

Brief summary for Tuesday 31st May (4.34 session - Part 4)

We must thank all our teachers for their contribution to what has been written below. These are things we have learned and heard from other gracious souls whose teachings are expressed in our own words/understanding.

If you missed part 59, [check out the notes here.](#)

You can find [all the previous notes here.](#)

Having looked at the qualification of the guru, we next look at our role in finding a guru. This is a very important aspect as naturally there is no meaning to guru without the disciple or student (and vice-versa).

Sometimes you find people who say that they are going to become a guru. But actually it isn't their decision to make. Who will decide to listen to you just because you proclaim yourself a guru? So we also play an important role in the guru-disciple relationship. For a guru to exercise their role, they need the disciple to exercise their role.

We are trying to make our hearts a temple and so the guru is a perfect interior decorator. He or she will throw things out to create a place for us to set up our altar. We have to allow and trust the interior decorator to do their work. We have to not put opposition to the gift we are being given, and also recognise we need help to make progress. This of course requires a deep trust in the person we are allowing to do this.

So it is a two way process and much of what we can draw out of the guru depends on us too. It is not that the guru presses a magic button and then we are fully enlightened. It is a process. A disciple brings things themselves to a relationship.

As a side note, a good student may be able to draw more out of even a less qualified guru, whereas a less qualified student may not be able to draw so much out of a very qualified guru. We will look into less qualified gurus and even fallen gurus as part of next week's session, but the point is, we bring a lot to the table of the relationship with guru-tattva ourselves. The mentality and sincerity, as well as the desire that we bring to the table, will determine how much fruit we can derive from Sri Guru. Sincerity never goes in vain and truth attracts truth.

We saw the qualifications of the guru given by the Bhagavatam in the last few weeks, but what really shows a command of the theoretical knowledge and being equipoised is arguably left open to interpretation. But the inner necessity of ourselves is unambiguous. A combination of this inner necessity, sincerity and previous bhakti-samskaras (impressions from prior encounters with bhakti) determine our ability to connect with the principle and person of sri guru. If our choice is less than ideal, that better prepares us to choose again and come under the affectionate care of a genuine guardian angel of Gaudiya Vedanta or bhakti.

So with that understanding, naturally it makes sense to start with the point that the guru is a manifestation of Krishna within our hearts in some ways.

There is a nice verse in Caitanya Caritamrita, Adi lila, Chapter 1, verse 58:

Since one cannot visually experience the presence of the Supersoul, He appears before us as a liberated devotee. Such a spiritual master is none other than Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Srila Prabhupada notes in his purport:

It is not possible for a conditioned soul to directly meet Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but if one becomes a sincere devotee and seriously engages in devotional service, Lord Kṛṣṇa sends an instructing spiritual master to show him favor and invoke his dormant propensity for serving the Supreme. The preceptor

appears before the external senses of the fortunate conditioned soul, and at the same time the devotee is guided from within by the *caitya-guru*, Kṛṣṇa, who is seated as the spiritual master within the heart of the living entity.

We spoke briefly about the Caitya-guru a few weeks ago, meaning Krishna as the guru in the heart of the devotees. This guru is very tied with the gurus who come into our lives externally. Actually the external guru will help our conception of the idea of God in the heart become more focused than the general idea of God in the heart. So they are tied together.

This Caitya guru comes in the form of the instructing or initiating guru. These gurus are manifestations of the Lord in the heart, tailor made for us, and they are therefore where we should pay all of our attention. There is nowhere God is more present in our life than there, as the guru can often speak louder to us than God in the heart, especially when we are easily distracted by the mind or senses. Sometimes we may feel some inspiration in our heart and later find that actually it puts us in an awkward position. The external guru is a way of cross-checking that for example, to see if the insights are coming from God or our mind or imagination.

The guru gives us the course to follow and so we can see how things fit in with that path we have been given. So Caitya guru is emphasised in Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the way he is manifest externally in the sadhu, Krishna in the form of a sadhu. Not that the sadhu or saint is Krishna, but they should be regarded with the same respect because Krishna has come to us in that way. Our prospect lies in paying attention to that manifestation, that form, in which God most prominently manifests in our life.

The guru conducts themselves in such a way that it serves to articulate feelings and thoughts we may be having that we aren't as well able to articulate. We feel the heart resonate, I agree with that, it makes sense to us, I'm drawn to that. It isn't a superimposition or fully external, but the guidance feels like "I wanted to say that." It is very familiar in a sense. It is homelike. We hear a person speak and say "that really hit home." Home is

in the heart so one who is actually a manifestation in our lives of the caitya guru will speak in such a way that it resonates with our heart, and therefore we feel the connection with the guru is natural and not artificial.

Sometimes caitya guru is misunderstood as a reason not to accept the principle of the manifest guru, but actually properly understood, the external guru will feel as familiar and right to us as our own heart, and be more effective in helping us connect even deeper to our heart guru beyond the chatter of the mind. The voice of the heart is often hard to hear. Often we can feel some connection to Paramatma in the heart, but usually in relation to how we navigate in this world, but the guru we are looking for is to go beyond this world. God is in the heart of everyone in a general way but we want Him in the heart in a particular way. If we begin to love Him in a particular way then He will come in that way in our heart. Remember our study earlier in this chapter, where Krishna says He reciprocates accordingly with the way people approach Him (4.11).

We shouldn't think the external guru is getting in the way of our relationship with God, but rather it is divinity coming to us to make Himself more accessible. If we look through the big end of a telescope we will get a blur or a headache. So the guru is like an accessible lens at the small end, so we can properly embrace the unlimited. They will be closer to us and more like us. Krishna has come to us in a way that is more accessible than even the deity as there can be questions, etc. Krishna coming after us more readily. Sometimes we have closed or guarded our hearts, and so the guru's task is to help equate us with the language of the heart beyond the intellect.

The Guru is to help us change our angle of vision, not that I'm a taker, but that I am a giver, and the world responds accordingly as we embrace this. Bhakti is not about world-escaping in the same way that Jnana is. It gives the same perspective and more. It gives us the perspective of the temporal nature of material manifestations, but takes it further and shows us they have a purpose in relation to Bhagavan. It is relational knowledge.

We should feel like our prospect has come before us. The guru is the goal of our life that comes before us in a very concrete form. Our own potential appearing in front of us. The guru will inspire us to keep traveling in that direction.

Our hearts then should really feel I need a guru. Not just I want a guru, but to feel I need a guru to make the next steps in my journey. This of course means becoming more in tune with our own hearts and what it is we want. Hopefully in the context of bhakti, this is exclusive surrender to Krishna. So this also ties in with the quality of the guru, they are fully surrendered to Krishna.

The problem isn't whether there is a shortage of bonafide gurus, but whether we are sincerely in our hearts looking to be bonafide disciples. Like attracts like. Are we looking for that exclusively in our lives? There is no shortage on God's side, but there may be a shortage of customers for what Krishna is actually about. We will be led toward what our ideal is. So it is worth refining our ideal for something so wonderful. In our school we emphasise that ideal as being Krishna Prema, selfless divine love that in itself is composed of super condensed bliss and attracts even Krishna Himself.

What we have done in the past, or even where we are now is not very relevant. We can evaluate anybody by their ideal; what is it that they want to become? If we have this in place, everything else that comes into our lives will nourish and lead us to this ideal. Our hearing and chanting will lead us to this ideal, and this will include bringing the guide to us in a way that is just perfect for us to make progress toward that ideal. The heart is where our ideals are kept, our dreams. We are our ideal and so we should embrace and identify with the ideal.

If we cultivate our sincerity and ideal, especially with practices of bhakti like chanting the Maha-mantra, then we have nothing to fear while traversing the land of gurus, and can be confident we will be given what we need to make progress in the form of guru.

It is difficult for a beginner to arrive at an objective view of even the external spiritual life of the guru. We are encouraged to be a little critical before accepting a guru (as we will discuss shortly) but that isn't easy if we do not have enough knowledge to know what to look out for. If we don't live with the guru, how can we spy on the guru? So naturally some subjectivity comes in to play, and this is why our ideal is important. Where we are in our spiritual lives will lead us to a particular person just right for us to make the next steps.

We will discuss next week how this person may change as we progress and gain more knowledge and devotional experience, but ideally it will not be the case, and ultimately we should focus on developing our own practice and ideal so that we will be led to higher and higher stages. The principle is we want to give ourselves in whatever place we find ourselves. We have more to gain from giving ourselves to the principle of guru, even if we can't fully recognise a good guru in the present moment (at least beyond what we have discussed in the last few weeks and will continue with in the next couple of weeks).

Faith and devotion given is not lost, and if we find out later we have made a mistake; mistakes are only as bad as we don't learn from them. There is only misrepresentation as much as there is proper representation. We should give ourselves according to the sadhu sanga that Krishna has given us at the moment, where we are receiving inspiration and nourishment. If needed, Krishna will send another agent when required, as ultimately it is the same guru-tattva underlying it all. Krishna accepts our feeling so we want to give our hearts.

Still, although sincerity of the heart is the most important factor, we shouldn't do away with our intelligence, and it is important to get to know the teacher. If we desire to find a guru, we should still examine different gurus before settling for the right one for us. We may or may not have mystical experiences along the way that help with that, but examining prospective gurus is important.

We may not really know if a guru is realised or not until we arrive at the plane of transcendence ourselves, but still we can at least see that someone isn't a worldly person. By Krishna's mercy, as we discussed, we will feel a resonating in our hearts and we will at least see whether a guru is unqualified, as many external acts of the guru are strong indicators of their internal realisation as we have discussed in previous weeks. Sometimes there can be wishful thinking and selective perception on our part, so it is worth taking some time to develop a relationship, as well as our own knowledge (such as studying guru-tattva).

We want to trust in the guru we accept and so this shouldn't be blind trust. In classical times, ideally the guru and disciple would live together for one year. This may not be practical, and it is not a fixed rule, but the essence of this point is that the two need to get to know each other. It is a commitment like marriage so it is worth getting to know each other. It can happen that we have an extraordinary experience after 5 minutes of meeting a sadhu or hearing a class. But it is still worth confirming that experience with some time of getting to know the person, so we can genuinely feel this is the direction I want to dedicate my life to.

Apart from wanting a bonafide guru, we also want someone who is right for us individually. As we mentioned, the guru should actually be an expression of our heart's ideal. The main principle is of course that we want a guru who is qualified. This should be there wherever the guru is from, whether from this country, from the moon, or wherever. This should be in place. But Hari Bhakti Vilasa points out that ideally the guru will be from the same culture or similar background, as they will be better able to guide us as they know our psychology better and so on. It will facilitate the explanation of the whole thing better, as the communication can be better, especially when asking questions and trying to clarify things. Sometimes different cultures can make us make more of something than is actually there. We will explore the relative side of the guru next week but it is worth considering.

Even if we are not compatible with a guru, it doesn't mean they are not qualified or that we aren't sincere, but there may be something relative that is incompatible because of our nature and the guru's nature, or the language or mode of expression they use. This is important because we should know they are relative issues, they don't speak of the qualification of the person, but we may find that we need some harmonious relative nature to help us develop deeper faith and deeper practice. In the beginning the student may not be able to just grasp the bhakti side and be nourished by that, so a person may need some adjustment and this isn't a problem. We will explore this more next week, especially if one has already taken initiation, but it is good to know that it is useful to test our compatibility with a guru as we develop a relationship.

It is true we need to find a guru to be able to embrace all the stages of suddha bhakti or pure devotion, and we should also develop a sense of urgency in some ways, but at the same time we shouldn't rush it.

The first three limbs of bhakti involve guru: taking shelter of guru, receiving the mantra and instructions, and rendering faithful affectionate service (just as Krishna points out we should do in the verse we are studying) but we don't need to wait until we have embraced a guru before we can practice bhakti, especially in the form of chanting the Maha-mantra for example. But our activities before initiation are beneficial if they help prepare us for our eventual initiation and aren't so useful if they don't lead us in that direction.

This is the meaning for example when we see Srila Prabhupada make statements like **"unless one is initiated by a bona fide spiritual master, all his devotional activities are useless"**, which is found in the Caitanya Caritamrita, Madhya 15.108. Srila Prabhupada has also said and written things to the contrary of course, so the point is, we should understand the importance of accepting the principle of guru ultimately, even if we are currently at a transitional stage in our devotional practice where we don't feel ready for initiation or have not found someone who we feel we can commit to. The length of time we wait is unique to everyone.

We will discuss this aspect more next week in relation to some common misconceptions, and naturally we shouldn't rush or do it as a fashion or social pressure (e.g. feeling like I am the only one in the group not initiated). We want the reality to become an overwhelming undeniable experience in our heart where we feel confirmation, I am heading in the right way.

But when we do get that confirmation, we want to approach in a humble way, as this humility will inspire the guru to reveal all their secrets with us. We want to develop surrender, humility, and then service. Interestingly service is after the first two as it doesn't necessarily mean doing things, but rather, pleasing the object of my affection. So we need to have that affection in the first place, which of course comes from a relationship. To serve also doesn't just mean offering a garland, although this might be a nice thing to do, but it really means to worship the instructions and message of our Gurudeva.

The relationship should also border on friendship. A good teacher-student relationship should inspire confidence in us that we can ask questions, reveal our doubts. So some intimacy needs to be there on some level. A deep trust. We'll look more next week at what inquiries we approach the guru with but we should have this confidence. So naturally this surrender is a process, it is not a click of the button. We have short term goals that help us reach the long term goal. We will talk more about distinguishing between faith and belief in a few weeks, but the guru should be deepening our faith which will fuel our practice to lead to more of our own realizations.

So much more can be said about our role in finding a guru. I will also link to some more resources on this topic when we end the guru section in a few weeks that will be useful for anyone wanting a deeper understanding of the topic. This is by no means a comprehensive look at the role of the disciple or the seeker. But hopefully it will be useful.

The best thing we can do is deepen our own understanding of what we want to aspire for (especially through studying this philosophy as you all are), take shelter of Krishna (especially in the form of the Holy Name), and pray for guidance. Krishna will help us in our journey for sure, and you will find amongst the katha (topics about Krishna) you hear, someone will stand out to you at some point. Many of us can attest to that.

Next week we are going to look at common misconceptions and pitfalls to avoid around the topic of guru. It will undoubtedly be an interesting discussion, maybe even a little controversial depending on our understanding of things. But it should serve us well as we look for the expression of guru in our lives and how we can embrace that principle in a deeper and more nourishing way. Then the week after that we will look at a few more topics as well as a summary of these sessions in relation to 4.34 before we move on to the next verses in the Gita.