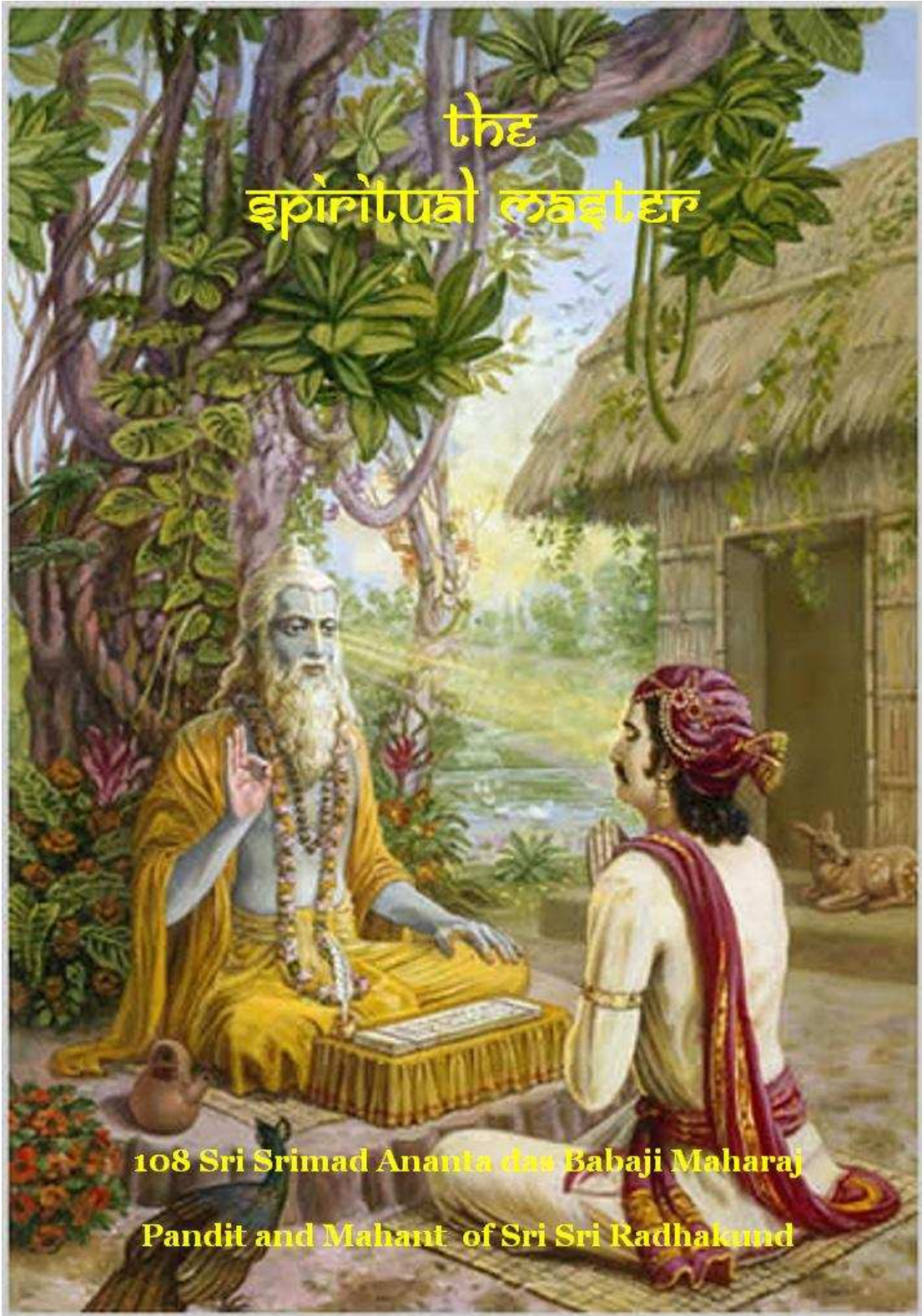


the
spiritual master



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The Spiritual Master

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Who is the Spiritual Master?

Sri Krishna, Who is God Himself, has defined the Spiritual Master to His dear devotee Sri Uddhav as follows (S.B. 11.17.27) -

Sri *Bhagavân* said-"O Uddhav! You should know the preceptor, meaning the Gurudev, to be myself and never disregard him. Do not find faults with him, taking him to be an ordinary human being for Sri Gurudev is the sum total of all *devatâs*."

"The scriptures proclaim the Gurudev as another form of Sri Krishna Who bestows His mercy upon the devotees in the form of Gurudev."

- (C.C.)

All these scriptures prove that Sri Krishna appears in the world in the form of Gurudev to extend His mercy upon the devotees. His grace consists of invaluable *bhajan* of Sri Krishna, and the fruit of that *bhajan* is priceless *prem*. Sri Krishna, in the form of Sri Gurudev graces a surrendered disciple with these two precious gifts.

Sri Uddhav told Sri Krishna -"O my Lord! A devotee has many sensual desires that are obstacles in the path of *bhajan*; You remove them externally in the form of Sri Gurudev who instructs in spiritual truth and internally in the form of good conscience. Thus You grant them realizations about You." - (S.B. 11.29.6)

We should remember that, although Sri Gurudev is as worshiped as Sri Krishna, he is not the ultimate object of worship like Sri Krishna. The Gurudev is the special devotee-manifestation of the Lord.

"Although my Gurudev is the servant of Sri Chaitanya Mahâprabhu (the Supreme Being), still I know him to be the Lord's manifestation."

- (C.C.)

Gurudev is the special devotee-manifestation of the Lord.

We must know Sri Gurudev as a special manifestation of the Lord in the form of the greatest saint - this is the true form of Sri Gurudev. In his Manah-Shikshâ Srila Raghunâth dâs Goswâmi has written -

"O Mind! Remember Shachisuta¹ Sri Goursundar as Sri Krishna and Sri Gurudev as Sri Krishna's dear most devotee!"

Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd has also written in his Gurvâshtakam-

"All the scriptures proclaim Sri Gurudev to be Lord Hari Himself, and the great saints also feel that, but he is also Sri Krishna's dear most devotee - I offer my obeisance unto the lotus feet of such Sri Gurudev."

The point is that although we should perceive Sri Gurudev as Sri Krishna's dear most devotee, we should also consider him to be His actual manifestation. If we do not think like that we may start considering Gurudev

¹ The son of mother Shachi

to be an ordinary mortal. This is a great offense that will make all our devotional practice fruitless, like an elephant's bath¹.

Why is it necessary to take shelter of Sri Gurudev's lotus feet?

If we want to worship the Supreme Being then we must first of all take shelter of the lotus feet of Sri Gurudev. We will never be able to perform devotional practice if we do not take shelter of the lotus feet of Sri Gurudev, because this is the gate through which one enters the path of *bhakti*. We cannot master any discipline without the guidance of an expert preceptor, then how can we accomplish perfection in spiritual science that is a more complex and difficult process? Another special feature of devotional knowledge is that the merciful Sri *Bhagavân* has personally appeared in this world in the form of Gurudev to teach us *bhakti*.

We have briefly discussed the *Guru-tattva* here. When we understand the *Gurutva* (gravity) of *Guru-tattva*, then we will not have any doubt about the importance of taking shelter of Sri Gurudev. We do not know the true form of Sri Gurudev, what is Sri Gurudev made of and what is the positive result of surrendering unto Sri Gurudev. Therefore we are bound to have many questions regarding surrendering unto Sri Gurudev. However, if we associate with pure devotees we can gain knowledge on all these topics. We can not deeply realize the *Guru-tattva* without the association of pure devotees. Therefore if we desire the highest welfare and hence wish to practice devotion, the scriptures and the great saints advise us to associate with the saints. In Srimad-Bhâgavatam Lord Kapiladev told His mother Devahuti -

"When you attain the excellent company of the saints, your heart and the ears relish my glory like nectar. The topics related to my excellences are the quickest means to get rid of ignorance. Anyone who lovingly enjoys hearing them will gradually develop faith, attachment and devotion for me."

- (S.B.3.25.25)

This indicates that by hearing topics on the Supreme Lord from the great saints we gain scriptural faith, and then we take shelter of a *sadguru*; we begin *bhajan* (that is so precious) as a result of which *rati* and *prem* gradually develop. We have been wandering (reincarnating) through different species of life since time infinite and by the Lord's grace we have got this human body, which is the gateway to liberation from repeated birth and death. The most fortunate amongst human beings are they who have acquired the association of the saints. When we hear about Sri Krishna from the greatly realized devotees of the Lord, the heart, which is polluted by attachment to the sense objects, will be somewhat purified and we will realize that the body and everything related to it is temporary, and the ocean of temporary material seems impossible to cross. We will also comprehend that this material world is full of agony and lust and anger are attacking us every moment like dangerous sharks and crocodiles. Then we

¹ After an elephant takes bath and comes out of the water, it sprinkles dust on itself. Srimad-Bhâgavatam (7.15.26) says - "A Spiritual Master is non-different from the Lord. He lights the lamp of transcendental knowledge. If one is so foolish as to see the Spiritual Master as an ordinary mortal, all his spiritual studies will be wasted and useless, just like lie bath of an elephant."

will become eager to cross the impassable and miserable ocean of material existence to attain the eternally blissful lotus feet of the Lord. We can use our invaluable human body to achieve this goal; however first of all we have to find a worthy captain – who is none other than Sri Gurudev. In Srimad-Bhâgavatam Sri Krishna has told Uddhav –

“O Uddhav! This human body is the root cause of all welfare, and it is expert in accomplishing its goal. The living entity attains this human body which is extremely rare. It is like an excellent boat that has Sri Gurudev as its captain. Moreover, I am providing favorable breeze to steer it in the right direction. A person who does not endeavour to cross the ocean of material existence despite receiving this body is committing suicide.”
- (S.B.11.20.17)

We have already discussed that in the company of devotees we come to realize that we should take shelter of a Spiritual Master. Thus it is logical that if we do not feel it necessary to surrender unto a Spiritual Master, we must not have associated with devotees in the true sense. Whenever someone has associated with devotees or is in the company of devotees right now, yet he has not realized the seriousness of taking the refuge of Sri Gurudev, we must understand that he has not got the real association of saints or the person has committed something foul, due to which the saintly relation is not showing result. As long as we do not gain the shelter of Sri Gurudev’s lotus feet, the ultimate fruit of association with the devotees is – ‘surrendering unto Sri Gurudev’, for **bhajan begins only after taking initiation and instructions from a sadguru.**

The Characteristics of a sadguru

When we wish to be blessed with the benefit of devotional practice and we desire to take shelter of Sri Gurudev it is absolutely necessary that we commit ourselves at the feet of a *sadguru* alone.

Who is a
sadguru?

When the Gurudev-potency awakens within a saint he becomes a *sadguru*. This Gurudev-potency awakens within a saint in the following way. He should have purified his heart through devotional practice. *Bhakti* awakens in him and he gains beautiful saintly qualities such as compassion and kindness. His heart melts when he sees the agony of the materially bound souls. By instructing devotional practice to these human beings he destroys their miserable condition and is extremely anxious to bless them by giving them the relish of *bhakti ras*. By the Lord’s wish the Gurudev-potency emanates from Him and appears within the heart of such a *bhakti siddha* great saint.

When we covet devotion for the Supreme Lord, we are blessed by taking shelter of such a qualified *sadguru*. Srimad-Bhâgavatam has described the characteristics of such a *sadguru*¹ -

“Therefore a person who inquires about the highest welfare should take shelter of a *sadguru*, **who is expert in the Word** (Vedic scriptures) and is **‘realized in the Supreme Being’**. He also has to be free from lust and greed.” - (S.B.11.3.21)

¹ Later on we shall describe these characteristics more in detail

Sridhar Swâmi writes in his commentary on this verse: That the *sadguru* is 'expert in the Word' means that he is learned in Vedic literature and knows of the Truth. If he is not, then he cannot remove the doubts of the disciples who take his shelter. Then again he has to be 'realized in the Supreme Being', which means that He is a devotee, or that He is endowed with transcendental realizations about Sri Krishna. Otherwise he cannot inspire his disciple with *bhajan*-realizations."

The question may arise, "We may be able to discern whether the Spiritual Master is expert in the Word by seeing and hearing from him about the scriptures, but how will we know if he is realized in the Supreme Being?" The answer to this is, he should *be upâsantasraya*, or devoid of lust, anger and greed. When *bhakti* enlightens a heart, the darkness of lust and greed cannot shroud it. **Therefore the characteristics of a *sadguru* given by the *shâstras* are as follows:**

1) He has realizations about Sri *Bhagavân* due to his solid faith and firm perseverance in *bhajan*. He has attained the grace of his own Gurudev by being similarly devoted to his lotus feet.

2) He is well-versed in the *Vedas* and in *bhakti*-scriptures that highlight the true Vedic purport such as *Srimad-Bhâgavatam*. Thus he can wipe out the doubts of his disciples.

3) Because he has transcendental realizations about Sri Krishna he has attained His mercy. Thus he has become so powerful that he is able to bring the disciple on to the path of *bhakti* and infuse this power within him.

4) He is not overcome by vices like lust and greed.

A saint who is endowed with such qualities and who has parental love for his disciples can attain the position of a *sadguru*. Such a *sadguru* is able to obliterate various obstacles that may hinder the disciple in his *bhajan*. He can bless the disciple with *prem* and bring him to the lotus feet of Sri Krishna. On the other hand, a person who desires to become famous as a Gurudev may have many virtues, like high birth etc., yet if he does not have the above mentioned characteristics he will not be counted as a *sadguru*. Therefore if we are sincere and are eager to do Sri Krishna-*bhajan* we should go unto a saint who is endowed with the right qualities, receive initiation in Sri Krishna-*mantra* and learn *bhajan* from him.

Common Characteristics of a *Sadguru*

One who has the following characteristics is a *sadguru* -

- learned in the *Vedas*
- has realization about Sri Krishna
- most peaceful
- possesses Sri Krishna-*bhakti*
- realizes Sri Krishna's glory as the One Who loves His devotees
- has offered his heart to Sri Krishna
- has a pure body (is free from disease)
- has conquered the six enemies such as lust
- has deep *râg-bhakti* for Sri Krishna
- knows the immaculate path of the Vedic literatures
- is approved of by the *sadhus*

- has control over his senses
 - is steadfast in the Supreme Being
- (Hari-Bhakti-Vilâs 1.32-35)

Special Characteristics of a Sadguru

A Spiritual Master who has the following characteristics is glorious –

- born in a faultless and sinless family
- is of unblemished character
- is careful about his conduct
- belongs to a certain *âshram*
- is free from anger
- knows the *Vedas*
- knows all other scriptures
- has faith
- does not find fault
- speaks affectionately
- is nice to behold
- pure
- nicely dressed
- young in mind
- engaged in the welfare of all living beings
- intelligent
- without arrogance
- satisfied
- nonviolent
- able to analyze transcendental truths
- endowed with parental love
- expert in worshipping the Supreme Lord
- thankful
- affectionate towards his disciples
- able to justly punish and reward
- practices *hom-mantra*
- learned in the art of debating
- pure-hearted
- merciful

- (Hari-Bhakti-Vilâs 1.38-41)

The Spiritual Master's mercy is Special

There is a difference in the mercy of Sri Hari and that of Sri Gurudev. The Upanishads say - "A person to whom Sri Hari wishes to lower in His eyes - He will make him perform wrong deeds, and He gives erroneous instructions to evil people." But the *âchârya* wants to elevate and engage everyone in saintly activities. He always speaks the right words everywhere. Therefore we should prefer the grace of Sri Gurudev rather than that of Sri Hari.

Who is an
âchârya?

After all –

"An *âchârya* is one who always pronounces (preaches) the scriptural injunction, follows them himself, and also teaches others to act

accordingly."

How do we get a Sadguru?

Some people think that a *sadguru* is very rare in this world and it is not easy to recognize and get one. Thinking like this, they do not endeavour to take *dikshâ mantra* and thus waste the precious moments of their rare human life. In this context we would like to state that the Lord Himself descends as *sadguru* for the welfare of the world; then for a genuine seeker, someone who is serious about performing *bhajan* and those who are eager to take shelter of a *sadguru*, He can never be hard-to-get or unattainable. We should give up crookedness and associate with pure devotees with a simple and innocent mind to rid us of material miseries. We should be anxious to get a *sadguru* so that we may perform devotional practice. To achieve this we should pray wholeheartedly to the Lord. Then He will bless us with a *sadguru* – harbor no doubt about it. Sri Hari is merciful. He will most certainly grant earnest devotees their heartfelt wish.

Shelter of Sri Gurudev's Lotus-feet

Srimat Rupa Goswâmpâd has stated 64 items of *bhajan*. The first three are -

1. Taking shelter of Sri Gurudev's feet
2. Taking initiation into Sri Krishna-*mantra* and learning Bhâgavata-*dharma* (the process of worshipping Sri Krishna) from him
3. Serving Sri Gurudev with faith.

- (Bhakti-Rasâmrta-Sindhu 1.2.74)

Sri Chaitanya-Charitâmrta states the same -

guru pādâshroy, dikshâ, gurur seban

- (C.C.)

Guru pādâshroy means that a person who wishes to practice devotion must live near Sri Gurudev's feet for a while before taking initiation, and sincerely render service to him according to his wishes, so that Sri Gurudev is pleased. The scriptures say it is also necessary that the Spiritual Master and the disciple should test each other before initiation. In this way both Gurudev and disciple can examine each other's nature and qualification. If they do not do this, then both may experience obstacles in their *bhajan* in the future. In other words, if the Gurudev does not have the characteristics that the *shâstra* describe the disciple will inevitably experience obstacles in *bhajan* and if the disciple is not qualified then the Gurudev too will face problems. Not only this, the mutual examination also has a very valuable outcome. When the *sâdhak* who is eager to receive *dikshâ*, stays for a few days with the Gurudev and serves him he will also become qualified for both *dikshâ* and *bhajan*. On the other hand, the Sri Gurudev-*tattva* will melt in compassion when he sees the sincere service rendered by such a great devotee. The aspirant achieves **an important goal of human life** by attaining the *dikshâ mantra* from Sri Gurudev. Since Sri Gurudev is satisfied with the disciple's service his heart is melting with compassion and hence the aspirant will be blessed with the true relish of ambrosial

bhakti ras. Here it is noteworthy that a great saint, who has extraordinary powers, can examine the qualifications of a disciple on mere sight, or can make an unqualified applicant at once qualified and can thus give initiation to a candidate at once. The above rules and regulations do not apply to such saints. This, however, is not appropriate for everyone.

Dikshâ or initiation

What do we mean by *dikshâ* or initiation? In his *Bhakti-Sandarbha* (283) Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd quotes the *shâstra* to describe the greatness of initiation--

What do we
mean by *dikshâ*?

"The *âchâryas* who know the truth define '*dikshâ*' as that which bestows divine knowledge and destroys all sins."

Sri Jivapâd adds: "Here 'divine knowledge' means the knowledge about the Lord's *swarup* which lies within the *mantra*, along with special knowledge about our relationship with the Lord."

"The *swarup* of the living entity is that he is Krishna's eternal servant. He is Krishna's *tatasthâ shakti* and so he is both different and non-different from Him." - (C.C.)

Although we are Sri Krishna's eternal servant, we have been averse to the Lord since time infinite. Hence ignorance and illusion have gripped us. Since we are under such illusion we identify with our false body, senses and mind. We forget our own *swarup* and call this false body "I". We forget our eternal relationship with Sri Hari and become bound to spouse, children and money.

"The living being has forgotten that he is Sri Krishna's eternal servant, and due to that fault *mâyâ* has tied a noose round his neck." - (C.C.)

In this way, although we are originally transcendental, we are bound by *mâyâ* and wander around in the miserable material world, reincarnating from one species to the other. Thus we suffer the pain of birth, disease, old age and death. Sri Gurudev mercifully cuts the bondage of *mâyâ* and breathes transcendental energy into our heart. Thus he awakens awareness in us - about who we are and our eternal and special relationship with Sri Hari - this is ***dikshâ***.

Then again, **the *mantra* is non-different from the Lord**. By the grace of the pure devotees and the Spiritual Master, who are the condensed form of Sri Hari's mercy, the Lord enters the disciple's heart in the form of *mantra* to make his body, mind and life-air transcendently suitable for serving the Lord. Sriman-Mahâprabhu has said with His holy lips-

"At the time of initiation the devotee surrenders himself and at that time Sri Krishna makes him His own. The Lord then makes the devotee's body transcendental and in this transcendental body the devotee serves His lotus feet." - (C. C.)

Some know the glory of surrendering unto a *sadguru* and taking initiation, yet think that it is not necessary to take *dikshâ*. Their idea is that chanting the Holy Name alone will suffice. It is easy to guess what enormous loss they are suffering in spiritual life. However the Goswâmis have a different opinion about this. They say that –

If someone knows the glory of *dikshâ*, yet he is averse to taking the shelter of a *sadguru*, he is only committing an offense when he chants the Holy Name.

This is because the *shâstras* and *Mahâjans* have glorified *dikshâ* and have stated that *dikshâ* is eternal; the present day devotees too are practicing such purificatory process. Still, he is disregarding the *shâstra* and *Mahâjan* on one hand, and showing contempt for the institution of *Guru-tattva* on the other¹ – both are very strong offences.

Dikshâ-Mantra

Of all the different *mantras* that have been mentioned by the *shâstras* in connection with *dikshâ*, the Sri Krishna-*mantra* is the most important, because Sri Krishna is *Swayam Bhagavân* and is the origin of all divine forms. Sri Krishna performs divine pastimes in three Holy Abodes - Vrindâvan, Mathurâ and Dwârakâ. The greatest quality of Sri *Bhagavân* - sweetness - is manifest in Sri Vrindâvan alone where Sri Krishna plays like a cowherd boy. Therefore the *mantras* in connection with this Vrindâvan-*leelâ* are the greatest. Then again the 10-syllable² and 18-syllable 'Gopijanavallabh' *mantra*, that induce the topmost *ras* (that of *madhur leelâ*), are the greatest of all. Although these *mantras* are all present in sacred books, their *jap* will yield no fruit without initiation! We must receive the *mantra* from the *sadguru*³.

Some people also consider the 16-word, 32-syllable Hare Krishna *Mahaamantra*⁴ as a *dikshâ mantra*, but no scripture on initiation consider *Harinâm Mahâmantra* as *dikshâ mantra*, because if it is chanted out loud, how can it be counted amongst the *dikshâ mantras*? In some places it is a custom to give *Harinâm* before *dikshâ* to purify the ears and the heart, but we cannot call it *dikshâ*. The question may arise –

When the Hare Krishna *mantra* is called the *Mahâmantra*, then will we not attain perfection by taking this *mantra* alone? And why will we not achieve '*dikshâ*' – which is our goal – by taking this *mantra*?

¹ *Gurvavagyâ* and *Shruti-shâstra-nindâ* – these are the two offences

² The 10-syllable *mantra* is meant for the brahmins by birth.

³ Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd explains this in his purport to Srimad-Bhâgavatam (11.21.15)

⁴ Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Râm Hare Râm Râm Râm Hare Hare

The answer to this is that the Hare Krishna *mantra* is called the *Mahâmantra* because it is more powerful than any other *mantra* in bestowing *prem*. Still, the rule is that a *dikshâ mantra* must have a dative case ending and the six standard sequences that form a certain pattern of composition. Since the *Mahâmantra* does not have this it is not a *dikshâ mantra*. We should know that when we take *Harinâm* before *dikshâ*, the *Mahâmantra* blesses us by giving us a *sadguru* and he instructs us about *bhajan*; after taking *dikshâ* the result of *Harinâm* is *prem*.

Dikshâ-Guru and Shikshâ-Guru

The one who gives *dikshâ mantra* is our *Dikshâ-Guru*, while the one who instructs us about *bhajan* is the *Shikshâ-Guru*. Srimad-Bhâgavatam says –

“Take *dikshâ mantra* from the Spiritual Master and then take the instructions regarding the rules and gain knowledge of the *shâstras* from him.”

Therefore we understand that the Spiritual Master, who gives *dikshâ*, also has to instruct the disciple about how to take the *mantra*. The *shâstras* want us to take the shelter of a *sadguru*; we should not think that he is incapable of imparting instructions. If we think like this we are reducing the stature of Sri Gurudev and this is an offence. However if the Spiritual Master disappears before we have got *bhajan*-instructions from him, we can accept a great devotee who is equally expert in *bhajan* as our *Shikshâ-Guru* and serve him like we would have served our own Gurudev. Sri Krishna Himself is a *Shikshâ-Guru* who resides in our heart to give us *bhakti* and externally He is present in the form of Spiritual Master and makes us His own. Sri Chaitanya-Charitâmrita says –

“*Shikshâ-Guru* is Sri Krishna personified. He resides in our heart as the overseer and also appears as the topmost devotee.” – (C.C.)

The *Shikshâ-Guru* who lives in our heart (*antaryâmi*) does not appear before us. He is called *chaitya-Guru* (the One Who resides in our *chitta* or sub-conscious mind). We should not confuse Him with Paramâtmâ Who regulates the ones who are turned away from Sri *Bhagavân* and inspires their intellect. That Paramâtmâ is not the One Who controls a devotees’ heart. He does not instruct a devotee as ‘*chaitya-guru*’. That divine form Whom we worship as Deity, He is our *Antaryâmi*. He appears in our heart as *Shikshâ-Guru*, instructs us and inspires the norms and rules of *bhâv* in us. Also it is Sri Krishna Himself Who appears as His dear most devotee outside our heart and imparts face-to-face teachings about *bhajan*.

There is an opinion that we should take ‘*shikshâ-mantra*’ from a *shikshâ-Guru* – otherwise we cannot perform *bhajan*. This is contrary to scriptural injunctions. According to the scriptures and *Mahâjans* there is nothing such as ‘*shikshâ-mantra*’. We should not allow anyone to cheat us by succumbing to such wrong preaching.

Serving Sri Gurudev

The duties of the disciple do not end after taking *dikshâ* from the *sadguru*. There is a special need to serve Sri Gurudev after taking initiation, because when Sri Gurudev is pleased, then all obstacles in *bhajan* will be destroyed and Lord Krishna will be pleased. Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has written in his *Bhakti Sandarbha* –

“We have many bad qualities that we are unable to get rid of in spite of various endeavors. However if we please the Spiritual Master these qualities get destroyed. Moreover Sri Hari will also be most pleased when the disciple pleases Sri Gurudev.”

Srila Goswâmpâd is indicating that when we make headway on the path of *bhajan*, then all kinds of powerful bad qualities cultivated in previous lives or in this life due to various offenses, raise their ugly heads and disturb our devotional practice. Nevertheless, we will not be able to get relief from these evil traits on our own, although we may try various means. The only way to destroy these traits is to please Sri Gurudev.

Also, the only way to make Sri *Bhagavân* happy is to please Sri Gurudev. From this we can realize Sri Gurudev’s satisfaction is the root of devotional practice and its result - that is - the destruction of all kinds of bad qualities and the attaining the love of Sri Krishna. Another way to please Sri Gurudev is to serve him honestly. We learn from *Srimad-Bhâgavatam* that all evil traits are destroyed when we serve Sri Gurudev with devotion.

Sri Nârada told King Yudhisthir - “My dear King, to give up lust one must give up planning for enjoyment, to give up anger one must give up lust, because when lust is frustrated, anger arises, and to give up greed one must see the evil of money and all things it can buy. We can conquer fear by constantly analyzing the truth, we can give up grief and illusion by considering what is material and what is spiritual; we can crush our pride by serving a devotee. We can gain concentration by forsaking all talks other than that pertaining to Sri Krishna and thus we achieve perfection in keeping the vow of silence (since the vow of silence is rendered perfect not when we simply maintain silence, but when we give up all talks other than Sri Krishna-kathâ). We can conquer violence by giving up endeavors for sense gratification. We can mitigate the suffering caused by other living entities by developing compassion and we can alleviate the suffering caused by natural elements (such as heat, cold etc.) by entering into *samâdhi*. We can end the suffering caused by our body and mind by practicing the eight-fold path of *âshtânga yog*. When we are in the mode of goodness (free from passion and ignorance) we can conquer sleep¹. When we increase our goodness, naturally our ignorance and passion decrease. In this way one process destroys one bad tendency, but we can conquer all these vices and simply by serving Sri *Gurudev* with devotion.”

- (*Srimad-Bhâgavatam* 7.15.22-25)

Thus we see how important it is to serve Sri Gurudev if we want to give up all bad qualities.

¹ Get the correct amount of sleep and good quality sleep, or feel relaxed with less sleep

Special sevâ of Sri Gurudev

In Bhakti-Sandarbha Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has written –

“Although it is true that when we take refuge at Sri *Bhagavân*’s lotus feet, we achieve the topmost goal, if we wish to accomplish that ‘something special’ then we have to necessarily serve our *shikshâ-Guru*, who instructs in the divine scriptures, and *dikshâ-Guru* who initiates us in the divine *mantra* regularly in a special manner.”

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd uses the words “*visheshatah sevâm kuryât*” – thus indicating that we should serve Sri Gurudev in a special manner (*vishesh* = special) As soon as we talk of ‘special sevâ’ it naturally follow as that there must be an ‘ordinary sevâ’.

What do we mean by
‘ordinary Guru-sevâ’?

After taking *dikshâ*, we worship Sri Hari by hearing, glorifying, performing *archanam*, *jap* etc daily. As a part of this daily routine, we worship and glorify Sri Gurudev. Therefore, we see that for us the hearing, *jap* etc are the main activities and Sri Gurudev’s *sevâ* is a part of these activities. This is ‘ordinary Guru-sevâ’.

What is ‘special
Guru-sevâ’?

If a devotee has single-pointed *Guru-bhakti* and is completely dedicated to Sri Gurudev’s *sevâ*, he will consider that *sevâ* to be the most important aspect and for him hearing, glorifying etc. will be a part of Sri Guru-sevâ. Whatever *sâdhanâ* he performs it is only to please his Gurudev. For him, Sri Gurudev’s satisfaction is the only aim. He strives to fulfill all the injunctions of *bhakti* only because it will please the Spiritual Master. This is ‘special Guru-sevâ’. Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has called such a devotee as ‘*vaishishtya-lipsu*’ (one who craves for something special). Sri *Bhagavân* showers *kripâ* on such a devotee (more than the one who serves Him). We find that Mother Devahuti is praying in Sri Padma Purân –

“If I have more devotion for my Spiritual Master than I have for Sri Hari then He may give me *darshan*.”

When the Spiritual Master is pleased, Sri Hari is naturally happy with us.

Vâman-kalpa says –

“Sri Gurudev is verily the *mantra* and Sri Gurudev is none other than Sri Hari; when Sri Gurudev is pleased with us Sri Hari is also pleased.”

THINGS TO BEWARE OF WHILE SERVING SRI GURUDEV

We should be especially careful when serving Sri Gurudev, who is so glorious. Srila Thâkur Mahâshay has said –

“The lotus feet of Sri Gurudev are the abode of pure devotion. I pay obeisance to them with great care.”

When we consider Sri Gurudev as an ordinary human being, then we commit the third offence to the Holy Name – that is – disregard for the Spiritual Master. It will deprive us of the great fruits of Guru-sevâ. While serving the Spiritual Master we should beware of the following –

- We should never disobey Sri Gurudev.
- We should never step on or use Sri Gurudev's shoes, garments, bathing water, bed and other utilities.
- Do not pronounce Sri Gurudev's name in a casual way. When it is absolutely necessary we should bow down, fold the hands and pronounce different reverential titles of the Gurudev such as '*astottara shata Sri Sri*', '*om vishnupâd*', '*prabhupâd*' and so on, before saying his actual name.
- Never imitate the gait, speech, voice or gestures of the Gurudev.
- We should not spread our legs, place one leg over the other or point the feet at the Gurudev.
- Do not yawn, laugh loudly, break the finger-joints, sway the body or make hands, feet or any other limb dance in front of the Spiritual Master.
- We should not sit down in front of Sri Gurudev without his prior permission, but stand before him with folded hands.
- Do not lie down on a bed in front of Sri Gurudev.
- When we live in the presence of Sri Gurudev, we should never go anywhere without his permission.
- Do not worship or praise anyone else in front of the Gurudev.
- Do not explain the *shâstras* in front of Sri Gurudev.
- Do not give initiation without Sri Gurudev's permission.
- Do not display superiority over others and do not chastise others in front of Sri Gurudev.
- Do not say anything to Sri Gurudev that sounds like an order.
- Do not make any gesture or hints in front of him, like flapping the hands or winking with the eyes.
- We should always tolerate Sri Gurudev's rebukes and must never respond with hatred, ill will or envy.
- Never take anything from Sri Gurudev without his permission.
- It is also a cause of offense to remain silent in front of Sri Gurudev, not to praise him or not to ask him any questions about *bhajan*.
- Even if the disciple has taken a vow of silence he should not remain silent in front of Sri Gurudev.
- Do not go to any place where someone is so envious of Sri Gurudev and slanders him. If by chance we hear the blasphemy of the Spiritual Master, we should block our ears, remember Sri Hari and leave that place. It is forbidden to associate with a person who blasphemes the Spiritual Master, to live with such a person or even to see his face.
- When we see Sri Gurudev arriving we should come forward and offer *sâstânga dandavat* and when he leaves we should walk behind him.
- We must personally bring water for washing Sri Gurudev's feet and for bathing him.
- We must personally massage Sri Gurudev's body, bathe him, anoint him with unguents like sandalwood pulp, wash his clothes and massage his feet.

- We must personally clean and anoint Sri Gurudev's house or room, and his yard.
- We must take *prasâdam* only after offering it to Sri Gurudev.

We must always please Sri Gurudev in a simple and loving manner, with a saintly heart, with body, mind and speech. We should serve him with one's house, wealth and one's very life. A *sâdhak* who follows these rules and prohibitions in connection with Sri Gurudev will swiftly attain the ultimate result of Sri *Guru-sevâ* that is, *prem-bhakti* for the lotus feet of *Sri Bhagavân* and thus become most blessed.

Points to be specially noted

Sripâd Baladev Vidyâbhushan has written in Sidhânta-Ratna –

"*Bhakti* is flowing from Sri Hari's eternal associates to the present day *sâdhaks* like the river Mandâkini. *Bhakti* is present in the eternal associates in the eternal abode forever and descends like river Mandâkini in this world through a channel of devotees."

This means that just as river Mandâkini arises from Sri *Bhagavân's* lotus feet, descends to the heavenly planets, earth and nether regions – *bhakti* (that is a characteristic of Sri *Bhagavân's* internal potency) too travels through the *Guru-paramparâ* and descends in the heart of a *sâdhak*. Similarly just as the river Mandâkini sanctifies the three worlds, *bhakti* too makes our heart pure. We can get the *Guru-pranâli* from a *sadguru*.

This *Kaliyug* is very special. Srîman-Mahâprabhu has taken mercy and descended to give us the topmost *ras*, which is *Manjari-bhâv-sâdhanâ*. Sri *Bhagavân* had not offered this *kripâ* to humanity in any other *yug*. Those of us who wish to feel blessed by taking advantage of this mercy and start performing *Manjari-bhâv-sâdhanâ* must take *dikshâ* from a *sadguru* in Sri Goudiya-Vaishnav Paramparâ. He should obtain Sri *Guru-pranâli* and *siddha-pranâli* from the Spiritual Master and then perform *bhajan* under his guidance.

We have already mentioned that we can conquer easily all our *anarthas* by serving the Spiritual Master with devotion. Now let us learn how Sri *Bhagavân's* mercy descends on us. It flows through two channels –

1. Sri Vaishnav
2. Sri Gurudev

When we associate with the Vaishnavs we realize it is our foremost duty to take the shelter of Sri Gurudev and we gain a *sadguru* by the mercy of the Vaishnavs. The Vaishnavs are so merciful that they bring us in contact with the priceless treasure called 'Spiritual Master' who is the source of devotional practice. Therefore if we wish to attain *prem* we have to serve Sri Gurudev and the Vaishnavs equally. The Vaishnavs are embodiment of devotion, while Sri Gurudev is the incarnation of Sri *Bhagavân*; when both shower mercy on us we shall attain success in devotional practice. This is why Srîla Narottam dâs Thâkur Mahâshay has written –

"chaadiyaa baishnab sebaa, nistaar peyechhe kebaa,
anukkhon khed uthe mone.

*narottam daase koy, jeebaar uchit noy,
sri guru-baishnab-sebaabine."*

Meaning – "Who has ever got deliverance by not serving the Vaishnavs? He is always pricked by his guilty conscience. Narottam dâs says – we have no right to live if we do not serve Sri Gurudev and the Vaishnavs."

If we serve Sri Gurudev and ignore the Vaishnavs then we are not serving the Spiritual Master perfectly and if we serve the Vaishnavs, yet we are not interested in the Spiritual Master then we cannot call it 'complete Vaishnav-sevâ'.

Therefore a *sadguru* surrenders his disciple at the Vaishnavs feet so that he associates with the Vaishnavs, serves them and gets their blessing. Similarly a good Vaishnav too instructs the devotee to serve the lotus feet of the Spiritual Master and get his mercy.

If a Spiritual Master is envious of great Vaishnavs and forbids his disciple to associate with him then the disciple should think that Sri Gurudev is testing me and he should approach the feet of his Gurudev and plead him to withdraw such an order. However still if the Spiritual Master continues to give such commands then the disciple should consider it his misfortune, take refuge of Sri *Bhagavân's* lotus feet and continue to worship his Spiritual Master from far. Under no circumstance must he reject that Spiritual Master or misbehave with him. He should not slander him either. If the Spiritual Master really starts behaving in an un-Vaishnav like manner then the disciple can consider him a non-Vaishnav, reject him, take initiation again from a Vaishnav Gurudev and perform *bhajan* under his shelter. Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has stated very clearly in Sri Bhakti-Sandarbh –

Sri Naarad-Pancharaatra says – "The one who speaks against the rules stated in the Vaishnav-scriptures and the one who hears such talk that is outside the rules stated therein – both perish in the hell for time infinite.

If the Spiritual Master's instruction is against the Vaishnav-scriptures then we ought to reject him and worship him from far. However if the Spiritual Master goes against the Vaishnavs or slanders the Vaishnavs it is better we forsake him altogether. 'Slandering' indicates the six types of Vaishnav offences. A Spiritual Master who commits Vaishnav-offence definitely is not worthy of being a Guru. Hence the rule states that we should reject him. If a Spiritual Master is materialistic, does not know the right from the wrong (what he should do and he should not do) and behaves contrary to the injunctions given in the *Bhakti-shâstras* then it is our duty to reject such a Spiritual Master for he is without a 'Vaishnav-bhâv' – so he is as good as a non-Vaishnav. Here is the rule - 'if we chant a *mantra* given by a non-Vaishnav, we shall perish in the hell' - becomes active.

We can forsake a Spiritual Master in the following cases –

- If he is envious of other Vaishnavs
- Conducts himself in an Un-Vaishnav like manner
- Has the wrong concept of God
- Preaches himself as God
- Is not interested in hearing and glorifying Sri Krishna's excellences
- Does not feel joy upon hearing the excellences of Sri Krishna
- Is intoxicated by the worship of the people since he has a massive false ego

Under the above circumstances it is our duty to reject him and take the shelter of a worthy Spiritual Master.

