 A.M. and write through the wee hours. If he had time, he would nap for maybe a half hour after breakfast and a full hour after lunch. His days and nights were a seamless weave of selfless services.

Another short sleeper is the cow, to whom Prabhupada would sometimes compare himself. Guru Dasa recalls that in Bombay he once told Prabhupada he was concerned not enough people would come to a program the devotees had arranged. Prabhupada replied: “No, I am like a cow. I give milk anywhere. That is what I like to do.”6

**Avesa-Avatara**

The *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta* (Antya 7.11) states: “The fundamental religious system in the Age of Kali is the chanting of the holy name of Krsna. Unless empowered by Krsna, one cannot propagate the *sankirtana* movement.” Commenting on this verse in *Antya* 2.14, Prabhupada further identifies the one who empowers the spreader of the chanting: “Unless one is empowered by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, one cannot spread the holy names of the Hare Krsna *maha-mantra* throughout the world. Persons who do so are empowered. Therefore they are sometimes called *avesa-avataras*, or empowered incarnations, for they are endowed with the power of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.”

Once an Indian swami criticized Prabhupada’s global preaching by saying that, if Caitanya Mahaprabhu had wanted Krsna consciousness in the Western countries, why didn’t He go there Himself? To which Prabhupada replied: “He left the credit for me. He loves His devotee more than Himself!”7

Yet Prabhupada always passed on that credit to others---to his followers, to his spiritual master, and finally to Krsna Himself. It is a mark of Prabhupada’s absolute transparency as an *avesa-avatara* that he named his movement after Krsna, not himself, whom most of the world has yet to discover.

**ISKCON’s Founder-Acarya**

If Srila Prabhupada is for everyone, he is certainly for everyone in ISKCON. As mentioned in Chapter 9, in 1994 ISKCON’s Governing Body passed its first founder-*acarya* resolution. Here are all its elements:

 a. Srila Prabhupada is the foundational *siksa-guru* for all ISKCON devotees. b. Srila Prabhupada’s instructions are the essential teachings for every ISKCON devotee. c. Srila Prabhupada’s books are the embodiment of his teachings and should be accepted as the standard by all future generations of ISKCON. d. Srila Prabhupada should be worshiped daily by every ISKCON member. e. Every spiritual master is responsible to guide his disciples to follow

 Srila Prabhupada’s instructions.8

More founder-*acarya* resolutions since then have identified our foundational relationship with Srila Prabhupada as the sublime pivot around whom all our relationships in his Society turn. Amid our ever-increasing diversity, Prabhupada remains the unity.

**Your Srila Prabhupada**

If you were born after Prabhupada’s time, or never knew him when he walked among us, you may wonder what will happen to his Society when the last “Prabhupada disciple” has left this world. If we understand “disciple” in its literal meaning as “follower,” we will realize that as the Hare Krsna movement continues to expand, Prabhupada’s presence will likewise expand through his divine instructions. Despite our different *gurudevas*, since we all share the same founder-*acarya*, generations will continue to follow Prabhupada into and out of this world, sharing Krsna’s mercy with suffering humanity in many ways.

Which Prabhupada inspires you most? Prabhupada the world *sankirtana* party leader? The divine writer? Sublime chef? Back-to-nature prophet? Cultural conqueror? Master educator? Founding father? The list continues.

A true, transcendental Renaissance man, Prabhupada is many-sided, but to whichever side we’re attracted, there are standard ways to build a personal, foundational relationship with His Divine Grace.

**By Spiritual Sound**

The first and foremost way we can all connect with Prabhupada is by becoming keen students of his spoken and written word. Regular, attentive hearing from our founder-*acarya*---especially in the company of sincere devotees---grounds us in the root relationship that nourishes us all.

In August 1968 a new initiate in Montreal told Prabhupada she felt far away from him when he wasn’t there in person. Prabhupada replied:

 Oh, that you should not think….There are two conceptions [of the spiritual master]: the physical conception and the vibration conception. So physical conception is temporary. The vibration conception is eternal. Just like we are enjoying, or we are relishing, the vibration of Krsna’s teachings. So by vibration He is present. As soon as we chant Hare Krsna or chant *Bhagavad-gita* or *Bhagavata*, so He is present imme- diately by His vibration. So we should give more stress on the sound vibration, either of Krsna or of the spiritual master. Then we’ll feel happy and no separation.9

Separated from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta for decades, Prabhupada would nonetheless say he always felt his spiritual master to be right by his side. How? By absolute absorption in studying and presenting Srila Bhaktisiddhanta’s teachings. In the same way, in the company of sincere and serious devotees absorbed in studying and presenting Prabhupada’s teachings, we will also feel Prabhupada’s presence in our lives. In this connection, two famous devotees from my generation come to mind: Yamuna Devi and Jayananda Prabhu.

In 1967, Yamuna and Jayananda were among the first to join Srila Prabhupada’s movement in San Francisco. Deeply dedicated to Prabhupada from the start, they were also as different as night and day.

To meet Yamuna was to meet a priestess of devotion, expressed most wonderfully through her cooking, singing, and deity worship. Prabhupada the cultural conqueror came through Yamuna.

Jayananda was strong as an ox and humble as grass. A mechanical engineer by training, Jayananda was a tireless worker who was perhaps most beloved for building huge chariots for ISKCON’s annual Rathayatra10 parades. Prabhupada’s surpassing strength and humility came through Jayananda.

Different as they were, Yamuna and Jayananda both had a deep love for hearing from Srila Prabhupada. By developing a similar love, and a deep dedication to serving Srila Prabhupada’s mission, one or more aspects of our beloved founder-*acarya* will also shine through us*.*

**By His Mission**

Since some dubious devotional groups prematurely focus on seeing Krsna face-to-face, Prabhupada admonished his followers that the best way to see Krsna is to serve His mission under the guidance of His pure devotee, the spiritual master:

 When one becomes serious to follow the mission of the spiritual master, his resolution is tantamount to seeing the Supreme Person- ality of Godhead….Instead of being eager to see the Lord in some bush of Vrndavana while at the same time engaging in sense grat- ification, if one instead sticks to the principle of following the words of the spiritual master, he will see the Supreme Lord without diffi- culty.11

As Srila Bhaktisiddhanta would say, “Don’t try to see God. You work in such a way that God will see you.”12 And when that work is done cooperatively in Prabhupada’s mission---synergizing the efforts of different generations---Krsna sees and blesses us manyfold.

**No Jumping Over**

In the early 1970s, as more devotees began to visit India, some became fascinated by the books of our Gaudiya forebears, especially Srila Bhaktisiddhanta and Srila Bhaktivinoda, so they asked Prabhupada if they could read them. Prabhupada wasn’t pleased:

 You cannot imagine what my spiritual master said. Or even if you read some books, you cannot understand unless you understand it from me. This is called *parampara* system.13 You cannot jump over to the superior guru, neglecting the next *acarya*, immediate next *acarya.*14

Since during his time with us, Srila Prabhupada was the only genuine spiritual

master we knew, we didn’t fully appreciate his unique position as our founder-*acarya.* In ISKCON’s multiple-guru culture today, we’ve come to realize that a prime duty of our initiating and instructing spiritual masters is to deepen, enhance, and enrich our foundational relationship with Srila Prabhupada. If “no jumping over” means no neglecting one’s “immediate, next *acarya*,” how much more does that apply to Srila Prabhupada, our founder-*acarya*, from whom we derive our core identity and through whom we see all teachers and teachings. And the more deeply our spiritual masters connect us with Srila Prabhupada, the more responsibility we have to pass on his unique legacy to others.

**Imbibe and Impart**

When Srila Prabhupada sees we’re sincerely following him, he blesses us with the realization to pass on his teachings in ways both faithful and fitting. Prabhupada explains:

 Personal realization does not mean that one should, out of vanity, attempt to show one’s own learning by trying to surpass the previous *acarya.* He must have full confidence in the previous *acarya*, and at the same time he must realize the subject matter so nicely that he can present the matter for the particular circumstances in a suitable manner ….*The original purpose of the text must be maintained.* [Prabhupada’s emphasis] No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. This is called realization.15

To imbibe and impart Prabhupada’s legacy is to become gurus in our own right, not to imitate or replace our founder-*acarya* but to follow in his footsteps: “Because people are in darkness, we require many millions of gurus to enlighten them. Therefore Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s mission is, He said, that ‘Every one of you become guru.’”16

**Benefits of Deeply Understanding Srila Prabhupada’s Position**

In his authorized booklet, *Srila Prabhupada, the Founder-Acarya of ISKCON,*17 Ravindra Svarupa Dasa concludes by listing the benefits of deeply understanding Prabhupada’s unique, transcendental position, especially for all who serve his movement:

 1. Generation after generation will be able to receive the special mercy offered by Srila Prabhupada. The path back to Godhead he opened will be ever-increasingly traveled. 2. Srila Prabhupada’s active presence will secure the unity and integrity of ISKCON, strengthening both the GBC and guru-disciple bonds. 3. By taking full shelter of Srila Prabhupada as *siksa-guru* in his *vani* manifestation, all teachers in ISKCON, on various levels of advancement, will be able to authentically convey Srila Prabhupada’s real teaching, thus giving proper guidance, shelter, and protection to all. 4. ISKCON’s teachings will remain consistent over space and time. 5. Prabhupada’s realized knowledge, endowing him with the specific potency to spread Krsna consciousness, will be not only preserved but also developed. 6. His books will remain central to us, for they contain insights and directions that await future development to be realized. 7.Srila Prabhupada’s eyes will always remain the lens through which all future generations see our predecessor *acaryas.*

All those benefits naturally accrue to devotees who realize their core identity as Prabhupada’s followers. Inspired by “our Prabhupadas,” we will cooperate---even when we disagree---to bring the Lord’s mercy to everyone. I can’t imagine a better way to please Srila Prabhupada, our beloved founder-*acarya.*

NOTES

1The birthday anniversary of the spiritual master. 2A name of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati’s preaching organization. 3*Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, Volume 4, *In Every Town and Village*, Chapter 35: “This Remote Corner of the World.” 4In Vedic culture, the third stage of renounced life, when one travels everywhere preaching the glories of the Lord. 5Remark by Srila Prabhupada to Hari Sauri Dasa, as reported by Hari Sauri in his seminar series, “Srila Prabhupada, the Living Bhagavatam.” 6*Following Srila Prabhupada*, Yadubara Dasa, DVD 2, World Sankirtana Harinama, Programs. 7*A Transcendental Diary*, Vol. I, 4 January 1976, Hari Sauri Dasa. 8 1994 GBC Resolution No. 35, Founder-*Acarya* Statement. 9*Srimad-Bhagavatam* lecture, 7.9.12, 18 August 1968, Montreal. 10Rathayatra is an annual Hare Krsna chariot parade, originating thousands of years ago in India and brought worldwide by Prabhupada and his followers. 11*Srimad-Bhagavatam*, 4.28.51, Purport. 12*Bhagavad-gita* lecture, 8.14-15, 16 November 1966, New York City. 13*Parampara* is the system of receiving spiritual knowledge through a succession of authentic spiritual masters traceable to the Supreme Lord Himself. 14*Srimad-Bhagavatam* lecture, 1.15.30, 8 December 1973, Los Angeles. 15*Srimad-Bhagavatam*, 1.4.1, Purport. 16*Srimad-Bhagavatam* lecture, 6.1.21, 21 May 1976, Honolulu. 17ISKCON GBC Press, 2014. (http://www.founderacharya.com/book)