

THE PRINCIPLE OF ŚRĪ GURU
AND SERVICE TO ŚRĪ GURU

श्रीगुरु तत्त्व एवं श्रीगुरु सेवा

*The Principle of Śrī Guru
and Service to Śrī Guru*



An examination of the role of the spiritual guide
and the disciple in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology



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Preface

Following the sacred discipular tradition of India, I first offer my prostrated obeisance at the lotus-like feet of my initiating *guru*, *nitya-līlā-praviṣṭha om viṣṇupāda* Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Vāmana Gosvāmī Mahārāja. I then offer my prostrated obeisance at the lotus-like feet of my instructing *guru*, *om viṣṇupāda parivrājakācārya aṣṭotaraśata* Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja. It is on the order of my instructing *guru* that I have completed this doctoral thesis on the role of the spiritual guide and the disciple in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. The thesis was submitted at Florida Vedic College in March 2008 and formally approved in June 2008.

When I first joined the Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti in 1979, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja handed me an article by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda from the *Gauḍīya* magazine. In this article, Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura discussed the relationship between the bona fide *guru* and the disciple, and the paramount importance of *guru-sevā*, or affectionate service to the *guru*. In doing so, he quoted from *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, composed by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī and Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, and from numerous Purāṇas and other sources. This was my first introduction to the subject. The article had a profound effect on me and, since reading it, I have tried my level best to dedicate my whole life to *guru-sevā*.

From 1996, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja has been travelling around the world continuously,

giving discourses on *bhakti*, selfless devotion to the Supreme Lord. He has regularly had me give lectures on the subject of the *guru* and the disciple in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, and particularly on *guru-sevā*. This thesis is, therefore, a natural continuation of these lectures.

Guru-sevā is the backbone of *bhajana*, or devotional absorption. Whoever wants to enter into the realm of *bhajana* must first dedicate his life to the service of a bona fide *guru*. Such a *guru* will never consider the disciple to be his or her own property. Rather, he will consider the disciple to belong to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the Divine Couple, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. He will transfer the disciple's attachment and dedication to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Whoever reads this work, will obtain a clear conception of the subject of the *guru* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought. For those eager to attain *bhakti*, this book is therefore a lighthouse that guides the aspirant to spiritual perfection. Without *guru-sevā*, no one can advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Over some thirty years I have gathered an extensive range of quotations and directives on the subject of the *guru* and the disciple from the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Itihāsas, as well as from the numerous commentaries, philosophical treatises, dramatic works and devotional poems, prayers and songs that form part of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava heritage. A relevant selection of these are presented in this work. I would like to thank the many individuals and well-wishers who have encouraged and assisted me in one way or another, particularly Śrīpāda B. V. Tīrtha Mahārāja, Śrīpāda B. V. Vana Mahārāja, Śrīpāda B. V. Muni Mahārāja and Śrīman Premānanda Prabhu.

I would like also to express my sincere thanks to Śrīman Madhuvrata Brahmācārī, Śrīman Acyutānanda Brahmācārī and especially Śrīman Anantācārya Prabhu for their help in transcribing and compiling the initial drafts of the manuscript. Śrīman Vṛndāvana Prabhu provided his library for research, and

Śrīman Sundara-gopāla dāsa assisted by editing the manuscript. Śrīmatī Bhadrā dāsī and Śrīmatī Śānti dāsī proofread the manuscript, and Śrīman Kṛṣṇa-kāruṇya Brahmācārī and Śrīman Madhukar dāsa completed the design and layout. Particular thanks must go to Śrīman Tamopahā Prabhu, Śrīman Janārdana Prabhu, Śrīman Vinaya Kṛṣṇa Prabhu, and Śrīmatī Nandini dāsī and Rādhānāth Prabhu for funding the printing of this book. I pray that they will quickly advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness through their selfless offering.

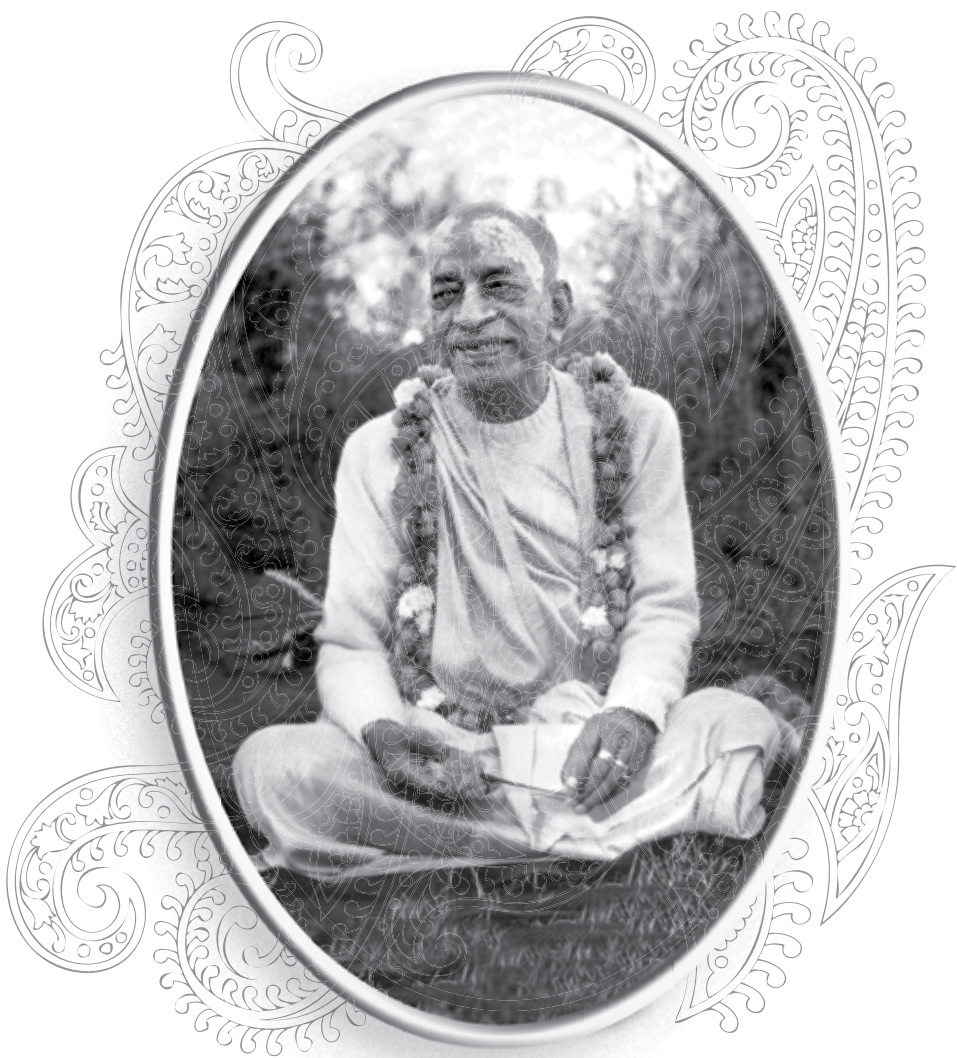
—Svāmī B. V. Mādhava (N. K. Brahmācārī, Ph.D.)



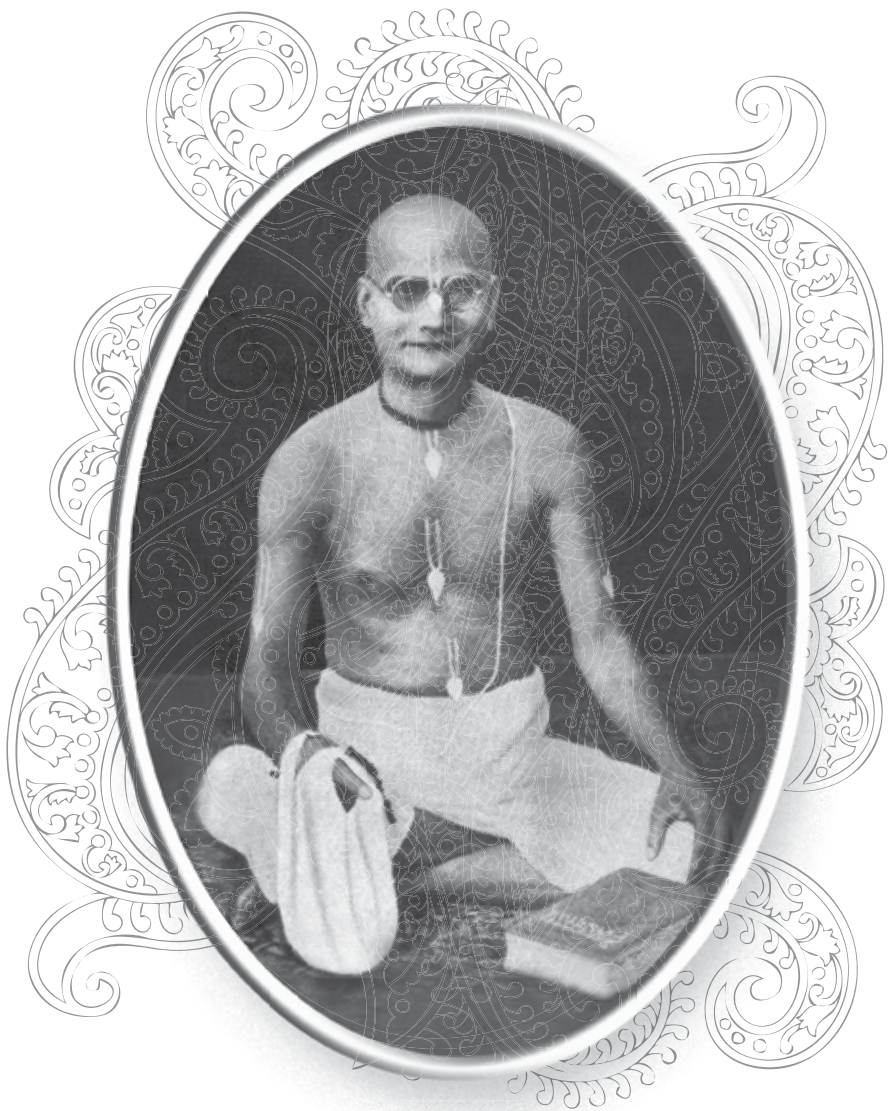
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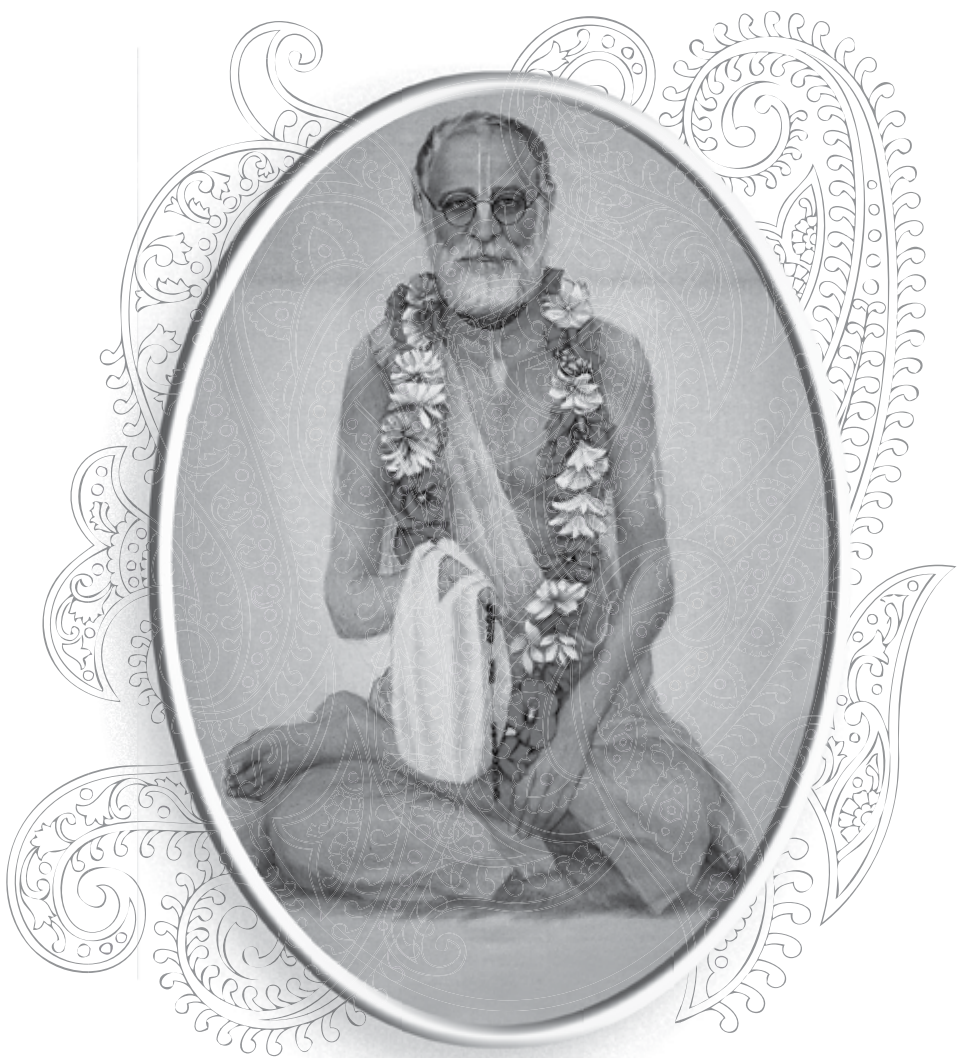
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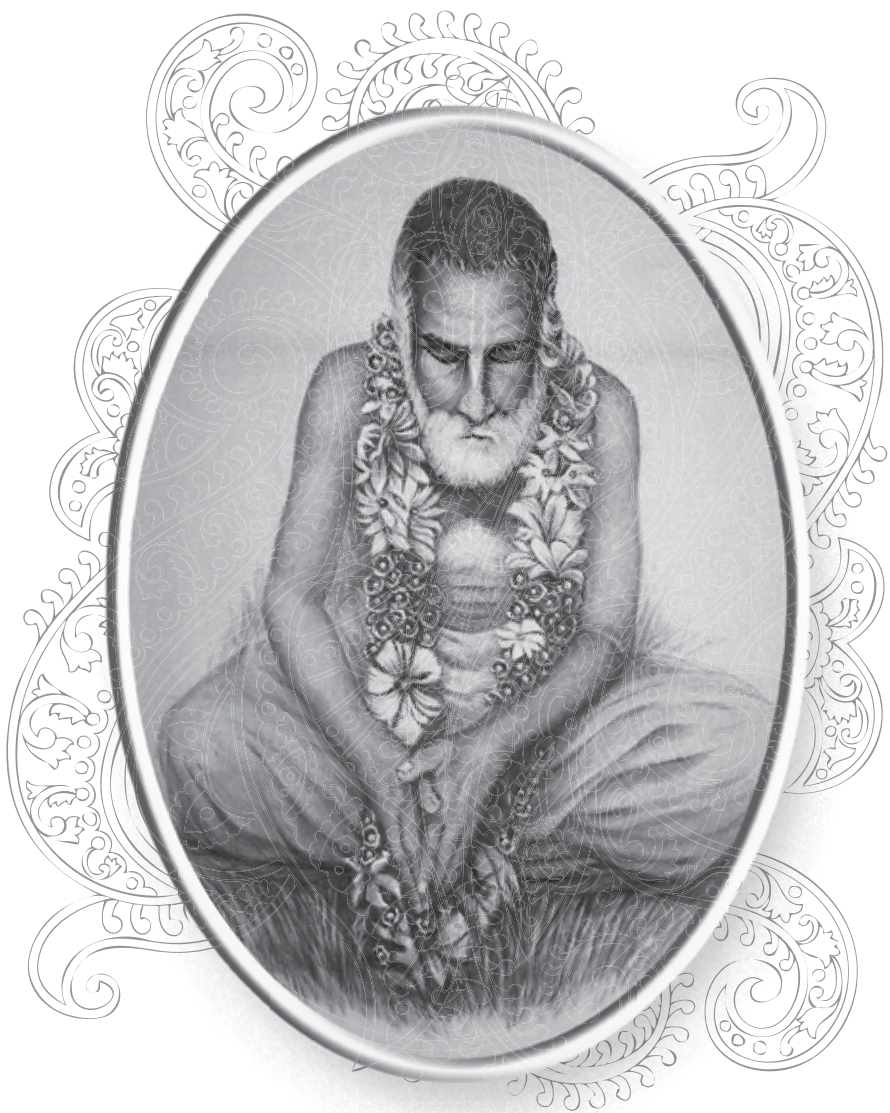
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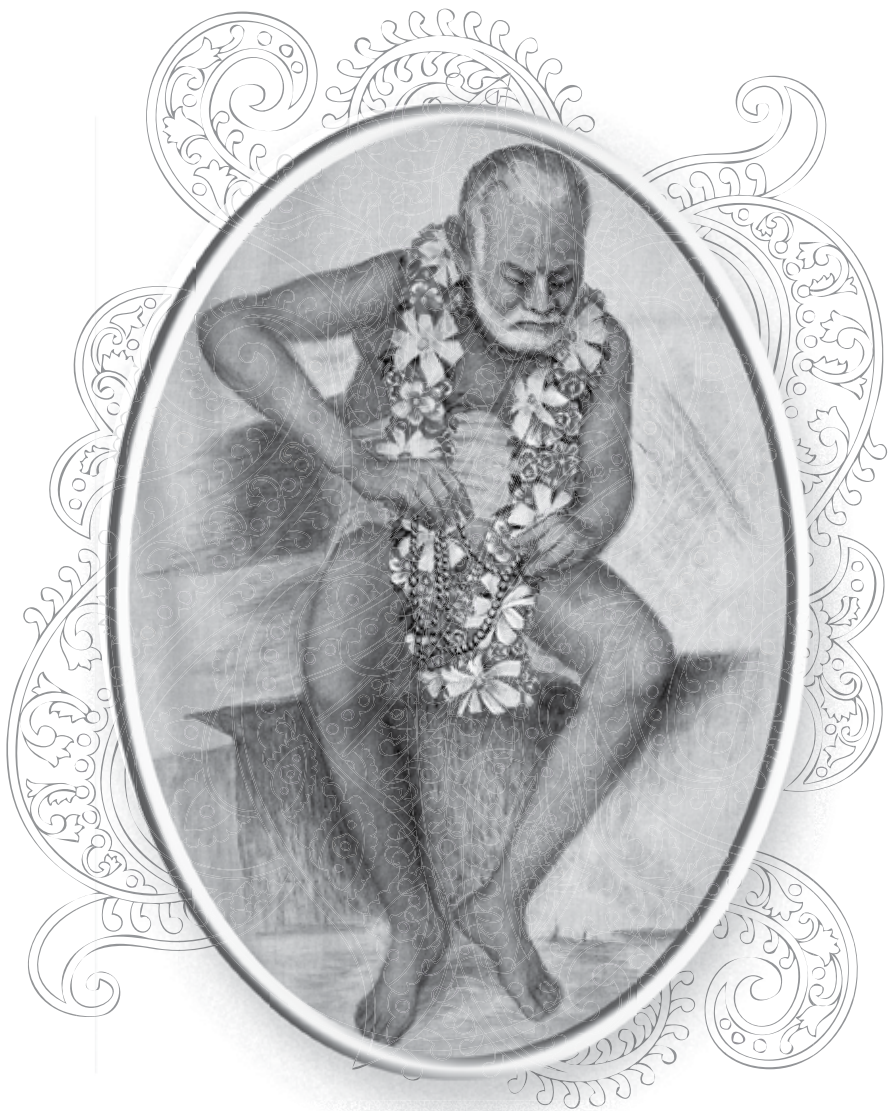
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Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda



nitya-līlā-praviṣṭha paramahansa
Śrīla Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja




nitya-līlā-praviṣṭha saccidānanda
Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura



nitya-lilā-praviṣṭha vaiṣṇava-sārvabhauma
Śrīla Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja

Introduction

 This study, entitled *The Principle of Śrī Guru and Service to Śrī Guru*, is a foundational work on the role of the *guru*, or spiritual guide, and of the disciple in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. Although the relationship between the *guru* and disciple is considered fundamental to any genuine spiritual inquiry in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, it has largely been side-stepped, glossed over or misunderstood in the numerous academic works to date on Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology.

The justification and scope of this study

Religious traditions are multi-dimensional, and can be examined from a number of different perspectives. One popular taxonomy recognises six such dimensions: (i) doctrinal, (ii) mythic, (iii) ethical, (iv) ritual, (v) experiential and (vi) social.¹ In terms of these six categories, this study sets out primarily to explore the doctrinal or theological dimension of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism – with a special focus on the line of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, this being the author's own specific tradition.

Of course, there is considerable overlap between these six dimensions, and any single one cannot be considered in complete isolation from the others. Nonetheless, this study aims principally to examine how the theology of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition treats the subject of the *guru* and disciple, even if it also moves

¹ Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), pp. 7–9.

into the ethical, ritual and experiential at times.² Accordingly, this study does not pretend to be a sociological study. Thus, while it sets out the theological qualifications of a true *guru*, it does not explore, for instance, the extent to which these criteria are actually being applied today or have been applied historically, either in India or in relation to *gurus* who have come from India to the West.

Also, while the focus of this study is Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, it is sure to be of particular interest also to scholars of and practitioners in other Vaiṣṇava traditions. This is because the theological reasoning set out herein rests almost entirely on statements found in the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Itihāsas, which are generally accepted by all four Vaiṣṇava traditions of India – that is, by the followers of Śrī Madhvācārya, Śrī Rāmānuja, Śrī Nimbāditya and Śrī Viṣṇu Svāmī.³

The Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, Itihāsas and later writings that comprise the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava canon repeatedly emphasise the need to approach a qualified *guru* to obtain spiritual understanding and wisdom. They also set out the qualifications of a genuine *guru* and a genuine disciple, and the nature of the *guru*-disciple relationship. As the subject is an underlying component of the tradition, it is fairly surprising that little

² For instance, Chapter 5 ('Can a Guru Ever Be Rejected?') has strong ethical or normative elements. Similarly, Chapter 2 ('The Ontological Identity of the Guru') briefly discusses *dikṣā*, which has a ritual dimension. The aim of the *guru*-disciple relationship is spiritual transformation, and so the experiential dimension cannot also be avoided altogether in any such study.

³ Śrī Madhvācārya is in the discipular line descending from Brahmā, known as the *brahmā-sampradāya*; Śrī Rāmānuja is in the discipular line coming from Śrī Lakṣmī, known as the *śrī-sampradāya*; Śrī Nimbāditya is in the discipular line of the Kumāras, known as the *kumāra-sampradāya*; and Śrī Viṣṇu Svāmī is in the discipular line descending from Mahādeva, known as the *rudra-sampradāya*. These four discipular lines are regarded as authentic Vaiṣṇava traditions.

attention has been given to it in contemporary theological studies of Vaiṣṇavism and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. For instance, Dr Ramakanta Chakravarti observes:

Although numerous books have been written by a host of scholars on the theological and literary aspects of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal, yet several lacunae are discernible... Almost nothing has so far been written on the reasons behind the popularity of *guru*-worship and its effects.⁴

The subject of the *guru* has largely been ignored or treated only superficially in contemporary theological studies, notwithstanding its critical importance not only in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism but indeed more broadly in all religious traditions of India that accept the authority of the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Itihāsas. The dialogue between the *guru* and disciple is established in the oral traditions of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. Indeed, the term *upaniṣad* itself derives from the Sanskrit words *upa* ('near'), *ni* ('down') and *śad* ('to sit'), meaning 'to sit down near' a *guru* to receive instruction. One of the best-known examples of this relationship is to be found in the *Mahābhārata* in the battlefield conversation between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, known as the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

To fill this academic lacuna is therefore the first and primary justification for this study. Accordingly, this study may be described as foundational or exploratory, to be used by the academic community as a basis for further research into any of the six dimensions of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism outlined previously (namely, doctrinal, mythic, ethical, ritual, experiential and social). While this study is not an exhaustive compendium that covers every aspect of the *guru*-disciple tradition,⁵ it is thorough

⁴ Ramakanta Chakravarti, *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal (1486–1900)* (Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985), p. vii.

⁵ Aspects that could form the basis of further research include the sacred meaning and importance of *dikṣā*, or spiritual initiation

and accurate in its presentation of those key aspects it does examine.

For the spiritual practitioner, this study is a valuable compilation of passages drawn from a wide range of authoritative sources on the nature and importance of the *guru*, the qualifications of the *guru* and of the disciple, the primary importance of service to the *guru*, and the dynamics of the *guru*-disciple relationship. While *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, an extensive work composed by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī and Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, contains significant material on the subject in Parts I and IV, it does not always spell out the rationale behind the *guru*-disciple relationship and the various scriptural edicts governing that relationship. Naturally, *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* assumes a great deal of knowledge and acceptance by the reader of the culture and traditions of India, including those relating to the *guru*. This study therefore aims to make the subject more accessible to the lay reader and to explain the foundational principles and coherent rationale behind the *guru*-disciple relationship. In doing so, it draws widely from original Sanskrit sources that are not to be found in *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. Accordingly, this study will also be of great value to the Vaiṣṇava community.

Unaware of the qualifications of a true *guru*, many Westerners have over the years been seduced by false *gurus*, both in India and in the West. Such charlatans do not possess the characteristics of a genuine *guru*, as set out in the scriptures. Rather, they pander to their disciple in the hope of securing and maintaining wealth, women and worship. In his book *Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus*, British professor of psychiatry Anthony Storr refers to ‘false prophets, madmen, confidence tricksters or unscrupulous psychopaths who exploit their disciples emotionally, financially

(which is examined only briefly in this study); the illegitimacy of *ṛtvik* initiation; and questions of gender, race and caste in the *guru*-disciple tradition.

and sexually'.⁶ Similarly, Dr David C. Lane writes in his book *Exposing Cults: When the Skeptical Mind Confronts the Mystical*:

The 1980's may be known in the future by spiritual aspirants as the decade of the fallen guru. Already a number of prominent and respected religious masters in India and elsewhere have had their secret, private lives exposed: hidden Swiss bank accounts; extensive cases of plagiarism; sexual misconduct; violent retaliations against detractors; egotistical power plays; drug trafficking and more.⁷

These regrettable events have led secular scholars, theologians, anti-cultists and sceptics to study and critique the role and desirability of the *guru*-disciple tradition. For instance, Dr David C. Lane proposes a checklist of seven points to assess a *guru*. One of these points is whether the would-be *guru* has a high standard of moral conduct. Another is whether he or she charges money for membership. Another is whether the *guru* is self-proclaimed or from a legitimate lineage.

Clearly, there are serious dangers in submitting to an unqualified *guru*. As Aldous Huxley points out, 'Devotion to a deified person who is still alive tends to degenerate that person.'⁸ If a spiritual aspirant is to submit to a *guru*, that individual must be a true teacher of extraordinary character with no interest in worldly affairs or in exploiting his or her disciples. Such a person is rare. Journalist Sacha Kester notes in a 2003 article in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* that finding a *guru* is a precarious venture. She points to many so-called holy men in India who are really frauds. She also relates a comment by

⁶ Anthony Storr, *Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus* (London: 1996), p. xii.

⁷ David C. Lane, *Exposing Cults: When the Skeptical Mind Confronts the Mystical* (Garland Publishing, 1994), Ch. 12. Available at <<http://www.geocities.com/eckcult/cultexpose/crucible.html>>.

⁸ Shankar Gopal Tulpule, *Mysticism in Medieval India*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), p. 125.

Suranya Chakraverti, who points out that some Westerners do not believe in spirituality and ridicule a genuine *guru*, while others believe in spirituality but tend to place their faith in a *guru* who is a swindler.⁹

The numerous sociological studies on the *guru* since the 1980s offer a variety of solutions and sets of criteria to try to help spiritual seekers recognise and avoid swindlers posturing as *gurus*. However, the sacred literature of India has already set out in significant detail the onerous criteria by which the spiritual aspirant should evaluate whether or not someone is a genuine *guru* (and also whether or not someone is a genuine disciple). The sacred texts of India even set out circumstances in which a disciple is under a positive duty to reject a spiritual teacher.¹⁰ Thus, far from advocating blind acceptance, the Vaiṣṇava scriptures require the spiritual seeker to remain vigilant and perspicacious.

To ascertain whether someone is a genuine *guru* and not a swindler, the spiritual seeker needs a clear set of criteria. But rather than apply criteria formulated by sociologists with little or no internal knowledge of the tradition, it seems far more apt to begin by examining the highly onerous set of criteria that already exists within the tradition and that has served that tradition for thousands of years. This, then, is further reason why a theological examination of the role of the *guru* and the disciple in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has real value, and is, accordingly, the second justification for this study. Indeed, it is precisely the lack of knowledge of the existing stringent criteria set out in the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Itihāsas of India that has led so many naive spiritual seekers, Indian and Western alike, to succumb to false *gurus*.

⁹ Sacha Kester, 'Ticket naar Nirvana' ('Ticket to Nirvana'), *De Volkskrant*, 7 January 2003.

¹⁰ See Chapter 5 of this study.

Dr Georg Feuerstein, a well-known German-Canadian Indologist, writes in the article ‘Understanding the Guru’ from his book *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice*:

The traditional role of the guru, or spiritual teacher, is not widely understood in the West, even by those professing to practice Yoga or some other Eastern tradition entailing discipleship. ... Spiritual teachers, by their very nature, swim against the stream of conventional values and pursuits. They are not interested in acquiring and accumulating material wealth or in competing in the marketplace, or in pleasing egos.¹¹

The false *guru* will tend either to be ignorant of or to shy away from any in-depth discussion of the characteristics and requirements of a true *guru*. This is because he himself does not possess these characteristics. The true *guru*, however, will begin by teaching the prospective disciple about the meaning of the *guru*-disciple relationship and the qualities of a genuine *guru* and a true disciple.

This study not only considers the qualifications of a genuine *guru*, but also of a genuine disciple.¹² All too often, a would-be disciple approaches a *guru* for the wrong reasons, or with a whimsical or impulsive attitude. The sacred texts of India therefore also delineate the qualifications of a true disciple. Indeed, a person who has these qualifications is far less likely to be taken in by the community of charlatans and swindlers.

The many unhappy experiences with false *gurus*, especially in the West, have led to a new trend among spiritual practitioners: the complete ‘demythologizing’ of the teacher. It has also led some Western critics to reject the *guru*-disciple tradition altogether. For instance, authors Diana Alstadt and Joel Kramer

¹¹ Dr Georg Feuerstein, *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2006).

¹² See Chapter 4 of this study.

claim in their 1993 book, *The Guru Papers*, that the tradition suffers from structural defects.¹³ These alleged defects include the authoritarian control of the *guru* over the disciple, which is heightened by the scriptural edict that the disciple should surrender himself to the *guru*. In Alstadt and Kramer's view, *gurus* are likely to be hypocrites, because to attract and retain disciples they must present themselves as purer than and superior to the public and to other *gurus*.

However, these views reveal a distinct ignorance of the function and nature of the *guru*-disciple relationship in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Informed by the numerous cases of false *gurus*, Alstadt and Kramer's work demonstrates no understanding of the function and benefits for the disciple of a relationship with a true and qualified *guru*. Cheaters are not properly regarded as *gurus*, for they lack the necessary qualifications of a genuine *guru* set out in the sacred texts of India. Accordingly, Alstadt and Kramer's conclusions are specious. Their approach is similar to that of a person studying air travel who has no real understanding of the function and benefits of airplanes, but who nonetheless reaches sweeping conclusions by focusing on air disasters.

There is a distinct and coherent rationale behind the *guru*-disciple tradition of India, as this study will show. It is not a dogma designed to allow a *brāhmaṇa* elite or a handful of charming and charismatic individuals to dominate a section of the public and earn an easy livelihood. This type of view betrays a prejudiced perspective and a lack of understanding of the Vaiṣṇava theology and tradition. To correct such misunderstandings is the third justification of this study.

Academic works on Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in the field of theology rather than sociology frequently contain errors and misunderstandings too. For instance, Dr Ramakanta Chakravarti,

¹³ Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad, *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power* (Richmond: North Atlantic Books, 1993).

having first identified a number of lacunae in the numerous theological and literary studies of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal, goes on to assert:

Later the *Dikṣāguru* was honoured as God. Service to the *guru* was described as the fundamental duty of the *bhakta*. There could be no question of any personal relation between the devotee and the deity. The intermediacy of the *Guru* became an essential concept of *bhakti*. Devotion to the *Guru* was described as something more important than devotion to God. The devotee was not permitted to do anything without the *Guru*'s advice. He was even asked to be a menial servant of the *Guru*.¹⁴

Dr Ramakanta Chakravarti says he has come across these teachings in the writings of Gauragovindānanda Bhāgavatasvāmī, and concludes that they must represent later 'theories' in the development of the role and function of the *guru*.¹⁵ However, the worship of the *guru* on the same level as God is hardly a development that occurred in medieval India. It derives directly from the Upaniṣadic and Purāṇic literature, which was committed to writing long before the renaissance of the *bhakti* tradition in the fifteenth century.

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, for instance, states:

*yasya deve parā bhaktir
yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ
prakāśante mahātmanah*

¹⁴ Ramakanta Chakravarti, *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal (1486–1900)* (Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985), pp. 81–82.

¹⁵ Ramakanta Chakravarti refers the reader to *Śrī Guru-vaiṣṇava-bhakti-kusumāñjali*, by Gauragovindānanda Bhāgavatasvāmī, pp. 6, 9, 14, 25, 28–29 and 37–38.

All the confidential meanings of the scriptures manifest in his heart of one who has supra-mundane devotion equally for the *guru* as for the Supreme Lord.¹⁶

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* is, of course, one of the Upaniṣads of the *Yajur Veda*. The *Padma-purāṇa* similarly states:

*bhaktir yathā harau me'sti
tadvan niṣṭhā gurau yadi
mamāsti tena satyena
svaṁ darśayatu me hariḥ*

If my devotion to my *guru* is even stronger than my devotion for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then may this fact cause Śrī Kṛṣṇa to reveal Himself to me.¹⁷

Likewise, Śrī Kṛṣṇa states in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

*ācāryaṁ mām vijānīyān
navamanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ*

Know the *ācārya*, or spiritual preceptor, to be Me. One should never disrespect him under any circumstance, nor should one envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods.¹⁸

There are many other such references, as we shall see in Chapter 2 of this study. If the practices of Vaiṣṇavas or Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas in relation to the acceptance and worship of the *guru* are considered unique, then this study provides the theological

¹⁶ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.23; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.346).

¹⁷ *Padma-purāṇa*, 6.128.269; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.358).

¹⁸ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.17.27.

and philosophical reasons why this is so. It shows where in the Upaniṣads and other sacred texts of India the theology finds its basis and support.

The limitations of the outside perspective

The conclusions reached by sociologists like Alstadt and Kramer highlight the dangers and limitations of approaching a subject of study from the position of a complete outsider. Some academics fall into error by imagining that they can approach a subject from a position of true objectivity. However, all positions are informed by a particular set of ideologies and prejudices.

This is, of course, most grossly evident in the works of early Western scholars and pioneer Indologists such as Sir William Jones, Horace H. Wilson, Theodore Goldstucker and Sir M. Monier-Williams, who studied the Vedas and Upaniṣads with the specific ulterior motive of replacing them with Christian beliefs.¹⁹ They sought to learn the Vaiṣṇava religion so as to be able to undermine it and convert natives of India to Christianity.

Horace H. Wilson, speaking before the University of Oxford in 1840, emphasised the need to study the Hindu religions in order to falsify them and to convert the Hindu intelligentsia to the Christian faith.²⁰ He pointed out that ‘to confute the falsities of Hinduism, and affirm to the conviction of a reasonable Hindu the truths of Christianity’, it was obligatory that one should know the doctrine and beliefs of the Hindus, for a Hindu would not take seriously one who argued with him without knowing his scriptures.²¹

¹⁹ Richard Garbe, *India and Christendom: The Historical Connection Between Their Religions*, trans. Lydia J. Robinson (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1959), pp. 214–2.

²⁰ Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), p. 1.

²¹ Ibid.

In his book *Modern India and the Indians*, Monier-Williams, Professor of the prestigious Boden Chair at Oxford, wrote unabashedly:

... when the walls of the mighty fortress of Brāhmanism are encircled, undermined, and finally stormed by the soldiers of the Cross, the victory of Christianity must be signal and complete.²²

In his preface to his famous *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Monier-Williams reveals Colonel Boden's objective in founding the prestigious Boden Chair for Sanskrit studies:

I must draw attention to the fact that I am only the second occupant of the Boden Chair, and that its founder, Col. Boden, stated most explicitly in his will (dated Aug. 15, 1811) that the special object of his munificent bequest was to promote the translation of the scriptures into Sanskrit; so as to enable his countrymen to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to the Christian religion.²³

Such ulterior motives and religious prejudice coloured the thinking of even Professor Max Müller, who in a letter to his wife in 1868 wrote:

It [Veda] is the root of their religion, and to show them what the root is, I feel sure, the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last 3000 years.²⁴

.....
²² Sir M. Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians: Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays* (London: Trübner & Co., 1878; reprint, Adamant Media: 2005), p. 218.

²³ Sir M. Monier-William, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1899), Preface, p. ix.

²⁴ F. Max Müller, *The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Fredrich Max Müller*, Volume I (London: Longmans, 1902), p. 328.

Meanwhile in Germany, Albert Weber and other scholars, witnessing the favourable reviews of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, postulated that it was influenced by Christian thought:

The peculiar colouring of the Kṛṣṇa Sect, which pervades the whole book, is noteworthy: Christian legendary matter and other Western influences are unmistakably present...²⁵

Weber published an article on ‘An investigation into the origin of the festival of Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭhami’ in 1874, and some of his arguments were supported and carried further by Hopkins, Kennedy and Macnicol. However, these theories were vigorously refuted in the early 1920s by R. P. Chanda and H. Raychaudhuri, whose arguments have won general approval.²⁶

Clearly, these early scholars did not make any effort to enter into the tradition they were studying. They did not themselves accept a *guru* or undergo the rigorous practice of a disciple, called *sādhana*. The sacred texts of India actually debar such scholars from studying the Vedas, because they lack the qualifications of a genuine disciple. This leads one to wonder under whom they studied the Vedas and Upaniṣads. It would appear that they did so either on their own, after gaining some grounding in Sanskrit, or from unqualified preceptors – for a bona fide *guru* would not consent to teach a person who has such ulterior motives.

Today, Western scholars take a more sympathetic approach to India. However, the prevalent view to this day is that the

²⁵ Albert Weber, *The History of Sanskrit Literature* (popular ed. 1914), p. 189, footnote. See also p. 300, footnote.

²⁶ Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), pp. 3–4. See also R. P. Chanda, *Archaeology and Vaiṣṇava Tradition*, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, no. 5 (1920), and Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of Vaiṣṇava Sect* (1921), pp. 128–60.

European tradition is not just another cultural tradition in the world. It is regarded as having a unique global mission to fulfil, predicated upon its distinct achievements in philosophy and pure theory. This view is nicely encapsulated in E. Husserl's judgment:

Europe alone can provide other traditions with a universal framework of meaning and understanding. They will have to 'Europeanize themselves, whereas we ... will never, for example, Indianize ourselves.' The 'Europeanization of all foreign parts of mankind' ... is the destiny of the earth.²⁷

The translation and understanding of texts from other cultures is an art, and it therefore requires personal interpretation. However, it is highly questionable whether one can translate one symbolic universe by trying to interpret or judge it from another symbolic universe. This is because you are working from different paradigms. If this is so, then an outside observer can never truly understand the nature of the genuine Vaiṣṇava, who has completely dedicated his life to the Supreme Absolute. Such an observer is unable to escape the lens of his own conditioning.

Indian thought strives not for information but for transformation.²⁸ As Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore remark, 'Every Indian system seeks truth, not as academic, "knowledge for its own sake," but to learn the truth which shall make all men free.'²⁹ This transformative experience, however, is closed to the outside observer. In other words, the outside observer cannot appreciate the

²⁷ Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 437.

²⁸ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1951), p. 4.

²⁹ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. xxiii.

transformative experience of one who is actually progressing on the spiritual path – whose perspective on life is altering daily and who is gaining deep wisdom in the living tradition. In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the outside observer is sometimes likened to a bee licking the outside of a jar of honey and never getting a taste.³⁰ The flavour of *bhakti*, or devotion to the Supreme Lord, is not something that can be grasped through academic speculation or empirical observation alone: it requires to be tasted to be understood.

The process of learning any art can be divided conveniently into two parts: mastery of the theory and mastery of the practice.³¹ For instance, if someone wants to learn the art of medicine, he will first need to learn a vast array of facts about the human body, about illnesses that affect the body, and about drugs that combat illnesses or suppress their effects. Once he has created this theoretical foundation, he is still far away from having mastered the art itself. He will still need a great amount of practice, at the end of which the results of his theoretical knowledge and the results of his practical experience will blend in him to make him a master of the art of medicine.

The spiritual path of Vaiṣṇavism may be considered an art.³² To study it as an outside observer is therefore much like studying the art of medicine or swimming without ever having

³⁰ For instance, see Rūpānuga dās Adhikārī, 'Īśāvāsyā: God-centered Society', *Back to Godhead Magazine*, Issue 32 (1970).

³¹ See Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (Thorsons edn; London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 4.

³² According to Fromm, '... there is a third factor necessary to become a master in any art – the mastery of the art must be a matter of ultimate concern; there must be nothing else in the world more important than the art. [Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 4]' In his *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.1.11), Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī defines *uttamā-bhakti*, or pure devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as being continuous, free from all self-interest, and not covered or obscured by any other practice. Vaiṣṇavism therefore fits Fromm's third requirement of an art.

treated a patient or jumped in a pool. In other words, such knowledge is incomplete or deficient. Knowledge of theory alone, however correctly understood, is insufficient to provide a true and full understanding of the subject. This serves to underline the value of a study of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism by someone who is not an outside observer, but who comes from within the authentic living tradition.

The author of this study is such a person. He was born into a family of Vaiṣṇavas in Midnapur, West Bengal, in 1956. He has been a full-time practising monk in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition since 1979, and accepted initiation in discipular succession from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Vāmana Gosvāmī Mahārāja, a Vaiṣṇava of the highest level with all the characteristics of a true *guru* described in the scriptures. For nearly thirty years, the author has served continuously as the *sevaka*, or personal servant, of his instructing *guru*, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja. Like his initiating *guru*, his instructing *guru* is also a Vaiṣṇava of the topmost calibre and a true *guru*, as described in the sacred texts of the tradition. In March 2000, the author was given the sacred order of *sannyāsa*, the highest level of a renunciant.

In 1977, the author graduated in Sanskrit with honours from the University of Kolkata. Thus, the author is fluent in Bengali, Sanskrit and Hindi. This has allowed him to read and study the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, Itihāsas and later writings that comprise the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava canon in the original languages in which they were composed. Accordingly, the author is in a privileged position to undertake this study. He has dedicated the better part of his life to serving his *guru* directly as his *sevaka*. Thus, he has met all the requirements of a disciple, as set out in the Vaiṣṇava scriptures. This renders this contribution particularly authoritative and valuable.

Objectives, theory frame and methodology

The core question this study seeks to examine may be put succinctly as follows: Is there any scriptural basis or coherent theology to justify, qualify and circumscribe the central role of the *guru* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition? More specifically, this study has the following three objectives:

1. To determine what basis or support there is in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures and theology for the fundamental role of the *guru* in the tradition.
2. To examine how, if at all, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures define the qualifications of the *guru* and the disciple.
3. To examine how, if at all, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures define the nature and limits of the *guru*-disciple relationship?

The expression ‘Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures’ is intended here to encompass all sacred literature that is generally accepted as authoritative within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. This includes the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas that glorify Viṣṇu or Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, which are known as Itihāsas, or great epics. However, it also includes the writings of the principal teachers in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition itself – including the *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* of Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī and Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī and the *Śrī Tattva-sandarbha* and *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha* of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī. These significant works draw on a variety of sacred texts, mostly from the body of literature just defined, to elucidate various aspects of the *guru*-disciple relationship in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition.

As already mentioned, this study is exploratory. It seeks to fill an academic lacuna by setting out the theological foundation of and coherent rationale behind the *guru*-disciple tradition. To achieve this, the author has conducted extensive bibliographical research over some thirty years. This has yielded

a large collection of theological and normative material on the subject of the *guru* and the disciple. The author has selected those elucidations and norms that relate directly to the three specific objectives of this study, as defined previously. Within the parameters of these objectives, this study is not selective. It does not suppress or ignore contrary evidence. Rather, it examines the full array of bibliographical material and seeks to explain or interpret any apparent inconsistencies within the contextual whole.³³

The material has been divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 considers the necessity of accepting a *guru*, and carries strong epistemic and axiological elements. Chapter 2 considers the ontological identity of the *guru*, and touches upon some of the more esoteric teachings relating to the *guru* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. These two chapters address the first objective of this study, namely, to determine what basis or support there is in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures for the fundamental role of the *guru* in the tradition.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider how the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures define the qualifications of the *guru* and the disciple, respectively. Hence, these two chapters address the second objective of this study.

Chapter 5 examines whether, and in what circumstances, a disciple is permitted to reject his *guru*. Chapter 6 considers the primary duty of the disciple to serve his *guru*, focusing on the theological foundation and rationale behind this sacred tradition and the benefits to the disciple of such dedication. Finally, Chapter 7 sets out the different types of *guru-sevakas*, or servitors of the *guru*, according to the degree and intimacy of their service to their spiritual master. These three chapters address the third objective of this study, namely, to examine

³³ A good example of this is a verse from the *Aditya Purāṇa* quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.359), which is examined in Chapter 5 of this study.

how the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scriptures define the nature and limits of the *guru*-disciple relationship.

Unless stated otherwise, all English translations of Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi quotations in this study are the author's own. These translations accord fully with the meanings generally accepted within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community. In every case, the quotation is also provided in the original language in roman transliterated form with diacritic marks. The system of transliteration used is one that scholars now accept almost universally to indicate the pronunciation of each Sanskrit sound. Source references for all quotations are provided as footnotes. Reference numbers in these footnotes are verse identifiers and not page numbers, unless otherwise indicated using the abbreviations 'p.' or 'pp.'

In this study, the *bona fide* spiritual preceptor is referred to using the Sanskrit word *guru*. This word has now found its way into the English dictionary to mean (1) 'A (Hindu) spiritual teacher' and (2) 'Anyone looked up to as a source of wisdom or knowledge; an influential leader or pundit'.³⁴ However, the word *guru* in this study is not accorded this broad or loose usage. Rather, it carries the specific Sanskrit meaning of *sad-guru*, or a *bona fide* spiritual preceptor who has met a set of very specific and onerous criteria, as set out in Chapter 3 of this work. To remind the reader of this, the word *guru* is frequently qualified in this study with the adjectives 'genuine', 'true', 'qualified' or 'bona fide'. This is to set the *sad-guru* apart from the multitude of so-called *gurus* who lack the qualifications of the *sad-guru*.

The *guru* is sometimes also referred to in this work as 'Śrīla Gurudeva' or 'Gurudeva'. This is the traditional mode of address of a disciple to his or her *guru*. This mode of address nicely conveys the personal and deeply affectionate nature of the relationship between the *guru* and the disciple. Indeed, the

³⁴ *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Version 1.0.03 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

essence of the *guru*-disciple tradition, as we shall see, is an unbreakable bond of trust and unconditional love between the *guru* and disciple. This bond – which is symbolized by the sacred thread conferred upon the disciple at the time of initiation – leads the disciple to ultimate spiritual transformation in the form of unconditional devotion to the Supreme Absolute. Upon the attainment of such devotion, everything this world has to offer, in comparison, appears trivial and worthless to the spiritual aspirant.

The Necessity of Accepting a *Guru*

Is it necessary, according to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology, for a spiritual seeker to accept a *guru*? If so, why is this? Why is it not possible to rely upon one's own intellectual acumen to grasp the Vaiṣṇava theology? Alternatively, if the spiritual aspirant has an eternal relationship with God, why can he or she not approach God directly, without the need for any intermediary? These questions are fundamental to any examination of the role and importance of the *guru* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, but have scarcely been addressed in the numerous academic works on Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. When they have been discussed, it has all too often been superficial only, casting the principle of the *guru*, so fundamental in Vedic thought, in the light of an accepted dogma.

The limits of perception and deductive reasoning

To understand the position of the *guru* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, one must turn first to an epistemological consideration of what constitutes a reliable source of knowledge in the tradition. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī does just this in his 'Sarva-saṁvādinī' commentary to his *Tattva-sandarbhah*, where he identifies various means to acquire knowledge, particularly perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). Perception refers to knowledge obtained by cognition of external objects based on

sensory perception.¹ Inference refers to knowledge obtained by deductive reasoning and analysis. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī concludes that both perception and inference are ultimately unreliable. This is because of four inherent defects found in all humans without exception: every human being is liable to be deluded or confused (*bhrama*), is prone to inattention (*pramāda*), has a propensity to cheat (*vipralipsā*), and has limited and imperfect senses (*karaṇāpāṭava*).² Indeed, these defects are so commonplace that we say, ‘To err is human’.

The only method by which we perceive the external world is through our human senses, namely, the eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin. These senses are blunt instruments, capable of perceiving only a small range of material phenomena – and only from a limited and subjective perspective.³ When the human senses are extended, as by microscopes and telescopes,

¹ The word ‘perception’ itself derives from the Latin *perceptio*, meaning ‘the action of taking possession, apprehension with the mind or senses’ (Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com).

² *Tattva-sandarbhah*, *Pramāṇa-prakaraṇam*, text 9 (as well as Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī’s ‘Sarva-saṁvādinī’ commentary on this text). See also Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa Prabhu’s commentary on this same text, in which he states, *bhramaḥ pramādo vipralipsā karaṇāpāṭavaṁ ceti jīve catvāro doṣāḥ*. See also Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā*, 2.86.

³ This position on the limits of perception accords fully with the conclusions of modern physics. Physical scientists no longer claims to be able to resolve for us what is meant by ‘real’. Instead, they seek to give only the best description of the world they can devise, and one that rests entirely on sense impressions. Albert Einstein, for instance, emphasised that ‘the concept of the “real external world” of everyday thinking rests exclusively on sense impressions’ (‘Physics and Reality’, *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, 221(3), pp. 349–50). Similarly, Eddington, the great English physicist-astronomer, warned, ‘I very much doubt if anyone of us has the faintest idea of what is meant by the reality or existence of anything but our own Egos’ (*The Nature of the Physical World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), p. 282).

they have a greater range, but we are still limited to the subjective material sphere. The Vedas therefore emphasise that the material senses have no ability to tell us anything about the existence and nature of a reality beyond this phenomenal world.

For instance, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, one of the Upaniṣads of the *Yajur Veda*, states:

*na saṁdṛṣe tiṣṭhati rūpam asya
na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścanainam*

His form is beyond material sense perception. No one can see Him with material eyes.⁴

The *Kena Upaniṣad*, which belongs to the *Sāma Veda*, expresses the same idea, emphasising that the Absolute lies beyond our powers of sight, speech and hearing.⁵

Similarly, the human mind cannot conceive of an object that exists outside time and space, that is limitless, or that is not governed by the principle of causality. The Vedas emphasise that the Absolute Truth lies beyond the categories of understanding of this observable world. For instance, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* states:

sa vrkṣa-kālākṛtibhiḥ paro 'nyo

He is free from the entanglement of the complex tree of time.⁶

na tasya kāryaṁ karaṇaṁ ca vidyate

He is not governed by the laws of action or cause.⁷

⁴ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4.20.

⁵ *Kena Upaniṣad*, 1.3–8. For instance, verse 1.3 of the *Kena Upaniṣad* states, *na tatra cakṣurgacchati na vāggacchati no manaḥ* ('The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind').

⁶ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.6.

⁷ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.8.

Similarly, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Brahma-saṁhitā* describe the Supreme Lord as *sarva-kāraṇa-kāraṇam*, the cause of all causes.⁸ This is supported by the *Vedānta-sūtra*, in the famous aphorism *janmadyasya yataḥ* ('From whom everything emanates'),⁹ which also forms the first words of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

The Supreme Lord is referred to as *adhokṣaja* because He is beyond the purview of the material senses and mind. Accordingly, the Vedas place little weight on human perception, inference, logic and linguistics as methods of acquiring knowledge about Him.

For instance, the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, an Upaniṣad of the *Atharva Veda*, states:

*nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutenā
yam evaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyas
tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām*

The Supreme Self cannot be known by any amount of discourse, intelligence or learning (hearing). Rather, He fully reserves the right to reveal Himself to whom He chooses.¹⁰

This same verse is also to be found in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*,¹¹ which further states:

*naiṣa tarkena matir āpaneyā
proktānyenaiva su-jñānāya preṣṭha*

This realization, my dear boy, cannot be acquired by deductive reasoning. It can be properly understood only when an especially qualified person speaks it.¹²

⁸ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.11.42, and *Brahma-saṁhitā*, 5.1.

⁹ *Vedānta-sūtra*, 1.1.2.

¹⁰ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.3.

¹¹ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.23.

¹² *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.9.

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* similarly states:

yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha

Our thoughts and words return to us, being unable to reach the Absolute.¹³

In other words, our thoughts and words, grounded as they are in this phenomenal world, echo against the coverings of this material universe. They cannot pierce the fabric of matter. Nor can they reach beyond the perspective of the conditioned observer.

The *Vedānta-sūtra* affirms this with the words *tarkāpratiṣṭhānāt*, ‘Logic and discourse are inconclusive’.¹⁴ The accepted purport of these words is that the discourse of one great thinker will in due course be challenged by another great thinker, whose discourse will in turn be deconstructed by another critic. In this way, such academics spend their days in fruitless debate, caught in the self-referential frame of this material world.

This is echoed in the *Mahābhārata*:

*tarko 'pratiṣṭhaḥ śrutayo vibhinnā
nāsāv munir yasya mataṁ na bhinnam
dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām
mahājano yena gataḥ sa paṁthāḥ*

Logic and discourse are inconclusive. A person whose opinion does not differ from others is not considered a great sage. Merely by studying the Vedas, which are wide-ranging, one cannot come to the correct spiritual path. Knowledge of this path is hidden in the heart of a self-realized person (*mahājana*). Consequently, one should accept whatever path these self-realized persons advocate.¹⁵

¹³ *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.4.1 and 2.9.1.

¹⁴ *Vedānta-sūtra*, 2.1.11.

¹⁵ *Mahābhārata*, Vana-parva, 313.117.

The *Mahābhārata* further states:

*acintyāḥ khalu ye bhāvā
na tāmś tarkeṇa yojayet
prakṛtibhyaḥ paraṁ yac ca
tad acintyasya lakṣaṇam*

That which is beyond matter and thereby outside the parameter of sensory perception is the inconceivable Absolute Truth. Do not attempt to approach it through deductive reasoning.¹⁶

Everything we know about this world begins and ends in sense perception. Accordingly, no one has been able empirically to either prove or disprove the existence of God. The attempt is futile, for the Absolute Truth exists beyond the range of the material mind and senses. To see Him, you need a position of objectivity; a position beyond matter. This is one of the first teachings of Vedānta.

The limits of independent study of the Vedas and meditation

If the Absolute Truth is truly limitless, independent and all-powerful, then He surely also has the power to make Himself known to the limited self. In other words, He must be able to lift a living being beyond this phenomenal world and afford him a glimpse of divinity. On this basis, the Vedas contain numerous accounts of sages and mystics who, by the grace of a highly qualified *guru*, crossed the threshold of matter and witnessed the Absolute. What they saw has been recorded in the Vedas and supporting texts. This body of literature is therefore regarded as perfect knowledge – knowledge transcendental to this world and untainted by the four human defects.

.....
¹⁶ *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma-parva, 5.12.

The *Vedānta-sūtra* affirms that the Absolute Truth may be known only through the revealed scriptures: *śāstra-yonitvāt*.¹⁷ In his ‘Sarva-saṁvādinī’ commentary to *Tattva-sandarbhāḥ*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī similarly writes:

*tathāpi bhrama-pramāda-vipralipsā-karaṇāpāṭava-doṣa-
rahita-vacanātmakaḥ śabda eva mūla-pramāṇam*

Nonetheless, the revealed scriptures are accepted as the most reliable form of evidence because they are free from the four defects of illusion, inattention, deception and imperfect senses.¹⁸

It does not follow, however, that one can understand the Absolute Truth simply by independently studying these scriptures or meditating on their import. To do so is once again to rely on the strength of one’s own mind and senses, and one will inevitably miss the spiritual essence of the Vedas. This is because the Vedas are not mere words on a page. They are secret truths concealed in Sanskrit verses and axioms, and passed down from master to student for centuries. Vedānta is the vision of the ancients, recorded in Sanskrit codes. First, these codes are difficult to decipher. Many a student has broken his teeth trying to pick apart the hard knots of these axioms.¹⁹ Without the instruction of a qualified teacher, the true meaning of the Vedas will be lost. This is why in the verse from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*

¹⁷ *Vedānta-sūtra*, 1.1.3.

¹⁸ ‘Sarva-saṁvādinī’ commentary to *Tattva-sandarbhāḥ*, *Pramāṇa-prakaraṇam*, text 9.

¹⁹ The Sanskrit word *vedānta* is a compound of *veda* (‘knowledge’) and *anta* (‘end’, ‘conclusion’), translating as ‘the culmination of knowledge’. It also signifies ‘the essence of the Vedas’. However, *vedānta* is sometimes referred to as *vidanta*, by way of a pun, which means ‘without teeth’ or ‘toothless’: in other words, the subject is so difficult that the student is likely to break his teeth on it.

beginning with the words *naiṣa tarkena matir āpaneyā*,²⁰ the word *proktā* ('said' or 'spoken') has been used. In other words, the Vedas can be properly understood only when explained by a highly qualified teacher.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī confirms this in his 'Sarva-saṁvādinī' commentary to *Tattva-sandarbhāḥ*:

*kintu sarvajñeśvara-vacanatvenāsarvajña-jīvair durūhatvāt
tat-prabhāva-labdha-pratyakṣa-viśeṣavadbhir eva sarvatra
tad-anubhave śakyate, na tu tārnikaiḥ*

But since they consist of the words of the all-knowing Supreme Lord, finite living beings who do not know everything have difficulty construing what they mean, and so only those who have by His power received special perceptive capacity are able to understand their meaning in all instances. Speculators are not able to do so.²¹

Similarly, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* states:

*chandāṁsi yajñāḥ kratavo vratāni
bhūtaṁ bhavyaṁ yac ca vedā vadanti
asmān māyī syjate viśvam etat
tasmimś cānyo māyayā sanniruddhaḥ*

The Vedas describe a bewildering variety of hymns, prayers, sacrifices, rituals, vows, austerities, histories and predictions. Simply by studying the Vedas it is very difficult for conditioned souls clouded by illusion and trapped in this phenomenal world to understand the Absolute, from whom this illusory potency and the material cosmos originate.²²

²⁰ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.9.

²¹ 'Sarva-saṁvādinī' commentary to *Tattva-sandarbhāḥ*, *Pramāṇa-prakaraṇam*, text 11.

²² *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4.9.

Moreover, while study of the Vedas may yield intellectual learning (*jñāna*), it will not impart true spiritual perception (*viñāna*). The former is merely the appearance of knowledge, while the latter is transformative wisdom that alters the way one sees the world and lives his life. The teachings of the Vedas are layered, according to the qualification of the student. But the scholar who studies the Vedas from a position of imagined objectivity does not experience their transformative power, and is thereby robbed of their actual essence. He does not obtain the qualification to enter into the progressively higher stages of learning, but remains always a distant observer, holding only the empty shell of the Vedas. He may have grasped the material words and letters, but the spiritual content has eluded him.

This is why the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* and *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* state:

*nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena*

The Supreme Self cannot be known by any amount of discourse, intelligence or learning (hearing).²³

As we have seen, the *Mahābhārata* makes the same point.²⁴ The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* similarly states:

*jñāne prayāsam udaṇḍasya namanta eva
jīvanti san-mukharitām bhavadīya-vārtām
sthāne sthitāḥ śruti-gatām tanu-vān-manobhir
ye prāyaśo 'jita jito 'py asi tais tri-lokyām*

Those who abandon the pursuit of knowledge entirely and who instead offer homage with their body, mind and words to topics of You spoken by pure devotees, dedicating their lives to these narrations while remaining in whatever social

²³ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.3, and *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.23.

²⁴ *Mahābhārata*, Vana-parva 313.117.

position they are in, certainly conquer You, although You are otherwise unconquerable by anyone in the three worlds.²⁵

The words *sat-mukharitām* are important. They signify that spiritual knowledge should be received by a qualified disciple from a qualified speaker or *guru*, who has transcended this world of self-interest and illusion. Independent study of the Vedas cannot yield transcendental perception. Such perception is to be obtained by dedication to one who has it already – that is, to one who is connected to transcendence. Such a person is able to impart this knowledge by referring to the Vedas – and in doing so will transmit not only the outer shell or appearance of knowledge (*jñāna*) but also the inner kernel (*vijñāna*), which is the ability to directly perceive it.

Taking shelter of a spiritual guide

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa advises:

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

Try to understand this knowledge by accepting a spiritual preceptor, asking relevant questions of him, and rendering service unto him. Those who are self-realized can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.²⁶

Indeed, Arjuna accepts Śrī Kṛṣṇa as his *guru* before Śrī Kṛṣṇa even begins to recite the *Bhagavad-gītā*.²⁷

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* offers the same advice:

tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet

²⁵ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.14.3.

²⁶ Bhagavad-gītā, 4.34.

²⁷ Bhagavad-gītā (2.7): *śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi mām tvām prapannam* ('Now I am Your disciple and have taken shelter of You. Please instruct me.')

To understand transcendental knowledge, one must certainly approach a guru.²⁸

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* similarly maintains:

ācāryavān puruṣo veda

One who has a spiritual preceptor can know things as they are.²⁹

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam corroborates this:

tasmād guruṃ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam

Therefore, one who wishes to know about the ultimate goal of life should take shelter of a guru.³⁰

There are numerous other such references in the Upaniṣads and Purāṇas. A qualified *guru* will be the perfect disciple of another qualified *guru*, who too will have become perfect under the tutelage of a *guru*. This unbroken chain of perfect *guru* and perfect disciple is known as *guru-paramparā* – a discipular line that has its origin, ultimately, in Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.³¹

Thus, the *Padma Purāṇa* states:

sampradāya-vihīnā ye mantrās te niṣphalā matāḥ

Unless one is connected with a bona fide discipular line, whatever *mantras* he chants will be without effect.³²

²⁸ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.12.

²⁹ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.14.2.

³⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.3.21.

³¹ See *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.1 and 4.2.

³² There are several different recensions of the *Padma Purāṇa*, and some do not appear to include this verse. However, this verse is quoted by Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa Prabhu in his *Prameya-ratnāvalī* (1.5). It is also quoted in Böhtlingk's Sanskrit dictionary (*Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*) and in the *Śabda-kalpa-druma* Sanskrit dictionary, under the entry *sampradāya*.

The process of acquiring knowledge in this chain of transmission is known as *avaroha-panthā*, the top-down or descending process of the Vedāntic tradition. It is in opposition to *āroha-panthā*, the bottom-up or ascending process of empirical and deductive speculation.

The Vaiṣṇava discipular lines explain that the highest good and ultimate aim of the Vedas is to attain *bhakti*, pure love for the Supreme Lord. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, for instance, states without reservation:

*śabda-brahmaṇi niṣṇāto
na niṣṇāyāt pare yadi
śramas tasya śrama-phalo
hy adhenum iva rakṣataḥ*

If a person becomes a scholar of Vedic literature through meticulous study but he does not absorb his mind in the Supreme Lord, then his hard labour is as useless as that of a man who works hard to care for a cow that gives no milk.³³

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says to his friend Uddhava:

*na sādhayati mām yoga
na sāṅkhyam dharma uddhava
na svādhyāyas tapas tyāgo
yathā bhaktir mamorjitā*

I am not controlled by those who practise *yoga*, Sāṅkhya philosophy, religious work, study of the Vedas, penance or renunciation. Uddhava, I am controlled by *bhakti*. Those who have firm *bhakti* for Me control Me by their love.³⁴

Like Śrī Kṛṣṇa, *bhakti* is also not to be had through mere empirical study, scholarship or meditation. Rather, it is a gift

³³ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.11.18.

³⁴ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.14.20.

from one who already possesses it. In other words, it is transferred from the heart of the genuine, qualified *guru* to the heart of the genuine seeker or disciple. This, indeed, is the true meaning of *dikṣā*, or spiritual initiation, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

The *Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa* makes it clear that *bhakti* is obtained only from one who possesses it:

bhaktis tu bhagavad-bhakta saṅgena parijāyate

Bhakti awakens through the association of devotees of the Supreme Lord.³⁵

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Prahlāda Mahārāja makes the same point, having heard and understood it from Śrī Nārada in discipular succession:

*naiṣāṁ matis tāvad urukramāṅghriṁ
spṛśaty anarthāpagamo yad-arthaḥ
mahīyasāṁ pāda-rajo-'bhiṣekam
niṣkiñcanānām na vṛṇīta yāvat*

As long as they do not cover themselves in the dust of the feet of the great souls, persons addicted to sense pleasure cannot become free from the bondage of this world and attain the lotus-like feet of the Supreme Lord, who is celebrated for His uncommon activities.³⁶

Indeed, this point is repeatedly emphasised in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Consequently, it is also echoed throughout the entire canon of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature. For instance, Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī states in his *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*:

*mahat-kṛpā vinā kona karme 'bhakti' naya
kṛṣṇa-bhakti dure raho saṁsāra nahe kṣaya*

³⁵ *Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa*, 4.33.

³⁶ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 7.5.32.

Unless one obtains the mercy of the pure devotee one cannot attain *bhakti*. To say nothing of *bhakti* for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, one cannot even become free from the bondage of material life.³⁷

The company of exalted devotees is so highly prized because it is able to confer *bhakti*, that rarest of treasures, to the spiritual seeker. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* states:

*tulayāma lavenāpi
na svargaṁ nāpunar-bhavam
bhagavat-saṅgi-saṅgasya
martyānām kim utāśiṣaḥ*

The value of even a moment's association with a pure devotee cannot be compared to the attainment of heaven or liberation from matter, what to speak of worldly riches, which are meant for those who are destined to die.³⁸

Bhakti is the essence of transcendental knowledge. Therefore, a pure devotee who bestows it upon a spiritual seeker is to be regarded as his or her *guru*. Without taking shelter of such a true and realized *guru*, *bhakti* will remain distant and elusive. It is like a person who studies a jar of honey, but never thinks to open the jar and relish its contents.

There is a further reason why accepting a *guru* is fundamental. Spiritual life is difficult: the road is long and has many dangers. The *guru* is one who guides the disciple on this path, continually correcting his trajectory ever so slightly so that he remain always on course. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* expresses this as follows:

*uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata
kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā
durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti*

³⁷ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya, 22.51.

³⁸ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 1.18.13.

Arise! Awake! Approach the great and learn. That path is like the sharp edge of a razor, so say the wise – hard to tread and difficult to cross.³⁹

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam poetically expresses the same idea using the analogy of a boat and its captain or navigator:

*nṛ-deham ādyaṁ su-labhaṁ su-durlabhaṁ
plavaṁ su-kalpaṁ guru-karṇadhāraṁ
mayānukūlena nabhasvateritaṁ
pumān bhavābधिṁ na taret sa ātma-hā*

While the human body, which permits one to attain all benefit in life, is obtained automatically in due course, it is a rare facility that may be likened to a dependable boat. The *guru* is the navigator, and I [Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in the form of His instructions] am the favourable winds that propel it on its course. Considering this, one who does not use this human life to cross the ocean of repeated birth and death is verily the killer of his own soul.⁴⁰

So long as we are entrapped in this world of illusion, our mind and intelligence lack clarity, and we are likely to slip on the razor-sharp edge of spiritual life. But the *guru* personally takes responsibility for the disciple's progress, and regularly offers direct guidance to ensure the disciple remains on the path of the *mahājānas*, or great ones.⁴¹ Thus, the *guru* is our compass. Without a compass, we are lost in the raging sea of material existence.

As this chapter demonstrates, the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and later writings that comprise the Gauḍīya canon repeatedly emphasise the need to approach a qualified *guru* to obtain true

³⁹ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.3.14.

⁴⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.20.17.

⁴¹ See *Mahābhārata*, Vana-parva, 313.117: *mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ* ('One should follow the path traversed by the great ones').

spiritual understanding. The Upaniṣads declare that the Absolute lies beyond the reach of the mind and senses. Empirical study and logical analysis are therefore impotent in approaching the Absolute. Independent study of the Vedic scriptures, which record the mystical experiences of the sages, also cannot take one to the Absolute; nor can independent meditation or contemplation on their hidden import. The Sanskrit verses and axioms of the scriptures are not only difficult to comprehend, but their essence lies in transformative wisdom that is not easily attained. The ultimate goal of the Vedas is *bhakti*, or unconditional love for the Supreme Lord. *Bhakti* cannot be isolated, examined or appropriated like ordinary objects of this world. Rather, it is independent and difficult to attain. It is transmitted from the heart of a qualified *guru* who possesses it to the heart of a qualified disciple. The qualified *guru* is one who guides the student on the path to spiritual perfection, having traversed that path already.

The Ontological Identity of the Guru

In the previous chapter, we explored the reasons why the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition places such emphasis on the need for a spiritual aspirant to accept a bona fide *guru*. In this chapter, we turn to the nature of the *guru*. This brings us within the ambit of some of the more esoteric teachings of the tradition. Specifically, this chapter looks at the etymology of the Sanskrit term *guru*, the nature of the *guru* as non-different from God, worship of the *guru* on the same level as God, and the four types of *gurus*.

Etymology of the word ‘guru’

The Sanskrit word *guru* stems from the verbal root *gri*, which means ‘to invoke’ or ‘to praise’.¹ Accordingly, the *guru* is that person who invokes the Supreme Lord on behalf of the disciple. The disciple therefore always worships the *guru* before worshipping the Supreme Lord. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself affirms this:

*prathamam tu guruṁ pūjya
tataś caiva mamārcanam
kurvan siddhim avāpnoti
hy anyathā niṣphalam bhavet*

¹ Leza A. Lowitz and Reema Datta, *Sacred Sanskrit Words* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2004), p. 85.

If anyone worships his *guru* first and then worships Me, he certainly achieves perfection. If he does not do so, his worship bears no fruit.²

Expressed differently, the *guru* is that person whom the disciple invokes or praises before worshipping the Supreme Lord or before beginning any endeavour on the spiritual path.

As an adjective, *guru* means ‘heavy’ or ‘weighty’, in the metaphorical sense of heavy with spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Thus, Swami B. B. Tirtha defines the term *guru* as ‘one who is heavy with knowledge of the Absolute and who removes nescience with the light of the divine’.³ As an adjective, *guru* is also associated with gravity of disposition. Indeed, Barnhart’s *Dictionary of Etymology* compares *gravis* – Latin for grave, weighty or serious – as cognate with the Sanskrit *guru*.⁴

This brings us to a popular, traditional etymology of the term *guru* that is based on the interplay between darkness and light. Sometimes it is said that the syllables *gu* and *ru* stand for darkness and light, respectively.⁵ The *guru* is seen as one who

² Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.344).

³ Swami B. B. Tirtha, *A Taste of Transcendence* (Mandala Publishing, 2002) p. 161. See also Jeffrey Hopkins, *Reflections on Reality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 72, and Jean Varene and Derek Coltman, *Yoga and the Hindu Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 226.

⁴ John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 133.

⁵ John Grimes ascribes this etymology to the ‘Guru-gītā’, a spiritual text in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which takes the form of a dialog between Śiva and Pārvatī on the nature of the *guru* and the *guru-disciple* relationship: see John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 133. M. Burley and D. Frawley ascribe this etymology to the *Advaya-tāraka Upaniṣad*: see M. Burley

brings the disciple from spiritual ignorance (darkness) to spiritual illumination (light). For instance, the *Gautamīya Tantra* states:

*om ajñāna-timirāndhasya
jñānāñjana-śalākayā
cakṣur unmilitaṁ yena
tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ*

I offer my obeisance to the *guru* and pray that, with the torchlight of divine knowledge, he opens my eyes, which have been blinded by the darkness of ignorance.⁶

In this metaphor, spiritual knowledge, or *bhakti*, is compared to light, and spiritual ignorance to darkness. Spiritual ignorance is everything that prevents one from serving the Supreme Lord continuously without any vestige of self-interest. This ignorance causes one to turn away from the Supreme Lord and become entangled in sinful activity in this world.

Interestingly, this verse from the *Gautamīya Tantra* has close parallels with the definition of *dīkṣā*, or initiation, in the *Viṣṇu-rahasya*, which is quoted as follows by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha*:

*divyaṁ jñānaṁ yato dadyāt
kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayaṁ
tasmāt dīkṣeti sā proktā
deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ*

and D. Frawley, *Hatha Yoga: Its Context, Theory, and Practice* (Asian Educational Services, 2000), p. 65. However, Reender Kranenborg calls this a ‘people’s etymology’ (Reender Kranenborg, *Neohindoeïstische bewegingen in Nederland: een encyclopedisch overzicht* [English: *Neo-Hindu movements in the Netherlands*] (Kampen Kok cop., 2002), p. 50).

⁶ Quoted and ascribed to the *Gautamīya Tantra* by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda in his *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (Bhaktivedanta VedaBase 2003, Bhaktivedanta Archives, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust), 8.1.11 (purport) and 8.3.25 (purport).

The process by which transcendental knowledge is imparted and sinful activity is completely destroyed is called *dīkṣā*, according to those who are expert in the revealed scriptures.⁷

The *guru* is therefore that person who transmits spiritual knowledge to the disciple, and this spiritual knowledge has the transformative effect of destroying the disciple's suffering and bondage to this world. In the next chapter, we shall examine the strict criteria of one who is qualified to fulfil this role.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the spiritual archetype of the guru

Only Śrī Kṛṣṇa has complete knowledge of the process for attaining the ultimate goal of *bhakti*, or selfless devotion for Him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the original source of all knowledge, is the original, collective or undivided *guru*. This is confirmed in the scriptures. For instance, the *Gopāla-sahasra-nāma* refers to Śrī Kṛṣṇa as *jagad-guruḥ*, the 'guru of the universe'.⁸ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* refers to the Supreme Lord as *jagatām paraṁ guruḥ*, the 'supreme guru of the universe'.⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* further states:

yo vidvān sa gurur hariḥ

One who is truly educated is fit to accept the position of the *guru*, who is non-different from Śrī Kṛṣṇa.¹⁰

There are numerous such statements. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Arjuna addresses Śrī Kṛṣṇa as follows :

*pitāsi lokasya carācarasya
tvam asya pūjyaś ca gurur garīyān*

⁷ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (2.9) and by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbhā* (Anuccheda 283).

⁸ *Gopāla-sahasra-nāma*, 19.99.

⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 12.3.43.

¹⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.29.51.

*na tvat-samo 'sty abhyadhikaḥ kuto 'nyo
loka-traye 'py apratima-prabhāva*

O possessor of unrivalled power! You are the father, the most worshipful, the *guru*, and the most honoured person in this entire world of moving and non-moving beings. No one in the three worlds is Your equal, so who could possibly be greater than You? ¹¹

According to the *Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma-stotra* of the *Mahābhārata*, two of the Supreme Lord's names are *Guru*, which denotes the spiritual master, and *Gurutama*, which signifies the 'greatest spiritual master'.¹² The Supreme Lord is the very author and knower of the Vedas, and the teacher in all spiritual study. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa declares:

*vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo
vedānta-kṛd veda-vid eva cāham*

By all the Vedas, I am to be known. Indeed, I am the origin of Vedānta and the knower of the Vedas.¹³

Indeed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that He is the origin and guardian of the ancient tradition of discipular succession.¹⁴ Accordingly, He is the original *guru*. The name *Gurutama* indicates that the Supreme Lord is also the *guru* of all

¹¹ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 11.43. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja's *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā* (with *bhāvānuvāda* of the commentary of Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Tākura and commentary by Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja) (Vrindavan, India: Śrī Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti, 2000), p. 699. Used with permission.

¹² *Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma-stotra*, 23. *Guru* and *Gurutama* are the 209th and 210th names of Śrī Viṣṇu contained in *Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma-stotra*.

¹³ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 15.15.

¹⁴ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.1–3.

gurus. He is therefore the origin of all spiritual knowledge. The name Gurutama also means ‘heavier than the heaviest’.

The *Manu-smṛti* affirms this:

*gurur brahmā gurur viṣṇur
gurur devo maheśvaraḥ
gurur eva param brahma
tasmāt sampūjayet sadā*

The *guru* is none other than Brahmā. He is none other than Viṣṇu. He is none other than Śiva. Indeed, the *guru* is the supreme Absolute Truth. Therefore, one should carefully worship the *guru* at all times.¹⁵

Śrī Brahmā is the cosmic creator, Śrī Viṣṇu is the maintainer of the cosmic universe, and Śrī Śiva is the annihilator of the cosmic creation.¹⁶ Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Absolute Truth, the origin of all incarnations. The *Manu-smṛti* is stating here that the *guru* is Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.

The Varāha Purāṇa corroborates this:

*guruḥ śrī-brahmano viṣṇuḥ
surāṇām ca guror guruḥ*

Śrī Viṣṇu is the *guru* of Brahmā, and is thus the *guru* of the *guru* of the demigods.¹⁷

¹⁵ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.352).

¹⁶ Like Śrī Brahmā, who manifests this universe, the *guru* gives the disciple the seed of *bhakti*, from which manifests the disciple’s relationship of love with the Supreme Lord. Like Śrī Viṣṇu, who maintains and protects the universe, the *guru* nourishes and protects the *bhakti* of his disciple. Like Śiva, the destroyer of the cosmos, the *guru* vanquishes the disciple’s spiritual ignorance and suffering in this world.

¹⁷ Quoted by Śrī Madhvācārya in his commentary to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.29.15.

The Varāha Purāṇa then goes on to state:

*mūla-bhūto guruḥ sarva-
janānām puruṣottamaḥ*

He is the Supreme Person and the existential root of the *guru* of all living beings.¹⁸

The ‘Gītā-dhyānam’ and ‘Śrī Kṛṣṇāṣṭakam’, both renowned throughout India, echo this:

kṛṣṇam vande jagad-gurum

I humbly prostrate to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the universal *guru*.¹⁹

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells His confidant Uddhava:

*ācāryam mām vijānīyān
navamanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ*

Know the *ācārya*, or spiritual preceptor, to be Me. One should never disrespect him under any circumstance, nor should one envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods.²⁰

Nārada Ṛṣi similarly instructs Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira:

.....
¹⁸ Quoted by Śrī Madhvācārya in his commentary to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.29.15.

¹⁹ ‘Gītā-dhyānam’, verse 5, and ‘Śrī Kṛṣṇāṣṭakam’, verse 1. ‘Gītā-dhyānam’ is a traditional short poem sometimes found as a prefatory inclusion in editions of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. ‘Śrī Kṛṣṇāṣṭakam’ referred to here is not the prayer composed by Śaṅkarācārya, but a devotional hymn composed by an unknown author.

²⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.17.27; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.347).

*yasya sākṣād bhagavati
jñāna-dīpa-prade gurau
martyāsad-dhīḥ śrutam tasya
sarvaṁ kuñjara-śaucavat*

The *guru*, who enlightens with the torchlight knowledge, is directly the Supreme Lord. If someone has the false idea that the *guru* is an ordinary human being, his study of the Vedas is like the bathing of an elephant.²¹

After an elephant comes out of a lake, it at once throws dust all over its body. Thus, his act of bathing is considered futile. Similarly, a person's attempts to understand the Vedas are futile if he considers the *guru* to be an ordinary mortal. This is because the Vedas instruct one to worship the *guru*, who is the direct representative of the Supreme Lord and non-different from Him. One who ignores this, thinking the *guru* to be different from the Supreme Lord, has already rejected the Vedas.

In his commentary to this verse, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes:

*sākṣād-bhagavatīti bhagavad-amśa-buddhir api gurau na
kāryeti bhāvaḥ*

You are not to think of the *guru* even as a portion of the Supreme Lord, but as the Supreme Lord Himself – *sākṣād bhagavān*.

In his celebrated prayer to the *guru* called 'Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam', Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura reinforces this:

*sākṣād-dharitvena samasta-śāstrair
uktas tathā bhāvyata eva sadbhiḥ
kintu prabhor yaḥ priya eva tasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*

²¹ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 7.15.26; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (4.349).

All the scriptures proclaim Śrī Gurudeva is *sākṣāt hari*, the direct potency of Śrī Hari, and is thus considered by saintly authorities to be His non-different representative. Because Śrī Gurudeva is so dear to the Lord, being His confidential servitor (*acintya-bhedābheda-prakāśa-vigraha*, the inconceivable different and non-different worshipful manifestation of the Lord), I offer prayers unto his lotus feet.²²

Thus, the Supreme Lord is the collective or undivided *guru*, the original spiritual archetype of the *guru*. He is the sum total of all *gurus*.²³ To destroy the spiritual ignorance in this world and introduce selfless devotion, He manifests as the innumerable separate forms of the bona fide *guru*.²⁴

The guru as an empowered avatar of the Supreme Lord

In Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu explains to Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī:

*sva yaṁ-rūpa, tad-ekātma-rūpa, āveśa – nāma
prathamei tina-rūpe rahena bhagavān*

The Supreme Lord exists in three principal forms: *svayaṁ-rūpa*, *tad-ekātma-rūpa* and *āveśa-rūpa*.²⁵

²² Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, 'Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam', 7. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja's Śrī Gauḍīya Gītiguccha (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 21. Used with permission. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's complete 'Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam' is included in the Appendix to this study.

²³ Denoted by the Sanskrit term *samaṣṭi-guru*.

²⁴ Denoted by the Sanskrit term *vyaṣṭi-guru*.

²⁵ Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 20.165. *Svayaṁ-rūpa* denotes the Supreme Lord's original form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as established by verse 1.3.28 of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam: *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayaṁ* ('Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the original Personality of Godhead'). *Ekātma-rūpa* denotes the various forms of the Supreme

In his *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī defines *āveśa-rūpa* as follows:

*jñāna-śakty-ādi-kalayā
yatrāviṣṭo janārdanaḥ
ta āveśā nigadyante
jīvā eva mahattamāḥ*

A living entity who is specifically empowered by Śrī Kṛṣṇa with knowledge or strength is technically known as *āveśa-rūpa*.²⁶

In *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī confirms this:

kṛṣṇa-śakti vinā nahe tāra pravartana

Unless a person is empowered by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he cannot spread [the holy name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa].²⁷

Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī is referring here to *āveśa-rūpa*. The Supreme Lord empowered the four Kumāras (namely, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanat-kumāra) with his knowledge potency, and therefore they are considered the *āveśa-avatāras*, or empowered incarnations, of knowledge. The Supreme Lord also empowered Pṛthu Mahārāja with his potency of nourishment, known as *pālana-śakti*, and thus he is renowned as the *āveśa-avatāra* of this potency. The Supreme Lord similarly infused Nārada Ṛṣi with His *bhakti* potency, and so Nārada is known as the *āveśa-avatāra* of *bhakti*. Any bona fide *guru* in the line of Nārada Ṛṣi who is attracting persons to the service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and is always glorifying Śrī Kṛṣṇa's name, qualities, beauty and pastimes without ever seeking his own happiness or comfort

.....
Lord that exist simultaneously with the *svayam-rūpa*, but appear to be different in bodily features and specific activities. *Āveśa-rūpa* is defined in this study.

²⁶ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta*, Pūrva-khaṇḍa, 18.

²⁷ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā, 7.11.

is undoubtedly also an *āveśa-avatāra*, or the *āveśa-rūpa* of the Supreme Lord. Accordingly, such a personality is of the same nature as the Supreme Lord. He is simultaneously different and non-different from the Supreme Lord.

Worship of the guru on the same level as the Supreme Lord

The Supreme Lord manifests in two ways: as *viṣaya-bhagavān* and *āśraya-bhagavān*. The former is the Supreme Lord as the supreme enjoyer, the object of *bhakti*. The latter is the Supreme Lord as the abode of *bhakti*, or the bona fide *guru*. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* defines *viṣaya-bhagavān* as follows:

*aiśvaryasya samagrasya
vīryasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ
jñāna-vairāgyayoś caiva
ṣaṇṇām bhagam itiṅganā*

Bhagavān is He who possesses the six categories of opulence in full – namely, wealth, strength, fame, beauty, knowledge and renunciation.²⁸

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* also defines *āśraya-bhagavān*:

*ayatim niyatim caiva
bhūtānam agatim gatim
vetti vidyām avidyām ca
sa vācya bhagavān iti*

One who knows the difference between what is auspicious and what is inauspicious, between the aim of life of the living entities and what are false destinations, and between knowledge and ignorance is referred to as *bhagavān*.²⁹

²⁸ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 6.5.47.

²⁹ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 6.5.78. The first line sometimes appears as *utpattim pralayaṁ caiva* ('and of creation and destruction').

This is a description of the bona fide *guru*. Thus, when the scriptures direct one to worship Bhagavān, the Supreme Lord, they in fact direct one to worship both *viṣaya-bhagavān* and *āśraya-bhagavān*, or the *guru*. Indeed, it is more important to worship the *guru* than to worship the Supreme Lord, because service to the *guru* bestows the ultimate objective of selfless love for the Supreme Lord. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the supreme enjoyer, does not possess the divine love for Himself for which the spiritual aspirant on the path of *bhakti* aspires. That divine love – known as *prema* – exists in the heart of His exalted devotee, the *guru*.

As we have seen, the disciple is advised always to worship the *guru* before worshipping the Supreme Lord:

*prathamam tu guruṁ pūjya
tataś caiva mamārcanam
kurvan siddhim avāpnoti
hy anyathā niṣphalam bhavet*

If anyone worships his *guru* first and then worships Me, he certainly achieves perfection. If he does not do so, his worship bears no fruit.³⁰

The *Padma-purāṇa* affirms this:

*bhaktir yathā harau me'sti
tadvan niṣṭhā gurau yadi
mamāsti tena satyena
svam darśayatu me hariḥ*

If my devotion to my *guru* is even stronger than my devotion for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then may this fact cause Śrī Kṛṣṇa to reveal Himself to me.³¹

³⁰ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.344).

³¹ *Padma-purāṇa*, 6.128.269; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.358).

This conception is clearly supported in the Upaniṣads. For instance, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, one of the Upaniṣads of the *Yajur Veda*, states unreservedly:

*yasya deve parā bhaktir
yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ
prakāśante mahātmanāḥ*

All the confidential meanings of the scriptures manifest in the heart of one who has supra-mundane devotion equally for the *guru* as for the Supreme Lord.³²

Without the mercy of the *guru*, the disciple is like a lotus flower in a dried up lake. The *Jayadākhyāna Samhitā* says:

*nārāyaṇo 'pi vikṛtiṁ yāti
guroḥ pracyutasya durbuddheḥ
kamalaṁ jalād apetaṁ
śoṣayati ravir na poṣayati*

The Supreme Lord abandons that foolish person who neglects his *guru*, just as the sun withers a lotus flower that is not situated in water.³³

Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja comments on this verse as follows:

When a lotus flower is situated in water, the rays of the sun cause it to blossom. The same sun, however, will wither a lotus which is

³² *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.23; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.346).

³³ Quoted and ascribed to the *Jayadākhyāna Samhitā* by Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja in his commentary to Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's *Śrī Manaḥ-śikṣā*, entitled 'Śrī Bhajana-darpaṇa-digdarśinī-vṛtti': see Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Manaḥ-śikṣā* (Śrī Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti, 1996), p. 16.

not situated in water. In this example the *guru* is compared to water and the Supreme Lord is compared with the sun.³⁴

In his ‘Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam’, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura makes the same point:

*yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo
yasyāprasādān na gatiḥ kuto 'pi
dhyāyan stuvāms tasya yaśas tri-sandhyam
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*

Only by the mercy of Śrī Gurudeva can one receive the mercy of Kṛṣṇa; without his grace the living entities cannot make any advancement nor be delivered. Meditating three times a day on the glories of Śrī Gurudeva and reciting *stava-stuti*, I offer prayers unto his lotus feet.³⁵

In his *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī explains that *bhakti* for the Supreme Lord and *bhakti* for the *guru* are in fact corollaries:

*yāvanti bhagavad-bhakter
aṅgāni kathitānīha
prāyas tāvanti tad-bhakta-
bhakter api budhā viduḥ*

The wise recognise that almost all the practices of *bhakti* for the Supreme Lord [as set out in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*] also apply automatically to the devotee of the Supreme Lord [the *guru*].³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, ‘Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam’, 8. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja’s *Śrī Gauḍīya Gīti-guccha* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 21. Used with permission. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura’s complete ‘Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam’ is included in the Appendix to this study.

³⁶ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.219.

This verse refers to the *bhakta*, or devotee of the Supreme Lord. The topmost *bhakta* is the *guru*. In *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī lists sixty-four aspects of devotional practice. The first three of these relate directly to the *guru*:

*guru-pādāśrayas tasmāt
kṛṣṇa-dīkṣādi-śikṣaṇam
viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā
sādhū-vartmānuvartanam*

Taking shelter at the feet of a *guru*; receiving *dīkṣā* and spiritual instructions; serving the *guru* with intimacy; following the path of the saintly persons.³⁷

The *Nārada-pañcarātra* emphasises the importance of service to the *guru*:

*sarva-sādhana-mukhyā hi
guru-sevā sadāḍṛtā
yayā bhaktir bhagavati
hy añjasā syāt sukhāvahā*

Of all the activities of devotional practice, the most important is service to the *guru*. By that service, *bhakti* for the Supreme Lord is quickly, easily and happily attained.³⁸

Similarly, in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Sudāmā:

*nāham iḍyā-prajātibhyāṁ
tapasopaśamena vā
tuṣṭyeyāṁ sarva-bhūtātma
guru-śuśrūṣayā yathā*

I, the soul of all beings, am not as satisfied by ritual worship, initiation as a *brāhmaṇa*, austerity or discipline as I am by faithful service rendered to the *guru*.³⁹

³⁷ *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.74.

³⁸ *Nārada-pañcarātra*, 4.57.

³⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.80.34.

After setting out the qualifications of a genuine *guru* and a genuine disciple, Śrī Prabuddha tells King Nimi in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

*tatra bhāgavatān dharmān
śikṣed gurv-ātma-daivataḥ
amāyayānuvṛttyā yais
tuṣyed ātmātma-do hariḥ*

The disciple should learn the practices of pure devotional service for the satisfaction of the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who gives Himself to His pure devotees, by accepting his *guru* as his very life and soul and serving him continuously without duplicity.⁴⁰

The *Viṣṇu-smṛti* confirms this:

*ācāryasya priyaṁ kuryāt
prāṇair api dhanair api
karmaṇā manasā vācā
sa yāti paramaṁ gatim*

A disciple should please his *guru* with his life, wealth, actions, mind and words. By doing so, the disciple attains the supreme destination.⁴¹

Some scholars claim that the worship of the *guru* on the same level as God is a later development in the evolution of the role and importance of the *guru*. For instance, Dr Ramakanta Chakravarti asserts:

Later the *Dikṣāguru* was honoured as God. Service to the *guru* was described as the fundamental duty of the *bhakta*. There could be no question of any personal relation between the devotee and the deity. The intermediacy of the *Guru* became an

⁴⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.3.22. See also *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.12.24.

⁴¹ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.100).

essential concept of *bhakti*. Devotion to the *Guru* was described as something more important than devotion to God. The devotee was not permitted to do anything without the *Guru*'s advice. He was even asked to be a menial servant of the *Guru*.⁴²

However, the worship of the *guru* on the same level as the Supreme Lord can be traced back to the ancient Upaniṣads, as we have seen. It is supported by numerous scriptures that predate the medieval renaissance of the *bhakti* movement in India. Accordingly, any claim that it is a later doctrine must be treated as erroneous.

Four types of gurus

To properly appreciate the nature of the *guru*, it is necessary also to understand the four types of *gurus*: the *caitya-guru*, *vartma-pradarśaka-guru*, *dīkṣā-guru* and *śikṣā-guru*. The *caitya-guru* is the Supersoul, who is seated in everyone's heart and who inspires all living beings from within. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna:

*sarvasya cāhaṁ hṛdi sanniviṣṭo
mattaḥ smṛtir jñānam apohanam ca*

I am seated in the heart of all living entities, and from Me come remembrance, knowledge and forgetfulness.⁴³

Similarly, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam states:

*yo 'ntar bahis tanu-bhṛtām aśubhaṁ vidhunvann
ācārya-caitya-vapuṣā sva-gatiṁ vyanakti*

You appear externally as the spiritual preceptor and internally as the Supersoul to remove the misfortune of the embodied living beings and direct them to You.⁴⁴

⁴² Ramakanta Chakravarti, *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal (1486–1900)* (Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985), pp. 81–82.

⁴³ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 15.15.

⁴⁴ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.29.6.

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* compare the soul and Supersoul to two birds sitting in the banyan tree that is the body:

*dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā
samānaṁ vṛkṣaṁ pariśasvajāte
tayoṛ anyah pippalaṁ svādv atty
anaśnann anyo 'bhicākaśīti*

Two companion birds sit together in the shelter of the same banyan tree. One of them relishes the taste of the tree's berries, while the other does not eat the berries but simply watches over His friend.⁴⁵

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* then explain that if the bird who is engrossed in tasting the berries of the tree, which represents the meagre enjoyment available in this world through the body, simply turns to his friend, he at once becomes free from all worldly suffering.⁴⁶

Thus, the Upaniṣads state that the Supreme Lord is the friend of the living being, who has turned away from Him. The Supreme Lord directs the wandering of the living being, and tries to steer him towards spiritual awakening. This is especially true for the spiritual aspirant who has dedicated his life to attaining the Supreme Lord. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa avers:

*teṣāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ
bhajatāṁ prīti-pūrvakam*

⁴⁵ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4.6, and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.1.

⁴⁶ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4.7, and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.2. By using the analogy of two separate birds, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* make it clear that the soul and Supersoul are not one and the same. The Vaiṣṇava conception is that the first bird is the spiritual self who has become conditioned in this phenomenal world, and the second bird is the Supreme Lord situated in the heart, who is known as Paramātmā and as the *caitya-guru*.

*dadāmi buddhi-yogaṁ taṁ
yena mām upayānti te*

To those who are constantly dedicated to worshipping Me with love, I give the spiritual understanding by which they can come to Me.⁴⁷

The second type of *guru* is known as the *varṭma-pradarśaka-guru*. He or she is the *guru* who first introduces one to the path of *bhakti*. The *varṭma-pradarśaka-guru* usually guides the spiritual aspirant to a qualified *guru*, from whom the spiritual aspirant may later accept *dīkṣā*, or spiritual initiation. Thus, Śrī Kṛṣṇa helps the spiritual seeker from within as the *caitya-guru*, or Supersoul, and He sends the three other types of *gurus*, including the *varṭma-pradarśaka-guru*, who help from without. Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta confirms this:

*kṛṣṇa yadi kṛpā kare kona bhāgyavāne
guru-antaryāmi-rūpe śikhāya āpane*

If Śrī Kṛṣṇa shows His mercy to a fortunate person, He personally guides him as the Supersoul from within and as the *guru* from without.

The third type of *guru* is the *dīkṣā-guru* or *mantra-guru*, who confers spiritual initiation. As part of the *dīkṣā* ceremony, the *guru* gives the disciple sacred and confidential *mantras*, or hymns, which the disciple must meditate upon three times a day – in the early morning, at midday and at dusk. According to the *Vāmana-kalpa*, the mantra received from the *guru* is non-different from the *guru* himself and from the Supreme Lord:

*yo mantraḥ sa guruḥ sākṣāt
yo guruḥ sa hariḥ smṛtaḥ
gurur yasya bhavet tuṣṭas
tasya tuṣṭo hariḥ svayam*

⁴⁷ Bhagavad-gītā, 10.10.

The *mantra* [received from the *guru*] is the *guru* himself, and the *guru* is directly the Supreme Lord. There is no difference between the *guru*, the *mantra* given by him, and the Supreme Lord. He with whom the *guru* is pleased also satisfies the Supreme Lord.⁴⁸

These *mantras* given at the time of *dīkṣā* help manifest the disciple's eternal relationship of love with the Supreme Lord.

However, *mantra-dīkṣā* is not merely a ceremony or formality. It is a process of spiritual awakening that may take time for the disciple to complete. As we have seen, the *Viṣṇu-rahasya* defines *dīkṣā* as the process by which transcendental knowledge is imparted to the disciple and sinful activity is completely destroyed.⁴⁹ In his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbhā*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī elaborates on this as follows:

divyaṁ jñānaṁ hy atra śrīmati mantre bhagavat-svarūpa-jñānaṁ, tena bhagavatā sambandha-viśeṣa-jñānaṁ ca ।

Transcendental knowledge signifies knowledge of the identity of the Supreme Lord contained within a *mantra*, as well as knowledge of one's particular relationship with the Lord.⁵⁰

Dīkṣā is considered essential for the spiritual aspirant. For instance, the *Viṣṇu-yāmala* states:

*adīkṣitasya vāmoru
kṛtaṁ sarvaṁ nirarthakam
paśu-yonim avāpnoti
dīkṣā-virahito janaḥ*

⁴⁸ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.353).

⁴⁹ See the definition of *dīkṣā* from the *Viṣṇu-rahasya* quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (2.9) and by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbhā* (Anuccheda 283).

⁵⁰ Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbhā*, Anuccheda 283.

O Vāmoru, unless a person has *dikṣā*, all his devotional activities are useless. A person without *dikṣā* descends again into the animal species.⁵¹

A full discussion of the importance and esoteric meaning of *dikṣā* is outside the scope of this study. However, it is important to note that a disciple may have only one *dikṣā-guru*. In his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī writes:

mantra-gurus tv eka evety āha –

*labdhānugraha ācāryāt
tena sandarśitāgamaḥ
mahā-puruṣam abhyarcen
mūrtyābhīmatayātmanaḥ [bhā.pu. 11.3.48]*

Now it is stated that there is only one *mantra-guru* –

‘After receiving the favour of the spiritual preceptor and having the rules for meditating upon the *mantra* explained by him, one should engage in worshipping a particular form of the Supreme Lord according to one’s preference.’ [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.3.48]

*anugraho mantra-dikṣā-rūpaḥ | āgamo mantra-vidhi-
śāstram | asyaikatvam eka-vacanatvena bodhyate |*

‘Favour’ refers to *mantra-dikṣā*. The *āgamas* are the scriptures that describe the rules for meditating upon *mantras*. Because the singular [of the word *ācārya*] is used, it is understood that there is but one *mantra-guru*.

We have discussed how the *guru* is Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself. In relation specifically to the *dikṣā-guru*, Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta states:

*guru kṛṣṇa-rūpa hana śāstrera pramāṇe
guru-rūpe kṛṣṇa kṛpā karena bhakta-gaṇe*

⁵¹ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (2.6).

The verdict of all the scriptures is that the *guru* is the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, because it is in the form of the *guru* that Śrī Kṛṣṇa bestows His mercy upon the devotees.⁵²

Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Mahārāja explains in his purport to this verse:

The relationship of a disciple with his spiritual master is as good as his relationship with the Supreme Lord. A spiritual master always represents himself as the humblest servitor of the Personality of Godhead, but the disciple must look upon him as the manifested representation of Godhead.⁵³

The fourth type of *guru* is known as the *śikṣā-guru*, or instructing spiritual master. This *guru* gives further detailed and confidential guidance on the path of *bhakti*. Sometimes, the *dīkṣā-guru* and *śikṣā-guru* will be the same Vaiṣṇava; at other times, the *dīkṣā-guru* will give his permission for the disciple to approach an elevated Vaiṣṇava for further guidance.

In fact, all true Vaiṣṇavas are *śikṣā-gurus*. In his *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta*, Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura wrote:

sakala-vaiṣṇavā eva guravaḥ

All Vaiṣṇavas are considered to be one's *guru*.⁵⁴

However, the disciple will generally take shelter of one particular highly advanced Vaiṣṇava who has special affection for him and learn the confidential secrets of devotion from him, especially on the path of spontaneous devotion, called *rāgānuga-bhakti*.

⁵² Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 1.45.

⁵³ Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Mahārāja, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Bhaktivedanta VedaBase 2003, Bhaktivedanta Archives, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust), Ādi-līlā, 1.45, purport.

⁵⁴ Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta*, 42.

While the *dikṣā-guru* is regarded as the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the *śikṣā-guru* is His personality. Śrī Caitanya-*caritāmṛta* states:

*śikṣā-guruke ta' jāni kṛṣṇera svarūpa
antaryāmī, bhakta-śreṣṭha – ei dui rūpa*

I know the *śikṣā-guru* to be Śrī Kṛṣṇa's personality. He comes in two forms – as the Supersoul and as the topmost devotee.⁵⁵

The living being cannot directly see the Supersoul, and therefore Śrī Kṛṣṇa manifests as the *śikṣā-guru*:

*jīve sākṣāt nāhi tāte guru caitya-rūpe
śikṣā-guru haya kṛṣṇa-mahānta-svarūpe*

Since the living entity cannot directly experience the presence of the *caitya-guru*, the *caitya-guru* appears before him as the *śikṣā-guru*, the topmost devotee, who is non-different from Śrī Kṛṣṇa.⁵⁶

In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava line, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is regarded as the supreme *śikṣā-guru*. According to Śrī Caitanya-*caritāmṛta*, Mahāprabhu came to teach the process of *bhakti* through His personal example:

*āpane karimu bhakta-bhāva aṅgikāre
āpani ācari' bhakti śikhāimu sabāre*

I shall assume the role of a devotee, and teach *bhakti* to everyone by practicing it Myself.⁵⁷

All the prominent teachers in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, who have elucidated Mahāprabhu's teachings by composing devotional literature, are considered *śikṣā-gurus* also.

.....
⁵⁵ Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Caitanya-*caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 1.47.

⁵⁶ Śrī Caitanya-*caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 1.58.

⁵⁷ Śrī Caitanya-*caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 3.20.

As explained previously, the *dikṣā-guru* is Śrī Kṛṣṇa's form, and the *śikṣā-guru* is His personality. According to the scriptures, there is no difference between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His name, form, personality and activities, these being all situated on the transcendental level beyond this phenomenal world.⁵⁸ Accordingly, there is also no difference between the *dikṣā-guru* and the *śikṣā-guru*. Both are manifestations of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's causeless mercy upon the spiritual aspirant. They are the same divine hand that reaches out and pulls the spiritual aspirant out of this world of repeated birth, disease, old age and death.

⁵⁸ For instance, see Śrī *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā*, 17.133. This verse from the *Padma Purāṇa* states that there is no difference between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His name. See also Śrī *Brahma-saṁhitā*, 5.32, which states that Śrī Kṛṣṇa's every limb is spiritual, and can fulfil the function of any of His organs.

How to Identify a Genuine Guru

The Vedic scriptures urge the spiritual seeker to take shelter of a genuine *guru*. As explained in Chapter 1 of this study, it is impossible to realize the Absolute through one's independent endeavour. One requires the grace of a qualified *guru* to advance on this path, which is said to be hard to tread 'like the sharp edge of a razor'.¹ However, the spiritual seeker must take great care not to be seduced by an impostor *guru*, a mere charlatan who is out to accumulate wealth, followers or a reputation for himself. This chapter will therefore set out the characteristics of a bona fide *guru*, as delineated in the scriptures.

Avoiding impostors and swindlers

False *gurus* abound, and a beginner in spiritual life is easily deceived by them. In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Śrī Mahādeva tells his wife Satī:

*guravo bahavaḥ santi śiṣya-vittāpahārakaḥ
durlabho'yaṁ gurur devī śiṣya-santāpa-hārakam*

Numerous are the *gurus* who exploit their disciples and plunder them. Rare is the *guru*, O Devī, who steals away the miseries of his disciples.²

¹ See *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.3.14.

² *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Guru-gīta*, 1.269.

In recent years, there have been a great many such false *gurus*. As Anthony Storr points out in *Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus*, some *gurus* 'have been entirely unworthy of veneration: false prophets, madmen, confidence tricksters or unscrupulous psychopaths who exploit their disciples emotionally, financially and sexually'.³

There are, of course, serious dangers in unqualified *gurus* holding authority and power over hapless disciples – especially as the Vedic scriptures instruct the disciple to dedicate himself fully and unconditionally to the *guru*. However, the Vedic scriptures carefully delineate the characteristics of a true *guru*. The spiritual aspirant is not to submit to just anyone; he is to dedicate his life only to a Vaiṣṇava of the highest calibre who meets the exacting standards set out in the scriptures.

Only a Vaiṣṇava may be a guru

As the *Padma Purāṇa* affirms, the first requirement of a genuine *guru* is that he be a Vaiṣṇava:

*mahā-kula-prasūto 'pi
sarva-yajñeṣu dīkṣitaḥ
sahasra-śākhādhyāyī ca
na guruḥ syād avaiṣṇavaḥ*

A person may be born in an aristocratic family, be initiated in all *yajñas* and be learned in a thousand branches of the Vedas, but if he is not a Vaiṣṇava, then he is not fit to be a *guru*.⁴

In his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī defines a Vaiṣṇava as follows:

3 Anthony Storr, *Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus* (London: 1996), p. xii.

4 Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.54). Also included in *Śrī Gauḍīya-kanṭhahāra* (1.46), along with a similar verse (1.17) ascribed to *Padma Purāṇa*.

grhīta-viṣṇu-dīkṣāko
viṣṇu-ṇṇjā-ṇaro naraḥ
aiṣṇavo'bhihito'bhiṇṇair
itaro'smād avaiṣṇavaḥ

One who has accepted initiation into a Vaiṣṇava *mantra* and who is devoted to the worship of Śrī Viṣṇu is called a Vaiṣṇava by the wise. One devoid of these characteristics is not a Vaiṣṇava.⁵

The conclusion is that a bona fide *guru* must have received *dīkṣā*, or initiation, from a Vaiṣṇava *guru* in discipular succession. Furthermore, he must be devoted to the worship of the Supreme Lord. Accordingly, a true *guru* will not advocate the paths of *karma*, *jñāna* or mystic *yoga*, but will be fully established in *bhakti*, or selfless devotion to the Supreme Lord. The *Nārada-ṇāicarātra* warns the spiritual novice:

avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena
mantreṇa nirayaṁ vrajet
ṇunaś ca vidhinā samyag
grāhayed vaiṣṇavād guroḥ

One who receives his *mantra* from a *guru* who is not a Vaiṣṇava is destined to go to hell. Such a person should approach a Vaiṣṇava *guru* and again receive the *mantra* according to the direction of the scriptures.⁶

⁵ Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.55.

⁶ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.366), and by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha* (Anuccheda 207).

A guru has complete realization of the Vedic scriptures

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam defines a true *guru* as follows:

śābde pare ca niṣṇātām brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam

A bona fide *guru* will be fully conversant with the Vedic scriptures and have direct realization of the Supreme Lord. Consequently, he will be wholly detached from worldly life.⁷

The first characteristic of a true *guru* in this verse is *śābde niṣṇātām*: perfect knowledge of all *śāstra*, or scriptures. The *Skanda Purāṇa* states:

*ṛg-yajuḥ-sāmātharvāṇca bhārataṁ pañcarātrakam
mūla-rāmāyaṇaṇcaiva śāstramityabhidhīyate
yacchānukūlametasya tacca śāstraṁ prakīrtitam
ato'nya granthavistaro naiva śāstraṁ kurvatma tat*

The *Ṛg Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sāma Veda* and *Atharva Veda*, as well as the *Mahābhārata*, *Nārada-Pañcarātra* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, are certainly known as *śāstra*. Those works that follow in the wake of these authorized scriptures are also considered to be *śāstra*. All other literature simply leads one the wrong way, and can never be known as *śāstra*.⁸

The bona fide *guru* will be learned in all these sacred texts. If a disciple has any question or doubt, the *guru* will be able to answer or dispel it immediately by reference to *śāstra*. Perfect knowledge of *śāstra* here means realized knowledge (*vijñāna*), not mere intellectual learning (*jñāna*). Śrī Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā*:

*tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ*

⁷ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.3.21.

⁸ Quoted by Śrī Mādhvācārya in his *Madhva-bhāṣya*, and included in *Śrī Gauḍīya-kaṇṭhahāra* (2.43).

Try to understand this knowledge by accepting a spiritual preceptor, asking relevant questions of him, and rendering service unto him. Those who are self-realized can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.⁹

Here Śrī Kṛṣṇa uses the words *tattva-darśinaḥ*, ‘seers of the truth’. This signifies that the true *guru* has crossed the ocean of material existence and has directly experienced the Absolute.

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* describes the characteristics of a genuine *guru* as follows:

*tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet
samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭham*

To understand transcendental knowledge, one must certainly approach a *guru* carrying firewood. Such a *guru* will have complete knowledge of the Vedas and be completely fixed in the Absolute.¹⁰

Here the genuine *guru* is described as *śrotriyaṁ*. Again, this means he has full knowledge of the Vedic scriptures.

A guru has realized the Supreme Lord

The second characteristic of the bona fide *guru* mentioned in the verse from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is *pare niṣṇātam*: direct perception of the Supreme Lord. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* similarly describes the *guru* as *brahma-niṣṭham*, which signifies he is fully fixed in transcendence.¹¹

The deep import of these words is that the *guru* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava line is fully immersed in serving Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the divine couple Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in the spiritual realm, even while present in this world.

⁹ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.34.

¹⁰ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.12.

¹¹ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.12.

In his *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī explains how to cultivate *bhakti* impelled by spontaneous attraction (*rāgānūga-bhakti*):

*sevā sādhaka-rūpeṇa
siddha-rūpeṇa cātra hi
tad-bhāva-lipsunā kāryā
vraja-lokānusārataḥ*

Both with the external body (*sādhaka-rūpa*) and the internally conceived body (*siddha-rūpa*) one should follow in the footsteps of the eternal residents of Vraja whose mood one aspires to attain.¹²

The true *guru* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava line will be fully immersed in hearing about Śrī Kṛṣṇa, uttering His name, and performing the other limbs of *bhakti*, following the example of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and the other great personalities in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava discipular line. With his internally conceived spiritual form, he will carry out transcendental loving service to the divine couple Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes in his celebrated Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam:

*nikuñja-yūno rati-keli-siddhyai
yā yālibhir yuktir apekṣaṇīyā
tatrāti-dākṣyād ati-vallabhasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*

Śrī Gurudeva is always present with the *sakhīs*, planning the arrangements for the perfection of yugala-kiśora's [Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's] amorous pastimes (*rati-keli*) within the *kuñjas* of Vṛndāvana. Because he is so expert in making these tasteful arrangements for Their pleasure, he is very dear to

¹² Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.295

Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I offer prayers unto the lotus feet of Śrī Gurudeva.¹³

This is the internal symptom of a true *guru*, and is concealed from view to all but his most intimate and advanced disciples.

A guru is wholly disinterested in this world

The third characteristic of a true *guru* is *brahmany upaśamāśrayam*: complete detachment from worldly affairs. Just as a lotus flower is situated above the water, the true *guru* will come to this world but remain untouched by the waters of material existence. In other words, he will have no self-interest. He will not desire money, disciples, honour or any other commodity this world has to offer. As such, the true *guru* has complete mastery over his mind and senses.

In this regard, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has written in his *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*:

*vāco vegam manasaḥ krodha-vegam
jihvā-vegam udaropastha-vegam
etān vegān yo viśaheta dhīraḥ
sarvām apīmām pṛthivīm sa śiṣyat*

A wise and self-composed person who can subdue the impetus to speak, the agitation of the mind, the onset of anger, the vehemence of the tongue, the urge of the belly and the agitation of the genitals can instruct the entire world. In other words, all persons may become disciples of such a self-controlled person.¹⁴

¹³ Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, ‘Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam’, 6. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja’s *Śrī Gauḍīya Gīti-guccha* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), pp. 20–24. Used with permission. Full prayer included in Appendix.

¹⁴ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, 1. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja’s edition of *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*

In his ‘Anuvṛtti’ commentary to this verse, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Saravatī Prabhupāda writes:

There are three kinds of overwhelming passions observed in worldly living entities attached to material sense enjoyment: the urges of speech, mind and body. When one falls into the powerful current of these three impetuous demands, it is very difficult to gain deliverance. ... But self-controlled persons who tolerate these demands are not overwhelmed by material sense enjoyment. They are competent to vanquish this material world.¹⁵

One who is able to control these urges is qualified to be *jagad-guru*, or the spiritual master of the entire world. Why is this? Because the only way truly to master the senses is to engage them fully in the service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. When *bhakti* appears, then these six urges are automatically pacified. Accordingly, one who has conquered the six urges listed by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is one who is fully fixed in devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhagavad-gītā* confirms this:

*viṣayā vinivartante
nirāhārasya dehinaḥ
rasa-varjaṁ raso 'py asya
paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate*

He who identifies himself with his body may artificially restrict his enjoyment by withdrawing the senses from their objects, although his taste for sense pleasure remains. But for he who has realized the Supreme Person, all taste for sense pleasure automatically ceases.¹⁶

(Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 2. Used with permission.

¹⁵ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), pp. 12–13.

¹⁶ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 2.59.

Thus, a *gosvāmī*, or ‘master of the senses’, is really one who is fixed in devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Disinterest in sense enjoyment is merely a natural consequence of his devotion. It is the outward characteristic of one who is qualified to teach the world.

The *Viṣṇu-smṛti* therefore summarises the qualities of a bona fide *guru* as follows:

*paricaryā-yaśo-lābha-
lipsuḥ śiṣyād gurur nahi
kṛpā-sindhuḥ susampūrṇaḥ
sarva-sattvopakāraḥ*

One who desires to obtain wealth, fame or service from others is not fit to become a *guru*. A true *guru* is an ocean of mercy, who feels pain by seeing others in distress. Such a person works tirelessly for the benefit of others.¹⁷

*niḥspṛhaḥ sarvataḥ siddhaḥ
sarva-vidyā-viśāradaḥ
sarva-saṁśaya-saṁchettā
nālasa gurur āhṛtaḥ*

The real *guru* is free from all desire for sense enjoyment, is perfect in all ways, is experienced in all types of knowledge, removes all doubts of his followers, and is not lazy.¹⁸

A guru is devoid of all fear

The bona fide *guru* has taken complete shelter of the Supreme Lord. Accordingly, he is completely fearless, like Prahlāda Mahārāja. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śrī Nārada attests to this:

*sa vai priyatamaś cātmā yato na bhayaṁ aṇv api
iti veda sa vai vidvān yo vidvān sa gurur hariḥ*

¹⁷ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.45).

¹⁸ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.46).

One who knows that the Supreme Lord is the Supersoul and friend of everyone is never in the least fearful. Such a person is truly educated; and, thus educated, he is fit to accept the position of the *guru*, who is non-different from Śrī Kṛṣṇa.¹⁹

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam teaches us the method to overcome all fear:

*bhayaṁ dvitīyābhīniveśataḥ syād
īśād apetasya viparyayo 'smṛtiḥ
tan-māyayāto budha ābhajet taṁ
bhaktyaikayeśaṁ guru-devatātmā*

Fear arises when the living being, who has turned away from the Supreme Lord, becomes absorbed in material life and falsely perceives things to be separate from the Supreme Lord. In this condition, he forgets his true identity and falsely thinks he is the body. This bewildering, fearful condition is effected by the illusory potency, known as *māyā*. Therefore, an intelligent person should worship the Supreme Lord with one-pointed conviction under the guidance of a bona fide *guru*, whom he should accept as his worshipful deity and his very life and soul.²⁰

Fear is overcome by taking complete shelter of a bona fide *guru*. Since a true *guru* is one who has completely conquered fear, it follows that a true *guru* is one who has himself taken full shelter of a bona fide and fearless *guru* in discipular succession.

A guru is a Vaiṣṇava of the highest level

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam describes three levels of Vaiṣṇavas.²¹ The *uttama-adhikārī* (or *mahā-bhāgavata*) is a devotee of the highest

¹⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.29.51.

²⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.2.37. Quoted by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 20.119, 24.137 and 25.138.

²¹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.2.45–47.

level; the *madhyama-adhikārī* is an intermediate devotee; and the *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* (or *prākṛta-bhakta*, materialistic devotee) is a neophyte on the spiritual path. A true *guru* is a Vaiṣṇava of the highest level. If the disciple wishes to attain the ultimate objective of *prema*, the zenith of pure love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then he will need to approach a *guru* who possesses it. A *guru* who has not himself attained *prema* cannot bestow it upon his disciple. Similarly, one who is not an eternal maidservant of Śrīmatī Rādhikā is incapable of bestowing *rādhā-dāsyam*, confidential service to Śrī Rādhā.

That the *guru* must be a topmost devotee is confirmed in the *Padma Purāṇa*:

*mahā-bhāgavataḥ śreṣṭho
brāhmaṇo vai gurur nṛṇām
sarveṣām eva lokānām
asau pūjyo yathā hariḥ*

A *mahā-bhāgavata*, or topmost devotee, who is a *brāhmaṇa* (twice born) is the *guru* of all mankind. He is to be worshipped by all people as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.²²

This point is also clear from Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī's definitions of the topmost and intermediate devotees in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* – in which he incorporates Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's definitions from *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*:

*śraddhāvān jana haya bhakti-adhikārī
'uttama', 'madhyama', 'kaniṣṭha'—śraddhā-anusārī*

One who has faith is eligible for *bhakti*. According to one's faith, one is classified as a topmost devotee, an intermediate devotee or a neophyte devotee.²³

²² *Padma Purāṇa*, 6.253.26; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.53).

²³ Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā*, 22.64.

śāstra-yuktye sunipuṇa, dṛḍha-śraddhā yānra
‘uttama-adhikārī’ sei tāraye saṁsāra

One who is fully proficient in *śāstra* and logic and who has firm faith in Śrī Kṛṣṇa is to be considered a topmost devotee, able to deliver the whole world.²⁴

śāstre yuktau ca nipuṇaḥ
sarvathā dṛḍha-niścayaḥ
prauḍha-śraddho ’dhikārī yaḥ
sa bhaktāv uttamo mataḥ

‘One who is in every way expert in both *śāstra* and logic, and who has firm conviction and deep faith that is not blind, is to be regarded as a topmost devotee in devotional service.’²⁵

śāstra-yukti nāhi jāne dṛḍha, śraddhāvān
‘madhyama-adhikārī’ sei mahā-bhāgyavān

One who does not have complete knowledge of *śāstra* and logic, but who has faith in Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is to be considered an intermediate devotee. Such a person is highly fortunate.²⁶

yaḥ śāstrādiṣv anipuṇaḥ
śraddhāvān sa tu madhyamaḥ

‘One who is not highly proficient in *śāstra* but who has faith in Śrī Kṛṣṇa is an intermediate devotee.’²⁷

As we have seen, the first characteristic of a qualified *guru* is *śābde niṣṇātam*, deep understanding and realization of the Vedic scriptures. Since only the topmost devotee possesses

²⁴ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 22.65.

²⁵ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 22.66. This verse is from Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.17.

²⁶ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 22.67.

²⁷ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 22.68. This verse is from Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu, 1.2.18.

such expertise, one must seek out a *guru* of this high calibre. Furthermore, it is clear that only a topmost devotee has direct experience of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Consequently, only a topmost devotee will have complete control over his mind and senses and have no interest whatsoever in even the most alluring things of this world.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam defines a topmost Vaiṣṇava as follows:

*sarva-bhūteṣu yaḥ paśyed
bhagavad-bhāvam ātmanaḥ
bhūtāni bhagavaty ātmany
eṣa bhāgavatottamaḥ*

The most advanced devotee sees everyone and everything as fully engaged in loving service to the Supreme Lord (in the same mood of love he possesses), and sees all things as situated within the Supreme Lord.²⁸

A *guru* on this level is fully absorbed in Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and will not differentiate between different categories of Vaiṣṇavas. Hence, he will not at that level be in a position to guide a disciple, although his mere presence in the world is highly auspicious for everyone. Furthermore, there is always the grave danger that the neophyte disciple may misinterpret the behaviour of such an exalted person and commit *vaiṣṇava-aparādha* and *nāma-aparādha*, offences to a Vaiṣṇava and to the holy name. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu points out to Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta:

*yāñra citte kṛṣṇa-premā karaye udaya
tāñra vākya, kriyā, mudrā vijñeha nā bujhaya*

Even a learned scholar cannot fathom the words, activities and symptoms of one in whose heart *prema* for Śrī Kṛṣṇa has awakened.²⁹

²⁸ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.2.45.

²⁹ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 23.39.

There are many similar warnings in the scriptures.³⁰

To help the disciple, the topmost Vaiṣṇava therefore descends to the intermediate level. From this position, he can observe the tendencies, limitations and progress of a disciple, and can correct him, if necessary. As the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* explains, the intermediate Vaiṣṇava is one who is able to distinguish between different levels of Vaiṣṇavas:

*īśvare tad-adhīneṣu
bālīṣeṣu dviṣatsu ca
prema-maitrī-kṛpopekṣā
yaḥ karoti sa madhyamaḥ*

An intermediate devotee offers his love to the Supreme Lord, offers his friendship to those fully engaged in service to the Supreme Lord, shows mercy to those who lack spiritual knowledge, and disregards those who are inimical to the Supreme Lord.³¹

The topmost devotee who descends to the intermediate level may thus be said to have one foot in the spiritual world and one foot in the material world. From this position he helps conditioned souls across the vast chasm of material existence. Such a *guru* is supremely merciful, and also extremely rare.

A prospective disciple should first examine the guru

The prospective *guru* and disciple should examine each other carefully for at least one full year before formalising a *guru*-disciple relationship. In his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī affirms this:

³⁰ For instance, see *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.33.29 and 11.20.36; *Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata*, Ādi-līlā, 6.26; and *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, 6.

³¹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.2.46.

*tayoḥ parīkṣā cānyo'nyam
ekābdaṁ saha-vāsataḥ
vyavahāra-svabhāvānu-
bhavenaivābhijāyate*

The prospective *guru* and disciple should live together for one year and carefully examine each other's activities and character, to determine that each is qualified.³²

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī then supports his statement by quoting the *Mantra-muktāvalī*:

*tayor vatsara-vāsena
jñātānyonya-svabhāvayoḥ
gurutā śiṣyatā ceti
nānyathaiveti niścayaḥ*

The prospective *guru* and disciple should live together for one year. Thus, they will come to understand each other's natures. Then it will be known whether the *guru* and the disciple are genuine. There is no other way to ascertain this.³³

However, it should be emphasised that a living being subject to illusion and entrapped in this world does not in fact have the power to identify a pure Vaiṣṇava. The *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* substantiates this as follows:

*yāvat pāpais tu malinaṁ
hṛdayaṁ tāvad eva hi
na śāstre satya-buddhiḥ syāt
sad-buddhiḥ sad-gurau tathā*

As long as one's heart is sullied by sin, one will not have the pure intelligence to recognise the truth set out in the scriptures or to recognise a genuine *guru*.³⁴

³² Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.73.

³³ Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.74.

³⁴ Quoted by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandharbha* (1.5).

It is not by his own ability that a spiritual seeker is able to identify a true *guru*. Rather, such a *guru* reveals himself to the spiritual seeker. When a person develops a sincere desire to serve God, the bona fide *guru* enters his life. By the causeless grace of such a *guru*, the prospective disciple then quickly advances on the spiritual path.

How to Identify a Genuine Disciple

The transmission of spiritual wisdom requires a genuine *guru*, as we have seen. But equally, it requires a genuine disciple. Indeed, it is sometimes said that while a genuine *guru* is rare, a genuine disciple is even harder to find. So who is qualified to learn spiritual wisdom from a *guru*? The scriptures set out the qualities of a true disciple.

A disciple understands the nature of this world

A real disciple is one who has carefully observed this phenomenal world and understood that it cannot afford one any real happiness or security. Rather, it is a world beleaguered by recurring birth, death, old age and disease, in which every situation is destined to come to an end through the inexorable movement of time. The fleeting happiness that may be found here is insubstantial and ultimately leads only to distress. Thus, a wise person does not invest his energy in trying to better his material prospects.

As we have seen, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* states:

*tasmād guruṃ prapadyeta
jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam
śābde pare ca niṣṇātām
brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam*

Therefore, one who wishes to know about the ultimate goal of life should take shelter of a bona fide *guru*. Such a *guru* will

be fully conversant with the Vedic scriptures and have direct realisation of the Supreme Lord. Consequently, he will be wholly detached from worldly life.¹

As we have seen in Chapter 3, the second two lines of this verse specify the characteristics of the true *guru*. The first two lines, however, specify the characteristics of the true disciple. The first quality of a disciple is carried in the Sanskrit word *tasmad*, ‘therefore’. To understand the import of this particular conjunction here, we need to examine the four verses in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* that immediately precede this one:

śrī-rājovāca
yathaitām aiśvarīm māyām
dustarām akṛtātmabhiḥ
taranty añjaḥ sthūla-dhiyo
maharṣa idam ucyatām

King Nimi said: O great sage, how can one who is engrossed in materialistic pursuits easily cross over the illusory energy of the Supreme Lord, which is insuperable for those who are not self-controlled?²

śrī-prabuddha uvāca
karmāṇy ārabhamāṇānām
duḥkha-hatyai sukhāya ca
paśyet pāka-viparyāsam
mithunī-cāriṇām nṛṇām

Śrī Prabuddha said: In human society, men and women unite in sexual relationships. They then work exceedingly hard to eliminate distress and attain happiness. But inevitably they achieve just the opposite.³

1 *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.3.21.

2 *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.3.17.

3 *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.3.18.

*nityārtidena vittena
durlabhenātma-mṛtyunā
gṛhāpatyāpta-paśubhiḥ
kā prītiḥ sādhitaiś calaiḥ*

Wealth always causes distress. It is most difficult to acquire, and spells death for the self. With one's wealth one maintains a home, children, relatives and animals, but whatever happiness is derived from these things is fickle.⁴

*evam lokam param vidyān
naśvaram karma-nirmitam
sa-tulyātiśaya-dhvaṁsam
yathā maṇḍala-vartinām*

Understand that even the position of the demigods is impermanent, attained as it is by a person's good deeds in this life. Even that world is marred by rivalry and envy, like the politics between the rulers of neighbouring kingdoms.⁵

*tasmād gurum prapadyeta
jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam
śābde pare ca niṣṇātam
brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam*

Therefore, one who wishes to know about the ultimate goal of life should take shelter of a bona fide *guru*. Such a *guru* will be fully conversant with the Vedic scriptures and have direct realisation of the Supreme Lord. Consequently, he will be wholly detached from worldly life.⁶

We can see from context the importance of the conjunction *tasmad*. The real disciple is one who has understood that wealth, family, relatives and home cannot provide any real and lasting

⁴ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.3.19.

⁵ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.3.20.

⁶ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.3.21.

happiness. Even the position of higher beings in the universe is temporary and marred by suffering. One who has understood the futility of material progress approaches a bona fide *guru* to obtain spiritual wisdom.

A disciple takes exclusive shelter of the guru

The second quality of a true spiritual seeker is *gurum prapadyeta*: he or she takes exclusive shelter of a *guru*. In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa affirms this:

*tad viddhi praṇipātena
paripraśnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānam
jñāninas tattva-darśinah*

Try to understand this knowledge by taking shelter of a spiritual preceptor, asking relevant questions of him, and rendering service unto him. Those who are self-realized can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.⁷

Here, Śrī Kṛṣṇa lists three requirements of a disciple: exclusive shelter of the *guru* (*praṇipāt*), relevant inquiry (*paripraśna*) and service (*sevā*). Thus, the first requirement of a disciple is to submit to the *guru*. In other words, the true disciple is one who has abandoned the futile hope of attaining happiness in this world and who takes complete refuge of the *guru*.

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* confirms this:

*tad-vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet
samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭham*

To understand transcendental knowledge, one must certainly approach a *guru* with firewood in hand. Such a *guru* will have

⁷ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.34.

complete knowledge of the Vedas and be completely fixed in the Absolute.⁸

Here, the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* instructs the spiritual seeker to bring firewood. This firewood is for the *yajñā*, or sacred fire, of self-surrender. In other words, the disciple must fully submit himself to the *guru*. In a *yajñā*, the words *namaḥ* and *svāhā* are traditionally uttered.⁹ *Namaḥ* means ‘not me’. That is to say that the disciple abandons all material designations beginning with the false notion that he is the body. Giving up all illusions in the purifying fire of self-surrender, the disciple offers his life and heart to the bona fide *guru*. The word *svāhā* similarly signifies the offering of oneself. Thus, the true disciple is one who willingly becomes the property of his *guru*.

Since the disciple has given himself over to the *guru*, he will easily be able to accept the directions of his *guru* without hindrance. It is sometimes said that a disciple is one who is able to accept discipline. In other words, if the *guru* chastises the disciple, the disciple accepts it gladly and without question. The Sanskrit word for disciple is *śiṣya*, which stems from the verbal root *śās*, meaning ‘control’ or ‘rule’. From this root comes the word *śāsana*, government. Hence, a disciple is one who can accept the control and chastisement of the *guru*.

The disciple’s mood of exclusive shelter in the *guru* is elegantly expressed in the following verse from *Vaiṣṇava-tantra*:

*trāyasva bho jagannātha
guro saṁsāra-vahninā
dagdhaṁ mām kāla-daṣṭaṁ ca
tvām ahaṁ śaraṇaṁ gataḥ*

⁸ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.12.

⁹ The word *namaḥ* is also contained in the *guru-mantra* given by the *guru* at the time of *dikṣā*, spiritual initiation.

O Gurudeva, master of this world! Seeing that material existence is like a blazing forest fire which resembles the devouring teeth of Yamarāja [the god of death], I take shelter of you and appeal to you for deliverance.¹⁰

Taking exclusive shelter of the *guru* and of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is often referred to using the Sanskrit word *śaraṇāgati*. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has written an outstanding collection of devotional songs called *Śaraṇāgati*. Some of his songs, such as ‘Gurudeva! Baḍa Kṛpā Kari’ and ‘Gurudeva! Kṛpā-Bindu Diyā’, specifically glorify the *guru*.¹¹ Others focus on particular aspects of *śaraṇāgati*, or exclusive shelter.

According to the *Vaiṣṇava-tantra*, *śaraṇāgati* has six features:

ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ
prātikūlyasya varjanam
rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāso
goṭṭṛtve varaṇam tathā
ātma-nikṣepa-kārpaṇye
śaḍ-vidhā śaraṇāgatiḥ

The six divisions of *śaraṇāgati* are (i) accepting those things that are favourable for *bhakti*, (ii) rejecting those things that are unfavourable for *bhakti*, (iii) considering Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be one’s protector in all circumstances, (iv) accepting Śrī Kṛṣṇa as one’s sole maintainer, (v) completely submitting oneself to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and (vi) cultivating an attitude of genuine humility.¹²

¹⁰ *Vaiṣṇava-tantra*; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.102). English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja’s *Śrī Gauḍīya Gīti-guccha* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 7. Used with permission.

¹¹ These two songs are included in the Appendix to this study.

¹² *Vaiṣṇava-tantra*; quoted by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha* (236) and by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (11.676).

A true disciple will possess these six moods of *śaraṇāgati* in relation first to his *guru*, who he will see as a direct representative of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. At first, the spiritual aspirant does not have any real realisation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The only relationship he has is with his *guru*. But as we have seen, the real *guru* is not one who seeks to enjoy the disciple. Rather, he takes the love and energy of the disciple and offers it to his own *guru*, who in turn offers it to his *guru* in the discipular succession that leads directly to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

In his *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī expands on the second division of *śaraṇāgati*, namely, rejecting those things that are unfavourable for *bhakti*:

*vāco vegam manasaḥ krodha-vegam
jihvā-vegam udaropastha-vegam
etān vegān yo viśaheta dhīraḥ
sarvām apīmām pṛthivīm sa śiṣyat*

A wise and self-composed person who can subdue the impetus to speak, the agitation of the mind, the onset of anger, the vehemence of the tongue, the urge of the belly and the agitation of the genitals can instruct the entire world. In other words, all persons may become disciples of such a self-controlled person.¹³

*atyāhāraḥ prayāśaś ca
prajalpo niyamāgrahaḥ
jana-saṅgaś ca laulyam ca
ṣaḍbhir bhaktir vinaśyati*

Bhakti is destroyed by the following six kinds of faults: (1) eating too much or collecting more than necessary, (2) endeavours that are opposed to *bhakti*, (3) useless mundane

¹³ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, 1. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja's edition of *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 2. Used with permission.

talks, (4) failure to adopt essential regulations or fanatical adherence to regulations, (5) association with persons who are opposed to *bhakti* and (6) greed, or the restlessness of the mind to adopt worthless opinions.¹⁴

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī then also expands on the first division of *śaraṇāgati* specified in the *Vaiṣṇava-tantra*, namely, accepting those things that are favourable for *bhakti*:

*utsāhān niścayād dhairyāt
tat-tat-karma-pravartanāt
saṅga-tyāgāt sato vṛtteḥ
ṣaḍbhir bhaktiḥ prasidhyati*

Progress in *bhakti* may be obtained by the following six practices: (1) enthusiasm to carry out the rules that enhance *bhakti*, (2) firm faith in the statements of *śāstra* and the *guru*, whose words are fully in line with *śāstra*, (3) fortitude in the practice of *bhakti*, even in the midst of obstacles, or patience during the practice stage of *bhakti*, even when there is delay in attaining one's desired goal, (4) following the limbs of *bhakti* such as hearing (*śravaṇa*) and chanting (*kīrtana*) and giving up one's material sense enjoyment for the pleasure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, (5) giving up illicit connection with the opposite gender, the company of those who are overly attached to the opposite gender and the association of *māyāvādīs*, atheists and pseudo-religionists, and (6) adopting the good behaviour and character of pure devotees.¹⁵

¹⁴ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, 2. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja's edition of *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), pp. 18–19. Used with permission.

¹⁵ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, 3. English translation from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja's edition of *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 29. Used with permission.

The six moods of *śaraṇāgati*, or exclusive shelter, are a primary requisite for any disciple. They are actually the outward manifestation of *śraddhā*, or spiritual faith. In his *Āmnāya-sūtra*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura states:

sā ca śaraṇāpatti-lakṣaṇā

Śraddhā is characterised by its external symptom of taking complete shelter of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.¹⁶

Thus, the true disciple is one who possesses *śraddhā*, or spiritual faith. But *śraddhā* is not blind faith: when you are unsure whether something is true or not, but you decide to suspend your rational faculty and believe it anyway. Blind faith is a function of ignorance and occurs in the mind; but *śraddhā* is the awakening of the soul. It is the finest or most minute glimmer of the zenith of selfless love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa known as *prema*. Thus, *śraddhā* is a function not of ignorance but of the highest wisdom, and it occurs not in the mind but in the heart. It has been defined in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* as follows:

‘*śraddhā*’-*śabde* – *viśvāsa kahe sudṛḍha niścaya*
kṛṣṇe bhakti kaile sarva-karma kṛta haya

Śraddhā is the firm, unshakable conviction that if one simply engages in *bhakti* to Śrī Kṛṣṇa one need not make any separate endeavour in life for anything else.¹⁷

A person who possesses *śraddhā* has complete confidence that by fully engaging his body, mind and words in the service of the bona fide *guru*, the Vaiṣṇavas and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he need no longer be concerned for his own welfare or maintenance. Rather, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself will look after all his interests, as promised in *Bhagavad-gītā*:

¹⁶ Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, *Āmnāya-sūtra*, 58.

¹⁷ Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā*, 22.62.

*ananyāś cintayanto mām
ye janāḥ paryupāsate
teṣāṁ nityābhīyuktānām
yoga-kṣemaṁ vahāmy aham*

For those who are always absorbed in thoughts of Me, and who worship Me with exclusive devotion by every means, I Myself carry their necessities and safeguard what they have.¹⁸

In his ‘Pīyūṣa-varṣiṇī-vṛtti’ commentary to the first verse of *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains that *śaraṇāgati*, or exclusive shelter, is not itself *bhakti*.¹⁹ Rather, it is the doorway to the temple of *bhakti*. Since *śaraṇāgati* is the external symptom of *śraddhā*, a disciple must possess *śraddhā* before he can even begin on the path of *bhakti*. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī confirms this in his delineation of the stages of *bhakti* in his *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*:

ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-saṅgo ’tha bhajana-kriyā

In the beginning there is *śraddhā*. This is followed by association with *sādhus*, and then by the performance of *bhajana*, or devotional activities [which include taking shelter of a bona fide *guru*].²⁰

Śraddhā is thus the first stage of devotion. Indeed, it is *śraddhā* that leads the disciple to accept a bona fide *guru* in the first place, as Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura confirms in his *Āmnāya-sūtra*:

tayā deśika-pādāśrayaḥ

Śraddhā leads one to take shelter at a bona fide *guru*’s feet.²¹

¹⁸ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 9.22.

¹⁹ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 7.

²⁰ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.4.15.

²¹ Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, *Āmnāya-sūtra*, 59.

A disciple makes relevant inquiry

The third quality of a true disciple is *jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam*: he is inquisitive about the highest spiritual good. In the language of Vedānta, the term *śreya*, spiritual welfare, is often set in opposition to the term *preya*, the fleeting pleasures of this world. In other words, the disciple is not interested in bettering his position in this world, but in securing his spiritual welfare. But here *śreya* has been qualified with the adjective *uttamam*, or 'highest'. Therefore, the true disciple is not simply interested in any type of spiritual knowledge, but in the ultimate and most exalted kind. In other words, the disciple desires solely to attain *bhāva-bhakti* and then *prema-bhakti*, the perfection of selfless love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

For the followers of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *śreya uttamam* may also be said to refer to the highest spiritual position a living entity is able to attain, namely, that of an eternal maidservant of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. As we shall see in Chapter 7, this exalted type of devotion is what Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to distribute in the world. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī fulfilled Mahāprabhu's desire through his voluminous esoteric writings on the subject, which set out the path to attain this highest and most confidential of spiritual goals.

Naturally, the disciple who is eager to advance on the path of *bhakti* will make relevant inquiries of his *guru*. To do so is indeed the duty of the disciple, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā*:

*tad viddhi praṇipātena
paripraśnena sevayā*

Try to understand this knowledge by taking shelter of a spiritual preceptor, asking relevant questions of him, and rendering service unto him.²²

²² *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.34.

However, the disciple will not be able to understand anything from his *guru* without a genuine attitude of humility and without dedicated service. Indeed, service to the *guru* is the essence of the *guru*-disciple relationship.

A disciple serves his guru with great affection

In Sanskrit, loving service is known as *sevā*. In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa includes this as the third requirement of a true disciple. As we shall see, it is indeed the primary duty of the disciple. This is confirmed throughout the scriptures.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, for instance, the young Prahlaḍa advises his friends as follows:

*guru-śuśrūṣayā bhaktyā
sarva-labdhārpaṇena ca
saṅgena sādhu-bhaktānām
īśvarārādhanena ca*

One must accept the bona fide *guru* and render service unto him with great devotion and faith. One should offer whatever one has to the *guru*, and one should worship the Supreme Lord in the association of saintly persons and devotees.²³

In his *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī defines supra-mundane devotion as follows:

*anyābhilāṣitā-sūṇyam
jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam
ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-
śīlanam bhaktir uttamā*

Pure devotional service is the uninterrupted flow of service to Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed through all endeavours of the body, mind and speech, as well as through the expression of various

²³ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 7.7.30.

spiritual sentiments, which is not covered by knowledge aimed at impersonal liberation and reward-seeking activity, and which is devoid of all desires other than the aspiration to bring happiness to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.²⁴

Here supra-mundane devotion is referred to as *uttamā-bhakti* – literally, ‘devotion free from ignorance’. The essence of such pure devotion is the cultivation of activities favourable to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In his *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu*, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravārtī Ṭhākura makes it clear that this embraces all sixty-four limbs of *bhakti*, which begin with (i) taking exclusive shelter at the feet of a *guru*, (ii) accepting initiation and spiritual guidance, and (iii) serving the *guru* with feelings of great intimacy.²⁵ In other words, dedication to the *guru* is tantamount to dedication to the Supreme Lord. This conclusion is supported by both the Upaniṣads and the Purāṇas.

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, for instance, avows:

*yasya deve parā bhaktir
yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ
prakāśante mahātmanaḥ*

All the confidential meanings of the scriptures manifest in the heart of one who has supra-mundane devotion equally for the *guru* as for the Supreme Lord.²⁶

²⁴ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.1.11; quoted by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 19.167).

²⁵ Śrīla Viśvanāth Cakravārtī Ṭhākura, *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), pp. 5–7.

²⁶ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.23; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.346).

The *Padma-purāṇa* affirms this:

*bhaktir yathā harau me'sti
tadvan niṣṭhā gurau yadi
mamāsti tena satyena
svaṁ darśayatu me hariḥ*

If my devotion to my *guru* is even stronger than my devotion for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then may this fact cause Śrī Kṛṣṇa to reveal Himself to me.²⁷

Indeed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself proclaims:

*prathamam tu guruṁ pūjya
tataś caiva mamārcanam
kurvan siddhim avāpnōti
hy anyathā niṣphalaṁ bhavet*

If anyone worships his *guru* first and then worships Me, he certainly achieves perfection. If he does not do so, his worship bears no fruit.²⁸

Similarly, Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa Prabhu quotes the *Śāṇḍilya-smṛti* as follows:

*siddhir bhavati vā neti
saṁśayo 'cyuta sevinām
niḥsaṁśayas tu tad bhakta
paricaryāratātmanām*

One may doubt whether the servant of the Supreme Lord will attain perfection, but there is absolutely no doubt that

²⁷ *Padma-purāṇa*, 6.128.269; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.358).

²⁸ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.344).

those who are attached to serving His devotees will attain perfection.²⁹

*kevalam bhagavat-pāda-
sewayā vimalam manaḥ
na jāyate yathā nityam
tad bhakta-caraṇārcanāt*

One's mind is not purified as fully by serving the lotus-like feet of the Supreme Lord as it is by serving the feet of His devotees.³⁰

It should be noted that the senior Vaiṣṇavas will all be *gurus* for the young spiritual seeker. By serving these *gurus*, the disciple's spiritual success is guaranteed. In fact, the disciple should faithfully serve the *guru* with his body, mind and words for several years before the *guru* agrees to initiate him. In the *Krama-dīpikā*, it is said:

*santoṣayed akuṭilārdretarāntarātmā
taṁ svair dhanaiś ca vapuṣāpy anukūlavāṇyā
abda-trayaṅkamalanābhadhiyā'tidhīras
tuṣṭe vivakṣatu gurāv atha mantra-dīkṣām*

His heart melting with sincere love and his thoughts fixed on the Supreme Lord, whose navel resembles a lotus flower, the prospective disciple should, with his wealth, body and pleasing words, serve his *guru* for three years. Then, when the *guru* is satisfied, the disciple may ask for initiation in chanting the sacred *mantras*.³¹

Service to the *guru* is fundamental to *bhakti*, and will be examined in greater detail later.

²⁹ Quoted by Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa in his *Govinda-bhāṣya* commentary on *Vedānta-sūtra*, 3.3.51.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Krama-dīpikā*, 4.3; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.78).

Further qualities of a disciple

In his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī enumerates further qualities expected of a disciple. First, he quotes from the *Mantra-muktāvalī* as follows:

*śiṣyaḥ śuddhānvayaḥ śrīmān
vinītaḥ priya-darśanaḥ
satya-vāk puṇya-carita
'dabhra-dhīr dambha-varjitaḥ*

A real disciple is faithful, glorious, humble, pleasing to the eye, truthful, pious, intelligent, honest and free from hypocrisy.³²

*kāma-krodha-parityāgī
bhaktaś ca guru-pādayoḥ
devatā-pravaṇaḥ kāya-
mano-vāgbhir divā-niśam*

He is free from lust and anger, and is completely devoted to the feet of his *guru*. He is dedicated to the demigods³³ and the Supreme Lord, and is engaged in service day and night, with his body, mind and words.³⁴

³² Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.59.

³³ This refers to demigods who are fully devoted to the Supreme Lord, such as Gopeśvara Mahādeva. Indeed, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* instructs one to abandon a demigod who is unable to save one from material existence (see *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 5.5.18). Also, the *guru* is the embodiment of the demigods and a manifestation of the Supreme Lord (see *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.17.27). Thus, by worshipping the *guru*, the disciple automatically worships the demigods and the Supreme Lord; and if a person worships the Supreme Lord, there is no need for him to make any separate endeavour to worship the demigods, just as watering the root of a tree automatically nourishes all the tree's branches, twigs and leaves (see *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.31.14).

³⁴ *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.60.

*nīrujo nirjitāśeṣa-
pātakaḥ śraddhyānvitaḥ
dviḥ-deva-pitṛṇām ca
nityam arcā-parāyaṇaḥ*

He is healthy, sinless, faithful and always devoted to the worship of the demigods, *brāhmaṇas* and forefathers.³⁵

*yuvā viniyatāśeṣa-
karaṇaḥ karuṇālayaḥ
ity ādi-lakṣaṇair yuktaḥ
śiṣyo dikṣādhikāravān*

He is young, in full control of his senses, and kind. A person who has these and other virtues is qualified for *dikṣā*, or initiation.³⁶

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī then also includes the following verse from the eleventh canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

*amāṇy amatsaro dakṣo
nirmamo dṛḍha-sauhṛdaḥ
asatvaro 'rtha-jijñāsur
anasūyur amogha-vāk*

A real disciple is free of pride, free of envy, diligent, free of any false sense of possessiveness, resolute, a sincere friend of his *guru*, unagitated, eager to learn the truth, free of hostility, and not one to waste time in useless banter.³⁷

³⁵ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.61. Refer to footnote 201.

³⁶ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.62.

³⁷ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.10.6.

Types of persons a guru should not accept as disciples

There are several types of disciples the *guru* should be wary of initiating. Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa goes on to list them as follows, quoting from the *Agastya-saṁhitā*:

*alasā malināḥ klišṭā
dāmbhikāḥ kṛpaṇās tathā
daridrā rogiṇo ruṣṭā
rāgiṇo bhoga-lālasāḥ*

Persons who are lazy, filthy, agitated, proud, miserly, wretched, sickly, angry, attached and greedy for sense enjoyment.³⁸

*asūyā-matsara-grastāḥ
śaṭhāḥ paruṣa-vādināḥ
anyāyopārjita-dhanāḥ
para-dāra-ratās ca ye*

Persons who are gripped by envy and hostility, who are cheaters, who speak harshly, who are addicted to accumulating wealth for no good reason, and who commit adultery.³⁹

*viduṣāṁ vairiṇaś caiva
ajñāḥ paṇḍita-māninaḥ
bhraṣṭa-vratās ca ye kaṣṭa-
vṛttayaḥ piśunāḥ khalāḥ*

Persons who are enemies of the learned, who are fools but think themselves wise, who have fallen from their vows, who earn their livelihood by indecent means, and who are cruel, harsh and wicked.⁴⁰

³⁸ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.64.

³⁹ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.65.

⁴⁰ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.66.

*bahv-āśinaḥ krūra-ceṣṭā
durātmanaś ca nindita
ity evam ādayo'py anye
pāpiṣṭhāḥ puruṣādhamāḥ*

Gluttons, the cruel and nefarious, the degraded, the sinful, and the lowest of men who have these and a host of other faults.⁴¹

*akṛtyebhyo'nivāryāś ca
guru-śikṣā-sahiṣṇavaḥ
evambhūtāḥ parityājyāḥ
śiṣyatve nopakalpitāḥ*

Persons who cannot turn away from what should not be done and who cannot bear to follow the *guru*'s instructions should be rejected. They are not fit to be disciples.⁴²

Śrī *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* then gives some stern warnings, still from the *Agastya-saṁhitā*:

*yady ete hy upakalperan
devatākrośa-bhājanāḥ
bhavantīha dardrās te
putra-dāra-vivarjitāḥ
nārakāś caiva dehānte
tiryāñcaḥ prabhavanti te*

Gurus who accept disciples like these become the objects of the Supreme Lord's anger. In this very life they become poverty-stricken and are abandoned by their wife and children, and at death they descend to hell. Finally, they are born as animals.⁴³

⁴¹ Śrī *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.67.

⁴² Śrī *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.68.

⁴³ Śrī *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.69–70.

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī then quotes from the *Hayaśirṣa-pañcarātra*:

*jaiminiḥ sugataś caiva
nāstiko nagna eva ca
kapilaś cākṣapādaś ca
ṣaḍ ete hetu-vādinah*

The six atheistic philosophers are Jaimini, Sugata, Nāstika, Nagna, Kapila and Akṣapāda.⁴⁴

*etan-matānusāreṇa
vartante ye narādhamāḥ
te hetu-vādinah proktāś
tebhyas tantraṁ na dāpayet*

Those who follow their ideas become the lowest of men. Although these followers may be called philosophers in this world, one should not initiate them.⁴⁵

A guru should first examine the prospective disciple

In *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī then advises:

*tayoḥ parīkṣā cānyo'nyam
ekābdaṁ saha-vāsataḥ
vyavahāra-svabhāvānu-
bhavenaivābhijāyate*

The prospective *guru* and disciple should live together for one year and carefully examine each other's activities and character, to determine that each is qualified.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.71.

⁴⁵ *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.72.

⁴⁶ *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.73.

To support this position, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī quotes from the *Mantra-muktāvalī*:

*tayor vatsara-vāsena
jñātānyonya-svabhāvayoḥ
gurutā śiṣyatā ceti
nānyathaiveti niścayaḥ*

The prospective *guru* and disciple should live together for one year. Thus, they will come to understand each other's natures. Then it will be known whether the *guru* and the disciple are genuine. There is no other way to ascertain this.⁴⁷

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī provides further evidence from *smṛti-śāstra* and the *Sāra-saṅgraha*:

nāsamvatsara-vāsine deyaṭ

The *guru* should not give initiation without first living with his disciple for a year.⁴⁸

sad-guruḥ svāśritaṁ śiṣyaṁ varṣm ekaṁ parīkṣayet

The bona fide *guru* should examine his prospective disciple for one year.⁴⁹

*rājñi cāmātyajā doṣāḥ
patnī-pāpaṁ sva-bhartari
tathā śiṣyārjitaṁ pāpaṁ
guruḥ prāpnoti niścitaṁ*

The faults of a counsellor fall on his king, and the sins of a wife fall on her husband. In the same way, a *guru* acquires the sins of his disciple. That is certain.⁵⁰

.....
⁴⁷ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.74.

⁴⁸ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.75.

⁴⁹ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.76.

⁵⁰ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.77.

Of course, if the *guru* is an exalted Vaiṣṇava, he will never be affected by the sins of his disciples. Rather, he at once burns those sins to ashes when he confers *dikṣā*, or spiritual initiation, upon a disciple. But the unqualified *guru* will certainly have to suffer for the misdeeds of his disciples.

The *Nārada-pañcarātra* declares:

*yo vakti nyāya-rahitam
anyāyena śṛṇoti yaḥ
tāv ubhau narakam ghoram
vrajataḥ kālam akṣayam*

When a *guru* gives specious instructions or a disciple follows his instructions speciously, both go to a terrible, perpetual hell.⁵¹

In his commentary to this verse, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī explains that this verse describes a situation where either the disciple or the *guru* did not properly examine the other before initiation.⁵² The possible consequences of such an error are serious for both parties.

⁵¹ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.101.

⁵² Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī's auto-commentary to Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa is entitled 'Dig-darśinī-ṭikā'.

Can a Guru Ever Be Rejected?

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the bona fide *guru* is regarded as a direct manifestation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The scriptures warn the disciple sternly never to disrespect or abandon the *guru*. Given this, does Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology ever permit a disciple to reject his *guru*? And if so, in what specific circumstances may the disciple do so? In these times of false *gurus* and fickle disciples, this topic is particularly germane.

The bona fide guru should never be disrespected

To reject or disrespect a bona fide *guru* is a serious offence. In the *Padma Purāṇa*, it is listed as the third offence to the holy name.¹ The scriptures repeatedly warn the disciple against making this grave error. For instance, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

*ācāryaṁ mām vijānīyān
navamanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ*

Know the *ācārya*, or spiritual preceptor, to be Me. One should never disrespect him under any circumstance, nor should one envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods.²

¹ *Padma Purāṇa*, Brahma-khaṇḍa, 25.17.

² *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.17.27.

The *Aditya Purāṇa* stipulates:

*avidyo vā sa-vidyo vā
gurur eva janārdanaḥ
mārgastho vāpy amārga-stho
gurur eva sadā gatiḥ*

Whether ignorant or learned, the *guru* is Kṛṣṇa Himself.
Whether on the path or off it, the *guru* is always our refuge.³

*harau ruṣṭe gurus trātā
gurau ruṣṭe na kaścana
tasmāt sarva-ṭrayatnena
gurum eva prasādayet*

If Śrī Kṛṣṇa is displeased with someone, the *guru* can protect him, but if the *guru* is dissatisfied with someone, there is no shelter for him. Therefore, one should carefully endeavour to properly please one's *guru*.⁴

Similarly, the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* states:

*bodhaḥ kaluṣitas tena
daurātmyaṁ prakāṣī-kṛtam
gurur yena parityaktas
tena tyaktaḥ purā hariḥ*

One who rejects his own *guru* pollutes his own intelligence and exhibits severe weakness of character, for such a person has already rejected the Supreme Lord.⁵

³ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.359).

⁴ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.360).

⁵ Quoted by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha* (Anuccheda 207), and by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.364).

*pratīpadya gurum yas tu
mohād vipratīpadyate
sa kalpa-koṭim narake
pacyate puruṣādhamah*

Any person who has once accepted a bona fide *guru* and then, due to illusion, rejects him, that lowest of mankind then falls into hell to suffer for ten million *kalpas* (ten thousand *yugas*).⁶

The *Agastya-saṁhitā* further warns the disciple:

*adhikṣīpya gurum mohāt
paruṣam pravādanti ye
śūkaratvam bhavaty eva
teṣām janma-śateṣv api*

Those who, out of ignorance, disrespect a *guru*, considering him to be an ordinary human being, take their next one hundred births as hogs.⁷

From these statements, it would appear that the *guru* can never be abandoned under any circumstance. This is undoubtedly true of the bona fide *guru* who is free from self-interest and envy, learned in the scriptures and devoted to the Supreme Lord. However, the scriptures do allow the disciple to reject a false *guru*. In fact, they state clearly that it is the duty of the spiritual seeker to abandon such an imitator.

⁶ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.365).

⁷ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.369).

The duty to reject a guru who is not a Vaiṣṇava

As we have seen in Chapter 3, the *Padma Purāṇa* stipulates that a real *guru* must be a Vaiṣṇava:

*mahā-kula-prasūto 'pi
sarva-yajñeṣu dikṣitaḥ
sahasra-śākhādhyāyī ca
na guruḥ syād avaiṣṇavaḥ*

A person may be born in an aristocratic family, be initiated in all *yajñas* and be learned in a thousand branches of the Vedas, but if he is not a Vaiṣṇava, then he is not fit to be a *guru*.⁸

Similarly, the *Nārada-pañcarātra* states:

*avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena
mantrēṇa nirayaṁ vrajet
punaś ca vidhinā samyag
grāhayed vaiṣṇavād guroḥ*

One who receives his *mantra* from a *guru* who is not a Vaiṣṇava is destined to go to hell. Such a person should approach a Vaiṣṇava *guru* and again receive the *mantra* according to the direction of the scriptures.⁹

Thus, if one has taken shelter of a *guru* who is not a Vaiṣṇava, then one has not yet submitted to a bona fide *guru*. It follows that in such a situation, the novice should abandon his so-called *guru* and take shelter of a pure Vaiṣṇava.

In his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī confirms this:

*tad etat paramārtha-gurv-āśrayo vyavahārika-gurv-ādi-
tyāgenāpi kartavya ity āha –*

⁸ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.54). Also included in *Śrī Gauḍīya-kanṭhahāra* (1.46), along with a similar verse (1.17) ascribed to *Padma Purāṇa*.

⁹ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.366).

*gurur na sa syāt sva-jano na sa syāt
pitā na sa syāj jananī na sā syāt
daivam na tat syān na patiś ca sa syān
na mocayed yaḥ samupeta-mṛtyum*

In this regard, one should take shelter of a *guru* who can help one achieve the highest goal of life. One should reject a *guru* who holds his position through social convention and so on, as stated as follows –

‘One who cannot deliver his dependents from repeated birth and death should never become a *guru*, a relative, a father or mother, a demigod, or a husband.’¹⁰

The verse Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī quotes is the words of Śrī Rṣabhadeva in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Everyone gets a father and mother at birth, but a real parent is he who can release his offspring from the cycle of repeated birth and death. If a parent is unable to do this, he is not qualified to be a parent. The same is true of other relations of dependency in one’s life, particularly that of the *guru*. In his purport to this verse from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Mahārāja explains:

The word *daivam* indicates a demigod or one who accepts worship from a dependent. Ordinarily, the spiritual master, husband, father, mother or superior relative accepts worship from an inferior relative, but here Rṣabhadeva forbids this. First the father, spiritual master or husband must be able to release the dependent from repeated birth and death. If he cannot do this, he plunges himself into the ocean of reproachment for his unlawful activities.¹¹

¹⁰ Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbhā*, Anuccheda 210. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī quotes from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 5.5.18.

¹¹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (Bhaktivedanta VedaBase 2003, Bhaktivedanta Archives, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust), 5.5.18, purport.

The principle of Śrī Rṣabhadeva's instruction is nicely illustrated throughout the Purāṇas and epics. In his delightful Hindi poem Śrī Rāma-carita-mānasa, Śrī Tulasī dāsa writes:

*jāke priya na rāma-baidehī
tajiye tāhi koṭi bairī sama,
jadyapi parama sanehī
so chāmṛiye
tajyo pitā prahlāda, bibhīṣana bandhu,
bharata mahatārī
bali guru tajyo kanta braja-banitanhi,
bhaye muda-maṅgalakārī*

If someone does not consider Śrī Sītā and Śrī Rāma to be dear to him, then he should be given up as if he were ten-million enemies, even if he is most dear to you. Thus, Prahlāda Mahārāja rejected his father, Vibhīṣaṇa his relatives, Bharata his mother, Bali Mahārāja his *guru*, and the *gopīs* their husbands, and they thus attained joy and auspiciousness.¹²

Prahlāda Mahārāja rejected his father Hiranyakaśipu, who developed a hatred for the Supreme Lord. Similarly, Prahlāda Mahārāja's grandson Bali Mahārāja rejected his *guru*, the powerful Śukrācārya, who was averse to Viṣṇu. When Viṣṇu came to Bali Mahārāja in the form of a young dwarf renunciant and begged three steps of land from him, Śukrācārya, understanding the boy's true identity, warned Bali Mahārāja not to give him anything. But the emperor, who understood that everything already belongs to the Supreme Lord, disregarded his *guru*. Consequently, Prahlāda Mahārāja and Bali Mahārāja have come to be known as *mahājanas*, or great personalities.¹³

¹² Śrī Tulasī dāsa, Śrī Rāma-carita-mānasa, 174.1–2.

¹³ The twelve *mahājanas* are Brahmā, Nārada, Śiva, the Kumāras, Kapila, Manu, Prahlāda, Bhīṣma, Janaka, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, Bali Mahārāja and Yamarāja.

The *Mahābhārata* decrees:

mahājano yena gataḥ sa paṇthāḥ

One should accept whatever path is set out by the *mahājanas*.¹⁴

Thus, the spiritual aspirant is urged to follow the examples of Prahlāda and Bali Mahārāja.

Like these two *mahājanas*, Vibhīṣaṇa rejected all his relatives, including his inimical brothers Rāvaṇa and Kumbakarna, and took exclusive shelter of Śrī Rāma. Similarly, Śrī Rāma's older brother Bharata rejected his mother Kaikeyī after she had Rāma exiled to the forest for fourteen years.

The Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* describes the love of the residents of Vraja. One day Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His cowherd friends were hungry and approached some *brāhmaṇas* on the outskirts of Vraja for some food. The *brāhmaṇas* were so preoccupied with their Vedic rituals that they simply ignored the boys. But when the boys approached the wives of these *brāhmaṇas*, those women immediately fed them sumptuously – with the food they had prepared for the ritual. In effect, they disregarded their husbands, who were incapable of delivering them from the path of repeated birth and death.

The love of the *gopīs*, or cowherd girls, in Vraja is the highest of all. The *gopīs* abandoned their husbands, family and social conventions for the sake of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as Śrī Uddhava describes poignantly:

*āsāṃ aho caraṇa-reṇu-juṣāṃ ahaṃ syāṃ
vṛndāvane kim api gulma-latauśadhīnām
yā dustyajam sva-janam ārya-patham ca hitvā
bhejur mukunda-padavīm śrutibhir vimṛgyām*

.....
¹⁴ *Mahābhārata*, Vana-parva, 313.117.

The *gopīs* of Vraja have abandoned the company of their husbands, sons and other family members, who are very difficult to give up, and they have forsaken the path of chastity to take shelter of the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whom one should seek out by Vedic knowledge. Oh, let me be one of the bushes, creepers or herbs in Vṛndāvana, which are trampled by the *gopīs* and blessed with the dust of their feet.¹⁵

In this verse, the words ‘they have forsaken the path of chastity’ mean the *gopīs* gave up their husbands, who were creating obstacles in their service to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The duty to reject a guru who loses his way

If a spiritual aspirant takes shelter of a *guru* who is a neophyte Vaiṣṇava and not a Vaiṣṇava of the topmost level (known as a *mahā-bhāgavata*),¹⁶ then it is possible that such a *guru* may stray from the path of *bhakti*. A neophyte devotee, who is not qualified to hold the position of *guru*, is likely to become infected by pride and think himself equal to a Vaiṣṇava of the highest calibre. Deluded by conceit, he is then likely to criticise or disrespect other Vaiṣṇavas, to become defeated by lust, and to become attached to the worship and comforts he receives from his disciples. Such a so-called *guru* will try to prevent his hapless disciples from receiving any guidance from Vaiṣṇavas who are more qualified than he is. Thus, he becomes the enemy of his disciples.

The *Nārada-pañcarātra* states:

*sa guruḥ paramo vairī
bhraṣṭam vartma pradarśayet
taj-janma-nāśam kurute
śiṣya-hatyām bhaved dhruvam*

¹⁵ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.47.61.

¹⁶ See Chapter 3, ‘A *guru* is a Vaiṣṇava of the highest level’.

If a *guru* is unable to show the proper path, then he is not a *guru* but a great enemy. He destroys the opportunity of human life, and is therefore the murderer of his disciple.¹⁷

A *guru* who abandons the path of *bhakti* and disrespects the Vaiṣṇavas is no longer to be considered a Vaiṣṇava. Accordingly, such a false *guru* should be rejected. In the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma instructs Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja as follows:

*guror apy avaliptasya
kāryākāryam ajānataḥ
utpatha-pratipannasya
parityāgo vidhīyate*

One should reject a *guru* who is arrogant, who is unable to discriminate between what is to be done and what is not to be done, and who has taken a wrong path.¹⁸

We noted previously that the *Aditya Purāṇa* appears to stipulate that a *guru* should never be rejected, even if he leaves the path of *bhakti*:

*avidyo vā sa-vidyo vā
gurur eva janārdanaḥ
mārgastho vāpy amārga-stho
gurur eva sadā gatiḥ*

Whether ignorant or learned, the *guru* is Kṛṣṇa Himself. Whether on the path or off it, the *guru* is always our refuge.¹⁹

¹⁷ Śrī Nārada-pañcarātra, 2.8.26.

¹⁸ *Mahābhārata*, Udyoga 179.25 (alternate reference: 5.178.24). Quoted by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha* (Anuccheda 238), and by Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura in *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta*. In *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta*, the final part of this verse appears as *nyāyo daṇḍo vidhiyate* ('he should be reasoned with and reprimanded').

¹⁹ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.359).

However, individual verses from the scriptures should be understood in relationship to the overall presentation. Given the other verses from the scriptures on the subject, especially from the *Nārada-pañcarātra*, *Mahābhārata* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, it is clear that this verse from the *Aditya Purāṇa* is a warning to the disciple not to dismiss a *guru* too easily. This is especially pertinent in relation to a *guru* of the topmost level, whose actions the ordinary person may not easily comprehend. It is easy for the neophyte disciple to misjudge such a *guru*, and the consequences of doing so are particularly severe.

In his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī explains:

*yaḥ prathamam śābde pare ca niṣṇātam [bhā.pu. 11.3.21]
ity-ādy-ukta-lakṣaṇam guruṁ nāśritavān tādṛśa-guroś
ca matsarādito mahābhāgavata-satkārādāv anumatiṁ na
labhate, sa prathamata eva tyakta-śāstro na vicāryate |
ubhaya-saṅkaṭa-pāto hi tasmin bhavaty eva |*

At first, one may have taken shelter of a *guru* who does not possess the qualities previously noted, such as *śābde pare ca niṣṇātam* [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.3.21]. And then, because of the *guru*'s envy and so forth, one does not receive his permission to serve a *mahā-bhāgavata*, or devotee of the topmost level. The unqualified *guru* should therefore not be considered, for he is the first to have violated the injunctions of the scriptures. With such a *guru*, the disciple is damned if he does and damned if he does not.

evam-ādikābhiprāyeṇaiva –

*yo vakti nyāya-rahitam
anyāyena śṛṇoti yaḥ
tāv ubhau narakaṁ ghoram
vrajataḥ kālam akṣayam*

iti nārada-pañcarātre |

This is the intention of the following verse from *Śrī Nārada-
pañcarātra* –

‘When a *guru* gives specious instructions or a disciple follows
his instructions speciously, both go to a terrible, perpetual
hell.’

*ata eva dūrata evārādhyas tādṛśo guruḥ | vaiṣṇava-
vidveṣī cet parityājya eva |*

*guror apy avaliptasya
kāryākāryam ajānataḥ
utpatha-pratipannasya
parityāgo vidhīyate*

[ma.bhā. 5.178.24] iti smaraṇāt |

Such a *guru* should be worshipped from afar. But if he has
actual hatred for the Vaiṣṇavas, he should certainly be rejected.
The *smṛti* states –

‘One should reject a *guru* who is arrogant, who is unable to
discriminate between what is to be done and what is not to
be done, and who has taken a wrong path. [*Mahābhārata*,
5.178.24]’

*tasya vaiṣṇava-bhāva-rāhityeṇāvaiṣṇavatayā
avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena ity-ādi-vacana-viṣayatvāc ca |*

Since he is devoid of the nature of a Vaiṣṇava and displays the
qualities of a non-devotee, one should consider him to be the
non-Vaiṣṇava mentioned in the verse quoted previously [in
Anuccheda 207] that begins with the words *avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena*.

*yathokta-lakṣaṇasya guror avidyamānāyām tu, tasyaiva
mahā-bhāgavatasyaikaṣya nitya-sevanam para-ma-śreyaḥ
| sa ca śrī-guruvat sama-vāsanaḥ svasmin kṛpālu-cittaś ca
grāhyah |*

If one finds himself without a *guru* with the good qualifications previously described, one should find a *mahā-bhāgavata*, or a devotee of the topmost level, and serve him constantly, which will give one the highest benefit in life. And if that topmost devotee is merciful towards one and wishes to reciprocate as a *guru*, then one should accept him.²⁰

The verse beginning with the words *avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena*, which Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī quotes earlier in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha*, is from *Śrī Nārada-pañcarātra*:

*avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena
mantraṇa nirayaṁ vrajet
punaś ca vidhinā samyag
grāhayed vaiṣṇavād guroḥ*

One who receives his *mantra* from a *guru* who is not a Vaiṣṇava is destined to go to hell. Such a person should approach a Vaiṣṇava *guru* and again receive the *mantra* according to the direction of the scriptures.²¹

Significantly, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī states that if a *guru* falls into error, the disciple should respect him from a distance and accept spiritual guidance elsewhere. However, if the *guru* strays to such an extent that he begins to disrespect the Vaiṣṇavas or prevent the disciple from taking shelter of a qualified Vaiṣṇava, then the disciple should promptly reject such a false *guru*.

The pseudo-*guru* who has completely lost his way is the subject of the verse from the *Mahābhārata*. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī concludes that a disciple who has accepted such a *guru* should follow the exact same direction given in the verse from *Śrī Nārada-pañcarātra*. In other words, he should reject the false

²⁰ Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha*, Anuccheda 238.

²¹ Quoted by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Bhakti-sandarbha* (Anuccheda 207), and by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.366).

guru and take initiation from a qualified *guru* who is a Vaiṣṇava of the topmost level. Thus, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī clarifies the meaning of the term *parityāgaḥ*, ‘rejected’, in the verse from the *Mahābhārata*. It signifies that the false *guru* should be rejected and a true *guru* accepted. The disciple should not be without a qualified *guru*.

This analysis is supported by Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura in his *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta*. Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura first advises the disciple not to immediately reject an erring *guru*, but to reprimand him in a secluded place for his improper behaviour. If the so-called *guru* does not change his ways and is averse to *bhakti*, then the disciple is advised to simply reject him:

*tatra gurur yadi visadṛśakārī, īśvare bhrāntaḥ, kṛṣṇa-yaśo
vimukhas tad-vilāsa-vinodaṁ nāṅgīkaroti svayaṁ vā
durabhimānī, loka-svastavaīḥ kṛṣṇam anukaroti, tarhi tyājya
eva |*

But if the *guru* now behaves improperly, is confused about the Supreme Lord, is averse to the glories of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, does not relish Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, or is intolerably proud on account of the false praise he receives from the public and thus falls into darkness, then he is simply to be rejected.

*katham eva gurus tyājyaḥ, iti cen na, kṛṣṇa-bhāva-lobhāt
kṛṣṇa-prāptaye guror āśrayaṇaṁ kṛtaṁ, tad-anantaraṁ yadi
tasmin gurau āsura-bhāvas tarhi kiṁ kartavyam, asura-gurum
tyaktvā śrī-kṛṣṇa-bhaktimantaṁ gurum anyam bhajet |*

One should not think, ‘How can the *guru* be abandoned?’ With great eagerness to obtain pure love and attain Śrī Kṛṣṇa, one accepts the shelter of a *guru*. But if a demoniac mentality later emerges in that *guru*, what is one to do? Rejecting this demoniac *guru*, one should worship in his place a *guru* who has devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

*asya kṛṣṇa-balād asurasya guror balaṁ mardanīyam iti
vaiṣṇava-bhajana-vicāraḥ | evaṁ tu dṛṣṭā bahavaḥ śrī-
kṛṣṇa-caitanyāvatāre iti guru-nirūpaṇa-siddhāntāḥ |*

By the power such a *guru* derives from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the power of the demoniac *guru* is destroyed. This is the correct analysis of Vaiṣṇava devotional practice. Indeed, many examples of this were seen at the time of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. This represents the conclusion of this discussion about the *guru*.²²

Without a genuine *guru*, the disciple cannot serve the Supreme Lord, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself declares:

*prathamam tu guruṁ pūjya
tataś caiva mamārcanam
kurvan siddhim avāpnoti
hy anyathā niṣphalaṁ bhavet*

If anyone worships his *guru* first and then worships Me, he certainly achieves perfection. If he does not do so, his worship bears no fruit.²³

Hence, the disciple who has had to reject his *guru* must accept another *guru*. If this *guru* is a *mahā-bhāgavata*, or topmost devotee, the disciple will be able to attain the highest spiritual perfection.

Six types of offences to the Vaiṣṇavas

As we have seen, the *guru* who deviates should be rejected if he begins to commit *vaiṣṇava-aparādha*, or offences to the Vaiṣṇavas. One who does not abandon such a *guru* becomes implicated in these offences. It is therefore critical for the spiritual practitioner to understand of what *vaiṣṇava-aparādha*

²² Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta*, commentary following verse 18.

²³ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.344).

consists. In his conversation with King Bhagīratha in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Mārkaṇḍeya Ṛṣi explains:

*hanti nindati vai dveṣṭi
vaiṣṇavān nābhinandati
krudhyate yāti no harṣaṁ
darśane patanāni ṣaṭ*

To beat or kill a Vaiṣṇava, to vilify him, to bear malice or envy towards him, to fail to welcome him properly, to become angry with him, and not to feel pleasure upon seeing him – by these six one falls to a degraded position.²⁴

One is guilty of beating or killing a Vaiṣṇava not only if he actually commits such a crime personally, but also if he attempts to do so and fails, if he aids or abets such an act, if he instructs someone else to carry out the act, if he knows someone is planning to commit such a crime but does not try to prevent him, or if he feels pleasure upon hearing of such an act.

To vilify a Vaiṣṇava means to defame him through libel or slander, to insult or minimize him directly or indirectly, or to criticise his birth, upbringing, education or previous conduct.

If an elevated Vaiṣṇava comes to the hometown of a disciple, but the *guru* of that disciple does not permit him to welcome this Vaiṣṇava and hear from him about Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then this is a symptom of envy. Such a pseudo-*guru* is more concerned to retain the adoration and service he receives from his disciple than to further the disciple's spiritual interest. This type of pseudo-*guru* is simply out to exploit his disciple and is not free from worldly attachment and illusion, as a true *guru* should be. Accordingly, the disciple should end his relationship with such an inimical *guru*.

If a so-called *guru* fails to welcome a Vaiṣṇava properly, he suffers the same spiritual fate as Romaharṣaṇa Sūta, who

.....
²⁴ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (10.312).

neglected to welcome Baladeva Prabhu. Greatly angered, Baladeva Prabhu killed Romaharṣaṇa by touching him with the tip of a blade of *kuśa* grass. The spiritual life of such a pseudo-*guru* is destroyed, as is that of the disciple who continues to stand by him. A *guru* fails to welcome a Vaiṣṇava properly if he does not go out to greet him, does not offer him a seat and some water, does not speak pleasing words to him, or attempts to prevent that Vaiṣṇava from speaking. A *guru* commits the same error if he instructs or encourages his disciples to do the same.

A disciple should similarly reject a pseudo-*guru* who does not feel joy upon seeing a pure Vaiṣṇava, what to speak of an imitator *guru* who becomes angry with a pure Vaiṣṇava.

All offences to the Vaiṣṇava stem from envy, which is the third of the six types of offences to the Vaiṣṇava. Envy is therefore the principal offence from which the other five manifest. In Sanskrit terminology, it is referred to as the *aṅgī*, or principal branch, from which the five *aṅgas*, or subsidiary branches, spring. Accordingly, if a so-called *guru* bears envy towards a Vaiṣṇava, the disciple should unceremoniously sever his relationship with him – before the disciple is himself infected by that mood.

In his book *Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Prabhupāda sums up the subject as follows:

Those who desire their own welfare should give up the materialistic, proud, so-called *guru* and take proper initiation from a Vaiṣṇava *guru*. If one has a prominent false ego and a material conception of life, then he will naturally become envious of the transcendental Vaiṣṇavas. One should give up the so-called *guru* who is envious of the Vaiṣṇavas, knowing him to be a non-devotee. If one fails to do so, one will incur sin and deviate from the path of devotion.²⁵

²⁵ Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Prabhupāda, *Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava*, trans. Bhūmipati dāsa, ed. Puṇḍarika Vidyānidhi dāsa (Vrajraja Press, 1999), p. 111.

Perfection Through Guru-sevā

In Chapter 4, we enumerated the qualifications of a genuine disciple. One of these is service to the *guru* with great affection. In his *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī lists sixty-four aspects of devotional practice. The first three of these, as we observed in Chapter 2, relate directly to the *guru*. The third of these is *viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā*, or service to the *guru* with great intimacy. In this chapter, we shall consider what such service consists of and how it awards complete spiritual perfection to the disciple.

The disciple's duty to serve the guru with great intimacy

The Sanskrit word *viśrambha* signifies 'confidence' or 'intimacy'. *Viśrambheṇa sevā* therefore denotes service performed in a spirit of great love and intimacy. There is in fact no accurate English translation for the Sanskrit word *sevā*. The English 'service' generally carries connotations of exploitation, if it is not related to a commercial relationship wherein the person carrying out the service receives some financial benefit or remuneration. Even in the service industry, however, service is often rendered with care but rarely with any love. The word *sevaka*, or 'servant', similarly carries negative connotations when transplanted in the foreign culture of Western capitalism.

The Sanskrit word *sevā* denotes a labour of love. It is looked upon not as ordinary work, but as privileged work. Similarly,

the word *sevaka* does not carry the negative connotations of an exploited worker of lowly status. On the contrary, a *sevaka* traditionally holds a position of great respect, for he or she has willingly and happily forsaken worldly interests for a greater spiritual purpose. In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, the *sevaka* engages in *sevā* with the aim of attaining *prema*, the summit of selfless devotion to the Supreme Lord.

The hallmark of *viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā* is the feeling that one is the property of the *guru*.¹ The disciple who possesses this mood will not hesitate to fulfil the request of his *guru*, no matter how much personal difficulty or inconvenience it involves. Indeed, if the mood of *sevā* is genuine, the *sevaka* will feel great joy to accept any difficulty or inconvenience for the happiness of his *guru*. The *sevaka*'s sole aim is to please his *guru*.

Accordingly, it is sometimes explained that *viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā* means service with *viśeṣa-rūpeṇa-śraddhā*, or an uncommon form of *śraddhā*.² In Chapter 4, we examined the concept of *śraddhā*, and distinguished it from blind belief. When the disciple has not ordinary *śraddhā* but extraordinary *śraddhā* in the instructions of his *guru*, then he becomes qualified to perform *viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā*. Such a disciple may rightfully be called a genuine *guru-sevaka*. He or she will understand the deepest wish of the *guru*, and will look to please the *guru* without any doubt or hesitation. Rather than deliberate on the wisdom of the order he receives from his *guru*, he will deliberate on the glories of that order. In the next chapter, we consider the various types of *guru-sevakas*.

The scriptures repeatedly advise the disciple that *guru-sevā* awards all spiritual perfection. *Guru-sevā* is therefore the

¹ This feeling of possessiveness is known in Sanskrit as *tadīya-bhāva*.

² Explained to the author of this study in discipular succession by his *dīkṣā-guru*, *nitya-līlā-praviṣṭha om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Vāmana Gosvāmī Mahārāja*, and by his *śikṣā-guru*, *om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja*.

disciple's primary duty. Some scholars have claimed that *guru-sevā* was not originally a fundamental duty of the disciple in the *guru-disciple* tradition of India, and is an additional requirement that was introduced later in the development of that tradition.³ This study has already demonstrated the erroneous nature of this claim by reference to the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and other texts.⁴

In Chapters 2 and 4 of this study, we considered the scriptural basis for the requirement of *guru-sevā*. We need not revisit the same material here, except to briefly explain the benefits for the disciple of this essential aspect of devotional practice. As explained in Chapter 1, the sacred texts of India repeatedly and unambiguously state that the Supreme Lord cannot be perceived by the blunt material senses. He can be reached only through pure *bhakti*. However, such *bhakti* is characterised by continuous, selfless *sevā*.⁵ When this *sevā* is directed towards the *guru*, who is non-different from the Supreme Lord, the *guru* automatically transfers it to the Supreme Lord, who then gives Himself to the devotee. In other words, the devotee thereby attains pure *bhakti* for the Supreme Lord.⁶ This is amply supported by *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. For instance, Śrī Kṛṣṇa advises Uddhava as follows:

evam gurūpāsanaika-bhaktiā

Thus, you should develop one-pointed *bhakti* by carefully worshipping the *guru*.⁷

³ For instance, see Ramakanta Chakravarti, *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal (1486–1900)* (Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985), pp. 81–82.

⁴ Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 of this study include ample evidence from the scriptures for the ancient and traditional requirement of *guru-sevā*. In particular, see *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.23, and *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.34.

⁵ See Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's definition of *uttamā-bhakti* in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.1.11).

⁶ See *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.14.20.

⁷ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.12.24.

Similarly, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Sudāmā in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

*nāham iṣyā-prajātibhyāṁ
tapasopāśameṇa vā
tuṣyeyaṁ sarva-bhūtātmā
guru-śuśrūṣayā yathā*

I, the soul of all beings, am not as satisfied by ritual worship, initiation as a *brāhmaṇa*, austerity or discipline as I am by faithful service rendered to the *guru*.⁸

The *Nārada-pañcarātra* corroborates this:

*sarva-sādhana-mukhyā hi
guru-sevā sadāḍṭā
yayā bhaktir bhagavati
hy añjasā syāt sukhāvahā*

Of all the activities of devotional practice, the most important is service to the *guru*. By that service, *bhakti* for the Supreme Lord is quickly, easily and happily attained.⁹

The *Viṣṇu-smṛti* similarly enjoins:

*ācāryasya priyaṁ kuryāt
prāṇair api dhanaḥ api
karmanā manasā vācā
sa yāti paramaṁ gatim*

A disciple should please his *guru* with his life, wealth, actions, mind and words. By doing so, the disciple attains the supreme destination.¹⁰

There are numerous such quotations in the scriptures, and the above represent only a handful of prominent verses.

⁸ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.80.34.

⁹ *Nārada-pañcarātra*, 4.57.

¹⁰ Quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (1.100).

The specific duties of the guru-sevaka

The scriptures also set out a number of specific daily duties for the disciple performing *guru-sevā*. He is required to assist the *guru* with menial tasks. This includes but is not limited to fetching water for him, washing his laundry and massaging him.¹¹ The disciple should ask the *guru* which daily duties he can perform.¹² He should offer his *guru* whatever food or drink his *guru* prefers, and he should honour the sacred remnants of his *guru* daily.¹³ Moreover, he should not eat anything without first getting permission from his *guru*.¹⁴

The disciple should also offer obeisance to his *guru* with folded hands whenever he sees him. The method of offering obeisance is to prostrate oneself fully on the ground before the *guru*, ‘falling like a tree cut at its root’.¹⁵ When speaking the *guru*’s name, a disciple should fold his hands with great respect, bow his head and preface his *guru*’s name with the words ‘*om śrī viṣṇupāda*’.¹⁶

The disciple is forbidden from using the *guru*’s belongings. Thus, he should never sleep on the *guru*’s bed, wear his clothes or shoes, sit on his seat, or eat from his plate.¹⁷ Also, he should never place his feet near his *guru*,¹⁸ nor step on, or cross over, his *guru*’s shadow.¹⁹ The disciple should also not go anywhere without first asking the *guru*’s permission.²⁰ In the company of the *guru*, he

11 Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.79 (quoting from *Kurma Purāṇa*).

12 *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.81 (quoting from *Kurma Purāṇa*).

13 *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.98.

14 *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.96.

15 *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.90 (quoting from *Devī-āgama*).

16 *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.95 (quoting from *Śrī Nārada-pañcarātra*).

17 *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.80 (quoting from *Kurma Purāṇa*), 1.88 (quoting from *Devī-āgama*) and 1.91 (quoting from *Devī-āgama*).

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.82 (quoting from *Kurma Purāṇa*).

should never speak or act impolitely.²¹ The disciple should not lie on his own bed or sit on an elevated seat in the presence of his *guru*.²² He should not allow himself to be worshipped in the presence of his *guru*, nor should he give initiation, instruct others or assume the role of a manager or senior in the presence of his *guru*.²³

Two examples of perfection through *guru-sevā*

The primary duty of the disciple is to please his *guru* in every respect. The *guru* will then bestow his full kindness on that fortunate disciple. There are numerous instances in the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, Itihāsas and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava writings of exemplary disciples attaining perfection in this way. To illustrate the benefits of *guru-sevā* for the disciple, we will present two such examples.

In ancient times there was a *guru* named Dhaumya Ṛṣi, who had a disciple named Aruṇi.²⁴ Dhaumya Ṛṣi wanted to test Aruṇi's eligibility as a disciple. One evening, as the sun was about to set, dark clouds filled the sky. Dhaumya Ṛṣi told Aruṇi to go to the small raised reservoir used to irrigate the nearby paddy field and to ensure it was not leaking. When Aruṇi made his way to the reservoir, he found a small leak and tried to plug it with branches and clay. Despite all his efforts, however, Aruṇi could

²¹ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.83 (quoting from *Kurma Purāṇa*).

²² Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.97.

²³ Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 1.89 (quoting from *Devī-āgama*).

²⁴ Explained to the author of this study in discipular succession by his *dikṣā-guru*, *nitya-līlā-praviṣṭha om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Vāmana Gosvāmī Mahārāja*, and by his *śikṣā-guru*, *om viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja*. There is a similar account of Dhaumya Ṛṣi and his disciple Upamanyu, who was sent by his *guru* to graze cattle without provisions of food.

not check the water flowing out of the reservoir. Darkness had now set in, but Aruṇi was determined to fulfil the instruction of his *guru*. As a last resort, he lay down in the mud and used his own body to plug the breach.

Aruṇi lay there all night, shivering with intense cold. In the early hours of the morning, Dhaumya Ṛṣi went out to look for him. He found his disciple in the field, submerged in mud and nearly unconscious. Dhaumya Ṛṣi held Aruṇi in his arms and asked him, ‘My dear boy, what are you doing? Why did you not just come home?’

‘Gurudeva, you ordered me to secure the reservoir,’ Aruṇi replied. ‘Without completing my *sevā*, how could I return home?’

Hearing this, Dhaumya Ṛṣi placed his hand on Aruṇi’s head and blessed him, ‘May all the wisdom of the scriptures manifest in your heart.’ By the mercy of his *guru*, Aruṇi obtained spiritual enlightenment at that moment, and the import of all the scriptures manifested in his heart.

Another example of ideal *guru-sevā* is that of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His childhood friend Sudāmā, who studied together at the school of Sāṇḍīpani Muni. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* relates how the wife of Sāṇḍīpani Muni once sent the boys to the forest to gather firewood and how they were caught in a fierce storm:

*api naḥ smaryate brahman
vṛttaṁ nivasatām gurau
guru-dāraiś coditānām
indhanānayane kvacit
praviṣṭānām mahāraṇyam
apartau su-mahad dvija
vāta-varṣam abhūt tīvraṁ
niṣṭhurāḥ stanayitnavah*

O *brāhmaṇa*, do you remember what happened to us while we were living with our *guru*? Once our *guru*’s wife sent us to collect firewood, and after we entered deep into the woods, O

twice-born one, an unseasonal storm broke, with fierce gales and rain and harsh thunder.²⁵

*sūryaś cāstaṁ gatas tāvat
tamaśā cāvṛtā diśaḥ
nimnaṁ kūlaṁ jala-mayaṁ
na prājñāyata kiñcana*

As the sun set, the forest was filled with darkness. With all the flooding, we could not distinguish high ground from low.²⁶

*vayaṁ bhṛśam tatra mahānilāmbubhir
nihanyamānā mahur ambu-samplave
diśo 'vidanto 'tha parasparaṁ vane
gṛhīta-hastāḥ paribabhrimāturāḥ*

Constantly harassed by the strong wind and rain, we lost our way in that flood. We wandered about in the forest in great distress, holding each other's hands and carrying the firewood we had collected.²⁷

*etad veditvā udite
ravau sāndīpanir guruḥ
anveṣamāṇo naḥ śiṣyān
ācāryo 'paśyad āturān*

Our guru, Sāndīpani Muni, understood our situation, and he set out at sunrise to search for us. He found us, his disciples, in our distress.²⁸

²⁵ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.35–36.

²⁶ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.37.

²⁷ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.38. Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī points out that when the verb *paribabhrima* is read as the prefix *pari* followed by the verb *bhṛ* ('to carry'), it indicates that Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Sudāmā continued to carry the firewood they had collected for their guru.

²⁸ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.39.

*aho he putrakā yūyam
asmad-arthe 'ti-duḥkhitāḥ
ātmā vai prāṇinām preṣṭhas
tam anādrtya mat-paraḥ*

[Sāṇḍīpani Muni said:] Oh, my children, you have suffered greatly for our sake! The body is the dearest thing of every creature, but you are so dedicated to me that you have sacrificed your own safety and comfort.²⁹

*etad eva hi sac-chiṣyaiḥ
kartavyaṁ guru-niṣkṛtam
yad vai viśuddha-bhāvena
sarvārthātmārpaṇaṁ gurau*

This is the duty of every true disciple: to repay the debt to his *guru* by offering him, without ulterior motive, everything he owns, including his life.³⁰

*tuṣṭo 'haṁ bho dvija-śreṣṭhāḥ
satyāḥ santu manorathāḥ
chandāṁsy ayāta-yāmāni
bhavantv iha paratra ca*

O best of the *brāhmaṇas*, I am satisfied with both of you. May all your wishes come true, and may the Vedic *mantras* you have learned never fail you, in this world or the next.³¹

*itthaṁ-vidhāny anekāni
vasatām guru-veśmani
guror anugraheṇaiva
pumān pūrṇaḥ praśāntaye*

²⁹ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.40.

³⁰ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.41.

³¹ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.42.

[Śrī Kṛṣṇa continued:] We shared many such adventures while living in our *guru*'s home. By the mercy of the *guru*, a person can fulfil the purpose of life and find lasting peace.³²

³² Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 10.80.43.

Types of Guru-sevakas

There are three broad categories of *guru-sevakas*: the *sevaka* of the highest level (*uttama-adhikārī*), the *sevaka* of intermediate standing (*madhyama-adhikārī*), and the *sevaka* of neophyte ability (*kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*). We will briefly consider each in turn.

The topmost guru-sevaka

The topmost *sevaka* understands at all times, without needing to be told, exactly what his Gurudeva desires or requires – and he is able to please his Gurudeva fully. Such a *sevaka* serves his Gurudeva by understanding his heart’s desire or mood, just as Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī served Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu:

*śrī-caitanya-mano-’bhīṣṭam
sthāpitaṁ yena bhū-tale
svayaṁ rūpaḥ kadā mahyaṁ
dadāti sva-padāntikam*

When will Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī give me the shelter of his lotus feet? Because he understood the confidential desire of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, he was able to establish His mission in this world and is very dear to Mahāprabhu.¹

Referring to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the son of Śacī-devī, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī wrote:

¹ Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, *Śrī Prema-bhakti-candrikā*, Maṅgalācaraṇa 2.

*anarpita-carīm cirāt karuṇayāvatīrṇaḥ kalau
samarpayitum unnatojjvala-rasām sva-bhakti-śrīyam*

He has appeared in the age of Kali by His causeless mercy to bestow what has not been given in a very long time – the service of Śrīmatī Rādhikā as Her confidential maidservant.²

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's mission in this world was to distribute *sva-bhakti-śrīyam*. *Sva* means Kṛṣṇa's 'own'. The Vrajavāsīs are all Kṛṣṇa's own. The *sakhas*, or cowherd friends, are very dear to Kṛṣṇa. But dearer to Him are the Vrajavāsīs with parental affection for Him. The *sakhīs*, or cowherd girls of Vraja, are still dearer – especially Lalitā, Viśākhā, Citrā, Indulekhā, Campakalatā, Raṅgadevī, Tuṅgavidyā and Sudevī. Even dearer than these eight principal *sakhīs* is Śrīmatī Candrāvalī. Dearest of all, however, is Śrīmatī Rādhikā. *Sva-bhakti* therefore refers to Her *bhakti*.

Since Mahāprabhu did not come to distribute the *bhakti* of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī wrote *sva-bhakti-śrīyam*. This signifies 'the beauty of Śrīmatī Rādhikā's *bhakti*'. That beauty is *mañjarī-bhāva*, the mood of an intimate maidservant of Rādhikā. This is the highest position that a living entity can achieve. Mahāprabhu came to this world to distribute this particular mood of devotion. Understanding Mahāprabhu's confidential desire, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī systematically explained this esoteric subject in his writings, especially in *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Śrī Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi*.

The words *śrī-caitanya-mano-'bhīṣṭam* mean 'fulfilling the inner desire of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu'. Although there have been numerous *gosvāmīs* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava lineage, this quality has been specifically ascribed to Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. He therefore exemplifies the topmost *sevaka*. Śrīla Sanātana

² Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī Vidagdha-mādhava*, 1.2, first half. Quoted by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 1.4 and 3.4.

Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī are, of course, all *sevakas* of the highest calibre also.

The intermediate guru-sevaka

The intermediate *sevaka* is one who is able to fulfil Śrīla Gurudeva's desire after he receives an instruction from Gurudeva to do so. Unlike the topmost *sevaka*, the intermediate *sevaka* does not fully understand the inner desire or mood of Śrīla Gurudeva in all respects. However, if Gurudeva gives an instruction, he will be able to grasp that instruction and execute it well without hesitation.

This type of *sevaka* is able to distinguish different levels of Vaiṣṇavas:

*īsvare tad-adhīneṣu
bālīṣeṣu dviṣatsu ca
prema-maitrī-kṛpopekṣā
yaḥ karoti sa madhyamaḥ*

An intermediate devotee offers his love to the Supreme Lord, offers his friendship to those fully engaged in service to the Supreme Lord, shows mercy to those who lack spiritual knowledge, and disregards those who are inimical to the Supreme Lord.³

Accordingly, the *sevaka* of intermediate standing is able to honour Śrīla Gurudeva and the Vaiṣṇavas properly. Gurudeva becomes satisfied with his careful and respectful dealings, free from *vaiṣṇava-aparādha* and *nāma-aparādha*, or offences to the Vaiṣṇavas and to the holy name.⁴

³ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.2.46.

⁴ According to the *Padma Purāṇa* (*Brahma-khaṇḍa*, 25.15), the first offence to the holy name is *satām nindā nāmnaḥ paramam aparādhām vitanute / yataḥ khyātīm yātaḥ katham u sahate tad-vigarhām*: To

The neophyte guru-sevaka

The neophyte *sevaka* is one who is unable to render service properly, even upon being directly guided by Śrīla Gurudeva. In this category are six types of entirely ineffectual *sevakas*. They have been referred to as *sevakādhama* – literally, ‘the lowest of *sevakas*’:

*alir bāṇo jyotiṣakaḥ
stabdhībhūtaḥ kimekakaḥ
preṣita-preṣakaś caiva
ṣaḍ ete sevakādhamaḥ*

There are six types of unsatisfactory *sevakas*. They are he who is fickle like a bee; he who talks back, piercing his master like an arrow; the procrastinator; the so-called *sevaka* who is lazy and inactive; he who refuses to try to do anything on his own; and the so-called *sevaka* who passes the buck.⁵

Let us briefly consider each type of these in turn:

1. He who is fickle like a bee

The bee is interested only in trying to extract honey for its own advantage. Upon receiving an order from Śrīla Gurudeva, this type of false *sevaka* will be highly reluctant to obey it if it is not pleasing to him. Rather, this type of so-called *sevaka* will spend an inordinate amount of time humming about the order he has received, wondering whether he should carry it out or focus on the many other things he feels deserve his

disrespect those saintly persons who have dedicated their lives to propagating the holy name of the Supreme Lord.

⁵ Source unknown. Quoted by Śrī Śrīmad Bhakti Pramode Puri Gosvāmī Mahārāja in ‘The True Spirit of Separation’, Bhaktivedanta Memorial Library [website]. <<http://www.bvml.org/SBPPG/ttsos.html>> accessed 29 Jan. 2008.

attention. Like the bee, he lacks focus. If he does begin to follow Gurudeva's instruction, he is easily distracted.

2. He who talks back, piercing his master like an arrow

This type of so-called *sevaka* continually answers back to his Gurudeva. His sharp retorts are like arrows that pierce the heart of Gurudeva. Alternatively, when Śrīla Gurudeva gives an order, this substandard *sevaka* will not wait to hear it fully or properly, but will at once fly out the door like an arrow to fulfil it, without knowing where to go, what to do, or how to do it.

3. The procrastinator

The Sanskrit word *jyotiṣa* actually means 'astrology'. This type of unsatisfactory *sevaka* will think up so many problems and eventualities, which will overwhelm him and prevent him from fulfilling the order of his Gurudeva. Such a so-called *sevaka* does not understand the power that is present within the instruction of a genuine *guru*. Rather, he calculates like an astrologer, waiting for the right alignment of planets or circumstances before he is willing to do anything.

4. The so-called *sevaka* who is lazy and inactive

The Sanskrit word *stabdhībhūta* means 'speechless' or 'motionless'. When Śrīla Gurudeva gives an order to this type of so-called *sevaka*, he becomes stunned, bewildered and incapable of taking action. Overcome by confusion or laziness, he does nothing at all.

5. He who refuses to do anything on his own

Upon receiving an order from Śrīla Gurudeva, this ineffectual *sevaka* thinks, 'How can I possibly do this alone? There are so many others here besides me; why did Gurudeva not order someone else? Why just me?'

6. The so-called *sevaka* who passes the buck

When Śrīla Gurudeva gives this imitator *sevaka* a task, he at once looks for someone to pass it on to, so that he can conveniently abrogate responsibility. In this way, Gurudeva's order gets passed on from one person to another and is in the end never fulfilled. For such a person, the order of the *guru* is an inconvenience. When Śrīla Gurudeva later asks this so-called *sevaka* whether he has accomplished the task, he promptly informs Gurudeva that he has passed it on to someone else.

All six types of false *sevakas* exhibit an ignorance of the *guru's* true nature by their apathetic attitude to service. They thereby commit *aparādhā*, or offences, to the *guru* and to the holy name of the Lord.⁶ This is detrimental to their *bhakti*. The *Agastya-saṁhitā* states:

*ye gurv-ājñāṁ na kurvanti
pāpiṣṭhāḥ puruṣādhamāḥ
na teṣāṁ naraka-kleśa-
nistāro muni-sattama*

O best of the sages, any person who avoids or disobeys the orders of the *guru* is sinful, the lowest of mankind, and is taken to hell for suffering. There is no deliverance for him.⁷

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says to Uddhava:

*ācāryaṁ mām vijānīyān
navamanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ*

⁶ According to the *Padma Purāṇa* (*Brahma-khaṇḍa*, 25.17), the third offence to the holy name is *guror avajñā*, or disregard of the *guru*.

⁷ *Agastya-saṁhitā*; quoted by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī in his *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (4.367).

Know the *ācārya*, or spiritual preceptor, to be Me. One should never disrespect him under any circumstance, nor should one envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods.⁸

There are numerous such directives in the scriptures. Disrespecting the *guru* is a grave error. The neophyte *sevaka* similarly does not know how to properly respect other Vaiṣṇavas:

*arcāyām eva haraye
pūjām yaḥ śraddhayehate
na tad-bhakteṣu cānyeṣu
sa bhaktaḥ prākṛtaḥ smṛtaḥ*

One who engages in the worship of the deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with faith but does not know how to properly respect Vaiṣṇavas or people in general is called a *prākṛta-bhakta*, or materialistic devotee.⁹

However, if the neophyte *sevaka* is sincere and takes full shelter of Śrīla Gurudeva and the senior Vaiṣṇavas, he will quickly be able to progress to the intermediate level, at which his determination to serve Gurudeva will be focused and strong. One who reaches the intermediate level is said to be *mahā-bhāgyavān*, ‘greatly fortunate’.¹⁰

⁸ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.17.27.

⁹ Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.2.47.

¹⁰ Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 22.67.

Appendix

The following four devotional poems, which glorify the *guru*, are celebrated in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition:

1. ‘Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam’ – by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura
2. ‘Śrī Guru-Caraṇa-Padma’ – by Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura
3. ‘Gurudeva! Baḍa Kṛpā Kari’ – by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura
4. ‘Gurudeva! Kṛpā-Bindu Diyā’ – by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

They are included below in their full form.¹

‘Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam’ by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura

*saṁsāra-dāvānala-liḍha-loka-
trāṇāya kārūṇya-ghanāghanatvam
prāptasya kalyāṇa-guṇārṇavasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (1)*

Just as a raincloud extinguishes a blazing forest fire by showering its rain upon it, Śrī Gurudeva, by his rain of divine mercy, delivers the people burning in the fire of material existence, suffering the threefold miseries – *adhyātmika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhidaivika*. I offer prayers

¹ English translations from Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja’s *Śrī Gauḍīya Gīti-guccha* (Vrindavan, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), pp. 20–24. Used with permission.

unto the lotus feet of Śrī Gurudeva, who manifests when Kṛṣṇa's mercy becomes very thick and who is an ocean of auspicious qualities.

*mahāprabhoḥ kīrtana-nṛtya-gīta-
vāditra-mādyan-manaso rasena
romāñca-kampāśru-taraṅga-bhājo
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (2)*

Śrī Gurudeva is inspired by Mahāprabhu's *saṅkīrtana* and is always dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments. Because he is tasting Mahāprabhu's *prema-rasa* in his heart, like a madman he sometimes exhibits ecstatic symptoms – his hairs stand on end, he shivers, and waves of tears flow from his eyes. I offer prayers unto Śrī Gurudeva's lotus feet.

*śrī-vigrahārādhana-nityā-nānā-
śṛṅgāra-tan-mandira-mārjanādau
yuktasya bhaktāṁś ca niyuñjato 'pi
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (3)*

Always worshipping Śrī Vighraha and absorbed in *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, Śrī Gurudeva daily dresses Them differently with beautiful clothes and ornaments designed to enhance Their meetings. He cleans the temple and performs other services for Them. He also engages his disciples in these services. I offer prayers unto the lotus feet of Śrī Gurudeva.

*catur-vidha-śrī-bhagavat-prasāda-
svādv-anna-tṛptān hari-bhakta-saṅghān
kṛtvaiiva tṛptim bhajataḥ sadaiva
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (4)*

Śrī Gurudeva is always satisfied to see Śrī Kṛṣṇa's devotees relishing four kinds of foodstuffs that have been offered, namely, those which are chewed, sucked, licked and drunk. Thus the devotees become satisfied by tasting *mahā-prasāda*.

(That is, by accepting *prasāda* in the mood of service, material life is destroyed and the bliss of divine love is awakened in the heart.) I offer prayers unto the lotus feet of Śrī Gurudeva.

*śrī-rādhikā-mādhavayor apāra-
mādhurya-līlā guṇa-rūpa-nāmnām
prati-kṣaṇāsvādana-lolupasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (5)*

At every moment Śrī Gurudeva is experiencing intense greed in his heart to taste the unlimited sweetness of the holy names, forms, qualities and pastimes of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava in Vṛndāvana. I offer my prayers unto the lotus feet of Śrī Gurudeva.

*nikuñja-yūno rati-keli-siddhyai
yā yālibhīr yuktir apekṣaṇīyā
tatrāti-dākṣyād ati-vallabhasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (6)*

Śrī Gurudeva is always present with the *sakhīs*, planning the arrangements for the perfection of Yugala-kīśora's amorous pastimes (*rati-keli*) within the *kuñjas* of Vṛndāvana. Because he is so expert in making these tasteful arrangements for Their pleasure, he is very dear to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. I offer prayers unto the lotus feet of Śrī Gurudeva.

*sākṣād-dharitvena samasta-śāstrair
uktas tathā bhāvayata eva sadbhiḥ
kintu prabhor yaḥ priya eva tasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (7)*

All the scriptures proclaim Śrī Gurudeva is *sākṣāt hari*, the direct potency of Śrī Hari, and is thus considered by saintly authorities to be His non-different representative. Because Śrī Gurudeva is so dear to the Lord, being His confidential servitor (*acintya-bhedābheda-prakāśa-vigraha*, the inconceivable

different and non-different worshipful manifestation of the Lord), I offer prayers unto his lotus feet.

*yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo
yasyāprasādān na gatiḥ kuto 'pi
dhyāyan stuvaṁs tasya yaśas tri-sandhyaṁ
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam (8)*

Only by the mercy of Śrī Gurudeva can one receive the mercy of Kṛṣṇa; without his grace the living entities cannot make any advancement nor be delivered. Meditating three times a day on the glories of Śrī Gurudeva and reciting *stava-stuti*, I offer prayers unto his lotus feet.

*śrīmad-guror aṣṭakam etad uccair
brāhme muhūrte paṭhati prayatnāt
yas tena vṛndāvana-nātha-sākṣāt-
sevaiva labhyā januṣo 'nta eva (9)*

That person who very attentively recites this *aṣṭakam* to Śrī Gurudeva during the *brāhma-muhūrta* is sure to achieve direct service to the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the very life and soul of Vṛndāvana (*vṛndāvana-nātha*), upon attaining his *vastu-siddhi*, or pure spiritual form.

‘Śrī Guru-Caraṇa-Padma’ by Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura

*śrī guru-caraṇa-padma, kevala bhakati-sadma,
vandō mui sāvadhāna-mate
jāñhāra prasāde bhāi, e bhāva tariyā jāi,
kṛṣṇa-prāpti haya jāñhā ha’te (1)*

The lotus feet of Śrī Gurudeva are the treasure-house of śrī, unalloyed *prema-bhakti* for Kṛṣṇa. I very carefully worship and serve those lotus feet (*gurupāda-padma*). By his mercy, O brother, anyone can cross over this vast ocean of misery and attain the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

*guru-mukha-padma-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya,
āra nā kariha mane āśā
śrī guru-caraṇe rati, ei se uttamā gati,
je prasāde pūre sarva āśā (2)*

The words emanating from the lotus mouth of Śrī Gurudeva should be embraced within the heart. No aspiration beyond his words should enter because his instructions bring one to the highest goal – *rati*, or attachment for his lotus feet. By his grace all of our desires for spiritual perfection are fulfilled.

*cakṣu-dāna dilā jei, janme janme prabhu sei,
divya-jñāna hṛde prakāśita
prema-bhakti jāñhā haite, avidyā vināśa jāte,
vede gāya jāñhāra carita (3)*

He gives me the gift of transcendental vision and enlightens my heart with divine knowledge. He is my master birth after birth. From him emanates *prema-bhakti*, divine loving devotion, by which ignorance is destroyed. The Vedic scriptures sing of his character.

*śrī guru karuṇā-sindhu, adhama janāra bandhu,
lokanātha lokera jīvana
hā hā prabhu! kara dayā, deha more pada-chāyā,
tuwā pade lainu śaraṇa
(ebe yaśa ghuṣuka tribhuvana) (4)*

Śrī Gurudeva is the ocean of mercy, the greatest friend of the shelterless, the life and soul of everyone! O master, be merciful! Alas, O Gurudeva, give me the shade of your lotus feet – at your feet I have surrendered. (Now your fame shall be spread all over the three worlds.)

‘Gurudeva! Baḍa Kṛpā Kari’ by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

*gurudeva! baḍa kṛpā kari’, gauḍa-vana mājhe,
godrume diyācha sthāna
ājṣā dilā more, ei vraje basi’,
harināma kara gāna (1)*

Gurudeva, very mercifully you placed me in Godruma in the forests of Gauḍa, ordering me to dwell in the sacred realm of Vraja and chant harināma.

*kintu kabe prabhu, yogyatā arpibe,
e dāsere dayā kari’
citta sthira ha’be, sakala sahiba,
ekānte bhajiba hari (2)*

But when, O my master, will you mercifully give this servant of yours the qualification to fulfil your order? Then my mind will be peaceful, I will be able to endure all difficulties and serve Śrī Hari with single-pointed focus.

*śaiśava-yauvane, jaḍa-sukha-saṅge,
abhyāsa haila manda
nija-karma-doṣe, e deha haila,
bhajanera pratibandha (3)*

Indulging in mundane pleasures in my childhood and youth, I cultivated many bad habits. Due to reactions to these sinful acts, my body itself has become an impediment to doing *bhajana*.

*vārdhakyē ekhana, pañca-roge hata,
kēmane bhajiba bala’
kāṇḍiyā kāṇḍiyā, tomāra caraṇe,
paḍiyāchi suvihvala (4)*

Now, in old age, afflicted with illnesses of the five senses, how can I do *bhajana*? O Master, bitterly weeping and in great anxiety, I have fallen at your lotus feet.

‘Gurudeva! Kṛpā-Bindu Diyā’ by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

*gurudeva!
kṛpā-bindu diyā, kara ei dāse,
tṛṇāpekṣā ati hīna
sakala sahane, bala diyā kara,
nija-māne sprhā-hīna (1)*

Gurudeva! Give me a drop of mercy – make this servant more humble than a blade of grass. Give me the strength to tolerate all eventualities. Let me not hanker for my own honour and fame.

*sakale sammāna, karite śakati,
deha nātha! yathāyatha
tabe ta’ gāiba, harināma sukhe,
aparādha ha’be hata (2)*

Give me the power to honour all living entities according to what they are due (and all Vaiṣṇavas as befitting their platform). Then I will be able to chant the holy names blissfully, and all my offences will be vanquished.

*kabe hena kṛpā, labhiyā e jana,
kṛtārtha haibe nātha!
śakti-buddhi-hīna, āmi ati dīna,
kara more ātma-sātha (3)*

O my master, when will I be benedicted with your mercy and finally be successful in my life? I am so fallen that I have no strength or intelligence. Kindly take my soul and make me like you.

*yogyatā-vicāre, kichu nāhi pāi,
tomāra karuṇā sāra
karuṇā nā haile, kāṇḍiyā kāṇḍiyā,
prāṇa nā rākhiba āra (4)*

If I examine myself, I find no good qualities; Your mercy is the essence of my existence. If you are not merciful, then bitterly weeping I will no longer maintain my life.

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