

Initiation Into Spiritual Life

Preface

The following article is an adaptation of a small English treatise written by His Divine Grace Om Vishnupada Paramahansa Parivrajakacharya Ashtottara-shata Shri Shrimad Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami Maharaj Prabhupada. He penned the original document in the year 442 of the Chaitanya Era, corresponding to December, 1928, on the western calendar.

The very same article was printed in that month and year within a Bengali newspaper containing topics on devotional service and the Absolute Truth.

The original treatise can still be found in various Gaudiya archives, under volume 26, number 7, of the Shri Sajjana-toshani.

This adaptation by Shri Kailasacandra das of the Vaishnava Foundation is not an effort to jump over or supersede the acharya. Rather it is an effort to glorify the acharya and his writing, which will always maintain its supreme superiority. A good many sentences of the adaptation are worded in this adaptation exactly as they were in the original. Many more sentences have been only very slightly altered from the original manuscript. The adaptation makes "changes" only in spelling, syntax and explanation. It does not--even slightly--change the meaning of any part of the original treatise, and it certainly does not change the meaning of the whole text in any way whatsoever.

This adaptation is simply a humble effort by the author to make the original manuscript easier reading for the majority of interested Western devotees and spiritualists. A transcribed copy of the verbatim original is available upon request. If even one person benefits from this adaptation, then we will consider our efforts worthwhile.

so 'ham vah sravayisyami yathadhitam yatha-mati

"Now I shall let you hear the very same thing, to the degree of my realization, just as I learned it." SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM 1.3.44

Initiation Into Spiritual Life

The ceremony of diksha, or initiation, is that by which the Spiritual Preceptor admits one to the status of a neophyte on the path of spiritual endeavor. The ceremony tends to confer spiritual enlightenment by abrogating sinfulness. Its

actual effect depends on the degree of willing cooperation on the part of the disciple. It is, therefore, not the same in all cases. It does not preclude the possibility of the novice reverting to the non-spiritual state--if he slackens in his effort or misbehaves.

Initiation puts a person on the true track and also imparts an initial impulse to go ahead. It cannot, however, keep one going for Good unless one chooses to put forth his own voluntary effort.

The nature of the initial impulse also varies in accordance with the condition of the recipient. Although the mercy of the Good Preceptor enables us to have a glimpse of the Absolute and of the path to His attainment, the seed thus sown requires very careful tending under the direction of the Preceptor. Only then will it germinate and grow into the fruit-and-shade-giving tree. After obtaining a working idea of his real nature, unless our soul, of his own accord, chooses to serve Krishna, he cannot long retain the Spiritual Vision. The soul is never compelled by Krishna to serve Him.

Still, initiation is never altogether futile. It changes the disciple's outlook on life. If he sins after initiation, he may fall into greater depths of degradation than the uninitiated. Although, even after initiation, temporary setbacks may occur, they do not ordinarily prevent the final deliverance. The faintest glimmering of the real knowledge of the Absolute has sufficient power to radically change for Good our whole mental and physical constitution. This glimmering is incapable of being totally extinguished--except in extraordinarily unfortunate cases.

It is undoubtedly practical for the initiated--if only he is willing--to follow the directions of the Preceptor, leading, by slow degrees to the Absolute.

The Good Preceptor is verily the savior of fallen souls.

It is, however, very rarely that a person, affected with modern culture, feels inclined to submit to the guidance of another. This is especially so in spiritual matters. But that very person will submit readily enough to the direction of a physician for being cured of bodily ailments. These ailments cannot be ignored without consequences which are self-evident to everybody. The evil that results from our neglect of the soul's ailments is of a nature that paralyzes and deludes our understanding, preventing recognitions of itself. Its gravity is not recognized, because it does not apparently stand in the way of our worldly activities, as do bodily ailments. The man of average culture is, therefore, at liberty to ask questions, despite the fact that he has not even realized his pressing necessity to have his spiritual maladies treated by the Really Competent Physician.

These are the questions which are frequently asked: "Why should it be at all necessary to submit to any particular person or to subscribe to any particular ceremony for the purpose of realizing the Absolute, since His nature is unconditioned? Why should Krishna require our formal declaration of submission to Himself? Would it not be more generous and logical to permit us to live a life of

freedom in accordance with the principles of our perverted nature? Admitting that it is our duty to serve Krishna, why should we have to be introduced to Him by a third party? Why is it impossible for one to serve Sri Krishna directly?"

It would no doubt be highly convenient and helpful to be instructed by a Good Preceptor, well-versed in the Scriptures, in order to understand those Scriptures. But one should ever submit to another in a way that may furnish a rascal with an opportunity of really doing harm. The bad preceptor is a familiar character. It is impossible to explain how such "gurus," who live openly in sin, can nevertheless contrive to retain the unquestioning allegiance of the cultured portion of their disciples.

This being the case, can we blame any person who hesitates to submit unconditionally to a preceptor, whether he is Good or bad? It is necessary, of course, to be quite sure of the bonafides of a person before we accept him--even tentatively--as our spiritual guide. A Preceptor should be a person who appears likely to possess those qualities which will enable him to improve our spiritual condition.

These, along with similar questions and thoughts, are likely to occur to most persons with an English education when they are asked to accept the help of any particular person as their Spiritual Preceptor. The literature, science, and art of the West pushes the principle of individual liberty and denounces the mentality which leads one to surrender the right of choosing his own course to some other superior person. Western culture inculcates the necessity and high value of having faith in oneself.

But the Good Preceptor claims our sincere and complete allegiance. The good disciple makes a complete surrender of himself at the feet of the Preceptor. The submission of the disciple is neither irrational nor blind.

It is complete, as long as the Preceptor himself continues to be altogether Good. The disciple retains the right of renouncing his allegiance to the Preceptor the moment the disciple is satisfied that the Preceptor has become a fallible creature like himself. Nor does a Good Preceptor accept anyone as his disciple unless the later is prepared to submit to him freely.

A Good Preceptor is duty-bound to renounce a disciple who is not sincerely willing to follow the Preceptor's instructions fully. If a preceptor accepts as his disciple one who refuses to be completely guided by him, or if a disciple submits to a preceptor who is not wholly Good, such preceptor and such disciple are both doomed to fall from their spiritual state.

No one is a Good Preceptor who has not realized the Absolute. One who has realized the Absolute is saved from the necessity of walking on the worldly path. The Good Preceptor lives the Spiritual Life and is, therefore, bound to be wholly Good. He should be wholly free from any desire for anything of this world, whether good or bad. The categories of good and bad do not exist in the Absolute.

In the Absolute, everything is Good. In our present state, we can have no idea of this Absolute Goodness. Submission to the Absolute is not real unless it is also Absolute.

It is on the plane of the Absolute that the disciple is required to submit completely to the Good Preceptor. On the material plane, there can be no such thing as complete submission. The pretense of complete submission to the bad preceptor is responsible for the corruptions that are found in the relationship of the ordinary worldly guru and his equally worldly-minded disciples.

All honest thinkers will realize the logical acceptability of the position just set forth. But most persons will be disposed to believe that a Good Preceptor cannot be found in this world. This is really so. Both the Good Preceptor and his disciple belong to the Spiritual Realm. But spiritual discipleship is nevertheless capable of being realized by persons who belong to this world. Otherwise, there would be no religion at all in the world. Still, just because spiritual life happens to be within realization in this world, it does not mean worldly existence is capable of being improved into spiritual. As a matter of fact, the one is perfectly incompatible with the other. They are categorically different from one another. The Good Preceptor, although he appears to belong to this world, is not really of this world. No one who belongs to this world can deliver us from worldliness. The Good Preceptor is a denizen of the Spiritual World. He has been enabled, by the will of God, to appear in this world, in order to enable us to realize the spiritual existence.

The much-vaunted individual liberty is a figment of the diseased imagination. We are bound, willingly or unwillingly, to submit to the laws of God in the material as well as in the Spiritual World. The hankering for freedom to defy His laws is the cause of all our miseries. The total abnegation of all hankering for such freedom is the condition of admission into the Spiritual Realm. In this world, we desire this freedom but are compelled--against our will--to submit to the inexorable laws of physical nature. This is the unnatural state. Simply becoming unwilling to accept this forced submission from material nature does not qualify us for entrance into the Spiritual Realm. In this world, the moral principle indeed claims our willing submission. But morality is also a curtailment of freedom, although the peculiar circumstances of this world necessitate it.

The soul who does not belong to this world is in a state of open or court rebellion against submission to an alien domination. By his very constitution, he is capable of willingly submitting only to the Absolute.

The Good Preceptor asks the struggling soul to submit not to the laws of this world (which will only rivet its chains) but to the higher law of the Spiritual Realm. Due to the absence of complete conviction, the pretense of submission to the laws of the Spiritual Realm (with no intention of really carrying them out in practice) is often mistaken for genuine submission.

In this world, the fully-convinced state is non-existent. We are, therefore, compelled in all cases to act upon make-believes, viz., the so-called working

hypotheses. We have learned this from our experience of this world.

The Good Preceptor tells us to change this method of activity. He invites us, first of all, to be really and fully informed of the nature and laws of the Other World. It happens to be eternally and categorically different from this phenomenal world.

If we do not sincerely submit to be instructed in the alphabets of eternal life, we are bound to remain where we are. We will go on perversely asserting (however unconsciously) our present processes and so-called convictions against the instructions of the Preceptor, even in the period of novitiate. This also will amount to the practical rejection of all Good advice, because the two worlds have nothing in common. At the same time, we naturally will fail to understand this. We will continue to always believe, in accordance with our accustomed methods, that we are, at any rate, PARTIALLY following the Preceptor. As a matter of fact, when we reserve the right of choice, we really follow ourselves.

Even when we seem to agree to follow the Preceptor, it is because he appears to be in agreement with ourselves. But, since the two worlds have absolutely nothing in common, we are only under a delusion when we suppose that we really understand the method or the object of the Preceptor--when we reserve the right to assert the apparent self.

Faith in the scriptures can alone help us in this otherwise impractical endeavor--believing in the Preceptor, with the help of the shastras, while understanding neither.

As soon as we are fully convinced of the necessity of submitting unambiguously to the Good Preceptor, it is then--and only then--that he is enabled to show us the way into the Spiritual World. He shows the way in accordance with the method laid down in the shastras for that purpose.

He can apply that method properly, without perpetrating fatal blunder, since he himself happens to belong to the Realm of the Spirit.

The crux of the matter lies not in the external nature of the ceremony of initiation, as it appears to us. That is bound to be unintelligible to us, being an affair of the Other World. The crux of the matter lies in the conviction of the necessity of--and the successful choice of--a really Good Preceptor. We can attain to this conviction by the exercise of our unbiased reason in the light of our ordinary experience.

Once this conviction has been truly formed, Sri Krishna Himself, in two ways, helps us in finding the really Good Preceptor. In the first place, He instructs us as regards the character and functions of a Good Preceptor through the revealed Shastras. In the second place, He Himself sends to us the Good Preceptor at the moment when we are likely to benefit by his instructions. The Good Preceptor also comes to us when we reject him. In such cases, also, it is certainly Krishna Who sends him to us--for no reason whatsoever.

Krishna has eternally revealed the tidings of the Spiritual Realm in the form of transcendental sounds which have been handed down in the records of the Spiritual Scriptures all over the world. The Spiritual Scriptures help all those who are prepared to exercise reason for the purpose of finding not the relative truth, but the Absolute Truth--and to find out the proper instructor in accordance with their directions. The only Good Preceptor is he who can make us really understand the Spiritual Scriptures. Those Scriptures enable us to realize the necessity for, and the nature of, submission to the processes laid down in them. But there is still every chance of foul play. A very clever man, or a magician, may pass himself off as a person who can properly explain the Scriptures by means of his greater knowledge or deceptive arts. It is very important, therefore, that we should be on our guard against such tricks. The scholar, as well as the magician, pretends to explain the Scriptures only in terms of the objects or happenings of this world. Conversely, the Scriptures themselves declare that they do not tell us at all about the things of this world.

Those who are liable to be deluded by the arts of perverted yogis persuade themselves into believing that the Spiritual is identical with the perversion, distortion, or defiance of the laws of physical nature. The laws of physical nature are not unreal. They govern the relation of all relative existences. In our present state, it is therefore always possible for another to possess the power or the knowledge to demonstrate the tentative character of what we choose to regard as our deepest convictions.

These powerful scholars or yogis merely expose the insufficiency or inapplicability of these convictions. But such surprises belong to the realm of the phenomenal; they have nothing to do with the Absolute.

Those who have an unspiritual partiality for scholarship or for magic fall into the clutches of such pseudo-religionists. Such unfortunate persons are victims of their own perversity. The serious plight of these victims will be realized from the fact that no one can be delivered from the state of ignorance simply by submitting to the force of compulsion in which a clever man keeps them under his own control. It is not possible to save the man who refuses on principle to listen to the voice of reason. The empirical and uninspired scholars are no exception to this rule.

When we actually feel the need of his guidance, the plain meaning of the Shastras should, therefore, be our only guide in the search of the Good Preceptor. The Scriptures have defined the Good Preceptor as one who himself leads the Spiritual Life. It is not any worldly qualifications which make the Good Preceptor. It is by unreserved submission to such a Preceptor that we can be helped to re-enter into the Realm that is our real home, but which, unfortunately, is unrecognizable to almost all of us at present. Our body and our mind alike find it impossible to access that Realm, and this is the result of abusing our faculty of free reason in the diseased state, with the consequent accumulation of a killing load of worldly experiences--which we have learned to regard as the very stuff of our existence.
OM TAT SAT.

