By Narasimha das

In his Purport to Srimad-Bhagavatam, 2.9.43, Srila Prabhupada describes who is a genuine disciple and who is a genuine spiritual master. The original guru is Lord Sri Krishna and the original disciple is Lord Brahma. Devotees in the Brahma Sampradaya receive transcendental knowledge through the paramapara coming through Narada Muni, Vyasadeva, Sukadeva Goswami—and other great paramahamsas in this line of succession. All this is described.

Qualifications of Genuine Disciples and Gurus:

Those who attempt to understand Vedic knowledge through grammar alone are not allowed access into the pure transcendental knowledge of bhakti-yoga. Such jnanis, yogis, karmis, and even prakrita-bhaktas, generally try to capture Vedic knowledge through scholarship, or under the tutorship of institutional leaders or professional clerics or pundits. Because they have not surrendered to a “realized person”, a pure devotee, they remain on the mundane plane.

“One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master. And one cannot be a bona fide and authorized spiritual master unless one has been strictly obedient to his spiritual master.” (SB.2.9.43, Purport)

Are Ecclesiastical Gurus Genuine?

Those who are disobedient, or those who never surrender to the real acharya, cannot be counted as disciples in the eternal paramapara. They can never be real gurus or disciples but are, at best, veda-vada-ratas—according to Srila Prabhupada’s purports.

The veda-vada-ratas sometimes criticize the bona fide spiritual master for doing things (such as initiating non-Brahmins or initiating through ritviks) that seem to them to be against Vedic principles. They adjudge such actions for preaching to be apa-siddhanta. They claim that only “living” ecclesiastical gurus can offer diksa through formal Vedic ceremonies authorized by clerics and institutional leaders. Or they say only born Brahmins can receive diksa. They often claim to be equal to Vedic acharyas, or they saygreat acharyas are subservient to Vedic procedures and regulations.

“Therefore the so-called formal spiritual master and disciple are not facsimiles of Brahma and Narada or Narada and Vyasa. The relationship between Brahma and Narada is reality, while so-called formality is the relation between the cheater and cheated.” (SB. 2.9.43, Purport)

“Sri Jiva Gosvami advises that one not accept a spiritual master in terms of hereditary or customary social and ecclesiastical conventions. One should simply try to find a genuinely qualified spiritual master for actual advancement in spiritual understanding.” (Cc. Adi-lila 1.35, Purport)

Followers of various teachers often claim their guru is the only guru and the only way, or they say, like some Christians do, that there will never be another real teacher in the guru-paramapara. This reactionary stance is another unauthorized point of view.

Real Gurus are Eternal:

On the other hand, without sectarianism, we can understand that real gurus are eternal. Thus there is no need to replace them every few years with updated upstarts. Nor do we need to wait around anxiously for another maha-bhagavata to appear or reappear. Great devotees are eternal and still living in sound

“One should not think of Brahmaji as a dead great-grandfather… He is the oldest great-grandfather, and he is still living, and Narada is also living.”

“The spiritual master is not a question of [living or dead]… The spiritual master is eternal—the spiritual master is eternal.” (Conv. Oct. 2, 1968, Seattle)

“A nitya-siddha devotee comes from Vaikuntha upon the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and shows by his example how to become a pure devotee… A pure devotee, therefore, is a practical example for all living entities, including Lord Brahma.” (SB. 7.10.3, Purport)

All glories to Srila Prabhupada, the eternal living link in the Brahma Sampradaya and Spiritual Master of the Universe!.