

श्रीगुरुतत्त्वविज्ञान

Śrī-Guru-Tattva-Vijñāna

The Nature of Śrī Guru

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In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* 11.17.27, during the discussion concerning the nature of Śrī Gurudeva, *svayaṁ bhagavān* Śrī Kṛṣṇa says to His dear devotee Uddhava:

ācāryaṁ mām vijānīyān nāvamanyeta karhicit |
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta sarva-devamayo guruḥ ||

The Lord said, “O Uddhava! You should know the *ācārya*, Śrī Gurudeva, to be myself, and no disrespect should ever be shown toward him. You should never be envious of him, judging him to be an ordinary man, because within Śrī Guru live all the gods.”

guru kṛṣṇa-rūpa hana sāstrera pramāṇe |
guru-rūpe kṛṣṇa kṛpā karena bhakta-gaṇe ||

“According to scripture, the *guru* is a form of Kṛṣṇa. In the form of *guru*, Kṛṣṇa gives his mercy to the devotees.” (*Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Ādi 1.45*)

From all the *sāstras* it may be understood that Śrī Kṛṣṇa appears in the world as *guru* to extend his mercy to the devotees. Here that mercy blesses the sheltered disciple with the treasure of *śrī-kṛṣṇa-bhajana* and its fruit, the gift of *prema*. *yo’ntar bahis tanu-bhṛtām aśubhaṁ vidhunvann ācārya-caitya-vapuṣā svagatiṁ vyanakti* (*Bhāg. 11.29.6*). Śrī Uddhava said to Śrī Kṛṣṇa: “O Lord! Externally, in the form of Śrī Guru giving philosophical instructions, and internally, as the Indwelling Guide urging him to do what is good and true, you drive away all worldly desires unfavorable to a person’s *bhajana* and reveal your true nature to him.” Therefore, in the sense of him being worthy of honor, Śrī Gurudeva is like Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But unlike Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he is not meant to be worshipped as a husband or lover.¹ Śrī Guru is the manifestation of God as a devotee.

yadyapi āmāra guru caitanyera dāsa |
tathāpi jāniye āmi tānhāra prakāśa ||

“Even though my *guru* is the servant of Śrī Caitanya, still I know him to be a manifest-

¹ The Bengali term here is *viśaya-tattva-rūpe*, which I have translated ‘as a husband or lover.’

tion of God.” (CC.Ādi 1.44)

Śrī Gurudeva should be understood to be God appearing in the form of the highest devotee. This is the true nature of Śrī Guru. In his *Manah-sikṣā*, Śrīla Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmipāda has written, *śacī-sūnuṁ nandīśvara-pati-sūtatve guru-varaṁ mukunda-preṣṭhatve smara param ajasraṁ nanu manaḥ*. “O Mind! Always meditate upon Śrī Gaurasundara, the son of Mother Śacī, as a form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and Śrī Gurudeva as the dearest of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s devotees.” Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartipāda has also written in his *Gurvaṣṭaka*:

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

“In all the scriptures Śrī Gurudeva is glorified as directly Śrī Hari, though in the form of one dear to Hari, and the great devotees contemplate him in that way. I sing the praises of the lotus feet of that *guru*.” The meaning is that even though Śrī Gurudeva is visibly the most beloved devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the disciple considers him to be a direct manifestation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Without this type of thinking by the disciple, there is a chance he will consider Śrī Guru to be an ordinary person, thus causing him to commit a great offense. Just like an elephant taking a bath and then blowing dust over himself, the disciple’s devotional practices become fruitless.

The Importance of Taking Shelter at Śrī Guru’s Lotus Feet (*guru-pādāśraya*)

To do *bhagavad-bhajana*,² it is essential that one first takes shelter of Śrī Guru’s lotus feet. Otherwise, *bhajana-sādhana*³ is hardly possible because this shelter is the natural gateway onto the path of *bhakti*.⁴ There is no pure *bhakti-mārga-sādhana* anywhere that doesn’t include *guru-pādāśraya*. To learn something in the physical universe, a competent teacher is necessary. Needless to say, to acquire spiritual knowledge about *bhakti*, a teacher is also required. So the merciful Lord personally appears in this world as the *guru* to bless mankind with instructions about *bhakti* philosophy.

We shall briefly discuss *śrī-guru-tattva*.⁵ If one is to understand the gravity of *śrī-guru-tattva*, he can have no doubt concerning the necessity of *guru-pādāśraya*. What is the nature of Śrī Guru? What does the word *guru* mean? What is the result of taking shelter of Śrī Guru? Those without knowledge have many questions about *guru-pādāśraya*. Everything about *guru-tattva* is learned in the association of *sādhus* (saintly people). Without the association of the Lord’s devotees, *guru-tattva* cannot be understood. For this reason, the scriptures and great souls first of all instruct those eager for *sādhana-bhajana* to seek the association of devotees (*sat-saṅga*). In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata*, Bhagavān Kapiladeva said to his mother Devahūti,

*satām prasaṅgān mama vīrya-saṁvido bhavanti hṛt-karṇa-rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ |
taj-joṣaṇād āśv apavarga-vartmani śraddhā ratir bhaktir anukramiṣyati ||*

“In the auspicious association of *sādhus*, one hears narrations describing my divine

² *Bhagavat* means God; *bhajana* means worship or service.

³ *Sādhana* means devotional practices.

⁴ *Bhakti* means devotion. *Mārga* means path.

⁵ *Tattva* means real or essential nature, fundamental truth.

power. These stories are like elixirs for the heart and ear, and by devoting oneself to them, one quickly progresses on the path of emancipation and develops faith, love and devotion for me.” (*Bhāg.* 3.25.25) The meaning is that by hearing discussions about God from the mouths of devotees, one first develops faith. Then, by taking shelter of a true *guru* and performing *bhajana*, *rati* (affection) and *prema* (love) gradually arise in one’s heart. Since time immemorial, souls searching for God, after wandering from womb to womb, finally obtain a human body, the doorway to liberation from worldly life. Among humans, those of the highest virtue obtain *sādhu-saṅga*. After hearing *kṛṣṇa-kathā* from highly realized devotees, their hearts and minds, sullied by attachment to worldly pleasures, become a little purified, and they understand the impermanence of the body and all related to it. They consider this temporary worldly life to be like an ocean that is very difficult to cross. Śrī Guru is the only competent helmsman for piloting the strong boat of one’s human form beyond the miserable ocean of worldly life, infested with the crocodiles and sharks of lust, anger and so on, and then causing an intense desire to awaken in one’s heart for obtaining the lotus feet of the ever-blissful Lord. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa said to Uddhava,

*nṛ-deham ādyaṁ sulabhaṁ sudurlabhaṁ plavaṁ sukalpaṁ guru-karṇadhāram |
mayānukūlena nabhasvateritaṁ pumān bhavābधिṁ na taret sa ātmahā ||*

“O Uddhava! This human form is unparalleled because it is the foundation for all gain and is well-suited for its purpose. The *jīva*⁶ obtains his rare human form by the course of nature. Śrī Gurudeva is the helmsman in this boatlike body, and above all am I, who, like a favorable wind, propel the boat on its way. Those who obtain this body but do not endeavor to transcend the ocean of worldly life are considered to be killers of their own souls.” (*Bhāg.* 11.20.17)

What we are saying is that by associating with devotees one will come to understand the necessity of taking shelter of a *guru*. It may be understood that wherever there is no knowledge of the need for *śrī-guru-pādāśraya*, it is because there has been no association with devotees. Or if there has been *bhakta-saṅga*,⁷ but still there is no realization of the need for a *guru*, or a *guru* has not been accepted, then either the *saṅga* is not genuine or the fruit of *bhakta-saṅga* has not appeared because of some sin. As long as one has not obtained the shelter of a *guru*, the ultimate effect of *bhakta-saṅga* shall be to get that shelter. The reason is that after receiving *dīkṣā* (initiation) and *sīkṣā* (instruction) from a true *guru*, one’s personal *bhajana* (worship) can begin.

Characteristics of a True Guru

If one is to be blessed with the fruit of *sādhana* and *bhajana*, it is absolutely essential that he accepts the shelter of Śrī Guru’s lotus feet. When the potency that distinguishes one as a competent teacher appears within a virtuous person, he is to be regarded as a *sad-guru*.⁸ This occurs when, as the result of *sādhana-bhajana*, a person’s heart and mind become cleansed of impurities, infused with devotion and adorned with the qualities of kindness and generosity. In seeing the worldly suffering of the *jīva* bound by *māyā*, his heart melts with compassion. By teaching the art of *bhajana*, these *sad-gurus* remove the suffering of materialistic people and

⁶ The living being

⁷ Association with devotees

⁸ Literally, a true teacher

remain always eager to bless them with the sweet taste of *bhakti-rasa*.⁹ The ability to serve as *guru* comes from Śrī Bhagavān, present within the hearts of those great souls who have attained divine grace through *bhakti*. A person desiring devotion to God is blessed with the opportunity to receive shelter from such a competent *sad-guru*. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata*, the characteristics of such a *guru* are described:

tasmād gurum prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam |
śābde pare ca niṣṇātām brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam ||

“Therefore, a person who is inquisitive about the state of ultimate bliss shall take shelter at the feet of a *sad-guru* who has deep realization of both the *Vedas* and the Supreme Being, and who is free from lower qualities such as lust and greed.” (*Bhāg. 11.3.21*) *śābde brahmaṇi vedākhye nyāyato niṣṇātām tattva-jñam. anyathā samśaya-nirāsakatvāyogāt. pare ca brahmaṇi aparokṣānubhavana niṣṇātām. anyathā bodha-sañcārāyogāt. parabrahma-niṣṇātatva dyotakam āha upaśamāśrayam iti (Śrīdhara-ṭīkā)*. The meaning is that if the *sad-guru* is not learned in the *Vedas* and related scriptures, he may be unable to remove the doubts of his disciples. He must also be deeply devoted to, and have direct perception of, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise he will be unable to infuse his disciples with a genuine experience of *bhajana*. One may ask that, even though it may be apparent that the *guru* has a great knowledge of the scriptures, how does one judge whether he has direct perception of Śrī Kṛṣṇa? The answer is that such a person will be totally free from lust, anger, greed and so on. Whenever the splendor of *bhakti* appears within his heart, the darkness can no longer remain. Therefore, the scriptures have described the characteristics of a *sad-guru* as follows:

1. He has unwavering faith and devotion, and as a result of his *bhagavad-bhajana* and the mercy of his own *guru*, he has direct experience of God.
2. He is conversant with the *Vedas* and the *bhakti-śāstras*¹⁰ such as *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* that express the correct meaning of the *Vedas*. He is competent in using the arguments given in scripture to dispel the doubts of his disciples.
3. He has direct perception of Śrī Kṛṣṇa because he has received the Lord’s mercy, and he is capable of infusing his disciples with that mercy and leading them onto the path of *bhakti*.
4. He is not under the control of lust, anger, greed, etc.

A virtuous person in whom these qualities are present and who has a feeling of parental affection toward his students is to be regarded as a *sad-guru*. This *sad-guru* is capable of removing everything unfavorable or useless from his disciple’s *bhajana*, blessing him with *prema*,¹¹ and delivering him to the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. On the other hand, even though some person yearning to be known as a *guru* may have many good qualities, such as coming from a pious family, if he lacks the above-mentioned characteristics he cannot be considered a *sad-guru*. Therefore, a faithful person who desires to practice *śrī-kṛṣṇa-bhajana* should take shelter of a great soul endowed with the characteristics of a competent *sad-guru*, accept initiation into the *śrī-kṛṣṇa-mantra* from him and then learn from him the art of *bhajana*.

⁹ Devotional feeling or sentiment

¹⁰ *Śāstra* means scripture.

¹¹ *Prema* means divine love.

General Characteristics of a Sad-Guru

To be regarded as Śrī Guru, one must have the following general characteristics: He is well-versed in the *Vedas* and has direct perception of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He is very peaceful, devoted to *śrī-kṛṣṇa-bhakti*, and has experienced Kṛṣṇa's noble qualities of being affectionate to His devotees and so on. His heart and mind are surrendered to Kṛṣṇa. He has a healthy body and has conquered lust, anger and greed. He bears the deepest devotional attachment for Kṛṣṇa. He has knowledge of the pure path involving the *Vedas*, *śāstras* and *Āgamas*. He is approved by the *sādhus*, is self-controlled and absorbed in contemplation upon the Supreme Spirit. (*Hari-Bhakti-Vilāsa* 1.32-35)

Particular Characteristics

These are further characteristics that are Śrī Guru's treasure: He has been born into a virtuous family and is personally virtuous. He is diligent in following the rules of appropriate conduct and belongs to one of the four stages of religious life. He is free from anger. He understands the *Vedas* and all other *śāstras*. He is faithful and free from envy, speaks pleasantly, is handsome, clean, neatly dressed and youthful. He is devoted to the welfare of all living entities, is intelligent, humble and satisfied. He does no harm to others, is able to determine reality, is loving and resolved to worship God. He is affectionate to his disciples and is capable of both chastisement and benevolence. He is devoted to the *homa-mantras*, knows the methods of debate, is a pure soul and is very merciful. (*Hari-Bhakti-Vilāsa* 1.38-41)

The Particular Characteristic of Śrī Guru's Mercy

There is some distinction between the mercy of Śrī Hari and that of Śrī Guru. In the *Upaniṣads* it is stated that Śrī Hari causes those whom he wants to go downward to commit immoral actions, so to demons he gives instructions that lead them to destruction. But he causes the *ācāryas*, whom he wants to reach the higher strata, to engage in acts of purity, and to them he always speaks the truth. Therefore, Śrī Guru's mercy is to be desired.

śāstroktam dharmam uccārya svayam ācarate sadā |
anyebhyaḥ śikṣayed yas tu sa ācāryo nigadyate ||

“The *śāstras* declare that one who always follows *dharmā*¹² and teaches others to do the same is to be known as an *ācārya*.”¹³

The Way to Obtain a Sad-Guru

Some people think that a genuine *sad-guru* is very rare in this world, and consequently, to identify and obtain a *sad-guru* is not an easy matter. Thus, without trying to receive *dīkṣā*,¹⁴ they pass the precious moments of their rare human form of life in vain. Regarding this, it should be said that whenever Śrī Bhagavān descends in the form of a *sad-guru* for the benefit of the world,

¹² *Dharma* means virtue (among other things).

¹³ *Ācārya* means a teacher by example.

¹⁴ Initiation

he then makes himself easily available to those who are eager for Śrī Guru’s shelter and the chance to practice true *bhajana*. Giving up hypocrisy, one who, with a simple and honest heart, sincerely associates with devotees and prays innocently to God for freedom from the miseries of worldly life and for engagement in *bhagavad-bhajana* under Śrī Guru’s shelter is certainly blessed with his wish. There is no doubt about this. Merciful Śrī Hari most surely gives the opportunity to such an eager person.

The Shelter of Śrī Guru’s Lotus Feet

At the beginning of his description of the sixty-four components of *bhajana*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmipāda has written specifically of three: *guru-pādāśrayas tasmāt kṛṣṇa-dīkṣādi-śikṣaṇam, viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā* (*Bhakti-Rasāmṛta-Sindhuḥ* 1.2.74). They are (1) the shelter of Śrī Guru, (2) initiation into *śrī-kṛṣṇa-mantra*, followed by instruction in *bhāgavata-dharma*,¹⁵ and (3) serving Śrī Guru with confidence. *guru-pādāśraya, dīkṣā, gurura sevana*--“taking shelter of a *guru*, receiving initiation, serving the *guru*” (*Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* M.22.115).

Guru-pādāśraya means that before a person who wants to do *bhagavad-bhajana* takes *dīkṣā*, he should live near to Śrī Guru for some time and try to please him with sincere and obedient service. The importance of such an examination period for the *guru* and *śiṣya*¹⁶ has also been described in the scriptures. During this time, the nature and worthiness of both *guru* and *śiṣya* can be understood. If this is not done, in the future it can cause problems. Specifically, if the *guru* doesn’t possess the characteristics described in scripture, and if the *śiṣya* isn’t suitable, then inevitably the devotional practices of both will be impeded. If this examination period is not observed, the result can indeed be costly. When the eager *sādhaka*,¹⁷ longing to be initiated, resides near Śrī Guru for some time and serves him, he will receive *dīkṣā* and eligibility for *bhajana*. On the other hand, when such a *mahābhāgavata*¹⁸ receives sincere service, he becomes filled with compassion and *śrī-guru-tattva* arises within him. The specific goal of the *sādhaka* is to receive *dīkṣā-mantras* from Śrī Guru, whose heart has melted with compassion because of the careful service rendered. In this way, the *sādhaka* can be blessed with the ability to taste the sweet nectar of true *bhajana*. It should also be noted here that extraordinarily powerful persons (*mahāpuruṣas*) can judge the worthiness of a disciple just by looking at him. They may also award competence to one previously unqualified and then, at the same time, give *dīkṣā* and so on to him. They aren’t bound by any kind of rule. These statements, however, don’t apply to everyone.

Dīkṣā

What is *dīkṣā*? In his *Bhakti-Sandarbhah* (283 *anuh*), Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmipāda has described the glory of *dīkṣā* by quoting from *śāstra*:

divyaṁ jñānaṁ yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya samkṣayam |
tasmād dīkṣeti sā proktā deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ ||

¹⁵ The religion of those devoted to Viṣṇu

¹⁶ Student

¹⁷ *Sādhaka* means devotional practitioner.

¹⁸ Great devotee

“Those *ācāryas* who truly understand reality define the word *dīkṣā* as ‘that which bestows divine knowledge and completely destroys sin.’” *divyaṁ jñānaṁ hy atra śrīmati mantrā bhagavat-svarūpa-jñānaṁ tena bhagavatā sambandha-viśeṣa-jñānaṁ ca* (Śrī Jīvapāda). “Here, the phrase *divyaṁ jñānaṁ*, or divine knowledge, indicates the understanding that God is present in the form of the *mantra*. It also means knowledge of the *jīva*’s particular relationship with God.”

*jīvera svarūpa haya kṛṣṇera nitya-dāsa |
kṛṣṇera taṭastha-śakti bhedābheda-prakāśa ||*

“The nature of the *jīva* is that he is the eternal servant of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. As the marginal potency of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he is a manifestation of the principle of simultaneous oneness with, and difference from, the Lord.” (CC.M.20.108)

Even though the *jīva* is the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa, since time immemorial he has been gripped by the ignorance of *māyā*¹⁹ because of his aversion to God. Being captivated by illusion, he has forgotten his own true nature and become overwhelmed by his material body, senses and mind, thinking them to be himself. Having forgotten his eternal relationship with Śrī Hari, and instead uniting with a wife, children, money and possessions, he has entered a state of bondage.

*kṛṣṇa nitya-dāsa jīva tāhā bhuli gela |
sei doṣe māyā tāra galāya bāndhila ||*

“Forgetting that he is the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa, the *jīva* becomes bound at the throat by *māyā*.” (CC.M.22.24)

In this way, even though the *jīva* is actually eternally cognizant and blissful, when he falls into the bondage of *māyā*, he is forced to cycle through the wombs of various other miserable *jīvas* wherein he must suffer terrible worldly agonies. The word *dīkṣā* means when, by the mercy of Śrī Guru, the knot of *māyā* is loosened, the *jīva*’s heart is infused with spiritually powerful *bhakti* and his eternal relationship with Śrī Hari is awakened.

Moreover, the *mantra* is a direct form of God. By the mercy of the *sādhus* and *gurus*, who are the embodiments of Śrī Hari’s compassion, Śrī Bhagavān enters the disciple’s heart as the *mantra* and spiritualizes his body, mind and vital airs, making them suitable for performing *bhagavat-sevā*.²⁰ The following is a statement by Śrīman Mahāprabhu:

*dīkṣā-kāle kare bhakta ātma-samarpaṇa |
sei-kāle kṛṣṇa tāre karena ātma-sama ||
sei deha karena tāra cidānandamaya |
aprākṛta-dehe tāra caraṇa bhajaya ||*

“At the time of initiation, the *bhakta* offers himself to Kṛṣṇa. The Lord then makes the devotee equal to himself by transforming the devotee’s body into one of spiritual bliss. In that transcendent body, the devotee worships the Lord’s lotus feet.” (CC.Ant.4.192-193)

Some people, even after learning of the importance of *dīkṣā*, think there is no need for them to acquire it. They believe that just by chanting *harināma*, everything is accomplished. For

¹⁹ Illusion

²⁰ Service to God

those who have been somehow harmed or deceived in spiritual matters, that is a natural attitude. But this is not the opinion of the Gosvāmīs. Even though observing that in the *śāstras* and the writings of the *mahājanas*²¹ that *dīkṣā* is described as a necessity, and seeing that the previous great devotees up through the present-day devotees follow this virtuous practice, some people are still averse to accepting the shelter of a *sad-guru*. The chanting of this type of person only results in *nāma-āparādha* (offense to the Holy Name). On one side, they ignore the *śāstras* and the statements of the *mahājanas*, and on the other they ignore *guru-tattva*, both of which are serious offenses.

Dīkṣā-mantra

Concerning *dīkṣā*, among all the *mantras* mentioned in *śāstra*, *śrī-kṛṣṇa-mantra* is the most important because Śrī Kṛṣṇa is Himself Bhagavān, or the origin of all forms of God. Among Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s three pastime sites of Vṛndāvana, Mathurā and Dvārakā, in the *gopa-līlā*²² of Śrī Vṛndāvana the quintessence of divinity--the sweet mood of *mādhurya*--is manifest. For this reason, the *mantras* concerning *vṛndāvana-līlā* are best. And the best of all are the ten-syllable and eighteen-syllable ‘*gopījana-vallabha*’ *mantras*, which bring together all the pastimes dealing with the most attractive *madhura-rasa*.²³ Even though all *mantras* are available from books and so forth, chanting a *mantra* received in that way will bear no fruit. *Mantra* must be received from a *sad-guru*.

Some people also consider the sixteen-name, thirty-two-syllable *hare-kṛṣṇa-mahāmantra* as a *dīkṣā-mantra*, but in some *dīkṣā-paddhatis* (manuals) the *harināma-mahāmantra* is not considered as such. Because it is chanted loudly in *kīrtana*, how can it be a *dīkṣā-mantra*? Now, in some situations, before *dīkṣā* is given, *harināma* may be given for the purpose of purifying a person’s ears and mind, but that is not called *dīkṣā*. It may be asked that since *hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare, hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare* is called a *mahāmantra*,²⁴ then if one accepts this, why does this not constitute *dīkṣā*? The answer to this is that concerning the bestowal of *prema*, *hare-kṛṣṇa-nāma* holds a position of greater importance than all other *mantras*. Because of this, it is called a *mahāmantra*. But still, since it has no words in the dative case and is not accompanied by the standard six components beginning with *ṛṣi*, it is not a *dīkṣā-mantra*. Before accepting *dīkṣā*, the fruit of *nāma-kīrtana*²⁵ is to get the shelter of a *sad-guru* and receive *dīkṣā* and instruction from him. After receiving *dīkṣā*, the fruit of *nāma-kīrtana* is *prema*.

Dīkṣā-guru and Śikṣā-guru

One who gives *mantra* is called a *dīkṣā-guru* and one who teaches *bhajana* is called a *śikṣā-guru*. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* (11.3.48) says: *labdhānugraha ācāryāt tena sandarśitāgamah*. “After receiving *mantra-dīkṣā* from Śrī Guru, one should obtain knowledge of *śāstra* and the use of *mantras* from him.” If this is so, it can be understood that whoever has the duty of giving *dīkṣā* also has the duty of teaching the use of *mantras*. It is the opinion of *śāstra* that one should

²¹ Great devotee

²² Cowherd pastimes

²³ Sweetest sentiment, taste, flavor

²⁴ Literally, great *mantra*

²⁵ Chanting of the Holy Names

take shelter of a *sad-guru*. Therefore, considering the above statement, one who becomes a *guru* but is not capable of giving instruction in *bhajana* becomes implicated in the offense of damaging the respectability of the position of *guru*. If the disciple's *dīkṣā-guru* passes away before he learns *bhajana* from him, he should accept another advanced devotee who is skilled in *bhajana* as his *śikṣā-guru*. The disciple should learn from him and, regarding him as *guru*, render service to him. One who teaches the art of *bhajana* by his own example is called a *śikṣā-guru*. In order to attract the *jīva* to himself and bless him with *bhakti*, the merciful Śrī Kṛṣṇa appears both within the *jīva*'s heart as *śikṣā-guru* and externally as the highest *bhakta-ācārya*. Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta (Ā.1.47) says:

śikṣā-guruke ta jāni kṛṣṇera svarūpa |
antaryāmī bhakta-śreṣṭha ei dui rūpa ||

“I understand the *śikṣā-guru* to be a form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He appears both as the Indwelling Guide and the best of *bhaktas*.”

The meaning is that among the two kinds of *śikṣā-guru*, the *antaryāmī* (Indwelling Guide) and the highest *bhakta*, the one who teaches from within and is not perceptible by the senses is known as the *caitya-guru*. He who, as *paramātmā*,²⁶ directs and stimulates the intellect of the worldly-minded *jīva* is not the director of the *bhakta*'s heart. Therefore he doesn't give instruction to the *bhakta* as *caitya-guru*. The form of God being worshipped by the *bhakta* as his own cherished Deity appears in his mind as the indwelling *śikṣā-guru*. The Lord then guides him by revealing the manners and customs regarding the *bhakta*'s particular mood. And he who appears externally as the greatest *bhakta* to teach *bhajana* in a way perceptible to the student's senses is in reality also Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Some people circulate a theory that is contrary to scripture that says if one doesn't receive a *śikṣā-mantra* from a *śikṣā-guru*, there is no real *bhajana*. According to *śāstra* and the *mahā-janas*, there is no sacred precept about any *mantra* called a *śikṣā-mantra*. Therefore, no one should let himself be deceived by such an erroneous doctrine.

Serving Śrī Guru

When one receives *dīkṣā* from a *sad-guru*, the *sādhaka*'s duties are not then complete. After receiving *dīkṣā*, some type of *guru-sevā*²⁷ is necessary because the satisfaction of Śrī Gurudeva is the root cause of the destruction of all impediments to the *sādhaka*'s *bhajana* as well as of pleasing God. In *Bhakti-Sandarbha*, Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmipāda has written, *tat-prasādo hi sva sva nānā-pratīkāra-dustyajānartha-hānau bhagavat-parama-prasāda-siddhau ca mūlam*. “Regarding the destruction of *anarthas*²⁸ that are very difficult for the *sādhaka* to remove by himself, and regarding the attainment of the true satisfaction of Śrī Hari, the satisfaction of Śrī Guru is the root cause.” The meaning of Śrīla Gosvāmipāda's words is that when the *sādhaka* is introduced to the path of *bhajana*, at that time various kinds of serious *anarthas* may appear as a result of offenses in this or previous births and become disruptive to his devotional practices. But even though the *sādhaka* may personally try so many remedies, he is still unable to get relief from the influence of those *anarthas*. The only way to remove them is to satisfy Śrī Guru.

²⁶ Supreme Spirit

²⁷ Service to *guru*

²⁸ Something that has no value, or is an impediment, to one's *bhajana*

Moreover, the only way to truly please Śrī Bhagavān is to please Śrī Guru. By this it is understood that the cause of *bhajana-sādhana* and its fruit, namely the removal of all kinds of *anarthas* and the attainment of the affectionate Lord, remains the satisfaction of Śrī Guru. And the way to please Śrī Gurudeva is to sincerely serve him. These verses from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* (7.15.22-25) also discuss the removal of all *anarthas* by *śrī-guru-sevā* or *śrī-guru-bhakti*:

asaṅkalpāj jayet kāmam krodham kāma-vivarjanāt |
arthānartheṣayā lobham bhayam tattvāvamarśanāt ||
ānvīkṣikyā śoka-mohau dambham mahad-upāsayā |
yogāntarāyān maunena himsām kāmādy anīhayā ||
kṛpayā bhūtajam duḥkham daivam jahyāt samādhinā |
ātmajam yoga-vīryeṇa nidrām sattva-niṣevayā ||
rajas tamaś ca sattvena sattvam copaśamena ca |
etat sarvam gurau bhaktyā puruṣo hy añjasā jayet ||

Śrī Nārada said to Yudhiṣṭhira, “O King! If one is able to thoroughly conquer his desires,²⁹ then lust is also conquered. To conquer anger, abandon lust, because anger results from having one’s lust for something obstructed.³⁰ By viewing wealth as an *anartha*, namely in considering it as merely something to be enjoyed by the senses, greed is conquered. By continuously pondering the nature of reality, fear is driven away. By understanding logical philosophy, or by awakening knowledge of matter and spirit, grief and illusion are removed. By serving an exalted person, hypocrisy and arrogance are conquered. By fulfilling a vow of silence wherein news or talks about anything other than Kṛṣṇa are given up, concentration of the mind is accomplished. By abandoning the pursuit for sensual pleasures, violence is cast away. By acquiring the quality of compassion, miseries caused by other living organisms are brought to an end. By the strength of spiritual meditation, suffering caused by supernatural forces is destroyed. By the power of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, miseries of the body and mind are relieved, and by living a *sāttvika* lifestyle,³¹ sleep is overcome. By increasing the mode of goodness, passion and ignorance are conquered. Thus, by each different practice each type of *anartha* is destroyed, but as a result of *guru-bhakti* alone, the *sādhaka* is able to easily conquer over all *anarthas* simultaneously.” The particular importance of *guru-sevā* is understood from these *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* verses concerning the destruction of *anarthas*.

Specific Guru-sevā

In *Bhakti-Sandarbhā* Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmipāda has written, *tatra yady api śaraṇāpattiyai-va sarvam siddhyati...tathāpi vaiśiṣṭya-lipsuḥ śaktaś cet tataḥ bhagavac-chāstropadeṣṭṛṇām bhagavan-mantropadeṣṭṛṇām vā śrī-guru-caraṇānām nityam eva viśeṣataḥ sevām kuryāt*. “Although a *sādhaka* who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān certainly achieves complete success, still, a person who yearns for and is qualified for a particular type of *sevā* shall daily serve his *śikṣā-guru*, who gives him scriptural instruction, and his *dīkṣā-guru*, who has imparted *mantras* to him, in that specific way.”

²⁹ The Sanskrit word used here is *asaṅkalpāt*, which comes from *saṅkalpa*. Besides meaning ‘desire,’ *saṅkalpa* also means ‘conception or idea or notion formed in the mind or heart.’ (Monier-Williams)

³⁰ See *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.62.

³¹ A life of goodness and purity

In Śrīla Gosvāmpāda’s statement *viśeṣataḥ sevām kuryāt*, by using the word *viśeṣataḥ*, he is indicating a specific type of *guru-sevā*. And by saying there is a particular type, it is understood that there is also a general type. After receiving *dīkṣā*, the *sādhaka* daily worships Śrī Hari by hearing, chanting, serving the image of the Deity, offering prayers and so on. Homage and prayers to Śrī Gurudeva are included within that. Therefore, wherever the elements of Śrī Bhagavān worship, such as hearing and chanting, are being performed as the primary function, and the elements of Śrī Guru worship are being performed as secondary components of Bhagavān worship, that is called general *guru-sevā*. As a result of practicing *guru-bhajana* as an accompaniment to *bhagavad-bhajana*, the *sādhaka* attains love of God. Sincere *guru-bhakti* mixed with *bhagavad-bhajana* is crowned with success. This is the method within the realm of *sādhana*.

Likewise, if some *sādhaka* is so deeply devoted to his *guru-sevā* that he considers it to be his primary service and the *śravaṇa-kīrtana* and other components of *bhagavad-bhajana* to be of secondary importance, that is called specific *guru-sevā*. In this case, attending to Śrī Guru’s needs and other types of *guru-sevā* are preeminent, while the elements of *bhagavad-bhajana* such as hearing and chanting hold a subordinate position. Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmpāda describes such a *sādhaka* who is so attached to his particular *guru-sevā* as being *vaiśiṣṭya-lipsuḥ*. In this way, the *sādhaka* who is single-mindedly devoted to his *guru-sevā* is showered abundantly with Śrī Bhagavān’s compassion. In Śrī Devahūti’s song of praise from *Śrī Padma-Purāṇa* we find the following:

*bhaktir yathā harau me ’sti tad-variṣṭhā gurau yadi |
mamāsti tena satyena sandarśayatu me hariḥ ||*

“If I have more devotion for my *guru* than for Śrī Hari, then for that reason, may Śrī Hari show himself to me.” If Śrī Guru is pleased, Śrī Hari is naturally pleased. In *Śrī Vāmana-Kalpa*, we find this:

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

“The *mantra* is Śrī Guru, and Śrī Guru is Hari himself, so one who pleases Śrī Guru also pleases Śrī Hari.”

Attentiveness in Śrī Guru’s Sevā

The *sādhaka* should take special care when serving Śrī Guru. Śrīla Ṭhākura Mahāśaya has said, *śrī-guru-caraṇa-padma, kevala bhakti-sadma, vandoṅ mui sāvadhāna mane*. “The lotus feet of Śrī Guru are the only abode of *bhakti*; I worship them with great care.” If in some way the *sādhaka* takes *śrī-guru-tattva* lightly, or considers Śrī Guru to be an ordinary person, the *nāmāparādha*³² known as *gurvajñā*, or ignorance of the *guru*, arises. The very serious result of this is that the *sādhaka* is deprived of *guru-sevā*. Some examples of attentiveness, or carefulness, would be as follows: Śrī Guru’s words should never be disregarded. The *guru*’s shoes, clothing, bathwater, bedding and other commonly used things shall never be violated. Śrī Guru’s name

³² Offense against the Holy Name

shouldn't indiscriminately be spoken just anywhere and everywhere. With utmost sincerity, the *sādhaka* shall bow or lie prostrate in obeisance, with folded hands, and say some respectful words like *aṣṭottara-śata-śrī-śrī*, *om viṣṇupāda* or *prabhupāda*, followed by Śrī Guru's name. He shall never try to mimic Śrī Guru's movements, speech or tone of voice. He shall never sit near the *guru* with outstretched legs or with his exposed foot upon his thigh. He shall not yawn, laugh loudly, snap his fingers, rock his body or make ludicrous gestures with his hands, feet or any other part of his body in front of Śrī Guru. When going before Śrī Guru, he shall not take a seat without permission, but rather remain standing with folded hands. He shall not lie on a bed in the presence of Śrī Guru.

He shall not leave the presence of Śrī Guru without receiving permission. He shall not offer *pūjā* or praise to someone else in front of Śrī Guru. He shall not give scriptural explanations or *dīkṣā* to someone in the presence of Śrī Guru without permission. He shall not try to dominate or reprimand someone in the presence of Śrī Guru. He shall not gesture to Śrī Guru with hand or eye movements or speak to him in a way that would suggest he is giving him an order. If Śrī Guru chastises or scolds him, he shall always remain tolerant and never show any animosity toward him. He shall not take something belonging to Śrī Guru without asking him. It is offensive to remain silent before Śrī Guru rather than offering some praise or asking a question about *bhajana*. Even if the *sādhaka* have taken a vow of silence, he shall not refuse to speak to Śrī Guru. He shall avoid anyone who, out of envy, slanders Śrī Guru or tries to diminish his greatness. If he should accidentally hear someone speak ill of Śrī Guru, then he shall cover his ears, remember Śrī Hari and leave that place. He shall not associate with, live with or even see the face of a person who vilifies Śrī Guru. If the *sādhaka* sees Śrī Gurudeva arriving, he shall lie prostrate on the ground before him and offer obeisance. If Śrī Guru is leaving, he shall follow after him.

He shall personally prepare the water for Śrī Guru's foot-washing and bath. He shall help Śrī Guru with his bath, apply sandalwood, wash his clothes and massage his feet. He shall clean and paint Śrī Guru's home and courtyard. He shall offer *bhagavat-prasāda* to Śrī Guru and then accept some for himself. He shall always, in an honest, pleasant and affectionate way, utilize his body, mind, words, home, wealth and vigor in the satisfaction of Śrī Guru. If a *sādhaka* observes these precepts and prohibitions regarding Śrī Guru, he will soon be blessed with the ultimate result of *guru-sevā*, *prema-bhakti* at the lotus feet of God.

A Few Other Things That Should Be Known

In his book *Siddhānta-Ratna*, Śrīpāda Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa has written, *eṣā tu bhaktis tan-nitya-parikara-gaṇād ārabhyedānīntaneṣv api tad-bhakteṣu mandākinīva pracarati...sā tathābhūtā nitya-dhāmnī nitya-pārṣadeṣu nityam cakāsti sura-sarid iva tad-bhakta-praṇālyā prapañce'vatarati*. "This *bhakti* originated from Śrī Hari's eternal companions and appears like the Mandākinī within the present-day *bhaktas*. *Bhakti* always resides within the Lord's eternal companions in the spiritual world and descends like the Mandākinī River through the channel of Śrī Hari's *bhaktas* into the material world." The Mandākinī River flows from the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān and purifies the heavens, the earth and the underworld. In the same way, *bhakti*, the essence of Śrī Hari's own *cit-śakti*,³³ descends from Śrī Kṛṣṇa through the channel of *bhaktas* (*gurus*) into the hearts of the *sādhakas* of this world. The *sādhaka* receives this *śrī-guru-praṇālī*

³³ *Cit-śakti* means inherent or spiritual cognition or perception. It is described here as *śrī-harira svarūpa-bhūtā*, or as being of the same nature as Śrī Hari.

(channel) from the *sad-guru*.

In this particular Kali age, Śrīman Mahāprabhu has mercifully given Vraja's very elevated, *ujjala-rasamaya* type of *bhakti* known as *mañjarī-bhāva-sāadhanā* to the people of the world. Those who desire to be blessed with *mañjarī-bhāva-sāadhanā*, the great and rare gift of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, shall take shelter at the feet of such a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *guru*, accept *śrī-guru-praṇālī* and *siddha-praṇālī* from him and engage in *bhajana*.

As we previously mentioned, by performing *śrī-guru-sevā* or *guru-bhakti*, the *sādhaka* easily overcomes all *anarthas*. The compassion of Śrī Hari descends into this world through two streams: one is Śrī Vaiṣṇava and the other is Śrī Guru. By the influence of the Vaiṣṇavas, the necessity of receiving the shelter of Śrī Guru is understood. And as a result of the Vaiṣṇavas' mercy, that shelter is obtained. The Vaiṣṇavas kindly give us a priceless treasure in the form of Śrī Guru, who is the origin of *bhagavad-bhajana*. Therefore, the *sādhaka* who is eager to obtain *prema* must serve both Śrī Guru and Śrī Vaiṣṇava equally. By the combined grace of both Śrī Vaiṣṇava, who is the embodiment of *bhagavad-bhakti*, and Śrī Guru, who is the embodiment of *bhagavad-bhakti* as well as a direct incarnation of Śrī Bhagavān, the *sādhaka's* devotional practices will be successful. Because of that, Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura Mahāśaya has written,

chāḍiyā vaiṣṇava-sevā, nistāra peyeche kebā,
anukṣaṇa kheda uṭhe mane |
narottama dāse kaya, jīvāra ucita naya,
śrī-guru-vaiṣṇava-sevā vine ||

“Who has ever received liberation without serving the Vaiṣṇavas? Instead, their minds are always filled with distress. Narottama Dāsa says it is not appropriate for the *jīva* to avoid serving Śrī Guru and the Vaiṣṇavas.” The mercy of Śrī Bhagavān exists in two forms: Śrī Guru and Śrī Vaiṣṇava. Serving Śrī Guru and the Vaiṣṇavas are two direct ways of receiving Śrī Bhagavān's compassion. Without one, the other is incomplete. If one performs *guru-sevā* but has no inclination for *vaiṣṇava-sevā*, then that *guru-sevā* is not complete. And if one performs *vaiṣṇava-sevā* but has no interest in *guru-sevā*, the *vaiṣṇava-sevā* is also incomplete. For this reason, the *sad-guru* offers his own disciples at the feet of the Vaiṣṇavas and teaches them how to obtain the Vaiṣṇavas' association and how to serve them. And the Vaiṣṇavas teach the people under their care how to serve the lotus feet of Śrī Guru.

If a *guru*, due to envy, forbids his disciple to associate with or serve a *mahābhāgavata-vaiṣṇava*, the disciple should consider that the *guru* is testing his devotion to the Vaiṣṇavas. He should then humbly bow before the *guru* and request that he retract that prohibition. But if the *guru* repeatedly gives him such an order, then the disciple should consider his own misfortune and take shelter at the feet of Śrī Bhagavān. He should continue to serve his *guru* from a distance without abandoning him or behaving inimically toward him. On the other hand, if the *guru* is openly malicious toward the Vaiṣṇavas, then the disciple should conclude that the *guru* is not a Vaiṣṇava and abandon him. Then, according to the appropriate procedure, he should take shelter of a Vaiṣṇava *guru* and perform *bhajana*. In *Śrī Bhakti-Sandarbhāḥ*, Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmipāda has established this very clearly.

yo vyakti nyāya-rahitam anyāyena śṛṇoti yaḥ |
tāv ubhau narakam ghoram vrajataḥ kālam akṣayam ||

iti śrī-nārada-pañcarātre. ataeva dūrata evārādhyas tādṛśo guruḥ; vaiṣṇava-vidveṣī cet parityājya eva---

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

iti smaraṇāt, tasya vaiṣṇava-bhāva-rāhityenāvaiṣṇavatayā “avaṣṇavopadiṣṭena” ityādi-vacana-viṣayatvāc ca.” (Bhakti-Sandarbhāḥ 238 anuḥ)

“Both the person who speaks inimically about the Vaiṣṇava scriptures and he who listens to such ignoble statements shall live in hell for endless time.” If some instruction of Śrī Gurudeva is inconsistent with *śāstra*, then one should leave his association and serve him only from a distance. If the *guru* becomes hostile toward the Vaiṣṇavas, he should be abandoned. Another meaning of the word *dveṣa*, or malice, is slander. *nindāpi dveṣa samāḥ* (*Bhakti-sandarbhāḥ*). “Slander and malice are the same.” It should be understood that by naming malice and slander, the six types of *vaiṣṇava-aparādha* are being implied. Therefore, a *guru* who is offensive to the Vaiṣṇavas is not qualified. For this reason, the scriptural ruling is that he should be abandoned. A *guru* who is attached to worldly pleasures, is ignorant of what should be done and what shouldn’t, and who has deviated from the path laid out in the *bhakti-śāstras* should be abandoned. Because such a *guru* has no *vaiṣṇava-bhāva*,³⁴ he is not a Vaiṣṇava. *avaṣṇavera upadiṣṭa mantrē naraka-gati haye thāke*. “One who is initiated in *mantra* by someone who is averse to the Vaiṣṇavas is destined for hell.” In this scriptural statement the precept for abandoning an *avaṣṇava-guru* is also seen.

Concerning an abandoned *guru*, the inference is that if a *guru* acts in an unbecoming way, such as showing animosity toward the Vaiṣṇavas or some other such behavior, or if he becomes confused in his understanding of God, such as proclaiming himself to be God, or if he becomes averse to hearing and chanting about Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s qualities and pastimes, then he will not feel the joy born of hearing *śrī-kṛṣṇa-līlā-kathā*. Intoxicated by the praise of insidious people, he gradually becomes more impure. At that point, one should forsake such a *guru* and take shelter of a competent one.

³⁴ *Vaiṣṇava-bhāva* can mean ‘the mood or nature of a Vaiṣṇava,’ or it can also mean ‘love or attachment for the Vaiṣṇavas.’