

LESSON 1: THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

Title/Subtitle/Overview

- Title: Srila Prabhupada, Our Founder-Acarya
- Subtitle: Celebrating Srila Prabhupada's preeminent position in ISKCON, as well as every follower's foundational relationship with him.
- Overview: Sambandha (Lessons 1-3) Our relationship with Srila Prabhupada; Abhidheya (Lessons 4-7) Acting in Srila Prabhupada's mission; Prayojana (Lessons 8-10) Loving Srila Prabhupada.

Lesson 1: The Spiritual Masters

1. Guru is one, gurus are many, and we offer our respects to all of them as multiple manifestations of Kṛṣṇa's mercy. (CC Adi-lila 1.1)

“He, [Srila Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Goswami] uses the plural here to indicate the disciplic succession. He offers obeisances not to his spiritual master alone but to the whole paramparā, the chain of disciplic succession beginning with Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself.” (SP's Intro to CC)

2. What is a guru?

- “Standard knowledge is received from the paramparā system, disciplic succession. Therefore it is said, śrotriyam. Śrotriyam means ‘who has heard from the paramparā system.’ Śrotriyam...And the result is brahma-niṣṭham: ‘He is firmly fixed up in the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.’” (SB lecture 3.25.4, Bombay, 4 Nov 1974)

3. Why do we need a guru?

- To learn almost anything, we need a teacher (even to tie our shoes!), yet when it comes to studying the highest science, “the spiritual science of the self” (Bg. 10.32), we often naively think we can “do it ourselves.”
- “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.” (Bhagavad-gītā, 2.7 purport)

4. How is the guru one?

- “The guru is one because he comes in disciplic succession. What Vyāsadeva and Kṛṣṇa taught five thousand years ago is also being taught now. There is no difference between the two instructions. Although hundreds and thousands of ācāryas have come and gone, the message is one.” (Science of Self-Realization, “Choosing a Spiritual Master”)
- As we’ll see in later lessons, SP is inviting everyone to realize God and become a guru in parampara, according to one’s capacity. Here’s a preview: “Because people are in darkness, we require many millions of gurus to enlighten them. Therefore Caitanya Mahāprabhu's mission is, He said, that ‘Every one of you become guru’...[And if you think,] ‘But I have no qualification. How can I become guru?’ There is no need of qualification. ‘Still I can become guru?’ Yes. ‘How?’ Whomever you meet, you simply instruct what Kāñēa has said. That's all. You become guru.” (SB 6.1.21 Lecture, 21 May 1976, Honolulu)

5. How is the guru different?

- **By role:** “The initiating and instructing spiritual masters are equal and identical manifestations of Kṛṣṇa, although they have different dealings.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā, 1.34 purport)

“Just as a faithful son may go out for earning money and subsequently brings to his father the wealth gained, later the son may ask for some allowance from the father and whatever he receives from the father he is entitled to spend of his own enjoyment. Similarly, a disciple may hear some instructions from another advanced Vaisnava but after gaining that good instruction he must bring it and present it to his own spiritual master. After presenting them, he should hear the same teachings gained from his spiritual master with appropriate instructions.” (Sri Kṛṣṇa Bhajanamṛta, verse 48, Srila Narahari Sarkara)

Observation: In ISKCON’s global family, initiating gurus are like parents, and instructing gurus are like well-wishing relatives. Their relative prominence in our lives depends on the relationships we develop with them. Sometimes we are closer to our parents and sometimes we are closer to our uncles and aunts. If all are well-wishers, serving cooperatively in our founder-acarya’s mission, harmony prevails.

- **By qualification:** “A person who is liberated acharya and guru cannot commit any mistake, but there are persons who are less qualified or not liberated, but still can act as guru and acharya by strictly following the disciplic succession.” (Letter to Janardana, 26 April 1968)

“This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement directly receives instructions from the Supreme Personality of Godhead via persons who are strictly following His instructions. Although a follower may not be a liberated

person, if he follows the supreme, liberated Personality of Godhead, his actions are naturally liberated from the contamination of the material nature. Lord Caitanya therefore says: ‘By My order you may become a spiritual master.’ One can immediately become a spiritual master by having full faith in the transcendental words of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and by following His instructions.” (SB 4.18.5 purport)

Observation: Liberated or nonliberated, a guru is genuine if he “strictly follows” the orders of guru and Kṛṣṇa. In this way, everyone is eligible to become a spiritual master and please SP and SCM.

- **By commitment:** “The spiritual master who first gives information about spiritual life is called the *vartma-pradarśaka-guru*, the spiritual master who initiates according to the regulations of the *śāstras* is called the *dīkṣā-guru*, and the spiritual master who gives instructions for elevation is called the *śikṣā-guru*.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 8.128 ppt)

Observation: Note the progressive commitment from introducing to initiating to instructing. Whoever instructs us the most is naturally more prominent in our lives because, whether introducing, initiating, or instructing, the guru is always teaching, especially by example, the most powerful teacher. “Example is better than precept,” and “Actions speak louder than words.”

6. All genuine gurus are different manifestations of Kṛṣṇa’s mercy.
 - “I first offer my respectful obeisances at the lotus feet of my initiating spiritual master and all my instructing spiritual masters.” (CC Adi 1.35) Purport excerpt: “A devotee must have only one initiating spiritual master because in the scriptures acceptance of more than one is always forbidden. There is no limit, however, to the number of instructing spiritual masters one may accept. Generally a spiritual master who constantly instructs a

disciple in spiritual science becomes his initiating spiritual master later on.”

- In this last sentence SP indicates the natural, normative guru-disciple relationship sustainable over time. Presently in ISKCON a relatively few number of spiritual masters are initiating dozens, hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of disciples, who often receive more instruction from local senior devotees. To help our guru-disciple culture become more local and sustainable, we need to train and empower “millions of gurus” worldwide to act as local spiritual masters—initiating and instructing--as SP indicated. But, one may ask, isn’t the initiator necessarily more important and qualified than the instructors?
- “One should know the instructing spiritual master to be the Personality of Kṛṣṇa. Lord Kṛṣṇa manifests Himself as the Supersoul and as the greatest devotee of the Lord.” (CC Adi-lila 1.47)

Purport excerpt: “There is no difference between the shelter-giving Supreme Lord and the initiating and instructing spiritual masters. If one foolishly discriminates between them, he commits an offense in the discharge of devotional service.”

- Furthermore, in Gita 4.34 Kṛṣṇa famously says: “Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.”

In the word-for-word translations, SP renders the knowledge-impartment verb, *upadeksyanti*, as “they will initiate,” whereas in the verse translation SP writes, “the self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.” In other words, the essence of initiation is the instructions that prepare one to go back home, back to Godhead.

- Ultimately, it is Kṛṣṇa, the original instructor, who delivers us (“I will deliver you from all sinful reactions...” Bg. 18.66) through all his sampradaya representatives. Thus, **sampradāya-vihēnā ye mantrās te**

niñphalä matäù. “If one is not actually connected with a bona fide disciplic succession, whatever mantras one chants will not bring the desired result.” (Padma Purana) If “it takes a village to raise a child,” it certainly takes a sampradaya of bona fide gurus—different manifestations of Krsna’s mercy--to raise a sadhaka.

7. How did SP introduce the oneness & difference of God & guru in ISKCON?

- “On Janmastami Day, 1966, SP announced on the eve of the first initiations: ‘Initiation means that the spiritual master accepts the student and agrees to take charge, and the student accepts the spiritual master and agrees to worship him as God.’ He paused. No one spoke. ‘Any questions?’ And when there were none, he got up and walked out...”

‘Does what you told us this morning,’ Howard asked, ‘mean we are supposed to accept the spiritual master to be God?’

‘That means he is due the same respect as God, being God's representative,’ Prabhupāda replied, calmly.”

‘Then he is not God?’

‘No,’ Prabhupāda said, ‘God is God. The spiritual master is His representative. Therefore, he is as good as God because he can deliver God to the sincere disciple. Is that clear?’ It was.” (SPL Vol. 2)

- SP introduced the oneness and difference of God and guru as a way to test whether his followers were ready for initiation. As SP writes in his purport to Bg. 4.34, “both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned.” Howard’s good question enabled SP’s followers to pass the test.

Lesson Outcomes: *By the end of the lesson Ss will be able to...*

- Identify different usages of the word *guru*, from popular to perfect.
- Explain why we need a guru.
- Explain how all genuine gurus are one, and also how they're different.
- Explain how all genuine gurus are different manifestations of Krsna's mercy.
- Recount how SP introduced the oneness & difference of God & guru.

Transition: All Vaisnava guru/disciple relationships thrive under the shelter of the founder-acarya, the foundational spiritual master of a disciplic branch. In the next lesson, we'll examine the origin, history, and characteristics of the founder-acarya, with a focus on our Gaudiya Vaisnava line.

LESSON 2: THE FOUNDER-ACARYA

In the first lesson, we looked at the guru principle—what a guru is, why we need a guru, how the guru is one, how gurus are different, and how all gurus are different manifestations of the original spiritual master, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In this lesson we'll look at the “founder-acarya,” the foundational spiritual master of all gurus and disciples in his line.

1. Our disciplic succession is a siksa-parampara, a line of instruction.
 - “Disciplic succession means to accept the disciplic conclusion.”
(Letter to Dinesh, Tittenhurst, 31 October 1969)
 - “Disciplic succession does not mean one has to be directly a disciple of a particular person...Arjuna accepted Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and we also accept the same truth under the disciplic succession of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Things equal to the same thing are equal to one another...Another example is that a tree has many branches, and you will find one leaf here and another leaf there. But if you take this leaf and the other leaf and you press them both, you will see that the taste is the same. The taste is the conclusion, and from the taste you can understand that both leaves are from the same tree.”
(Letter to Kirtanananda, Los Angeles, 25 Jan 69)

2. Historical seeds of “founder-acarya” in the Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya
 - **Organizational seed:** Within a dozen years after the disappearance of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu (SCM) in 1534 C.E., His chief disciples, the Six Goswamis of Vrndavana, founded an organized sanga in His name, “The Visva-Vaisnava-Raja Sabha.” The “Visva-Vaisnava-Raja” is SCM, the “King of the world’s devotees,” and the “Sabha” is the gathering, or assembly, of those who worship Him.

- **Philosophical seed:** In his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī identified the fourth principle of devotional service as *sādhū-vartmānu-varttanam*, which Śrīla Prabhupāda later translated in *The Nectar of Devotion* as “following in the footsteps of great ācāryas (teachers) under the direction of the spiritual master.” (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.100; *The Nectar of Devotion*, p. 53) As a child may see his parents as everything at first, then matures to see them in perspective, so we may first see our spiritual parents and relatives (sikṣa/dikṣa gurus) as everything, then mature to appreciate them in relation to the “great acaryas.”

- **Cultural seed:** In the 17th song of his Prarthana collection (circa 1560), Srila Narottama dasa Thakura distinguished his dikṣa guru, Lokanath Goswami, from their great rasacarya, Srila Rupa Goswami. Verse 4 reads:

*prabhu lokanātha kobe saṅge loyā jābe
śrī rūpera pāda-padme more samarpibe*

“When will my master, Lokanātha Gosvāmī, take me with him and place me at the lotus feet of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī?”

“Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is described as the bhakti-rasācārya, or one who knows the essence of devotional service. His famous book *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is the science of devotional service, and by reading this book one can understand the meaning of devotional service.”

(CC Adi 5.203 purport)

Note: Since Lokanath Goswami knows it is his duty to enhance his initiated disciple Narottama’s relationship with their “rasacarya,” Srila Rupa Goswami, he is privileged and honored to assist his disciple in his spiritual quest.

- **Linguistic seeds:** More than 300 years after the planting of the aforementioned organizational, philosophical, and cultural seeds of “founder-acarya,” Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura planted the phrase’s

linguistic seeds in Bengali in his Harinama-cintamani. In Chapter 6, verses 22-23, we find:

sampradāyera ādi-gurura--the original guru of the *sampradāya*.

ādyācārya yini—one who is the original *ācārya* of a *sampradāya* [branch].

guru-śiromaṇi—the crest jewel of all the gurus.

(*Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, 1900)

While planting those seeds, SBT made an implicit connection between the originators of the four Vaisnava sampradayas and the great acaryas empowered to represent them in our Kali-yuga.

3. Advent of “founder-acarya”

- “founder Acharyya” first appears in the October 1930 issue of *The Harmonist*, p. 131: “The Gaudiya Math is also identical with its founder Acharyya. The associates, followers and abode of His Divine Grace are limbs of himself. None of them claim to be anything but a fully subordinate limb of this single individual.”
- “Founder-Acharya” next appears in 1933, in *Sree Krishna Chaitanya*, the scholarly book by Prof. Nishikant Sanyal, edited by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura (SBST). In this work SBST and Sanyal make explicit *Harinama-cintamani*’s implicit connection between the originators of the four Vaisnava sampradayas and their powerful representatives, the founder-acaryas of our Kali-yuga:

“The systems of Sree Vishnuswami, Sree [Nimbarka], Sree Ramanuja and Sree Madhva ...are connected with the ancient times by their recognition of the [remote] authority of the eternal ancient teachers, [namely] Lakshmi, Brahma, Rudra and the four [Kumaras], respectively...”

“The four Founder-Acharyas of the Iron Age professed to preach the views of those original teachers of the religion.” (*Sree Krishna Caitanya*,

Professor Nisikant Sanyal, edited by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī
Ṭhākura, Gauḍīya Maṭha, 1933)

4. Founder-acaryas of the four Vaisnava sampradayas
 - Each founder-acarya’s philosophy highlights an aspect of the relationship between the Lord and His energies.
 - In his visionary Sri Navadvipa-dhama-mahatmya, SBT describes how SCM appeared to each of the four Vaisnava founder-acaryas, foretelling His advent and mission. “From Madhva, the Lord said, He would accept his complete defeat of the Mayavada philosophy and his service to the Deity of Kṛṣṇa. From Ramanuja the Lord would accept the concept of bhakti unpolluted by karma and jnana, as well as service to the devotees. From Viṣṇusvami’s teachings He would accept the sentiment of exclusive dependence on Kṛṣṇa, plus the path of raga-bhakti. And from Nimbarka the Lord would embrace the necessity of taking shelter of Rādhā and the high esteem for the gopis’ love of Kṛṣṇa.” (NDM 73)
 - Taking his cue from SBT, Prof. Sanyal noted in SKC (164) that each philosophy of the four Vaisnava founder-acaryas, while sound, is incomplete. The teachings of SCM, however, “reconciles, harmonizes, and perfects” those philosophies as acintya-bhedābheda-tattva, the inconceivable and simultaneous oneness and difference of the Lord and His energies.
5. Founder-Acaryas are the foundational spiritual masters for all gurus and disciples in their disciplic lines.
 - Providing the core identity and relationship for all generations of their followers, Srīla Ramanujācārya and Srīla Madhācārya are outstanding examples of the preeminent position of the founder-acarya in the guru-parampara.

- In the Lakṣmi-sampradaya’s Ramanuja branch, for example, the scripture Sri Prapṇanamṛta Tapana identifies the founder-acarya as the uddharaka, “the savior of everyone,” and the gurus who follow him in disciplic succession as upakarakas, benefactor spiritual masters who assist their founder by engaging their disciples in his mission. The mission is based on the maha-grantha, the great books the founder-acarya wrote to reinvigorate the sampradaya.
- For ISKCON we may note with profit how the Ramanujis and Madhvas have survived and thrived over the centuries by keeping their founder-acarya front and center as the foundational spiritual master for all generations of gurus and disciples.

2.5 The Gaudiya-sampradaya

- By analogy to the four Vaisnava sampradayas, Gaudiya Matha literature refers to SBST as the founder-acarya of the Gaudiya-sampradaya, the Six Goswamis as the sampradaya’s adi-gurus, & Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
- Centuries before the Gaudiya Matha, Kṛsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami saw the parallel between Kṛsna enlightening Brahma and Lord Caitanya enlightening the Six Gosvamis: “Before the creation of this cosmic manifestation, the Lord enlightened the heart of Lord Brahmā with the details of the creation and manifested the Vedic knowledge. In exactly the same way, the Lord [SCM), being anxious to revive the Vṛndāvana pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa, impregnated the heart of Rūpa Gosvāmī with spiritual potency. By this potency, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī could revive the activities of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, activities almost lost to memory. In this way, He [SCM] spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness throughout the world.” (CC Madhya 19.1)

- In our Gaudiya Sampradaya, Srila Bhaktivinoda’s Harinama-cintamani offers conclusive statements about the unique position of the founder-acarya.

6. Revisiting Srila Bhaktivinoda’s Harinama-cintamani seeds in translation:

- “One should first of all accept the instructions of the *sampradāyera ādi-gurura*, the original guru of the *sampradāya*, and behave accordingly. In the disciplic succession of Vaiṣṇavas, the previous *ācāryas* are established respectfully as *śikṣa-gurus* for the *sampradāya*. However, the *ādyācārya yini*, the founder-*ācārya*, or original guru of a disciplic line, is appropriately worshiped and respected as the *guru-śiromaṇi*, the topmost crown jewel of the spiritual masters. His perfect philosophical conclusions are to be followed by all in the *sampradāya*; any contrary instructions will not be accepted.”

(*Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, Chapter 6, verses 22-23)

7. Summary characteristics of a founder-acarya in Harinama-cintamani:

- Possesses great spiritual strength.
- His teachings supersede all others and are compulsory for his followers.
- Holds a unique post.
- Is the *ācārya*, or leader, of all Vaiṣṇavas when physically present.
- Awards power of attorney [representation] to his followers who strictly adhere to his teachings.

Lesson Outcomes: *By the end of the lesson, students will be able to...*

- Identify organizational, philosophical, cultural & linguistic seeds of the “founder-acarya” concept, as they appeared over time in the Gaudiya Vaisnava sampradaya.
- Identify the unique role of the founder-acarya in all four Vaisnava sampradayas.
- Recount how the “founder-acarya” phrase advented in the 1930s.
- Identify symptoms of a founder-acarya noted in the Harinama-cintamani.

Transition: Having looked at the origin and characteristics of the founder-acarya, we are now ready to examine how our Srila Prabhupada emerged as the founder-acarya of the ISKCON branch of Lord Caitanya’s tree of divine love.

LESSON 3: SRILA PRABHUPADA, OUR FOUNDER-ACARYA

In Lesson 2 we examined the founder-acarya principle—its origin, evolution, and characteristics. In this lesson we'll look at our own founder-acarya, Srila Prabhupada, and how he realized and revealed his position as service to his Guru Maharaja, to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and to all generations of his followers.

3.1 Our relationship with Srila Prabhupada

- Write down in 108 words or less your relationship with Srila Prabhupada. At the end of our founder-acarya journey, you will revisit your words to see how the seminar lessons have affected your relationship with His Divine Grace.

3.2 What prophecies did our Srila Prabhupada fulfill?

- Puranic prophecy:

Ganga Devi to Kṛṣṇa: “O Lord, we can see that Your pastimes are about to end, and people are becoming more and more materialistic. You have been very merciful to us. After You leave, however, all the sinful people of Kali-yuga will bathe in our waters, and we will become overwhelmed with sinful reactions.”

Smiling, the Lord replied, “Be patient. After five thousand years My mantra-upāsaka [worshiper of the holy name] will appear in this world and spread the chanting of My holy name everywhere. Not only in Bhārata-varṣa but also all over the world people will chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare / Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. By this chanting the whole world will become eka-varṇa, one designation, namely, hari-bhaktas, devotees of Lord Hari. And because the devotees of Lord Hari are so pure, anyone who contacts them will become purified from sinful reactions. These pure devotees will visit

Bhārata-varṣa and purify you of sinful reactions by bathing in your sacred waters. This period of worldwide chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa will continue for ten thousand years.” (Brahma-vaivarta Purana 4.129.49-59)

- Gaudiya-smṛti prophecy: “With the powerful chopper of nama-sankirtana, I will cut the hard knots of demoniac desires from the hearts of everyone. Yadi papi chadi dharma dure dese yaya/mora senapati-bhakta yaibe tathaya. “Even if the sinners reject religion or flee to foreign countries, I will send mor senapati-bhakta [My military field commander] to go there and deliver them.” (SCM to Narada Muni in Srila Locana dasa Thakura’s Sri Caitanya-mangala, Sutra-khanda, Song 12, texts 564-565)
- Gaudiya-acarya prophecy: “A personality will soon appear in order to preach the teachings of Śrī Caitanya and move unrestrictedly over the whole world with His message.”

(Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, *Sajjana-toṣanī*, 1885)

- “He, 1896, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura wanted to introduce this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement by sending this book, Shree Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, His Life and Precepts. Fortunately, that year was my birth year, and by Kṛṣṇa's arrangement, we came in contact. I was born in a different family, my Guru Mahārāja was born in a different family. Who knew that I will come to his protection? Who knew that I would come in America? Who knew that you American boys will come to me? These are all Kṛṣṇa's arrangement.”

(SBST Disappearance Day Lecture, Los Angeles, 9 Dec 1968)

3. How did Lord Caitanya set the world stage for Srila Prabhupada’s advent?
 - In the 16th century Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s saṅkīrtana movement ignited a *bhakti* renaissance in India.

- In the 17th & 18th centuries, when pseudo-Vaisnava sects forced Mahāprabhu’s movement underground in India, the Age of Exploration and the Industrial Revolution brought technology and new horizons to Europe.
- In the late 19th century Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura revived Mahāprabhu’s pure teachings and envisioned a worldwide movement of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- In the early 20th century Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura’s Gauḍīya mission spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness throughout India and sent the first Vaiṣṇava preachers to Europe.
- In the 1960s, when our Śrīla Prabhupāda sailed to the West, the USA relaxed its Asian immigration laws, the Vatican relaxed its attitude toward other religious teachings, and the American counter-culture began to look to the East for truth.

3.4 Śrīla Prabhupāda launched the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement alone with complete humility and enthusiasm.

- As the following letter excerpt shows, when SP came to America, he wasn’t thinking of founding a new mission; rather, he wanted to revive his own spiritual master’s mission: “I came here to study the situation and I find it very nice and if you are also agreeable to cooperate...it will be all very nice by the will [of] Srila Prabhupada...If you agree then take it for granted that I am one of the worker of the Sri Mayapur Caitanya Matha. I have no ambition for becoming the proprietor of any Matha or Mandir but I want working facilities.” (Letter to Bhakti Vilās Tīrtha Mahārāja, 8 November 1965)
- Six years after founding ISKCON, SP reflected on the miracle Kṛṣṇa was manifesting through him: “When I was alone in your New York, I was thinking, who will listen to me in this horrible, sinful place? All right, I

shall stay little longer, at least I can distribute a few of my books, that is something. But Krishna was all along preparing something I could not see, and He brought you to me one by one, sincere American boys and girls, to be trained-up for doing the work of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Now I can see that it is a miracle. Otherwise, your city of New York, one single old man, with only a few books to sell for barely getting eatables, how he can survive, what to speak of introducing God-consciousness movement for saving the humankind? That is Krishna's miracle. Now I can see it.” (Letter to Sudama, 23 December 1972)

3.5 When Śrīla Prabhupāda incorporated the first chapter of ISKCON in New York City on July 13, 1966, he signed the papers with his *sannyāsa* name only, “A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.” No “Prabhupada,” no “Founder-Acarya.”

- Between fall 1965 & summer 1966, SCM showed SP that almost no cooperation would come from India, that he would have to start a fresh branch of the Gaudiya sampradaya, and that only he was qualified to lead the new international Vaisnavas. Between Sep 1965 and July 1966, SP went from obscurity to “Swamiji.”

3.6 Even though he was still only known to his followers as “Swamiji,” in 1967 SP revealed that only he was being uniquely empowered to lead them.

- Stinson Beach, July 1967. From Mukunda Maharaja’s book:

“When you die, what will happen to the movement,” I asked. “Will you have a successor who will continue your work and look after our spiritual education?”

As I heard myself say the words, I realized it had been a mistake to ask this...The swami sat silently, looking out the window at the sand dunes

and the mountains. It was high tide and I could hear the waves pounding the beach. Gulls shrieked...

The swami muttered something quietly.

“I couldn’t hear what you said, Swami,” I said carefully. “Can you repeat it?”

“Actually, it is an insult to the spiritual master,” he said a little louder.

He turned away from the window and looked at me pensively, as if he was hurt by my question.

“I’m sorry, Swami,” I said. I felt like shrinking into the carpet.

He closed his eyes. Outside a dog barked. A shallow stream of tears appeared below each of his eyes and flowed over his cheeks. He slowly wiped them away.

“My spiritual master...” he said, and his voice choked to gravel.

I was stunned. What had I done?

“My spiritual master,” he said, “he was no ordinary spiritual master.” He paused again, and then whispered falteringly, “He saved me.”

(Miracle on 2nd Avenue, Mukunda Maharaja, pp. 237-38)

From Hayagriva Prabhu’s book:

“Some of the devotees, worried that Swamiji has decided to go to India to leave his body, ask him whether, during his absence, one of his God-brothers should come to America to assume ISKCON leadership.

“The minute this question is presented to him, we sense that it is offensive.

“Swamiji becomes very grave, closing his eyes, and for a moment, he seems to consider it. Then suddenly we see tears falling down his cheeks.

‘My Guru Maharaja...he was no ordinary spiritual master,’ he says, wiping away the tears. ‘He...saved me.’

“Later, Swamiji tells us that we should have always known. There is no one to replace him. The very idea is insulting.

‘If someone comes and tells you something different,’ he says, ‘you will be confused.’” (The Hare Krishna Explosion, Hayagriva Dasa, pp. 214-15)

- Note “no ordinary spiritual master” in both memoirs, reminding us of the difference between a “regular spiritual master” and a “great acarya.” Neglected by his godbrothers, SP knows, and is now revealing, that only he can lead them as the founder-acarya of a fresh branch of SCM’s tree of love of God.

- Despite noncooperation from, and differences with, his godbrothers, references like the following remind us of SP’s broad view:

“The disciples of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja are all Godbrothers, and although there are some differences of opinion, and although we are not acting conjointly, every one of us is spreading this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement according to his own capacity and producing many disciples to spread it all over the world.” (SB 4.28.31 pt.)

“Even amongst our God-brothers we have misunderstanding but none of us is astray from the service of Krishna. My Guru Maharaja ordered us to execute his mission combinedly. Unfortunately we are now separated. But none of us have stopped preaching Krishna Consciousness. Even if there was misunderstanding amongst the God-brothers of my Guru Maharaja none of them deviated from the transcendental loving service of Krishna.” (Letter to Brahmananda, 18 November 1967)

- SP wanted us to be respectful of his godbrothers, everlastingly our seniors, and at the same time, not seek their advice about how to spread KC all

over the world. By dint of his absolute surrender to the order of SBST, only our founder-acarya was uniquely empowered to do that, and to communicate that mood & mission to all who strictly followed his teachings.

3.7 From “Swamiji” to “Prabhupada”

- Govinda dasi: All along everyone knew him as “Swamiji.” This is up until May of 1968. So Goursundar decided he wanted to call me “Govindaji,” and so he asked Prabhupada and Prabhupada said, “No, actually ‘ji’ is a third-class form of address. It’s better not to call her ‘Govindaji.’” So I piped up, I was sitting right in front of him and I said, “Well, if it’s a third-class form of address, why are we calling you ‘ji’? Why are we calling you ‘Swamiji?’” And he said, “It’s not very important.” I said, “Oh, no, it’s very important. If it’s a third-class form of address, then we don’t want to call you that. We want to call you the most first-class form of address. So tell us what would be a good name for us to call you by.” And he was very humble, very reluctant, but I pressed him, “We’ve got to change this,” and he said, “You can call me ‘Gurudev’ or ‘Guru Maharaj’ or ‘Prabhupada.’” So I said, “Well, that’s three. We need one. So which one is the best?” And he answered, “‘Srila Prabhupada’ is nice, that is the best.” So I said, “From today you will be called ‘Srila Prabhupada.’” So I told all the devotees. Some of the devotees didn’t like it because it kind of is a tongue twister, “Prabhupada,” and “Swamiji” kind of flows more easily. But we gradually started calling him ‘Srila Prabhupada’ from that time. (From *Following Śrīla Prabhupāda*, DVD 01, Remembrances, May 1968, Boston)
- If SP had said “Gurudeva” or “Guru Maharaja” were the best, the name change wouldn’t have been so momentous. SP was thinking of ISKCON for the long-term. In ISKCON’s multiple-guru culture today, we all may

have different gurudevas, but foundationally, we all have our one and only “Prabhupada,” “the master at whose feet all masters sit.”

3.8 Srila Prabhupada formally identifies his position as ISKCON’s founder-acharya.

- On July 28, 1970, when Śrīla Prabhupāda legally established a Governing Body Commission to manage ISKCON, he formally identified his relationship with his mission:

“International Society for Krishna Consciousness Incorporated
Founder-Acharya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami
Prabhupada”

3.9 On July 22, 1974, Śrīla Prabhupāda approved a GBC amendment to his earlier management document, reasserting his supreme position in ISKCON.

- “It is declared that His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda is the Founder-Acharya of (ISKCON) International Society for Krishna Consciousness. He is the supreme authority in all matters of the society. His position cannot be occupied by anyone else, and his name and title must appear on all documents, letterheads, publications, and buildings of the Society.”

(Amendments for Official Documents, July 22, 1974)

- In the mood of SP’s list today, we can add “websites.” How we present our FA on the internet—publicly or privately—is a measure of our understanding of his unique spiritual position.

3.10 Srila Prabhupada as Sarasvata

- That same year, 1974, even as Śrīla Prabhupāda was reasserting his position as ISKCON’s founder-ācārya, while he was translating the Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, he also reasserted his disciplic obedience and service to his own spiritual master in the mission of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu:

“As members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we belong to the family, or disciplic succession, of Sarasvatī Gosvāmī, and thus we are known as Sārasvatas. Obeisances are therefore offered to the spiritual master as *sārasvata-deva*, or a member of the Sārasvata family “(namas te sārasvate deve), whose mission is to broadcast the cult of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (gaura-vāṇī-pracāriṇe) and to fight with impersonalists and voidists (nirviśeṣa-sūnyavādi-pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe).” (CC Adi 10.84ppt)

- Absolute power requires absolute humility lest it degrade to absolute corruption.

3.11 Srila Prabhupada on himself as ISKCON’s founder-acarya:

- “So here it is said that origin is life, because here it is said, yato 'nvayād itarataś ca artheṣu abhijñāḥ svarāt. [He is directly and indirectly conscious of all manifestations, and He is independent]. Just like if I am taken as the origin of this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, that means I know everything directly and indirectly of all this movement. If I do not know directly or indirectly everything of this movement, then I cannot be called the founder-ācārya. And as soon as the origin becomes a knower, he is life.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam lecture 1.1.1, Caracas, 21 February 1975)
- As Kṛṣṇa is the origin and knower of all creation, so SP is the origin and knower of ISKCON, whose members must imbibe and transmit his unique spirit to carry his matchless KC gifts to future generations.

3.12 Srila Prabhupada, Our Founder-Acarya

- As ISKCON’s founder-ācārya, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the life and soul of all generations of his followers. Moreover, whoever enriches our common identity as “Prabhupādānugas” is glorious, deepening the cooperation we’ll need to take Prabhupāda and Lord Caitanya’s mission of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to every town and village on earth.

Lesson Outcomes: *By the end of the lesson students will be able to...*

1. Identify Puranic and Gaudiya prophecies that Srila Prabhupada fulfilled.
2. Recount SCM’s historical stage-setting—East and West--for SP’s advent.
3. Describe how SP went from obscurity to “Swamiji” to “Only he” to “Prabhupada” to “Founder-Acarya.”
4. Identify SP as the life & soul of all generations of his followers.

Transition: Having deepened our understanding of Srila Prabhupada’s relationship with all of us as our founder-acarya (sambandha), we are now ready to enter the abhidheya phase of our seminar: how to act on our understanding by deepening our service to his mission.