

The bona fide spiritual master

Srila Prabhupada's quotes on "The bona fide guru"

"What is the difficulty? I can see, just like all my disciples, they are following me. Why? Because they understand that 'Our spiritual master explains about God better than us. Therefore they are surrendering. I am not bribing them. They are not fools. They have got very nice brain to act. So they accept me as the spiritual master brain because they understand it that 'He can explain about God better than me.' Where is the difficulty? These, all my disciples, surrender unto me because they have found in me a better brain in explaining what is God, direct perception. There is no question of indirect understanding. It is direct understanding. And the Vedas also advise that 'Go to a better man,' *śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭham* (MU 1.2.12), 'one who heard better and wise from the Vedic knowledge, and *brahmā*, as a result of it he has become fully devoted to Kṛṣṇa,' *brahma-niṣṭham*. These are the qualifications of spiritual master. His knowledge is perfect according to the Vedic injunction, and by having that knowledge he has become a perfect devotee of the Lord. These two things are to be seen. Then he is a spiritual master." **(June 4, 1972)**

"Just like my disciples, because they have accepted me as *guru*, whatever I say, they accept it. Otherwise I have not bribed them. These European, Americans... I have no money. I went to New York with seven dollars. What money I have got? But they have accepted. So this is the process. You must find out somebody whom you can accept as *guru*. That *guru* must be bona fide. Otherwise what is the use of accepting a bogus *guru*? So what is that bona fide *guru*? That bona fide *guru* means one who has accepted Kṛṣṇa as *guru*. He is bona fide *guru*. That is bona fide *guru*." **(April 19, 1974)**

"You cannot learn to become a perfect human being without accepting *guru*. Then you remain a rascal. *Tad-vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet* (MU 1.2.12). That is the Vedic injunction. If you want to learn that transcendental science, you must approach a *guru*." **(April 13, 1976)**

"The *guru* should be treated as good as God. This is stated in all the *śāstras*. The difference is that God is master-God and *guru* is servant-God". **(January 29, 1976)**

"When *guru* speaks, you cannot argue. That is not the process. You should accept a *guru* who is infallible. Otherwise it is useless." **(Vrindavan, October 3, 1976)**

"Not that you have to submit yourself blindly. Although your spiritual master may be self-realized and experienced in the Absolute Truth, still, you have to question. You have to understand from him all critical points by your intelligent questions. That is allowed." **(New York, August 17, 1966)**

"Do not ever try to approach Kṛṣṇa directly. Anyone who talks of Kṛṣṇa without service to *guru* will not be successful. So your faith in *guru* and Kṛṣṇa simultaneously will help you to become crowned with success in the progressive march in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Do not be worried, be situated in the present aptitude and everything will be clear." **(September 27, 1967)**

"One thing, on the invitation card you have written All Glories to Our *Guru* Maharaj. This is impersonalism. As soon as we offer obeisances to *guru*, the name should be there. We are strictly personalists. The sahajiyā's, they write Glories to *guru*. Why you are learning this impersonalism, who has taught you? Daily I am offering obeisances to my *guru* by vibrating his real name, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, otherwise it is impersonal." **(Letter, July 14, 1972)**

"One thing you may note also as a matter of etiquette. The Spiritual Master is addressed as His Divine Grace, a God brother is addressed as His Grace, and any Sannyāsin is addressed as His Holiness." **(January 30, 1967)**

"This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is expanding by their help. I am alone, but they are helping me. They are my *gurus*. I am not their *guru* because they are helping me in executing my *Guru* Mahārāja's order." **(Bombay, March 29, 1971)**

"So God is great, and we are dependent on God. Therefore natural conclusion is that we have to serve God. Serving means with love. Unless, now just like these boys, my disciples, they are serving me. Whatever I say, they are immediately executing. Why? I am an Indian, I am a foreigner. Two or three years ago I was not known to them, nor they were known to me. Why they are doing that? Because it is love. Serving means developing love. So unless you develop your love for God you cannot serve Him. Anywhere. Whenever you give some service, it is based on love. Just like mother giving service to the helpless child. Why? Love. So similarly, our life will be perfect when our love is perfect with the perfect Supreme Personality of Godhead. Then it is all right. You have to learn this. This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness: in a relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Just like I am loving my disciples, my disciples are loving me. Why? What is the medium? Kṛṣṇa." **(Seattle, September 30, 1968)**

"Unless there is loving feeling, how is it possible for you to always make offerings to me? The spiritual master is always instructing his disciples and they in turn are always trying to serve their spiritual master. It is a reciprocal relationship of love." **(January 31, 1976)**

"Thank you very much for your kind sentiments. This attitude of serving first the spiritual master is the correct one, for only by the mercy of the spiritual master can one obtain the mercy of Kṛṣṇa." **(Januray 29, 1973)**

"A Vaiṣṇava always feels himself incapable to repay his debt to his spiritual master therefore he works very hard in order to try and repay that debt." **(August 9, 1976)**

Prabhupāda: "Those who are neophyte, they will be always in danger. Always in danger because they are neophytes, just like a child is always in danger. So how you can save them? He's always in danger. So as far as possible, let us try. He's going to the fire. He's going to the water. He's going to the animal. He's eating some poison. So always in danger. That childish age is dangerous. Therefore mother takes care. Danger is already there because he's neophyte, *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*. Therefore we have to abide by the injunction of the *śāstra* and guided by *guru*. That's all. That is our secure position. And otherwise danger always."

Devotee: "One boy in Paris, he had a visit."

Prabhupāda: "Whatever it may be, this is the position. Those who are neophyte, they are always in danger. Therefore their duty is to be guided by *sādhū-śāstra-guru*. That's all. That is our... Now, I'll say from my practical life... It is not pride. Actually everyone knows that my *Guru* Mahārāja had thousands of disciples. So out of thousands of disciples, practically I am little successful. That everyone knows. Why? Because I firmly believed in the words of my *guru*. That's all. This is the... There may be many other Godbrother, maybe very learned and very advanced, whatever it may be, favored, and... Everyone claims that 'I am the most favorite.' And practical point of view, so I think sometimes that 'Why this wonderful thing has happened to me?' So I search out. I search out only that I cent percent believe in the words of my spiritual... That's all, nothing else. *Guru-mukha-padma-vākya, cittete koriyā aikya, ara na koriho mane asa*. Don't think of any nonsense. Simply execute what your *guru* has said. That is success. You are daily singing, *guru-mukha-padma-vākya*. You know the meaning?"

Devotee: "Yes. *Cittete koriyā aikya, ara na koriho mane asa*."

Prabhupāda: "This is the instruction. And the child decides it that 'Whatever my parent says, that's all I shall do. I shall do nothing,' then he's safe."

Devotee: "My only wish is to have my consciousness purified by the words emanating from his lotus mouth."

Prabhupāda: "Then he's safe. And as soon as he manufactures — finished. So don't do this. *Yasya deve para bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau, tasyaite kathitā...* (SU 6.23). This is the secret of spiritual success." (**Bhuvaneśvara, January 28, 1977**)

"So Kṛṣṇa is the original *guru*. Therefore Kṛṣṇa comes to teach these fallen souls. *Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata, tadātmānam śrjāmy aham* (**BG 4.7**). As *guru*'s business is to protect the subordinate disciples from falldown. Just like I am traveling all over the world twice, thrice in a year. My duty is to see that my disciples who have accepted me *guru*, they may not fall down. (**San Francisco, July 15, 1975**)

"I have seen what you have written about your protection by my humble self, but that is inevitable when a Spiritual Master accepts somebody as disciple. Kṛṣṇa says in Bhagavad-gītā that He takes charge of a surrendered soul; so much so that Lord Kṛṣṇa protects His devotee from all his sinful activities in the past. Similarly, the Spiritual Master, when He accepts a disciple and the disciple surrenders unto Him, He has got the responsibility of absorbing the sinful reaction of His disciples life. This is a great responsibility of the Spiritual Master." (**September 19, 1969**)

Prabhupāda: "Comfortable situation is also sense gratification. Any situation, we shall have to serve Kṛṣṇa. That is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Not that 'If it is comfortable to me, I shall do it.' That is sense gratification. That is sense gratification. That is not spiritual; that is material. 'Comfortable or uncomfortable, it doesn't matter. If Kṛṣṇa wants it, I must do it.' That is wanted. That is wanted. As soon as I discriminate 'This is comfortable, this is uncomfortable,' that is material."

Devotee: "Prabhupāda, how can we know what type of service Kṛṣṇa."

Prabhupāda: "Therefore you have got spiritual master. Why he is there? Therefore you have to accept spiritual master who will give you direction. You cannot do it. If you manufacture your own..., then go to hell. *Yasya deve para bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau, tasyaite kathitā hy arthaḥ* (SU 6.23). Kṛṣṇa is there; *guru* is there. Why should you manufacture your own way? If you are sincere, Kṛṣṇa will dictate from within. *Teṣāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ bhajatāṁ prīti-pūrvakam* (BG 10.10). Find out this verse. *Teṣāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ bhajatāṁ prīti-pūrvakam, buddhi-yogaṁ dadāmi tam*."

Devotee: "10.10"

Prabhupāda: "Kṛṣṇa is ready to give you instruction. The spiritual master is ready. Why should you do at your whims, and do something wrong and go to hell?" (**Hawaii, January 23, 1974**)

"Unless you are convinced, how you can say that 'You are my spiritual master?' So what is the secret? I am not a scientist. I am not M.A., C.A. How do you agree to accept me as spiritual master? Because I stick to this principle, Kṛṣṇa and *guru*, that's all. This is the secret of *guru*." (**August 3, 1974**)

"Our process is very easy. We have to see whether my *Guru* Mahārāja, his *Guru* Mahārāja has followed this. Then there will be no more doubt. *Evam paramparā-prāptam* (**BG 4.2**). We receive things by paramparā system. *Mahājano yena gataḥ. Sādhu marganu-gamanam*. We have to follow the footsteps of *sādhu*. Even if I am not well conversant with the Vedas

and Purāṇas, if I see that my spiritual master is doing that, that's sufficient." (**Bombay, November 10, 1970**)

"Satisfaction of the spiritual master is the secret of advancement in spiritual life. The Lord is the original spiritual master, and a person in the disciplic succession can convey the message of the Lord as it is to his sincere disciple. We cannot manufacture our own process, therefore mental speculation does not at all help us in spiritual life. One simply has to surrender himself to his *guru* and everything will be revealed to him." (**November 7, 1974**)

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. The definition of a genuine guru is that he is simply talking about God—that's all. If he's talking about some other nonsense, then he is not a guru. A guru cannot be bad. There is no question of a bad guru, any more than a red guru or a white guru. Guru means "genuine guru." All we have to know is that the genuine guru is simply talking about God and trying to get people to become God's devotees. If he does this, he is genuine. — *Science of Self Realization, Chapter 2 (SSR)*

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 *dīkṣā-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. — *HNC 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. — *SB 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 (*evam paramparā-prāptam imam 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. — *SB 8.16.24p*

A bonafide guru is fixed in serving the 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*

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. — *SB 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. — *SB 1.2.21p*

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*

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. — *SB 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 tattvam nihitam guhāyām 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

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 *gosāñī*. 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

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 *Brahmanand 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 5p