

Tridandisvami Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja

YOUR TWENTY-FOUR GURUS

Badger, California: June 18, 2005

[Respected Harikatha Readers, Please accept our humble obeisances.

During his visit to Badger this year, Srila Narayana Maharaja gave a course on Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's book, Sri Bhagavat-arkamarici-mala, wherein Bhaktivinoda Thakura groups various essential verses from Srimad-Bhagavatam according to topic, and then explains them. You have previously received several lectures from this course, and here is another.

If you have not already done so, we hope you will enjoy taking advantage of the beautiful links at this lecture:]

Yesterday I explained the following two verses:

tasmad gurum prapadyeta
jjnasuh sreya uttamam
sabde pare ca nisnatam
brahmany upasamasrayam

["Therefore, any person who seriously desires real happiness must seek a bona fide spiritual master and take shelter of him by initiation. The qualification of the bona fide guru is that he has realized the conclusions of the scriptures by deliberation and is able to convince others of these conclusions. Such great personalities, who have taken shelter of the Supreme Godhead, leaving aside all material considerations, should be understood to be bona fide spiritual masters." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.3.21)]

tatra bhagavatan dharman
siksed gurv-atma-daivatah
amayyanuvrttya yais
tusyed atmatma-do harih

["Accepting the bona fide spiritual master as one's life and soul and worshipable deity, the disciple should learn from him the process of pure devotional service. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Hari, the soul of all souls, is inclined to give Himself to His pure devotees. Therefore, the disciple should learn from the spiritual master to serve the Lord without duplicity and in such a faithful and favorable way that the Supreme Lord, being satisfied, will offer Himself to the faithful disciple." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.3.22)]

The root and backbone of bhajana is guru-nistha (strong faith in guru). Without strong faith in the bona fide guru, and unconditional surrender to him, you cannot begin your bhakti. You will never be able to do so.

There are two kinds of guru: diksa-guru and siksa-guru. If diksa-guru has given all siksa (instructions) from beginning to end – teaching bhajana, the aim and object of life, and all

other devotional topics – be satisfied. However, if diksa-guru could somehow not complete this work, then siksa-guru is needed. Siksa-guru should be of equal rank to Gurudeva, but this is very rare. At the time of Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja there was no one equal to him in ISKCON. For his disciples, therefore, there were senior god-brothers.

Lord Sri Krsna instructed Uddhava in the Eleventh Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam. In this regard He cited a historical narration concerning the conversation between the great King Yadu and an avadhuta [*see endnote 1] named Dattatreya. The avadhuta was questioned by the king, who asked how he had attained such an advanced state of spiritual consciousness, and he replied to the king's enquiry:

santi me guravo rajan
bahavo buddhy-upasritah
yato buddhim upadaya
mukto 'tamiha tan srnu

["My dear King, with my intelligence I have taken shelter of many spiritual masters. Having gained transcendental understanding from them, I now wander about the Earth in a liberated condition. Please listen as I describe them to you." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.7.32)]

You may have accepted a diksa-guru, and after Gurudeva disappeared you found that something was lacking. Or, it may be that Gurudeva has many disciples and therefore he told you can accept another pure devotee as siksa-guru. In such circumstances you should take a siksa-guru.

Siksa-guru is of three kinds, and we will explain this later on.

Dattatreya is said to be a saktavesa-avatara (an incarnation of the Lord; a living being who is empowered by the Lord to act for a specific purpose). He used to travel naked without any belongings. No one knew where he was going, and even he himself did not know. Sometimes he was laughing and sometimes weeping bitterly and rolling on the earth. His movements made him appear as though he had been captured by a ghost.

As mentioned, one day Yadu Maharaja met him and asked, "You appear extremely happy. I cannot understand your moods. Why you are weeping, laughing and rolling on the ground?"

Yadu Maharaja is teaching us to approach a spiritual master with a submissive mood.

tad viddhi pranipatena
pariprasnena sevaya
upadeksyanti te jnanam
jnaninas tattva-darsinaù

["Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth." (Bhagavad-gita 4.34)]

Go to a tattva-darsi (one who has seen the Absolute Truth). He knows everything, he is self-realized, and he can remove all your doubts. Offer him obeisances, surrender to him, serve and please him. Then pray to him, "If I am qualified to hear and understand, please answer my question." Ask in this way, and not in a challenging mood.

Yadu Maharaja did this; he asked, "You are very happy, but I cannot understand your mood. Please tell me why you are traveling, why you are happy and why you are laughing and weeping."

Dattatreya replied, "I have many gurus. I have received so many instructions from them, and I have followed those instructions. I have 24 siksa-gurus: Prthivi (Earth), Vayu (air), water, fire, the Moon, the Sun, the pigeon, the python, the ocean, the moth, the bumblebee, the elephant, the honey collector, the deer, the fish, the prostitute named Pingala, the hawk, the baby, the young and unmarried girl, the arrow-maker, the snake, the spider and the wasp.

Instructions are also of three kinds: 1) hearing the teachings of those who are actually sadhus; that is, guru and maha-bhagavata Vaisnavas. 2) Learning from their character. We should follow the manner in which they do bhajana, conduct their daily routine and behave towards others. 3) Seeing here and there, and thus learning by one's own intelligence. Dattatreya was telling about what he saw from nature. By his intelligence he took something for his own bhajana, and we should also do that.

You are very fortunate that you have either taken birth in a devotee family, or somehow Krsna has given you the intelligence to hear hari-katha. You will have to hear. What is the meaning of the word 'hear'?

Once an avadhuta (not Dattatreya) came to the assembly of King Vikramaditya and challenged the king's council members. He had been carrying a human skull, and now he put it on the table and asked, "Who can tell whether this person was very intelligent or foolish during his lifetime?" No one could answer, so he said, "I have wasted my time here. Everyone here is foolish, because nobody can answer." King Vikramaditya said, "One of my counselors, Kalidasa, is coming in a few moments. He may answer you. Please don't be angry." Kalidasa soon came, and that man again asked the question. Kalidasa picked up a coconut leaf straw. He put it in one ear of the skull and it came out the other. He then said, "Oh, he was foolish. If the straw would have gone in one ear and then down towards the heart, that would have indicated intelligence. "

Don't be foolish. Be intelligent.

Dattatreya told the king what instruction he received from each of his twenty-four gurus.

From the Earth – Prthivi – he learned patience, tolerance, great determination and forgiveness. You can dig anywhere on the Earth, pass stool and urine anywhere on the Earth, or make houses and anything you like from the Earth; the Earth is always tolerant. Can you be so tolerant? As I told you yesterday, even if someone is beating you and doing nonsense to you, you should be tolerant and forgiving.

This is the extraordinary quality of a pure Vaisnava. If one is doing any nonsense to a Vaisnava, the Vaisnava will forgive that person. I have seen this in my guru-parampara, and we should also be like this.

Mountains – on the Earth there are so many mountains. We should learn from those mountains how to work for the benefit of others. A mountain gives so many trees, herbs and water, but not for itself – for others. Your life should be for others. Also, mountains live alone, in lonely places, and their only association is that of sadhus. They take only sadhu-sanga. So many sadhus used to live in the Himalayas in India, and also at Govardhana, because those places are very silent and favorable for bhajana.

Trees – we also learn from the trees. You should be as tolerant as a tree. What are the qualities of a tree? His bark, root, leaves, fruits, flowers, dry wood and everything else is for others. Even if there is no summer rain and the tree is going to become dry, still he does not say, “Oh, give me water.” In the Caitanya-Caritamrta it is said that one should be like a tree.

Air – what is the quality of air? She lives for others. If there is no air, we cannot survive for even a moment. She is always detached. She can take the bad fragrance from here and there – bad and good – and yet she is detached. We should be detached like the air. Don't be attached to anyone. Reserve your attachment for guru, but not a bogus guru. A bogus guru will say, “You should marry.” Nowadays this is going on. Do not have attachment to unqualified gurus. Be attached only to qualified gurus, to those who can take your heart and give it to Sri Sri Radha and Krsna.

Sky – the sky is everywhere, even in our hearts and bodies. Empty space is called sky. The sky is everywhere, and yet it is always detached. You should be like that.

Water – the qualities of water are purity, softness and refreshment. When you take a bath, your body feels pure and refreshed. Be like the water.

Fire – fire can burn stool, and still it maintains a good fragrance. After death one's body is put in fire, and yet that fire always remains pure. We should be like that – always pure. Try to be pure to do bhajana. Purity can come by performance of bhajana; otherwise it will not come. No one can be pure without doing bhajana. One cannot become pure by performance of yoga or the execution of austerities; it is only possible by remembering Lord Sri Krsna and His sweet pastimes.

The Moon – we think that there is a first, second and third Moon, up to the full Moon; It seems there are fifteen moons, but this is not true. There are not many moons; the Moon

is one. If you go very high in space, you will see that the moon is always full. It is sometimes covered by another planet, sometimes by Rahu and at other times Ketu, so it seems there are 15 moons.

Don't sleep.

The Sun – the Sun has no birth and no death, but it seems that it has taken birth. The Sun illuminates everywhere, and it therefore seems that there also are many various suns. But there is only one. Similarly, Paramatma (the Lord as Supersoul) is seen in various places, but he is one. Jivas (individual souls) are so many, but Paramatma is one.

The python – don't become a python, but take instructions from him. The python remains in one place, and by his fruitive karma some animal comes nearby without any effort on his part, and he eats it. He will not go here and there in search for food. What you are obtaining by your previous karma you will always get – not more or less than that. The python may be very hungry when nothing is there, and it may be that he can't get his food for some time, but still he will not go here and there. If any creature comes nearby, he will eat it and be satisfied. You should try to be like that. If anything is coming without much effort – and it is bound to come – accept that. As suffering comes without effort, good things also come in the same way.

Your maintenance of life will come according to your previous karma. Thus, we should tolerate everything.

The ocean – the ocean is always happy, and this is understood by his rolling tides. He is laughing, but at the same time he is very grave. You should be like that. If an ant bites you, don't be overwhelmed, repeatedly exclaiming, "OH, AN ANT HAS BITTEN ME! An ant has BITTEN ME!"

The moth – in the rainy season in India, if there is light or fire anywhere, moths at once fly into it. You should be careful – for ladies, men should be careful; and for men, ladies should be careful. Don't go to the fire; always be careful. If you go, this means your intelligence is finished and you will die.

The big black honeybee – a honeybee (madhukara) goes from flower to flower, but he only takes the essence. He does not collect more than he needs. If he collects extra, this will go to the honey collector.

The honey-collector – A hunter may come to the honey collector and take that bee in his net. You should not collect more than you need, because nothing can be taken at the time of death. If you have a million dollars in India, so many dacoits will know and they will come to kill you. Be like a bee. Collect very little, like those doing madhukari (like the bee) bhiksha (begging alms)* [See Endnote 2].

The Elephant – I have heard that in India some female elephants are sent to the forest, where there is a large well covered with long grasses and tree branches. She brings there

a male elephant, which is controlled by that lady, and he falls in the well. Then, after many days of fasting from even water, the male elephant becomes weak. At that time, the same lady elephant goes inside the well, places a chain around his leg and takes him out. The humans then take charge of that male elephant and train him, and he then becomes a trained elephant. So, men should be careful about ladies and ladies should be careful about men. They should be careful about each other. This is not a joke. If you are not careful, you may become like a dog with no sense at all.

Deer – a hunter goes to the forest and keeps any net hidden somewhere. Then, by his playing very sweet music, so many deer become attracted. The net falls, and at once all the deer are caught. Don't hear mundane talk. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu once heard the sweet voice of a lady singing Gita-govinda and ran towards her. Somehow Govinda told Him, "O Prabhu, it is a lady singing." Mahaprabhu then said, "If you had not saved Me, I would have gone to the ocean and drowned there."

The fish – in catching fish, the fisherman attaches a thread (with a worm on a hook at its end) to a stick, and then drops that thread in the river. Thus, by the greed of the fish's tongue, he is at once caught. Try to control your tongue. Don't be attached to good tasting foods. Be like Srila Rupa Gosvami and Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami, who never cared even for salt, what to speak of other things. So many people want rich foods – but especially sannyasis shouldn't take such foodstuffs. Take only such things as simple boiled vegetables, otherwise material desires will come. Be very careful. This instruction is not only for males, but for females too.

The small baby – a small baby lives naked. Sometimes he laughs and sometimes weeps, and only his mother takes care of him. He is like a paramahansa, like Nityananda Prabhu. Sometimes Nityananda prabhu took off his clothes and then went naked to the courtyard of Sacimaiya (the mother of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu), and Mahaprabhu gave His chaddar to him. Nityananda Prabhu is an avadhuta (beyond social etiquette) and because of this, being married or not married was inconsequential. We cannot imitate the character of transcendental personalities like him.

Don't criticize what others are doing. A small boy is doing so many things, but after all, he is only a small boy. Similarly, every living entity is different, and it is not for us to criticize or find fault with what Lord Krsna has arranged for them. As a boy may sometimes puts his toe in his mouth, and sometimes take a toy, be like a boy. Do not be worried about what others are doing. Be carefree and oil your own machine.

An unmarried girl – there was a young lady who was not yet married. One day she was in her home and there was nothing to cook. There were a few vegetables, but no rice. Her mother and father were not at home. In the meantime, a gentleman from another village came to see if that girl would be a suitable bride for his son. Because her father was not at home, she told him, "Wait a little while." There was no rice, so she went begging for rice. She was wearing many bangles and they were making some sound. She began thinking, "If this sound is heard by him, he will know I am very poor He will know that I am begging for rice when he hears the sound of the bangles, and he will not select me for his

son." She was very intelligent. She took off all the bangles but one, and there was no longer any sound.

What do we learn here? Jana-sanga-tyaga advaita-tyaga. Be far away from those who do not accept God as a person. Jana-sanga means the association anyone other than those engaged in krsna-bhakti. Advaita means mayavadis. Don't associate with mayavadis or non-devotees, even if they are your mother and father. You can serve by other means, but don't speak hari-katha with them. Even if you have to mix with our family members, do not create a disturbance by trying to speak harikatha to them, because they have no faith in your ideals. They always think you are their child.

The arrow-maker – There was an arrow-maker, a blacksmith. He was so absorbed in making arrows that when a marriage party with drums, singing and dancing passed by, he was not aware of it. Someone told him, "A very beautiful marriage party has just passed by." He replied, "When? I didn't see it." Be absorbed like this. Don't see what is going on here and there. Be absorbed in Krsna and not in nonsense. Better to be absorbed in nama-sankirtana: "Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare." Then you will not hear anything else.

The snake – a snake lives and travels alone, and he has no house. He lives in rat holes and is always very careful. Even if you are at a far distance from him, he will know by eye vibration that you are there. Similarly, always be very careful and alert for maya.

The spider – a spider expands thread from his own mouth, his own saliva, and makes a web. Then later, at the end, he swallows it. After he has created his web, many flies or other insects become entangled in it, and he eats them. Then, when there is no further need for the web, he takes it inside himself. Similarly, God creates this world by Himself, through the agency of His maya, and later on everything enters in Him. He expands His personal potency from within Himself, displays the network of cosmic manifestation, utilizes it according to His purpose and eventually withdraws it completely within Himself.

The wasp – Srimad-Bhagavatam (seventh canto) states that a grass-worm confined in a hole of a wall by a bee always thinks of the wasp in fear and enmity. Later he becomes a wasp, simply because of such remembrance. Similarly, if the conditioned souls somehow or other think of Krsna, who is sac-cid-ananda-vigraha, they will become free from their sins. Whether thinking of Him as their worshipful Lord or an enemy, because of constantly thinking of Him they will attain their spiritual bodies." *[See Endnote 3]

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura concludes this part of Sri Bhagavat-arkamarici-mala with the following quote from Srimad-Bhagavatam:

samsara-sindhur ati-dustaram uttirasor
nanyah plavo bhagavatah purusottamasya
lila-katha-rasa-nisevanam antarena
pumso bhaved vividha-duhkha-davarditasya

[For a person who is suffering in the fire of countless miseries and who desires to cross the insurmountable ocean of material existence, there is no suitable boat except that of cultivating devotion to the transcendental taste for the narrations of the Supreme Personality of Godhead's pastimes." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 12.4.40)]

All the living entities here are suffering in many ways. To cross the unlimited, endless cycle of birth and death is very difficult. Those who want to cross it very easily should hear hari-katha. There is no other way. We should hear all the sweet pastimes of Lord Sri Krsna and Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and the histories in Srimad-Bhagavatam such as those of Prahlada Maharaja and others like him.

Today we are finished.

Gaura Premanande!

[The following endnotes are all quotes from the translations and purports of Srila Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja:]

[*Endnote 1 –

"The word avadhuta means "most free." A person is not under the rules and regulations of any injunction when he has attained the stage of avadhuta. In other words, he can act as he likes. This avadhuta stage is exactly like air, which does not care for any obstruction. (Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.20.11 purport)]

"...a great saintly person without material care..." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 5.5.29)

"...one who has surpassed the rules and regulations of varnasrama-dharma is called avadhuta. Such a person has already surpassed the clutches of maya, and he lives completely separate and independent." (Srimad-Bhagavatam 5.5.29 purport)]

*Endnote 2 –

"A madhukari is a saintly person or a mendicant who does not accept a full meal at one house but begs from door to door, taking a little food from each householder's place. In this way he does not overeat or give householders unnecessary trouble." (Caitanya Caritamrta, Madhya 20.81, purport)

*Endnote 3 –

"...in Bhagavad-gita (9.30), where the Lord says:

api cet su-duracaro

bhajate mam ananya-bhak

sadhur eva sa mantavyah

samyag vyavasito hi sah

"Even if one commits the most abominable actions, if he engages in devotional service he is to be considered saintly because he is properly situated." A devotee undoubtedly worships the Lord with rapt attention. Similarly, if an enemy (suduracarah) always thinks of Krsna, he also becomes a purified devotee. The example given here concerns the

grass-worm that becomes beelike because of constantly thinking of the bee that forces it to enter a hole. By always thinking of the bee in fear, the grass-worm starts to become a bee. This is a practical example. Lord Krsna appears within this material world for two purposes-paritranaya sadhunam, vinasaya ca duskrtam: [Bg. 4.8] to protect the devotees and annihilate the demons. The sadhus and devotees certainly think of the Lord always, but duskrtis, the demons like Kamsa and Sisupala, also think of Krsna in terms of killing Him. By thinking of Krsna, both the demons and devotees attain liberation from the clutches of material maya. (Srimad-Bhagavatam 7.1.28-29 purport)]

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