Śrī Madhvācārya on Sādhaka-gurus

A compilation
by
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INTRODUCTION

Though there have been several discussions in the writings of the Vaiṣṇava-sampradāyas about the cardinal importance of serving one's gurus, it is in the writings of Śrī Madhvācārya that we come across discussions pertaining to *sādhaka*-gurus or gurus who are not on the perfectional stage of Bhagavad-bhakti.

We took up the task of assembling such statements into an article with explanations from Tattva-vādī sources, and submitted them same for the perusal of three English-speaking and recognized scholars from the Madhva line: (1) Acharya Veeranarayana Pandurangi, (2) P. Vinayacharya, and (3) Vyasanakere Prabhanjanacharya, all residing in Bengaluru. The article was unanimously accepted by them as correctly depicting the teachings of Madhvācārya on this topic.

We also interviewed these scholars in detail about Tattva-vādī practices — how do they *actually* apply this in their practical lives, and so on. The interviews were recorded and we composed an annotated summary of these interviews as another article.

The current compilation contains the above two articles.

To help ISKCON devotees better understand the scholarly topics covered in the first article, we have begun to paraphrase it in a separate document with a number of chapters, with each will also contain parallels from standard Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities.

We have also undertaken preliminary research on a few related topics: (1) the scope of *guru-mukha-padma-vākya* according to Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, (2) internal and external initiation according to the scripture Viṣṇu-rahasya, (3) dealings between gurus and their respective śiṣyas as set out in Prapanna-pārijāta, a booklet on the process of Śaraṇāgati by an authority in the Rāmānuja line named Śrī Vātsya Varada, (4) Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī on dealing with the improper teachings of a guru who has not become addicted to sinful life or offenses, (5) Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura on different types of gurus or authorities, whose instructions should be given higher priority, and dealing with their improper instructions, and (6) External symptoms of elevated devotees that are invariably and verifiably present only in them and which cannot be faked by others, according to Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. However, we have yet to compile all this into a document.

This research was taken up at the behest of Śrī Guru Prasāda Swami Mahārāja, and we offer our respectful obeisances unto him for giving us this opportunity to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers. We hope that the information in this article will shed further light on the topic of sādhaka-gurus, and we humbly seek the blessings of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers so that we can serve them better.

We remain in the service of Hari, Guru and Vaiṣṇavas,
Vidvān Gaurāṅga dāsa and Rāma Aprameya dāsa

PART 1

SELECTED QUOTES FROM ŚRĪ MADHVĀCĀRYA ON GURUS AND ŚIṢYAS

INTRODUCTION

The following contains a sample of Madhvācārya's statements regarding gurus and śiṣyas. Though there are many more detailed instructions in this regard, we have herewith chosen those that we felt were significant at this point in time.

Much of what we have presented here is directly quoted from the Tattva-vādī community itself and is heavily footnoted. Some of those footnotes are or contain *original* footnotes from our sources. Throughout this document, we have presented the Sanskrit in the form of roman transliteration, even though the original texts or commentaries or quotations might have been in Devanāgarī. When quoting Dr. BNK Sharma who uses abbreviations profusely, we have replaced those abbreviations with their respective expansions.

SOURCES

1. The text of **Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya** is taken from the multi-volume edition published by Dvaita Vedanta Studies and Research Foundation.

   a. The *gloss* here is the gist of a few prominent Mādhva explanations of the sūtra in question by Dr. VR Panchamukhi, as found in his edition of *Brahma-sūtra-dīpikā* (Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, Tirupati, 2002).
   b. The *explanation* here is abridged from relevant portions of Dr. BNK Sharma's *The Brahmasūtras and Their Principal Commentaries* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, second edition, 1986). The headings for Sections 5, 7 and 8 are Dr Sharma's chapter headings on these topics in the third volume of this book. We have added excerpts from his footnotes among our footnotes and identified them as *original footnotes* therein.
   c. The *summary* here contains excerpts from Prof. KT Pandurangi's English summary of the commentarial literature as found in his edition of Śrī Madhva's Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya with three sub-commentaries and several sub-sub-commentaries (Dvaita Vedanta Studies and Research Foundation, 2016).
   d. The *remarks* here are excerpted from Prof. KT Pandurangi's English summary of the commentarial literature on Śrī Madhva's **Anuvyākhyāna** and Śrī Jayatīrtha's **Nyāya-sudhā** which is published as *Central Teachings of Śrīman-Nyāya-sudhā* (*in accordance with the philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya*) by Vidyadheesha Post-Graduate Sanskrit Research Centre.

2. The translations of **Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya** are derived from those by Anuradha Shridhar in the edition published by Tatvasamshodhana Samsat (2023). The *notes* to its translations are also derived from her notes in the same edition.

3. Text from **Bhāgavata-tātparya** is taken from the Sarva-mūla edition of Śrī Vyasanakere Prabhanjanacharya.

4. Section 6 of this document is an excerpt from the English summary of the ten Upaniṣads by Prof. KT Pandurangi as found in **Sarva-mūla-grantha, Volume 3 (Upaniṣat Prasthāna)**, published by Dvaita Vedanta Studies and Research Foundation.

5. The text of **Anuvyākhyāna**, its numbering and the Nyāya-sudhā portions on them are taken from https://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_jayatIrtha-nyAyasudhA.htm. The *explanations* presented in Section 10 are our own abridged renditions in English of the Nyāya-sudhā portions. The original Sanskrit of the Nyāya-sudhā portions has been presented as footnotes.

6. For **Tantra-sāra-dīpikā**, the *comment* here is an abridged rendition in English of the relevant portions of Śrī Bidarahalli Veṅkaṭapati Ācārya's commentary named **Gurv-artha-dīdhiti**. Our English translation of the verses is also based on that commentary. The edition that has been used here is the one with this commentary published by Poornaprajna Samshodhana Mandiram in 2009. The verse numbering here is also according to this edition.

TOPICS DEALT WITH IN THIS DOCUMENT

The section headings of this document themselves reveal the topics under discussion: (1) Two modes of gradation of candidates for spiritual development, (2) Gurus in the mode of gradation by birth, (3) Characteristics of gurus in that mode of gradation, (4) The significance of a guru in the śiṣya's life, (5) The place and importance of a guru, (6) Satyakāma, Upakosala and their gurus, (7) Guru's grace or personal effort — which is the more efficacious means, (8) Change of gurus — when permitted, (9) Why Satyakāma sought the approval of Gautama after learning from Gautama's superiors, (10) Anuvyākhyāna on grades of gurus and śikṣā, (11) Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha on gurus, (12) An inferior as one's guru, (13) What does "superior" mean in this context, (14) Who needs multiple gurus and who doesn't, (15) Conditions for success in dīkṣā or śikṣā, and (16) The meaning of "ācārya-devo bhava."

We have also included a tabulated summary on the discussion pertaining to change of gurus in the appendix.

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1. TWO MODES OF GRADATION OF CANDIDATES FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Excerpt from Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya 1.1.1

adhikāraś cokto bhagavata-tantre:

manda-madhyottamatvena tri-vidhā hy adhikāriṇaḥ
tatra mandā manuṣyeṣu ya uttama-gaṇā matāḥ

madhyamā ṛṣi-gandharvā devas tatrottamā matāḥ
iti jāti-kṛto bhedas tathānyo guṇa-pūrvakaḥ

bhaktimān parame viṣṇau yas tv adhyayanavān naraḥ
adhamaḥ śamādi-saṁyukto madhyamaḥ samudāhṛtaḥ

ābrahma-stamba-paryantam asāraṁ cāpy anityakam
vijñāya jāta-vairāgyo viṣṇu-pādaika-saṁśrayaḥ

sa uttamo 'dhikārī syāt sannyastākhila-karmavān iti

And the eligibility [for spiritual development] is described in Bhāgavata-tantra as follows:

"Eligible persons are of three classes: the lowest, the middle and the highest. Of these, the lowest class comprises men of the highest order (manuṣyottamas). To the middle class belong the ṛṣis and gandharvas, and the gods (devas) belong to the highest class. This is a [mode of] gradation based on birth (jāti). There is another [mode of gradation], which is based on qualities (guṇa): He is said to belong to the lowest class who is only devoted to the Supreme Lord and has studied [the scriptures]. He is of the middle class who is also endowed with qualities such as tranquillity. He is of the highest class who, having realized that everything of this world from the four-faced Brahmā down to the clump of grass is useless and temporary, has become detached and renounced, has taken complete shelter of the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu alone, and has given up all other activities."

2. GURUS IN THE MODE OF GRADATION BY BIRTH
Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya 1.115, 118

brahmādīnāṁ ca muktānāṁ tāratamye tu kāraṇam
tāratamya-sthitānādi-nityā bhaktir na cetarat

Gradation of Bhakti is the cause for gradation among Brahmā and other Devatās. This gradation of Bhakti exists eternally. Thus, gradation in mukti of jīva is based on the intensity of Bhakti and not on any other means.

NOTE. The most important cause for 'devatā-tāratamya' is the intensity of Bhakti possessed by them. Brahmā and Vāyu are 'jīvottamas' (best among all jīvas) only because they possess maximum Bhakti to Śrī Hari compared to the rest. The next in gradation is Sarasvatī and Bhāratī. The bhakti of Garuḍa, Śeṣa and Rudra is less and thus they are ranked after Sarasvatī and Bhāratī. This gradation continues.

brahmaṇaḥ paramā bhaktiḥ sarvebhyaḥ paramas tataḥ
ity-ādīni ca vākyāni purāṇeṣu pṛthak pṛthak

Brahmadeva's Bhakti is the highest order. Therefore, he is highest of all. These are sayings to this effect in various Purāṇas.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF GURUS IN THAT MODE OF GRADATION
Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya 1.119-121

ṣaṇ-ṇavaty-aṅgulo yas tu nyagrodha-parimaṇḍalaḥ
sapta-pādaś catur-hasto dvātriṁśal-lakṣaṇair yutaḥ

asaṁśayaḥ saṁśayacchid gurur ukto manīṣibhiḥ
tasmād brahmā guru mukhyaḥ sarveṣām eva sarvadā

A guru of the highest order should be ninety-six fingers (*aṅgula*) in height. The circumference around the stomach should be forty-eight fingers (*aṅgula*). His height should be seven times the length of his feet. His hands when stretched should measure four cubits. He should possess thirty-two physical features in his body. He should not possess any doubt about anything in the śāstras. He should be able to clear any doubt that arises in the śāstras. Such a personality is called a true guru. Brahmā who satisfies all these qualities is the guru of the highest order.[1]

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[1] An excerpt from Madhvācārya's commentary to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.87.33 that is similar to the above: *"ṣaṇ-ṇavaty-aṅgulo yas tu tālāsyo daśa-tālakaḥ, daśa-prādeśakaḥ sapta-pādo hasta-catuṣṭayaḥ, kalamatrayāṅgulaś caiva vāgmī sandeha-varjitaḥ,*

NOTE. Such qualities can be found in a group of jīvas known as *ṛju-gaṇas*. The following are the qualities which are known as *dvātriṁśat lakṣaṇas*: Five parts have to be long: shoulders, eyes, cheeks, knees and nails. Five have to be subtle: skin, forehead, fingers (slender), teeth, and joints in the fingers. Seven have to be pinkish red in color: palms, soles, corners of the eyes, palate, tongue, lips and nails. Six have to be prominent: chest, stomach, hair, shoulders, hands and face. Three have to be broad: forehead, waist and chest. Three have to be small: neck, urinary organ of male and ankles. Three have to be deep: voice, looks and navel. Ācārya Madhva possessed all the above said qualities.

anye 'pi svātmano mukhyāḥ kramād gurava īritāḥ
kramāl lakṣaṇa-hīnāś ca lakṣaṇālakṣaṇaiḥ samāḥ
mānuṣā madhyamāḥ samyag durlakṣaṇa-yutaḥ kaliḥ

Those who have lesser number of attributes are also considered gurus in order of hierarchy. Mediocre humans are a combination of good as well as bad attributes. Morever, Kali is dreadful. He does not possess even a single good quality in him.

NOTE. *Sat-jīvas* possess more number of good attributes and minimum bad attributes. Sat-jīvas are gurus to those who are lower to them in hierarchy. Rājasa-jīvas have equal good and bad attributes. Therefore, they cannot attain the status of a guru. Tāmasa-jīvas possess only bad attributes and it keeps increasing in hierarchy and Kali is the worst among all. The *ṛjus* like Brahmā and Vāyu possess all the thirty-two auspicious features described above. Rudra and others qualified for that status possess twenty-eight lakṣaṇas. Other devatās have *lakṣaṇas* varying from sixteen to twenty-four. Ṛṣis have sixteen to eight lakṣaṇas. Less than that are emperors and *manuṣyottamas*. All of them other than 'ṛjus' possess certain bad traits along with their goodness.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A GURU IN THE ŚIṢYA'S LIFE
Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya 1.122-123

samyag-lakṣaṇa-sampanno yad dadyāt suprasannadhīḥ
śiṣyāya satyaṁ bhavati tat sarvaṁ nātra saṁśayaḥ
agamyatvād haris tasminn āviṣṭo muktido bhavet

With a pleasant mind, when a guru who has all the good attributes blesses his disciple with whatever knowledge he possesses, it will be rewarding for the disciple. There is no doubt in this. As Śrī Hari cannot be approached directly, mukti can be attained through His presence in such gurus.

NOTE. The guru should possess all the *lakṣaṇas*, he should give upadeśa with a pleasant mind. Then his upadeśa will definitely bear fruits. The disciple should also serve the guru in every way and make him happy. As Śrī Hari cannot be perceived directly, He is present in the gurus who impart knowledge and blesses His devotees through them. However, Śrī Hari is always independent.

nātiprasanna-hṛdayo yad dadyād gurur apy asau
na tat satyaṁ bhavet tasmād arcanīyo guruḥ sadā

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vāsudevaika-śaraṇo gurur ity ucyate budhaiḥ, guru-lakṣaṇa-sampūrṇaḥ sākṣād eva caturmukhaḥ, tataḥ śeṣendra-vīndrādyāḥ krameṇaiva prakīrtitāḥ" ity-ādi guru-viveke.

Blessings will not become fruitful if the guru does not give knowledge wholeheartedly. Therefore, gurus have to be always honored.[2]

NOTE. The guru's blessings is absolutely essential for gaining knowledge. Therefore, the guru has to be served with devotion and dedication.

5. THE PLACE AND IMPORTANCE OF A GURU

Brahma-sūtra and Bhāṣya 3.3.44

oṁ pradānavad eva hi tad uktam oṁ

That [process of learning, understanding and meditation] is meant to be joined with instructions [imparted by one's guru] with his full grace, for that is said [in the Śruti].

> *na ca śravaṇādi-mātreṇa brahma-dṛṣṭir bhavati, kintu setikartavyena. yathā-guru-dattaṁ tathaiva bhavati. 'ācāryavān puruṣo veda' iti hy uktam.*

The vision of Brahman cannot be attained merely by learning, understanding and meditating. Only when they are coupled with the direction of one's guru on how to engage in such activities, will they be fruitful. The instruction bears results only when the guru bestows it upon the śiṣya, for it is said in the Śruti thus, "He who has an ācārya knows Him." (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.14.2)

GLOSS: Śravaṇa, manana and dhyana would yield the stipulated results only when they are handed over with affection by a preceptor. It is stated in the Śruti that only a person who has a preceptor would understand the Vedas.

EXPLANATION: This adhikaraṇa tells us about the mode (*iti-kartavyatā*) or the proper and recognized manner in which the threefold Sādhanas of Śravaṇa, manana and dhyana are to be pursued to make them effective instruments of Aparokṣa-jñāna.[3] The question is sure to be asked if anything else is requires to make the three Sādhanas fruitful. The Sūtra makes it clear that as the spiritual equipment of Śravaṇa, manana and dhyāna is a precious asset, it has to be built up under the benign guidance and direction of a proper Guru with all his loving grace.

True to the ancient traditions of the Upaniṣads, the Sūtrakāra does not countenance the building up of these assets by one's own unaided effort without the help and guidance of a competent Guru.[4] No overhearing or hearing in concealment will help. The Guru has to take the disciple under his care and guidance and see him thro' with his boundless grace.

As Madhva's commentators put it, what is significant to the spiritual evolution of the seeker is directly receiving what is imparted by the Guru (*dāna*) with all his boundless love and grace (*pra-*[5]). See also Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad vi.23.

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[2] An excerpt from Guru-viveka quoted in Śrī Madhva's commentary on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.87.33 is similar to the above: *guror anugraham ṛte sādhanaṁ na hareḥ priyam, gurūpadeśāt tu hariṁ prāpnoty eva na saṁśayaḥ*.

[3] Original footnote: *atra bhagavat-prāpti-sādhanopāsaneti-kartavyatā-sādhanād asti śāstrādi-saṅgatiḥ*. (Tattva-prakāśikā iii.3.44)

[4] Original footnote: Cf. '*ācāryavān puruṣo veda*' (Chāndogya Upaniṣad vi.14.2), '*śrutaṁ hy eva me bhagavaddṛśeśyaḥ ācāryād dhy eva vidyā viditā sādhiṣṭhaṁ prāpayatīti*.' (Op. cit. v.9.3)

[5] Original footnote: *dānam upadeśaḥ. prīti-pūrvakatva-rūpa-prakṛṣṭa-dāna-yutam eva dṛṣṭy-ākhya-phalavat iti yojyam*. (Rāghavendra Tīrtha's *Tantra-dīpikā* iii.3.44)

The general principle underlying the importance attached to Gurūpadeśa and Guru-prasāda in respect of all orders of Upāsakas is in full accord with the highest spiritual traditions of the Śāstras.

Tho' primarily only Śravaṇa has to depend on Guru-pradāna while manana and nididhyāsana by their very nature may be deemed to depend on one's own powers of reflection and concentration, it is pointed out that manana too has to depend equally upon sound reasonings communicated by the Guru and Dhyāna likewise is the deep concentration on the august attributes of [Brahman] which the Guru's grace communicates to the disciple. Rightly then has the question of 'iti-kartavyatā' been considered with reference to *all the three Sādhanas*.[6]

The Pūrvapakṣa is that Śravaṇa, manana, etc. are competent to lead to Aparokṣa in whatever manner they are carried out. For in the Śruti, there is only the bare injunction with regard to them. If then Aparokṣa were to depend on the grace of the Guru, the attainment of Mokṣa too by Jñānins may likewise depend on the Guru's grace in which case one may have to run the risk of forfeiting his Mokṣa on account of the Guru's wrath. If the Guru's displeasure is impotent, his favors too will be equally in vain.[7] If the Guru's wrath could prevent one from attaining Mokṣa it will contradict the statement already made in Brahma-sūtra iii.3.32 assuring Mokṣa to all Aparokṣa-jñānins. Aparokṣa-jñāna cannot, therefore, be made to depend on the Guru's favor. There is no need, therefore, for the Sādhanas to be carried out under the Guru's directions.[8]

The Siddhānta is that śravaṇa and other Sādhanas are not alone the means of Mokṣa. They are to be duly augmented by the Guru's gracious bestowal. For the realization of the fruits of Sādhanas depends on the Guru's grace. This does not conflict with the general statement referring to Śravaṇa, manana, etc. as the means of jñāna. The emphasis on Guru-pradāna means it is the *modus operandi* thro' which they become effective instruments of jñāna.[9] It is to be understood as an auxiliary tho' not expressly so mentioned in the Vidhi-vākya. When Soma twigs are to be pounded and pressed to get the juice, there is no need to say in so many words that the juice must be wrung out with strong hands. There is no need to fear the forfeiture of Mokṣa in the event of one's falling into the Guru's disfavor. For by Divine regulation, Mokṣa is assured to all Aparokṣa-jñānins. While the Guru's ire may curtain Jñāna or prevent the welling up of innate joy to some extent and for some time, it will not preclude the Aparokṣa-jñānin's attaining release from bondage. In the light of these facts, the Mumukṣu should receive instruction, guidance and grace from the Guru in the pursuit of all the three Sādhanas.[10]

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[6] Original footnote: *yady api śravaṇam eva guru-pradāna-sādhyaṁ dṛṣṭaṁ na manana-dhyāne nyāyānusandhānādeḥ sva-buddhy-adhīnatvāt, ataḥ śravaṇasyeyaṁ cintā yuktā, tathāpi mananasya gurūpadiṣṭa-guṇacintanātmakatvāt dhyānasya ca gurūpadiṣṭa-guṇa-cintanātmakatvāt samuccaya-peṭikāntar-bhāvāc ca tritaya-viṣayiṇī cintā yuktā*. (Śeṣa-tātparya-candrikā iii.3.44)

[7] Original footnote: *yathā-kathañcid anuṣṭhita-śravaṇādi jñāna-sādhanam iti pūrvaḥ pakṣaḥ. 'śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavya' iti śravaṇādi-mātrasyaiva jñāna-hetutvāvagamāt. jñānasya ca guru-pradānādhīnatve, jñānino 'pi mokṣasya tad-adhīnatva-prasaṅgaś ca. nedam aniṣṭam iti cen na, kadācit guru-kopena tad-abhāva-prasaṅgāt*. (Tattva-prakāśikā iii.3.44)

[8] Original footnote: *anyathā, guru-kopavat tad-varasyāpi nirarthakatā syāt. abhyupagame ca 'aniyama'* (Brahma-sūtra iii.3.32) *ity-ukta-virodhaḥ. ato jñāne gurv-apekṣābhāvād ukta-prakāreṇopāsanam ayuktam iti*. (Tattva-prakāśikā iii.3.44)

[9] Original footnote: *na śravaṇādi-mātraṁ jñāna-sādhanam. kintu prasāda-pūrvaka-guru-pradāna-yuktam eva. guru-pradānānusāritvāt phalasya. na caivam ukta-vacana-virodhaḥ. guru-pradānaṁ jñāna-sādhanasya śravaṇāder iti-kartavyatā ity abhyupagamāt*.

[10] Original footnote: *na hi dṛḍha-muṣṭi-nipīḍanādi pṛthak sādhanam ucyate iti bhāvaḥ. na caivam ukta-rītyā jñānādy-abhāvaḥ. taj-jñāna-mokṣayor īśvara-kalpitatvāt. na caivaṁ guru-śāpo viphalaḥ. jñānādi-hrāsa-hetutvāt. uktaṁ ca: jñānino guru-śape 'pi nāmuktiḥ saṁsṛter bhavet, ānanda hrāsa-mātreṇa saiva muktir viduṣyati. ye jñāna-viṣayāḥ śāpā muktigāś cādhikāriṇām, kādācitkās te bhavanti naiva te sārvakālikāḥ. teṣāṁ jñānasya mukteś ca tāratamyasya caiva hi, bhagavan-niyatatvāt tu śāpādir naiva kāraṇam. iti. ato guru-pradānasyāvaśyakatvāt uktaṁ yuktam*. (Tattva-prakāśikā iii.3.44)

SUMMARY: This adhikaraṇa informs that śravaṇa, manana and dhyana will lead to aparokṣa-jñāna when these are undertaken with proper instruction from a suitable guru. This is made clear in the Śruti, 'ācāryavān puruṣo veda.'

Pradānavat means gurūpadeśa-yuktam.[11] This raises the question, "What would be the position, if the guru is displeased?" This does not affect the final result;[12] it only results in the decrease in the bliss to be enjoyed. *Jñānino guru-śāpe 'pi nāmuktiḥ saṁsṛteḥ bhavet, ānanda-hrāsa-doṣeṇa saiva muktir viduṣyati.*[13]

REMARKS: In this adhikaraṇa it is stated that in addition to śravaṇa, manana, etc., guru-prasāda is also an essential requirement for obtaining jñāna.

6. SATYAKĀMA, UPAKOSALA AND THEIR GURUS[14]

A summary of Chāndogya Upaniṣad 4.4-14 as understood in Tattva-vāda

In the next section, Satyakāma Jābāla approaches Gautama for learning about Brahman. Gautama inquires about his gotra. Satyakāma frankly tells Gautama that neither knows it nor his mother. Gautama was pleased by his truthfulness and agrees to teach him. However, he entrusts four hundred cows to him and instructs that he should return from the forest only when these grow into one thousand cows. Accordingly Satyakāma takes them to the forest. These grow into a thousand in due course. Satyakāma starts back to the Āśrama. On his way back he camps at four places for four nights. Four deities appearing the form of a bull, swan, etc. teach him four aspects of the the Supreme God, viz. Prakāśavān, i.e. luminous, Anantavān, i.e. limitless, Jyotiṣmān, i.e. brilliant, and Āyatanavān, i.e. the abode of all. On his return to Āśrama the teacher finds that he had already received the necessary knowledge. But Satyakāma insists that the teacher should teach him. The knowledge obtained from the chosen teacher only is firm.[15] Gautama teaches him the same and Satyakāma receives it with great reverence. Through this episode the importance of the chosen teacher is demonstrated.

Upakosala approaches this Satyakāma to learn. He serves at his residence for twelve years. Many other students complete their education and leave. However, Satyakāma does not teach Upakosala. Satyakāma's wife pleads for teaching Upakosala. But Satyakāma goes on a journey without heeding his wife's word. Then the three sacrificial fires, viz. Gārhapatya, Anvāhārya-pacana and Āhavanīya, teach him. The central teaching of these is that the Supreme God who is present in Āditya, Candra and Vidyut is the same one who is present in these three sacrificial fires who are teaching Upakosala. He is called 'Aham' as none can remain without Him. There is no difference among the various forms of the Supreme God present in different places. This is the purport of the phrase 'So 'ham asmi sa evāham asmi' in these passages. On his return Satyakāma found that Upakosala had received the necessary knowledge. He asked him to narrate what he had learnt so far. Upakosala narrated. Then, he told him that he knew God who was present outside, and said, 'Now I will teach you about God who is present in your eye." He taught him about the Vāmanī and Bhāmani forms of the Supreme God present in the eye.

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[11] That is, endowed with the instructions of the Guru.

[12] This is for Aparokṣa-jñānins only. This is clear from Madhvācārya's statement in Nyāya-vivaraṇa which is quoted next. Nyāya-vivaraṇa is Madhvācārya's third commentary on the Vedānta-sūtra.

[13] The meaning of this quote was presented just *before* the quote.

[14] This portion is presented here to help the readers better understand the subsequent sections of this document which refer to the events noted herein.

[15] Original footnote: *ācāryād dhy eva vidyā viditā sādhiṣṭhaṁ prāpayati*.

7. GURU'S GRACE OR PERSONAL EFFORT — WHICH IS THE MORE EFFICACIOUS MEANS?

Brahma-sūtra and Bhāṣya 3.3.45

oṁ liṅga-bhūyastvāt tad dhi balīyas tad api oṁ

Because of the several indicators, the grace of one's guru is indeed more powerful. Nevertheless, learning, understanding and meditation are also necessary.

> *ṛṣabhādibhyo vidyāṁ jñātvāpi satyakāmena "bhagavāṁs tv eva me kāmaṁ brūyāt, śrutaṁ hy eva bhagavaddṛśebhya, ācāryād dhy eva viditā sādhiṣṭhaṁ prāpayati" iti vacanāt, "atra ha na kiñcana vīyāya" ity anu-jñānād upakosala-vacanāc ca liṅga-bhūyastvād guru-pradānam eva balavat. tarhi tāvatālam iti na mantavyam. "śrotavyo mantavyaḥ" ity-ādes tad api kartavyam. vārāhe ca: "guru-prasādo balavān na tasmād balavattaram, tathāpi śravaṇādiś ca kartavyo mokṣa-siddhaye" iti.*

Though he had gained knowledge from [gods in the form of] a bull and others, Satyakāma told his guru, "May your worshipful self be pleased to impart to me that which is for my good, for I have heard instructions only from those like your revered self. Indeed, knowledge from one's own ācārya attains stability." Satyakāma's teacher had approved of his learning by saying, "Indeed, nothing that you learnt was lost." Upakosala also made similar statements. Thus there are several indicators that the grace of one's guru is stronger. But one should not think that it is sufficient. Because of the injunction, "One should learn about, understand and meditate upon the Supreme Soul," these activities should also be performed. It is also stated in the Varāha Purāṇa: "One's guru's grace is strong; nothing is stronger than that. Still, one must learn about, understand and meditate [upon Lord Viṣṇu] to attain liberation."

GLOSS. The preaching of the preceptor and his pleasure and affection are more effective instruments in the process of achieving Brahma Darśana because there are many strong reasons for drawing this inference. Even though Satyakāma had heard the tattvas from the bull, swan, crow, etc., he did approach his Guru for knowledge and his benevolence, and Guru, out of compassion for him did preach to him and shower his pleasure on him. Further, Śravaṇa, Manana and Dhyāna should also be practised because there is clear prescription for doing so.

EXPLANATION. This [adhikaraṇa] establishes the superior efficacy of the Guru's grace as the indispensable *modus operandi* in respect of the Sādhanas[16] — without belittling the necessity for personal effort in carrying out the Sādhanas, on the part of the Mumukṣu.

The question raised is whether the Guru's grace is more powerful or the disciple's personal effort in the form of the Sādhanas; or whether both of them are to be regarded as of equal efficacy in leading to Aparokṣa.

The Pūrvapakṣa is: Personal effort of the disciple must indeed be deemed to be the powerful factor. For Guru-prasāda is only a *modus operandi.* As such it cannot be more powerful than the Sādhanas themselves of which it is the *modus operandi.*

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[16] Original footnote: The Abhinava-candrikā compares Guru-prasāda as a *modus operandi* to the Upanayana ceremony which determines the power of Vedic study to produce dharma. Read: *dvi-vidham aṅgaṁ dṛśyate — kiñcit pradhāna-gata-kārya-janana-śakti-niyāmakaṁ, yathopanayanādi. tena vinā pradhānasya vedādhyayanasya kvāpi dharma-janakatvābhāvāt, pratyutādharmasyaiva jananāt. kiñcit sauṣṭhavāpādakaṁ yathā prāṅ-mukhatvādi, tena vināpi dharma-janakatvāt guru-pradānaṁ tu, na prāṅ-mukhatvādivat sauṣṭhavāpādakaṁ kintūpanayanādivat pradhāna-śakti-niyāmakam eveti samarthyata iti bhāvaḥ*. (Abhinava-candrikā iii.3.45)

Even if it is not conceded that the disciple's effort is more important it deserves to be treated on a part with Guru-prasāda instead of being relegated to an inferior position. For, after all, the Guru is as much a human being as the disciple. His action in advancing the spiritual evolution of the disciple cannot be credited with greater efficacy than the personal effort of the disciple. It cannot, therefore, be that Guru-prasāda is the *sine qua non* for successful carrying out of the Sādhanas.

The Siddhānta is that as between the two Guru-prasāda is undoubtedly the more powerful factor in achieving Aparokṣa-jñāna. This is proved by a number of indications (*liṅga-bhūyastva*) in the Śrutis (see Chāndogya Upaniṣad iv.4.5; 6-9; 10-14)[17] where the disciples seek to be instructed again by their own Gurus even tho' they have received enlightenment at the hands of the gods. Rāghavendra in his Tantra-dīpikā points out that the Sūtrakāra here has used the comparative form 'balīyaḥ' instead of the positive form 'balavat' to indicate that Guru-prasāda is neither inferior nor merely equal to personal effort of the disciple in efficacy but is decidedly more powerful.[18]

The contention of the Pūrva-pakṣin that Guru-pradāna and Guru-prasāda as *modus operandi* are of lesser efficacy than the personal effort of the disciple is unsustainable. There are cases where the *modus operandii* is observed to be quite powerful. For example, injury to life entails sin. But injury to life done in a sacrifice with due observance of the subsidiary rites of prokṣaṇa, añjana, paryagnikaraṇa and others and the recitation of mantras wards off sin and confers merit instead.[19]

Tho' not God, the Guru has earned his status by the grace of God and by his previous merit and the Śiṣya takes his place as a disciple and has to seek the help of the Guru to augment the efficacy of his own effort.

The greater importance attached to Guru-prasāda does not mean that Aparokṣa-jñāna is attained without the practice of Śravaṇa, manana, etc. as prescribed. The last two words of the Sūtra (tad api) are meant to correct such an impression that if Guru-prasāda is the more powerful instrument of Aparokṣa, the cultivation of Śravaṇa, manana and other Sādhanas, as such, may well be dispensed with. They emphasize the point that the personal effort in diligently carrying out the Sādhanas is qually necessary.[20] The particle 'hi' in the Sūtra underlines this necessity of personal endeavor as well.[21]

SUMMARY. This adhikaraṇa informs that guru-prasāda is stronger than śravaṇa, etc. This does not mean that śravaṇa, etc. can be avoided when guru-prasāda is bestowed. Śravaṇa, etc. must be undertaken. Śravaṇa, etc. are karaṇa while guru-prasāda is iti-kartavyatā. Therefore, both are necessary. Normally karaṇa is superior to iti-kartavyatā. However,

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[17] Original footnote: The references are to the stoy of Satyakāma Jābāla and Upakosala in the [Upaniṣad]. Satyakāma, after being instructed by the gods Vāyu, Agni, Brahmā and Varuṇa in the form of a bull, the sacred fire, a swan and a diver-bird respectively, begs again to be instructed by his own Guru. His Guru, after hearing from him what he has been taught by them, gives his approval and blessings. Upakosala, after being instructed by the Fires, prays again to his Guru to instruct him further. The [Tattva-pradīpa] points out that in Satyakāma's case, he had departed to the forest to tend the cows of the Guru, immediately after Upanayana without undergoing Vedic studies. When the gods voluntarily instruct him in Brahma-vidyā he feels he has not fulfilled the obligation of serving them and requests to be taught over again by his own Guru, thereby emphasizing the point that Brahma-vidyā imparted by the Guru who has initiated him and obtained thro' long devotion to him and with his abundant grace is alone the efficient means of Aparokṣa.

[18] Original footnote: *balavad iti vācye balīya iti prakarṣoktiḥ na śravaṇādito 'pi durbalaṁ nāpi tadvat balavat kintu balīya iti daurbalya-tat-sāmye vyudasitum iti*. (Tantra-dīpikā iii.3.45)

[19] Original footnote: *na ceti-kartavyatvena daurbalyam. yāgīya-hiṁsāyām iti-kartavyatāyā eva prābalya-darśanāt*. (Tattva-prakāśikā iii.3.45)

[20] Original footnote: Cf. *tad api śravaṇādy api kāryam ity arthaḥ*.

[21] Original footnote: *atra śrotavya ity-ādi-śruti-sūcako hi-śabdaḥ*.

there are instances wherein iti-kartavyatā is important. In the present case, guru-prasāda is important, though it is of the nature of iti-kartavyatā. The importance of guru-prasāda is illustrated by the examples of Satyakāma and Upakosala. Satyakāma received instructions from [the bull and so on] but still he appealed to his guru to teach, declaring *ācāryād dhy eva vidyā viditā sādhiṣṭhā bhavati.*[22] Similarly Upakosala also received instructions from Agni but he still appealed to his guru to teach him. These instances reveal the importance of *prasāda-pūrvaka-guru-pradāna.*[23]

8. CHANGE OF GURUS — WHEN PERMITTED?

Brahma-sūtra and Bhāṣya 3.3.46-47

oṁ pūrva-vikalpaḥ prakaraṇāt syāt kriyā-mānasavat oṁ

An option for changing one's guru because of [another equally advanced guru's] bestowal of grace is admissible like the mental acts [of meditation of equal efficacy].

> *na ca pūrva-prāpta eva gurur iti niyamaḥ. samagrānugrahaṁ cet paścāttanaḥ karoti svayam eva tadā vikalpaḥ syāt. mānasa-kriyāvat, yathobhayor dhyānayoḥ samayoḥ. 'pūrvasmād uttamo labdhaḥ svayam eva gurur yadi, gṛhṇīyād avicāreṇa vikalpaḥ samayor bhavet. samagrānugrahābhāvāt satyakāmaḥ svakaṁ gurum, ṛṣabhādy-anujñayā caiṣa prāpa tasmād dhi yujyate' iti bṛhat-tantre. 'samagrānugrahaṁ kaścit svayam eva samo yadi, kuryāt punaś ca gṛhṇīyād avirodhena kāmataḥ. dhyānayoḥ samayor yadvad vikalpaḥ kāmato bhavet, evaṁ guror dvitīyasya vikalpo grahaṇe 'pi ca' iti mahā-saṁhitāyām.*

There is no fixed rule that [the guru] who has been obtained earlier [in one's life] has to be his only guru. If [another equally qualified] guru, by himself, bestows his full grace upon one, then there would be an option [for the śiṣya to choose between the two gurus] just as there is an option to engage in two acts of meditation [of equal efficacy]. The Bṛhat-tantra says, "If a superior guru [who is inclined to bestow his full grace] is obtained by his own accord [and not by the endeavor of the śiṣya], he should be accepted without any hesitation. If both [the gurus] are equal, there would be an option [for the śiṣya to choose between them]. Because of a lack of complete bestowal of grace [upon him], Satyakāma went to his guru with the permission of the bull and so on; therefore, that was proper." The Mahā-saṁhitā says, "If [a guru who is] equal [to one's guru] bestows his full grace [upon the śiṣya], he can, if he so desires, accept him, provided [his guru has] no objection to it. Just as there is an option to engage in two acts of meditation of equal efficacy, there is an option to accept a second guru [in place of the first]."

oṁ atideśāc ca oṁ

And because of the emphatic instruction to that effect.

> *'brahmopāssva brahmopacarasva tac chṛṇu hi tat tvām avatu. yathā brahmopacarer yathā mām upacarer ye cānye 'smad-vidhāḥ śreyasaś ca tān upāssva tān upacarasva tebhyaḥ śṛṇu hi te tvām avantv' iti pauṣyāyaṇa-śrutāv atideśāc ca.*

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[22] Knowledge that is acquired becomes firmly established when it is imparted by one's own ācārya.

[23] That is, the guru's happy bestowal of knowledge upon the śiṣya.

And because of the emphatic instruction in the Pauṣyāyaṇa Śruti: "Worship Brahman. Serve Brahman. Indeed, learn from Him. May He protect you. Just as you serve Brahman [and] just as you serve me, worship and serve others like me and others better than me. Indeed learn from them. May they protect you."[24]

GLOSS. Some rules for accepting a preceptor are set out here. The option of acceptance or non-acceptance of a second Guru when there is already a Guru accepted in the first instance arises only in a situation when the second Guru who is equal or superior to the first one is willing to bestow comprehensive favours (Pra-karaṇa) on the disciple. Further, if the second Guru is inferior to the first one in terms of knowledge, abilities, etc., then there is no question of considering him for acceptance as Guru. The option in regard to acceptance of Gurus is similar to those that arise in the context of two types of Dhyāna — the function of the mind — which yield equivalent fruits.

EXPLANATION. The importance of Guru-prasāda or the Guru's grace for spiritual realization has been dealt with in the previous [adhikaraṇa]. The Sūtrakāra now goes on to emphasize that the Mumukṣu should always try to obtain spiritual instruction and guidance from the best preceptor suited to his Yogyatā. For, having a Guru or receiving instruction from him is not a mere matter of form.[25] The purpose of seeking a Guru is to obtain fulness of grace from him after learning from him the nature and limitations of one's own Yogyatā for the Upāsanā of the sovereign attributes of [Brahman]. One should stick to such a Guru.

But it may happen that after having placed oneself under a Guru, one may come into contact with another and a more competent one who can bestow full grace and illumination on him. Or one may feel drawn towards an equally competent one as the first Guru who is disposed to bestow full grace and illumination. The Sūtra lays down the procedure to be followed in such circumstances.

The Pūrva-pakṣa is that one should stick to his first chosen Guru and never change him, as the purpose of spiritual life is realized by having a Guru. The Śāstras also visit severe punishment on those who abandon the Guru without sufficient reason.[26] So whosoever is sought as the Guru in the first place will do for the rest of one's spiritual life.

The Siddhānta is pronounced by the Sūtra: Pūrva-vikalpaḥ pra-karaṇāt syāt kriyā-mānasavat — which means: "There is option (*vikalpa*) for change from a former (*pūrva*) preceptor (to a better or an equally competent one) taking into account the bestowal by him of fulness of grace and enlightenment (*pra-karaṇāt*[27]) — as there is in the mental act (kriyā-mānasavat) of Dhyāna with regard to two or more forms of [Brahman] chosen for meditation, the fruits whereof are equal."

The point is this. There is no absolute principle that the first sought is the only Guru to be adopted throughout one's spiritual life. A new Guru may be sought where it is found necessary to do so. For, the purpose of resorting to a Guru is to obtain full measure of grace and enlightenment according to one's Yogyatā. If such grace and illumination can be received from a preceptor other than one's present one and/or from one who is more competent than he, it is obligatory

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[24] "Emphatic instruction" means "instruction based on an illustration." Here the guru instructs his śiṣyas to worship and serve other gurus like him and better than him *just as* they serve Brahman and *just as* they served him. Jagannātha Yati's Bhāṣya-dīpikā: *dṛṣṭānta-mukhena vacanam atideśaḥ*.

[25] Original footnote: *guru-prasādam antarā guru-svīkāra-mātreṇa mokṣādi-lakṣaṇa-mahā-phalābhāvāt*. (Abhinava-candrikā iii.3.46)

[26] Original footnote: *guru-tyāgo bhaven mṛtyur mantra-tyāgo daridratā, guru-mantra-parityāge rauravaṁ narakaṁ vrajet*.

[27] Original footnote: The meaning given to 'pra-karaṇāt' is closely connected with that given to 'pra-dāna' in the previous Sūtra.

to go to him. However, even a superior Guru who would *not* bestow complete grace and illumination on the disciple (for valid reasons) should not be sought in preference to one who is disposed to do so.[28]

Thus the option to change from the first to another Guru holds only in respect of Gurus of equal competency and who are pleased to bestow fulness of grace and enlightenment. In exercising the option, the permission of the first Guru is to be obtained. There is, however, no obligation to change the Guru, where the old and the new ones are of equal competence. The option is to be exercised in such cases only where the equal one turns up in the life of the disciple, of his own accord. There should be no deliberate attempt to go in search of such a one. Where a new Guru who is more competent than the first one is disposed to bestow full grace and illumination is available there should be no hesitation in going to him and no permission from the former Guru is necessary. The option to change in respect of Guru equal in competency is analogous to the acts of meditation, whereof in regard to such meditations on two or more forms of Brahman upon which one is eligible to meditate the fruits may be equal. In such cases one is free to meditate on either of them.

The censure on changing the Guru is not applicable to such *bona fide* cases. They apply to changes made without such reason, or without permission or in favor of a less competent Guru.[29]

The second Sūtra of this adhikaraṇa 'Atideśāc ca' refers to the words of the Śruti exhorting the disciples in the words of their teachers, to seek fulfilment of their spiritual lives by seeking light and guidance from their betters also — in addition to their present Gurus and serve them with devotion just as they serve their own teachers.[30] The term 'atideśa' is used here in the sense of an exhortation to proper behavior towards other teachers of equal or superior merit and not in its purely technical sense of an 'extension of the rule.'

Thus the first Sūtra thus adduces the intimate reason (*antaraṅga-hetu*) justifying the change of Gurus for a superior one or of equal merit unders certain circumstances. The second Sūtra gives the external reason that noble-minded Gurus themselves as stated in the Pauṣyāyaṇa Śruti, exhort their disciples to seek light and guidance on the road to spiritual progress from still more competent teachers where and when available.[31]

There are two grammatical points to be noted in connection with Madhva's interpretation of the opening Sūtra. The first is connected with his interpretation of the term 'pra-karaṇāt.' This has been explained by Madhva with his usual brevity and depth of thought as fulness of grace: (samagrānugraham apekṣya) (pūrva-guros tyāga)-vikalpaḥ. The option in respect of changing the first Guru is dependent on (*apekṣya*) the ability and preparedness of the other one to bestow (*karaṇa*) fulness (*pra*) of grace and enlightenment.[32]

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[28] Original footnote: This explains why Satyakāma went back to his own Guru after receiving partial instruction, grace and illumination from the gods. It is suggested that tho' undoubtedly superior to Satyakāma's own Guru they refrained from conferring full illumination on him as he was *not* eligible to receive it *from them*. Satyakāma, therefore, went back to his own Guru with their (tacit) permission and obtained full grace and illumination from him. *anenottamo 'pi ṛṣabhaḥ svasmāt śravaṇāyogyatvān na sampūrṇānugrahaṁ kṛtavān iti jñeyam*. (Vādirāja's Tattva-prakāśikā-gurv-artha-dīpikā)

[29] Original footnote: *doṣa-vacanasya viṣayo darśito bhavati — adhama-svīkāra-viṣayaṁ vā, vyartha-svīkāra-viṣayaṁ vā, anujñābhāva-viṣayaṁ veti*. (Tattva-prakāśikā iii.3.46)

[30] Original footnote: *dṛṣṭānta-mukhena vacanam atideśaḥ*. (Bhāṣya-dīpikā iii.3.47)

[31] Original footnote: Cf. *uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata*. (Kaṭha Upaniṣad i.3.4)

[32] Original footnote: *anugrahaḥ prakṛtaḥ. anugrahasya prakarṣeṇa karaṇāt hetoḥ*. (Tantra-dīpikā iii.3.46)

The other word in the Sūtra which deserves similar attention is: 'kriyā-mānasavat' which according to Madhva means 'the mental act of "Dhyāna"' (*mānasa-kriyāvat*).[33]

SUMMARY: This adhikaraṇa instructs the guidelines to seek a preceptor. Naturally one approaches a preceptor who is first available. Then, if a superior preceptor is found and if he is inclined to bestow his full grace he has to be accepted as the preceptor. In this case, the endorsement by the previous preceptor is not necessary. In case another equally good preceptor is available, the seeker has a choice. He may continue with the earlier preceptor or opt for the new one. In this case the permission of the previous preceptor is necessary. However, the new preceptor should be willing to bestow his full grace. In case the new preceptor is inferior the question of leaving the earlier preceptor and opting for the new one does not arise. samagrānugrahasya akartā uttamo 'pi na svīkāryaḥ.[34] (Tattva-prakāśikā)

REMARKS: In this adhikaraṇa it is stated that as far as possible the best guru be approached for instruction. If a guru who has been approached earlier is not the best, he may be changed on the availability of a better guru. If the latter guru is of the same capacity as the earlier guru, there is an option to choose one of them. However, the permission of the earlier guru is necessary.

Further, *Sarasvatī-prasāda* is also essential.[35] Caturmukha Brahmā is the guru for all. Hence, *guru-prasāda* primarily means his *prasāda*.[36]

9. WHY SATYAKĀMA SOUGHT THE APPROVAL OF GAUTAMA AFTER LEARNING FROM GAUTAMA'S SUPERIORS

Excerpt from Chāndogyopaniṣad-bhāṣya 4.4

> *vāyur vṛṣabha-rūpaḥ sann agnir haṁsaś caturmukhaḥ, madgu-rūpaś ca varuṇaḥ satyakāmāya hocire, prakāśānanta-tejovat-sthānavat-saṁjñikā hareḥ, vāsudevādikā mūrtīḥ pratyekaṁ catur-ātmanaḥ, dig-ādiṣu sthitās teṣām adhipāś ca tad-ākhyakāḥ, nācārya-buddhyā tair uktam ato 'nujñāṁ guror agāt uttamācārya-samprāptyai nāvarācāryataḥ kvacit, icched anujñāṁ śrutvāpi nānujñāṁ prārthayet tataḥ, ṛṣibhyas tūttamā devā devebhyo vāyur uttamaḥ, vāyoś ca bhagavān viṣṇur na tasmād uttamo guruḥ ity ācārya-saṁhitāyām.*

Vāyu in the form of a bull, Agni [in the form of fire itself], Caturmukha Brahmā in the form of a swan and Varuṇa in the form of a diver-bird spoke to Satyakāma about Lord Hari's forms named Prakāśavān, Anantavān, Tejovān and Sthānavān, as well as each of Them having four expanded forms named Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, who reside in the cardinal directions and so on as their presiding deities and who are named after those directions, etc. [The four demigods] informed [Satyakāma] about Them [but] they did *not* consider themselves to be

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[33] Dr. BNK Sharma continues: The post-position of the word 'mānasa' in the karmadhāraya compound is to be explained according to [Madhva's] commentators on the authority of Pāṇini's Sūtra: Kaḍārāḥ karmadhāraye (ii.2.38). Such compounds admit of being read either way — kriyā-mānasa(vat) or mānasa-kriyā(vat). Original footnotes: *mānasī ca sā kriyā ca, tadvat dhyānavat 'kaḍārāḥ karmadhāraya' iti para-nipātaḥ*. (Tantra-dīpikā iii.3.46)

[34] Which means: "Even a guru superior to one's current guru should not be accepted if he does not bestow his full kindness, affection and grace."

[35] *Sarasvatī-prasāda* means "the blessings and mercy of Sarasvatī, Brahmā's consort."

[36] Prof. Pandurangi continues by quoting from the Anuvyākhyāna: *gurur brahmākhilānāṁ ca vidyā caiva sarasvatī, devata bhagavān viṣṇuḥ sarveṣām aviśeṣataḥ. tat-prasādena muktiḥ syāt nānyathā tu kathañcana. upadeśo brahmaṇas tu sarveṣām eva muktaye*. He also quotes Śrī Jayatīrtha — *iha janmāntare vā hiraṇyagarbhopadeśena vinā na kasyāpi muktiḥ*: "In this life or the next, without following the instructions of Caturmukha Brahmā, no one can attain liberation."

[Satyakāma's] ācāryas [because they were not inclined to fully bestow their kindness and grace upon him and accept him as their śiṣya]. It is for this reason that [Satyakāma] went to his guru [Gautama] for his approval [concerning what he had been taught]. One should never desire to take permission from an inferior ācārya in order to accept a superior ācārya [who has come by his own accord and who is fully inclined to bestow his kindness and grace upon him]. Nor should one beseech [an inferior] ācārya for an approval [of what has been taught by a superior ācārya who comes by his own accord and who is fully inclined to bestow his kindness and grace upon him]. Devas are superior to ṛṣis, Vāyu is superior to the devas, the Personality of Godhead Lord Viṣṇu [is superior] to Vāyu, [but] no one is superior to Him." (Ācārya-saṁhitā)

NOTE. We have presented a tabulated summary of the discussion concerning when one's guru can be changed in the appendix.

10. ANUVYĀKHYĀNA ON GRADES OF GURUS AND ŚIKṢĀ

Anuvyākhyāna 3.3.72, 74-77

mati-śruti-dhyāna-kāla-viśeṣaṁ gurur uttamaḥ
vetti tasyokti-mārgeṇa kurvataḥ syād dhi darśanam

The first-class guru knows the details pertaining to learning, understanding, meditation and the specific time [when they should be executed by the śiṣya]. Direct experience of Brahman is attained by one who follows the path of his instructions.

EXPLANATION: The first-class guru is well aware of his śiṣya's capabilities. Direct experience of Brahman is attained by one who follows the path of such a guru's instructions, that is, who engages in learning, understanding and meditation [according to such a guru's instructions].

This is the point: The process of learning and so on is actually meant to attain direct experience of Brahman which cannot be attained by engaging in learning, understanding and meditation in any whimsical manner. On the other hand, as the Ācārya will explain, when such activities are performed as directed by a guru who knows the capabilities of his śiṣya and who provides such direction with love, grace and happiness, the śiṣya attains direct experience of Brahman, and even for a hundred reasons the śiṣya will not experience any calamity in the form of doubts and so on.[37]

"But there is the possibility that one might not engage in learning, understanding and meditation because such a guru is rarely found. Even if he were to be found, he can only be found by a śiṣya who has spiritual potency and who has executed the process of learning, understanding and meditation. We have a case of mutual dependency here![38]"

Anticipating this objection, the Ācārya writes text 74:[39]

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[37] Nyāya-sudhā: *matir mananaṁ, śrutiḥ śravaṇam. uttamaḥ śiṣya-yogyatābhijñaḥ. kurvataḥ śravaṇādikam. darśanaṁ brahma-sākṣātkāraḥ. etad uktaṁ bhavati. brahma-darśanārthaṁ hi śravaṇādikam. na ca tad yathā-kathañcid anuṣṭhitaṁ tat sādhanam. kintu śiṣya-yogyatābhijña-guru-pradāna-pūrvakam eveti vakṣyati. atas tādṛśo gurur eva śravaṇādi-kāla-viśeṣam upadekṣyati. yataḥ paraṁ kāraṇa-śatopanipāte 'pi na saṁśayādy-utpādaḥ syād iti.*

[38] "Mutual dependency" refers to a "Catch-22" situation.

[39] Nyāya-sudhā: *śiṣya-yogyatābhijña-gurūpadeśānusāreṇa śravaṇādikaṁ kartavyam ity ayuktam. tādṛśasya guror dulabhatvena śravaṇādy-abhāvāpatteḥ. labhyamāno 'py asāv anuṣṭhita-śravaṇādinā ādhyātmika-śakti-sampannenaiva śiṣyeṇa labhyate, nānyena. tathācānyonyāśraya ity ata āha: yadīti.*

yadi tādṛg gurur nāsti nirṇīta-śravaṇādikam
tat-siddhāntānusāreṇa nirṇaya-jñāt samācaret

If such a guru is not available, one should execute the process of learning, understanding and meditation as ascertained by him and in accordance with the siddhānta taught by such a guru from one who knows how to ascertain such details.

EXPLANATION: Śāstra is of two types: that which has ascertained the conclusions of the entire body of Vedic literature (*nirṇīta-śāstra*) and that whose conclusions need to be ascertained (*nirṇetavya-śāstra*). The Brahma-sūtras and so on belong to the first category of nirṇīta-śāstra. The Vedas and so on belong to the second category of nirṇetavya-śāstra. [Under the current circumstances], one should execute the process of learning, understanding and meditation with reference to the nirṇīta-śāstra under the direction of one who knows those conclusions have been ascertained on the basis of the teachings of the all-knowing [first-class gurus].

This is the idea: Even if one first of all does not attain a first-class guru, there is no reason to not engage in learning, understanding and meditation because they can be executed under the direction of a guru who is not first-class. Though the non-first-class guru is not capable of properly explaining the most mysterious Vedas and so on [which belong to the second category of nirṇetavya-śāstra] like the first-class guru, he can take recourse to the explanations of the nirṇīta-śāstra. One should not claim that the purport of the explanations of the nirṇīta-śāstra is controversial and hence difficult to understand because even a non-first-class guru can understand that purport with the help of the assisting writings of the all-knowing [first-class gurus]. In this manner, when one executes learning and so on under the direction of a non-first-class guru, he gets a first-class guru [at the right time when he is qualified for it].[40]

"If an element [of sādhana] is to engage in the learning and so on under the direction of an all-knowing [first-class] guru, why don't you accept that in the absence of such a guru there is no [use in the] process of learning, understanding and meditation? What is the use of engaging in that process under the guidance of a non-first-class guru? Attainment of an all-knowing [first-class] guru can also come about when one accumulates [sufficient] piety."

Anticipating this objection, the Ācārya writes:[41]

śravaṇādi vinā naiva kṣaṇaṁ tiṣṭhed api kvacit
aty-aśakye tu nidrādau punar eva samārabhet

One should not even pass a single moment without engaging in the process of learning, understanding and meditation [under the direction of a guru who knows the nirṇīta-śāstra and how to ascertain the conclusions from the teaching of a first-class guru]. If he is absolutely incapable of doing so because of unavoidable activities such as sleep, he should recommence [his engagement in learning and so on immediately after his sleep and so on].

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[40] Nyāya-sudhā: *dvi-vidhaṁ śāstraṁ nirṇītaṁ nirṇetavyaṁ ca. tatrādyaṁ brahma-sūtrādikaṁ, dvitīyaṁ vedādikam. tatra nirṇītasya śravaṇādikaṁ samācaret. sarva-jñānāṁ siddhāntānusāreṇa yo nirṇayaṁ jānāti tasmāt. idamu ktaṁ bhavati. mukhyasya guroḥ prathamam alābhe 'pi na śravaṇādy-abhāvāpattiḥ. amukhyād api guros tad-upapatteḥ. tatra mukhyavad amukhyasyātigahana-vedādi-vyākhyāna-sāmarthyābhāve 'pi nirṇīta-vyākhyānam upapadyata eva. na ca nirṇīta-śāstrasyāpi vyākhyāna-vipratipattyābhiprāyo duradhigama iti vācyam. sarva-jña-praṇītopāya-granthānusāreṇāmukhyasyāpi guros tad-avagama-sambhavāt. evaṁ cāmukhye śravaṇādāv anuṣṭhite mukhyo 'pi gurur labhyata iti.*

[41] Nyāya-sudhā: *sarva-jñasya guroḥ śravaṇādy-aṅgatve, tad-abhāve śravaṇādy-abhāva eva kuto nāṅgīkriyate, kim anenāmukhyena śravaṇādinā. sarva-jña-guru-prāptis tu puṇyopacayenāpi bhaviṣyatīty ata āha: śravaṇādīti.*

EXPLANATION: The Śrutis and Smṛtis convey this teaching. Therefore, one must someone how or other constantly execute this process of learning and so on, under the direction of a non-first-class guru. It is unreasonable to speculate that one should not do so just because he does not have the excellent direction of an all-knowing [first-class] guru.[42]

This is what the Ācārya wants to convey: The Śrutis that instruct one to continually engage in this process of learning and so on are not unreasonable. They are like the scriptural injunctions that one should perform the Agnihotra sacrifice in the evening and in the morning [every day], even though it is very much possible that the performer can undergo a health crisis and so on [which prevent him from occasionally performing the Agnihotra sacrifice at the stipulated times].[43]

"If one does not have [such a second-class] guru who knows how to ascertain [the conclusions of the entire body of Vedic knowledge by following the teachings of the first-class guru], should one desist from engaging in the process of learning and so on?"

No. This is stated by the Ācārya as follows:[44]

abhāve nirṇaya-jñasya sac-chāstrāṇy eva sarvadā
śṛṇuyād yadi saj-jñāna-prācuryam upalabhyate

In the absence of a [second-class] guru who knows how to ascertain [the conclusions of the entire body of Vedic knowledge by following the teachings of the first-class guru], one should constantly learn the Vaiṣṇava scriptures, and only them, from one who has more authentic knowledge and understanding than himself, if such a person is available.

EXPLANATION. In the absence of a [second-class guru] who knows how to ascertain, one should somehow or other and constantly learn the Vaiṣṇava scriptures, and only them, and understand them [properly] too.

To learn the Vedas and other nirṇetavya-śāstras, an all-knowing [first-class] guru is needed. For the purpose of learning the nirṇīta-śāstras, a guru who knows how to ascertain is as good as the all-knowing guru. In the absence of both of them, one should learn and understand the Vaiṣṇava scriptures, not the non-Vaiṣṇava scriptures, from one who has more authentic knowledge and so on than oneself, if such a person is available, but not from one who has lesser authentic knowledge and so on than oneself, because that would be useless. It is implied that one should not engage in [indiscriminate] learning and so on.[45]

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[42] Nyāya-sudhā: *santi tāvat sarvadā śravaṇādikaṁ kartavyaṁ kṣaṇam api na tyājyam ity evam-arthāḥ śruti-smṛtayaḥ svādhyāyapravacane eveti nāko maudgalya ity-ādyāḥ. tatra ca sarva-jño gurur aṅgam. tad-alābhe tu guṇe tv anyāyya-kalpanam iti nyāyena yādṛśa-tādṛśam api śravaṇādikaṁ kāryam evetīti bhāvaḥ.*

[43] Nyāya-sudhā: *ayam abhiprāyaḥ. yathā sāyam prātar agnihotraṁ juhotīty-ādi-vidhayaḥ sannipātādy-upaplava-sambhave 'pi nānupapannas tathā prakṛte 'pīti.*

[44] Nyāya-sudhā: *nirṇaya-jñasya guror abhāve kiṃ śravaṇādy-abhāva eva, nety āha: abhāva iti.*

[45] With which one can attain a first-class guru in the future. Nyāya-sudhā: *nirṇaya-jñasya guror abhāve 'pi yādṛśa-tādṛśāt sarvadā śṛṇuyāt. manvīta ca. vedādi-śravaṇe sarva-jño gurur apekṣitaḥ. tad-itara-śravaṇe tu nirṇaya-jñaḥ sarva-jña-kalpaḥ. dvayor abhāve 'pi śravaṇādikaṁ ced anuṣṭheyaṁ tadāsacchāstrāṇām iti pratītiḥ syāt. ataḥ sac-chāstrāṇy evety uktam. yādṛśa-tādṛśāt śṛṇuyād ity anenāti-prasaktau satyām āha: yadīti. yadi tasmin puruṣe svāpekṣayā samyag-jñānādi-prācuryam upalabhyate, tarhi tataḥ śṛṇuyāt. na tv adhamāt, vaiyarthyāt. na hy adṛṣṭa-mātrārthaṁ śravaṇādikam iti bhāvaḥ.*

"If there is no possibility of [hearing] an explanation of the Vaiṣṇava scriptures from a man who is superior to him [in authentic knowledge and understanding of them], should one desist from learning and so on?"

Anticipating this, the Ācārya says:[46]

mahadbhyo viṣṇu-bhaktebhyo yathā-śakti ca saṁśayān
chindyāt svato 'dhikābhāve svayam eva samabhyaset

[If that is not possible], he should, to the best of his ability, dispel his doubts by consulting many devotees of Lord Viṣṇu who surpass him [in devotion and other such qualities]. If there is none superior to him [in either of these two ways], he should engage in such studies by himself.

EXPLANATION. One can be superior to another not just in terms of having more authentic knowledge and understanding, but in terms of qualities too — qualities such as devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. In this context, "doubts" include ignorance and misconceptions too. Eradication of doubts, ignorance and misconceptions is the result of engaging in the process of learning and so on. "To the best of his ability" indicates that one should learn and understand various parts [of the Vaiṣṇava scriptures] to whatever extent it is possible for him.[47]

11. TANTRA-SĀRA-SAṄGRAHA ON GURUS[48]
Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha 4.106, 126-129

smṛtvā guruṁ pūrva-gurum ādi-mūla-gurūṁs tathā
devatāṁ vāsudevaṁ ca vidyābhyāsī tu siddhibhāk

One who practices the vidyā [taught in the scriptures] attains success by remembering and offering his respectful obeisances unto his guru, his predecessor guru, ādi-guru, mūla-gurus, the presiding deity of that vidyā and Lord Vāsudeva.

COMMENT: Here "his guru" means "his guru who taught him the vidyā." According to some, this also includes all of [his] other gurus. "His predecessor guru" means "the guru of his guru." "Ādi-guru" refers to the revered Śrī Ānandatīrtha [Madhvācārya]. "Mūla-guru" refers to the seven gurus from Vyāsa to Nārāyaṇa mentioned in the Pañcarātra: Vyāsa, Bhāratī, Vāṇī, Vidhi, Vāyu, Ramā and Nārāyaṇa. "Vāsudeva" refers to Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vasudeva.

pratimokta-lakṣaṇair yāvad-yukta ācārya uttamaḥ
sarva-vit tapasā yukta ājñā-śakti-yuto hareḥ

The first-class ācārya has the following qualities: he is fully endowed with the auspicious physical features meant to be in authentic deities [as per the scripture], he knows all [the scriptures], he is [always] engaged in austerities and knows the direct meaning of Lord Hari's orders.

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[46] Nyāya-sudhā: *svato 'dhikasya puruṣasya prabandhena vyākhyānāsāmbhave kiṁ śravaṇādy-abhāva evety ākāṅkṣāyām āha: mahadbhya iti*.

[47] Nyāya-sudhā: *svato mahadbhyo, mahattvaṁ ca na saj-jñāna-mātreṇa kintu viṣṇu-bhakty-ādi-guṇaiś cety uktaṁ viṣṇubhaktebhya iti. saṁśayān ajñāna-viparyayāṁś ceti śravaṇādi-phalam uktam. ekasmāt prabandhena śravaṇādy-asambhave 'pi bahubhyo mahadbhyo yathā-śakti yathā-sambhavam ekaika-deśa-śravaṇādikam api kuryād eva*.

[48] Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha is a manual of Deity worship by Śrī Madhvācārya.

COMMENT: The auspicious physical features (*lakṣaṇas*) in this context are those that are noted in the third chapter [of Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha]. The thirty-two auspicious features [referred to elsewhere and found in the bodies of great personalities] are to be included herewith because [the authority] Śrī Viṣṇutīrtha states that the first-class guru has these features.[49] "He knows all [the scriptures]" in the sense that he has a sharp understanding of the scriptures [even] without learning them [in his current life]. Lord Hari's orders are the Śruti and Smṛti scriptures, that is, the five Vedas.

yāvad-bhaktaḥ yathā-labdhair guṇair yukto hi vaiṣṇavaḥ
guruḥ sat-sampradāya-jñas tāratamyena siddhidaḥ

[In the absence of such a first-class guru], a guru who is a Vaiṣṇava, who is sufficiently devoted [to the Supreme Lord], who has qualities appropriate to that degree of devotion and who is learned in [the teachings of] the Vaiṣṇava-sampradāya bestows success in degrees.

COMMENT: The expression "sufficiently devoted" should be understood in relation to the extent of one's qualification for advancement in spiritual life. "Bestows success in degrees" is explained [in the first line of the following verse].

uttamād uttamā siddhir dharma-mokṣādiṣu sphuṭā
tasmād uttama ācārye labdhe nāto 'varaṁ vrajet

First-class success among dharma, mokṣa and so on is clearly manifested from a first-class [guru]. Therefore, when one has attained a first-class ācārya as his instructor, one should not go to [an ācārya who is] inferior to his ācārya.

COMMENT. The reason for the prohibition in the second half of the verse is stated in the scriptural text — guru-mantra-parityāgī rauravaṁ narakaṁ vrajet: "One who abandons one's guru and mantra will go to the hell Raurava."

ekasya śiṣyatāṁ prāpya tad-ājñāṁ na vinā samam
avaraṁ vā vrajed ucca-guṇaś cen naiva duṣyati

Having become a śiṣya of one, he should not go to one who is equal to his guru without his order. Nor should be go to one who is inferior to his guru. If he attains a guru who is superior to his guru, he does not become an offender.

12. AN INFERIOR AS ONE'S GURU
Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya 1.124

svāvarāṇāṁ gurutvaṁ tu bhavet kāraṇataḥ kvacit
maryādārthaṁ te 'pi pūjyā na tu yadvat paro guruḥ
ity etat pañcarātroktaṁ purāṇeṣv anumoditam

Sometimes, on account of special reasons, someone who is inferior may become a guru. They should also be honored with due respect, although not as much as to the one who is really superior. Pañcarātra mentions this, which is supported in the Purāṇas.

[49] The quote from Śrī Viṣṇutīrtha, as excerpted from the commentary, is: *dvā-triṁśal-lakṣaṇair yukto gurur uttama iṣyate.*

13. WHAT DOES "SUPERIOR" MEAN IN THIS CONTEXT?
Aitareyopaniṣad-bhāsya 3.2

ācāryam eva taṁ vidyād guṇair yaḥ svātmano 'dhikaḥ

One should know that one who is superior to himself in spiritual qualities is an ācārya.

14. WHO NEEDS MULTIPLE GURUS AND WHO DOESN'T?
Excerpt from Bhāgavata-tātparya 11.9.31

ekasmāt tu guror jñānaṁ jāyate naiva kasyacit
ekasmād eva jāyeta yogyād brahma-padasya tu

[In general, complete] knowledge [necessary for attaining liberation] does not arise from a single guru. However, [as an exception], it may arise from a single guru if that guru is qualified to occupy the post of Caturmukha Brahmā.[50]

15. CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS IN DĪKṢĀ OR ŚIKṢĀ
Bhāgavata-tātparya 6.8.42

> *"guru-śiṣyayor ayogyatvād guru-vṛtter apūrtitaḥ, aprasādād guror vidyā na yathokta-phala-pradā" iti ca. "vidyāḥ karmāṇi ca sadā guroḥ prāptāḥ phalapradāḥ, anyathā naiva phaladāḥ prasannoktāḥ phalapradāḥ" iti tantra-sāre.*

"Vidyā or the method of meditation [taught by a guru to a śiṣya] does not produce the predicted results when (1) the guru and/or the śiṣya is unqualified, (2) the [śiṣya's] service to the guru is incomplete, or (3) the guru is unhappy [with the śiṣya]."

"When methods of meditation and duties are taught by a guru, they always produce the [predicted] results, never otherwise. When they are taught [by the guru] in happiness, they produce the [predicted] results." (Tantra-sāra)

16. THE MEANING OF "ĀCĀRYA-DEVO BHAVA"
Bhāgavata-tātparya 7.11.29

> *"harir asmin sthita iti strīṇāṁ bhartari bhāvanā, śiṣyāṇāṁ ca gurau nityaṁ śūdrāṇāṁ brāhmaṇādiṣu, bhṛtyānāṁ svāmini tathā hari-bhāva udīritaḥ" iti ca.*

It is also said: "The constant contemplation — 'Lord Hari is present in him' — by wives regarding their husband, by śiṣyas regarding their guru, by śūdras regarding a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya or vaiśya, and by servants regarding their master — is what is meant by 'considering him to be Lord Hari.'"[51]

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[50] This is part of a larger quote which ends with *iti guru-viveke*.

[51] In his Sanskrit edition of the collected writings of Śrī Madhvācārya, Śrī Vyasanakere Prabhanjanacharya, one of the contemporary authorities in Tattva-vāda, writes — *anena ācārya-devo bhava ity-āder artho 'py ukta iti jñeyam*: "It should be understood that the [intended] meaning of statements such as ācārya-devo bhava has been presented here." *Ācārya-devo bhava* (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1.23) means "Accept your ācārya as God."

APPENDIX

A tabulated summary of the discussion on when change of gurus is permitted

#	Does the second guru bestow his *full* blessings, kindness and affection to the śiṣya?	Has the second guru come by his own accord to the śiṣya?	Is the second guru superior or equal or inferior to the first guru of the śiṣya?	Can the śiṣya give up his first guru and accept the second guru?	Does the śiṣya need to take permission from the first guru before accepting the second guru?
1	yes	yes	superior	**yes**	**no**
2	yes	yes	equal	**that is up to the śiṣya**	**yes**
3	yes	yes	inferior	no	not applicable
4	yes	no	superior	no	not applicable
5	yes	no	equal	no	not applicable
6	yes	no	inferior	no	not applicable
7	no	yes	superior	no	not applicable
8	no	yes	equal	no	not applicable
9	no	yes	inferior	no	not applicable
10	no	no	superior	no	not applicable
11	no	no	equal	no	not applicable
12	no	no	inferior	no	not applicable

PART 2

TATTVAVĀDĪ PRACTICES CONCERNING GURUS AND ŚIṢYAS

Annotated summaries of interviews with Tattvavādī scholars

On 11 and 13 June 2025, we had the opportunity to interview three reputed and established Tattvavādī scholars on the practices concerning gurus and śiṣyas in the Tattvavādī community. The interviews were in English and recorded. We present herewith summaries of those interviews along with our annotations, which appear in footnotes.

1

ACHARYA VEERANARAYANA NK PANDURANGI

interviewed on 11 June 2025
at Poornaprajna Vidyapeetham, Bengaluru

Acharya Veeranarayana Pandurangi is a Vedic scholar living in Bengaluru. Born in the year 1973, he studied at Poornaprajna Vidyapeetha under the tutelage of Śrī Viśveśa Tīrtha Swami and Prof. Prahladachar (now Śrī Vidyāśrīśa Tīrtha), Prof Hayavadana Puranika, Prof. G. Guruvenktacharya (Now Śrī Suvidyendra Tīrtha), Prof. A Haridasa Bhat, Pandit Maddulapalli Manikya Shastri, Pandit Martand Deekshit, etc. He holds the Vidvad-uttama degree in Navya Nyaya and Dvaita Vedanta, a Vidvan-madhyama degree in Purva Mīmāṃsā, a Master of Arts degree in Sahitya and two PhDs — one in Dvaita Vedanta from Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan (New Delhi), and one in Navya Nyaya from Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha (Tirupati). From 1995 to 1999, he served as a lecturer of Navya Nyaya at the Poornaprajna Vidyapeetha, Bangalore. From 1999 to 2005, he was a researcher at the French Institute of Pondicherry. From 2005, he was an associate professor in the Department of Darshana and from 2007 the Dean of that department at the Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Rajasthan Sanskrit University, Jaipur. At present he is a professor and dean of Vedanta at Karnataka Sanskrit University, Bangalore. He was awarded the Maharshi Badrayan Vyas Award for Sanskrit by Pratibha Patil, the then President of India, in 2011. He has also received other awards. Pandurangi has authored and edited eight books (including an ongoing Sanskrit commentary on the Ṛg Veda) and more than twenty papers. His research interests are Vedic studies, Indian Logic, Dvaita Vedanta, Purva-mimamsa, Ancient Indian History and Machine translation. With Śrī Shrinivas Varkhedi, he co-founded Bharatiya Vidvat Parishat, a worldwide group of more than 2,000 Sanskrit scholars, in 2009.

1. Hari will operate through the guru [to help the śiṣya].

2. If a guru is unreliable, one has to go to more deserving gurus as we learn from the [Upaniṣadic descriptions of] Satyakāma and Upakosala.

3. The gurus who told their disciples to accept gurus better than them and so on, as quoted by Madhvācārya in Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya 3.3.46, were liberal — they were not ordinary mortals like us — they were ṛṣis. They were great people. If you have any doubt, you should follow them [and eradicate your doubt].

4. Even if the gurus are inferior to one, they should still be worshipped, though not to the extent as gurus who are superior to one. This is noted in Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya. But will such a śiṣya progress? Yes, and that will happen according to his yogyatā [fitness].

5. Among all the different types of dīkṣās, sannyāsa-dīkṣā is the highest in the Madhva tradition because the sannyāsī is filled with most tejas [spiritual prowess].

6. Even if a pīṭhādhipati [head of the maṭha] is not as great as his guru, the fact that his guru bestowed anugraha [mercy] upon him and appointed him as pīṭhādhipati must be accepted, and he should be given the honor due to him because he has received his guru's anugraha.

7. Even though Madhvācārya has given such a great lineage, sometimes there is not that much of a capable person, but still the guru-śiṣya-paramparā is followed. Otherwise, if one does not accept a guru, everybody will be free [to do whatever he wants and make no spiritual progress]. That is why all the Mādhvas are united despite whatever disputes might be between them — everybody accepts Madhvācārya and nobody dares to go against the words of Madhvācārya.

Questions and answers

1. *What if the guru is unreliable?*

Acyutaprekṣa was unreliable. Still, Madhvācārya accepted him as his guru and took sannyāsa from him even though the latter engaged in Advaitic dhyāna. Acyutaprekṣa had several arguments with Madhvācārya for a number of years, after which he submitted to Śrī Madhva. Now, why did Madhvācārya take sannyāsa-dīkṣā from him? He could have taken from Vyāsa Himself. (He could talk to Vyāsa.) Still, he took sannyāsa-dīkṣā from Acyutaprekṣa only.

2. *But how can one change a sinless guru? Does that actually happen in the history of the Tattvavādī line? Have you seen it in your own eyes? Is it not considered an aparādha? Madhvācārya says that there is nothing wrong in changing* [*from a guru to a superior guru under certain constraints*].[52]

Madhvācārya is very practical and realistic in this regard. Yes, such a change does take place. I have seen it also applied. Non-sannyāsīs or general devotees also change their guru when they come across a much greater guru [like a sannyāsī or a pīṭhādhipati-sannyāsī]. It is not considered an offense. My lineage has been disciples of Uttaradi Maṭha and I also received some mantras from there, but I studied here [at Pūrṇaprajña Vidyāpīṭha which is under the Pejawar Maṭha] and accepted [this Vidyāpīṭha's founder] Śrī Viśveśvara Tīrtha as my guru. However, Uttaradi Maṭha's guru requested that I follow the practices of that Maṭha. So, change of a guru is not uncommon. Śiṣyas of one Maṭha might study in another Maṭha.

3. *What if a disciple develops a concept that his guru is better than Madhvācārya*?

Then he should be able to show that that is the case [to the Mādhva community]. Everything is based on śāstra and logic.

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[52] Nyāya-vivaraṇa (3.3.28): na cottama-guru-svīkārārthatvena prāpta-santyāga-nimitta-doṣaḥ. tatra doṣe mānābhāvāt.

4. *But ultimately is it not the apauruṣeya Veda that is the highest authority*?

Yes. We accept Madhvācārya as our guru but the ultimate ācārya is Vyāsadeva who is following the Veda. Madhvācārya is a follower of the Vedic teachings and maryādā. No logic can refute it. We follow Madhvācārya not because of simple belief, but because we are convinced that Madhvācārya represents the real intentions of Vedavyāsa on the basis of śāstra and [the logical presentation found in] Nyāya-sudhā and so on. And Madhvācārya is himself saying that he is not saying anything new — he is repeating Vedavyāsa — and he always gives a pramāṇa.

5. *Occasionally, we come across the expression "niyata-guru" [in Tattva-vādī circles]. What does it mean*?

It refers to the eternal guru [of the śiṣya]. We have some twenty teachers at our Vidyāpīṭha, teaching various subjects, and they are all gurus [for the students here]. Even I took dīkṣā from Śrī Viśveśvara Tīrtha Swamiji, but whether he is my niyata-guru or not, only he will reveal after aparokṣa-jñāna [spiritual realization] arises in me.

Ṛtvikism and the Madhva-paramparā

The most important point to take into consideration is that the guru should keep the [particular prospective] śiṣya in mind before teaching that person. He should be pleased to teach him. That saṅkalpa [determination] should be there [in the mind of that guru]. That is not possible in this system.

After the ācārya becomes aprakaṭa [unmanifest], are you able to hear his upadeśa [or instructions for you]? Lord Kṛṣṇa is always living, Śrī Madhvācārya is always living, Śrī Viśveśvara Tīrtha is also there [in an unmanifest state now]. But they are not *physically* living. Can you hear their [particular] upadeśa [for you]? No. Therefore, you require a guru-śiṣya paramparā.

Before Madhvācārya's appearance, his predecessors experienced great persecution. But somehow or other they wanted to preserve the [physically living] guru-śiṣya mantra-paramparā tradition. They could have easily given up that tradition. But to the extent of even disguising themselves as Māyāvādīs in order to survive the onslaught [of the Māyāvādīs], they strove very hard to preserve the mantra-paramparā tradition of [physically living] gurus and śiṣyas. They strove very hard to preserve that particular tradition.

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VIDVĀN P. VINAYACHARYA

interviewed on 11 June 2025
at Karnataka Samskrit University, Bengaluru

Vidvān P. Vinayacharya (aged 43 at the time of the interview) lives in Bengaluru. In addition to his accredited studies in certain aspects of computing, he holds an MA in Sanskrit and a PhD from the University of Mysore. His thesis was a critical study of the examination of the Śruti texts in Śrī Vyāsatīrtha's Nyāyāmṛta. He has a Vidvad degree in Dvaita Vedānta and a DLitt from Kavikulaguru Kalidasa University, Nagpur. He has twenty years of teaching experience and is a MPhil and PhD guide at Karnataka Sanskrit University. He was a post-doctoral research fellow on pramāṇa-mīmāṁsā (a comparative

analysis of knowledge and its means in Indian philosophy). The World Forum of Vyasaraja Devotees has awarded him the title "Vyāsarāja Sevā Dhurandhara." He has written a number of research papers and a few books including a fine English exposition of Śrī Madhva's Prapañca-mithyātvānumāna-khaṇḍana that also contains the arguments in modern symbolic logic. More recently, he has begun the mammoth task of translating the collected writings of Śrī Madhvācārya (the "Sarva-mūla") into English with a fresh English commentary and a critical study summarizing the voluminous Sanskrit commentaries on these writings in English. In this manner, he has already translated Tattva-saṅkhyāna, Tattva-viveka, Pramāṇa-lakṣaṇa, Kathā-lakṣaṇa, Īśa Upaniṣad-bhāṣya, Kena Upaniṣad-bhāṣya and Praśna Upaniṣad-bhāṣya. He is the Assistant Professor and Head of Department of Vedanta as well as the Principal of the Samskrit College in Karnataka Samskrit University.

1. In the Mādhva tradition, there are situations where one accepts an *additional* guru:

(a) For an academic purpose, for the sake of learning more and more śāstras. For example, Śrī Vyāsarāja refers to Brahmaṇya Tīrtha as his guru and Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha (Śrīpādarāja) as his vidyā-guru [teacher]. Vyāsa Tīrtha traveled about 150 km to Śrīpādarāja's place to learn from him certain advanced texts for several years, and then he went to Kāñci for debates. If there is an advanced text of Nyāya or Vyākaraṇa, one has to learn it [from one who is more competent in the subject].

(b) To ensure succession of a branch in the monastic order, that is, to continue the lineage of a particular branch. At times they would take up the paramparā of a different guru when there is a need, for instance, in the life of Vijayīndra Tīrtha. Vijayīndra Tīrtha was formerly Viṣṇu Tīrtha and was both a vidyā-śiṣya [student] and an āśrama-śiṣya [disciple] of Śrī Vyāsa Tīrtha — actually, he was ordained by Vyāsa Tīrtha to be his successor. At that time, there was a Surendra Tīrtha who belonged to a different branch and who did not have a [competent] successor. He was a close friend of Vyāsa Tīrtha and so he asked Vyāsa Tīrtha to give him Viṣṇu Tīrtha so that he could be made Surendra Tīrtha's successor. Vyāsa Tīrtha agreed, after which Surendra Tīrtha changed Viṣṇu Tīrtha's name to Vijayīndra Tīrtha and made him his successor. This Vijayīndra Tīrtha was the guru of the guru of Rāghavendra Tīrtha. So, if the guru of a branch is old and does not find a good successor, then he would consider, "Why not borrow a successor from another maṭha?" Vijayīndra Tīrtha in his writings salutes Vyāsa Tīrtha even though he identifies himself as Vijayīndra Tīrtha and not as Viṣṇu Tīrtha.

(c) To get *another* mantra, [to worship another form of Lord Viṣṇu].[53] You cannot take the *same* mantra from more than one person among the followers of Madhvācārya, because such an action will result in a very devious aparādha [to the first mantra-guru].

2. Change of guru for the sake of vidyā, as set out in the Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya 3.3.46-47, is very much permitted, and it does happen *very often* [in the Mādhva community]. One goes to many vidyā-gurus to learn various śāstras and thus continue one's studies. There is no doubt about it. So the tradition indicated in the Pauṣyāyaṇa Śruti in Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya 3.3.47 *is* very much in practice in the Mādhva community *even today*.

3. The demarcation between mantra-dīkṣā [mantra initiation] and śāstra-vidyā [scriptural study] is sharp nowadays, but it was not always so in the past. Learning the Bhāgavata [from a competent teacher] is as good as receipt of a mantra because the study of the Bhāgavata was not academic; it was like taking mantra-dīkṣā — it might not be an actual bīja-mantra [or seed-mantra for mantra-japa], but the first śloka of the Bhāgavata is *like* a mantra — and so you have to

[53] This is allowed in the Mādhva tradition.

treat it like a mantra. That was how it was in the past, even as far as 2,000 years back. But nowadays we may be studying the Bhāgavata by approaching Vinayacharya or someone else online — these things do happen because we accept it more as an academic text nowadays, (of course, *with* devotion). In the Rāmānujācārya-sampradāya, regarding their [concept of] prapatti-guru: the vidyā, mantra and prapatti do not seem to be demarcated compartments. But today in our Mādhva lineages, vidyā refers to academic studies, but it is not comparable to mantra-dīkṣā to that extent [as in the Rāmānuja-sampradāya].

4. But sannyāsa-āśrama-dīkṣā is considered the highest dīkṣā because sannyāsa-āśrama is the highest āśrama. The sannyāsa-āśrama-guru helps in attaining self-realization; therefore, he is accepted as the svarūpoddhāraka-guru [the guru who reveals one's self]. After accepting praṇava [oṁkāra] from one sannyasa-guru, one doesn't take it again from anyone else. But sannyāsīs are expected to do *more* fasting. *All* Tattva-vādīs, not just sannyāsīs, do complete nirjala fasting for every ekādaśī from the age of seven and when there is a mixed ekādaśī, such fasting is for 48 hours to cover both the tithis [that have been mixed]. *Beyond that*, sannyāsīs have to do additional full nirjala fasting for every grahaṇa [eclipse], etc. On other days, the sannyāsīs can eat only once a day and are served in only one serving — no second servings, etc. These very austere practices are going on even now. They are accustomed to such full fasts. A sannyāsī who is very old, sick and unable to do such fasts will make a disciple of his a pīṭhādhipati and move out of the scene, and he would probably be given some fruits, but that is only done separately and unofficially. The sannyāsīs are also expected to do a lot of japa. All of this is known to one who is thinking of taking sannyasa. This is common knowledge. Therefore, they are venerated and worshipped — for a good reason.

5. In addition to all this, sannyāsīs should be studying and teaching. And all salutations and credit goes to Śrī Viśveśvara Tīrtha (of course, to his guru Śrī Vidyāmānya Tīrtha also) for bringing this to the forefront. Śrī Viśveśvara Tīrtha wanted to have an arrangement to test the scholarship of the prospective pīṭhādhipati, to see if he has sufficiently studied and understood the Sarva-mūla, Nyāya-sudhā and other primary texts.[54] He incorporated this arrangement into a sort of unwritten constitution for the Maṭhas of the Mādhva fold. (He also wanted to literally incorporate it into a written constitution.) Within his circle, he managed to bring about this arrangement. In this context, study of the Sarva-mūla can refer to studying the original text under a guru with a self-study of the commentaries or a quick study of some portions and longer study of other portions — it depends on the guru and śiṣya. If the śiṣya is a nyāya-inclined person, his study of Nyāya-sudhā will be fast and his study of Bhāgavata and Bhāgavata-tātparya will be slow.[55] If he is a prameya-inclined person, his study of Bhāgavata and Bhāgavata-tātparya will be fast and his study of Nyāya-sudhā will be slow.[56]

6. One's *real* guru is his niyata-guru ("the guru ordained for him"), who inculcates the śiṣya and brings about his direct realization of the spiritual form of Lord Nārāyaṇa (bimbāparokṣa). Such inculcation can be in the form of mantra-dīkṣā or śāstra-vidyā [in this or some later life, whenever the śiṣya is ready]. Some of the conversations that take place in the course of such vidyā are reflected in the Upaniṣads. For instance, in the Kena Upaniṣad Brahmā teaches Rudra [about the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu]; actually, in this instance, it *is* a mantra, and it is actually forbidden to be studied in a [mere] academic fashion, even though that is what may be going on today.

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[54] *Sarva-mūla* refers all the all the writings of Śrī Madhvācārya — they constitute their foundational texts. Nyāya-sudhā is a famous commentary by Śrī Jayatīrtha on Śrī Madhva's second explanation to the Vedānta-sūtra.

[55] "Nyāya-inclined" means "inclined to grasp logical arguments."

[56] "Prameya-inclined" means "inclined to study various facts."

7. It is a fact that Madhvācārya is the unrivalled and supreme authority. Yes, the śiṣyas cannot think that their gurus are as good as Madhvācārya or better than him — that is not acceptable to the Mādhva community. But the intervening gurus are also given due respect. One's parama-gurus, praparama-gurus are also given more respect because they are elderly and more experienced.[57] Besides, I might be in a family which has taken initiation from a particular Maṭha and I might go and learn from another Maṭha, but I do *not* disrespect the guru from whom I had taken a mantra.

Questions and answers

1. *When the śiṣya is accepting an* additional *guru, he is* not *changing his guru — he is purely accepting an additional guru for Bhagavat-sevā. He is not considering if the second guru is more advanced than the first guru or if the second guru is equally advanced as the first guru, etc. So what to make of this?*

Though there is reference [to change of gurus] in the Upaniṣads, in the present times there is a practical problem about *saying* that a second guru is superior to a first guru. If the first guru is very large-hearted, he *might* say that the second guru is equal to him. But, [in general], to *say* that the second guru is superior to the first guru sounds very disturbing, and by social etiquette it is objectionable to speak in that manner. So such statements are not made in the Mādhva community [nowadays] because nobody [in the community] would accept them.

2. *Are there liberal souls in the Tattva-vādī community who encourage their śiṣyas to go forward to learn more from other [and superior] vidyā-gurus [as set out in the Pauṣyāyaṇa Śruti]?*

Yes, there *are* such liberal souls in the community.

Education

1. *In the Northern Branch of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community, four primary writings beginning with Śrī-bhāṣya are, ideally, meant to be carefully and thoroughly studied [in the languages in which they are written] under competent gurus. Do you have such a concept of a certain set of books to be carefully studied in this manner in the Tattva-vādī community?*

[Yes, that is] the Sarva-mūla, particularly [Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya and then Anuvyākhyāna with] Nyāya-sudhā.

Of course, the times have changed, but at least until 200 years back, study of the entire Sarva-mūla and Nyāya-sudhā *was* going on. Since then, there have been a lot of [political] disturbances, and the social [and economic] conditions of India [also] changed. Over the generations, the [brāhmaṇas'] lands were usurped and so the boys had to work to bring money for the families. So spiritual and scholastic pursuits could only be undertaken during their free time.

2. *As of now (2025), what would bright, self-motivated [and deserving] students [of the Mādhva community] be taught?*

If they are more spiritually (rather than scholastically) inclined, may be the entirety of Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha, or the entirety of Bhāgavata with Bhāgavata-tātparya.[58]

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[57] "Parama-gurus" are gurus of one's gurus. "Praparama-gurus" are gurus of gurus of one's gurus.

[58] Tantra-sāra-saṅgraha is Madhvācārya's summary of the Pāñcarātrika process of Deity worship.

3. *How are they actually taught?*

Privately. If there are two, they can form a group.

4. *Do you teach such a small number of students like that?*

We teach even a single student. *Why not?* If a single person comes [for education], why should we deprive him? He might be a highly elevated soul. We have no right to deprive him of this.

5. *And for such private education of such students, do you teach in the śāstric way, without taking any money?*

Of course, no money at all.

For whatever śāstras I have studied up to this day in accordance with the traditional practices, I have not paid a single rupee as a fee — niḥśulka in the real sense. Dakṣiṇā is something else, but no fee. In fact, in the Vidyāpīṭha, they would give [the vidyārthīs] clothing, residence, food and proper education for fourteen years, till they formally graduate from traditional education. It is a practice to teach Anuvyākhyāna and Nyāya-sudhā as the culminating text [after Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya].

6. *Do they study the entirety of Sarva-mūla [in the Mādhva Vidyāpīṭhas]?*

Some portions would be taught and some left for self-study. At least the first chapter of Viṣṇu-tattva-vinirṇaya would be taught. A part of Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya also. There would not be enough time to teach the entire Sarva-mūla word for word in fourteen years because the boys are taught vyākaraṇa, mantra, paurohitya, discoursing skills, some computer usage, etc. and they sit for a formal examination from this university so that they don't experience any hindrance in the future. These are considered from various perspectives.

Besides this, the Vidyāpīṭhas also have slightly differing syllabuses. Some concentrate more on Nyāya-sudhā, some concentrate more on the Bhāṣya, something like that. [At the end of their education], they would conduct a ceremony qualifying them as vidvāns, and after that the Swamiji who is the head of the institution would arrange for their marriages, give them residence, take care of their medical facilities, and take care of *their* children. Thus they would be protected by the Maṭha.

7. *Does this happen in all the three big Gurukulas or Vidyāpīṭhas [in the Mādhva community]?*

Yes. And the students [who have graduated from there] in turn contribute to these educational institutions by teaching. Thus, they would become gurus there and teach *their* disciples without taking any fee. This is the ancient Vaidika-paramparā [of scriptural education]. If they want to take sannyāsa, they would be given sannyāsa. If they want to execute their duties to the parents and become a householder, they are told, "Please continue, but please be pious in household life." So they get a strong philosophical basis. Of course, there are problems — how do you accommodate so many students [who graduate in your institution]?

The Guru-sārvabhauma Vidyāpīṭha at Mantralayam publishes so many books, obviously with the help of these [young] scholars whom they have nurtured [as their students]. They would get into it, form a team [to help in such publication work] — free of cost. They are thus benefitted, the Maṭha is benefitted, and the children of these scholars are also put in the same educational institution.

Additional gurus

1. *So, in the life of a Mādhva brāhmaṇa boy, he would be considering so many persons as his gurus. Is it not?*

As vidyā-gurus, yes.

The mantra that one receives should have been [previously] given [to the giver of the mantra] by spiritual order — nobody can read it from a book and start chanting it. So, the boy's gāyatrī-dīkṣā-guru would be his father [who had received it from his father and so on] and who might give him one or two other mantras. Of course, the boy might then receive *another* mantra from someone else, generally not from a householder, unless that householder is a very great ācārya who is similar to a sannyāsī and who can give a mantra that the boy's own father is not eligible to give. Generally, the father who wants his son to become elevated would probably take him to a saint, I mean, a sannyāsī to get him the mantra. That sannyāsī would himself be chanting that mantra lakhs of times. I don't even dare to give a mantra to any of my disciples.

2. *What about the role of a tapta-mudrā-dātā* [the one who bestows tapta-mudrā initiation]*?*

Madhvācārya mentions that tapta-mudrā should be given by an ācārya who is a very spiritually elevated Viṣṇu-bhakta. There is no actual reference *in Sarva-mūla* that it should *always* be given by a monk (sannyāsī) only, and more so, only by a monk of your own Maṭha only, and that if you take tapta-mudrā from a different Maṭha, you are engaged in guru-droha — these concepts are not there at all. But, today, in practice these things are there.

Even at the time of Śrī Vyāsa Tīrtha, there are some references that when he visited all places across India at the time of his dig-vijaya [travel for philosophical victory], he saw that in some villages there were no Maṭhas or sannyāsīs. However, normally there was a greatly learned scholar for the whole village. It seems that he gave such scholars mudrādhikāra, the eligibility to grant tapta-mudrā, "They might not be able to travel a long distance to receive it from me. So I am giving you the adhikāra to give it. You being a great ācārya give the mudrā and take them as your disciples. When we come there after some time, we can see the situation." He was so broad-minded, "You are yourself an ācārya. Why should I stop you from giving tapta-mudrā?"

In Tirupati, he even gave the pūjādhikāra [back] to the Śrī-Vaiṣṇava line. He didn't need to, considering the importance of Tirupati. He could have arranged for his disciples to continue holding the right to worship [the Lord there]. But he wouldn't do it. Personalities like him and Purandara dāsa were broad-minded and they saw a broader perspective.

3. *In Śrī-Vaiṣṇavism, [the traditional pupils] seem to respect* all *of their ācāryas, the one under whom they underwent the ceremony of prapatti as well as the ones under whom they studied Śrī-bhāṣya and other [important] texts.*

It happens among us also because you cannot expect one guru to teach both Bhāgavata and Nyāya-sudhā equally well. Bhāgavata[-tātparya] is full of prameyas and you should have a lot of exposure to the prameya-granthas [in order to be

able to teach the Bhāgavata with Bhāgavata-tātparya]. When he is teaching Nyāya-sudhā, he should be very logically oriented and sharp. I mean, we can't really expect the guru to be expert in both fields at the same level.

Naiṣṭhika-brahmacarya

1. *In some other lines, there is a provision for naiṣṭhika-brahmacarya (lifelong brahmacarya). This provision is originally from Manu-smṛti and other Dharma-śāstras. So one could be a lifelong brahmacārī in their communities. Is that there in the Mādhva community? Is it allowed there?*

Yes. It is there. My grandfather's brother was like this.

2. *Such a naiṣṭhika-brahmacārī is filled with vairāgya, vidyā and bhagavad-bhakti. But for whatever reason, he does not want to take sannyāsa. Now, who will maintain him?*

He will be self-maintained. My grandfather's brother was in Nava Brindavana, a flood-prone island [in the Tungabhadra River at Anegundi, near Hampi at Karnataka] for 49 years from 1935. He practiced severe austerity by controlling his eating and maintained himself by the grace of God. Brahmacārīs would [generally] not go to that extent, but they would be living with their brothers or so, and enter into [deep] study [of the texts].

Sannyāsīs

1. *After one takes sannyāsa also, one is expected to study [the scriptures] under that sannyāsa-āśrama-guru. Is that so?*

Yes. But they can go to other vidyā-gurus also.

2. *Would they learn from gṛhastha ācāryas also?*

At times [when their sannyasa-āśrama-guru is unavailable], yes. But [they would] not learn Vedānta, because only a sannyāsī has the adhikāra to teach [another sannyāsī Vedānta]. However learned a householder may be, he is still not a practicing Vedāntin per se — he is still in household practice, engaging in a lot of non-Vedāntic activities.

3. *Is this not in line with Śaṅkara in this case?*

Why not? It is not that only a sannyāsī is eligible for mokṣa, but it will be ridiculous to arrange for a householder to teach a sannyāsī Vedānta. How can a householder who is attached to houses [and other temporary paraphernalia] instruct a sannyāsī, "You should become detached from everything! There is nothing eternal in this world!"?

4. *Therefore, it was a matter of surprise to learn that after one takes sannyāsa at a young age, he is engaged in studies for ten years, generally under a gṛhastha. But what would he be studying?*

From a gṛhastha ācārya, he would be studying other śāstras such as nyāya, vyākaraṇa, [other areas of] Sanskrit learning, and, of course, portions of Vedāntic texts that contain nyāya. For instance, there are portions of Nyāya-sudhā that are

very very logically oriented like apauruṣeyatva-vāda. And if there is a good [gṛhastha] scholar who is teaching them, he would study them from the logical point of view in an academic style.

But when it comes to the actual inculcation [of the teachings of Vedānta like] *īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiṁ ca jagatyāṁ jagat, tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam*, a householder does not have the right to teach them to a sannyāsī. His [sannyāsa-]guru is very much alive [to teach him such teachings]; if he is not alive, he would learn them from *some other sannyāsī*. That is very much observed [in the Mādhva community], I am very sure about that.

A sannyāsī learning the nyāya portions of Vedānta-granthas is actually an exception. He should actually go to another sannyāsī to learn these portions too, I mean texts such as Nyāyāmṛta and Nyāya-sudhā. If his sannyāsa-guru or the other sannyāsī is not so much academically qualified to teach them, then bring in a good, very pious [gṛhastha] ācārya — only to provide [the young sannyāsī] with academic inculcation, not for his spiritual [elevation].

5. *What is included in "Vedānta" here?*

Upaniṣad-bhāṣyas, Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya, Nyāya-sudhā, Gītā-bhāṣya [and Gītā-tātparya], Bhāgavata with Bhāgavata-tātparya, Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya, [etc.].

6. *But where do these sannyāsīs have the time to teach [their sannyāsī disciples] so much*?

They *should* be having the time; that is their primary duty.

7. *But they are in charge of institutions with large resources, etc.*

That's a problem. That's a problem that they have to solve. They are tackling that [nowadays]. I would say that they should lessen their burden of administration.

8. *It was a matter of surprise for us to learn that Śrī Vidyāmānya Tīrtha had himself taught the Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya and Nyāya-sudhā to some. The traditional system is that the texts should be read out word by word and explained [if needed] in the vernacular language, and that when a student has a doubt, the teacher should stop and resolve that doubt fully before continuing to teach. But in this manner, teaching the Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya itself would take a few years.*

Yes. I think they would be teaching for about four to five hours per day. They should lessen their burdens of administrative responsibilities by handing them over to some efficient and trustworthy gṛhastha disciple to handle the [administrative affairs of the] Maṭha, take care of the finances, legal issues, etc.

9. *Do all sannyāsīs become pīṭhādhipatis? It doesn't appear so.*

There is a lesser number of sannyāsīs who do not become pīṭhādhipatis.

During the time of Śrī Vyāsa Tīrtha, it is said that he was accommodating one thousand sannyāsī disciples and one lakh householder scholarly dvija disciples with their families (which had twelve or so children in each family) in his Maṭha! He protected them with accommodation, arrangements for food and so on so that they could study śāstra. And only

one of those sannyāsī disciples would be come the pīṭhādhipati. He would have actually sent his [sannyāsī] śiṣyas to different regions to propagate Tattvavāda, where he would have established Maṭhas.

Maṭhas were places where students were taught. According to the lexicon Amara-koṣa also, *maṭha* is a *vidyārthi-nilaya*, a residence for students. A Maṭha is meant to be an educational institution, of course, with a temple, but not a temple *without* an educational institution. That is the correct model. The education was also wholistic and spiritual — pūjā was also taught [in the Maṭha].

Sannyāsīs *not* being pīṭhādhipatis seem to have become exceptions. Nowadays sannyāsa is also being given to some with the written and signed precondition that they would not claim the right to become the next pīṭhādhipati.

Niyata-guru

1. *In the Śrī-Vaiṣṇava line, they say, "Even after I die, I want to attain service to my ācārya in Vaikuṇṭha. Even in Vaikuṇṭha I need to serve my ācārya."*

That concept is here also. In the state of liberation, there would be gurus [and śiṣyas serving them].

2. *But then such a guru would be the niyata-guru [of that śiṣya]?*

Yes. This is his niyata-guru, who may or may not be his present guru.

3

ŚRĪ VYASANAKERE PRABHANJANACHARYA

interviewed on 13 June 2025
at his residence at Bengaluru

Śrī Vyasakere Prabhanjanacharya (born in 1946) is an eminent scholar of the Tattva-vādī community. He obtained a BE (Mechanical) degree from Mysore University, BA from Karnataka University, MA in Sanskrit from Bangalore University, PhD from Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha and a DLitt from Benaras Hindu University for his critical edition of Madhvācārya's Sarva-mūla (which he first published in Devanāgarī, and then in Kannada and Telugu scripts). He was a Professor of Sanskrit in various colleges and later became the Principal of Government First Grade College in Bengaluru. However, he opted for voluntary retirement to concentrate on his writing and research work. He has published more than a 100 books in Sanskrit from original manuscripts, more than 130 books in Kannada (many being translations of Sanskrit works), and more than fifteen books in English (including a fine rendition of Madhva-vijaya as Life and Works of Śrī Madhvācārya*). Twenty-eight of his publications have been translated into other languages (fourteen into Telugu, twelve into Tamil, two into Hindi and four into Marathi). He has taught the Sarva-mūla thrice, the Nyāya-sudhā twice and the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad-gītā, Brahma-sūtra and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, all with commentaries, several times. He has delivered more than 30,000 lectures on these subjects. He has also founded organizations to research and propagate the teachings of Śrī Madhvācārya, and set up a Sanskrit manuscript library with more than 2,000 manuscripts from various parts of the country. He has received four awards from the Government of Karnataka (1999, 2002, 2017 and 2024) and the President's Award of Certificate of Honour (2005). Between 1985 to 2022, he received thirty-three awards and twelve titles of respect*

from Mādhva institutions, and a number of other awards from other institutions. He was also the President of the All-India Philosophical Conference of the Akhila Bhārata Mādhva Sammelana held in Bengaluru in 1994 under the organization of Śrī Viśveśvara Tīrtha.

1. Even though Satyakāma's gurus were divine, he still went to his own guru for knowledge because he was the guru prescribed for him [by God]. Satyakāma knew that knowledge should only come from such a guru.

2. At an extraordinary and higher stage [of spiritual progress], dīkṣā is of two types: (1) sannyāsa-dīkṣā and (2) pīṭha-dīkṣā. Pīṭha-dīkṣā is for [appointing] a successor for a pīṭha.

3. The Maṭhādhipatis are expected to be 100% loyal to the teachings of Madhvācārya, and they are also seen to be so as of now. When one becomes connected to one of the Maṭhas, we expect the prerequisites to be taken care of. When we get into a government bus, we don't check if the driver has a driving license because these prerequisites are taken care of by the government. In an institutional setup, we expect the institution to take care of the prerequisites, but still we need the guidance of some trustworthy superior(s) to help us choose a proper guru.

Questions and answers

1. *Is the provision for change of gurus as set out in the Pūrva-vikalpa Adhikaraṇa actually applied in the Tattva-vādī community?*

Yes, [that provision is] definitely applied.

But two considerations are there: (1) the prior permission of this guru is a prerequisite, (2) but if the new guru is extraordinarily greater [than this guru], then no permission [from this guru] is required.

Say one is studying [a śāstra] under one guru, but you get a guru who is better than him [for studying it], then you have the option [to switch]. When you get a seat for a good college, you naturally leave the first college [in which you have enrolled]. So in the laukika [sphere] also, that [option] is there, just to avoid risks. Even if one is already admitted [in a college], there is a choice [to switch to another] — they deduct some fees and give the transfer certificate. Like that, here also.

Mantra-dīkṣā and Tapta-mudrā-dhāraṇa

1. *What about the mantra-dīkṣā that gṛhasthas get in the Maṭhas?*

That is also there, but studying and being convinced of Tattvavāda is considered the real thing, not simply giving dīkṣā without knowing anything about the śiṣya or simply receiving dīkṣa without knowing anything about the guru. After listening to a speech or instruction, if one is convinced, "This is the real philosophy," and he then wants to enter into [a life based on] that philosophy, then initiation is necessary for that person. That counts a lot. One's vidyā-guru may or may not be his mantra-dīkṣā-guru.

2. *What about the tapta-mudrā-guru?*

Everyone is not allowed to give tapta-mudrā. Only a person at the level of a paramahaṁsa is allowed to give tapta-mudrā-dhāraṇa-dīkṣā. This is clearly stated by Vādirāja Swami in his Yukti-mallikā. Nowadays, this is understood to refer to a pīṭhādhīśa-guru. Mantra-dīkṣā is different — it can be gotten from anyone, from a gṛhastha also.

Many gurus

1. *In the Rāmānuja line, generally they take samāśrayaṇa and bhara-nyāsa. So they generally have the concept, "He is my guru for my whole life."* My guru*, one guru, a singular guru for my whole life, not many, many, many gurus in a life. But is it like that in Dvaita-siddhānta?*

No. It is not like that [here].

The whole guru-paramparā is there [for him]. The guru's guru is also the guru of his praśiṣya [granddisciple].

In Dvaita-siddhānta, one may have many gurus. That is not a problem. But [the śiṣya] should make sure that there is no dispute among those gurus [regarding him]. He may have other gurus, such as gurus for Vyākaraṇa, Tarka and so on. These are his vidyā-gurus who might also give him mantra-dīkṣā. But, in Tattvavāda, the guru who is his Vedānta guru is considered his guru [for spiritual progress]. The minimum qualification for becoming such a guru is that he should be well learned in Vedānta.

2. *In Tattvavāda, if one has five different gurus,* who *will he follow?*

Different gurus for different subjects: one guru for Vyākaraṇa, one guru for Tarka, etc.

3. *And for spiritual development, who will he listen to?*

Only one guru, at a time, until he completes his course [of scriptural study], after which he can continue under his guidance or opt for a new guru, with the permission of his present guru.

4. *In the other lines, like in the Rāmānuja, Nimbārka or Gauḍīya lines, generally, the concept is that there is only one guru for the śiṣya for his whole life.*

No, it is not at all like that [in Tattvavāda] because his gurutva depends on his knowledge, and for knowledge you have to study prescribed texts. Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya is the ultimate [text to be studied]. A guru who has himself not studied the Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya cannot be a [competent] guru [for a śiṣya who wants to progress], even if he has given that śiṣya a mantra-dīkṣā. For that, one needs a proper guru who can guide the śiṣya.

Just as there are different stages of education — primary school, high school, pre-university college — before going to a university, there are different stages [of spiritual life] and there are different saintly gurus [for each of those stages].

How can one [directly] go to the highest guru? That is impossible. How can one directly join a university without knowing anything? That is not possible. At different stages, different gurus of different levels are appointed [by God's arrangement]. So, at any given point in time, there is only one guru for one subject.

5. *Suppose there is a śiṣya and he sees a [prospective] guru. Will he consider to what extent that guru represents Madhvācārya's teachings? Will he do this check?*

Yes. That is very important. For this, one should take guidance from his mother, father and other [trustworthy] superiors to help in choosing his guru.

6. *So in reality the śiṣya is listening to several authorities.*

Yes, because he is a small person. Bhīṣma's mother Gaṅgā guided him to study under Paraśurāma. So, it is the parents' responsibility to guide their children to select [a proper] guru.

7. *So in the Mahābhārata also, the śiṣya has several gurus.*

There are different gurus at different *stages.* At primary school there is the primary school teacher and while doing PhD also there is the PhD guide.

So in the beginning, when one is entering into the path [of Tattvavāda], there are parents and Maṭhas to guide one because the śiṣya may not be able to deal with various subtle considerations. If one's parents are not interested [in following Madhvācārya], then help should be taken from other [trustworthy superiors] of such stature [as those following Śrī Madhva].

8. *In the Ekādaśa Skandha of the Bhāgavata, there is the verse:* tasmād guruṁ prapadyeta jijñasuḥ śreya uttamam*. This guru is the one who is helping in the śiṣya's pāramārthika life. So, who is this in Tattvavāda?*

This is at a very high level. This only comes after [the śiṣya has developed] some [spiritual] maturity, not in the beginning stage. After he commits himself, he becomes more and more involved, sacrificing everything for the sake of [attaining spiritual] knowledge. *At that stage* one should be very careful in selecting a guru [who can guide him further]. Such a guru is, practically speaking, very difficult to find. [However, by then] the śiṣya should know how to seek out such a guru, and at the same time such a guru would also be selective about giving his śikṣā [to such a śiṣya]. For such a guru to teach such a śiṣya, there is to be an examination of one year: *nāsaṁvatsara-vāsine prabrūyāt.* That is said in śāstra. The śiṣya may be a gṛhastha or a sannyāsī — that is not a point of consideration — but how much that śiṣya is dedicated to knowledge with no commercial motives is what counts. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge. That is a real śiṣya and the guru should also be like that, teaching for the sake of teaching, with no other motive.

The Bhāgavata-tātparya (11.3.49) clearly says — *parīkṣyaiva guruḥ śiṣyaṁ śiṣyo 'pi gurum āvrajet, anyathā narakāyaiva prāyaścittaṁ guros tathā*: "A guru should accept a śiṣya only after examining him. A śiṣya also should accept a guru only after examining him. Otherwise, [the śiṣya] goes to hell and the guru has to do prāyaścitta." So the śiṣya has every *right* to examine if his [prospective] guru is proper or not. At the same time, the guru has every right to examine if his [prospective] śiṣya is proper in all respects. In the past, the tests were very severe. They would be impossible to pass in the modern days. The śiṣya has to be competent to understand whom he should accept as his guru, be humble, pass the tests of his prospective guru, and be willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of learning from his guru.

Whom he should choose is irrespective of which Maṭha the guru is a part of. The guru's śama, dama and then knowledge are meant to be taken into primary consideration. (*Śamo man-niṣṭhatā-buddheḥ dama indriya-nigrahaḥ* is stated in the Ekādaśa Skandha of Bhāgavata and these are included in the meaning of *atha* in *athāto brahma-jijñāsā*.) The guru's Maṭha is a matter of secondary consideration [in Tattvavāda].

The śiṣya should know these things clearly [beforehand] just as we know about the universities we want to join or the administrative posts we want to hold *before we go for their respective entrance examinations*.

Niyata-guru

1. *But how does an ordinary sādhaka understand who his niyata-guru is?*

That [consideration] does not come in at the beginning stage, it only comes in at a higher stage [of spiritual progress]. The guide for PhD is required only after one completes his post-graduation.

At *this* [beginning] stage, the consideration of whether to change one's guru or not has no meaning at all; that is at the final stage [of spiritual advancement]. [This sense of] the Pūrva-vikalpa Adhikaraṇa is *definitely not* for those in the preliminary stage. It is for those who have reached the stage wherein aparokṣa-jñāna starts to come. That is a very important point. Satyakāma and Upakosala belong to *that* category [of aparokṣa-jñānins]. One's niyata-guru is his real guru [for further spiritual advancement]. The superior guru guides [the śiṣya].

2. *For self-realization, one needs a guru. Isn't it?*

Yes, but that is not at the [preliminary] stage [of scriptural study]. That is at *that* [or final] stage. First śravaṇa [learning], then manana [deliberation and understanding], and finally nididhyāsana [meditation on the Supreme Lord]. The niyata-guru will give the ultimate guidance on nididhyāsana. Whatever he says will be final: he selects the mantra, he selects the form of the Lord to worship, and he selects the place of worship of the Lord, just as Nārada instructed Dhruva to go to Madhuvana, etc. The term "guru" *finally* applies to that guru only.

3. *But even in the lower stages . . .*

That is for practical purposes. But [even then], not with *total* sacrifice [of oneself to the gurus at these stages]. They are of relative importance, not absolute importance. One should sacrifice [oneself] as proportionate to the knowledge and [spiritual] position of the guru, *not more than that.* [At these stages], the guru should not expect [such total surrender from the śiṣya] and the śiṣya should not give it also. These things are commonly understood, just like in modern education also.

4. *There are so many śāstra-vākyas saying that one's guru is everything, etc.*

Technically speaking, such a guru is *that* guru, the niyata-guru, the svarūpoddhāraka-guru [the guru who reveals one's spiritual svarūpa]. The other gurus [at the lower stages] are of relative importance.

1. *Is there no system to take mantra-dīkṣā from a guru after the guru has attained samādhi?*

No. That is not there. You need a [physically] living guru from a proper lineage [of such gurus].

2. *But even then, this guru is not as great as Madhvācārya!*

Yes, but that is impossible. Madhvācārya is Madhvācārya! If the guru's lineage is valid and he fully adheres to Madhvācārya's teachings, he is valid.

3. *But how can one attain Madhvācārya's anugraha [mercy] by approaching someone* lower *than him?*

Madhvācārya can guide *through* anyone. The basic guru is Madhvācārya. All the gurus like Rāghavendra Tīrtha are connected to Madhvācārya.