

OBSTACLES

IN

BHAKTI

Binod Bihari das

SRI SRI GOURANGA-VIDHUR-JAYATI

Obstacles

in

BHAKTI

By

Prabhupâd Sri Sri 108 Tinkodi Goswami Maharaj's

most fallen servant

Sri Binod Bihari das

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Sri Binod Babaji



Offering

abidyar andhakare tritap-duhkha parabare
sada mui hoinu nimajjito,
keshe dhori akarshane enechile brindabane
kripa kori koile mor hito.

na korile more ghrina emoni tobo koruna
sri charane dile more thai,
seba-adhikar diya sheetal korile hiya
emon koruna dekhi nai.

goswamider jei mot rager bhajan-path
dekhaile tumi kripa kori,
rai-kanu brindabon sada preme nimagan
sebarata joto sahachari.

sei bhab hride kori sebo kishor-kishori
ei moto koile upadesh,
swa-swarup bhabna loiya sakhir anuga hoiya

dile je amulya dhan judaile tanu mon
pratidan na chahile ar,
ki dibo he prabhu ami tumi to go antaryami
kichhu mor nahiko dibar.

bhaktir antaray jâhai likhinu tay
ihao mor kichu noy,
tobo kripay likhon toma kori samarpan
tobo pade moti jeno roy.

Translation

I was eternally submerged in the ocean of darkness (ignorance) and the threefold misery –adhidaivik, adhibhautik and adhyatmik¹. But you are so merciful that you caught me by my hair and brought me to Vrindaban in order to uplift me.

You are so kind that you not only did not hate me for being what I am, but also granted me a shelter at your holy feet. You cooled my scorching heart by giving me the right to offer seva. I have never seen any one as merciful as you.

You took mercy on me and showed me the path of love, following in the footsteps of the Goswamis (the associates of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu). You introduced me to Sri Radharani and Sri Krishna Who are forever engaged in love dalliance in Sri Vrindaban dham and are surrounded by sakhis who are engaged in seva.

You instructed me to serve the Divine Couple in the same mood as they possessed. You ordered me to serve Them by being absorbed in the siddha-swarup which is my original form, following the instructions of the sakhis.

You gave me the most priceless wealth that soothed my body and mind completely. You never asked anything in return. O Master! What can I give you in return? You are omniscient and you know I have nothing of my own.

Even this book – about stopping in the path of Bhakti - is not by me, it is by your mercy alone that it was possible. I surrender this text to you and pray that my mind may always be fixed on your holy feet.

-Binod

¹ The threefold misery consists of –

- Natural catastrophe –e.g. Earthquake, cyclone etc.
- Pain inflicted by other living beings -e.g. Mosquitoes
- Psychological disorders

A few words by



108 Sri Srimad Ananta das Babaji Maharaj Pandit and Mahant of Sri Radhakund

Sri Bhagavân is most easily attainable by Bhakti alone – the Scriptures and Mahajanas have stated this axiom. Sri Garuda Puran says –

“bhaj ityesha vai dhatuh sevayam parikirtitah”

Meaning – “the root word ‘bhaj’ means ‘seva’, hence Bhakti means ‘seva’.”

We must forsake all desires for sense gratification and serve Sri Bhagavân only for His pleasure – the Scriptures call this ‘the best form of Bhakti’.

Narad Pancharatra says –

“sarvopadhi-vinirmuktam tatparatvena nirmalam,
hrishiikena hrishikesha-sevanam bhaktiruchyate”

Meaning – “Bhakti is the process by which we serve Sri Bhagavân for His pleasure alone with a heart devoid of all material desires.”

Sri Gopal-tapani shruti too says –

“bhaktirasya bhajanan tad-iham-utropadhinai-rasyenan-usmin manah-
kalpanam-etad-eva naishkarmyam”

Meaning – “When we perform Bhakti such as hearing, chanting etc. only for the pleasure of Sri Bhagavân it is called Bhajan. This Bhajan has to be devoid of all material desires. Sri Bhagavân is ras and we must surrender our hearts completely to Him. This is true ‘naishkarma’¹.”

¹ An action for which there is no reaction. It is good for the living being.

So we see that 'Bhajan' is equal to 'naishkarma'. In fact, when we start performing pure devotional practice all our karmas are destroyed, our hearts are purified and we are absorbed in relishing the seva-ras of Sri Bhagavân.

Shandilya-bhakti-sutra says – "sa bhaktih para-anu-rakti-ishware"

Meaning – "Bhakti means great and deep love for Sri Bhagavân."

Sripad Swapneshwaracharya has explained this verse in the following manner.

"anu' means 'followed by' and 'rakti' means 'deep attachment'. So first of all we must learn about Sri Bhagavân's glory and then we must develop deep attachment for Him."

So we see that it is best to hear about the glory of Sri Bhagavân, Bhakti, the goal of life and how to achieve it from the Vedic Scriptures, Gurudev and pure devotees and then perform pure devotion with deep attachment. This is Bhakti.

But often we find that in spite of hearing from the Scriptures, Gurudev and pure devotees and in spite of discussing so much about the goal of life and how to achieve it, we are unable to perform pure Bhakti. Somehow, our material desires are not quenched, rather the desire for sense gratification becomes increasing day by day and we are engulfed by the pitch darkness of passion and envy. We continue to hear and chant externally like a machine, but our dangerous mind wanders in the garden of sensual pleasures most happily.

If we do some soul-searching, we shall surely find some very minute matters arising from various *aparâdhs*. If we are inattentive to these minute matters then later on they gain huge proportions and stop our progress in the path of Bhakti. Binod dasji is the blessed disciple of the Most worshiped Prabhupad 108 Srila Tinkodi (Kishori-Kishorananda) Goswami. He is sheltered in Vrajadham and is dearer to me than my life. He has gained the mercy of great souls and has progressed in self-sacrifice, material detachment and devotional practice within a very short time. Many questions have arisen in his heart regarding the obstacles in the progress of Bhakti. So he decided to share his realizations in this book. Although this book is small, it is a bright torch in the path of pure Bhajan. He showed me the manuscript of this text some days back. I thought it is a most essential grantha¹ and encouraged him to publish it. Any devotee who is serious in performing Bhajan must read it and it will surely help him – I have no doubt in this regard.

Begging for the mercy of Sri Guru and Vaishnavs –

Most fallen servant
Ananta das.

Sri Krishna Chaitanya Shâstra Mandir,
Brajananda Ghera,
P.O. –Radhakund,
Dist. – Mathura,
U.P.
12.6.87.

¹ Religious text

Jay Sri Goursundar

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Vivek das – O exalted soul, since many days a question is troubling me. If you take mercy on me and solve the problem, I shall consider myself truly blessed.

Gour kripâ – Please tell me in details. I shall try my level best to solve the problem.

Vivek das - As a householder I had heard *Harikathâ* and the glory of *Harinâm* from pure devotees. I had understood that the only way to make this human life worthwhile is to obtain Sri Krishna-*bhakti*. And the easiest means to gain this Krishna-*bhakti* is to chant *Harinâm*.

"*khaite shuite jotha totha nâm loy,
desh kâl niyam nai sarba siddhi hoy.*"
❖ (C.C.)

Meaning – "We should chant *Harinâm*¹ while eating and sleeping, anywhere and everywhere. We may chant anywhere, at any time and reach the supreme goal."

It is with this expectation that I came to Sri Vrindavan *dhâm*². Ever since I have reached Vrindavan, I have been chanting continuously and am trying my level best to perform all the parts of *bhakti*. Yet I admit with regret that I have not made the slightest progress on the road of *bhakti*. Not only have I lost this eagerness but also the earlier enthusiasm for chanting has disappeared. I do not feel happy any more about chanting *Harinâm*. Although I am still chanting, I am not relishing it. It is somewhat mechanical. In the beginning whenever I saw the trees and creepers of Sri *dhâm* Vrindavan, I used to enter some sort of *bhâv*³, but now when I see them, I am not only unhappy, but I also find all objects in Sri *dhâm* as material. Earlier I had heard great glory of Sri *Harinâm*, such as –

"*ek krishname kore sarba pâp khoy,
naba bidha bhakti purna nam hoite hoy.
anusanga phale kore samsarer loy,*

¹ Holy name

² Holy place

³ Mellows, sentiment

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chitta akorshiya kore krishna-premoday."

❖ (C.C.)

Meaning – "One Krishna-*nâm* can destroy all the sins. The nine activities of *bhakti* become perfect only when we chant *Harinâm*. His prime function is to attract the heart and arouse Krishna-*prem*, to destroy material desires is only His secondary effect."

In spite of chanting lakhs and lakhs of times, I can see no result; rather something opposite is happening. Earlier I had contempt for some material things and now the very same objects are attracting me. I feel I am losing all faith in Holy name! Please show mercy on me and help me out of this problem.

Gour kripa – Why are you so confused? Chaitanya Charitamrita is very clear on this matter –

*"sei krishnanâm jadi loy bohu bar,
tobe jodi nohe prem nohe ashrudhar.
tobe jani tahate aparâdh prachur,
krishnanâm beej tahe na hoy ankur."*

Meaning – "Even if we chant the immensely powerful Krishna-*nâm* countless times, and yet we do not gain *prem* nor do we shed tears then we should know that we have committed massive *aparâdh*¹. Hence the chanting of Krishna-*nâm* is not resulting in *prem*."

Vivek das – I accept what you say – but earlier I did get pleasure out of chanting and I was very eager and enthusiastic. Then why has it decreased now? When we continue to chant Holy Name, our interest and enthusiasm ought to increase, is it not? Yet why is it decreasing?

Gour kripa - See, *aparâdh* is of two types –

1. The *aparâdhs* that we have collected over many earlier lifetimes.
2. The *aparâdhs* we have committed in the present life.

Our *anurâg*² for Krishna is proportional to the *aparâdhs* in our past lives. If we have less *aparâdhs* in the past lives, we will have more Krishna-*anurâg*. If such a person does not commit any further offence then he will progress very fast in Sri Krishna-*bhajan*. Instead of this if the opposite happens, that is, in spite of following all the paths of *bhakti* if our interest and enthusiasm go down we must accept that we are committing some offence somewhere.

Vivek das - This is making me very scared indeed! Please tell me more about this thing called 'offence' and please explain in detail about how it blocks the path of *bhakti*. I will be truly grateful to you.

¹offence

² Deep love

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Gour kripâ - Look, our *âchâryas*¹ have stated 10 *nâm-aparâdhs* and 32 *sevâ-aparâdhs*. The *nâm-aparâdhs* are greater than the *sevâ-aparâdhs*. Again, amongst the *nâm-aparâdhs* the offence called 'Vaishnav-*aparâdh*'² is the most dangerous.

The 10 *nâm-aparâdhs* are as follows –

1. To commit *nindâ*³ of *sâdhu*-vaishnavs (Vaishnav-*nindâ* or Vaishnav-offence).
2. To consider Lord Shiva as an independent controller. Shivji is not an independent *Ishwar* although he is an incarnation of Vishnu.
3. To consider Sri Gurudev as an ordinary human being and show *avagyâ*⁴ for him.
4. To criticize Vedic scriptures.
5. To think that the Scriptures are only exaggerating when they extol Holy Name.
6. To give an interpretation for Holy Name.
7. To sin on the strength of Holy Name.
8. To compare Holy Name with pious activities.
9. To instruct Holy Name to a faithless person.
10. Not to love Holy Name even after hearing His glory.

Now I shall discuss the *nâm-aparâdhs* more in detail. If you have any question please feel free to ask me.

Vaishnav-nindâ

The other *aparâdhs* break the branches and leaves of the wish-fulfilling creeper of *bhakti*. However Vaishnav-*aparâdh* is very powerful and it uproots the creeper altogether. If we commit the other *aparâdhs* the creeper will, no doubt, grow weak, but it will continue to live. However, if we commit Vaishnav-*aparâdh* the creeper of *bhakti* dries up completely. Vaishnav-*nindâ* is not the only way to commit Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. Here are other ways too.

*"hanti nindânti vai dweshti vaishnavan-nabhir-nadanti,
krudhyate yati no harshang darshane patanani shat."*

Meaning – "If we beat, criticize, disrespect, get angry with, do not express pleasure on seeing, do not pay obeisance and do not glorify a Vaishnav we commit Vaishnav-*aparâdh*." - (Sri Hari-bhakti-vilas)

Sriman-Mahaprabhu has especially warned the *sadhak* about this Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita and Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat mention Vaishnav-*aparâdh* repeatedly.

*"madyapere uddharilo chaitanya gosain,
baishnab-nindukere kumbhipake dilo thain."*

¹ preceptors

² Offending a Vaishnav

⁴ Either show contempt or to disobey or to ignore

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*sobare gourachandra koribe uddhar,
byatirek baishnab ninduk durachar.
shool-papi sama jadi bhakta-nindâ kore,
Bhâgabat-pronam tothapi shighra more.
heno baishnab ninde jodi sarbagna hoi,
se jonar adhahpat sarba shastre kohi.
sarba maha prayashchitto je krishner nâm,
baishnab-aparâdhe se na miloye tran."*

Meaning – "Chaitanya Gosain (Sriman-Mahaprabhu) delivered even the drunkards, but He sent the ones who indulge in Vaishnav-*nindâ* in the *Kumbhipâk*¹ hell. **Gourachandra**² will deliver everybody except the ones who criticize the Vaishnavs since they are the most fallen ones. Even if one pays obeisance to Sri *Bhagavân*, he will perish if he criticizes a devotee since it strikes Sri Gourahari like a spear in His heart. All *Shâstras*³ declare that even if one is all-knowing he will fall down if he criticizes a Vaishnav. Although Sri Krishna's Holy name cleanses us of all the sins, He cannot deliver us from the effects of Vaishnav-*aparâdh*."

– (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

*"heno baishnab-aparâdh jasi uthe hatimata,
upariya chinde tar shuki jay pata."*

Meaning – "A Vaishnav-*aparâdh* is like an intoxicated elephant. It uproots the wish-fulfilling creeper of *bhakti* and its leaves dry up."

– (C.C.)

Besides these, other *Shâstras* too have warned us about Vaishnav-*aparâdh*.

*"nindâ kurvanti ye mudha vaishnavanang mahatmanang,
patanti pitribhish sardhang maha-raurava-sansthite."*

Meaning – "All those fools who criticize Vaishnavs, they fall into the *Raurava* hell⁴ along with their ancestors." – (Skanda Puran)

*"janma prabhriti yat kinchit sukritang samuparjiang,
nasham-ayati tat sarvang pidayed yadi vaishnavan."*

Meaning – "Those who hurt Vaishnavs, all their pious activities (even those performed in previous lifetimes) come to a naught."

– (Skanda Puran)

*"pujitaih bhagavan vishnur-janmantarshatair-api,
prasidati na vishwatma vaishnave cha-avamanite."*

Meaning – "Sri *Bhagavân* is never ever pleased with all those who show disrespect towards Vaishnavs." – (Srimad-Bhâgavatam)

¹ A type of hell in which the sinner is cooked in a vessel.

² Gourânga Mahaprabhu Who looks as beautiful as a moon

³ Scriptures

⁴ A type of hell (S.B.5.26.10)

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So now, you can understand how dangerous Vaishnav-*aparâdh* is. If we keep on collecting Vaishnav-*aparâdh* there is no point in performing lots of *bhajan*. There is no way we can progress even the slightest bit in *bhakti*.

Vaishnav-*aparâdh* does not constitute only Vaishnav-*nindâ*. May be someone comes to you and does Vaishnav-*nindâ*, you only say "Yea, yea, that's right". Even then, you will have to bear the entire effect of Vaishnav-*nindâ*. It is like this - suppose, someone comes to you with an application, you do not say anything, but only sign below it; this is proof enough that you are making that statement. Similarly, if someone comes to you and does Vaishnav-*nindâ* and you quietly nod your head then you should understand that you too are making the same comments.

Vivek das – That is all right. However, *Shâstras* prescribe some behavioral code for the Vaishnavs, do they not? If some Vaishnavs do not follow these rules – instead - they behave in a completely opposite manner then why can we not mention it? Why should that constitute Vaishnav-*aparâdh*?

Gour kripa – Most certainly, it will constitute Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. Even if we see some Vaishnav behaving against the *Shâstriya*-rules, we must not indulge in *nindâ*. Instead, we should give him full respect, as a *sâdhu*¹ deserves to be given. This is because the Lord says in Sri Bhagavad Gita –

*"api chedsuduraharo bhajate mam-ananyabhk,
sâdhureva sa mantavyah samyag vyavasito hi sah."*

Meaning – "Even if someone is most sinful, but he worships me alone, then you must consider him to be a *sâdhu*."

Hence, if we ever disrespect a *sâdhu* it is an *aparâdh*.

*"hari-bhakti-para ye cha harinama parayanah,
durvritta vâ suvritta va tebhyo nityang namo namah."*

Meaning – "Whoever does Hari-*bhakti* and chants Holy Name – he may be good or bad – I pay him my obeisance."

– (Brihan-naradiya Puran)

*"bhagavati cha haravananya-cheta
bhrisha-malino'pi virajate manushyah,
na hi shasha-kslushachchaviv kadachit
timira-parabhâvatam-upaiti chandrah."*

Meaning – "One who has *bhakti* for Sri Krishna alone, even if he is seen to commit some sinful activities, he always emits the aura of *bhakti*, just as the moon, although blemished, is not defeated by darkness." – (Nrisimha Puran)

As evidence we may take the example of Mârichi *rishi's* six sons who had laughed when they had seen Lord Brahma (in a state of lust) rushing behind his own daughter. This *aparâdh* forced them to take birth from Devaki's womb in Kamsa's jail and Kamsa killed them. Therefore, we must never ever

¹ Holy person

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show contempt for a Vaishnav. **Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat** has strictly warned us –

“We shall never get any respite if we criticize a worthy Vaishnav, for his behavior is beyond our limited understanding. Sometimes a worthy Vaishnav commits the same activities as a sinful person, only by Sri Krishna’s *kripa*, someone can understand this – but there are others who fall in trouble (of Vaishnav-*nindâ*) and perish. Those who do not fall in this pit, they survive in *bhakti*. I can see only one way out of this peril – it is best to glorify and behave humbly with everyone. In this mood, we must chant Holy Name and carefully hear from the great devotees. Then Krishna gives them divine intelligence, he crosses over the material ocean and no one can stop him.”

Vivek das – All right, I will not do Vaishnav-*nindâ*. However, if someone comes to me and does the same then how is it harmful?

Gour kripa – Of course, it will harm you! If someone come to you and does Vaishnav-*nindâ* – you don’t know whether that person is telling the truth or a lie, yet your respect towards that Vaishnav will decrease, won’t it? Immediately you will incur Vaishnav-*aparâdh* ! This is why *Shâstras* have ordered us not hear Vaishnav-*nindâ*.

*"nindâm bhagavah shrinvan tatparasya janasya Vaishnav-aparâdh,
Tato napaiti yah so’pi yatyadhah sukritachchyutah."*

Meaning – “On hearing Sri Krishna-*nindâ* and *nindâ* of Sri Krishna’s devotees, those who do not leave the place, he loses all his *sukritis*¹ and falls down to the hellish planets.”

❖ (Srimad-Bhâgavatam)

*"sâdhu-nindâ shunile sukriti hoy khoy,
janma janma adhahpat bede ei koy."*

Meaning – “The Vedas state that if we hear *sâdhu-nindâ* we lose our *sukriti* and fall down in every birth.”

From all these statements made in *Shâstras* we can understand how dangerous is Vaishnav-*aparâdh* ! So whoever wishes to progress in *bhakti* must be extremely careful about Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. It is best to consider every Vaishnav as Sri Govinda’s dear devotee, show him respect and pay obeisance.

Vivek das – Does this mean that even a Babaji should show respect to a householder and pay obeisance?

Gour-kripa – A Vaishnav is a Vaishnav. He may be a *grihastha* or a renounced – that is immaterial. We must never distinguish. We must show respect, behave respectfully and pay *dandavat* to every Vaishnav. Otherwise, we’ll be committing an offence. Sri *Bhagavân* sees our heart. Whose heart is always filled with Krishna and he is not interested in material things, is a true Vaishnav. Sri Gita has defined ‘*sannyas*’ as –

¹ Pure devotion that pleases Sri Hari – (G.L.8.8)

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"*jneyah sa nitya-sannyasi yo dweshti na kankshati,
nirdvandvo hi mahabaho sukhang bandhat pramuchyate.*"

Meaning - "O *Mahabaho*¹! He who never desires anything material, is devoid of anger and envy, know him to be an eternal *sannyasi*. A pure devotee like him, who is devoid of such dilemma very easily, transcends material bondage and gains liberation."

Sri *Bhagavân* has said in Sri Gita -

"*anashritah karmaphalang karyang karma karoti yah,
sa sannyasi cha yogi cha niragnima chakriya.*"

Meaning - "Whoever discharges his duties without expecting any fruit thereof; he alone is a *sannyasi*, a *yogi* and not one who has given up all activities."

Therefore, if we accept the above statement of Sri Gita, then it is quite possible that a *grihasta*, whom I have shown contempt so far, is actually a *sannyasi*. Therefore, I have no business to feel proud 'Ohh! I am a Babaji' and treat a *grihasta* with contempt. I will only be committing Vaishnav-*aparâdh* if I think him to be 'a person worthy of my mercy' or 'a materialist'.

Now this does not mean a *grihasta* should disrespect a Babaji and think - 'What is there in a dress? Greatness depends on the quality of *bhajan*. I am a nice devotee, I perform good *bhajan*, while this person is only a Babaji in name, and he does not behave like one.' Even this is wrong. If a *grihasta* thinks like this and has contempt for a Babaji, he is crossing *maryada*² and so is committing Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. If a *grihasta* sees a young Babaji and thinks - "I am old and experienced. Moreover, I have lived for so long in Vrindâvan and performed *bhajan* while this Babaji is of my son's age, so why should I pay *dandavat* to him? Rather I should bless him." This is an *aparâdh*. We must remember that '*kaupin*' is not something ordinary. It is according to Sriman-Mahaprabhu's wish and Goswamis such as Sri Rup and Sanatan have worn this attire. Therefore, we must never disregard this dress.

"*maryada langhile hoy narake gaman.*"

Meaning - "If we overstep '*maryâdâ*' we shall go to hell" - (C.C.)

He may do *bhajan*, he may not do *bhajan*, he may or may not behave properly, and still we should not disrespect him.

Moreover, who knows, I am considering him to be my junior, I am thinking - 'He is a newcomer, what does he know of *bhajan*?' - In reality, he may have performed *asadhan-bhajan* for many previous lifetimes and is in a much more advanced state than I am. Therefore, I will be at a loss if I disregard him. Hence, it is best to consider every Vaishnav higher than myself, pay *dandavat*, and treat him with respect. Then we have nothing to fear. We

¹ One with strong arms

² The boundary of morality or propriety of conduct

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must do *dandavat* to anyone who dons Vaishnav emblems such as *tilak* and *Tulsi*.

*"sakal baishnaber sahit abhed dekhiya,
je krishna-charan bhaje se jay toriya."*

Meaning – 'One who worships the lotus-feet of Sri Krishna without discriminating between Vaishnavs, he is delivered.'

- (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

*"e-kale je baishnaber bodo chhoto bole,
nishchinte thakuk se janibe koto kale."*

Meaning – "Whosoever discriminates between Vaishnavs may rest in peace, for it will take him a long time to realize the Truth."

❖ (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

Vivek das – Tell me, when I see a Vaishnav, will it not do if I pay him *dandavat* mentally?

Gour kripa – How is that? *Pranam* means 'By body, mind and speech'. If we do not pay *dandavat* bodily then it means we have a veiled pride. What will happen if he considers me inferior? Only those who think like this will not pay *dandavat* openly. Sriman-Mahaprabhu does not like this sort of *Pranam*. If we are ashamed to bow our head in front of Vaishnavs how can we expect to advance in the path of *bhakti* as shown by Sriman-Mahaprabhu?

*'baishnab dekhiya je na noway munda,
sei mundo pode giye naraker kunda."*

-(Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

Meaning – "The one who does not bow his head before a Vaishnav, his head falls into the pit of hell."

When we meet a Vaishnav we should at least join our palms, lower our head, speak humbly and thus show respect.

Vivek das – O exalted one, today I can see the Vaishnavs embroiled in so many quarrels, due to this my faith is shaking. What should I do?

Gour kripa – Never ever speak like this, because Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat is saying –

*"nitya-shuddha gyan bastu baishnab sakal,
tobe je koloho dekho sob kutuhol.
iha na bujhiye kono kono buddhi nâsh,
eke bonde, âr ninde, jaibeko nâsh."*

Meaning – "All Vaishnavs are eternally pure and have pure knowledge, when you see them quarrel it is only in play. Some foolish people don't understand this and take sides. They praise one and criticize the other – they will surely perish."

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Therefore we must think – “It is only a *leelâ* of the Vaishnavs. I am foolish, so am unable to comprehend” and we must not take sides. If you support one and find fault with the other, you will harm your *bhajan*.

*"je papishtha ek baishnaber paksha hoy,
anya baishnaber ninde sei jay khoy."*

Meaning – “He is verily a sinner who supports one Vaishnav and criticizes another. Such a person will surely perish. – (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

We must not even go where there is groupism and Vaishnav-*nindâ*.

*je sobhay baishnaber nindâ matra hoy,
sarba-dharma thakileo târ hoy khoy.*

Meaning – Even if an assembly follows all the rules of *Dharma*, yet indulges in Vaishnav-*nindâ*, it perishes.” - (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

Vivek das – But O exalted one! I live amidst so many Vaishnavs. Then how can I save myself from such Vaishnav-*aparâdh*?

Gour kripa –For this we must stick to a few rules.

1. We should always remain engrossed in *bhajan* and *sâdhanâ*.
2. We should not discuss anything else other than God.
3. We should speak with anyone only when it is **absolutely** necessary to do so.
4. We should walk on the road with our head lowered and palms joined – thus showing respect to everyone.
5. It is best to consider everyone superior to us.
6. When one comes to us and criticizes another person we should say, “I have remembered some urgent work” and quickly leave that place.
7. If we ever see some fault in another, we should think, “my heart is evil, so I am finding a fault in him, it is my fault and not his.” In this manner, we must chastise ourselves.

If we do not live like this, we shall never get rid of *aparâdh* and these huge barricades will continue to block our progress in *bhakti*. We will never even realize when, unknown to us, these *aparâdhs* have accumulated and have formed mountains on our path.

Vivek das – Now I am really scared. I have begun to realize that Vaishnav-*aparâdh* is very dangerous indeed! If I collect Vaishnav-*aparâdh*, then no matter how much I try, I will make no progress in *bhakti* whatsoever.

Please tell me how I can rid myself of these Vaishnav-*aparâdhs*. Please have mercy on me.

Gour kripa – Sriman-Mahaprabhu Himself has instructed how to get rid of Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. He said –

*"prabhu bole upadesh korite se pari,
baishnab-aparâdh khondaite nari.*

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*je baishnab-sthane apardh hoy jar,
punah se khomile se ghuche nohe ar."*

Meaning – "The Lord said –I can instruct you on this matter, but I cannot take away your Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. The only way to get rid of this *aparâdh* is to beg forgiveness from the person against whom you have committed the *aparâdh*. If he forgives then you are saved, there is no other way." - (C.B.)

Therefore, we must please the one against whom we have committed an *aparâdh* by glorifying him and showing him respect. It does not mean we should go and angrily beat our head on the ground saying, "Sir! Please forgive me. It is entirely my fault! I should have never spoken to you at all! From now on I'll never talk to you and you mustn't speak to me either." In this manner if we harbor anger against that person then it is of no use.

The best way to rid ourselves of *aparâdh* is to repent. "Alas! I am ignorant, so I have committed *aparâdh* against a Vaishnav. Unknowingly I have hurt the feelings of a Vaishnav, shame on me! I am not qualified to be called a devotee at all. If my heart is blemished like this I shall never ever progress in *bhakti*." In this way, we should be ashamed of ourselves. Bow at the feet of the one against whom we have committed *aparâdh* and cry out in misery for forgiveness. Sri Vishwanath Chakravartipad has stated the same –

*"tatashcha daivat tasminnaparâdhe jate 'hanta pamarena maya sâdhusu
aparâdhâmiti' anutapta janah 'krishanou shâmyati taptang krishanano
evayam' iti nyayena tatpadagra eve nipatya prasadayamiti vishannachetasa
pranatistuti samman-adibhis-tasyopashamah karyah."*

After much trying if we are unable to please the devotee, we should continue to try to please him by doing things to please him. If we are still not successful, we should chastise ourselves, be very much repentant and take the shelter of Holy Name. We must also take an oath that we shall never again commit an *aparâdh* like this. Then some day Sri Nâm-prabhu will take mercy on us.

Vivek das –That's good. The *Shâstras* say, "If we take the shelter of Holy Name we will be rid of all *aparâdh*." So isn't it better to follow *Shâstra* and take the shelter of Holy Name rather than beg others repeatedly to forgive us?

Gour kripa – In that case we will commit another *aparâdh* called 'to commit a sin on the strength of Holy Name'. We have to follow the above-mentioned rule only when we don't know against whom we have committed an offence, or the person whom we have offended, is no more. It leaves us with no option other than to take the shelter of Holy Name. Then may be Holy Name will take mercy on us. Even then, we must remember that we must repent enough and we must be especially careful about not committing such an *aparâdh* again. Otherwise, Sri Nâm-prabhu will never be pleased.

Many times, we see that great devotees do not take offence in spite of behaving badly with them or insulting them. Instead, he considers it his own fault and repents. Even if someone treats him unjustly, or expresses anger,

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he thinks, "I have hurt him – it is all because of my faulty character." Thinking thus, he chastises himself. Such is the nature of a pure devotee.

*"rukshakshara girah shrinvan tatha bhagavateritah,
pranama-purvakang kshantva yo vaded-vaishnavo hi sah."*

Meaning – "He is a Vaishnav who, in spite of hearing harsh words from a devotee, pays obeisance unto him and praises him."

- (Linga Puran)

Although a great devotee may forgive us, yet the specks of dust on his feet do not forgive. Hence if we think, "Oh! He is a great devotee, he is not hurt, so I have not committed an *aparâdh*," the *aparâdh* will not leave us and we shall have to suffer for it. All those who have gained Bhaktidevi's *kripa*, they never sight faults in others. They only sense their own faults. Let me tell you about the great Saint Tukaram.¹

When Tukaram became a famous devotee, then many devotees used to come to his house for hearing *Harikathâ* from him. Everyone was pleased to hear about the Lord's pastimes from Tukaram. Gradually Tukaram became very popular. He had a scholarly Brahmin neighbor who also had a few disciples. When Tukaram became popular, he got envious. After some days, a few of his disciples stopped going to him and instead joined Tukaram's *Harikathâ*! Now the Brahmin could not tolerate any more.

In one dark night, he took a thorny stick and waited for Tukaram. When Tukaram passed by that way, without wasting a single word he started thrashing him sound and proper. At last, when his anger subsided he went home. On the other hand, Tukaram was badly injured and could not get up for quite some time. Then with great difficulty, he lifted himself and went home. He could not sleep the entire night, due to the immense pain. Moreover, the thorns had stuck to his body. However, what hurt Tukaram more than the thorns was the thought that why did the Brahmin beat him. Definitely, he must have hurt him. Tukaram pondered on the matter, but could not come to any conclusion. Hence, he decided that he must have hurt the Brahmin unknowingly and so he has beaten him, for how someone could beat without any reason? Tukaram's heart bled for the Brahmin. He said. "I am an *aparâdhi*." He decided he would accost the Brahmin at the break of dawn and roll at his feet and seek forgiveness.

As soon as the sun rose, with great difficulty Tukaram went to the Brahmin's house and started calling out to him. The Brahmin too was repenting because he had beaten Tukaram out of envy. When he opened the door Tukaram fell

¹ **Sant Tukaram**, respectfully referred to as Sri Tukaram, and colloquially referred to as "Tuka" was a seventeenth century Marathi poet saint of India, with a very great stature in the Bhakti movement of Maharashtra. He was a devotee of *Vitthal*, a form of Lord Krishna, the Supreme Being. The days of his life are contentious with scholars assigning various dates to his birth. The four most popular options are 1568, 1577 1608 and 1598 AD, so we do have a wide choice. There is lesser dispute that he died in 1650 AD. He was born in Dehu, very close to modern Pune city in Maharashtra. His father was a small trader or peddler and he was barely literate all his life. His family was successful grain sellers but the priestly class considered him lowborn. He is considered one of the favorite saints of Maharashtra especially the Varkari sampradây (community).

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at his feet and said tearfully, "Sir, I am the lowest of all beings, a fool. I must have committed an offence against you, otherwise why should you beat me? You wish me well, that is why you beat me for my betterment. But dear sir, please take mercy on me and tell me how I have hurt you then I shall surely rectify my mistake. Please forgive my offence." Saying like this he started crying.

The Brahmin's heart had melted by now. He was extremely ashamed for his activity. Perceiving Tukaram's Vaishnav-ness, he said tearfully, "Dear brother Tuka, you have not committed any offence. I am an *aparâdhi*.¹ I have hurt an exalted devotee such as you; I have committed an extremely foul offence. Dear brother please forgive me; if you don't forgive me I shall have no deliverance." Saying this he too fell at Tukaram's feet.

So now, you understand, how a pure devotee thinks. Even though someone hurts them, they only search for their own faults. When we achieve such mentality, it means we have Bhaktidevi's *kripa*. If we are less fortunate, we will never see our own faults.

*"mahater swabhab ajner dosh kshama kore,
krishner swabhab bhakta nindâ sohite na pare."*

Meaning - "Hence, although a pure devotee does not accept *aparâdh*, *Bhagavân* never forgives us, or you may say the dust of his feet do not forgive us."

Anyhow, at the very onset of *bhakti* if we are not extremely alert about Vaishnav-*aparâdh*, then unknowingly when we'll commit *aparâdh*, we will not even come to know. Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat has given us strict warning to this effect -

*"chaitanya singher ajna koriya langhan,
na bujhi baishnab ninde paibe bandhan.
chaitanyer dande jâr na jonmilo bhoy,
janme janme sei jeeb jom-dandya hoy."*

To consider Shiva as a controller independent from *Bhagavân* Vishnu is another *Nâm-aparâdh*. Sri Brahma-samhita says -

*"kshirang yatha dadhi vikara-vishesha-yogat
sanjayate na tu tatah prithag-anti hetoh,
yah shambhutam-api tatha samupaiti karyad-
govindam-adi-purushang tam-ahang bhajami."*

Meaning - "Although milk turns into curds, their basic ingredients remain the same. Similarly the Supreme Being appears as Shiva to perform certain functions - I adore That Govinda, the Primeval Purush."

Srimad Bhâgavatam states - Sri Hari assumes the names Virinchi (Brahma) and Hara (Shiva) depending on the function He performs."

¹ offender

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Therefore, it is evident from the above-mentioned *Shâstras* that Shiva is non-different from Vishnu. If we consider Shiva different from *Bhagavân* Vishnu or an independent controller, we commit *Nâm-aparâdh*.

However, the *Shâstras* also tell us, "whoever equates the Supreme Being Lord Narayan with Brahma or Shiva is an atheist." This is contradictory with the above statements. Therefore, our *âchâryas* have explained it as follows – "In some *Mahakalpas*, some living entity who is absorbed in *Ishwar* becomes Shiva. Hence when a living being is elevated to this status, he assumes the role of the destroyer."

"tatvat paryalochana-vijna-sâdhujana-prabodhitatve tesham-eva shivasya bhagavat-swarupad-abhinnatvena labdha-pratitinang nama-kirtanenaiva- aparâdha-kshayah"

❖ (Sri Vishwanath Chakravartipad)

Meaning- "We must get rid of this offence by not considering Shiva an independent controller and we must pay him obeisance and glorify him, all the while taking the shelter of Holy Name."

To disregard the Spiritual Master – This is also a dangerous *aparâdh*. If we consider Sri Gurudev to be a human being disrespect him, or we see a flaw in him, we will never get the mercy of Holy Name.

Sri Krishna is saying –"O Uddhav! Know *Âchâryadev* to be non-different from me. Do not ever disregard him. Do not ever disrespect him by considering him a mere mortal. Sri Gurudev is the abode of all celestial beings."

– (Srimad Bhâgavatam)

If we are so foolish as to consider Sri Gurudev as a mere mortal we must rebuke ourselves, forsake such foolish ideas, and serve Sri Gurudev's lotus-feet and please him all the time considering him as non-different from Sri *Bhagâvan*. Then we should seek forgiveness from Holy Name and take His shelter. Then Holy Name will forgive us.

To criticize Vedic texts – If we have committed this offence, then with the same mouth that we had criticized the Vedic texts, now we must glorify them repeatedly. Along with this, we must chant Holy Name loudly. In this way, it is possible to get rid of this *aparâdh*.

To sin on the strength of Holy Name – This is another dangerous *aparâdh*. Sri Vishwanath Chakravartipad has called this *aparâdh* as 'destroyer of Vaishnavness'.

"Many people say that chanting the Holy Name destroys all sins, so there is no need to strive to forsake sinful activities." If we think like this then we will be committing this *aparâdh*. We must be careful not to commit this *aparâdh*; otherwise, Holy Name will not take mercy on us.

Vivek das - You have dashed all my hopes. I have taken shelter of Holy Name. However, if Holy Name does not clear my intelligence, get rid of my blemishes and purify my heart, then what will I do? After all, I am a conditioned soul. For so many lifetimes I have been in ignorance, how can I

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rid myself of my faults? It is impossible for me to realize my faults. I am doubtful that Holy Name is all capable.

Gour kripa – If you take it like this, you will make a mistake. Holy Name is capable of granting every wish, but once we take shelter of Holy Name we must endeavor diligently to avoid all that *Shâstras* forbid. If we become slack in this respect, although Holy Name is all capable, He will not yield auspicious results.

Some times if we go crazy and do something that *Shâstra* prohibits, our conscience should burn and we should pray to Holy Name –“O Nâm-prabhu! I have committed a gross crime; please forgive me. I shall try my level best not to commit it again. I have surrendered unto You. Please grant me good sense so that I will not stray next time.” If we pray in this manner, chastise ourselves, try our level best to follow the regulative principles and all other principles of *bhakti* very strictly and continue to chant Holy Name with reverence, definitely He will give us good sense and rid us of our faults.

Many a times we harbor some subtle tendency to commit *aparâdh*. We don't think deeply about it. Take this example – I take a *Grantha*¹ from someone. Many days pass. Whoever had given me the *Grantha* has forgotten to whom he had given and when. Now I start thinking, “That devotee has forgotten all about the *Grantha*. He is not asking me to return it. Therefore, it is not an *aparâdh* if I don't return it anyway. First, let him ask for it. Then I will give it back.” Nevertheless, my dear, *this is outright robbery!* I am performing *bhajan*, yet I am not afraid of *aparâdh*! These subtle tendencies to commit *aparâdh* can destroy our Vaishnavness altogether.

There are some more *aparâdhs*. We should be careful not to collect them, and continue to chant diligently. Holy Name will forgive those *aparâdhs*. These are as follows.

Thirty-two *sevâ-aparâdhs* mentioned in the Âgam-Shâstras.

1. We must not enter a place of worship wearing footwear or riding in a vehicle.
2. We must participate in Holy Feasts and follow the Lord when the devotees take out His procession.
3. We must always pay Him obeisance.
4. We must not worship Sri *Vigraha*, pay obeisance or do any *sevâ* in the state of *uchchhishta*² and *ashauch*³.
5. We must not pay obeisance with single hand.
6. We must not perform *pradakshina*⁴ showing our backs to Him. If we want to circumambulate Him, we must go completely around Him, keeping Him to our right.
7. We must not sit with our legs pointing towards Him.
8. We must not sit in front of Him by embracing the knees.

¹ Holy Book

²(a)One who still has the remains of food in the mouth or hands, (b)one who has not washed his hands or mouth after eating and therefore is considered impure (c)impure.

³ Impurity, foul, contamination, defilement (contracted by the death of a relation, or by the commission of a prohibited act), uncleanness

⁴ circumambulation

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9. We must not eat before Sri *Vigraha*.
10. We must not lie down in front of Him.
11. We must not tell a lie in front of Him.
12. We should speak softly in His presence.
13. We must not indulge in material or frivolous talk in His presence.
14. We must not cry for material reasons in front of Him.
15. In front of Sri *Vigraha*, we must not quarrel with anyone.
16. We must not disfavor anyone in front of Him.
17. We must not lavish special favor on anyone in His presence.
18. We must not speak cruelly to anyone in front of Him.
19. We must not cover ourselves with blanket while performing *sevâ*.
20. We must not indulge in *para-nindâ* in front of Their Lordships.
21. We must not glorify anyone in front of Him (other than our Sri Gurudev).
22. We must not use indecent language in His presence.
23. We must not break wind in front of Him.
24. If we are able to afford objects of superior quality for *sevâ* and still offer objects of inferior quality, it is an offence.
25. We must eat only what is offered to Him.
26. It is an offence not to offer the fruits, vegetables, flowers etc. of that particular season¹.
27. We must not offer Him remaining portion of food, i.e., we must always offer Him the first portion.
28. We must not sit with our backs to Deity.
29. We must not pay obeisance to anyone in front of Deity.
30. We must not remain silent if Sri Gurudev questions us.
31. We must never praise ourselves.
32. We must not criticize the demi-gods or goddesses.

Varâha Purân enlists some more *sevâ-aparâdhs*.

We may unwillingly commit *sevâ-aparâdhs*, but if we **recite *stotras*², surrender completely – by speech, body and mind – to Holy Name**, and continue to chant attentively we can get rid of *sevâ-aparâdh*. We have heard that, reading one chapter of Bhagavad-Gita can free us from *sevâ-aparâdh*. However, this does not mean we adopt a casual attitude towards *sevâ-aparâdh* and think –“Oh! It’s all right! I am reciting *stotras*, so I can commit as many *sevâ-aparâdhs* as I like.” If we think like this, we shall fall under the jurisdiction of *nâma-bale pap-âcharan*³ – a serious *Nâm-aparâdh*.

Besides these *nâm-aparâdhs* and *sevâ-aparâdhs*, Srîman-Mahaprabhu has warned us against another thing, that is, never to pass judgment on anyone. No doubt, Vaishnav-*nindâ* is very dangerous; but He has instructed us not to indulge in *nindâ* of even an ordinary person.

Regarding this Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat says –

¹ If we cannot afford we must offer at least a minimum quantity.

² Prayers recited according to Shastras. We will very soon present you with Raganuga Stotras.

³ To commit sins on the strength of Holy Name.

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"The Lord showers mercy on a womanizer and drunkard, but He destroys a *ninduk* although he may be a *Vedantin*¹. He says –'I solemnly pledge that Krishna will easily deliver you if you do not indulge in *nindâ*'. The Lord kills the demons in only one birth, but He destroys a *ninduk* every moment in every life. We should understand that Krishna is the all-powerful Supreme controller and all the *Shâstras* declare that *nindâ* angers Krishna the most. A scholar may have studied the four Vedas, yet if he commits *nindâ* he is punished by drowning in the *Kumbhipak* hell in countless births."

Hence, if we want to gain Sriman-Mahaprabhu's mercy we must refrain from *nindâ*. Moreover, when we do *nindâ* we accept the other person's bad qualities and our good qualities flow through him.

"*Nindâ* is useless. It only results in sin. He who does not indulge in *nindâ* is blessed indeed" - Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat.

If we truly want to receive Bhaktidevi's *kripâ*, we must most carefully refrain from *para-nindâ*.² Otherwise, in spite of performing *sâdhanâ* we shall be bereft of Bhaktidevi's *kripa*.

"Sri Goursundar lifted both His arms and called out to the world at large –'Be *aninduk*³ and chant the Holy Name of Krishna! If you are *aninduk* and carefully chant the Holy Name I pledge firmly unto you that I shall deliver you."

- (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

If we fix our gaze on this declaration of Sriman-Mahaprabhu, He will most certainly shower His *kripa* on us – harbor no doubt about it.

Vivek das – Now I know why, in spite of chanting Holy Name so many times, I am not progressing in *bhakti*. The saddest part of my life is that, I forsook everything – my home, luxury, wife, children, and relatives – but I could not give up *para-nindâ*. Please tell me, how can I rescue myself from this miserable state?

Gour kripa – Sriman-Mahaprabhu has said in this context –

"I tell you there is but one truth. You have committed many *aparâdhs* (*nindâ*) unknowingly; but henceforth if you never ever commit *nindâ* and constantly glorify Sri Vishnu and the Vaishnavs, then these *aparâdhs* will leave you. This is the only means to get out of this trouble. Even if you perform crores of penances, you will not be cleansed."

Sri Goursundar continued, "Whoever does not obey this command and still commits *nindâ* is verily a sinner and floats in the ocean of misery. When someone indulges in the *nindâ* of my servant, my all-powerful Holy Name destroys him. I have countless servants in infinite universes. Whoever is envious of a single one of them surely perishes."

- (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

¹ Scholar of Vedanta

² Slandering others

³ One who does not commit ninda

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Vivek das – Now I understand that it is not enough to avoid *Nâm-aparâdh* alone; I have to be very careful about *nindâ* also.

Please have mercy on me and throw some more light on the blocks in *bhakti* and how to remove them.

Gour kripa – The goal of our life is to obtain God. If we are firm on this point and we are striving hard to progress in *bhakti*, then first of all we must be aware that – “God exists in every element.”

God exists in every element – This is the beginning of *sâdhanâ* and also the end. *Sâdhanâ* begins with–

"Jibe sammân dibe jani krishna adhishtân."

Meaning – “We must respect every living being since Krishna dwells in each and every one.” - (C.C.)

And *sâdhanâ* ends in –

"jâhân jâhân netra pode tâhân krishna sphure."

Meaning – “Krishna reveals Himself wherever we glance.” - (C.C.)

All *Shâstras* have repeatedly mentioned this fact. It is impossible to obtain God if we are not aware that “God exists in every element.”

*"sarva-bhuta-sthitang yo mâng bhajaty-ekatvam-âsthitah,
sarvathâ vartamâno'pi sa yogi mayi vartate."*

Meaning – “The devotee who is equal towards all, and forsaking all differences, adores Me – the One Who dwells in every element – he always resides in Me.”

❖ (Sri Gita 6.31)

*"yo mâm pashyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pashyati,
tasyaham na pranashyâmi sa cha me na pranashyati."*

Meaning – “The one who sees Me in every element and sees every element in Me, we continuously gaze upon each other.”

❖ (Sri Gita 6.30)

There is no existence other than God. He is the cause and He is the ingredient of every element. He is present in all living beings as the Witness.

"mayâ tatam-idang sarvang jagad-vyakta-murtinâ."

Meaning – “I am present throughout Creation as the Unmanifested.”

- (Sri Gita)

*"vistârah sarva-bhutasya vishnur-vishwam-idang jagat,
drashtavyam-âtmavat tasmâd-bhedena vichakshanayih.
sarvatra daityâh samatâm-upetâ samatwam-ârâdhanam-achyutasya."*

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Meaning- "O *Daityas!* All Creation is the expansion of Vishnu. Therefore, we must consider everybody as our own. This sort of perception is 'God adoration'."

- (Vishnu Puran)

Having embarked in *bhajan*, if we are not aware that "God exists in every element." we shall mete out differential treatment to others. This will lead to envy and violence. We shall lose concentration in *bhajan*. When we envy someone we envy Sri *Bhagavân*; for is not everyone within Him? And is He not within all? This means we are worshiping and envying the same Person! Sriman-Mahaprabhu has said –

"Forget hurting a Vaishnav, the lowly man who hurts any being, adores Vishnu and tortures His subject, His worship is in vain and he eventually dies miserably. He is not aware that Vishnu exists in every element. This means, he thinks Vishnu is a material being! It is as if he massages a Brahmin's feet with one hand and bangs a stone on his head with the other one."

- (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

So, let us realize that He exists in every element. If we do not respect each and every soul, we are hurting Him Whom we are worshiping. This sort of *bhajan* is futile. Srimad-Bhâgavatam too says –

"I dwell in every being as the Witness. The one who ignores Me, thus situated (in all beings), and worships Me in various forms such as Deity, is embarrassing. If you ignore Me –as situated in all elements - the Witness and Controller of every being – and worship Me in various forms such as Deity, you are only pouring *ghee*¹ in ashes. If you disregard living beings and worship Me, albeit with many ingredients, I am not pleased. So it is your duty to be aware that I am present in all elements, be impartial and friendly to all, and adore everyone with hospitability and respect."

This does not mean that we should not worship Deity. Of course, we must worship Deity, but at the same time, we must be aware that He is present in all elements. We should love and respect every being. Otherwise, our *pujâ*² is 'lost labor'.

So now, you see, **we started out to love God, and we are committing a grave mistake right at the onset.** It is indeed unfortunate! I love God - yet I envy and hate the ones in whom He resides! Does this not imply that I have not succeeded in loving Him? If someone asks us, "How much does this mango weigh?" - shall we weigh it after discarding its seed and peel? Similarly, whenever we consider God, we have to consider all living beings along with Him.

¹ Clarified butter

²Honor, worship, respect, revere, venerate, pay homage, adore – (Pancharâtra)

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"The one who knows Krishna's *swarup*¹ and three *shaktis*² knows all about Krishna." - (C.C.)

We perform Love-*sâdhanâ*. Will our love remain confined to just one *kunja*³? Then it is a very narrow love indeed! But this is not true! When a single spark of this Love enters us, we realize Love within each molecule, nay, each atom. This Love is so magnificent that we should be careful not to minimize it. So the bard has sung –

"O mind! You did not bow your head at every foot. Do you not realize the Treasure of your heart dwells amidst all? *Bhagavân* is in every being and He is the same. You puffed up and insulted others. O my foolish mind! Do you not know - your Priceless Beloved Krishna exists in so many forms? If you desire Him, if you have any wish to get Him, make everyone your own, beg at his or her feet and love all. If you cannot do it, your *sâdhanâ* and *bhajan* are worthless. Consider yourself fallen; you will gain from it. You will get His lotus-feet, intoxicate your heart and beget *prem*. Otherwise you will only come and go (roam around in the cycle of birth and death) and never gain that priceless treasure called 'Love'."

We simply cannot avoid this point in our *sâdhanâ*. We shall love *Bhagavân* and not love our fellow men - then we can be sure that we shall never love *Bhagavân*. If we really love *Bhagavân*, we shall love His creation as well. **I dislike or envy my fellow men and I say – "I love *Bhagavân*". Most definitely I am a liar!! On the other hand if I don't serve *Bhagavân* and say – "Service to mankind is the topmost *Dharma*", I am verily a cheat.**

When we experience Him as the One present in all and all present in Him, then we are Bhagavad-bhaktas (God-lovers). Srimad Bhâgavatam defines the best devotee as –

*"sarva-bhuteshu yah pashyet bhagavad-bhâvam-atmanah,
bhutani bhagavatyâtmanyasha bhagavatottama."*

Meaning – "He who experiences Sri *Bhagavân* in every element and perceives all objects in Him is the best devotee."

Sri Gita agrees with the above statement –

*"bahunân janmanân ante gyânavân mâm prapadyate,
vâsudeva sarvam-iti sa mahatma sudurlabhah."*

Meaning – "After many lifetimes a wise devotee realizes that 'Vâsudev is everything'. Such a great soul is very rare."

¹ Own form or shape, own condition, peculiarity, character, nature, 'by nature', 'in reality', 'by itself' –(Mahâbhârat, Pancharâtra, Nrisimha Upanishad)

² Power, ability, strength, might, effort, energy, capability, the energy or active power of a deity personified as his wife and worshipped by the respective devotees.

³ Flower-grove

Obstacles in Bhakti

There is nothing other than Him. *Advay-gyân-tatva*¹ Sri Krishna is *Swayam Bhagavân*². The more we realize it, the more we'll move away from hate and envy. We'll relish Divine *ras* more and more. When we develop this *bhâv*, all will appear nice and we will like everyone. We'll go beyond good and bad, happiness and sorrow, and submerge in the ocean of Krishna-*prem*. Although lotus leaves touch the water, they never get wet. Similarly, the good and bad, justice and injustice of this material world will not affect the *sâdhak*³ any more.

Vivek das – Everything you say is true; but how shall I get this realization? How can I get rid of liking some and disliking others? I can understand that He is the same and is present in every element, but when it comes to practicing, I cannot do it. What do I do?

Gour kripa – It is not as easy as we think. To bring this *bhâv* in us we must always keep our conscience awake. Conscience is a very sharp weapon. In all our waking hours, we must constantly feel this *bhâv*. When we move on the streets we should awaken this feeling in us – “Sri *Bhagavân* exists in every element” and we should indiscriminately respect everyone. If we ever see a fault in someone, we should think – “It is my mistake; when Sri *Bhagavân* exists in everybody, then how come I am superior to anyone? How dare I pick a fault in someone else?” We should evaluate ourselves constantly and correct ourselves. We should be very careful that we do not lapse into faultfinding. We should practice such *bhâv* daily. Then gradually this *bhâv* will become dense.

Vivek das – I am very much satisfied by your reply. Please tell some more about the roadblocks in *bhakti*.

Gour kripa – **Trinâdapi sunichena** –Sriman-Mahaprabhu said –

“Listen, O Swarup-damodar and Râmânanda Roy! In what manner should we chant Holy Name to get *prem*?

*trinâdapi sunichena tarorapi sahishnunâ,
amâninâ mânadena kirtaniya sadâ harih.*

We should be of superior quality, yet consider ourselves lower than a blade of grass. In addition, we should be as tolerant as a tree. A tree never protests even when we cut it and never begs for water in spite of dying of thirst. It gives its bounties to whosoever seek of it. It forebears the sun and the rain, yet it protects others who seek its shelter. Similarly, a Vaishnav should be superior to all, yet be devoid of false ego. We must respect others knowing that Sri Krishna is present in all, yet not seek any respect for

¹There is none like Him or above Him. The Rishis call this property as ‘advay’. He does not depend on anything. Therefore, He is the only One worthy of the adjective ‘self independent’. He is the only One Who has knowledge (jnân). He is also ‘tattva’ – here it means the ‘essence’. Both jnân and tattva indicate joy and all three are eternal. – Sripâd Râmânujâchârya.

²The Supreme personality Himself in His original form as Sri Krishna, the Son of Nanda Mahârâj, and a cowherd boy.

³ An assistant, an efficient and skilful person, a worshiper.

Obstacles in Bhakti

ourselves. If we chant in this manner, we shall get *prem* from the lotus-feet of Sri Krishna." – (C.C.)

Sriman-Mahaprabhu has given great prominence to this '*trinâdapi*' *shlok*. He has said – "We must always keep our gaze transfixed on this *shlok*. How much we can follow this *shlok*, that much we will relish *prem*."

Vivek das – You declared the Word. However, I cannot practice this '*trinâdapi*' *shlok* to the slightest extent. My great and good person, is there no other way than this '*trinâdapi*' *shlok*? I would like to follow that path, you know.

Gour kripa - No. This is the only door to enter the *Bhakti*-empire. Until we bow down, it is impossible to enter through this door, because this door is pretty low and narrow. If we think – "I cannot become so small, rather I will chant one more lakh *Harinâm*", *Bhakti Devi* is saying – "No. You cannot enter my empire by any other means. The day you become small, you come to me." Whosoever has gone beyond this door has first proved himself an epitome of '*trinâdapi*' *bhâv*.

Sri Sri Krishna das Kaviraj Goswâmi, the great author of *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* was Sriman-Mahaprabhu's true associate – just see how humble he was! He wrote –

"I am a sinner worse than Jagai and Madhai,
I am worse than a worm in the stool,
Whoever hears my name, loses all piousness,
Whoever utters my name, commits a sin."
– (C.C.)

Vivek das – Shall I tell you the truth? I am, after all, an intelligent person who can think and analyze. It hurts me to think that I am worse than a worm in the stool. How can that be?

Gour Kripa – See, the one who has really, and I mean really, has obtained *Bhakti Devi*'s *kripâ*, he always feels that *Sri Bhagavân* exists in every element. He perceives only good qualities in others. Let's try to understand this fact through a story –

Once upon a time, a young man approached a *siddha baba* and begged for his *kripâ*. The *Mahâtmâ* told him – "I will give you *dikshâ* later. First, you do a work for me. You search and bring me an object that everyone hates."

The youth searched high and low for a hateful object. On the way, he saw some stool. He said to himself, "Everyone hates it. Let me take it to Gurudev." As soon as he bent down to pick it up, he felt the stool talking indignantly - "O! You dare not touch me. Earlier I was *Bhog* fit for the Lord God. You hate me. After entering your tummy, I have become like this. Now everyone hates me. You are responsible for my sorry state! How dare you find me hateful! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? I sacrificed myself to give you life; in return, you offer me hatred! You shameless creature!! You dare not touch me. If I come in contact with you again I don't know what more miserable state I will attain."

Obstacles in Bhakti

The young man was shocked. He remained silent for some time and pondered. "It is true. The stool was indeed superior before. I am responsible for its sorry state. So it is better than me." Meanwhile he spotted a worm in the stool and said, "Alright, but what about the worm in this stool? Everyone hates it. I will take it to Gurudev." As soon as he bent forward to pick up the worm, he felt the stool talking again, "You there! Dare you touch it! You reduced me to this hateful state, while this worm will liberate me from this hideous form. It will eat me and mix me with the soil. I will mix with earth and help trees and plants to grow. They will blossom into beautiful flowers and fruits that the Lord will accept as *sevâ*. Once again, I will become blessed. The worm is my friend and you think he is hateful? Who is great - you, who have reduced me to this horrible state, or the worm who will reinstate me to a glorious form? Will you be able to do what the worm does? You think you are a man and so you have the right to feel proud! Go away!"

The youth bowed his head, paid obeisance to the worm in the stool. He went to his Gurudev, hanged his head in shame and stood in silence. Gurudev asked him, "What happened? Did you bring the most hateful object of all?" The youth uttered a cry, threw himself at Gurudev's feet and said, "O my Lord! I could not find a more hateful object than myself. Please forgive me."

Gurudev smiled at him in joy, and said, "My child, you have realized the truth. Come, let me give you *dikshâ*."

Therefore, you understand that the great devotees accept only the good qualities of others. Sri *Bhagavân* has bestowed one or the other good quality in every living being. Therefore, a devotee must see only the good in others and not consider his faults.

This creation is like a machine. A machine has many parts. Every part plays some role in running the machine. Now if I think the big part of the machine is doing more work and the small part is doing less work, I will be committing a great mistake. If that small part stops working, the entire machine will halt. In the same manner, In Sri *Bhagavân's* creation, all living beings - big or small, are functioning according to His will. If I am so ignorant as to think I am better than others are, I am a fool. This is '*Maya*' or 'illusion'. When we gain Bhakti Devi's *kripâ*, we do not consider anyone small, rather we feel ourselves to be inferior. Just see how humble is Thakur Mahâshay¹ in Prem-bhakti-chandrika -

*mo sama patita nâi tribhubone dekho châi
narottam-paban nâm dhorô*

Meaning - "Look everywhere - there is none so fallen as myself. Please deliver me from my sins and take the name - 'The One Who purified Narottam'."

See how humble is Nâmâchârya Sri Haridâs Thâkur! He never entered Jagannâth Mandir lest his touch should defile anybody! Sriman-Mahaprabhu would celebrate with His devotees while Haridâs Thâkur, who was capable of purifying the *Devatâs*, would remain afar because he thought he was untouchable.

¹ Srila Narottam dâs Thâkur Mahâshay

Obstacles in Bhakti

One day Sriman-Mahâprabhu sent a message to Sanâtan Goswâmi from Totâ-Gopinâth calling him there. Sanâtan Goswâmi went via the long route – through the scorching sand on the seashore. He did not take the short cut through the main road lest some priest should touch him and get defiled. Due to this, he got blisters on his feet, but he did not care for his pain. He was more concerned about others' feelings.

*"simha-dwâre jâite mor nâhi adhikâr,
bishesh thâkureer tânhâ sebaka prachâr.
sebak sob gatâgati koren âbeshe,
kâr sahit sparsha hoile mor sarbanâshe."*

Meaning – (Sanâtan Goswâmi said) – "I do not have the right to go through the Lion-gate¹, since the chief servants of Lord Jagannâth use that entry. They are busy and engrossed in sevâ. If I touch anyone he will be defiled and I shall perish."

They are close confidantes of Sriman-Mahâprabhu, yet see how humble they are! If we very badly want Bhakti Devi's *kripâ*, we must become extremely humble like them. Otherwise, we shall never relish Bhakti-ras.

Vivek das - One moment! You mentioned, "We should be like a tree that never protests even when it is cut, etc. etc." Tell me, if we do not protest when someone behaves unjustly then does it not promote the evil? The evildoer will gain more and more strength and ultimately destroy the world. I believe in the saying – "The one who is unjust and the one who accepts injustice are both worthy of contempt." Great writers too have made such statements. Then why do you say it is good to be tolerant?

Gour Kripa – See, there are two ways of looking at things. One is the material point of view and the other is the spiritual point of view. "The one who is unjust and the one who accepts injustice are both worthy of contempt." This statement has one meaning in the material world and a different one in the spiritual context. We devotees should understand that it refers to us, not to others. Let us discuss this point in detail. We must definitely protest, but against the evil in ourselves. If we notice a folly in ourselves, under no circumstance must we tolerate it! We must vehemently protest. If we find even a seed of material desire in ourselves, we must censure and chastise ourselves.

'Vaishnav-jivani'² tells us about a Bhajanânanadi Mahâtmâ who was giving a discourse on Srimat Bhâgavatam. He had a large audience. A breeze came, blew the sari off a Mâtâji's bosom, and revealed some part of her body. He saw this and was aroused. This Mahâtmâ immediately forsook the *Vyâs-âsan* and stood facing the audience. He said – "Look at me! All of you think I am Bhajanânanadi! Yet, I am aroused on seeing the revealed bosom of a woman. In spite of this, you continue to think I am a Bhajanânanadi. You mark me – I am so lowly!" Now you see what 'protesting against evil' means.

¹ The main gate of Sri Jagannâth Mandir

² Name of a book

Obstacles in Bhakti

'Vaishnav-jivani' tells us another fact. A certain Mahâtmâ had promised, "Even if someone spits on me, or throws stool and urine at me, I shall never tell anyone anything. If I do, I shall cut off my head with this weapon. If I do not fulfill my vow may I eternally perish in hell. I pledge in the name of Sri *Bhagavân*." He always kept a sharp knife with him, so that he may cut off his head if he broke his vow. See, what 'protest' means. It is very easy to speak up against other evildoers; but what step do we take against the evil tendencies in us? It is immensely difficult to recognize these tendencies, what to speak of protesting against them.

We have come here to reform ourselves, not to reform others. If we want to protest then it is better to protest against our own wrong doings. If we want to discipline someone, let that someone be we. Let us reform ourselves. If we wish to pick faults, let us pick our own faults.

want to protest against the injustice in this world? When we ourselves are ridden with so many follies, how can we rid the world of its evil? When our own hearts are black, how can we purify others? We ourselves are in darkness, how can we hold the torch for others? We are in material bondage, how can we liberate others? We are so impoverished, how can we distribute the priceless treasure of *Prem* to others?

Are you talking of doing good to the world? If we want to do some good, then let us first think of our own well-being. If we cannot do good for ourselves, how can we do good unto others? If we can reform ourselves, then we should think we have really done some good for this world. If we become pure and attain *Prem* in the lotus-feet of the Divine Couple, we should realize we have done a lot of good to this society. The one who has memorized all the books in all the libraries of the world is not necessarily a well-wisher.

If we can bear everything in silence, we are chaste. If we cannot, we are prostitutes.

Gour Kripa continues ----

If our hearts are unclean, we cannot do well for humanity by protesting against injustice. Such acts give rise to enmity. The faulty person does not reform. Therefore, if we have the slightest wish to gain *Bhakti*

Devi's mercy then we must stop protesting against others. Instead, we should seek our own flaws and get rid of them. The Lord of the world will worry for the world. I am begging for my own upliftment; how dare I think of uplifting others? If, by the mercy of Sri *Bhagavân* I manage to reform myself then I will not need the trumpet and drum to preach Pure *Bhakti*. It will happen on its own. This is why Sriman-Mahaprabhu has ordered us to be tolerant as a tree. If we can bear everything in silence, we are chaste. If we cannot, we are prostitutes. A '*sâdhu*' is one who has forbearance.

Obstacles in Bhakti

"urddha-bâhu kori kôhi shuno sarba-lok,
nâm-sutre gânthi mâlâ poro ei shlok.
trinâdapi sunichena tarorapi sahishnunâ,
amâninâ mânadena kirtaniyah sadâ harih.
prabhur âgnyây koro ei shlok acharan,
achirât pâbe tobe krishna-prem dhan."

Vivek das – You speak nothing but the truth. Nevertheless, I am unable to follow it. I don't even realize when I start seeing faults in a person and feel contempt for him. Please tell me an easy remedy to get rid of this disease.

Gour Kripa – The easiest way to practice the "trinâdapi" verse is to feel that God exists in every being. When He is present in everyone and everyone is present in Him then we shall not feel embarrassed to bow before anyone. Whenever we meet a person, we should get into this mood. This is the best way to practice "trinâdapi". Along with this, we should chant constantly without any gap. At the same time, we should give up all *aparâdhs* in body, mind and speech. There is no other way to get "trinâdapi" *bhâv*¹. If we do not follow this path even if show humility, it will only be external. Inside our false ego will always hold its head high.

"You must pay obeisance and have lots of respect for all beings – be it a Brahmin², Chandâl³ or a dog. It is the religion of Vaishnavs to pay obeisance to everyone. A Vaishnav who does not obey this dictum is a cheat."

❖ (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

Vivek das – By your mercy now, I have understood that without practicing "trinâdapi" I can never ever enter the realm of *bhakti*.

Please tell me some more about what is necessary for *bhakti*. I shall be grateful to you.

Gour Kripa – In the path of *bhakti*, as shown by Sriman-Mahaprabhu, one point we just cannot ignore is "**Guru-sevâ**".

In our Gaudiya Vaishnavism "Guru-sevâ" is extremely important. In all other spiritual paths, once the *sâdhak* gains 'sâkshâtkâr'⁴, there is no need for Guru-sevâ any more. Then Guru merges into God. In *gyân-mârg* and *Yog-mârg* once you reach the top – it is – "koun guru, koun chelâ, main hoon akela" (who is Guru? Who is the disciple? I alone am everything.) However, in our *sâdhanâ*, we have to serve Sri Gurudev during the *sâdhanâ* and when we attain *siddha-swarup*⁵. In this state, the *sâdhak*-body may perish, yet we continue with Sri Gurudev's *sevâ*. Even when we are participating in the Eternal Pastimes of the Divine Couple, we continue with Sri Gurudev's *sevâ*. Sri Gurudev not only reaches us to our *Ishtadev*⁶ he takes his disciple with him and together they engage perpetually in the Eternal Pastimes. When we

¹ To be in the mood – "I am lower than a blade of grass".

² Holy man, priest, pious

³ A heartless person.

⁴ Actual meeting with Sri Bhagavân

⁵ Spiritual form as revealed by Sri Gurudev – Manjari-form

⁶ Worshiped Deity, the Deity who wishes us well (Ishta).

Obstacles in Bhakti

meditate on our *siddha-deha* too, we should engage ourselves in Sri Gurudev's *sevâ* and serve the Divine Couple under his guidance. As a *sâdhak* if we do not please Gurudev with our *sevâ*, it is impossible to get the *sevâ* of the Divine Couple in *siddha-deha*. To serve Sri Gurudev as non-different from Sri *Bhagavân* with body, mind and speech is our foremost duty.

"*âchâryam mam vijâniyân-na-avamanyeta karhichit.*"

– (Srimat Bhâgavatam)

Meaning – "Sri Govinda is doing *kripâ* on me in the form of Sri Gurudev – we should serve him in this manner."

"Scriptures prove that Sri Gurudev is the form of Sri Krishna, and Sri Krishna bestows mercy on the devotees in the form of Sri Gurudev." – (C.C.)

We can never reach our goal without Sri Gurudev's mercy. Thâkur Mahâshay has said in P.B.C. –

"*sri guru-charana-padma keboli bhakati-sadma*
Bando mui sâbadhâna mate,
Jânhâro prasâde bhâi e bhaba toriyâ jâi
Krishna-prâpti hoy jâha hote."

Meaning – "Sri Gurudev's lotus-feet are the only repository of *bhakti*. I worship such lotus-feet most carefully. By their mercy I cross the material ocean and gain Sri Krishna."

The author of P.B.C. also says –

"*sri guru-charane rati ei se uttâmâ-gati*
je prasâde pure sarba âshâ."

Meaning – "Deep attachment for Sri Gurudev's feet is the highest goal of mankind; for, by their mercy all spiritual desires are fulfilled."

The author of P.B.C. has called 'deep attachment for Sri Gurudev's feet' as the highest goal. This means there is nothing higher than this. It is the best thing we can attain. Shâstras tell us that 'a loving *sevâ* such as massaging the lotus-feet of the Divine couple is the highest goal of human life'. Who gives us that *sevâ*? Sri Gurudev. He takes us to the secluded *Kunja*. Even Sri Radharani cannot take us there without Sri Gurudev's permission. This is because our *sevâ* is always '**under guidance**'. We shall get the *sevâ* of Sri Sri Râdhâ-Mâdhav in the most confidential pastimes in the *kunja* only under the guidance of Sri Gurudev. There are no ways to reach there on our own. Sri Gurudev will give me that goal by his mercy. Therefore, after taking *dikshâ*, if we go to some lonely, silent spot and try to meditate on only the *sevâ* of the Divine Couple, and never think of Sri Guru-*sevâ*, it is hopeless. Unfortunately, this is the trend in the present generation of devotees. Even if we go to a secluded place for *bhajan*, there also we have to first serve Sri Gurudev in the external body and meditate first on Sri Gurudev's *sevâ* in *siddha-swarup*. Then we can enter *Yogpeeth-sevâ* following Sri Gurudev in our *siddha-swarup*.

Obstacles in Bhakti

We do meditate on *sevâ* so that we may get actual *sevâ* someday. We call this '*sâkshât-sevâ*'. When we get *sâkshât-sevâ*, we do need *mânasi-sevâ* (do *sevâ* in meditation) any more. **Here we have Sri Gurudev still present on this earth and we go and perform *mânasi-sevâ*! When we can serve him in reality, we are sitting in a lonely spot and serving him in meditation! Is this not foolish?** In silence, I am serving him so lovingly and in reality I don't care for him – I don't want to carry out his

After taking *dikshâ*, if we go to some lonely, silent spot and try to meditate on only the *sevâ* of the Divine Couple, and never think of Sri Guru-*sevâ*, it is hopeless. **Unfortunately, this is the trend in the present generation of devotees.**

order, please him or serve him in a manner he likes. What sort of *bhajan* are we doing? If Sri Govinda appears before me just now, shall I serve Him in meditation? Similarly the Gurudev whom I am serving in meditation – is he someone else? Or is he the same person who has taken *kripâ* on me and shown me how to gain the *sevâ* of the Divine couple? If the answer is 'yes', then when he is present before me now, how come I am not serving him? Whom am I serving in meditation? Such *bhajan* is useless.

*"tâate krishna bhaje kore gurur seban,
mâyâjâl chhuti pay shrikrishna-charan."*

Meaning – "The one who practices Sri Krishna-bhajan and simultaneously serves Sri Gurudev, gets free from *Mâyâ-jâl*¹ and reaches Sri Krishna's lotus-feet."

- (C.C.)

Sri Chaitanya Charitâmrita is very clear on this point. It won't do to worship only Sri Krishna. Sri Gurudev's *sevâ* is the topmost.

Vivek das – You have spoken the absolute truth; but what about the devotees who have taken *dikshâ* and are staying far from their Gurudev? They are compelled to remain far because of their occupation. Then, according to you, they are not performing *bhajan* at all in the real sense.

Gour Kripa – Suppose a father has five sons. One of them lives in a foreign country due to his occupation. One looks after the family business, while another lives with the father and takes his personal care. It does not mean the one who resides far is not pleasing the father. I am not talking about the disciples who live far away due to their occupation. I am discussing what the disciples who live near Sri Gurudev must do – the ones who have forsaken everything and are living in Sri *Vraja-dhâm* to serve the lotus-feet of the Divine Couple.

¹ Snare of material bondage and suffering

Obstacles in Bhakti

What about the disciples who remain far? If the *grihasthas*¹ who live in some other place are also greedy for spiritual benefit, they must come to Sri Gurudev from time to time and serve him personally. It is their bounden duty. Some devotees think massaging Sri Gurudev's body is the only *sevâ*. However, this is not true. Real Guru-*sevâ* consists of pleasing Sri Gurudev in all respects. The householders who live far should set aside a portion of their honest income for Sri Guru-*sevâ*. They should serve Sri Gurudev with their body, mind and wealth – in every possible way. The renounced disciples should serve him with their body and mind.

The householders should serve Sri Gurudev with their body, mind and wealth – in every possible way.

Vivek das – There are many Gurudevs who do not accept any *sevâ* from their disciples. What should we do under these circumstances?

Gour Kripa – Look, if we have a very strong desire for *sevâ*, we will definitely seek out *sevâ* and please Sri Gurudev. Sri Narottam das Thâkur Mahâshay is a burning example.

His Sri Gurudev – the most worshiped Sri Lokanâth Goswâmi did not accept *sevâ* from anyone. (Thâkur Mahâshay had not yet taken *dikshâ*). Thâkur Mahâshay used to sweep and clean the place where Sri Lokanâth Goswâmi passed stool and urine. However Lokanâth Goswâmi was not aware of this. Thâkur Mahâshay served him in this manner daily and for a long time. He had thus managed to please Sri Lokanâth Goswâmi. If we have a strong desire, we will definitely seek out the opportunity for *sevâ*. Eagerness and caring attitude are the only requisites. If we do *sevâ* only out of a sense of duty, it is useless. In case we cannot get an opportunity for *sevâ*, we should approach Sri Gurudev and humbly request him to command us – “Please order me to render *sevâ* unto your lotus-feet.”

Vivek das – Please tell me – *Shâstras* state that a Guru should be ‘the one who is devoid of lust, anger etc., without a disease, the one who has excellent *Râgâtmikâ Bhakti* at the lotus feet of Sri Krishna, is a scholar of the Vedas and all *Shâstras*, respected by *sâdhus* and has conquered his senses.’ *Shâstras* instruct us – “A person who wishes to learn the *Mantra* of how to cross the ocean of material bondage and suffering should take the shelter of such a Gurudev”. However, after taking *dikshâ* some disciples discover their Gurudev does not possess the above qualities. Instead, he has the opposite qualities, then what should the disciple do?

Gour Kripa – You have asked an extremely painful question. The disciple should think about all this before he takes *dikshâ*. After *dikshâ* if he thinks like this then he will not only suffer spiritually, but also fall down. In fact, there is a great possibility of falling down.

¹ householders

Obstacles in Bhakti

After accepting Sri Gurudev, we must have firm faith that "My Sri Gurudev is free of all *dosh*¹. He is full of all excellent qualities and all capable. I am ignorant, so I do not realize this."

*"mohimây guru-krishna ek kori jâno,
guru-âjnâ hride sada satya kori mano.*

*gurur bikriyâ jadi dekhoho kokhono,
tathâpi abajnâ nâhi koro kadâchana.'*

Meaning – "Know Sri Gurudev and Sri Krishna to have the same excellent qualities. Have firm faith that Sri Gurudev's command is the Supreme Truth. Even if you see Sri Gurudev's weak points, do not ever feel contempt for him."

Every *sâdhak* sings this hymn as soon as he wakes up. Just singing the hymn will not help. We must put this to practice. Idle glorification is useless. We will not get any *kripâ*.

Vivek das - It is right. Nevertheless, even after trying very hard what if we fail to make our heart understand? I mean, what if we continue to see in him those flaws that *Shâstras* prohibit? Then the respect diminishes day by day. What should the disciple do under such circumstance?

Gour Kripa – Sripâd Jiva Goswâmi has instructed such unfortunate disciples to remain away from their Spiritual Master. He has said – "*ataeva durata eva-ârâdhyanta-drisho-guruh.*" It will not do only to remain away. We should control our minds, get rid of *dosh-buddhi*² and take shelter of Holy Name. We should try our level best to please Sri Gurudev, since Sri Guru-kripâ is the root of all *bhajan*.

"Sri Mâdhavendra Puri was pleased and embraced Sri Ishwar Puri. He blessed him that he will get the priceless treasure of Sri Krishna-*prem*. From then onwards, Sri Ishwar Puri became an ocean of Sri Krishna-*prem*, while Sri Râmchandra Puri became full of defects. If we disregard Guru then we suffer like this. Ultimately we offend Sri *Bhagavân* also." – (C.C.)

Vivek das – Please tell me, O revered Sir, if Sri Gurudev passes some improper command, then too should we obey?

A *sadguru* never gives improper commands. Nevertheless, if some unworthy Guru orders his disciple to perform an act that *Shâstras* prohibit, then *Shâstras* tell us that we must not perform that action. Srila Jiva Goswâmi has said in Sri Bhakti-Sandarbha –

*'yo vyakti nyâya-rahitam-anyâyena shrinoti yah,
tâvubhau narakang ghorang vrajatah kâlam-akshayam.'*

¹ Fault, guilt, sin, vice, crime, blemish, defect, flaw, imperfection, weak points in one's character, faults of speech.

² The feeling that Sri Gurudev has any *dosh*

Obstacles in Bhakti

Meaning – “The Guru who orders his disciple to act improperly, unlawfully or unjustly and the disciple who obeys such an order – both rot in hell forever and ever.”

Vivek das – I have one serious doubt. You quoted, “*Guru Krishna-rup hon shâstrer pramâne*” and “*mohimây guru-krishna ek kori jâno.*” Suppose I select someone as my Guru. How will he suddenly become Krishna? All right, I’ll explain more in detail. Suppose I give *Ishta-Mantra* to someone. Then how did I become *Bhagavân*? How is it possible that I will gain the same excellent qualities as Sri Krishna? After all, I am a slave to sense gratification. I know it.

Gour Kripa – I’ll try to explain logically. Suppose a king sends an ambassador to a king of another country. That ambassador does not possess any good quality of the king. He is only an obedient servant of the king. Yet he will receive all respect from the other king. His own king too will be pleased to know how they have honored him. He will think the king of the other country has honored him. Whereas, if the people of that country disregard the ambassador, his king will take it as a personal insult and will declare war on that country. In addition, the ambassador signs contracts on behalf of the king. Both the kings uphold the conditions of the contract.

Similarly, our Sri Gurudev is the Lord’s ambassador. *Shâstras* call him ‘*vyâshti-guru*’. Sri *Bhagavân* is the Supreme Guru – ‘*samashti-guru*’. However we must remember one very important point – if we take Mantra from any Guru, it is not necessary that Sri *Bhagavân* will accept him as His ambassador. That Guru must be in bona fide *Sampradây* and the Mantra he gives must be handed down in *Paramparâ*. Only the Mantras that travel down in *Paramparâ* come directly from Sri *Bhagavân*. Then He will accept such a guru as his ambassador. Otherwise, we may learn Mantras just by reading a text. Why is it necessary to have a Guru at all? Mantras that do not travel through *Sampradây* and *Paramparâ* are fruitless.

“If you chant Mantras that do not travel through *Sampradây* and *Paramparâ*, even for crores of *kalpas* - they will not yield any result.” – (Goutamiya Tantra)

In truth, there is no difference between Sri Gurudev and Sri Krishna.

“If Sri Krishna bestows *kripâ* on some fortunate soul, then Sri Gurudev, who reposes in the devotee’s heart, teaches him on his own.” – (C.C.)

When Sri Gurudev is pleased with us, Sri Krishna too is pleased. As soon as Sri Gurudev blesses us, Sri Krishna too bestows His mercy. When Sri Gurudev is displeased, Sri Krishna too is displeased. Since Sri Gurudev is Sri Krishna’s ambassador, His excellent qualities act through him. This is why we sing “*mohimây guru-krishna ek kori jâno*”.

“Although my Guru is the servant of Sri Chaitanya Mahâprabhu, I know him to be His expansion. *Shâstras* declare that Sri Gurudev is non-different from Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna bestows *kripâ* on the devotees in the form of Sri Gurudev.”

- (C.C.)

Obstacles in Bhakti

Vivek das – This means that even if a person does not possess the good qualities as mentioned in *Shâstras*, and he only belongs to proper *Sampradây* and *Paramparâ*, he is qualified to be a Guru. We may accept *Mantra* from him. What is important is that the *Mantra* should travel in *Paramparâ*. I think that is what you said.

Gour Kripa – If we understand the topic like this then there will be a problem. *Shâstra* is the Word of Sri *Bhagavân*. *Shâstras* state the characteristics of Sri Gurudev as follows –

*"kripâ-sindhuh susampoornah sarva-sattva-upakârahah,
nisprihah sarvatah siddhah sarva-vidyâ-vishâradah.
sarva-samshaya-sangchhetta-analaso gururâhritah."*

Meaning – "He who is infinitely merciful, does not lack anything, is all qualified, a well-wisher of all, desire-free, all-learned, excellent expert in the principles of *bhakti*, can solve all the doubts of his disciples and hard-working is worthy of becoming a 'Guru'."

Srimad Bhâgavatam has said –

*yasmâd gurung prapadyet jignâsuh shreya uttamam,
shâbde pare cha nishnâtang brahmany-upasham-âshrayam.*

Meaning – "Someone who wants to know about what he should do and not do, who wants to know what is best for him, should take shelter of a *Sadguru*. The Spiritual Master should be learned in the Word of God (*Shrutis*), and have God-realization. He should be untainted by materialism. If he has these qualities, he is a 'Sadguru'."

Shâstras want us to have such a Spiritual Master. When a Guru is endowed with such qualities, then Sri *Bhagavân* works through him.

Vivek das – Then, does it mean, if we take *diksha* from a Gurudev who belongs to *Paramparâ* and proper *Sampradây*, but is devoid of these qualities, is it useless?

Gour Kripa – Well, maybe it is not completely useless. However, the devotee has to work very hard. He has to undertake a lot of suffering. If the Guru has the above-mentioned qualities, *sâdhanâ* becomes much easier for him. Otherwise, what happens? When the Guru cannot solve a disciple's doubt, his respect for the Guru may diminish. If the Guru does not possess a wealth of *sâdhanâ*, then he cannot transmit the power of *sâdhanâ* into his disciples. Thirdly, if he is tainted with materialism then he expresses anger etc. due to which the disciple may start finding faults with his Guru. Fourthly, he finds it very difficult to equate his Guru with God. Nevertheless, under all circumstances, if the disciple continues to have absolute faith in his Guru, and practices all aspects of *bhajan* without committing any offence, then he may be successful. But, this also depends on *sukriti* collected in past births.

We should remember that Gurudev is necessary to obtain mercy and become strong in *bhajan*. Both are very powerful potencies of Sri Krishna. If the

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Spiritual master's heart has not mingled completely with these potencies of Sri Krishna, then it is useless taking *dikshâ* from him. **The one whose heart is worthy of receiving Sri Krishna is qualified to be a Guru.**

Vivek das – Yes. The *Shâstras* say so many things about *bhajan*, please enlighten me about some easy methods in this matter. I shall be ever grateful.

Gour Kripa – *Shâstras* have stated 64 rules of Bhajan. Of these, five are very important.

Five Important rules of Bhajan

1. We must serve Sri *Vigraha* with *shraddhâ*¹.
2. We must hear Srimad Bhâgavatam
3. We must associate with *Sâdhus*.
4. We must practice Sri *Harinâm-sankirtan*.
5. We must live in *Vraja-dhâm*.

If the *sâdhak* obeys these five instructions, the Lord will fulfill his Spiritual desires.

Vivek das – I am following all five instructions. However, it is not bearing any fruit. I have forsaken everything and am now living in Sri Dhâm Vrindavan. I am performing Sri *Harinâm-sankirtan* also. I am hearing Srimad Bhâgavatam regularly and serving Sri *Vigraha*. What to speak of *sâdhu-sanga*² - wherever I look - there are *sâdhus* and *sâdhus* only. I am living right in the midst of *sâdhus*. Yet I see no good sign. Why?

Gour Kripa – You are, no doubt, following the five instructions. However, **you are not following them accurately.** There is some mistake inside.

Vivek das – You surprise me. Please tell me what you mean by 'not following accurately.' Please instruct me about the right way to carry out the instructions.

Gour Kripa – Listen very attentively.

1. Serving Sri Vigraha with shraddhâ

Sevâ alone does not suffice. We must serve our Deities with love. We should ponder on how much of our *sevâ* contains love. All renounced Babajis serve Sri Giridhâri. Many a times we feel irritated while doing *sevâ*. We keep on thinking – "When will this *sevâ* get over?" Maybe we have some money; yet instead of spending it on the Lord's *sevâ*, we only offer chickpeas. In spite of having money, we may offer only water and *Tulsi*. He is the soul of my soul. Yet in spite of having money, I offer Him only water and *Tulsi*. Then is it not clear that I do not love Him at all?

¹ Extremely firm Scriptural faith – (C.C.)

² Associating with devotees.

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Yes, Shâstra does say –

*"tulasi-dala-mâtrena jalasya chulukena va,
vikrinite swam-âtmânang bhaktebhyo bhaktavatsalah."*

Meaning – "Sri *Bhagavân* loves His devotee so much that if he offers him only a palm full of water along with a *Tulsi* leaf, He becomes his slave."
- (Sri Gautamiya Tantra)

This holds good only for the penniless devotees - the devotees who do not have any money at all. In their case, Sri *Bhagavân* sees only the love and not the offering. He rejected Duryodhan's royal meal and ate Vidurâni's¹ banana-peels with extreme pleasure.

When a devotee engages in *sevâ* for many days in the *Mandir*, mostly after serving continuously for a long time, he becomes careless and loses enthusiasm for *sevâ*. He feels Sri *Vigraha-sevâ* a burden. He cleans the *Mandir*, does *Shringâr* and cooks.....but.....mechanically. Such *sevâ* is not much useful.

*"ashraddhayâ hutang dattang tapas-taptang kritancha yat,
asad-iti-uchyate pârtha na cha tat pretya no iha."*

Meaning – "O *Partha!* If one performs a sacrifice, charity, austerity or any other spiritual endeavor – if one lacks *shraddhâ*, I call it 'dishonest'. They are useless in this world and the next." – (Bhagavad-Gitâ)

Many devotees who are engaged in Sri *Vigraha-sevâ* think – "I am not able to perform any *bhajan*. This *sevâ* is taking up all my time." **This shows disregard for Deity-sevâ and it is a mistake.** We should not harbor such wrong opinions.

*"ek anga sâdhe bohu anga,
nishthâ hoite upajaye premer taranga."*

**Our entire
Bhajan
comprises
of only sevâ**

Meaning – "We may practice one method of *bhakti* or many methods – but it should be with *nishthâ*². *Nishthâ* gives rise to waves of love."

Our entire *bhajan* comprises of only *sevâ*. We have to perform *sevâ* during *sâdhanâ*, and continue to serve even after we attain *siddhi* or success. It is our bounden duty to serve with utmost love.

2. Sâdhu-sanga or association with devotees

We should not associate with each and every devotee. We should be very careful with whom we associate. Most worshiped Srimad Rupa Goswâmi has mentioned - how we should associate.

*"krishneti yasya giri tang manasâdriyeta
dikshâsti chet pranatibhishcha bhajantamisham.
shushrushayâ bhajana-vijna-manasyam-anya-*

¹ Vidurji's wife

² Steadfast, perseverance

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nindâdi-shunya-hridam-ipsita-sanga-labdhyâ."

Meaning –

From whose lips you hear Krishna-*nâm*, you should respect him in your mind. When you meet someone who is initiated in Krishna-*mantra*, show him respect by paying obeisance. Serve the one who is learned in Krishna-*bhajan* with *shraddhâ*. However, associate with only the one who has single-pointed devotion and never ever commits *nindâ*.

"sajâtiya snigdha mahattara sâdhu-sangah."

Meaning – "We must associate with only a devotee who follows the same path of *bhajan* as we (*sajâtiya*), serene, more advanced than us, one who does not indulge in *nindâ* (*aninduk*), and learned in *bhajan*."

- Srila Vishwanâth Chakravarti

If we do not follow these rules of association, our *bhajan* may suffer and more harm done than good.

Harikathâ alone does not necessarily mean '*sâdhu-sanga*'. If both the devotees quarrel on some point and both get agitated, then such association will result in Vaishnav-*aparâdh*. If both the devotees do not follow the same path of *bhajan*, then each will try to justify his own path, or both may try their level best to prove that his *bhajan* is greater than the other's. This will result in competitiveness and ill feeling.

If the devotee is not learned in *bhajan*, he may give wrong instruction due to his lack of knowledge. Ultimately, we will suffer.

If the devotee, with whom we associate, indulges in *nindâ*, then he may criticize some Vaishnav while giving some example during *Harikathâ*. Hearing such *nindâ* will harm our *bhajan*. Hence, we must be extremely careful while associating with devotees. Of course, we should pay respectful obeisance to all, but we must not associate with every body. We should also remember – residing together or chitchatting does not mean '*sâdhu-sanga*'. Rather this sort of so-called 'association' is harmful for the devotee.

Vivek das – You have mentioned some qualities for *sâdhu-sanga*. I am a fallen person and inexperienced too. How can I judge a Vaishnav. *Shâstras* say –

"baishnaber kriyâ-mudrâ vigne nâ bujhoy."

Meaning – "Even the wise cannot understand a Vaishnav's action and expressions."

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So, please tell me some easy means by which I can do the right *sâdhu-sanga*. Please enlighten me.

Gour Kripa – You will surely be able to note two points. First, whether he is *aninduk* (one who does not indulge in *nindâ*). Second, whether he gets heated. If he is *aninduk* and does not get heated during a discussion, and he is serious about *bhajan*, you may take his association. **After this, how will you understand whether you have benefited from his association or not?** After

association, we should contemplate

– after associating with this devotee have I become more Krishna-conscious? Am I feeling more enthusiastic about *bhajan*? Am I feeling calmer than before? If the answer to the above questions is “no”, that is, we are still feeling the same as before, or maybe my state has worsened, then we should conclude that the association was useless.

Vivek das – It is very difficult to come across such association. On the other hand, if we do not associate we are deleting a very important part of *bhajan*. What option do we have?

Gour Kripa – Do not be disappointed. Our *Âcharyas* have composed plenty of Bhakti-granthas. Their thoughts and realizations shine brilliantly through these texts. If we read these *Shâstras*, we are associating with that particular Goswâmi. It is excellent *sâdhu-sanga*. Let us read Sri Chaitanya-Charitâmrita, Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat, Brihad-Bhâvatâmritam, along with the explanations given by our Goswâmis. We shall get tremendous result of *Sâdhu-sanga*.

*bujhe bâ nâ bujhe keho, shunite shunite seho,
ki adbhut chaitanya charit,
krishne upajibe preeti, jânibe raser reeti,
shunilei hoy boro hit.*

“Sri Chaitanya Mahâprabhu’s life is so wonderful that if we hear constantly although we may not understand anything, we shall gain love for Krishna and learn the doctrine of *ras*. It benefits us if we simply hear it.”

❖ (C.C.2.2.76)

3. Hearing Srimad-Bhâgavatam

It is not enough just to hear Srimad-Bhâgavatam. The speaker should be worthy of speaking on this divine topic. Our *Âchâryas* have instructed us about his qualities.

"vaktâ sa-râgo ni-râgo dwividhah parikirtitah,

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*sa-râgo lolupah kâmi tad-uktang hrit na sansprishet,
upadeshang karotyeva na parikshâng karoti cha,
aparikshy-opadishtang yat loka-nâshaya tad-bhâvet."*

Meaning – "There are two types of speakers -

- ❖ **Sa-râg speaker** – He is materialistic. He is greedy for money, fame and power. His words do not touch the heart. He gives all sorts of advice, but he himself does not follow them. Such speakers are harmful for the people.

Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd said, "*rasikaih saha sri-bhagavatârtha-swâdah.*"

Meaning – "The speaker should be one who has relished Bhâgavat-ras practically."

This means that, if the speaker has not relished divine *ras* himself, he cannot reach it to his audience. He may be a great orator, but the audience will not benefit truly from such *Harikathâ*.

Suppose, one day, someone tells you that a widow has lost her only child. He describes the heart-rending cry of that widow. It does not touch your heart. Nevertheless, when you saw her state with your own eyes – how she is lamenting for her lost child – you could not control yourself. You too started weeping. In the same manner, if the speaker has not relished the *ras* of Bhâgavatam himself, he will not be able to drench your heart.

If the speaker is not thorough in the content matter, and does not understand or know the correct principles, he will convey wrong *siddhântas* to his audience. The people in general do not have much spiritual knowledge. They will learn wrong *siddhântas* and think that the *Shâstras* preach such teachings.

If the speaker is not thorough in the content matter, and does not understand or know the correct principles, he will convey wrong *siddhântas* to his audience.

- ❖ **Ni-râg speaker** – He is immersed in Bhâgavat-ras. When he presents the nectarine Bhâgavat-kathâ, it infects you with similar *bhâv*. He does not care for money, honor and glory.

So much about the speaker. Beside this, we should also make it a point to reminisce what we hear. Many a times we hear, but we do not ponder on what we hear. This means that it does not touch our heart. Then what is the use? Along with reminiscing, we should also follow all the rules and regulations of *bhakti* with body, mind and speech. Hearing alone is not useful.

Let us summarize -

- ❖ **The speaker should practice what he preaches.**

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- ❖ He should be a connoisseur of Bhâgavat-ras.
- ❖ We should hear attentively and reminisce what we hear.
- ❖ We should practice what he hear.

4. Sri Nâm-sankirtan

Chanting alone is not helpful. Srîman-Mahaprabhu has instructed us how we should chant –

*je rupe loile nâm prem upojâay,
tâhâr lakshan shuno swarup-râmaray.
trinâdapi sunichena tarorapi sahishnunâ,
amâninâ mânadena kirtaniyah sadâ harih.*

Meaning – “Listen O Swarup-Damodar and Râmânanda Roy! In what manner should we chant Holy Name to get *prem*?”

We should consider ourselves lower than a blade of grass and be as tolerant as a tree. We should respect everybody, but never expect any honor in return. We should constantly chant the Holy Name in all humility.” – (C.C.)

We should chant the Holy Name in this “*trinâdapi*” mood. Besides this, we must also strictly avoid *nindâ*.

*aninduk hoiya je krishna krishna bole,
satya satya krishna târe uddhârîbe hele.*

Meaning – “Krishna will easily deliver the one who chants His Name constantly without committing *nindâ*.” - (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

*je mor dâser sakrit nindâ kore,
mor nâm kalpatoru tâhâre sanghâre.*

Meaning – “My Name is a wish-fulfilling tree. He annihilates the one who commits *nindâ* of my servant (devotee).” - (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat)

The above *Shâstras* confirm that if we chant the Holy Name and continue to indulge in *nindâ*, then Sri Nâm Prabhu will be angry and destroy us. Hence, if we commit *nindâ* and with the same lips, we chant the Holy name, then what is the use? So, DEVOTEES! BEWARE!

*aparâdh châdi koro nâm sankirtan,
achirât pâbe tobeshri krishna-charan.*

Meaning – “Avoid *aparâdh* and chant the Holy Name. Very soon you will gain Sri Krishna’s lotus-feet.” - (C.C.)

This means that we should carefully avoid the ten-fold *Nâm-aparâdhs* also.

Bhajan is of two types –

- ❖ **Sâ-sanga Bhajan** – When we perform *bhakti* along with meditating on Sri *Bhagavân*’s Name, beauty, excellences and *leelâs*, we call it ‘*Sâ-sanga Bhajan*.’

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- ❖ **Anâsanga Bhajan** – When we perform *bhakti* and at the same time think about various material topics, we call it 'Anâsanga Bhajan'.

Anâsanga Bhajan is not much useful. Therefore when we chant we should fill our minds with the sweetness of Sri Bhagavân and chant most lovingly. This is the rule of

Recap –

- ❖ **Chanting alone is not so useful.**
- ❖ **We should imbibe the mood of “*trinâdapi*” while chanting.**
- ❖ **We should strictly avoid *nindâ*.**
- ❖ **We must get rid of all external thoughts.**
- ❖ **We should fill our minds with the sweetness of Sri *Bhagavân* while chanting.**
- ❖ **We should chant most lovingly.**
- ❖ **Then Holy Name will be pleased and grant us *prem* in no time.**

5. Living in Mathura district.

Mathura district means 84 *krosh* Vrajamandal. Living in Vraja Mandal alone will not suffice. I am living in Vraja Mandal, but thinking about some village in Bengal. This is of no use.

*amâni mânad krshna-nâm sada lobe,
braje râdhâ-krishna-seba mânase koribe.*

Meaning – “Never expect any respect from anyone, but you must honor one and all. In addition you must spiritually (meditation) serve Sri Sri Râdhâ-Krishna in Vraja.” - (C.C.)

Sri Chaitanya Charitâmrita is commanding us to plant our minds firmly in Vrindavan and constantly meditate on Sri Yugal-kishor’s sweet pastimes.

living in Vrindavan; yet do not consider this Holy *Dhâm* as divine. I feel as if Sri Vrindavan is just like other material places. Maybe I think – “Vrindavan is like all other places. There is nothing special about it. The poets imagine a lot of things.” Thinking like this tantamounts to *Dhâm-aparâdh*¹.

*vrindâvanastheshu-api ye’tra doshâ’
naropayanti sthira-jangameshu,
ânanda-murtishu-aparâdhinaste
sri-râdhikâ-mâdhavayoh kathang syuh?”*

Meaning – “All the moving and non-moving objects of Vrindavan are made of intense bliss. The unfortunate people who find faults with them commit an *aparâdh*. Due to this they never become dear to Sri Sri Râdhâ-Mâdhav.”

❖ (Sri Vrindâvan-shatakam)

¹ Offence against Holy Place.

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*ye vrindâvana-vâsi-nindâna-ratâ ye va na vrindâvanang
shlâghante, tulayanti ye cha kudhiyo kenâpivrindâvanam,
ye vrindâvanam atra nitya sukha-chid-rupang sahante na va
taih pâpishtha nrâdhâmairna bhâvatu swapne'pi me sangatih.*

Meaning – “The evil people who commit *nindâ* of the residents of Vrindâvan and never glorify them, or compare Vrindâvan with other places, or say that this earthly Vrindâvan is not eternal and not blissful, are sinners. May I never associate nor see such lowly people.” - (Sri Vrindâvan-shatakam)

If we cut the trees or kill the insects and worms in Vrindavan thinking them to be like the trees, insects and worms of other places, we will be committing *aparâdh*.

*hâ-mâdhava-pâda-pankaja-rajah premonmâde tat-priya-
kridâ kânana-vâsisu sthira-chara-prâishu-api drohishu,
pradveshang parama-aparâdhâm-ahaho tyakte-tarairapyaghair-
yukto'py-âmaranânta labdha vasati vrindâvane syat kriti.”*

Meaning – “Animals, birds, insects, worms, trees, creepers, moss and all other living beings reside in the garden of Vrindâvan that is overwhelmed with the divine love-sports of Sri Sri Râdhâ-Mâdhav. These creatures always live in the dust of the lotus feet of the Divine Couple. Therefore, even if they turn against us, we must never hurt them. If we do so, we commit great *aparâdh*. If we obey this rule, then residing in Vrindavan destroys all our sins.” - (Sri Vrindâvan-shatakam)

It is an *aparâdh* to consider *Vrajavâsis* as the people of any other place. We must not consider them ordinary or show contempt towards them.

*paraswa steyaika vâsanam-api nityang para-vadhu-
prasaktang vishweshâm-ahaha bahudhâ himsakamapi
durâchârang lobhâdy-upahatam-api bhrâta-rarunang
divândhastang vrindâvana-gata-janang nâvaganayeh.”*

Meaning – “Even if a *Vrajavâsi* gets interested in another’s wife or steals, or is violent towards mankind, is bereft of proper conduct, is greedy, do not show contempt towards him. Think to yourself “I am as blind as an owl in daylight, so am unable to see his good qualities.” Continue to think like this.”

❖ (Sri Vrindâvan-shatakam)

Gour Kripa – Residing in Vrindavan means – to settle here permanently. I am living in Vrindavan, yet traveling here and there on business purpose or for some other convenience, then we cannot call it ‘*Vraja-vâs*’.

Srila Prabodhânanda Saraswatipâd has made it very clear –

*milanti chintâmani kotikotayah
swaying bahir-drishtim-upaiti va harih,
tathâpi vrindâvana-dhuli-dhusarang
na deham-anyatra kadâpi yâtu me.*

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Meaning – Even if I get crores of wish-fulfilling gems, or Sri Hari tells me He will give me *darshan* outside Vrindâvan, I will not accept His offer. In stead I will roll on the dust of Vrindavan, yet I will not step outside Vrindavan.”

Recap –

- ❖ **We must consider Vrindavan Dhâm as divine.**
- ❖ **We must love and respect all moving and non-moving objects of Vrindavan**
- ❖ **We should be especially careful not to find fault with any resident of Vrindavan, or show disrespect in any way.**
- ❖ **We should not travel outside Vrindavan continue to live here until death with single-pointed devotion.**

If we follow the above rules, then we can say with confidence that “We live in Vrajamandal”. Then alone it is fruitful.

There are 64 rules of *Bhajan*. We have discussed the five most important points. Now we shall discuss a very important and unavoidable point – that is ‘**smaran**’.

g a U f U b

We have to integrate *smaran* in all our *sevâs*. It is something without which our devotional efforts are lifeless. *Smaran* means ‘meditating on Sri *Bhagavân*’s Name, beauty, excellences and *Leelâs*.’ We must fill our mind constantly with sweet thoughts of Sri Sri Gour-Govinda.

Thoughts have great impact on our body. If we think of a naked feminine body, we experience sexual arousal. The thought of raw tamarind with salt makes our mouth water. When we think of an enemy, we get angry. This means that thoughts make our body behave in certain manner. Therefore, we can safely conclude that if we are always immersed in the sweet thoughts of Gour-Govinda Lila, our body will slowly display divine qualities. Thoughts are that powerful.

The *Rishis* have churned all the *Shâstras* and have arrived at two conclusions – one “do” and one “don’t”. They are –

*smartavyah satatang vishnur-vismartavyo na jâtuchit,
sarve-vidhi-nishedhâh syuretayoreva kinkarâh.*

Meaning – “Always remember Sri Vishnu. Never forget Sri Vishnu.”

❖ (Sri Padma Purân)

❖

The rest of the commands are subservient to these two main commands.

Sri *Bhagavân* is telling us –

*ananya-chetâh satatang yo mâng smarati nityashah,
tasyâhang sulabhah pâth nitya-yuktasya yoginah.*

Obstacles in Bhakti

Meaning – “The one who constantly meditates on me with deep concentration – I am easily available to that *yogi*.”

In Srimad-Bhâgavatam Sri Shukadev Goswâmi told Parikshit Maharaj –

*tasmât sarvâtmanâ râjan hridisthang kuru keshavam,
mriyamâno hy-avasthitas-tato yâsi parâng gatim.*

Meaning – “O *Râjan*¹! You carefully meditate on *Bhagavân* Sri Keshav with all your might. Due to the effect of such meditation you will attain the Supreme Abode.”

Again, He told in Sri Gitâ –

*abhyâas-yuktena chetasâ na-anya-gâminâ,
paramam purusham divyam yâti partha-anu-chintayan.*

Meaning – “Dear Pârtha ! Do not let your mind wander elsewhere. In stead still your mind with repeated practice and concentrate on That Divine Personality (Me). Then you will attain Him.”

The aim of all *sâdhanâ* is to draw the mind away from material objects and fix it on Sri *Bhagavân*. As we practice meditation, our mind is so deeply immersed in Him that we are not aware of our body even. As long as our mind will remain attached to external objects, we will not relish true *bhajan*. This is because, when we think more about material objects we continue to taste the same.

Vivek das – You speak the truth. However, whenever I sit to perform *bhajan*, my mind gets engrossed in other things. I don't even realize when it happens. It involuntarily rushes towards sensual objects. Now, please tell me - how on earth do I control this terrible mind?

Gour Kripa – Arjun asked Sri *Bhagavân* in Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita –

*chanchalam hi manah krishna pramâthi balavad-dridhâm,
tasyâham nigraham manye vâyoriva sudushkaram.*

Meaning – “O Krishna! The mind is naturally flickering. It leads the senses astray, is extremely powerful and strong. Therefore I feel, just as it is impossible to control the wind, it is impossible to control the mind.”

Sri *Bhagavân* replied –

*asangshayang mahâbâho mano durnigrahang chalam,
abhyâsena tu kounteya vairâgyena cha grihyate.*

Meaning – “O strong-armed Arjun! The mind is naturally playful. Undoubtedly, it is very difficult to control it. Nevertheless, the son of Kunti, We can subjugate the mind with practice and renunciation.”

¹ King

Obstacles in Bhakti

Practice makes man perfect. **It is possible to achieve the impossible with practice.** A baby does not start walking the moment it is born. It has to practice walking. Gradually it learns to walk. The result of mental practice is more wonderful than physical practice. Our thoughts leave a mark on our subconscious mind. The wise call this – '*sanskâr*'. Many such *sanskârs* collect and form our nature. This *sanskâr* inspires us to perform a particular *karma*. The thoughts and *karmas* of our previous lifetimes form the *sanskâr* in this birth. My present thoughts and *karmas* will form my *sanskâr* in the future birth. Therefore, it is extremely important to fix our mind on Sri *Bhagavân*. In the future, this practice will form a *sanskâr* and inspire us on the path of Spiritual progress.

My father has not left me a single paisa. So shall I starve? Definitely not. I have to go out and earn for myself. Similarly just because I have not inherited a *sanskâr* of Bhakti from my previous birth, should I sit still? If I do, I will never gain any God-realization. I must practice meditation. Along with this, I must also perform detachment.

What is detachment?

When we are not attached to anything in this world, we are attached only to Sri *Bhagavân* we are 'detached'. It is natural for the mind to think of what we like. Therefore, as long as we relish material things our mind will think of the same. So we need to ponder on what is temporary and what is permanent. What we may do, we should be conscious – we should always ask ourselves – am I doing the right thing? Is it conducive for my *bhajan*? We must reject anything that is temporary and takes us away from the thoughts of Sri *Bhagavân*.

Our mind is like an equi-arm balance. One arm carries material objects while the other arm carries divine objects. If one arm is heavy, the other arm will move up. The more intensely we feel – "This world is temporary and devoid of happiness", the more our mind will move up (away) from worldly objects. "I have no one but Sri *Bhagavân*" – the more we feel this, we will become more detached from worldly things. When we feel more detached, the ambrosial Sri Krishna-*bhâv* will fill our hearts.

All the devotees who have done '*nirjalâ*'¹ fast know how, especially in the summer, our mind automatically conjure visions of water. The more our thirst increases, the thought of water becomes more intense. The more the hunger, the more we think of food. We don't have to try hard to think about food. Similarly, **to fill our mind with Sri Krishna-*bhâv*, we need hunger – a sense of lacking.** If we do not have this hunger, it is very difficult to concentrate on Sri *Bhagavân*, even forcefully.

¹ Fast without water,

Obstacles in Bhakti

Vivek das – I understand everything. But why do I not feel hungry? Why do I not feel this 'sense of lacking'? I know everything is temporary. I realize that my mind is absorbed in material things, and so I am not remembering Sri *Bhagavân*. Yet, why do I not feel any sense of lacking?

Gour Kripa – "I am not hungry" – this means I must have eaten something. Had I not eaten, surely I would have felt hungry. Similarly, if we don't feel we are lacking Sri *Bhagavân*, it means that we are still attached to material things. **Material objects do not mean only money, house, relatives etc. It also includes the desire for respect and fame.** It is easy to forsake house, relatives and friends, but it is extremely difficult to give up the desire for honor and glory.

If we are attached to other material things, it is possible we will survive, but if the craving for recognition enters our heart even once, it will kill any possibility of spiritual survival. It destroys the heart of a *sâdhak* just as a ferocious tigress tears open its prey. Our Goswâmis have called the desire for fame as a 'tigress'.

Once the *sâdhak* falls prey to this vampiress called 'honor', he is finished. She will suck the blood out of him. There is no more hope for any spiritual progress. I cannot tell you how much the desire for respect can ruin a *sâdhak*. If the *sâdhak* falls once in the clutches of this enemy, all his spiritual endeavors will go in vain.

When we think deeply, we realize that the world is temporary. Sri *Bhagavân* is my only friend. Although we say this, we do not show it in action. However if this feeling becomes firm, then automatically we will think about Sri *Bhagavân*. We will not have to make any special effort for the same. We will not find *ras* in material things any more. Listen, I'll tell you a story.

Once upon a time, there was a King. He suffered from some incurable illness. He had seen many doctors, but they could not cure him. Therefore, the King gave up all hopes for living and spent his time in misery. One day a sage arrived in the palace. The King served him carefully. The sage too became extremely happy with the King. Now the time of farewell arrived. The sage told the King – "*Mahârâj*, you have served me well. I am most satisfied. Please tell me what I can do for you." The King said, "See, O great soul, I do not lack anything material. However, I have been suffering from an incurable illness since many days. Please, can you cure me of this illness?"

The sage said, "*Mahârâj*, I will most certainly rid you of the illness, but you have to obey my command. Otherwise the medicine will have no effect." "Look *Mahârâj*", continued the sage, "As long as I give you the medicine, you must not desire for material enjoyment. If you have any such desire, the medicine will become ineffective. All this while, you have to practice celibacy. You cannot even see the face of a woman. If you promise to obey me, then I will give you the medicine." The King was overjoyed. He said, "O great one! I

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had given up all hopes of living. If you can get rid of my disease, I can do anything for you. What you are asking me to do is a small thing."

On the next day, the sage went to the forest and collected various herbs, roots and leaves. He squeezed out the juice. Then he poured it into two gold goblets – he half-filled one of them and filled the other one up to the rim. He gave the half-filled vessel to the King and asked him to drink it, while he gulped down the other one himself. This became a daily routine. After a month, the King felt completely well. In fact, he felt stronger and healthier than before the illness. At last, the King was convinced that the sage had cured him fully. However, the medicine had not stopped. After some time the King experienced lust. How much ever tried he could not control his mind at all. At last, the King approached the sage and expressed his condition. He said, "O great soul, for so many days, I had controlled myself, but since some days, I am experiencing an outburst of lust. Now I have recovered completely. I also want to know another thing – you drink twice the quantity of the medicine you give me. Yet, I don't think you face any problem. What is the reason for this? The sage said, "*Mahârâj*, I will reply tomorrow."

Next morning the sage told him, "*Mahârâj*! I came to know that, because you experienced lust, the medicine has become ineffective. Not only this, you will live only for one more month. Most certainly, you will die after one month. However, I shall give you some medicine so that you die in peace. You may enjoy how much ever you desire for this one month." As soon as the King heard this, he felt as if he had already died. The King did not like anything; he was the least interested in worldly affairs. He lost his appetite. As for associating with women – he forgot the matter entirely. On the other hand, the sage continued to give him one glass full of the medicine. The King too continued to drink it.

The King had changed completely. He neither talked nor met with anyone. He only thought of death. He thought of all the misdeeds he had committed in the past. He pondered on what would happen to him when he died. Would the *Yamaduts* come with a noose? Would he go to hell? Such questions troubled him constantly. He only counted the days remaining for his death. He did not like his home and family any more. He gave up all association and spent his time in the temple. He would gaze at the Deity and weep. On the last day of the month, the sage told the King, "*Mahârâj*, how are you?" The King replied in piteous voice, "O great soul, only my body is remaining, the soul is as good as gone." Again, the sage asked him, "*Mahârâj*, have you experienced any lust these few days?" The King said, "O great soul, what do you mean? I am going to die in a very short while. How can you expect me to feel lust?"

The sage said with a smile, "*Mahârâj*, you are completely well. Your lifespan too has increased. You will not die just now. Nevertheless you had asked me a question – why do I not experience lust in spite of drinking such a large amount of medicine? There is only one reason – *Mahârâj*, I always think that I may die any moment. Death is the only thing guaranteed to us. I feel this truth firmly, so material objects do not tempt me. You, on the other hand, felt you do not have to fear death any more. This is the reason why you felt the desire for material enjoyment. *Mahârâj*! This material world is temporary and so is this body. Even then, we waste this rare and precious human life in

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material enjoyment. This is suicide. *Mahârâj!* I cannot stress enough how precious is each moment of human life. We should always remember that we might die any moment. Therefore, it is extreme foolishness to waste human life in material pursuits.”

By now, the King too had gained awareness. He forsook all the happiness and opulence of his vast kingdom. Then he went away with the sage, in the dark night, for gaining the lotus-feet of Sri *Bhagavân*.

So, now do you understand? When we really feel the world is temporary and even this body is temporary, will we care for material things? If our hearts are not full of Sri Krishna and we are firmly attached to material objects, then we must try our level best, conscientiously, to immerse our mind in Sri Krishna and not in worldly objects.

Let us ponder; do the worldly objects really make me happy? No, they do not. Happiness is the property of the spiritual world. How can material objects give us joy? Are we not spirit souls? We make a very big mistake when we seek joy from this material world. When we obtain material things, we think, “I am happy”. Joy and sorrow are the states of the mind. Sometimes we see dreams that give us joy. Please let me explain with an example.

Suppose you have bought a lottery ticket. When the result was out, then you matched the number of your ticket and saw that you have the first prize. You went mad with happiness. After some time you decided to recheck the number, and you discovered that the number is right, but the series is wrong. The first prize goes to the number belonging to series ‘A’, while the number on your ticket belongs to series ‘B’. Now you broke down in sorrow. Please ponder – at first, you did not get the money, yet you celebrated. Later on you did not lose any money; still you went into mourning. This is ‘illusion’.

Every living being in the creation is striving hard to become happy. What happiness is this? It is the happiness of one’s true self (*swarup*). Sri *Bhagavân* is supremely happy. He always attracts the living being because he is a part of that happiness. “*yo vai bhumâ tat sukham*”. As long as we do not get Sri Krishna, Who is Complete Happiness, we shall continue to search for joy. The living being is caught up in the clutches of ignorance. He is full of false ego. Therefore, he searches for joy in material objects. As a result, he suffers in the cycle of repeated births and deaths.

*krishna bhuli sei jeeb anâdi bahirmukh,
ataeb mâyâ tare dey sansâr duhkha.*

Meaning – “The living being had been materialistic since time infinite and had forgotten Krishna. Therefore *Maya* makes him suffer in this world.”

❖ (C.C.)

The root cause of all the suffering is – we are engrossed in materialism and forgotten Krishna. So we must diligently give up this engrossment and immerse our mind in Sri Krishna-meditation. For this, we have to practice.

Obstacles in Bhakti

This is the sole reason why our saints have stressed Sri Sri Râdhâ-Krishna's *leelâ-smaran*¹ so much.

"Meditation is the life and soul of the mind (what is the mind without meditation?) It is the essence of meditation is the divine sports of the Divine Couple. This is both - the goal and the means to achieve it. There is no other goal and no other means. This Truth is the essence of all the laws."

❖ (Prem-Bhakti-Chandrikâ)

Meditation is the sole function of the mind. If we do not fill it with thoughts of Sri *Bhagavân*, it will most certainly rush towards material objects. It will become the home of wicked elements such as lust and anger. So if we allow the mind to wander in the jungle of worldly objects even for a second, we are asking for trouble.

Vivek das – But what about those who cannot do *leelâ-smaran*? Maybe they remain busy in too many *sevâs*, how will they meditate on Divine pastimes? Yet, Thâkur Mahâshay is saying – "This Truth (*leelâ-smaran*) is the essence of all the rules of *bhajan*." This means they will never be able to carry out true *bhajan*. What will they do?

Gour Kripa – Why? Prem-Bhakti-Chandrikâ says –

"Chanting Sri Sri Râdhâ-Krishna's Holy Name is the supreme meditation. Do not think twice about this."

We must chant *Mahâmantra* constantly and become one with the Holy Name. If we are unable to do *leelâ-smaran*, we must resort to chanting like this – with complete engrossment.

Vivek das – I don't understand. At first Thâkur Moshâi is saying – "Meditation is the life and soul of the mind (what is the mind without meditation?) It is the essence of meditation is the divine sports of the Divine Couple. This is both - the goal and the means to achieve it. There is no other goal and no other means. This Truth is the essence of all the laws." This means that *leelâ-smaran* is the topmost *sâdhanâ*. Again he saying –

"Chanting Sri Sri Râdhâ-Krishna's Holy Name is the supreme meditation. Do not think twice about this."

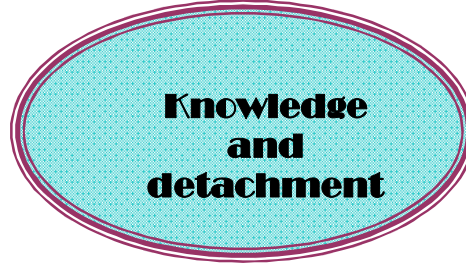
Here 'supreme meditation' means – this is also the topmost. Do we not find the two statements contradictory?

Gour Kripa – If we analyze like this with our material intelligence, we will be committing a big mistake. The devotees, who can perform *leelâ-smaran*, must do so. Those who cannot, they must chant with deep engrossment and without committing *aparâdh*. Slowly but surely by the mercy of the Holy Name, they will graduate to the level of *leelâ-smaran*. The great saints do not make contradictory statements. If I find something contradictory, it is because I am ignorant.

¹ Meditating on Sri Sri Râdhâ-Krishna's divine pastimes.

Obstacles in Bhakti

Vivek das – Earlier you mentioned detachment, but *gyân* (the path of knowledge) and *vairâgya* (the path of renunciation) are not parts of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* manifests by itself. Then what is the use of knowledge and detachment?



Gour Kripa – Look, knowledge and detachment are born of *bhakti*. These two children always remain in the shelter of their mother (Bhakti devi). I'll explain more clearly. When Bhakti Devi manifests in our heart, knowledge and detachment arrive there before she arrives. It is like this – before the sun rises, the eastern sky becomes bright and announce the rising of the sun. In the same way, before we gain *bhakti*, we gain knowledge and detachment.

Vivek das – But Thâkur Moshâi has said –

“The ignorant people strive after knowledge and fruitive actions; they do not know anything about *Bhaktiyog*.”

This means knowledge opposes *bhakti*.

Gour Kripa – Aha! It is a mistake to analyze like this. To which knowledge is Thâkur Moshâi referring? When the living being thinks he is equal to Sri *Bhagavân* – this sort of knowledge arises out of ignorance.

Knowledge can be of three types:-

1. Knowledge regarding the living being's true identity.
2. The Truth about Sri *Bhagavân*.
3. The living being and God are non-different from each other.

The third knowledge is false and it opposes Bhakti. If we gain such knowledge, we lose the sense that we are the servants of Sri *Bhagavân*. Therefore, we must reject the knowledge that we are non-different from Sri *Bhagavân*. The first two types of knowledge – that is, regarding our identity and the Truth about Sri *Bhagavân* – are good knowledge. We should definitely gain such knowledge. It is good for our *bhakti*. If we do not know the truth about God and ourselves, we will not be able to form a relation with Him. If we do not form a relation, we will not do *bhajan* or gain *bhakti*. Sri *Bhagavân* says in Bhagavad-Gitâ –

*kshetrajnancha-api mang viddhi sarva-kshetreshu bhârata,
kshetra-kshetrajnayor-jnânang vataj-jnânang matang mâm.*

Obstacles in Bhakti

“O *Bhârat* (Arjun)! Know me to be the *kshetrajna* in every *kshetra*. The knowledge about *kshetra*¹ and *kshetrajna*² is true knowledge. This is my opinion.”

When we gain knowledge about *kshetra* and *kshetrajna*, we realize that we are not this body. We realize our identity. Then we start on the path of *bhakti*.

After this Sri *Bhagavân* is again saying in Bhagavad-Gitâ -

“We should not expect honor, we should be without material pride, be non-violent, forgiving and simple. We should serve Sri Gurudev, be pure, have unwavering determination, self-control, renouncement, without a false ego, feel sorrow that living beings suffer birth, death, disease and old age and be materially detached. We should not think the spouse and children to be our property, be balanced in profit and loss, have singular devotion for me and live in a pure and secluded place. He should dislike mingling with material people, be always immersed in studying and practicing spiritualism and discuss only the necessary Truth. I classify all of these as ‘knowledge’. Anything other than this is ‘ignorance’.”

This verse of Sri Bhagavad-Gitâ makes it clear that the one who behaves in this manner is a true ‘*gyâni*’³. He, who considers himself non-different from Sri *Bhagavân*, is not a ‘*gyâni*’. Every *sâdhak* must try to imbibe the above qualities. However, once we gain *bhakti*, these qualities come naturally to us.

Now let us discuss the topic of renunciation.



Renunciation is of five types:

1. *Phalgu* (like the Phalgu river)
2. *Shushka* (dry)
3. *Markat* (like a monkey)
4. *Shmashân* (crematorium)
5. *Yukta* (renunciation coupled with *bhakti*)

¹ Kshetra –living beings

² Kshetrajna – One Who knows the living entity; the Witness; Sri Krishna Who is present within us in the form of the Supreme Soul.

³ Wise

Obstacles in Bhakti

1. **Phalgu renunciation** – Generally, you cannot see the water in the Phalgu River, but as soon as you scratch the sand on top, the water streams out. So – sand on top while water runs underneath. In the same way, we may make a show of renunciation and detachment externally, yet our heart is full of material desires. This is 'Phalgu renunciation'. It is completely useless.
2. **Dry renunciation** – This type of renunciators try their level best only to remain a renouncer. We may starve, go naked and lie under a tree, yet perform hardly any *bhajan* and we are not concerned about our progress in devotional path. We call this as 'dry renunciation'. This type of renunciation is also useless.
3. **Monkey-like renunciation** – The monkey lives in the forest and does not collect more than his need. He does not build a house, and is a strict vegetarian. On the surface, he seems to be the best renouncer, yet he is full of lust, anger and greed. When we show we are strong renunciators, yet we are full of lust, anger and greed, we are 'markat renunciators.'
4. **Shmashân renunciation** – Suppose someone's wife dies. He goes to the crematorial ground and detachment for the material world overwhelms him. He decided not to remain in this material world any more. Instead, he decides to settle in Vrindavan and perform *bhajan*. However, when he returns home, his children speak sweetly to him and he forgets everything. After a few days, he even gets married.
5. **Yukta renunciation** – In this type, the renouncer accepts only what is absolutely necessary to keep his body and soul together so that he may perform *bhajan*. We can classify this type further into –

➤ Householders

➤ Bâbâjis

Srîman-Mahâprabhu instructed the householders – "Do not be a 'monkey renouncer'. Enjoy within the regulative principles (for devotional purpose) forsaking worldly attachments".

When Srîla Raghunâth das was a householder, the Lord instructed him thus. However when he came to Neelâchal, the Lord gave him a different instruction. Raghunâth's father sent him money. He used this to serve the Vaishnavs, yet Srîman-Mahâprabhu was not happy. Then He did not say, "Use your wealth (for devotional purpose) without being attached to it."

The Lord said –

"If you eat the offering of a materialist, it will soil your heart. You cannot meditate on Sri Krishna with a soiled heart." – (C.C.)

Further Srîla Raghunâth dâs thought –

"I entertain the Vaishnavs with the money of a materialist. I can feel that the Lord is not pleased with me. It is soiling my heart as well. I am only gaining fame by serving the Vaishnavs in this manner." – (C.C.)

Obstacles in Bhakti

Therefore if any Bâbâji in the renounced order says –“I will enjoy within the regulative principles (for devotional purpose) forsaking worldly attachments” – it will be a big blunder. Those of us, who have renounced their homes to join the line of our Goswamis, must be extremely careful about the rules pertaining to renunciation.

*mahâprabhur bhaktaganer boirâgya pradhân,
jâhâ dekhi preeto hon gour bhagabân*

Meaning – “Mahâprabhu’s devotees follow the rules of renunciation very strictly. When the Lord sees this, it pleases Him.”

The Goswamis such as Sri Rup and Sanâtan are the eternal companions of Sriman-Mahâprabhu. What was the need for them to practice renunciation? Yet they became renouncers to teach us how to conduct ourselves in the renounced order. Sriman-Mahâprabhu told Srila Sanâtan Goswâmi –

“Your body is my principle instrument. I shall perform many necessary actions with your body. You will establish the Truth regarding the qualities of a devotee, *bhakti*, *Krishna-prem*, the duties and conduct of a Vaishnav, how to perform *Krishna-bhakti*, *Krishna-prem* and *Krishna-sevâ*. You will re-establish the glory of the lost Holy Places and be a model for renunciation.” – (C.C.)

Sriman-Mahâprabhu’s statement is making it clear that these Goswâmis accepted the renounced order to teach us the rules of renunciation. What are these rules?

“Both of them (Sri Rup and Sanâtan) were homeless. They lived under the trees. They spent only one night under one tree. Sometimes they accepted a full meal in the house of a Brahmin and at other times, they did *mâdhukari*. Sometimes they only chewed dry bread or chickpeas. They did not indulge in any material enjoyment whatsoever. They carried only a begging bowl and covered themselves with rags and loincloth. All day and night they sang and spoke the glory of Sri Krishna.” – (C.C.)

“Sanâtan said –‘I will do *mâdhukari*. Why should I accept a full meal from a Brahmin?’ Sanâtan’s renunciation brought immense joy to the Lord.”

If some devotee came to Neelâchal from Vrindavan, Mahâprabhu’s associates would enquire about Sri Rup-Sanâtan’s renunciation –

“If some devotee returned to Neelachal after visiting Vrindavan, the Lord’s associates would ask him, “Tell us how do Rup and Sanâtan live? What sort of renunciation do they observe? What do they eat?” – (C.C.)

Sri Raghunâthdâs Goswâmi observed renunciation in the following manner –

“Govinda told the Lord, “Raghu does not take prasâdam. In stead he begs at night at the Lion-gate¹. When the Lord heard this he was pleased and said, ‘It is good that he is practicing what is good for a *vairâgi*’².’ – (C.C.)

¹ Main gate of Sri Jagannâth Mandir

² Renouncer, but NOT a ‘sannyâsi’.

Obstacles in Bhakti

Tell me, if Dâs Goswâmi would have accepted Lord Jagannâth's *prasâdam*, would it hurt? Definitely not. Then why did he forsake Jagannâth dev's *prasâdam* and resort to begging at the Lion-gate? The answer is – because this is the *dharma* of the *vairâgi*. If we do not behave like this then what is the use of renouncing? If we intend to enjoy within the strictures of the regulative principles, without having material attachment, then why become a *vairâgi* and show that we are following Sri Rup and Sanâtan?

“The *vairâgi* must constantly chant the Holy Name. He should beg in order to live. A *vairâgi* who harbors material expectation from others, is never successful in spiritual life and Krishna only neglects him.” – (C.C.)

Vivek das – Suppose we have a desire for material enjoyment and we still become a *vairâgi* - and struggle with hardships - will we not become hard-hearted?

Gour Kripa – Those who have material desires should not become *Vairâgis*. If we practice self-control by force, then it is useless. This path was followed by our Goswâmis. It is a very glorious path. We shall do nothing but disgrace their fair name. Srimad-Bhâgavatam mentions –

“(Sri Krishna is saying) – Until and unless you are deeply attached to Me alone and feel complete detachment from everything else, and you have firm faith in hearing about Me, perform your daily duties within the strictures of the regulative principles.”

It is clear that, if we force renouncement on ourselves, it will not bring any good result. Needless to say, when we are naturally detached from material objects and we have gained unwavering faith in Sri Harikathâ, we are worthy of joining the renounced order.

How should the *vairâgis* perform **Yukta renunciation** ?

Well the *vairâgi* should accept only that much as is barely enough to sustain himself. He should not accept any more than this. If a torn rug can keep me warm in the winter, why should I use a blanket? If I can survive on dry bread, why should I eat vegetables? If I can make food with an earthen pot, why should I use a metal bowl? I should ponder and decide how much do I need exactly ? Talking about needs – now it is raining; I need an umbrella. In winter I need shoes and warm socks. In winter it is cold; I cannot sleep well. I need blankets, mattresses and bed sheets. It is not an exaggeration to state that a *vairâgi* must not live like this.

Obstacles in Bhakti

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There is no end to our needs. However we, who have accepted Sri Krishna-Bhakti as the goal of our lives, have to accept hardship. It is impossible to gain Sri Krishna by living in comfort.

Mahâprabhu has ordered Srila Sanâtan Goswâmi –

“Dear Sanâtan! When my penniless devotees who only don rags and carry begging bowls, come to Vrindavan, look after them.”

Even today, the ones who are truly detached and penniless, Sanâtan Goswâmi takes care of them. Why, Sanâtan Goswâmi had told Siddha Baba of Govardhan¹ - “What, Krishnadâs? I hope you are well? Do you get *mâdhukari*?”

If we are truly penniless, we have nothing to fear. As long as we have material desire, we shall not get Bhakti Devi.

Vivek das – I am finding great joy in your association. Please enlighten me about how to protect *bhakti*.

Gour Kripa – If we want to embark on Sri Krishna-Bhakti, we must reject **three *dosh***² at the very onset –

1. Place-*dosh*
2. Association-*dosh*
3. Food-*dosh*

1. Place-*dosh* – Every place has its own characteristic. It has particular thought waves. These thought waves enter and pervade every pore of our system. When materialistic people, who turn away from God, and have evil ideas, crowd a place, their negative energies pervade that place and defile it. On the other hand, if the majority of the people are pious, that place has positive energy. If we live in a place that has negative energy, it will affect us and our *bhajan* – although we may avoid the crowd. We will not be able to concentrate on God properly.

Generally most of the places (other than Sri Vrindavan and a few holy places) are polluted with impious people. In certain holy places many devotees reside. This makes the atmosphere pure. Such a place is good for *bhajan*.

For devotees like us, who are praying in the sweet mood, Sridhâm Vrindavan is the best. Within Vrindâvan, it is best if we can live in a secluded spot.

¹ Siddha Krishnadâs Baba ; although Sanâtan Goswâmi had disappeared long ago, he appeared to Siddha Baba.

² Contamination or harmful effect

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(Sriman-Mahâprabhu asked) – ‘O Râmânanda Roy, a living entity must forsake all material attachments and then where should he live?’

(Râmânanda Roy replied) – ‘He should live in Vrajabhumi Vrindavan, where the Divine Couple performs the Eternal Râs dance’.”

-(C.C.)

2. Association-dosh – Association-*dosh* is more dangerous than place-*dosh*. Sriman-Mahâprabhu said –

“A Vaishnav must necessarily forsake

- bad company,
- one who is attached to women,
- dishonest people
- one who is not a Krishna-devotee”

-(C.C.)

We must never associate with those who are not devoted to Sri Krishna. It is extremely harmful for our *bhajan*. Similarly, we must never desire anything other than Krishna-Bhakti.

When we associate with non-devotees, it only proves that we have material desires.

The material objects are outside, but the desire is inside us. Wherever we go, the desire travels with us. Therefore if we desire anything else other than Krishna and Krishna-Bhakti, it will harm us and so we must judiciously give up such desires.

“Bad company¹ cheats us – we are cheating ourselves when we keep such association. We should not harbor any desire other than Krishna and Krishna-Bhakti.” – (C.C.)

We must necessarily relinquish the association of ***stri-sangi***.

Who is a ***stri-sangi*** ?

A ***stri-sangi*** is one who is attached to women and is lusty.

“Company of women and the company of lusty men cause much more illusion and ignorance than anything else. They result in maximum material bondage.” – (S.B.3.31.35.)

“Never ever associate with corrupt men who are the playthings of women, because their company destroys truth, purity, kindness, quietude, good

¹ ‘bad company’ refers to all non-devotees.

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sense, shame, holiness, fame, forgiving nature, self control, spiritual progress completely. These men are never at peace, foolish, in a sorrowful state and have no spirituality whatsoever." - (S.B.)

*"varam hutavaha-jwâlâ-panjarântaryava-sthitih,
na shouri-chintâ-vimukha-jana-samvâsavaishasam."*

Meaning - "It is better to live in a cage of fire but never ever accept the painful association of those who are averse to thinking about Sri Krishna." - (B.R.S.)

Sri Thâkur Mahâshai said -

*"jogi nyâsi karmi gyâni anya deb-pujak dhyâni
ei lok dure porihori,
karma dharma dukkha shok jebâ thâke anya-jog
chhari bhojo giriborodhâri."*

Meaning - "Strictly avoid *ashtânga-yogis*, *sannyâsis*, *karmis*, *gyânis* and the worshipers of other gods. Forsake all *karmas* and *dharmas* that only cause pain and worry, and serve Lord Girivaradhâri (Sri Krishna)."

- (P.B.C.)

This indicates that just as we should give up lustful attachment to the opposite sex, the association of people who lust for the opposite sex and those who turn away from Sri Krishna, we should also forsake *ashtânga-yogis*, *sannyâsis*, *karmis*, *gyânis* and those who worship other gods. This is because if we do not reject their company, their qualities may infect us and this is detrimental to *bhakti*.

3. Anna-dosh - Contamination due to food - We should be very careful about what we eat to protect our *bhakti*. We simply cannot neglect this point.

"âhâr-shuddhou satva-shuddhih satva-shuddhou dhruvâ-smritih"

Meaning - "When we eat *sâtvic* food, our sub-conscious mind becomes pure. When it becomes pure then we can remember God uninterruptedly (continuously)." - (Chândogya Upanishad)

It is difficult to purify the sub-conscious mind if we do not eat food that is in the mode of goodness. 'Sâtvic' or 'pure' food does not imply simply vegetarian. Food can be contaminated in three ways -

- ❖ **Impure by nature** (*jâti-dushta*) - For example - meat, alcohol, fish, onion, garlic etc that cause passion are prohibited.
- ❖ **External contamination** (*nimitta-dushtâ*) - presence of dust, mosquitoes, flies, saliva, sweat etc. contaminate food.
- ❖ **Contaminated by source** (*âshray-dushta*) - If the food is either cooked or served by impure, miserly, lusty, greedy, angry, dull-witted person or one who is afflicted by sexual diseases then the food is contaminated. The one who pays for the food, the

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one who cooks and the one who serves – their qualities are transmitted to the one who eats. Amongst them, the one who pays for the food – the effect of his mentality is the greatest. Purer the heart, more that devotee will be able to realize the effect of food. Anyway, all practicing devotes should be extra-careful about partaking of *prasâdam*. Otherwise safe-guarding *bhakti* will be impossible.

Another way to classify food is as follows.

- ❖ **Sâtvic food** – The food that increases life-span, energy, strength, fitness, is pleasing and appetizing is called 'sâtvic'. It has good flavor, has essential nutrients and enhances joy.
- ❖ **Râjasic food** – The food that is too bitter, too sour, high in sodium, is spicy, oily, too hot or too sweet is called 'râjasic' or in the mode of passion.
- ❖ **Tâmasic food** – The food that is stale, dry, foul-smelling, contaminated, impure is called 'tâmasic' or in the mode of ignorance.

The type of food we eat decides our nature. So if we desire *bhakti* we should avoid food with the above-mentioned contaminations and also the food in the modes of passion and ignorance. We should accept only food that is *sâtvic* and offered to Sri Krishna.

The Vaishnavs in the renounced order should be especially careful about partaking *prasâdam*. If we wish to relish *Bhakti-ras*, then of course we shall have to reject invitations and feasts. In the feasts, we usually don't know the host's mentality or with what intention he is throwing the '*bhândârâ*' (prasâd-distribution). Moreover if the cook or the ones who are serving have anger then it will harm the *sâdhak*. Not only this, we see that often in the feasts, the *prasâdam* is rich with oil and spice. This is *rajasic* and detrimental to *bhakti* as well as health. Gradually we develop all sorts of diseases.

If the host earns money by illegal means then the guests (in this case the devotees) suffer the most. Food has such strong impact that it can make the greatest of *sâdhaks* fall down. We find such instances in '*Vaishnav-jivan*' (The Biography of Vaishnavs). Those who are unaware of this fact need necessarily read *Vaishnav-jivani*. I am quoting one true incident from this book.

A renounced Vaishnav had accepted hospitality of a brahmin. The host made arrangement for the babaji to sleep in his Deities' room. After accepting dinner-*prasâdam*, the babaji's intelligence went astray. He took off all the Deities' ornaments and went away. After the babaji had walked the entire night he came to his senses. "Oh my! Why did I steal the Lord's ornaments? I never behaved like this before! It is indeed very strange!" Although he pondered on his erratic behavior, he could not draw any conclusion. Anyway he decided to return to the brahmin's house and beg forgiveness. In the morning when the people had realized the ornaments were missing they had decided that the babaji had been a thief in the guise of a Vaishnav. When they saw the Babaji return all of a sudden they were astonished. The babaji placed the bundle of ornaments in the brahmin's hands, admitted his mistake

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and begged forgiveness. He asked the brahmin from where he had procured the rice for last night's *prasâdam*. The brahmin inquired and learnt that one of his 'Yajmâns'¹ had procured the rice by theft. It was this very rice that the brahmin had given the babaji. Now we can realize the powerful impact of food. This is why Srīman-Mahâprabhu said –

*"bishoyir anna khâile molin hoy mon,
Molin mon hoile nohe krishner smaran.
Bishoyir anna hoy rajas nimantran,
Dâtâ bhoktâ dohâr molin hoy mon."*

Meaning - "Eating the food offered by a materialistic person contaminates the mind; we cannot remember Sri Krishna with an impure mind. A materialist's food fills us with passion and it defiles the minds of both the giver and the acceptor (of such food)."- (C.C.)

Srīman-Mahâprabhu has instructed babajis since they are in the renounced order –

*"boirâgi koribe sada nâm-sankirtan,
mâgiyâ jâchiyâ kore jibon-rakshan.
boirâgi hoiyâ jebâ kore porâpekshâ,
kârjya-siddhi nohe krishna koren upekshâ.
boirâgi hoiyâ kore jihbâr lâlos,
paramârtha jây âr hoy roser bosh.
jihbâr lâlose je iti-uti dhây,
shishnodar-parâyan krishna nâhi pay."*

Meaning - "A *vairâgi* must constantly take the Holy Name. He has to survive by begging alms. If a *vairâgi* expects gifts from others, he shall not achieve the topmost goal and Sri Krishna will neglect him. If a *vairâgi* gives in to the temptation of the tongue, then he loses out on the spiritual path and becomes a victim of material pleasures. If a *vairâgi* runs here and there to satisfy his tongue then such a person who is a slave of his genital and stomach does not attain Sri Krishna." – (C.C.)

From Srīman-Mahâprabhu's instructions we learn that if our only goal in life is to achieve the bounties of Bhakti devi, then we must necessarily forsake the pleasures of the tongue and accept the minimum that Sri Krishna provides for us. In this manner we should continue with devotional practice.

"bhâlo nâ khâibe âr bhâlo nâ poribe"

Meaning - "Neither eat nor dress well." – (C.C.)

This indicates that Srīman-Mahâprabhu has ordered us not to eat rich food.

Vivek dâs – The scriptures mention that –

*"yatra yatra param tâta prâptam hari-niveditam,
tatra tad-bhakshayed-eva nâtra kâryâ vichâranâ."*

¹ The brahmin was a priest; the man who engages a priest to perform worship is called 'yajmân'.

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Meaning - "My dear child, whenever you get *prasâdam* offered to Sri Hari partake of it there itself. Have no doubt regarding this." –(Bhavishya Purân)

Bhâvishya Purân also says –

*"vishnor-niveditâne cha sparsha-dosho na vidyate,
yasya sandarshanenaiva naro bhâvati pavanah."*

Meaning - "Man gets purified immediately upon seeing the food offered to Sri Vishnu, such food is never contaminated."

Then should we not understand that there is no *dosh* in *prasâd* and we should accept it as soon as we receive it? Are you not contradicting the *Shâstras*?

Gour Kripa – You are right. However we have to somewhat analyze these statements. How should we accept *prasâd*? We should glorify *prasâdam* and offer prayers. We should pay it obeisance and then with the utmost reverence accept very little of it. If we accept *prasâdam* in this manner then we shall not commit any *dosh*. Accepting *prasâd* does not mean we should eat like a glutton. We should ponder whether we are truly accepting *prasâdam* or satisfying our greedy tongue. **If I accept *prasâdam* as ordinary food then ordinary food will have its effect on me.** There is an incident in 'Vaishnav-jivani' – When *siddha* baba partook of *prasâdam* in Govindadev Mandir of Jaipur, he experienced lust¹.

Moreover Sriman-Mahâprabhu has said – "bishoyir anna khâile molin hoy mon." Our mind becomes impure when we eat the offering of a materialist." He has also said – "bhâlo nâ khâibe âr bhâlo nâ poribe" – "Neither eat nor dress well." He knows that every Vaishnav accepts only *prasâdam*; therefore he is referring to *prasâdam* only and surely not to food that is not offered ! Is Sriman-Mahâprabhu contradicting the *shâstras* or are we disregarding the Lord when we fill ourselves up to the throat? Vaisnav-jivani states that when great saints accepted the *prasâd* offered by a prostitute's money, all of them experienced nocturnal emission. We all know this fact. Surely those saints did not eat un-offered food? Even that was *prasâdam* – then why did it have such a negative impact?

Vivek das – Alright. Maybe I accept what you say. However the *shâstras* say –

*"bhaktyâ lobham koutakâdvâ kshudhâ samyamanena vâ,
âkantha-bhakshitam taddhi punâti sakalâmhasah."*

Meaning - "The one who partakes of fills himself with *Mahâprasâdam* up to the brim – whether out of devotion or greed or amusement or hunger, he is freed of all sins." – (Skanda Purân)

Are you not contradicting the scriptures?

¹ Since that *prasâdam* was offered by a prostitute. Although she was purified by feeding the Vaishnavs, they got the outcome of eating food offered by ill-gotten wealth.

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Gour Kripa – Not at all, there is no contradiction. The verse that you quoted is meant for the non-devotees.¹ This is not for serious practitioners of *bhakti*. You may say – this verse does not mention it. Our reply is that – a Vaishnav in the renounced order will never accept *Mahâprasâdam* out of greed or amusement; only a great materialist will amuse himself with *prasâd*. You also mentioned ‘out of devotion’. Well, this is also meant for non-devotees. Otherwise there is no parity between Srīman-Mahâprabhu’s words and the statement of the Shâstra. You surely do not think that Srīman-Mahâprabhu will instruct us against the Shâstras!

We have already agreed that each and every Vaishnav eats nothing but *prasâdam*. However the question may arise – what about the non-devotees? If they ‘fill themselves to the brim’ with *prasâdam* that is offered by the host’s ill-gotten money, then even their minds should get polluted. Instead the verse is saying that they will be freed of all sins! Point one, However, the non-devotees anyway keep eating food that is anti-bhakti. Also they do not constantly in Bhagavad-*bhajan*; in stead they are always busy in material pursuit. Therefore their minds are already polluted or ‘*malin*’ (as per Srīman-Mahâprabhu). After all, the definition of ‘*malin*’ is – “not remembering Sri Krishna and engrossment in material endeavors. The mind of a non-devotee cannot get any more polluted than it already is. Therefore in his case *Mahâprasâdam* will free him of his sins and draw him to the path of pure devotion, since one can take to this path only after his sins have been destroyed.

Another point. Mostly we think whatever is offered to the Deity is ‘*prasâdam*’. But does He really accept everything that we offer? One may offer food to the Deities and *prasâdam* to the Vaishnavs with ill-gotten money just to launder away his sins. It may be that some unclean person may be cooking or the cook gets angry while cooking and he shouts in anger and unknowingly spit from his mouth may land in the *bhog*. We sometimes prepare food thinking not of the Deities but rather about the ones who will take the *prasâdam* – that decides the quality and quantity of *bhog*. This means that mentally we have already offered the *bhog* to them. The one who will offer the *bhog* may (due to some reason) offer with irritation. In all these cases does the Lord truly accept the *bhog*? Of course we accept all food offered in these manners as ‘*prasâdam*’ and certainly we cannot compare it with un-offered food, if serious devotees gorge on such *prasâdam* then surely the quality of food will take its toll on our spiritual health. There is no second thought about this. Very often we find such contaminations in the mega-feasts.

When the Lord truly accepts the *bhog* it gets absolutely transformed. It becomes transcendental and it is extremely rare. We see in Sri Chaitanya-Charitâmrita –

“The servants of Lord Jagannâth brought out the *Mahâprasâdam* and approached Srīman-Mahâprabhu. They honoured Him with the *prasâdi* garland and placed the *prasâd* in His hands. Forget the taste; its mere fragrance was enough to make one dizzy with ecstasy. The *prasâd* was priceless and the servant insistently requested the Lord to taste a little. Lord Gourânga placed a bit on His tongue and tied the remaining in the end of

¹ Mahâprasâdam will draw them to the path of pure devotion.

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Govinda's *dhoti*. The Lord was wonder struck for it was innumerable times more tasty than ambrosia. His body was covered with gooseflesh and tears flowed from His eyes. He repeatedly glorified the *prasâdam* – "How did it become so delicious? Simply because the nectar of Sri Krishna's lips have got transmitted into it. Only a person with immense *sukriti* gets to relish such *prasâdam!*" The servant of Lord Jagannâth asked – "What's the matter?" The Lord replied – "You gave this nectar of Sri Krishna's lips – it is not available to even devatâs such as Brahmâ. It is so delicious that it puts ambrosia to shame. One with ordinary luck cannot get this mercy (*prasâd*). Only one who has got Sri Krishna's complete *kripâ* can get this *prasâd*." – (C.C.)

Then please understand – when the Lord really and truly accepts *bhog* how its taste and fragrance gets transformed into transcendental! And when we partake of such *prasâdam* our body will experience gooseflesh. Now if someone with abundant *sukriti* eats this *prasâdam* up to his throat he is immensely fortunate; we do not have the words to express his luck! Needless to say such *prasâd* is free of any *dosh*. However we should accept only a little of the other *prasâdam*.

It is not as if only babajis in the renounced order should be careful about the rules regarding the acceptance of *prasâdam*; even the householder Vaishnavs who are serious about *bhajan* and lead a Krishna-conscious life should be cautious about food. If they really want to progress in Krishna-consciousness, practice Vaishnav-etiquette and accept only Sri Krishna-*prasâdam* offered with honest income, they need to be careful – this means they will especially benefit in devotional life if they avoid accepting invitations anywhere and everywhere.

Many people may have this firm belief that there is nothing wrong with taking *prasâdam*. They may put forth numerous points from the scriptures even to support their belief. If it may be so, even then – according to the law "the latter rule is stronger than the previous one"¹ – whatever *Purna-brahma* (Absolute Brahman) *Swayam Bhagavân* (God Himself) Sanâtan (eternal) Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahâprabhu has said hold stronger than the rules stated in the scriptures. And He has ordered "*bhâlo nâ khâibe âr bhâlo nâ poribe*" – do not eat nor dress well. He has also ordered the renounced babajis –

*"bishoyir anna khâile molin hoy mon,
boirâgi hoiyâ kore jihbâr lâlos,
paromârtha jây âr hoy raser bosh"*

Meaning - "if you eat food offered by a materialist, your mind gets polluted. In spite of being renounced if your tongue is greedy, your spiritual life is destroyed and you become a slave of material pleasure."

The ones who are disobeying Sriman-Mahâprabhu's instructions and are gorging on *prasâdam* anywhere and everywhere by citing rules from the scriptures are showing contempt for Sriman-Mahâprabhu's words. They are committing the *aparâdh* against the Holy Name that says "Never disregard the words of the Spiritual Master", since Sriman-Mahâprabhu is Jagadguru – the Spiritual Master of the entire universe.

¹ Mimânsâ sutra

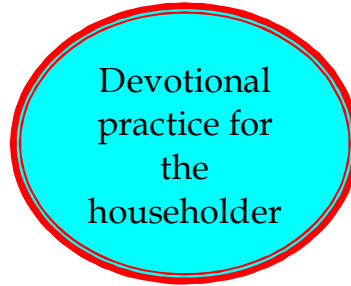
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Vivek das – Many a times we see that some high-level Vaishnavs too have accepted invitation. Are they not disobeying Srīman-Mahāprabhu?

Gour Kripa – No, since they never accept invitation to satisfy their tongue. They go there either to pay respect to some exalted Vaishnav or simply out of mercy. You may ask – “Does this mean that their mind too may get polluted?” No, they are strong and capable. They have so much *bhakti* that the food they eat becomes free of all *dosh*. It becomes *maha-maha-prasādam*. If we partake of their remnant we shall be blessed.

Vivek das – Now I understand that every *sādhak* must be especially cautious about food, otherwise it is extremely difficult to progress in the path of *bhakti*.

Okay, whatever you mentioned up till now – it is impossible for ordinary householders to follow such dictum. Then how will they gain *bhakti* ?



Gour Kripa - Srīman-Mahāprabhu has said in relation to the devotional practice for the householder –

*"grihastha bishoyi âmi ki mor sâadhane,
Shrimukhe agnya koro Prabhu nibedi charane.
Prabhu kohe krishna-sebâ boishnab sebon,
Nirantar koro krishna-nâm Sankirtan."*

Meaning - "The devotee asked the Lord – I am a householder steeped in material attachment. Please tell me what devotional practice to perform. I beg at Your lotus-feet, O my Lord, please command me with Your Holy lips.

The Lord replied – Serve your Deities and the Vaishnavs. And constantly take the Holy Name.” – (C.C.)

Thus we see that Sriman-Mahâprabhu mentioned three points –

1. to serve the Deities
2. serve the Vaishnavs
3. constantly take the Holy Name

To serve the Deities – The householder should install Sri *Vigraha* or photos of the Lord. Every day they should serve Them with love and faith. They should take *prasâdam* only after offering to the Deities. They must never ever accept un-offered food. Just as we perform so many activities as compulsory, serving the Deities too is compulsory for the householder.

To serve the Vaishnavs – Serving the Vaishnavs is the easiest way to please Sri Govinda. The Lord is more quickly pleased with Vaishnav-sevâa than we can please Him with any other Bhakti-endeavour.

*"morey bhojibâre jâr âchhe abhilâsh,
Se bhojuk âmâr mangal priyo dâs."*

Meaning - "Who desires to serve me he should serve my servant who is dear to me." – (C.C.)

Padma Purân says –

*"ârâdhanânâm sarveshâm vishnor-ârâdhanam param,
Tasmât parataram devi tadiyahânâm samârchanam."*

Meaning - "To worship Lord Vishnu is the most important of all adorations. Better than that is to adore His devotee."

Sri *Bhagavân* says – "My dear living being, I lack nothing. I am absolute bliss and the form of intense love, yet if you wish to please me then serve my devotee. Then I will be most happy, since –

*aham bhakta-parâdhino hyaswatantra iva dwija,
sâdhubhirgrasta-hridayo bhaktair-bhakta-jana-priyah.
nâaham-âtmânâm-âshâse mad-bhaktaih sâdhubhirvinâ,
shriyanchâtyantikim brahman yeshâm gâtir-aham parâ.
ye dârâ-gâra-putra-âptân prânân vittam-imam param,
hitvâ mâm sharanam yâtâh katham tânstyaktumutsahe.
mayi nirva-baddha hridayâh sâdhavah samadarshanâh,
vashi kurvanty mâm bhaktyâ sat-striyah satpatim yathâ."*

Meaning – (the Lord is saying) - I am subordinate to my devotee, I have no freedom were my devotee is concerned. I love my devotees and my heart is enslaved by them. The devotees consider me as their sole refuge. I do not love myself and not even my consort Sri as much as I love them. They have forsaken their children, spouse, home, relatives, wealth, life, the material world as well as the spiritual world all because of me and have surrendered unto me – how can I ever think of leaving them ? The pure devotees are

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impartial to all and just as a chaste woman subjugates her husband, they have captured me in their heart: - (Srimad-Bhâgavatam)

Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabat says –

“All Vedas and Purâns seek my shelter (surrender unto me) while I am surrendered unto my devotees. I have no one but my devotee. He is my father, mother, friend, son and brother. Although I am independent and there is no restriction on my movements – still, it is my nature to be subordinate to my devotee.”

However to be deeply attached to Sri Krishna’s devotees we have to be very lucky. Âdi Purân says –

“Dear Arjun, those who love me, loves me not; those who love my devotees they truly love me.”

*“durâpâ hyalpatapasah sevâ vaikunthavartmasu,
yatropagiyate nityam devadevo janârdanah.”*

Meaning - "The devotees who constantly sing the glory of Janârdan Who is the Lord of all lords – serving them is the means to obtain Sri *Bhagavân*. However if one does not have much *sukriti* to their credit they cannot serve such devotees.”

Linga Purân says –

“The one who gives a Vaishnav, food and clothes according to his capacity, know him to be a devotee.”

Brihan-Nâradiya purân says –

“The one who respectfully feeds a Vaishnav ascends to Lord Vishnu’s realm along with his 21 generations.”

Again in Brihan-Nâradiya purân –

“If a Vaishnav who serves Sri *Bhagavân* lives in your house, then know that Sri Krishna and Srimati Râdhârâni reside there along with all *devatâs*.”

Âdi Purân says –

“O Arjun, forsake worshiping all *devatâs* and only worship the Vaishnavs because the Vaishnavs purify the entire world.”

Brihan-Nâradiya purân says –

“The one who worships Sri Hari’s devotees with body, speech and mind as if he is worshiping Sri Hari Himself, then all *devatâs* such as Brahmâ, Vishnu, Shiva are pleased with him. The one who adores *Harinâm* and Sri Hari’s worship, and are engaged in serving Vaishnavs – even if they are sinful – they attain Sri Hari’s realm.”

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The above statements from the scriptures prove beyond doubt that if we serve the Vaishnavs diligently considering them non-different from Sri Hari then even though we may be incapable of practicing all parts of *bhajan* we will please Sri Govinda. In fact, we will not progress so quickly in *bhajan* as we will if we serve the Vaishnavs.

"Srimad-Bhâgavatam and other scriptures have firmly declared that serving the Vaishnavs is greater than serving Sri Krishna. They have ascertained Vaishnav-sevâ as the supreme means for achieving the highest spiritual goal – that is obtaining Sri Krishna." – (Sri Chaitanya Bhâgabab)

1. Constantly chant the Holy Name -

Sri Brihan-Nâradiya Purân says –

*"harer nâma harer nâma harer nâmaiva kevalam
Kalou nâstyaiva nâstyaiva nâstyaiva kevalam"*

Meaning - "In *Kaliyug* simply chant the Holy Name, chant the Holy Name, chant the Holy Name – there is no other way, no other way, no other way."
It further guarantees –

"The one who adores the Holy Name in this terrible *Kaliyug* is indeed blessed. *Kaliyug* can never obstruct him."

Sriman-Mahâprabhu said –

"We should chant the Holy Name while eating, sleeping or during any activity – anywhere and everywhere. There is no restriction of place and time in it and we shall succeed in every endeavor." – (C.C.)

Vivek das – Whatever you said is all true. However householders are always engaged in some work or the other; they are so busy. How is it ever possible for them to chant constantly? This instruction is meant only for recluse babajis.

Gour Kripa – Whoever thinks like this is deceiving himself. We work with our hands; what is wrong with the tongue? Why can we not chant with the tongue while working with our hands? We will have to work – true. But if I cannot use my mouth to chant the Holy Name – and this is such a small *sevâ* – then who is responsible for my bad luck?

There is no rule saying that to practice Sri Krishna-*bhakti* and to gain Him we will have to forsake home and family. It is useless to take this body in the forest – we must keep our mind in seclusion. This means that in spite of remaining in the family we should feel that no one here belongs to me other than Govinda – no one loves me except Him. In a forest we are lonely – in the same way, in spite of living in a family we should consider ourselves lonely; then it is truly living in the forest. Otherwise, I may leave my home and family, yet I am thinking always about my kith and kin and all sorts of material attachments – what is the use? If this is not cheating then what is it? We are not cheating others, but ourselves.

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We have two homes; one is the external home where we live, and the other is in our mind where our material desires and *sanskârs* reside. It is easy to give up the external home, but not the one in our mind. However if we simply forsake the external home and not the internal one then all sorts of material desires will enter the home in our mind and make it stronger. In spite of gaining spiritually we will only defame the order of recluses.

Vivek das – Yes, I can understand, however what about the householders? They are surrounded by so many worldly troubles and disturbances that they forget to utter Sri Krishna's name – what is the solution to this problem?

Gour Kripa – The reason for this is that they consider their family as their own. When they think, "This family belongs to Govinda. I am only His servant; my job is only to carry out His order. I am simply executing my duty", then they will not be worried any more. As long as we consider the family to be ours, it results in material bondage; as soon as we pass the burden on Govinda, we are liberated. It is our thoughts that bind us, and our thoughts lead us to freedom.

Govinda is saying – "Dear child, you carry on your worldly duties, but know in your mind that it is not your work but mine. I shall not take a single *paisa* from your earning – you enjoy the pleasure of it all. Only know firmly that it does not belong to you, and then you shall not get the repercussions of *karma*."

If we can think like this then easily we can remember Govinda, otherwise we shall be happy when the family is happy and grieve when they are sad – and then it will be impossible for us to chant the Holy Name constantly.

Vivek das - Please tell me one thing – how will I know whether I am progressing in *bhakti* or not?



What shows we are
progressing in
bhakti?

Gour Kripa – When people progress in other spiritual paths then they show certain symptoms which tell them in what stage they are at that particular time. However in the case of *Bhakti-yog* it is just the opposite. I mean, the more we progress in this path the more we think we are worthless and feel "I am getting nowhere". It is true that our *mahâjans* have described the path from *anartha-nivritti* (getting rid of bad qualities) to *prem* – but the surprising fact is – the devotee who is progressing from *anartha-nivritti* to *prem* never ever believes that he is crossing from one state to another and that he is actually making a headway. The more we advance the more we think – "Oh, I don't have any realization; I am a great *aparâdhi* (offender); where do I go? What do I do?" We are engulfed with sheer humility. The most amazing fact is the sort of humility that a devotee expresses when he reaches the stage of *prem*! Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd has written in his *Mâdhurya-Kâdambini* –

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"Such a devotee considers his kith and kin like a dark and dangerous well, his home like a bed of thorns, food appears as poison to him, even when good people praise him it stings like a venomous snake-bite, and he executes his daily duties like he is arranging his own obituary and he finds his own body a great burden. When his well-wishers console him he thinks it is a shower of poison and his waking hours like an ocean of lamentation and sleep as something that destroys his life. He thinks Sri *Bhagavân* has turned away (not merciful) from him - otherwise how come he is still alive? Whatever he used to like earlier - now he finds them extremely troublesome and he finds thoughts of Sri *Bhagavân* killing."

Then please understand how a devotee feels meek and submissive in the exalted stage. How much he burns inside! At this time if someone tells him - "Sir, do you know, you have reached *prem*?" then the devotee will feel as if a snake has bitten him. He will not feel happy at all, in stead he will get mad at that person. There is no way you can make him believe that he has attained *prem*. What to speak of the *sâdhak*, Sriman-Mahâprabhu is *Swayam Bhagavân*; He is the intense *prem* personified - yet just see how humble He is!

*"nâhi krishna-prem dhan,
Daridra mor jeebon,
Dehendriya brithâ mor sob."*

Meaning - "I don't have the precious wealth called Sri Krishna-*prem* and my body and senses are all worthless."- (C.C.)

Therefore the one who is making a fore way in *bhakti* - humility and pleading are his main symptoms. Even then, if we carefully study ourselves we too can realize whether we are progressing or not.

We can roughly divide these symptoms (that show our progress in *bhakti*) in two categories -

1. internal symptoms
2. external symptoms

Let us study them in detail -

Internal symptoms of progress in bhakti

1. **Eagerness in bhajan** - The more we advance in *bhakti* the more we will be eager for *bhajan*. We will not feel satisfied with the number of rounds we used to chant earlier and we will try very hard to increase the number. Also we will spend more time on meditation.
2. **Dissatisfied with bhajan** - The more we progress in *bhajan* the more we feel "I am nowhere".
3. **Anxiety** - When we go forward in *bhajan* we feel more and more anxious. We think - "Oh really! Time is flowing - when will I get His

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mercy? Will He deprive me because I am fallen? No, no, of course He will shower His blessing on me. He is all purifying. He has compassion for the sinners. I will surely get His mercy and feel blessed." Our anxiety will increase in proportion to our *bhajan*.

4. **Value of time** – Earlier we spent time in worldly activities; however when we make deeper forays in *bhakti* we realize that we are wasting time in worldly matters. We stop spending time in all matters unrelated to our spiritual goal. Gradually we will try to lessen even our sleep because we will understand that we are wasting time while sleeping.
5. **Consider ourselves worthless** – As we march forward in *bhakti* we will think everyday like this – "I am truly useless. How will I get *bhakti*? I have no good quality and instead I am covered with everything that is bad. I have no *bhakti* and no *bhajan*. What will happen to me?"
6. **Talk openly and freely about our faults** – The more mercy we get from Bhakti devi the more we shall realize our own faults. We will think – "Alas! Alas! I have so many faults! I am the most fallen of all, otherwise how come I have so many bad qualities? I am definitely not a devotee; rather I am lowlier than animals and birds." Earlier we never even realized our mistakes, now even the slightest mistake will appear as a great *aparâdh* and we will burn with remorse. This means we are getting Bhakti devi's *kripâ* and we are making advancement.
7. **Disinterested in worldly matters** – As we go ahead in *bhakti* we will see that earlier the worldly matters that interested us are now appearing as troublesome. This indicates that Bhakti devi is pleased with us.
8. **Agitation** – The more we advance in *bhakti* the more agitated we will become for Sri *Bhagavân*. When we feel more and more hungry our thoughts revolve more and more around food – in the same manner, when we progress in *bhakti* our innermost mind becomes pure and our heart churns for Sri *Bhagavân*.

External symptoms of progress in bhakti

1. **Overjoyed to see Vaishnavs** – Remember all the Vaishnavs we didn't like to see earlier? Well, now we will feel overjoyed when we see them. Just the sight of *tilak* and *tulsi* will make us ecstatic, since we will sense them to be Sri *Bhagavân*'s own people.
2. **Not seeing faults** – Earlier we would see faults in others; now by the mercy of Bhakti devi we will see everyone as pure.
3. **Feel the presence of the Supreme Being in everyone** – As our sub-consciousness get purer due to *bhajan* we shall perceive the Supreme controller in all elements – and love everybody.

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4. **Unaffected by good and bad** – gradually the good and bad of this world will stop affecting us. Earlier the matters that would attract our attention will now fail to do so – since we will find everything other than Sri Krishna as *ras*-less.

We have started with *bhajan* our goal is *bhakti*. Now if we do not find the above-mentioned changes in us – that is –

- Our state of mind is still the same – earlier I would love gossip and mundane talk, now also;
- Earlier what *bhajan* I would perform, now I still practice the same amount of *bhajan* or even less;
- In the past I loved to entertain myself by criticizing others and basked in my own glory – ditto now;
- Previously I was an expert at finding faults in others and it still remains the same;
- Formerly I considered myself flawless and very intelligent, now also I continue to think the same;
- My interest in worldly matters remain unchanged;

Then we should conclude that we are not progressing at all towards the light of *bhakti*. I am chanting 3 lakh *Mahâmantra* everyday and people call me a '*bhajanânandi*'. I too bask in the firm belief that I am *bhajanânandi*. I can diligently seek out the faults in others, yet I am blissfully oblivious of my own flaws. What can be more unfortunate than this? The main proof that we have entered the realm of *bhakti* is - whether we can see our own faults. In the path of *bhakti*, as long as we continue to think we have not committed any mistake and we do not have any bad quality we should understand that we have not relished a single drop of *bhakti*. If we are able to avoid *Vaishnav-aparâdh* and consistently practice *bhajan* then we shall certainly mark the above-mentioned changes in ourselves. **We do not have to try specifically any other means to rid ourselves of *anarthas*.**

Suppose we are going somewhere in a boat. How will we come to know whether the boat is moving or not? By seeing the far away scenario changing, we know the boat is moving. If this does not happen and we keep seeing the same scene in front of us then we should conclude that the boat is not moving. Similarly after stepping in to *bhajan* if our mentality does not change it means that the tide (force or impact) of offences is high (strong) and therefore in spite of rowing hard (chanting the Holy Name) the boat is not inching towards the topmost goal that is *prem*.

Vivek das – I am so happy I talked with you. Please enlighten me – what is the easiest way to get Sri *Bhagavân's darshan*?

The easiest way to get Sri *Bhagavân'a darshan*

Gour Kripa – The easiest way to behold Sri *Bhagavân* is to cry like a baby. However if our heart is not agitated we will not be able to cry. Our heart will be agitated only when we lack something. We have to realize that material objects are temporary and destructible, they cannot give us pleasure – on the other hand, Sri Govinda is my only dear One. I have nobody but

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Govinda. Govinda belongs to me and I belong to Govinda. Unless and until we feel this strongly we will not realize what we are missing.

Who wants Him gets Him. Also we have to want Him in the correct manner. It has to be like this – “I have nobody but Govinda, I have no possession other than Govinda and I don’t want anything other than Govinda.” I want material things and I want Govinda also. A wicked woman loves her husband yet hankers for another man – we call her promiscuous. In the kingdom of *bhakti* we cannot afford to be like this.

We cry when we lose five rupees. We know we won’t get the rupee again. Yet we keep searching for it for two days and our mind thinks about it time and again. Tell me, the whole day we thought about those five rupees, shed tears over it – do we think even that much about Sri *Bhagavân*? How much we miss those five rupees – do we miss Him even that much? Then please realize I am so fallen that I have not been able to love Govinda as much as five rupees!

Really, material attachment is the cause of my bondage. There is none other than Sri Govinda who belongs to me – when will I feel this? The day I realize this world will appear like a jungle. Just as in a deep forest there are wild carnivores roaming everywhere, in this world also there is no one we can call our own – only wild beasts wandering freely – in the form of lust, anger, envy.....at any time they will attack us – we shall realize this. It is then that our heart will cry out piteously for Govinda.

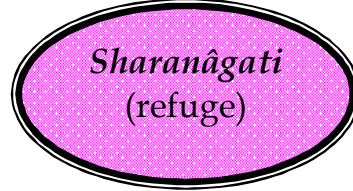
A child is playing; her mother calls her so many times, yet she does not answer, in stead she gets irritated. As the evening approached she felt no liking for her toys any more. Her heart cries out for her mother. But now her mother had left her in someone else’s charge and had gone out. Now the child starts crying – “I want mummy!” She was given so many toys, yet none pacifies her. She starts bawling – “I want mummy!” Similarly just now we are enjoying the toys of worldly pleasure, so we are not answering Sri Govinda’s call. When really and truly we will get fed up of this game we will realize we have none other than Sri Govinda – that day no material object will give us pleasure. And on that day we will really cry from the bottom of our heart – “Hâ Govinda!”

The baby was calling her mother. She was busy with cooking. She did not answer her call. Suddenly the baby fell down and she screams – “Ma-” and stopped. The mother immediately dropped all her chores and rushed to her baby. “My darling”, she gushed and picked her up – “Here I am, child, look at me, sweetheart!” She started smothering her with kisses. Similarly when we cry out for Govinda compelled with the agitation from our heart – if we cry out simply once – Sri Govinda’s seat will tremble. A single cry from the bottom of the heart can achieve what innumerable cries can not. But there should be great stirring in the heart. It is necessary. When this agitation reaches the zenith only then Sri Govinda appears to the devotee.

Vivek das – Your words are nectarine. I feel so happy. However O great soul, I have one extreme weakness. I have started with *bhajan* very late. At an advanced age I have left my household and taken the life of a recluse. My body is unfit and my mind has no confidence. My past *sanskâr* is bad and is

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still strong. I don't think I will manage to remain in seclusion and practice *bhajan*. Not only this, I am struck with numerous diseases too. However I do wish to obtain Sri Govinda's lotus-feet as well. I know there is no way to accomplish this task in this life – I don't know how many lifetimes I will take to achieve my goal. I cannot understand how I can please Sri Govinda under these circumstances. Please take mercy on me and enlighten me. I will feel blessed.



Gour Kripa – Sri *Bhagavân* told Arjun in Srimad-Bhagavad Gitâ –

*iswarah sarvabhutânâm hriddeshe' rjuna tishthati,
bhrâmayan sarvabhutâni vastra-rudhâni mâyayâ.*

Meaning - "Dear Arjun, God is present in everyone's heart and makes the living being dance like a puppet with strings of *Mâyâ*. Just as the puppeteer hides behind the screen and makes the puppets dance to His will, God resides in us and makes us dance on this stage like world with the power of His illusion. Nothing happens according to our will."

*ekole ishwar krishna âr sob bhritya,
jâre jaichhe nâchây se toichhe kore nritya."*

Meaning - "Sri Krishna is the only God and everyone else is His servant. They dance according to how He wants them to dance." – (C.C.)

We are full of false pride, so we think "we are the doers". This false ego is the cause of our bondage. We may ask – "When nothing is happening according to our will what can we do?" Sri *Bhagavân* has replied in the Gitâ –

*"tameva sharanam gachchha sarva-bhâvena bhârata,
tat-prasâdât param shântim sthânânam prâpsyasi shâshwatam."*

Meaning - "O Arjun, take my refuge in every way, by my mercy you will attain supreme peace and my eternal abode."

Taking shelter unto Sri *Bhagavân* is the easiest way to get His mercy. We may be the biggest sinners, yet if we sincerely take shelter unto Sri Govinda's lotus feet, then He will definitely purify us and give us a place at His holy feet. He is certain to protect His refugee. He is the destroyer of all troubles. When we take shelter at His holy feet with body, mind and speech how can He reject us?

Sriman-Mahâprabhu said –

*"koti koti janmer joto âchhe pâp tor,
âr jodi nâ koris to shob day mor."*

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Meaning - "If you do not commit any more sin then I take the burden of all the sins you have committed in innumerable lifetimes." – (C.C.)

My dear living being, please accept His shelter with body, speech and mind and say just once – "I have committed countless sins, but O my Lord, I will not commit a sin any more. I seek Your shelter, please protect me." This is enough. We need not fear any more. Sri Govinda will release him of all burdens and place Him at His lotus feet which are free from all fear.

*"sharan loiyâ kore krishne âtma-samarpan,
krishna tare kore tatkâle âtmasama."*

Meaning - "When we accept Sri Krishna's shelter and surrender at His feet, immediately He makes us His own." – (C.C.)

Sri *Bhagavân* said in Srimad-Bhâgavatam –

*tasmâttvam-uddhârotsrija chodanâm pratichodanam,
pravrittincha nivrittincha shrotavyam shrutamevacha.
mâmekameva sharanamâtmânâ sarva-dehinâm,
yâhi sarvâtmabhâvena mâyâ syâ hyakutobhayah.*

Meaning – "Dear Uddhav, forsake all the rules and regulations prescribed in the *Shrutis* and *Smritis*, what you should and should not do – as stated in the scriptures and take shelter unto me for I am the soul of all souls and reside in all. If you take my refuge you will have nothing to fear."

The Lord has said Sri Nrisimha Purân –

"When you say – 'I take refuge unto the lotus feet of Sri Janardan Who is the God of gods' – and take my shelter, I deliver him of all troubles."

Srimad-Bhâgavatam says –

Sri *Bhagavân* told Uddhav – "When man forsakes all activities and surrenders unto me, then I want to tell him something special as a result he is liberated and becomes worthy of enjoying my wealth."

However self-surrender is not so easy. We have false pride. Unless and until we give up the feeling – "I am the doer" – there is no surrender. With our lips we may say – "I seek Your refuge", yet in the practical sense I continue to feel I am doing everything, then it will not do. The Bhakti-scriptures state 6 characteristics of '*sharanâgati*' –

1. to do what is favorable for Sri *Bhagavân*
2. to refrain from what is not favorable
3. firm belief that He will protect me
4. to accept him as the protector
5. self-surrender
6. to cry out "please protect me"

We should do what is favorable for Sri *Bhagavân*.

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Sri *Bhagavân* said in *Gitâ* – “The one who does not envy any body, is friendly towards all, compassionate, impartial, rid of false ego, is balanced in happiness and sorrow, always satisfied, has self-control, extremely faithful, his mind and intellect are surrendered to me, he does not cause anxiety to any being and neither gets troubled by others, is free from joy, misery, fear, anxiety – he is dear to me. He is detached from material attractions, pure, enthusiastic in executing his duties, impartial, nothing can cause him sorrow, does not expect anything in return for his duties, such a devotee is dear to me. He is not pleased with material gain neither expects what he does not have, he does not care for good or bad result – he is dear to me. He is impartial to friends and foes, is balanced in respect and disrespect, cold and heat, joy and sorrow, is mentally balanced, is detached from every material object, is balanced in praise and criticism, is satisfied with he gets, does not consider his home and wealth his own, is of steadfast nature – such a devotee is dear to me. He is faithful, devout and follows the above-mentioned path – such devotees are extremely dear to me.”

– (Bhagavad *Gitâ*.12.13-20)

So we understand that if we have these qualities Sri Govinda will be pleased with us. Therefore when we practice devotion and conduct ourselves in this manner it is favorable for *bhakti*. If we behave in the opposite manner it is unfavorable.

We should have firm faith that Sri Krishna will protect us. If we do not believe this strongly it means we don't have *sharanâgati*. Then we do not feel enthusiastic in *bhajan*. If a student feels that in spite of studying he will not pass in the examination, then he will become slack in his studies. And if he knows for sure that if he studies he will definitely pass then he will study with renewed vigor. Therefore if we want *bhakti* it is necessary to have this firm belief – “I may be a great sinner, yet I have taken His shelter, then He will most certainly purify me and will place me at His feet.”

It is possible that a father throws his son out of the house due to misconduct. However when the son realizes his folly and comes to his father saying- “I will not misbehave again” – how can the father shut the door on his face? Similarly since eternity, we, who have been steeped in materialism, take His shelter and beg – “My dear Lord, I have indulged in many bad activities, but I promise not to repeat them; please protect me, I take Your refuge” then how can Sri *Bhagavân* reject His refugees? After all He is the soul of souls. When we take His shelter truly we shall have no fear, for it is His nature to dispel fear.

*"sakrideva prapanno yastavâsmiti cha vâchate,
abhayam sarvadâ tasmai dadâmyetad-vratam mâm"*

Meaning - "When we take His shelter and pray even once – ‘I am Yours’ – I always grant him protection; this is my pledge.” – (Râmâyan)

Putanâ offered Sri Krishna her breast smeared with poison and He gave her the status of His mother in turn. When I take the shelter of such compassionate Sri Krishna why do I fear? Fear is afraid of Him. I have nothing to worry once I accept His shelter.

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We should accept only Sri Krishna as our protector. It should not be like this that as soon as we fall in trouble we start worshiping some other god, wear their amulets and recite their prayer. In every trouble and tribulation we should be firm in the faith that Sri Krishna is my only protector.

We should surrender completely unto His lotus feet. Complete surrender means to sell ourselves to Sri Krishna's lotus feet. When a man sells his cow to another person he does not worry anymore about what and how to feed it. In the same way when we surrender we should not worry either about ourselves or about anything else. In case we feel worried, we should know that we have not surrendered. After surrendering we will notice that we are now performing *bhajan* only to please Sri Govinda. We will neither want nor get anything other than Sri Govinda's pleasure. If we ask for anything, we will look like a fool. Why? We don't know to ask! Listen, I'll tell you a story-

Once upon a time a brahmin was in need of some money. He went to the king. The king seated him with respect and asked him the cause of his arrival. The brahmin said – "O king, all of a sudden I needed some money. I thought – whom should I ask? I came to you." The king smiled and said, "Please be seated, I will return immediately." And the king went inside the palace. There he met his eldest son and told him, "Look son, a brahmin whom I know has come to me. He wants some rupees. Tell me, how much should I give?"

The prince replied, "Give him one hundred rupees." The king was not pleased with this suggestion. He started thinking. Meanwhile his eldest daughter, who was passing by, saw him. "Father, why are you standing here? What are you thinking?" she asked. The king told her about the brahmin. The princess said, "Why don't you give him two hundred rupees?" Even this idea did not please the king. Just then his youngest son saw him and asked him the cause of his worry. The king told him why the brahmin had approached him. The youngest prince said, "What is there to worry about? Just give him five hundred rupees, that's all!" The king was still not satisfied. He kept on thinking, what if this money is not enough to fulfill the brahmin's requirements? Then the brahmin might think, "See, I went to the King, yet he gave me such a small amount." If this happens it will be a great insult. Therefore the king was worried. Just then the youngest princess passed by; she saw her father and asked, "Why are you standing here? What are you thinking?" The king said, "My dear, I am very worried. A brahmin whom I happen to know, needs some rupees. I am not able to decide how much I should give him; you decide and tell me how many rupees should I give?" The youngest princess said, "You are really crazy! Why don't you simply ask him how much he needs? Why do you bother your head?" Saying this she quickly strutted out. At last the king was pleased. "Yes! I should ask the one who requires the money. It is not my headache." The king approached the brahmin and asked, "O venerable sir, how many rupees do you need?" The brahmin thought a while and said, "O king, a total of ten rupees will suffice." The king looked at him in astonishment. He has come to a king just for ten rupees! The brahmin saw the look on the king's face and thought, "I have asked too much! The king looks embarrassed!" so he scratched his head and said meekly, "*Mahâraj*, for the time being, five rupees will be enough." The king was shocked.

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This is just a story. However if we analyze it, we will realize we are tiny beings – stupefied by ignorance and illusion – we don't know what to ask from Sri *Bhagavân*. Even after entering the life of *bhajan* we beg for "I want an institution, I want a temple, I want to be a guru, I want power, and I want position" and Sri *Bhagavân* looks at us in astonishment. He thinks, "I want to give him the greatest treasure of all – that is myself, and look what he is asking! Such a fool!"

When we steal nothing other than Sri Govinda's pleasure, then He starts pondering about what to give him in return. If after lots of *sevâ* the devotee does not seek anything but Sri Govinda's pleasure, then He appears before the devotee and says – "Dear devotee, you want nothing other than my happiness, then I will give you a rare gift! Your devotion has enslaved me. I am surrendering myself to you, please accept me. I have nothing else to give you."

The *Gopis* of *Vrajadhâm* do not want anything from Sri Govinda – whatever they do is simply to give Him joy. Therefore Sri Krishna told them – "Dear *Gopis*, I could not give you anything in return for this love. Hence I am indebted to your love." Sriman-Mahâprabhu says in Sri Chaitanya-Charitâmrita –

"The devotees forsake their wife and children for me and come running to Puri for my sake. They travel through such difficult paths to reach me. I simply keep sitting here in Neelâchal and do not labor. I do not serve you in any manner. I am only but a *sannyâsi* and do not possess any money. How will I ever repay you? Therefore I give you my body which is my only possession – you sell it wherever you please."

Therefore there is no peace greater than not asking for anything. When we do not ask, we receive the maximum. There is no higher gift than this. A surrendered devotee does not ask the Lord for anything for himself or any relation.

Sharanâgati is the topmost and ultimate instruction of the Holy Gita. After saying "*tameva sharanam gachchha sarva-bhâvena bhârata*", the Lord said in the next verse –

*"iti te gyânânam-âkhyâtam guhyâd guhyataram mâyâ,
vimrishyaitadasheshena yatthechchhasi tathâ kuru."*

Meaning - "Dear Arjun, I expressed this most confidential truth, you ponder upon it and do what you will."

The Lord emphasized this instruction by saying again –

*"sarva-guhyatamam bhuyah shrinu me paramam vachah,
ishto'si me dridhâmiti tato vakshyâmi te hitam."*

Meaning - "Dear Arjun, I am once again telling you the supreme most process and the topmost confidential truth, please hear. You are extremely dear to me; therefore I am revealing what is good for you."

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*manmanâ bhâva madbhakto mad-yâji mâm namaskuru,
mâmevaishyasi satyam te pratijâne priyo'si me
sarva dharmân parityajya mâmekam sharanam vraja,
aham twam sarva pâpebhyo mokshayishyâmi mâshuchah*

Meaning - "Dear Arjun, keep your innermost mind fixed on me, perform my *bhakti*, worship me, pay obeisance unto me. I promise you that you will obtain me, because you are dear to me. O Arjun, forsake all *dharmas* and take my shelter. I will deliver you from all sins, do not worry."

Sharanâgati is the last word of Bhagavad Gitâ.

Now we may ask - "What is so confidential that the Lord could not tell everyone? And what is so special about 'take my shelter'? What? Is this confidential? And if this is the ultimate truth that 'nothing happens without my will' - then what was the need to propound so many philosophies in the beginning? Follow the path of *dharma*, do *yog* and what not. There was no need for so much talk.

First of all, we cannot reveal a confidential fact to anyone other than who is dear to us, because only a dear one will believe us. If we reveal a secret to any one else, he may put it to misuse. When the *sâdhak* forsakes all and accepts Sri Krishna's lotus feet as the topmost achievable goal of life and supreme shelter - Sri Krishna's confidential message is for that dear and special devotee.

Does this instruction sound ordinary? No. "Take my shelter in all respects" - the devotee does not have to worry about anything. In practical sense it is not an ordinary instruction. Please listen to this story.

A guru and his disciple practiced devotion in a cottage on the banks of the Gangâ. There was no settlement nearby. One day, the guru had a slight fever. He asked the disciple to bring milk from the village across. The disciple said, "Gurudev, there is no boat available to cross the Gangâ. I have no money either. I do not know to swim. How will I cross the Gangâ?" The Spiritual Master wrote some *mantra* on a piece of paper gave it to the disciple and said - "Hold this in your palm and simply walk across the Gangâ, you will not drown. But beware! Do not open the paper." Truly, the disciple held the paper in his fist and walked across. He brought milk from the villages. On the next day the Spiritual Master ordered him to bring milk again. The disciple brought milk in the same manner as he did on the previous day. He continued to walk across the Gangâ everyday. One day when he was in the middle of the river he had an indomitable wish to see what was written on the paper. He thought, "What on earth is written on this that is so powerful? And I manage to walk across the Gangâ everyday?" His curiosity got the better of him and he opened the paper. He saw that only two syllables were scrawled on it - "Râm". The disciple was full of scorn. He exclaimed - "Aw shucks! Is this a *mantra*?" As soon as he said this, he drowned.

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The Spiritual Master knew that the disciple had no special faith for the name 'Râm'; therefore he had forbidden the disciple to open the paper. In the same way *sharanâgati* is the topmost instruction – everyone will not believe it – and hence the Lord keeps it a secret.

Next why did Lord Krishna propound so many paths before instructing us about *sharanâgati*? The feeling that I am the doer is extremely strong. Till we have this feeling we cannot surrender and there is no use even giving a lecture on *sharanâgati*.

First of all Arjun had a very strong feeling – “I am brave”. Therefore Sri Krishna instructed him about *gyân* (the path of knowledge), *karma*, *yog* and so many other philosophies. Yet Arjun was puffed up with false ego. Then the Lord showed him His universal form. Then Arjun's pride was crushed. If in the very beginning Sri Krishna would have spoken about *sharanâgati* then it would have been a waste.

In the countryside Bengal it is a common scene to see people sitting quietly with a fishing hook near some river or pond. The one who wants to catch a fish, at first he scatters some fish-food in the water and then he attaches bait at the end of the hook and sits silently. The fish-food has very strong smell. Some fishes are attracted and they come rushing, yet do not swallow the bait. There are others who just peck at the bait and turn away. There are yet other fishes that immediately swallow the bait and the hook gets caught in their throats. They struggle very hard to get away, yet what does the fisherman do? In stead of withdrawing the thread from the water (and lifting the fish) he moves the wheel, loosens the thread and lowers the fish in the water. When the fish runs here and there in the water, becomes absolutely exhausted and loses all strength, then it starts floating. The person catching the fish now slowly pulls it up on the land.

Similarly Sri *Bhagavân* has scattered *Harikathâ* (which is like fish-food) in this world. Some people come to hear it, yet it has no effect on their hearts. (They are like the first type of fish that come rushing due to the strong smell but do not swallow the bait). It does have some effect on others, but does not make a deep impact. (They are like the fish that peck the bait but do not swallow it) Yet there are others who, after hearing Sri *Harikathâ* from pure devotees, realize that devotional practice is the only goal of life (like the fish that do swallow the bait). They are determined to obtain Sri Krishna. Then they do not like this material world any more. On the other hand they do not get peace since they are unable to obtain Him. They still continue to feel “I am the doer” and rush here and there. They continue to wander everywhere – Gayâ, Kâshi, Haridwâr, Badrikâshram, Kedârnâth, Amarnath, Pushkar etc. However there is no peace outside us. The happiness lies within. We have to discover it. But these people do not realize this essence and exhaust themselves by running around. When the perfume forms in the navel of the musk deer¹ then it is enchanted by its sweet aroma. It tries to investigate from where this scent is coming. He runs throughout in the forest, searching for it. However it does not realize that this mesmerizing perfume is emanating from its own body. Similarly in stead of hearing the call of his heart the *sâdhak* rushes from one holy place to another. Ultimately he is

¹ The musk gland is found only in adult males. It lies in a sac located between the genitals and the umbilicus.

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exhausted; he thinks, "Now no more running. I shall go to Vrindâvan and settle there." He comes to *Vrajadhâm* and starts with his devotional practice. But he does not attain anything. When his pride is entirely vanquished – even the feeling that "I am performing *bhajan*" is crushed – then he realizes that Sri Krishna's *kripâ* is the real thing. When he reaches this firm conclusion, then he floats in tears and cries out piteously – "O Govinda, I beg for Your mercy. My endeavors are too less. Depending on my strength I will achieve nothing. Oh! Lord of the poor! O protector of Your refugee! O Savior of the fallen! My dear One! I take Your shelter in every respect. Please have mercy on me." Then Sri Govinda sees that his devotee is devoid of false ego and his heart is pure – how much he is anxious for Him! At that moment Sri Govinda's *kripâ-shakti* descends and floods the devotee's heart with *bhakti-ras* and makes it worthy of beholding the enchanting form of Sri Govinda Who is intense *prem*, eternal, conscious and bliss personified. Sri Govinda appears before the *sâdhak*. The devotee is liberated forever from the clutches of ignorance, illusion, all sufferings and the cycle of birth and death. He is now under the protection of the embodiment of *Amritam* (sweet nectar) and attains supreme peace.

Jai Gour Jai Gour Jai Gour

Self-test

1. Q: To what degree is my heart purified?
A: To the degree I have stopped seeing faults in others.
2. Q: How much have I progressed in *bhajan*?
A: To the extent I have become free of false ego, material desires and thoughts other than Sri *Bhagavân*.
3. Q: How much have I gained Bhakti devi's mercy?
A: I have gained Bhakti devi's mercy to the extent I consider myself lower than others, unworthy and fallen.
4. Q: How much fearless have I become?
A: To the extent I have become free of false ego and taken the shelter of Sri Govinda's lotus feet.
5. Q: How much of a pure devotee have I become?
A: To the extent I have stopped seeing faults in others and forgiving.
6. Q: How much has my intelligence become clear?
A: To the extent I can seek out my own faults and trying with body, speech and mind to improve myself for the better.
7. Q: How much free have I become of false ego?
A: To the extent I can hear harsh words of an evil person and yet remain non-agitated.
8. Q: How much is my heart illuminated with *bhakti*?
A: To the extent it has become free of false ego and it is agitated for the *darshan* of the Divine Couple.
9. Q: How much liberated am I?
A: As much as I am free of material desires.
10. Q: How much detached am I?
A: As much as I have become disinterested in worldly matters.
11. Q: Am I deprived?
A: Yes, if I am still waiting for that auspicious moment to arrive when I will start with *bhajan*.
12. Q: Am I qualified to receive Sri *Bhagavân*'s mercy quickly?
A: Yes, if I think –"I don't have one second to lose. Death will come any moment and snatch me." Thinking like this, if I accept all sorrow and amidst innumerable troubles and tribulations I continue in the endeavors of *bhajan* with firm determination. **(We can gain Sri *Bhagavân*'s *kripâ* so quickly in unfavorable circumstances that**

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we cannot when the situation is favorable. How fast I will gain *kripâ* - unfavorable circumstances are the tests.)

13.Q: Am I foolish?

A: Yes, I am, if I consider this destructible material body to be mine.

14.Q: Am I intelligent?

A: Yes, if by using this body that is material, destructible and full of suffering - I am able to obtain the transcendental, eternal and blissful Sri Govinda - I am truly very intelligent.



Nectarine Instructions

1. If we neglect the present waiting for an auspicious future to arrive, we shall deprive ourselves of a golden opportunity.
2. If we want something special in the future then we have to turn every present moment into action.
3. The best way to purify ourselves is to seek our own faults.
4. When we depend on God we are free of stress. We are worried as long as we think we are the doers.