

## Chapter I. Gurus and Mantras

**D**evotee: Swami, can we ask you freely about any topic concerning the spiritual path that we don't know?

**Swami:** Certainly. Why this doubt? What is the objection? What am I here for? Isn't it for explaining to you things you don't know? You can ask me without any fear or hesitation. I'm always ready to answer. However, I want earnest inquiry with a desire to know.

**Devotee:** But some elders say it is wrong to vex the *guru* with questions. Are they right, Swami?

*guru:* That is not correct. Whom else can the disciple approach? Since the *guru* is everything to the disciple, it is best to consult the *guru* in all matters and then act.

**Devotee:** Some say that we should reverentially carry out whatever the elders ask us to do, without raising objections. Is that your command also?

**Swami:** Until you develop full faith in them and know that their words are valid, it will be difficult for you to carry out their orders reverentially. So, until then, it won't be wrong to ask them the significance and validity of their orders, so that you may be convinced.

**Devotee:** Swami, whom are we to believe, whom are we to discard? The world is so full of deceit. When those whom we believe to be good turn out to be bad, how can faith grow?

**Swami:** Well, My boy! Where is the need for you in this world or any world to grow faith in others? Believe in yourself first. Then believe in the Lord (*Param-atma*). When you have faith in these two, neither the good nor the bad will affect you.

**Devotee:** Swami, faith in the Lord also diminishes sometimes. Why is that?

**Swami:** When one is deluded by the mere external world, and when one doesn't attain success in such external desires, faith in the Lord diminishes. So give up such desires. Desire only the spiritual relationship; then you won't become the target of doubts and difficulties. The important thing for this is faith in the Lord; without that, you start doubting everything, big and small.

**Devotee:** They say that until we understand the reality of the Supreme Self (*Param-atma*), it is important to be in the company of the great and the good and also to have a *guru*. Are these necessary?

**Swami:** Of course! The company of the great and the good is necessary. To make the reality known to you, a *guru* is also important. But you should be very careful. Genuine *gurus* are scarce these days. Cheats have multiplied, and teachers have retreated into solitude, in order to realise themselves undisturbed. There are many genuine *gurus*, but they can't be secured easily. Even if you get them, you must thank your destiny if they vouchsafe to you more than one single divine maxim; they won't spend time telling you all kinds of stories! There should be no hurry in the search for a *guru*.

**Devotee:** Then, what in the world is the path?

**Swami:** Why, it is just for this that we have the *Vedas*, *Sastras*, *Puranas*, and *Ithihasas*. Study them, adhere to the path they teach, and gather the experience. Understand their meaning and the trend of their message from *pundits*. Follow them in practice, and meditate on the Supreme Self (*Param-atma*) as the *guru* and as God. Then, those

books themselves will help you as your *guru*. For what is a *guru*? The *guru* is that through which your mind gets fixed on God. If you consider the Supreme Self as the *guru* and do spiritual exercises with unshakable love, the Lord Himself will appear before you and give you a *mantra* just as a *guru*. Or, He may so bless you that as a result of your spiritual exercises, you may meet a true teacher.

**Devotee:** But nowadays, some great big people are granting a *mantra* (*upadesa*) to all who ask; aren't they true teachers (*sadgurus*), Swami?

**Swami:** I won't say they are or they are not. I declare only this: It is not the sign of a true teacher to grant a *mantra* to each and every person who comes with praise, without considering the past and the future, without discovering the qualifications of the pupil and testing whether the pupil is fit.

Devotee: Then Swami, I have committed a blunder! When one great person arrived at our village, and when all were receiving a *mantra* from him, I also went and prostrated before him and asked him for it. He granted me a good *mantra*. I repeated it for some time, but soon, I learned that the great person was a cheat. Since that day, I lost faith in the name he gave me; I gave up the *mantra*. Was this wrong? Or am I right?

Swami: Do you doubt the right and wrong of this? It is very wrong. Just as the *guru*, as I told you now, examines the qualifications of the disciple, the disciple also has to critically examine the credentials of the *guru* before receiving a *mantra*. Your first mistake was that you didn't pay attention to this but hastily accepted the *mantra*. Well, even if the *guru* gave it without the necessary qualification, why did you break your vow and stop repeating the name? That is the second mistake: casting the fault of another on the sacred name of God.

Before receiving a *mantra*, you should have taken the time to learn of the *guru*'s genuineness and develop faith in them. Then, when the desire to accept the person as *guru* emerged, you should have received the *mantra*. But once you accept it, you must repeat it, whatever the difficulty; you shouldn't give it up. Otherwise, you commit the wrong of accepting without deliberation and rejecting without deliberation. That wrong will be on your head. You should not accept a Name when you are still afflicted by doubt or a Name that you do not prefer. Having accepted it, you should not give it up.

**Devotee:** What happens when it is given up?

**Swami:** Well, my boy. Disloyalty to the *guru* and discarding the name of God —on account of these, your one-pointed endeavour and concentration will wither away. As the saying goes, "The diseased seedling can never grow into a tree."

**Devotee:** But if the *guru* grants the *mantra* even though we lack the merit?

**Swami:** Such a *guru* is no *guru*. The result of the *guru*'s wrong act won't fall on you. The evil of that wrong will devolve only on the *guru*.

**Devotee:** Can disciples realise the goal if they act according to the promise made to the *guru* and honour the *guru* as before, regardless of what the *guru* may turn out to be?

**Swami:** Certainly! What doubt is there? Don't you know the story of Ekalavya? Though Dronacharya did not accept him as his disciple, he installed an image and took it as Dronacharya himself; revering as such, he learned archery and achieved mastery of all arts. Finally, when the *guru*, blinded by injustice, asked for his right thumb as his fees, he offered it gladly. Did Ekalavya take to heart the injury done by the *guru*?

**Devotee:** Of what avail was that offer? His education was all a waste, that was all. What was the net result of his

achievement?

**Swami:** Though Ekalavya lost all chance of using his skill, the character that he earned by that training was never lost. Isn't the fame he acquired by his sacrifice enough compensation?

**Devotee:** Well, what is past is past. Hereafter, at least I shall hold fast and try not to discard the name. Please grant me a *mantra* (grant *upadesa*) yourself.

**Swami:** Your attitude is just like that of the person who, after having witnessed the *Ramayana* being enacted all through the night, asked someone at daybreak how Rama was related to Sita! I was telling you that the *guru* and the granting of the *mantra* will come when your qualifications ripen. It will come by itself. There is no need for you to ask!

Really speaking, the disciple should not ask for a *mantra*. The disciple cannot be aware of being ripe for it. The *guru* will watch for the proper moment and will himself bless and help. You should not get a *mantra* (receive *upadesa*) more than once. It is not repeatable. If you give up one *mantra* and take up another, whenever you feel like it, you will be like a married woman gone astray.

**Devotee:** So, what is my fate now? Is there no way to save myself?

**Swami:** Repent for the mistake committed, but continue meditating on the name you received. For remembrance of the name of the Lord (*nama-smarana*), apart from soft prayer (*japa*), you can use as many names as you like. For meditation (*dhyana*), only the name obtained by initiation into a *mantra* should be used, remember. Don't change that sacred name; transform yourself by persistent yearning and effort, and proceed.

**Devotee:** Swami! Today is indeed a great day; for all doubts have disappeared by the message you gave. As you said, the granting of a *mantra* created the doubt, and Your instruction dispelled it. If permitted, I will return now to my place. When I come again, I'll bring some new doubts to be cast away in Your Presence, in exchange for peace and joy. If you so command, I shall come next month.

**Swami:** Very good. That is exactly what I want—that people like you should rid themselves of doubts, should grasp the real significance of life, and, welcoming the instruction with faith and steadfastness, should dwell in constant remembrance of the name of the Lord. Whenever you come, whatever comes, learn from Me the method and means of ridding yourself of grief, doubt, and worry. Never suffer from grief, for with that pain inside you, you will not be able to do any spiritual exercises. Whatever spiritual exercise you do will be like rose water poured on ash. Very well, go now and come later.