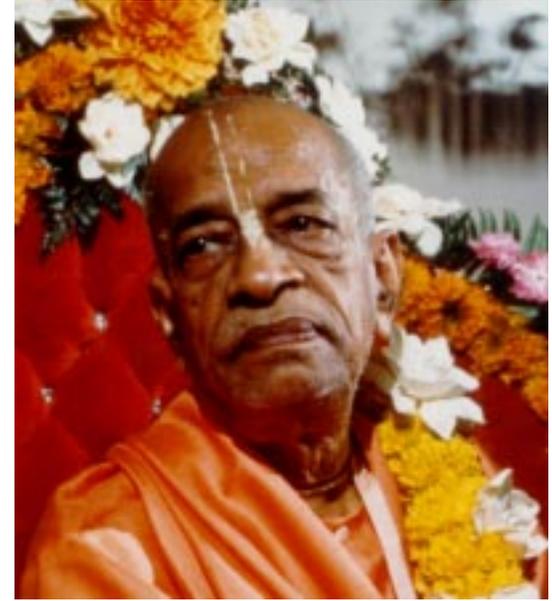


The Śikṣā-guru

Implementing Tradition Within ISKCON

Śivarāma Swami

*This book is humbly dedicated at the
lotus feet of*



**His Divine Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda,**

*my beloved spiritual master and the imperishable śikṣā-
guru and Founder-Ācārya of the International
Society for Krishna Consciousness.
May it bring him some small pleasure.*

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*mantra-guru āra yata śikṣā-guru-gaṇa
tānhāra caraṇa āge kariye vandana*

“I first offer my respectful obeisances at the lotus feet of my initiating spiritual master and all my instructing spiritual masters.”
(*Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 1.35*)

Preface

The concept of *guru-tattva* is very grave and deep. Before embarking upon this project, I understood my limitations were well short of the subject's vast shores. Once I set to the task, I understood better how extensive this ocean of devotional science was. At its conclusion, edified, having bathed in the waters of transcendental truth, I wished I could have written more.

What was I to do? The subject of *śikṣā-guru*, an important principle in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology, requires promotion within our Society. It has lain dormant and undefined for too long. The GBC had commissioned me to do the needful in this regard, and I have complied with the orders of higher authority. The recommendations of that work were submitted for the 1999 GBC meetings. This is the original form of that research, published at the behest of many Vaiṣṇavas. While engaged in this task, I prayed constantly to Śrīla Prabhupāda, consulted with senior ISKCON Vaiṣṇavas, and primarily, reviewed Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions on the subject. Some outside literary sources also proved very helpful.

Time was short. Can this topic be comprehensively presented? If so, it requires years of time and volumes of books. I had neither. Dear reader, I have made an effort to record what I understand to date. No doubt it is imperfect, for no endeavor is free of faults.

My hope is that this book will define the principle of *guru* and help introduce a culture in which the role of all our *gurus* is appreciated.

In Śrīla Prabhupāda's words, the definition of *guru* is "Anyone who gives instructions on the basis of revealed scriptures." Spiritual instruction is known as *śikṣā*; therefore, in principle, *guru* means *śikṣā-guru*. From this definition it is obvious there are many *śikṣā-gurus* in our lives, although only one will become our initiator or *dikṣā-guru*. However, plurality among the *śikṣā-gurus* does not make them unimportant. While it is true that the *dikṣā-guru* is special, he is so among a plethora of special Vaiṣṇavas, our *śikṣā-gurus*. We must learn to recognize their contribution to our spiritual life, show our obligation, and offer due respect. In the words of Lord Kṛṣṇa, "A human being who takes advantage of these spiritual masters and, receiving proper knowledge from them, crosses the ocean of material existence is to be understood as having properly utilized his human form of life." That is Vaiṣṇava culture.

I expect this book will be a catalyst for discussion, further study, and the compilation of more qualified works than this. We need not be frugal in defining the philosophical basis of the vast spiritual legacy so tirelessly gifted to us by Śrīla Prabhupāda. My conviction is that the research work recorded in the following pages reflects the teachings of our *ācāryas*, as presented by Śrīla Prabhupāda. If it serves as an impetus for change in an ISKCON wherein the concept of *guru* is almost exclusively equated with the initiator, my efforts will have been fruitful.

One last note. In the terminology of this book, I use the standard male gender throughout. I have done this for the sake of style, simplicity and custom. However, it should not be taken as a doctrinal statement that only males are qualified *gurus*. Qualification speaks for itself and defines who is *guru*, male or female.

Praying for the forgiveness of all the Vaiṣṇavas for my mistakes and impudence, I request them not to be angry with me. I have

completed this book on the 2nd of December, 1998, and offer it at the lotus feet of all those great souls who take the *śikṣā* of our *guru-paramparā* as their prime asset.

Śivarāma Swami

Introduction

The Purpose of this Book

The following book is an effort to define the role of the *śikṣā-guru* in the life of a devotee. In addition, it offers a set of practical guidelines, or Codes of Etiquette, on how to implement such theory.

As regards the subject of *guru*, the main thrust of our Society at present is directed towards the *dikṣā-guru*. “Guru” has been taken to be synonymous with *dikṣā-guru* and little else is understood by the use of the word. But who are those great souls who have introduced us to Kṛṣṇa consciousness? What relationship do we have with those Vaiṣṇavas who train us in the devotional way? What obligations do we have toward our parents, teachers, *sannyāsīs* and superiors, who guide us back to Godhead? Have we not to consider them?

Not much has been said by the Society on these topics. Little recognition has been given to those *gurus* who give *śikṣā*, or the essential instructions by which we now stand on the threshold of pure devotion. Hardly any appreciation is shown for those souls who labor to elevate us day by day. As a consequence, members of ISKCON do not know how to “give credit where credit is due,” and their negligence fuels the fires of discontent within respectable superiors. Honor should be offered to those who take respon-

sibility for our training. If we neglect to do so, we run the risk of the offense of *guror avajñā*, neglect of our spiritual masters.

The current practice of identifying the principle of *guru* solely with a ritualistic initiation is a misconception. Its consequences run the risk of minimizing the *dikṣā-guru* as well as the *śikṣā-gurus*, and tampers with our *siddhānta* on *guru-tattva*.

Vaiṣṇava *śāstras* emphasize the importance of *śikṣā*. They glorify as *guru* all Vaiṣṇavas who guide a conditioned soul back to Godhead, be they instructors or initiators. Scriptures train devotees to recognize and respect their *gurus*, universally advocating a culture of honor and respect for those to whom we are in debt. ISKCON needs to reflect upon these principles further, and the purpose of this book is to act as a catalyst toward such an end.

The Form of Presentation

This Introduction presents our purpose and a brief prologue explaining the content of each chapter. The book is divided into five Parts and sixteen Chapters.

The General Overview (which follows this Introduction) gives a summary of the main points and themes of the book. For the reader who has little time, or wants an advance glimpse into the body of the text, this is for you.

Parts Two to Five present the understanding of the principles underlying the tradition of *śikṣā-guru*. Chapters One to Twelve cite the arguments and evidence which forms the conclusion of the book, presented in the form of the Codes of Etiquette in Chapter Thirteen. The last three chapters are the practical application of the tradition within ISKCON.

The eleven Appendices contain relevant information, quotes and explanations to the arguments found in the book.

Prologue

To clarify the development of thought through the text, each chapter is summarized below.

Chapter One: The Principle of Guru

The instructions of Lord Kṛṣṇa coming down in the disciplic succession is known as *śikṣā*. The transmission of *śikṣā* is the principle characteristic of *guru*. Therefore anyone who gives relevant instruction on the basis of revealed scripture is known as a spiritual master, *śikṣā-guru*.

Chapter Two: Two Types of Guru

There are two types of *guru*, the instructor and the initiator. Both derive their authority from adherence to the instructions of Lord Kṛṣṇa, as received through the medium of the founder-*ācārya*. The *śikṣā-gurus* and *dikṣā-gurus* act in harmony to assist the disciple in going back to Godhead.

Chapter Three: Gurus with Different Dealings

There are many types of *śikṣā-gurus*. Their main role is to give instruction in devotional service, generally known as *abhidheya*. The founder-*ācārya* is the *śikṣā-guru* for his followers, and the *dikṣā-guru* initiates the disciple with the holy name and Gāyatrī *mantras*, giving instructions in devotional science, known as *sambandha*.

Chapter Four: Reviewing Oneness and Difference Between Śikṣā-gurus and Dikṣā-gurus

The *dikṣā-gurus* and *śikṣā-gurus* are non-different. That is *tattva*. Simultaneously, in terms of their dealings, they are different. How are these opposing characteristics resolved?

Chapter Five: Understanding Traditional Protocol

In the training of a disciple, the *dikṣā-guru* is the root and focus of the disciple's devotions, while instructors act as assistants to the initiator. This cooperative relationship is known as the Traditional Protocol.

Chapter Six: Exceptions to Traditional Protocol

All disciples are duty-bound to follow the Traditional Protocol,

even if their attachment to the instructor is greater than to the initiator. There are exceptions to this, when then *śikṣā-guru* becomes the prominent spiritual figure, but this takes place under specific conditions.

Chapter Seven: The Distinctive Role of the Founder-Ācārya

Dikṣā-gurus and *śikṣā-gurus* also differ in characteristics other than the roles defined by Traditional Protocol. The primary distinction is their subordinate position to the founder-*ācārya*.

Chapter Eight: Vaiṣṇavas of Varying Spiritual Strength

The next prominent distinction between the *gurus* is the relative measure of their spiritual strength. A disciple should be aware of general categories of spiritual empowerment and how to give proportionate respect.

Chapter Nine: Gurus Varying in Their Commitment

Different Vaiṣṇavas make varying commitments to their disciples. A devotee should know how to recognize the degree of commitment his *gurus* exhibit and be able to reciprocate with them accordingly.

Chapter Ten: Other Differences Among Gurus

There are some other ways in which distinction manifests among *gurus*. This study concludes the discussion on this topic.

Chapter Eleven: Liberated and Non-Liberated Gurus

To complete proper etiquette, devotees should know the classifications among *gurus*. There are the liberated and the non-liberated Vaiṣṇavas, who are found among devotees, non-devotees, animals, birds, reptiles and material nature.

Chapter Twelve: Conduct of the Non-Liberated Guru

Vaiṣṇavas follow proper behavior according to their advance-

ment. There are non-Vaiṣṇavas whose behavior is not exemplary, but whose teachings may be relevant at times. A devotee should know how to take the essence of their instruction without being contaminated by their non-devotional qualities.

Chapter Thirteen: The Codes of Etiquette

This chapter summarizes the contents of the book in the form of the points of etiquette concluded in previous chapters.

Chapter Fourteen: Our (Śikṣā) Sampradāya

Much has been said on the prominence of the *dikṣā-guru*. Still it should be understood that our Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* traces itself through the medium of *śikṣā* to Lord Kṛṣṇa. While initiation is important, it does not trace the course of the *paramparā*.

Chapter Fifteen: The Relevance of Śikṣā to ISKCON

ISKCON needs to incorporate the principles of *śikṣā* in a systematic way to be true to its spiritual tradition and properly guide the Vaiṣṇavas. There may be abuse in the application of *śikṣā* principles, but its benefits will far outweigh its liabilities.

Chapter Sixteen: Summary

Though Traditional Protocol emphasizes the role of the initiator, ours remains a *śikṣā-sampradāya*. We cannot ignore or foolishly discriminate against the many instructors in a disciple's life. *Śikṣā* requires recognition and encouragement within the Society.