

Who is a Bonafide Guru?

Reporter: But the bad gurus...

Śrīla Prabhupāda: And what is a “bad” guru?

Reporter: A bad guru just wants some money or some fame.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Well, if he is bad, how can he become a guru? [Laughter.] How can iron become gold? Actually, a guru cannot be bad, for if someone is bad, he cannot be a guru. You cannot say “bad guru.” That is a contradiction. What you have to do is simply try to understand what a genuine guru is. — SSR, Ch. 2

1. A bonafide guru honestly accepts and faithfully serves the authority of the disciplic succession represented by the Founder-Ācārya of ISKCON, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

“The *founder-ācārya* of the *sampradāya* is the principal *śikṣā-guru* for that disciplic succession. Speculations that contradict his teachings are to be immediately rejected. Only a saintly devotee who has understood the teachings of the principal *śikṣā-guru* is eligible to be a *dikṣā-guru* for others. If one thinks that he can be initiated by an unauthorized *guru* or a Māyāvādī into these teachings, he errs severely. He will never attain Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” — Śrī Harināma-cintāmaṇi 6.21-26



All bona fide representatives of Śrī Vyāsadeva in the chain of disciplic succession are to be understood to be *gosvāmīs*. These *gosvāmīs* restrain all their senses, and they stick to the path made by the previous *ācāryas*. The *gosvāmīs* do not deliver lectures on the *Bhāgavatam* capriciously. Rather, they execute their services most carefully, following their predecessors who delivered the spiritual message unbroken to them.

— ŚB 1.1.5p



The guru does not manufacture a new process to instruct the disciple. The disciple receives from the guru an authorized process received by the guru from his guru. This is called the system of disciplic succession (*evaṁ paramparā-prāptam imaṁ rājarṣayo viduḥ* [Bg. 4.2]). This is the bona fide Vedic system of receiving the process of devotional service, by which the Supreme Personality of Godhead is pleased. Therefore, to approach a bona fide guru, or spiritual master, is essential. The bona fide spiritual master is he who has received the mercy of his guru, who in turn is bona fide because he has received the mercy of his guru. This is called the *paramparā* system.

— ŚB 8.16.24p

2. A bonafide guru is fixed in serving Supreme Personality of Godhead as servant of the servant.

A Vaiṣṇava never thinks that he has a direct relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Lord Caitanya says, “I am the servant of the servant of the servant of the servant — a hundred times

the servant of the servant — of Kṛṣṇa [Cc. Madhya 13.80].” We have to agree to become the servant of the servant of the servant. This is the process of disciplic succession, and if one wants real, transcendental love of God, then he has to adopt this process.

— SSR, Ch. 8



A spiritual master’s qualification is that he is *brahma-niṣṭhā*, which means that he has given up all other activities and has dedicated his life to working only for the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa.

— Kṛṣṇa Book Ch. 87

3. A bonafide guru hears from the disciplic succession.

Some spiritual teachers say, “In my opinion you should do this,” but this is not a guru. Such so-called gurus are simply rascals. The genuine guru has only one opinion, and that is the opinion expressed by Kṛṣṇa, Vyāsadeva, Nārada, Arjuna, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and the Gosvāmīs.

— SSR Ch. 2



An actual guru is *śrotriya*, one who has heard or received perfect knowledge through *paramparā*, the disciplic succession.

— ŚB 7.5.31p



Perfect knowledge is called *paramparā*, or deductive knowledge coming down from the authority to the submissive aural receiver who is bona fide by service and surrender.

— ŚB 1.2.21p

4. A bonafide guru has realized the conclusions of scriptures.

The qualification of a spiritual master is that he must have realized the conclusions of the scriptures by deliberation and arguments and thus be able to convince others of these conclusions. Such great personalities who have taken shelter of the Supreme Godhead, leaving aside all material considerations, are to be understood as bona fide spiritual masters.

— NOD Ch. 7



A spiritually advanced person who is authorized to act as the spiritual master speaks as the Supreme Personality of Godhead dictates from within. Thus it is not he that is personally speaking. In other words, when a pure devotee or spiritual master speaks, what he says should be accepted as having been directly spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the *paramparā* system.

— CC Antya 5.71p



Whatever position one may have, if he is fully conversant with the science of Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he can become a bona fide spiritual master—an initiator or a teacher of the science.

— TLC, Ch. 31

5. A bonafide guru does not behave whimsically.

One who is in the line of disciplic succession cannot manufacture his own way of behavior. There are many so-called followers of the Vaiṣṇava cult in the line of Caitanya Mahāprabhu who do not scrupulously follow the conclusions of the *śāstras*, and therefore they are considered to be *apa-sampradāya*, which means “outside of the *sampradāya*.” — CC Ādi 7.48p



One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master. And one cannot be a bona fide and authorized spiritual master unless one has been strictly obedient to his spiritual master. — ŚB 2.9.43p



If one is seriously interested in Kṛṣṇa conscious activities, he must be ready to follow the rules and regulations laid down by the *ācāryas*, and he must understand their conclusions. The *śāstra* says, *dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyāṁ mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ* (*Mahābhārata, Vana-parva* 313.117). It is very difficult to understand the secret of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but one who advances by the instruction of the previous *ācāryas* and follows in the footsteps of his predecessors in the line of disciplic succession will have success. Others will not. — CC Ādi 8.7p

6. A bonafide guru is self-controlled.

One who is not self-controlled, specifically in sex life, can become neither a disciple nor a spiritual master. One must have disciplinary training in controlling speaking, anger, the tongue, the mind, the belly and the genitals. One who has controlled the particular senses mentioned above is called a *gosvāmī*. Without becoming a *gosvāmī* one can become neither a disciple nor a spiritual master. The so-called spiritual master without sense control is certainly the cheater, and the disciple of such a so-called spiritual master is the cheated. — ŚB 2.9.43p



A person who has full control over the senses and mind is called a *gosvāmī* or *gosāñi*. One who does not have such control is called a *godāsa*, or a servant of the senses, and cannot become a spiritual master. — CC Ādi 7.13p

7. A bonafide guru is an *uttama-adhikārī*.

The guru must be situated on the topmost platform of devotional service. There are three classes of devotees, and the guru must be accepted from the topmost class. The first-class devotee is the spiritual master for all kinds of people.....The guru is a qualified *brāhmaṇa*; therefore he knows Brahman and Para-brahman. He thus devotes his life for the service of Para-brahman. The bona fide spiritual master who accepts disciples from all over the world is also worshiped all over the world because of his qualities. *Lokānām asau pūjyo yathā hariḥ*: the people of the world worship him just as they worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead. All these honors are offered to him because he strictly follows the brahminical principles and teaches these principles to his

disciples. Such a person is called an *ācārya* because he knows the principles of devotional service, he behaves in that way himself, and he teaches his disciples to follow in his footsteps.....The *mahā-bhāgavata* is one who decorates his body with *tilaka* and whose name indicates him to be a servant of Kṛṣṇa by the word *dāsa*. He is also initiated by a bona fide spiritual master and is expert in worshiping the Deity, chanting *mantras* correctly, performing sacrifices, offering prayers to the Lord and performing *saṅkīrtana*. He knows how to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead and how to respect a Vaiṣṇava. When one has attained the topmost position of *mahā-bhāgavata*, he is to be accepted as a guru and worshiped exactly like Hari, the Personality of Godhead. Only such a person is eligible to occupy the post of a guru.

— CC Madhya 24.330p



One should not become a spiritual master unless he has attained the platform of *uttama-adhikārī*. A neophyte Vaiṣṇava or a Vaiṣṇava situated on the intermediate platform can also accept disciples, but such disciples must be on the same platform, and it should be understood that they cannot advance very well toward the ultimate goal of life under his insufficient guidance. Therefore a disciple should be careful to accept an *uttama-adhikārī* as a spiritual master.

The *uttama-adhikārī*, or highest devotee, is one who is very advanced in devotional service. An *uttama-adhikārī* is not interested in blaspheming others, his heart is completely clean, and he has attained the realized state of unalloyed Kṛṣṇa consciousness.....Out of many such Vaiṣṇavas, one may be found to be very seriously engaged in the service of the Lord and strictly following all the regulative principles, chanting the prescribed number of rounds on *japa* beads and always thinking of how to expand the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Such a Vaiṣṇava should be accepted as an *uttama-adhikārī*, a highly advanced devotee, and his association should always be sought.....When a person realizes himself to be an eternal servitor of Kṛṣṇa, he loses interest in everything but Kṛṣṇa's service. Always thinking of Kṛṣṇa, devising means by which to spread the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, he understands that his only business is in spreading the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement all over the world. Such a person is to be recognized as an *uttama-adhikārī*.

— NOI Text 5

One should not accept as a spiritual master someone who is fool number one, who has no direction according to the scriptural injunctions, whose character is doubtful, who does not follow the principles of devotional service, or who has not conquered the influence of the six sense-gratifying agents. The six agents of sense gratification are the tongue, the genitals, the belly, anger, the mind and words.

— NOD Ch. 7