

Dynamics of Guru-Disciple Relationship

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What Makes it Work

“Now I am confused about my duty and have lost all composure because of weakness. In this condition I am asking You to tell me clearly what is best for me. Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You. Please instruct me.” (Bhagavat-gita As It Is 2.7)

Shri Krishna had chosen to speak the Bhagavad-gita to His friend Arjuna. Why did He not choose to speak it to His servant, or to His parents, or to His lovers? Friendship is the relationship of equality but reception of knowledge requires stepping down from one's equal position—and this is exactly what Arjuna did. He submitted himself to Shri Krishna. Because he was the topmost devotee he could transition from being a friend to becoming a student. Shri Krishna wanted to show exactly how this process is done to the future population of Kali Yuga where ideas of equality are big obstacles of becoming receptive to transcendental knowledge.

Today equality is propagated and officiated as an attribute of a proud social order. This equality is very comfortable for the equal exchange that the money system is based on. The buyer is expected to pay an equal amount for the calculated worth of the product that he purchases. A society founded upon money is based upon artificial equality. Equality is always artificial because nothing is ever equal to anything else. Even when a product is produced for the market it bears only a calculated value of itself. But the actual value may involve many hidden costs. Nonetheless, a product has to be marketable and for that somebody has to desire to pay its “exact” value. This principle of artificial equality is what drives the world today. And the more money and value becomes prominent, the more the ideas of equality also float around.

In this day and age women are viewed as equal to men, students have become equal to their teachers, and children are becoming equal to their parents. When women become equal to men, they no longer can receive protection. When students become equal to their teachers they no longer can receive knowledge. When children become equal to their parents they can no longer receive protection and education from them. Equality disconnects the natural receptivity for beneficial social exchanges. The innate relationships of inequality have become replaced by stagnate exchanges that are based upon receiving favors. In the exchange of favors there is always the expectation of a positive result. One

expects to receive exactly what he has paid for. Such an exchange does not allow constructive negativity or criticism which is the basis of diverse relationships.

In today's society of "happy" equality everyone is supposed to be viewed in a positive light. But more and more we experience that people have become depressed. A façade of external happiness hides a sense of enormous dissatisfaction with one's own self image. The reason is because there is no actual system which evaluates one's self worth, as was done in the past by authority figures in authority-based societies. At the present time where there is no authority there can be no constructive criticism. When an authority figure gives evaluations, he does so based on a moral system that ultimately comes from the higher principles of dharma. The impeccable support of dharma is the actual justification for the position of a superior. Thus, the authority figure is also a role model and he pulls those that sit beneath him or her into a higher platform of spiritual understanding. Therefore the dynamics of society become progressive and not stagnant. Whenever there is progress, there is a sense of achievement and inner satisfaction that one is receiving something of real value.

Now regarding today's state of affairs, the society of equality has actually been construed in such a way that it is meant to self-destruct. This destruction of society based upon presumed equality is the natural consequence of the literary death of its members. This has come about due to the depression caused by lacking a proper system of self-evaluation. The solution to this conundrum comes from the Bhagavad-gita. Because God is not dead His authority is ever present. He is eternal. The principles of varnashrama dharma have also been given by Him:

"According to the three modes of material nature and the work ascribed to them, the four divisions of human society were created by Me." (Bg 4.7)

The key to happiness is to find the authority and to submit to him. Authority figures are all around us. At least humans still have mothers and fathers. Children can never be equal to their parents despite the artificial value system of today. In the present day parents take care of their children by producing all the goods that money can buy. But if they teach their children to accept criticism by showing them the benefits of learning and becoming better humans by doing so, then the rising generation will become empowered to make the right decisions in life. This approach sets the precedent for a healthy and competitive social spirit that leads one to the satisfaction of inner achievement.

In general, accepting criticism is the ability to stay strong and to expand. Today people cannot handle criticism. Even the thought of it throws their status quo out of control. Although this reaction is

unnatural, it is provoked by the fear that one is not receiving the value which he paid for. There is the ever-present feeling that one is being cheated. Ultimately this kind of attitude leads to isolation without real human interaction, and it destines one to a lonely existence even while he is in the company of other humans.

If one is willing to slip out of the vicious cycle, he has to look for an authority figure and submit to him or her. Authority figures are always available because in the real world there artificial equality does not exist. In fact, everyone is different from everyone else, and for different reasons one can learn from anyone else. At least one can start with the set authorities that still stand in this day and age such as the parents and the gurus. One should approach them with humility and a desire to accept criticism. Nonetheless, parents are more and more becoming victims of the system of social equality. Regular school teachers have long been employed as paid personnel for the money-based society, and they no can longer act as real authorities. Yet the spiritual teachers of society are available since they stand above the changes that society undergoes. The spiritual seeker, especially the one who is looking after the ultimate quest of self-satisfaction, should carefully examine his authority prospects. Then, once he has found his role model, he should submit to him. Shri Krishna states:

“Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth. (Bg 4.34)

Only when one places oneself lower than his guru can knowledge flow from the authority to the recipient just as water flows from higher to lower ground and nourishes everything on its way in the process. The fear of being criticized comes from the ignorance that criticism will destroy the foundation of the self by putting it into a negative value. That may be true in the world of set values but in the spiritual world, where everything is constantly expanding, the self is a dynamic and integral part of the ever-expanding pastimes between the Supreme Lovers Shri Radha and Shri Krishna. If one is about to embark on a quest to the spiritual reality, he should expect to be in a state of constant criticism. The ability to take and to answer the expectation of criticism makes one into a perfect servant of God. This state of perfection cause one to live in an ever-blissful state of inner satisfaction, knowing that he has done the right thing and that he is an expert who can meet any kind of challenge. The glory of the soul is revealed only when there is the dynamic of inequality. If one ever wishes to approach his glory, he should be willing to submit to the criticisms of a spiritual authority. The relationship of mundane friendship and equality may be good for social prestige, but will never give one the ecstasy that comes with real achievement.

After all said and done, we should make a distinction between mundane friendship and equality and the transcendental friendship that Shri Krishna and Arjuna share. In mundane equality giving and taking come in equal amounts, or the attitude of what is expected is that which is served. In the spiritual world, friendship means that one has a positive appreciation for another—but that friendly approval always exceeds one’s expectations. In the spiritual world friendship can create a great competitive spirit because one is always trying to give more appreciation than he receives. That is not difficult when one’s friend is the Supreme Lord Shri Krishna Himself. In spiritual friendship there is always the sense that the friend or the Supreme Lord Shri Krishna is always superior, and that is precisely why Shri Arjuna was able to accept his friend as a guru.

It is time for those who desire the essence of spirituality to see their guru as their best friend, not because the guru should be accepted as equal but because his only interest is to give the highest knowledge. Spiritual friendships are based upon positive exchanges that always result in inner satisfaction. But, as clarified above, no inner satisfaction can be achieved without accepting criticism given by a higher authority who is not only a representative of Shri Krishna, but should also be related to as such. In the Bhagavad-gita Shri Krishna and Arjuna have set the example of what the ideal exchange between a guru and disciple should be.

“That very ancient science of the relationship with the Supreme is today told by Me to you because you are My devotee as well as My friend; therefore you can understand the transcendental mystery of this science.” (Bg 4.3)