

Do I Know Guru/Disciple Culture? Am I Living It?

The guru principle

Both the śikṣā guru and the dīksā guru are Kṛṣṇa's servants. Both are manifestations of Kṛṣṇa's power that reside eternally in Vraja. Never think that the spiritual master is an ordinary mortal; the guru is Kṛṣṇa's potency, Kṛṣṇa's beloved, our eternal master. One who devotes himself to the guru in this consciousness frees himself from the material predicament on the strength of this devotion.

— Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Śrī Harināma-cintāmaṇi* 6.31.33

The proper etiquette

Before worshipping Kṛṣṇa, one must first worship the guru. One offers the spiritual master Kṛṣṇa's prasāda. One should worship Kṛṣṇa with the guru's permission, and one should chant the Lord's names while remembering the guru.

How one must have faith in the guru

One who shows disrespect to the guru commits an offense, It is an offense that impedes his advancement in spiritual life. Anyone who is equally devoted to the guru, Kṛṣṇa and the Vaiṣṇavas and takes shelter of the Holy Name is a pure devotee and is quickly delivered. One whose faith in his guru is unshakeable will reach the goal of Kṛṣṇa prema on the strength of chanting the Pure Name.

When to reject a guru

Nevertheless, it may happen that for some reason the spiritual master falls into bad company and becomes bereft of qualifications. At the time the disciple accepted the guru, he was highly exalted, but by committing offenses he loses his spiritual understanding. He becomes inimical to the Vaiṣṇavas and loses all taste for chanting, and gradually succumbs to the desire for wealth and women. The disciple should leave such a guru and if Kṛṣṇa is merciful, he will find out a Sat Guru and again take up the Pure Name.

The guru and disciple should test each other before establishing a relationship

*The spiritual master must be strict with unworthy disciples, while a disciple who takes shelter of an unqualified guru becomes worthless. As long as both of them remain stable in their qualifications, there is no question of either one of them breaking off their relationship. The guru-disciple relationship is a permanent one. If both maintain their purity and sincerity, their eternal relationship is never broken. However, if the spiritual master becomes contaminated, the disciple should immediately repudiate him. Similarly, the spiritual master should repudiate the disciple who is insincere and fallen. If either of them fail to do so, they will fall down. The evidence for such repudiation of a guru by disciple or disciple by spiritual master is given elsewhere.**

*The following verse from the *Mahābhārata* (5.178.24) is quoted in *Bhakti sandarbha* 238; *guror apy avaliptasya kāryākāryam ajānataḥ/utpatha-pratipannasya parityāgo vidhiyate*// “If the spiritual master has been contaminated, no longer can discriminate between what is to be done and what is not to be done, and has taken up the path of wickedness, then he must be abandoned.” In *Jaiva Dharma*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes

that there are two valid reasons for leaving a *guru*. The first is if at the time of being initiated, the disciple had not properly examined the spiritual master for his worthiness and later found him to be ineffectual. The second is if the spiritual master changes and due to bad association, becomes a *Māyāvādī* or envious of the Vaiṣṇavas.

One should only take a *guru* after testing him

One who shows disrespect for a bonafide spiritual master is the most sinful offender anywhere in the world. One should therefore take particular care from the very beginning that he has taken a pure devotee for his spiritual master. The scriptural injunction is that both the spiritual master and his disciple should test each other prior to cementing their relationship by initiation. If one thinks beforehand, “May I never have to suffer the distress of leaving my guru,” this difficulty will never arise.

If a guru has no devotion, his disciple will be just like him, so one should take care to examine the guru to see if he is pure. The offense against a pure devotee guru is a terrible thing, so disastrous that it can ruin both man and god alike.

How to properly honor the spiritual master

One should never step on or over the guru’s seat or bed, his shoes, vehicle, footstool, bathwater, or his shadow. One should not worship another person, think someone else to be his equal, initiate, explain, or give orders in the guru’s presence. Whenever and wherever the disciple sees the spiritual master, he should fall on the ground and offer prayers. The guru’s name must be uttered with reverence and one should never show indifference to his commands. One should eagerly honor the remnants of his meals and never say anything displeasing to him. One who acts in this way will attain all perfection through chanting the Holy Name, so say the scriptures.

— Op. cit. 6.34-56