

WHEN IS AN EXAMPLE NOT BETTER THAN PRECEPT?

In all of North America no center in ISKCON is more prominent than New Vrndavan. It is a national tirtha for the devotees and a place of interest to tourists from across the continent. We think Srila Prabhupada would be especially proud of Srila Kirtananda Swami, Radhanath Swami, Kuladri prabhu and other devotees here for making such a successful project in what used to be a virtual wilderness. Nevertheless, because for many, New Vrndavan is their first close-up impression of ISKCON, apart from the media and the sankirtan devotees, we are concerned about an aspect of New Vrndavan which we feel conveys a wrong impression to visitors, is offensive to our godbrothers, and most of all, is displeasing to Srila Prabhupada. That is the simultaneous guru-puja to Srila Prabhupada and Srila Kirtananda Swami.

We find simultaneous guru-puja objectionable for the following reasons:

1. Srila Prabhupada ordered that the GBC is the "topmost managerial" authority in ISKCON. By cooperating with that body we show our love for him. The GBC ruled in 1982, that considering the unique position of Srila Prabhupada as the Founder-Acarya of ISKCON, the practice of simultaneous guru-puja must be stopped in all ISKCON centers. But here in New Vrndavan simultaneous guru-puja continues. This we find to be very discouraging, because it is a bad example for the unity of ISKCON.

2. Why should our godbrother, -- wonderful though he may be, but still, our godbrother -- be worshipped along with our guru, against our desire, -- and at his insistence?

3. Why should we, the disciples of Srila Prabhupada, when visiting New Vrndavan, one of Prabhupada's ISKCON centers, be obliged to attend the puja of one of our godbrothers, in order to attend Srila Prabhupada's guru-puja? Naturally, any devotee who wants to worship his dear godbrother should be free to do so, but why should we be forced by making it simultaneous?

4. We have heard it said that the principle of parampara authenticates the practice of simultaneous guru-puja, because (a) guru is one, (b) the puja is offered up through the chain of disciplic succession. These reasons we hold to be heretical, because:

A) We understand from Srila Prabhupada's teachings that Guru is not one in the sense of having the same identity, but guru is "one", in the sense that the message is the same. We would not consider Narada, Lord Brahma, and Vyasadeva one in any sense save and except the oneness of their message, the Srimad Bhagavatam. At guru-puja we do not worship an amalgam of gurus in disciplic succession, we worship our guru, personally. Further, we do not consider our relationship with a godbrother who takes disciples the same as our relationship with Srila Prabhupada. Besides, it

is not godbrother-puja, it is Guru-puja, and it is for the disciples and grand-disciples of the guru.

(B) Our Vaisnava doctrine is that a disciple's relationship with his guru is personal and eternal. That is to say, that no disciple of Srila Prabhupada, whether he realizes it or not, requires a go-between to Srila Prabhupada. This philosophical principle was also upheld by the GBC in 1980.

(C) We learned from Srila Prabhupada that the spiritual master is present in his picture or murti. Further, the sastra states that in the presence of one's guru, no one else should be worshipped. It is improper, therefore, to accept worship at the same time when one's own guru is being worshipped, for it seems to say one of two things, both of which are offensive and antithetical to the humble demeanor of a Vaisnava: 1) "My guru is not present in his picture or murti." 2) "Yes, my guru is present, but I want to be worshipped simultaneously anyway."

5. Last, but not least; the topmost concern of a disciple is to please his spiritual master. Specifically, by surrendering to him. This surrender is not a one time thing. It is the ongoing, moment by moment practice of the disciple, even after the liberated stage of life. Now, if I am accepting worship at the same time, in the same place, and in the same manner as my spiritual master, how am I surrendering to and worshipping him? Moreover, by the furthest stretch of my imagination, I cannot envision Srila Prabhupada accepting worship at the same time as Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, sitting right next to him. Srila Prabhupada would certainly want to worship his spiritual master. In fact, that was the example he set in Atlanta on the appearance day of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta.

These questions are not being raised merely to disrupt the wonderful transcendental accomplishments of the New Vrindavan community. They are legitimate questions that occur not only in the minds of godbrothers, but even in the minds of intelligent grand-disciples of Srila Prabhupada and visitors to the community who know enough about Krsna consciousness to understand that every bit of our philosophy implies an act and that every act implies philosophy. Here, however, is an act without any philosophical underpinning.

A WORD OF CAUTION AND A REMINDER:

My dear Godbrothers:

Let us please bear in mind that the Vaisnava way is: Because everything one does is correct, one is qualified to be guru. Not: Because one is a guru, therefore, whatever he does is correct.