

Pariksa - Mutual testing

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Parīkṣā, the mutual testing of between the prospective guru and disciple, is encouraged in the scriptures to ensure that expectations in a guru-disciple relationship will be met. This phase is an aspect of guru-pādāśraya, taking shelter of a guru's feet, the first of the 64 aspects of bhakti in Rupa Gosvami's Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu that precedes diksa, the rite of receiving a sacred mantra.

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1 Examination in Hari-bhakti-vilasa

In the first chapter of Hari-bhakti-vilasa, dedicated to examining diverse aspects of guru-tattva, the following four verses are particularly relevant in the context of the mutual examination of the prospective guru and the disciple:

*tayoḥ parīkṣā cānyo'nyam ekābdaṁ saha-vāsataḥ |
vyavahāra-svabhāvānubhavanaivābhijāyate || HBV 1.73*

"They should undergo a mutual examination for the duration of a year, living together, to experience and understand each others' behavior and nature."

*tayor vatsara-vāsena jñātānyonya-svabhāvayoḥ |
gurutā śiṣyatā ceti nānyathaiveti niścayaḥ || HBV 1.74*

"They should live a year together to get to know each others' natures, certainly this applies to both the guru and the disciple – indeed without this, there is no

certainty."

nāsamvatsara-vāsine deyāt || HBV 1.75

"It (diksa) is not to be given without a year's living together."

sad-guruḥ svāśritaṁ śiṣyaṁ varṣam ekam parīkṣayet || HBV 1.76

"A sat-guru should test a disciple, who has sought shelter of him, for the duration of one year."

2 The positive results of undergoing examination

During the period the disciple spends together with the guru prior to diksa, a close, affectionate relationship is established through service and inquiries by the disciple, and the guru's subsequent reciprocal blessings and thorough explanations.

The giving of diksa-mantra is not a mere ceremony, for in it the guru gives of his very heart:

*sākṣatam gurur ādāya vāri śiṣyasya dakṣiṇe |
kare'rpayed vadan mantrō'yaṁ samo'stv āvayor iti || HBV 2.132
svasmāj jyotirmayīm vidyām gacchantīm bhāvayed guruḥ |
āgatām bhāvayec chiṣyo dhanyo'smīti viśeṣataḥ || HBV 2.133*

"The guru shall offer water to the disciple's right hand, saying 'May this mantra be equal for the two of us.' The guru shall meditate on great, effulgent knowledge arising of himself, meditating on its entrance into the disciple, who shall think, 'I have become blessed'."

sāṣṭam sahasram tan-mantram sva-śakty-akṣataye jayet || HBV 2.181

"To keep of his own potency unharmed, he shall chant this mantra one thousand and eight times."

Will such a gift be possible without the establishment of a prior, thick relationship? Hardly so. Therefore, the concluding words of Hari-bhakti-vilasa 1.74 are particularly relevant in highlighting the need for the examination: *nānyathaiveti niścayaḥ* – "Without this, there will be no certainty." Without certainty there is no faith, and without faith love has no foundation. The fire of mutual testing melts the hearts of both and clears away the impurities of doubt, forging a permanent alloy in the form of an everlasting relationship of spiritual nourishment.

3 Neglect and possible repercussions for the disciple

Neglect of the principle of examination may yield a number of undesired results for the disciple.

3.1 Lack of power to commit oneself

Diksa is described as the time when the disciple shall surrender his self to the guru and the path of sadhana given by him.

*ato gurum praṇamyaivam sarvasvaṁ vinivedya ca |
grhṇīyād vaiṣṇavaṁ mantraṁ dīkṣā-pūrvam vidhānataḥ || HBV 2.10*

"Therefore, paying obeisance to the guru and offering unto him one's all, one should receive Vaisnava mantra-diksa preceded with proper procedures."

*dīkṣā-kāle bhakta kare ātma-samarpaṇa |
sei kāle kṛṣṇa tāre kare ātma-sama || CC 3.4.192*

"At the time of diksa, the devotee surrenders his self (ātma-samarpaṇa); at that time, Krishna makes him equal to himself."

If firm faith in the guru has not arisen through proper conviction, how is such self-surrender (atma-samarpana) to the guru and his instructions ever possible? Again, without self-surrender, what is the meaning of diksa? The fruit of diksa in the form of the intended devotional attainment may then ripen with a substantial delay.

3.2 Inability to receive the needed inspiration

A relationship with a guru, who cannot deliver the desired spiritual instructions and inspiration to the disciple, has sometimes been likened to the maintenance of a barren cow. The Bhagavata, hinting at an earlier theme (11.3.21) of the guru's being realized both in the scriptures (śabda) and the supreme (para), notes:

*śabda-brahmaṇi niṣṇāto na niṣṇāyāt pare yadi |
śramas tasya śrama-phalo hy adhenum iva rakṣataḥ || BhP 11.11.18*

"If one is deeply versed in the scriptures but not conversant with the supreme, then the fruit of his labor is more labor, as in protecting a cow that yields no milk."

The fruit of the labor of serving a person who is yet to rise to divine realization is undoubtedly just so much more labor. In serving a guru whose substantial relationship with the Lord is yet to be forged, a disciple will regardless attract the compassion of Krishna with his austerities and sincere endeavors, but the very powerful mercy of an advanced devotee, the greatest of contributors for swift spiritual progress, will remain wanting.

Should the disciple witness such a guru acting or advising in a manner contrary to the scriptures, his faith may waver or break, or he may become critical towards the guru (guru-ninda). Should either of the two occur, they will pave the road of spiritual progress with great obstacles.

4 Neglect and possible repercussions for the guru

Even the spiritual standing of the guru may become compromised over his establishing a relationship with an unfit disciple. Two kinds of burden may fall upon him: the burden of sins and the burden of offenses.

4.1 The burden of sins

Hari-bhakti-vilasa notes that the burden of the disciples' past deeds falls upon the guru:

*rājñi cāmātyajā doṣāḥ patnī-pāpam sva-bhartari |
tathā śiṣyārjitam pāpam guruḥ prāpnoti niścitam || 1.77 ||*

"As the faults of the ministers fall upon the king, and as the sins of the wife come to his husband, so the sins the disciple has acquired will be attained by the guru, that is certain."

Ideally, none of the burden is borne by the guru; the sins vanish on the power of the guru's devotional worship. A warning is in place, however: *bahu-śiṣya nā koribo* – "Do not make many disciples." (CC 22.118) If a guru were to accept an excessive number of disciples, it is possible that he would not be able to administer to their spiritual needs despite having accepted the responsibility for their deliverance. This, coupled with the past evils of the disciple that are not becoming eradicated on account of the disciple's lack of proper devotional engagement, may bear an ill effect on the guru.

4.1.1 Description of unfit disciples

Hari-bhakti-vilasa lists a number of kinds of disciples the guru should be wary of initiating (*apekṣyāḥ*):

*alasā malināḥ kliṣṭā dāmbhikāḥ kṛpaṇās tathā |
daridrā rogiṇo ruṣṭā rāgiṇo bhoga-lālasāḥ || 1.64 ||
asūyā-matsara-grastāḥ śaṭhāḥ paruṣa-vādināḥ |
anyāyopārjita-dhanāḥ para-dāra-ratās ca ye || 1.65 ||
viduṣām vairiṇās caiva ajñāḥ paṇḍita-māninaḥ |
bhraṣṭa-vratās ca ye kaṣṭa-vṛttayaḥ piśunāḥ khalāḥ || 1.66 ||
bahv-āśinaḥ krūra-ceṣṭā durātmanaś ca nindita |
ity evam ādayo'py anye pāpiṣṭhāḥ puruṣādhamāḥ || 1.67 ||*

"The lazy, the filthy, the afflicted, the hypocrites, the misers, the wretched, the sickly, the angry, the attached, and those who yearn for enjoyment. (64)

"The envious, the jealous, the possessed, the deceitful, the harsh-speaking, those who gain wealth illegally, and those who enjoy with others' wives. (65)

"The sinners, the inimical, as well as the ignorant and those who think of themselves as learned, those who have rejected their vows, those who earn their livelihood through great pains, the treacherers and the villains. (66)

"The over-eaters, the violent, the evil and the despicable, these and also others, who are sinners and fallen among men." (67)

During the period of a year, a sincere aspiring disciple, even if riddled with bad habits from the past, can certainly be reformed and become fit for initiation. If within a year

the prospective disciple shows no sign of improvement, the establishment of a relationship would certainly prove to be a burden.

4.1.2 Warning on initiating unfit disciples

Then, warnings are in place (HBV 1.68-70):

akṛtyebhyo'nivāryāś ca guru-śikṣā-sahiṣṇavaḥ |
evam bhūtāḥ parityājyāḥ śiṣyatve nopakalpitāḥ || 1.68 ||
yady ete hy upakalperan devatā-krośa-bhājanāḥ |
bhavantīha daridrās te putra-dāra-vivarjitāḥ || 1.69 ||
nārakāś caiva dehānte tiryāñcaḥ prabhavanti te || 1.70 ||

"Those, who cannot restrain from forbidden works, and who are reluctant to follow the guru's advice - such people should be rejected, they should not be accepted as disciples. (68)

"If one accepts such people, the gods shall howl and cry, and he shall become poor and bereft of his children and wife (69), and as his body expires, he certainly goes to hell, later taking birth among the sub-human species. (70)"

All of this has been stated particularly in the context of sins.

4.2 The burden of offenses

In the context of devotional growth, the consideration of offense (aparādha) is considered to be even graver a danger than sin, for even those untouched by sin will be brought down with the weight (BRS 1.3.52-54) of offenses:

hari-priya-janasyaiva prasāda-bhara-lābhataḥ |
bhāvābhāso'pi sahasā bhāvatvam upagacchati || 1.52 ||
tasminn evāparādhenā bhāvābhāso'py anuttamaḥ |
kramaṇa kṣayam āpnoti kha-sthaḥ pūrṇa-śaśī yathā || 1.53 ||
bhāvo'py abhāvam āyāti kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāparādhataḥ |
ābhāsatām ca śanakair nyūna-jātīyatām api || 1.54 ||

"Certainly, by attaining the mercy granted by those dear to Hari, a reflection of bhava will rapidly progress to the stage of bhava. (52) By offending them, even the most excellent reflection of bhava will gradually diminish, akin to the full moon on the sky. (53) Even bhava will vanish by offending those dear to Krishna, becoming a reflection or transforming into a lesser category." (54)

If the guru, for some unfortunate reason, has accepted a disciple who turns out to be a sinner or an offender, it is the guru's duty to attempt to reform him. If the disciple is unwilling to be reformed and continues to sin or commit offenses, the guru must certainly reject him to avoid becoming implicated himself. If the guru were to not repudiate the disciple who engages in sins, thinking that such sins will regardless be cleansed through the fire of bhajana, he would partake in the nāma-aparādha (offense against the holy name) of *nāmno balād pāpa-buddhi*, or sinning on the strength of the name.

4.2.1 The special burden of offending Vaisnavas

Among the varieties of aparadhas, offending Vaisnavas has been particularly highlighted. Grave warnings, befitting in this context, have been issued in Caitanya Bhagavata (2.22.128-130):

vaiṣṇavera nindā karibeka yāra gaṇa |
tāra rakṣā sāmārthya nāhika kona jana || 128 ||
vaiṣṇava-nindaka gaṇa yāhāra āśraya |
āpaneī eḍāite tāhāra samśaya || 129 ||
baḍa adhikārī haya āpane eḍāite |
kṣudra haile gaṇa saha adhaḥpate yāya || 130 ||

"If any one among someone's followers blasphemes a Vaisnava, no-one has the ability to protect him. (128) If someone gives shelter to those who blaspheme Vaisnavas, it is doubtful if even he himself can escape it. (129) Someone, who is very qualified, can escape himself; A weak person, along with his followers, will head to the nether regions. (130)"

One should be wary of considering oneself immune, for the gravest warnings have been issued on the matter of offending Vaisnavas (Caitanya Bhagavata 2.13.388):

śula-pāṇi sama yadi bhakta-nindā kare |
bhāgavata pramāṇe tathāpiha śighra mare || 388 ||

"Even if someone equal to the trident-bearing Shiva offends the devotees, he will quickly perish all the same – this is proven in the Bhagavata."

5 The responsibility of the guru

When one accepts the position of a guru, he accepts responsibility over the deliverance of his disciples. This responsibility has been discussed in the Bhagavata, in Rishabha's advice to his sons:

gurur na sa syāt sva-jano na sa syāt
pitā na sa syāj janani na sā syāt |
daivam na tat syān na patīś ca sa syān
na mocayed yaḥ samupeta-mṛtyum || BhP 5.5.18

"He should not become a guru, he should not become a kinsman; he should not become a father, he should not become a mother; he should not become a worshipable deity, nor should he become a husband, if he cannot deliver another from the path of death."

If this burden is not duly borne, a great disrespect towards the principle of guru will take place. As in the famous Guru-vandana of the poet Sanatan Das, *jīvera nistāra lāgi nanda-suta hari, bhuvane prakāśa hana guru-rūpa dhari* - "For the deliverance of souls, Hari, the son of Nanda, appears in this world, bearing the form of the guru." If someone does not actively adopt the due responsibility of another's deliverance, and yet goes on

accepting service and donations from his disciples, he essentially betrays the position he has assumed. This is aptly put in Shiva's words to Parvati in Skanda-purana's Guru-gita:

*guravo bahavaḥ santi śiṣya-vittāpahāraḥ |
durlabho'yaṁ gurur devi śiṣya-santāpa-hāraḥ || 1.269*

"O Sati, many are the gurus who seize the property of the disciple. Rare is the guru, O Devi, who steals away the affliction of the disciple."

6 The fault of neglecting the scripture

Jiva Gosvami has discussed the relationship between worshiping Sri Guru and Vaisnavas in his Bhakti-sandarbha (238). As a general principle, Vaisnavas are to be served only when the service does not contradict the service of the guru. There is an exception in place, however:

*yaḥ prathamam "śābde pare ca niṣṇātam" [BhP 11.3.21] ity ādy ukta-lakṣaṇam
guruṁ nāśritavān, tādrśa-guroś ca matsarādito mahā-bhāgavata-satkārādāv
anumatim na labhate, sa prathamata eva tyakta-śāstro na vicāryate | ubhaya-
saṅkaṭa-pāto hi tasmin bhavaty eva ||*

"The situation of the one, who has not taken shelter of a guru who has the qualities beginning with 'deeply experienced in the scripture and the supreme', and due to this guru's envy and so forth a permission for praising a maha-bhagavata is not attained, is not being discussed here - he did not consider the shastras in the first place. In this way, both options have become hazardous."

"Both options" means that it is hazardous to both disobey the guru's order, as well as to be barred from the company of the maha-bhagavatas. The lesson is that one should have consulted the scriptures to begin with, duly examining the guru. Had this been done, such a situation would have never arisen.

Therefore, one should always ensure that the path to be embarked on is the path of the scriptures, avoiding uncertain avenues. In absence of thorough scriptural knowledge, one should approach devotees who are conversant with the traditional and perfect ways of the acaryas to attain certainty.

7 Limits of application

With all of that documented, it must be noted that it is unbecoming for one to begin judging the gurus of others. This examination has been described as taking place between the prospective guru and the disciple – not as a public affair.

The principle of guru-tattva appears in myriads of subjective manifestations; therefore, the examination must be applied only in the context of one's own quest for a sat-guru, and when in doubt over the candidate guru, one should not pass a judgment, but rather merely move on in his search, offering respect to those he was unable to understand, yet from a distance to avoid possible further perception of faults and subsequent ill

feelings.