

The Line of Spiritual Teachers

If there is a fruit tree full with tender, ripe fruits, each fruit has to be picked and handled properly, not just dropped down to the ground, or it will get ruined. In many parts of the world, fruit is picked from the high branches and then carefully handed down, person to person, situated at different levels on the tree, until the person on the ground gently places it, undamaged, into the box.

In a similar way, Vedic knowledge, the science of self-realization, must be passed down from the Lord Himself through various qualified caretakers so that it reaches the ear of the genuinely inquisitive soul in its pure, unadulterated form. This lineage of guardians of the pure, absolute science of reawakening our love of God, Krishna, is called the disciplic succession, or the guru paramparā.

The way of receiving real knowledge is by accepting proper authority. With any educational system of this world, there are textbooks, but the contents of that textbook are brought to life and understanding by a proper instructor who is well versed in the subject and has practical experience of the science. For example, one cannot study a surgical text and then proclaim oneself to be a surgeon. There is a system of education and proper practicum. One cannot reach real knowledge without being helped by someone who is already established in that knowledge, and that pertains at least equally to the spiritual science of self-realization.

Śrīla Prabhupāda states in his introduction to Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is, “Vedic knowledge is not a question of research. Our research work is imperfect because we are researching things with imperfect senses. We have to accept perfect knowledge which comes down, as is stated in Bhagavad-Gītā, by the paramparā disciplic succession. We have to receive knowledge from the proper source in disciplic succession beginning with the supreme spiritual master, the Lord Himself, and handed down to a succession of spiritual masters. Arjuna, the student who took lessons from Lord Śrī Krishna, accepts

everything that He says without contradicting Him. One is not allowed to accept one portion of Bhagavad-Gītā and not another. No.

We must accept Bhagavad-Gītā without interpretation, without deletion and without our own whimsical participation in the matter. The Gītā should be taken as the most perfect presentation of Vedic knowledge. Vedic knowledge is received from transcendental sources, and the first words were spoken by the Lord Himself. The words spoken by the Lord are different from words spoken by a person of the mundane world who is infected with four defects. A mundaner 1) is sure to commit mistakes, 2) is invariably illusioned, 3) has the tendency to cheat others and 4) is limited by imperfect senses. With these four imperfections, one cannot deliver perfect information of all-pervading knowledge.

Vedic knowledge is not imparted by such defective living entities. It was imparted unto the heart of Brahmā, the first created living being, and Brahmā in his turn disseminated this knowledge to his sons and disciples, as he originally received it from the Lord.”

Sometimes it will appear that there is a break in the disciplic succession. The Lord will act in His own way to reinstate the proper science.

Bhagavad-Gītā, Chapter 4, text 2, states- This supreme science was thus received through the chain of disciplic succession, and the saintly kings understood it in that way. But in course of time the succession was broken, and therefore the science as it is appears to be lost.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport to that verse-

“It is clearly stated that the Gītā was especially meant for the saintly kings because they were to execute its purpose in ruling over the citizens.

Certainly Bhagavad-Gītā was never meant for the demonic persons, who would dissipate its value for no one's benefit and would devise all types of interpretations according to personal whims. As soon as the original purpose was scattered by the motives of the unscrupulous commentators, there arose the need to reestablish the disciplic succession. Five thousand years ago it was detected by the Lord Himself that the disciplic succession was broken, and therefore He declared that the purpose of the Gītā appeared to be lost. In the same way, at the present moment also there are so many editions of the Gītā (especially in English), but almost all of them are not according to authorized disciplic succession.

There are innumerable interpretations rendered by different mundane scholars, but almost all of them do not accept the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna, although they make a good business on the words of Śrī Krishna. This spirit is demonic, because demons do not believe in God but simply enjoy the property of the Supreme. Since there is a great need of an edition of the Gītā in English, as it is received by the paramparā (disciplic succession) system, an attempt is made herewith to fulfill this great want. Bhagavad-Gītā—accepted as it is—is a great boon to humanity; but if it is accepted as a treatise of philosophical speculations, it is simply a waste of time.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport to the 16th verse of the 4th Chapter of Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is, “To act in Krishna consciousness, one has to follow the leadership of authorized persons who are in a line of disciplic succession as explained in the beginning of this chapter. The system of Krishna consciousness was first narrated to the sun-god, the sun-god explained it to his son Manu, Manu explained it to his son Ikṣvāku, and the system is current on this earth from that very remote time. Therefore, one has to follow in the footsteps of previous authorities in the line of disciplic succession. Otherwise even the most intelligent men will be bewildered regarding the standard actions of Krishna consciousness. For this reason, the Lord decided to instruct Arjuna

in Krishna consciousness directly. Because of the direct instruction of the Lord to Arjuna, anyone who follows in the footsteps of Arjuna is certainly not bewildered.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to Bhagavad-Gītā, chapter 2, text 7, states-

“By nature's own way the complete system of material activities is a source of perplexity for everyone. In every step there is perplexity, and therefore it behooves one to approach a bona fide spiritual master who can give one proper guidance for executing the purpose of life. All Vedic literatures advise us to approach a bona fide spiritual master to get free from the perplexities of life which happen without our desire. They are like a forest fire that somehow blazes without being set by anyone. Similarly, the world situation is such that perplexities of life automatically appear, without our wanting such confusion. No one wants fire, and yet it takes place, and we become perplexed. The Vedic wisdom therefore advises that in order to solve the perplexities of life and to understand the science of the solution, one must approach a spiritual master who is in the disciplic succession. A person with a bona fide spiritual master is supposed to know everything. One should not, therefore, remain in material perplexities but should approach a spiritual master.”

It is a popular misconception today that the evolution of human society means that one can now rise above accepting any authority on the spiritual path, that humans have evolved to where a spiritual master, guru, proper mentor is no longer required, and is simply an antiquated and unnecessary custom of the past. There is the widely publicized modern notion that the capacity is there to figure it all out by the mind's evolved ability. Nothing is further from the truth, and the result of this misconception only leads one to speculations, mundane pride, confusion, and the rule of the false ego. Without accepting proper spiritual authority, even the most intelligent person will be bewildered in the quest for spiritual understanding.

Bhagavad-Gītā, chapter 4, text 34, states-

tad viddhi praṇipātena
paripraśnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ
jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ

The translation of this verse is-

Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth.

Śrīla Prabhupāda states, in the purport to this verse-

“The path of spiritual realization is undoubtedly difficult. The Lord therefore advises us to approach a bona fide spiritual master in the line of disciplic succession from the Lord Himself. No one can be a bona fide spiritual master without following this principle of disciplic succession. The Lord is the original spiritual master, and a person in the disciplic succession can convey the message of the Lord as it is to his disciple. No one can be spiritually realized by manufacturing his own process, as is the fashion of the foolish pretenders. The Bhāgavatam says: dharmam hi sākṣād-bhagavat-praṇītam—the path of religion is directly enunciated by the Lord. Therefore, mental speculation or dry arguments cannot help one progress in spiritual life. One has to approach a bona fide spiritual master to receive the knowledge.

Such a spiritual master should be accepted in full surrender, and one should serve the spiritual master like a menial servant, without false prestige. Satisfaction of the self-realized spiritual master is the secret of advancement in spiritual life. Inquiries and submission constitute the proper combination for spiritual understanding. Unless there is submission and service, inquiries from the learned spiritual master will not be effective. One must be able to pass the test of the spiritual master, and when he sees the genuine desire of the disciple, he automatically blesses the disciple with genuine spiritual understanding. In this verse, both blind

following and absurd inquiries are condemned. One should not only hear submissively from the spiritual master; but one must also get a clear understanding from him, in submission and service and inquiries. A bona fide spiritual master is by nature very kind toward the disciple. Therefore when the student is submissive and is always ready to render service, the reciprocation of knowledge and inquiries becomes perfect.

Complete knowledge can be achieved only by the devotee of the Lord directly from the Lord in disciplic succession. Renditions of absolute knowledge outside the purview of the paramparā system are simply stumbling blocks on the path of spiritual understanding. Deluded interpreters of spiritual literatures, who are not surrendered to the Lord and act only on the whims of their minds and false egos, simply cheat themselves and others, and divert them from the real pleasure of bonafide spiritual life. One must follow in the footsteps of the great teachers who are in the disciplic succession in order to achieve success in spiritual life.”

The purport of Bhagavad-Gītā chapter 4, text 42, tells us, “One is therefore advised to study Bhagavad-Gītā, or any other scripture, under a bona fide spiritual master, with service and surrender. A bona fide spiritual master is in the disciplic succession from time eternal, and he does not deviate at all from the instructions of the Supreme Lord as they were imparted millions of years ago to the sun-god, from whom the instructions of Bhagavad-Gītā have come down to the earthly kingdom. One should, therefore, follow the path of Bhagavad-Gītā as it is expressed in the Gītā itself and beware of self-interested people after personal aggrandizement who deviate others from the actual path.”

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