

“Be Careful With Bhakti” Or, Why the Guru Withdraws: The Unconventional Life and Teachings of Svami Sadananda Dasa

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“Initiate me in the name of God” [implored Vamandas]

“I am no guru,” [Sadananda replied].

“My task, this time,” he continued,

“is only to lead people to the lotus feet of my guru.”¹

The German Vaishnava guru Svami Sadananda Dasa (1908–1977) from the very beginning *withdrew* when people approached him to become his disciples or receive any mantras. Why was he so reluctant to play the conventional role of the guru? Moreover, his last advice was: “*Vorsicht mit Bhakti!*” (Be careful with bhakti!). Taking this instruction seriously, his disciples, who continue to look after his spiritual legacy, do not engage in missionary work but focus instead on typing, translating and publishing Sadananda’s manuscripts of his German translations of and commentaries on the major bhakti Shastras or sacred Gaudiya Vaishnava texts. The following article is meant to shine some light on the biographical background, the reasons for this reluctance, his and his disciples’ focus on the spiritual practice or sadhana of serving the Word Form of God, the Shastras², and his special instruction to be “careful with bhakti”.

This article consists of three main sections. Section (I) provides an overview of Sadananda’s life with a special focus on his relationship with his disciple Walther Eidlitz. Section (II) discusses possible theological reasons for his reluctance to play the conventional guru role. The final section (III) presents the direct instructions Sadananda received from his guru, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur, and their presumed connection with Sadananda’s final instruction to be “careful with bhakti”.

The article is based on the material provided by the *Sadananda Archive* which is maintained by the author.

I. The life of Svami Sadananda Dasa

1. *Longing for a life given in the service of Godhead*

First, the main stages in Sadananda’s life are outlined to explain his motivation for joining a then obscure Hindu sect from Bengal, the “Gaudiya Vaishnavas”, and eventually emigrating to India to live as a sadhu. Of particular importance is his meeting with the Austrian poet and writer Walther Eidlitz (Vamandas) during their imprisonment in a British prisoner of war camp during the Second World War, as Eidlitz’ autobiographical work “Unknown India” (1952) and his diaries give us a first impression of how Sadananda acted as a guru then and also hints why he probably acted as he did.

Sadananda was born Ernst Georg Schulze in Zittau, Germany, in 1908. In 1934 he became one of the first European disciples of Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur³, the founder of Gaudiya Math. In 1933 Sadananda met a disciple of Bhaktisiddhanta, Svami Hridaya Bon Maharaja, when the latter was giving a lecture on “The Life and Message of Shri Krishna-Caitanya” at the Lessing Hochschule in Berlin, Germany.⁴ Bhaktisiddhanta had sent Svami Bon and some other disciples to Europe to preach the message of Krishna Caitanya in the West. Sadananda was then an independent scholar, having just completed his studies in philosophy, theology and comparative religious history, including the study of Hindi, classical Chinese, Pali, Japanese, Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

After his first encounter with Svami Bon in 1933, Sadananda began corresponding with him and in 1934 he eventually joined the Indian monks of the Gaudiya-Vaishnava-Mission in London, who had established a centre there. He was attracted by a religion where one’s “*life is entirely given in the service of Godhead*”⁵, i.e., where serving God is *not a means* but the means *and* the goal. Bhakti yoga as an *independent* path – i.e., not as an adjunct to other yoga paths – is special in that it is free from any secondary motive, i.e. free from the desire to receive *anything* from God in return for one’s service: be it freedom from ignorance, liberation from suffering, eternal peace or spiritual bliss. This is stated in the second verse of the central sacred text of the Vaishnavas, the Bhagavata Purana, where bhakti yoga is defined as “the highest religion (dharma parah), that has completely dejected all interest in personal gain, including mukti or liberation (projjhita-kaitavo) [...]” (Bha I.1.2)⁶ Deeply moved by the beauty, purity and rare preciousness of this form of religion he gave up his life as a scholar and decided to start to take up the path of pure bhakti without any further delay.

In London, he soon received initiation at the request of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur through his agents Svami Bon Maharaja and Svami Bhaktipradip Tirtha Maharaja. This fulfilled the expectation of Bhaktisiddhanta regarding the preaching mission in Europe that by “delivering hari-katha to many people, maybe one or two good people will become interested in devotional topics.”⁷ In 1935 Sadananda travelled to India with Svami Bon where

Bhaktisiddhanta gave him his spiritual name “Sadananda Das” because he was “always cheerful and happy”, as Bhaktisiddhanta remarked.⁸ After his guru’s passing in 1937, Sadananda dissociated himself from the religious institution his guru had founded and which was about to disintegrate into competing splinter groups. He devoted himself exclusively to the seva of the Shastras, serving God’s Word Form, by collecting manuscripts and translating them into German.

2. “Aggressive Grace”

During the Second World War, from 1939–1945, Sadananda was interned in several British internment camps in India. In the internment camp in Ahmednagar he met Walther Eidlitz (Vamandas) who later became his shiksha⁹ disciple. During the time in the camp in Dehra Dun they became friends and Vamandas accepted Sadananda as his guru. Their relation, however, was not always harmonious. In his autobiographical work “Unknown India” Vamandas explains how he learnt to understand why Sadananda treated him sometimes with love and affection and then again aggressively and harshly: “Gradually I learned to realize that every word uttered by Sadananda was an expression of bhakti, knowing love of God, and that all his actions, whether friendly or scornful – he could be exceedingly harsh and stern – were based on an effort to waken the atma in the people he contacted.” (Eidlitz, 1952, 124)¹⁰ In one of his diaries Vamandas sums up the time he shared one room with Sadananda: “For one year I was living together with him in a tiny room in the camp and yet I didn’t recognize him for what he was; i.e., sometimes I guessed it and instantly he hid himself again, as this belongs to the play. And it is grace, grace, grace when he shows his true nature.”¹¹

Already from these lines one gets an idea, why Sadananda continued to push his disciple away and hide himself from him: He wanted to wake up Vamandas’ atma by attacking the human ego that stood in the way. Vamandas labelled this method of teaching as *aggressive grace* (Eidlitz, 1952, 120).

Sadananda himself later explained to him that he *out of love* sometimes acted so harshly towards him. In a letter to Vamandas he writes: “You must not take my severe criticism of your mistakes badly – it is only because I love you so incredibly, Vamandas, *for your absorption in the bhakti cult*, that I claim the right to be so hard with you [...]”¹²

However, Sadananda continued to decline Vamandas’ wish to give him *formal* initiation (diksha)¹³ – which he eventually received through the help of Sadananda from Sadananda’s godbrother, Svami Bon, in 1946. But Vamandas understood that this was Sadananda’s way of teaching him what a genuine guru-disciple relationship is about. In one of his diaries Vamandas writes: “Guru erst scheinbar verlieren, um ihn auf einer höheren Ebene wiederzufinden”¹⁴, i.e. *one first has to lose the guru (seemingly), in order to find him again on a higher level*. (What this “higher level” could mean and why one should strive to reach

this higher understanding will be explained in section II.) It is important to note that Sadananda’s dealings with Vamandas are an example of a special way of teaching a specific disciple in a specific situation. In other situations, Sadananda gave initiation.¹⁵

II. The dynamic “seva pyramid”

When Sadananda was planning to move back to Europe by the end of the 50ties he explained his worries regarding people’s possible reactions to him as a Hindu monk in a letter to Vamandas (1958): “One thing is certain – I do not wish to look like a ‘Svami’ *at all* when I will be in Sweden, but like a plain and normal human being. I hate if people make a fuss over me. Sensationalism so far has killed *every* religion.”¹⁶ And in a letter from 1974 he explained to Kid Samuelsson how he himself defined his role: “I did *not* come to make *disciples*. I want to be a friend of those very few who desire to get a glimpse of a path and goal which is possible to reach. One should know each other very well and such understanding may take a long time.”¹⁷

It is clear from these lines that he conceived of the guru-disciple relationship as a form of friendship. Aristotle’s description of an ideal friendship comes to mind.¹⁸ According to Aristotle, the perfect form of friendship is a relationship between autonomous, mature individuals. It is *symmetrical and reciprocal*. Two people choose to bind themselves to each other, not out of any expectation of personal gain or pleasure, but out of genuine affection for the other, wishing the friend’s good *for the friend’s sake*.

It might be objected that a guru-disciple relationship must imply a hierarchy, that the teacher of spiritual knowledge should occupy a higher position, be somehow ‘closer to God’, transmitting spiritual knowledge and shakti or divine power to the disciple. In this image, the disciple is filled with awe and respect for the guru, from whom he passively expects to receive special gifts. When the guru-disciple relationship is seen in this light, guru and disciple can *never* be friends in the way just described. But is this common view compatible with what the Shastras describe?

On the one hand, according to the Bhagavata Purana (11.17.27), the guru is to be considered *as good as* God or as God’s “other self”: “He should look upon his spiritual guru [...] as the [...] other self of Myself and never treat him with scant regard. He must not look upon him as a mere mortal being, for the spiritual guru is the embodiment of all divinity.”¹⁹ On the other hand, the guru is not to be worshipped *as* God, but as being *as good as* God. This is specified by Jiva Gosvami in his Bhaktisandarbhā (126): “Wherever in the Shastra Shri Guru and Shri Shiva are mentioned as identical with Godhead Himself, there the pure devotee looks upon them *as the dearest of Godhead*.” (ibid.)

Therefore, the disciple should serve the guru respectfully because the guru is dearest to God, and therefore serving the guru will please God, but also out of *love for a friend* who shares the same goal in life: to please God by serving Him. The guru is like a senior companion and friend on the spiritual path. It is important to note that this relationship is not a temporary one between people, but an eternal one between *atmas*. In bhakti yoga, each *atma* is in an eternal relationship with Bhagavan, or God, and – through this common metaphysical centre to which all service is directed – with other *atmas* who are of similar *atma* nature, i.e. who serve God in a similar mood (*bhava*).

Having clarified the nature of the guru-disciple relationship as a form of friendship, the function of the guru-disciple relationship is discussed. The guru-disciple relationship is like a link in a long chain of disciplic succession called a *sampradaya*. *Sampradaya* means “to pass (da) on (pra) in the right way (sam)”. The translation “tradition” for “*sampradaya*” is inadequate because it is not a matter of (blindly) following a custom or simply passing on certain mantras and shastras to the next generation. What is properly transmitted is the living current of pure bhakti from a bona fide guru to the qualified disciple. This implies the faithful transmission of God's own power (*svarupa shakti*), which first appears as *spiritual knowledge* (*sambandha jnanam*), i.e. knowledge (*jnanam*) of the interrelationship (*sambandha*) between *Atma*, world and Bhagavan, the method of service (*abhideya*) and the goal of the bhakti-path (*prayojana*). Bhakti in general is *samvit-samaveta-hladini-shakti*²⁰ or *hladini-shakti* combined with *samvit*, the same power by which Bhagavan knows (*samvit*) and experiences Himself as *ananda* or joy (*hladini*). This power is made available to a particular person through the guru. It affects that person's nature and *atma* and returns to Bhagavan in the form of bhakti or loving service combined with blissful knowledge of who God is, what He defines as His service, and who the servant (*atma*) is. This transmission of *shakti* or empowerment takes place *continuously* in the living relationship between guru and disciple, but is *ritually expressed* in the act of *formal initiation*.

In the Vaishnava tradition, however, the relationship between guru and disciple is not limited to the transmission of knowledge and spiritual power. The relationship continues in the eternal *lila* or divine play of God, even after guru and disciple have shed their human shells. Guru and disciple are usually of kindred spirit or *atma* nature (*bhava*). While participating in the ever-evolving divine play of God and His eternal co-actors (*parishads*), the personality of the guru in the *lila* and the personality of the disciple evolve and unfold accordingly and infinitely. The guru serves the disciple as a guide, and the disciple happily subordinates himself to the guru in an ever-expanding dynamic structure of mutual loving subordination that Sadananda called a *seva pyramid*: “Its structure is in the form of a pyramid the augmentation of which is established by new cells which have no other inclination than to

be the lowest ingredients of the whole. The *entelechia* or the moving motive is the longing for being accepted as proper ingredients, [...].”²¹

As they serve together, the guru reveals ever more intimate and deeper aspects of his or her own character and inspires ever more vivid expressions of the eternal atma-nature of his disciple. Svarupa siddhi, or the awakening of the eternal atma-personality (sthayi-bhava) while still living in the human form, is only the beginning of knowing one’s own continuously and progressively evolving eternal personality as an eternal servant of the servants of Bhagavan’s parishads in the eternal lila. Vastu siddhi or receiving a spiritual form after discarding the human body made of the gunas of maya, implies for the Vaishnava, according to Sadananda, “entering an unlimited world of manifold relationships with never ending prospects and insights, entries and exits, greatest harmonies and disharmonies, emanating from and flowing back to the centre of all conscious and subconscious gravitation in a new inexhaustible form of its Own Being.”²²

So, on the one hand, the guru serves as an *instrument* to transmit bhakti shakti to the disciple and on the other hand, he is an *eternal person* in the Divine Play with an *eternal relationship of friendship* with the *atma* of his or her disciple. Because the guru is a mere channel of bhakti shakti he or she never poses as the “great person”. As Sadananda points out, it is “the *hearing* of Hari-katha [accounts of Hari] from the lips of the guru, that leads to shraddha in His seva [firm faith that serving God is both the means and the goal of life together with the resolution to act accordingly]. It is *Krishna* Who uses the guru as an instrument.”²³ This explains the conversation that was quoted before the article where Sadananda refuses to play the role of a (conventional) guru. Without Krishna, the guru is nothing. And every guru depends on his or her guru. Therefore, the characteristic of a genuine guru is *humility*. As a disciple, he or she *remains* subordinate to his or her own guru even if they are approached as guru by someone else. In this *dynamic* seva-pyramid every guru is also a disciple, everyone who is served, is also serving: the disciple serves the guru and the guru serves (the atma of) the disciple and both serve the Absolute. Loving service (prema) is the life-force that connects all atmas with the Divine Couple, Shri Shri Radha-Krishna and – *via serving Them* – with each other.

One could argue that it is impossible to build a seva-pyramid without implying the concept of hierarchy. One has to keep in mind, though, that *every* individual atma in this pyramid is *continuously* subordinating itself to the others. Even the Supreme Absolute Person, Shri Krishna, subordinates Himself to His shakti Shri Radha and to His (and Her) bhaktas. Where the principle of love reigns, no *static* hierarchies can be established for *love always puts the other first*. The Power of Divine Love (prema) originates in Krishna but is directed towards His bhakta and returns to Him through the bhakta. Krishna puts the bhakta first, and the

bhakta puts Krishna first. Consequently, the image of the pyramid has its limits. It can only hint at the “construction principle” of what might be called the web of “Divine Inner Life”, that is *dynamic* and ever evolving.

One also has to be aware that the relation between guru and disciple is a relation that appears on the mundane level as a relationship between two *human* individuals, but actually roots in a *spiritual* relationship between two *atmas*.²⁴ Therefore, to attach oneself to the human personality of the guru, rather than to his teachings, distracts the disciple from the essence, i.e. bhakti, that is transmitted *through* the guru. Sadananda warned Vamandas that if his strong personality carried the message, and the message was interesting because of his personality, then, when the power of his personality waned and he “made his final exit” there would be nothing left but a weak, personal reverberation of the message.²⁵ To have a lasting effect, the path of bhakti should rather be presented in an *impersonal* way. First the world view of the bhakti texts had to be taught, for “*without* being deeply shaken, without having been thrown out of one’s secure world view while listening to the world view described in the Shastras, there can be no *basis* for bhakti whatsoever. And this philosophical basis is completely *dry*, objective, impersonal” (ibid.). This is why Sadananda points out the *dangers of emotional ties*: “Emotional ties to a person are like death, and that is why genuine gurus withdraw, over and over again, or else they send their disciples away in order for them to learn right from the start to develop through the power of bhakti.”²⁶

These lines show why Sadananda was so reluctant to act as a guru: he wanted his disciples *to develop freely through the power of bhakti* instead of binding themselves to him as their so-called “guru”. He simply refused to meet their expectations:

I am aware that people in the West like flies fall on porridge when a ‘flesh and blood’ Indian and ‘Vaishnava’ or yogi appears, for all expect magic and ‘miracles’ from a ‘guru’ and sudden resolving of the conflicts of life (if not the physical ones, at least the mental ones.) You know: I give no mantras [...], I do not give mysticism [...]. First I deconstruct, then I build up anew, upon a clear foundation. Nobody will like this and many will believe to have missed something [...]. It is my damned duty to point out to all of you: *You have to be free!*²⁷

Here again we see that he valued the autonomy of his disciples. He didn't want to have followers, but friends or comrades who walked the path of bhakti with him. - But there may be another, more esoteric reason why Sadananda, as a guru of *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism, withdrew and hid himself, as Vamandas reveals in one of his early diaries from the internment camp in India in 1945:

I still beg Sadananda for ‘his gifts’ (1st and 2nd initiation etc.) instead of begging for *Him* [Caitanya Mahaprabhu] *in His very essence*, i.e. Him in *viraha* [in the mood of Radha in separation from Krishna]. – Sada: ‘Hare maccittam hritva-bhavabandhanan-mocaya ...’ [...] also means: ‘[O Radha] draw me into Your terrible pangs of separation (viraha) from Him, i.e. into the *ever deepening union* with Him.’²⁸

In the same way, *separation from the guru* could be a way of entering into an even deeper union with the guru, explaining the earlier statement mentioned in the first section of this article. One may have to (seemingly) lose the guru by being rejected or sent away in order to find him or her again on a higher level of spiritual realisation as a companion in the eternal lila and an eternal friend of one’s atma.

III. Be careful with bhakti

In the third section of this article, it will be made clear how the first instructions Sadananda received from his guru, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, led to Sadananda’s focus on serving the Word form of God and his final instruction to be “careful with bhakti.”

Bhaktisiddhanta never expected that the mission in Europe would attract more than one or two atmas. From this expectation, one can understand that *pure* bhakti is and will be of interest only to *a few* souls. *Mixed* bhakti or bhakti as a *means* to achieve other human goals of life such as kama (pleasure), artha (riches), dharma (piety) and moksha (liberation from suffering and ignorance) may be interesting and helpful to *many*. However, only those who desire bhakti *for its own sake* will attain the *highest* fruit that the Names of Hari and bhakti can give: prema or cognizant serving *love* of God.

In 1954 Sadananda explains to a disciple why so many of those who listened to Vamandas’ lectures were probably driven into perplexity and rationalizations:

What we say is so totally, so completely against what one calls man’s natural instinct and habits of thinking. [...] There are only a few very noble souls who are truly ready, from their own nature, to experience something of the *preciousness* of this seva, which grows in intensity for eternity. For most people, it will only be an intellectual or emotional novelty, a sensation that will soon fade away.²⁹

In order to be able to experience the preciousness of this seva to Bhagavan Shri Krishna, that does not desire anything in return, one has to get rid of the way one usually regards and assesses the world, people – and God. Sadananda remembers how his guru explaining this need for a *change of perception* to him:

So long as we carry on looking on things, starting from a rose in a garden up to Himself with the tendency to weigh, how far and to what extent the rose or He Himself can help us to make us happier, we are bound to be disappointed. This tendency is called *maya*, because such assessment distorts reality and we see and experience a world, as it is *not* in reality.³⁰

Therefore, the first instruction Sadananda received from his guru when he arrived in India in 1935 was: “The first thing you have to do is to collect all what you learnt, read, excerpted, felt, know. Put it in a big bag and throw it into the sea where the sea is deepest and start anew.”³¹ This is not as easy as it sounds, for there are strong attachments to what we have learnt, felt and known. All this constitutes our human personality. Most people are so attached to what they think they are that they try to keep their human personality and carry it to the spiritual plane. They read their human ideas, sentiments and longings into the spiritual texts, thereby only mirroring themselves, unable to see beyond and unable *to receive* the revelation of God as He reveals Himself in the Shastras.

In a letter from 1956 Sadananda explains that he only gradually realised the implications of his guru’s first instruction

[...] that what people read [into] and translate from the Shastras [...], what they present as the teachings of the Upanishads, etc., is not in the texts themselves; that people are either too lazy to see in what sense a word is used in the text itself – or simply unable to keep their own ideas and emotions out of the texts when they read and translate.³²

So, to get rid of everything one has learnt, read, excerpted, felt or known implies *to get rid of this maya attitude* that not only distorts the perception of the world of man but also of spiritual texts and the spiritual realm. This implies that one first has to *actively unlearn* one’s old ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving and then build up a new world view upon a clean foundation.

On another occasion, when Sadananda had expressed his sadness that he had not been born in India, his guru made clear that this was really an advantage: “It is a blessing that you did not imbibe all these associated ideas. You would have learnt only wrong things. There is nothing to be learnt from people, poets etc. You have to learn from God directly – i.e. what God teaches in His Own words (in the Shastras).”³³ These instructions pointed to the further direction and focus of Sadananda’s *seva*: to serve the Shastras, the Word form of God. As he told Vamandas in the camp: “To sit down with the dictionary. Eight days to translate one line. Even if out of ten words one can only find five. This is service.”³⁴ Already in India and later

on, after he had returned to Europe, Sadananda worked together with Vamandas to realize these instructions. His goal was to collect those

who have the nobility to be allowed to walk the most magnificent path in this dark age (due to serving God in previous lives) [...] – and, secondly, to write down in word and text for the future, that there are such magnificent, great Divine things, so different from what man expects and presumes so that people like Sadananda might at least be able to receive the deepest truth in correct words.³⁵

But as early as in 1955, he warned Vamandas that one should be careful and not try to make things palatable to people’s mentality by, e.g., drawing parallels to Christianity or European mystics and poets. This would rather be a disservice because

nirguna-bhakti has nothing to do with India or the Orient. Bhakti is beyond *every* human sentiment, beyond *every* soul, the occidental one as well as the oriental one. The Bhagavatam, bhakti imply something completely un-Indian [sic] (das Bhagavatam, die Bhakti bedeutet etwas völlig Un-Indisches). To truly appreciate them demands a complete break with *everything* that is Indian as well as Western.³⁶

This implies that people first have to *unlearn* their old concepts and then receive a *completely new and “revolutionary metaphysics”*.³⁷ “If mere ‘Hare Krishna’ was sufficient”, Sadananda remarks in a letter to Vamandas,

then Shuka would not have needed to teach Parikshit for seven days the whole philosophy etc. of the Bhagavatam. And therefore it says in Caitanya Caritamritam I.2.117: Don’t be lazy in your hearts, saying: ‘this is mere philosophy’, because on the basis of philosophy the mind becomes fond of and attached to Krishna.³⁸

The “laziness of the heart” he criticizes here is a symptom of the *lack of real interest* in who God is and what He describes as His service in the Shastras. This lack of interest shows that a person is not really interested in bhakti or serving God, because this person is not willing to listen to God’s Words and obey them. In Sanskrit “desirous to hear” and “desirous to serve” (shushrushu; Bhagavadgita 18.67, Bha I.1.2 etc.) are identical terms. There is a crucial verse in the Bhagavadgita where it is declared that the essence of the Bhagavadgita (18.66)³⁹ should not be “disclosed to an *a-shushrushu*, to someone, who is *not* willing to *listen, obey and to serve*” (cf. Bhagavadgita 18.67).⁴⁰ Therefore, *laziness* is more than a “sin of omission”. The degree of laziness is an expression of the degree of being *disinclined to*

serve God – a “capital vice” in Christian terminology, or an “aparadha” in Vaishnava terminology.

In the corrections to Walther Eidlitz’ book “Die Indische Gottesliebe” (1955)⁴¹ Sadananda sums up, why real interest in spiritual matters is vital and why sound spiritual psychology and philosophy have to be taught instead of hazy mysticism:

One cannot say: ‘What does it matter, the main thing is that people can hear about the love of God’, because neither God nor the love for Him are to find behind a mystic, hazy curtain. Everything is completely clear, with a razor-sharp sharpness, which hurts deeply, because it hurts our human instincts.

This resonates with a verse from the Katha Upanishad (1.3.14) where it says that the spiritual path is difficult, sharp as a razor’s edge and hard to cross. Probably Sadananda agreed with this statement, and this could explain why Sadananda insisted on teaching bhakti with as much caution as one would handle a sharp razor blade. A small inaccuracy in the definition of the goal and consequently a deviation from the path could quickly lead to a destination far off from the initial goal and where one never intended to end up.

Conclusion

This article dealt with the general question of why the guru withdraws and – in particular – why Svami Sadananda Dasa rejected to play the conventional guru role and placed such emphasis on the need for his disciple-friends to be *free* and not emotionally attached to him. The answer is that he saw the guru-disciple relationship not as hierarchical but as a symmetrical relationship between autonomous friends with the guru serving as a channel for God’s Own Power or bhakti shakti. He wished to help others unlearn their old maya ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving the world, God and themselves by bringing them into contact with the Word Form of God, the Shastras, so that they could develop freely under the beneficial influence of the bhakti shakti itself. Therefore, he was careful not to speak about the highest expression of bhakti, *prema* or selfless serving *love*, unless he knew a person very well and was sure that this person could appreciate it. Instead, he focused on teaching sambandha jnana or “philosophy” to the general public.

His final advice to be “careful with bhakti” was based on the realization that *pure* bhakti, bhakti or service that does not expect *anything* in return from God, is only appreciated by *few*. But for these few, the source to drink of, the Shastras, needs to be kept pure and alive. Consequently, Sadananda and his disciples focused and focus on serving the Word form of

the Absolute by translating, editing, and publishing bhakti Shastras. These publications are meant to initiate an *internal* revolution: from being turned away from wishing to serve God to being turned towards it – with an eternally *increasing* “greed” (lobha) to serve more and in a more skillful way. In this sense, Sadananda called out to Vamandas: “Thousands have read and read [the Shastras] and yet they do not see. Please, Vamandas, *inaugurate the spiritual revolution!*”⁴²

But beyond the rather impersonal role of the guru as an instrument of bhakti-shakti the *atmas* of guru and disciple cherish an *eternal personal relationship* that, after both have discarded their human shells, eternally evolves while both are serving in the Divine Play of God in the Eternal Realm.

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¹ Walther Eidlitz, *Diary of Walther Eidlitz*. 1942. Unpublished manuscript. Sadananda Archive. – All letters, diaries and notebooks from Svami Sadananda Dasa and Vamandas/Walther Eidlitz that will be quoted in the following are stored in the Sadananda Archive. They are usually unpublished manuscripts if not otherwise stated. Excerpts have been published on the website of the Sadananda Archive under <https://sadananda.com/> For further biographical information and translations from Vaishnava texts into German and English by Sadananda please visit this website. The original sources quoted in the following (letters, manuscripts etc.) can be accessed as scans on request via contact@sadananda.com. – Most of the quoted letters and diaries in this article were originally written in German and were translated into English by Kid Samuelsson or the author.

² “Shastra” is written with capital “s” for the same reason as other sacred books like the Bible and the Koran are capitalized.

³ For more information regarding Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur and his role in renewing the bhakti cult please consult, e.g.: Sardella, Ferdinando (2010): *Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. The Context and Significance of a Modern Hindu Personalist*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg. – An extensive biography in three volumes, including a list of all publications, disciples and achievements of Bhaktisiddhanta was published by Bhakti Vikasa Swami, Bhakti Vikasa (2009): *Shri Bhaktisiddhanta Vaibhava. The Grandeur and Glory of Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura*. Surat: Bhakti Vikas Trust. – The Mandala Publishing group has also published a beautiful work with many historical photo sources: Mandala Publishing Group (Eds.) (1997): *Prabhupada Sarasvati Thakur. The Life & Precepts of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati*. Hong Kong: Mandala Publishing Group.

⁴ This lecture can be found in: Bon Maharaj, Dr. Tridandi Swami Hridaya (1984): *My lectures in England and Germany*. Calcutta and Vrindaban: Messers N. K. Banerjee, p. 47–56.

⁵ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Svami Bon Maharaja, 12 January 1933.

⁶ Sadananda explains in his commentary that the gist of the verse is that the highest form of religion is completely *free from any form of kaitavam* which consists, according to the classical commentary by Shridhara, in hypocrisy and speculation on or interest in the result of one’s own actions, including moksha, i.e. the liberation of the atma: “In other words, *akaitavam* means to be *free from any selfish interest in the result of one’s own actions whatsoever*”, Sadananda concludes. – Dasa, Svami Sadananda: *Shrila Prabhupada’s Vani*. Retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/spv-en.pdf.

⁷ Bhaktisiddhanta in a letter to Bhakti Pradip Tirtha Maharaja, 1933. (Mandala Publishing Group, 1997, p. 44) – One has to be aware that this rather low expectation was no expression of pessimism, but an expression of *realism* based on the statement of the Bhagavadgita (7.3.) that among thousands of human beings only one tries to attain siddhi or perfection (i.e. the realization to be an eternal soul or atma and of the same spiritual quality as Brahman or the formless Absolute); and that among the thousands of human beings who have attained this perfection, hardly one knows Bhagavan in His very essence, i.e. in His two-armed all-beautiful form of Krishna-Shyamasundara. Therefore, the interest in “devotional topics” (more specifically: in bhakti) is *naturally* low.

⁸ Svami Sadananda Dasa, *Diary of Svami Sadananda Dasa*. 2 July 1936.

⁹ A *shiksha* disciple is a disciple who receives spiritual instructions from a guru. A *diksha* disciple is a disciple who has received mantras or initiation from his guru.

¹⁰ To “waken the atma” is not an end in itself, but, in bhakti yoga, means, to make the atma realize its true nature as an eternal servant of Krishna.

¹¹ Eidlitz, Walther: *Diary of Walther Eidlitz*. 1944.

¹² Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas, 19 July 1952. (emphasis by me)

¹³ “*Formal initiation*” here refers to *initiation by word or mantra (vak diksha)*. According to the Brahmananda Purana, which belongs to the eighteen major Puranas, there are several nonverbal forms of diksha or initiation: initiation by touch (sparsha diksha), by sight or glance (drik diksha) and even mental initiation (manasi diksha). The latter is considered the highest form of initiation. (Lalita-mahatmya, 43.2–8). – J.L. Shastri (ed.) (1999): *The Brahmananda Purana*. G. V. Tagare (transl.). Reprint of the first edition (1959). 5 Vols., Part V. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, p. 1336.

¹⁴ Walther Eidlitz, *Diary of Walther Eidlitz*. 1942.

¹⁵ Vamandas mentions a dialogue with Sadananda in his diary from 1942 where Sadananda declares that he initiated someone from the medical corps when he was staying in the hospital in the camp. – Walther Eidlitz, *Diary of Walther Eidlitz*. 1942. In Sweden and Switzerland Sadananda gave initiation to at least three other disciples.

¹⁶ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas, 5 December 1958.

¹⁷ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Kid Samuelsson, 27 April 1974.

¹⁸ Cp. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8.3.3–9 (Bekker pages 1156a–b). Aristotle presents three kinds of friendship: friendship based on *utility*, friendship based on *pleasure* and friendship based on *virtue*. The latter is called the perfect form of friendship and includes utility and pleasure, but *not as ends in themselves* but as by-products of true friendship *that wishes the good of their friends for their friends’ sake*. Moreover “such friendships are of course rare because such men are few. Moreover, they require time and intimacy. [...] You cannot [...] really be friends, before each has shown the other that he is worthy of friendship and has won his confidence.” – Aristotle (1934): *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19, H. Rackham (transl.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd. Retrieved from <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg010.perseus-eng1:1094a.1>.

¹⁹ Tridandi Sri Bhakti Prajnan Yati (ed.) (1986): *Srimad Bhagavatam of Krishnadvaipayana Vyasa*. In Six Volumes in English with purport following the commentary of Shri Vishvanatha Chakravarti and annotation of Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Thakur. Vol. V. Sree Gaudiya Math: Madras, p. 159–160.” – Måns Broo discusses the tension between the two roles of the guru as *servant* of Krishna and as *representative* of Krishna (from the point of view of the disciple) in his dissertation “As Good as God”. – Måns Broo (2003): *As Good as God. The Guru in Gaudiya Vaishnavism*. Åbo Akademi University Press: Åbo. – The inner tension of the guru role is also expressed in a famous lecture by Sadananda’s guru, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. During the Vyasa Puja ceremony, where the guru is worshipped, he expressed the doubt how a “great sinner” like he himself could accept the position of a guru. And he concluded that it was only possible to assume the responsibility of being a guru by the command of one’s own guru, and, ultimately, Caitanya Mahaprabhu. He quoted Caitanya’s instructions to the Kurma Brahmana (Caitanya-Caritamritam, Madhya-lila 7, 128–129): “Whom-so-ever thou meet’st, instruct him regarding Krishna; By My command being guru deliver this land; In

this thou wilt not be obstructed by the current of the world; Thou wilt have My company once again at this place.” Consequently, to be able to assume the responsibility of a guru, one has to do so as the *servant* of one’s own guru, going back to Caitanya Mahaprabhu, obeying his command. (The lecture “Sree Krishna Chaitanya and How to Attain Him” was delivered on 10 July 1927, Cuttack, and printed in *The Harmonist*, Vol. XXV, February 1928, No.9, p. 193–201, p. 195.)

²⁰ Svami Sadananda Dasa, *What is Bhakti?* Kid Samuelsson (transl.). Retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/what-en.pdf. – Also cp. Bhaktivinod Thakur (1890): *Shri Amnaya Sutra*, Sutra 120: bhavan maha-bhava-paryanta hladini-sara-samaveta samvid-rupa siddha bhaktih: “The stages that begin with bhava and end in maha-bhava are called siddha bhakti (perfect devotional service). In these stages the samvit shakti (potency of transcendental knowledge) and hladini shakti (potency of transcendental bliss) are manifested.” – English translation by: Kusakratha Dasa and Purnaprajna Dasa (transl./eds.) (2006): *Bhaktivinoda Thakur. Sri Amnaya Sutra*. Vrindaban: Rasbihari Lal & Sons. – Also online: Retrieved from http://www.prabhupada.de/kusakratha/Kusakratha_Sri-Amnaya-Sutra.pdf, p 146.

²¹ Schulze, E. G.: “Society – Community – Math”. In *The Harmonist*, Vol. XXXII, March 19, 1936, No. 14., p. 329–332, p. 331. – The quote is taken from an article Sadananda wrote for the “Harmonist”, the organ of the Gaudiya Mission. The subject was the structure of the *ideal spiritual community*, not the structure of the Divine Inner Life in the form of the Divine Play of God and His eternal companions. However, the described construction principle of the ideal spiritual community on earth is *derived* from the ideal of the community in the Spiritual Realm. Therefore, it can also be used to describe the structure of the Divine Inner Life. On the mundane plane, the analogy of the pyramid serves as a “regulatory idea” (Kant) or guide to form the best spiritual community possible. – Regarding the concept of “regulatory ideas” see Kant, Immanuel (1965): *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith (transl.). New York: St. Martin’s Press. A3/B7 and A180/B222 (References are to the A (1781) and B (1787) German editions.)

²² Svami Sadananda Dasa, *Guru Tattvam*. – Also compare Bhaktivinoda Thakur’s work on the essential function of the soul or “Jaiva Dharma”, chapter 40: “At the stage of bhavapana (svarupa-siddhi), the faculty of transcendental vision appears, and at that time, the sadhaka can have darshana of his sakhi, and also yuthesvari Shrimati Radhika. Even after having darshana of Golokanatha Shri Krishna, the sadhaka’s realization is not steady at all times until he achieves the stage of sampatti-dasha (vastu-siddhi), in which his gross and subtle bodies are destroyed. In bhavapana-dasha, the pure jiva has full command over the inert gross and subtle bodies. However, the secondary result of sampatti-dasha, the stage in which Krishna’s mercy is fully manifested, is that the connection of the jiva with this mundane world is completely cut off. Bhavapana-dasha is called svarupa-siddhi, and in sampatti-dasha one attains vastu-siddhi.” – Thakura, Shрила Bhaktivinoda (2004): *Jaiva Dharma. The Esssential Function of the Soul*. Translated from the Hindi Edition of Tridandisvami Shri Shrimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja. Bangalore: Gaudiya Vedanta Publications, p. 824.

²³ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Mandalibhadra Dasa, 18 April 1974. Excerpt to be retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/tg-en.pdf.

²⁴ Sadananda explicitly told Barbara Josephson in a letter, that he was not interested in people as persons, but as atmas: “Believe me, I am completely disinterested in the *personal* affairs of your or anyone’s personal life and history and know about you practically from your letters only. People’s atma does interest me, not their minds, [empirical] ‘souls’ or bodies. Nothing of our personal individuality remains as soon as the atma or Real Self in us gets awakened.” – Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Barbara Josephson, November 11 1954.

²⁵ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas, 23 May 1958. Excerpt to be retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/pers-en.pdf

²⁶ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas and Hella Eidlitz, 1961. Excerpt to be retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/ties-en.pdf.

²⁷ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas, Hella and friends, 15 May 1960. Excerpt to be retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/magic-en.pdf.

²⁸ Eidlitz, Walther. *Diary of Walther Eidlitz*. 1945. – For the explanation of the Mahamantra according to Gopalguru Gosvami and Bhaktivinod Thakur also see: Katrin Stamm: “Take Me Along When You Play: Discussion of the 16th Name of the Hare-Krishna-Mahamantra”. *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, Vol. 24, No 2, Spring 2016, p. 259–270.

²⁹ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Hella Eidlitz, 18 February 1954.

³⁰ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Barbara Josephson, 11 August 1955. Original in English. Excerpt to be retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/des-en.pdf.

³¹ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas, 20 September 1955.

³² Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas, 24 April 1956. Excerpt to be retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/my_wanderings_in_india-en.pdf.

³³ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas etc., 20 September 1955.

³⁴ Eidlitz, Walther. *Diary of Walther Eidlitz*. 1942.

³⁵ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas. 15 April 1959.

³⁶ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas, 12. November 1954.

³⁷ Cp. Svami Sadananda Dasa, commentary on Caitanya Bhagavatam Madhya-lila, 10.33. Retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/meta-en.pdf.

³⁸ See endnote 34.

³⁹ “Abandon all socio-religious duties and take absolute shelter in Me alone. Grieve not. I shall deliver you from all sins.” – Tirtha Maharaj, Tridandi Gosvami Shrila Bhakti-Pradip (ed./transl.) (1990): *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita*. Enlarged and Revised Fourth Edition. Calcutta: Gaudiya Mission, p. 598. – According to Tirtha Maharaja, verse 66 is the sum and substance of the whole text of the Gita and the stepping-stone to the realm of pure bhakti. (p. 600)

⁴⁰ Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Barbara Josephson, 1 April 1956. Excerpt to be retrieved from http://sadananda.com/txt/en/text_downloads/en/i-en.pdf

⁴¹ Eidlitz, Walther (1955): *Die indische Gottesliebe*. Olten und Freiburg im Breisgau: Walther-Verlag.

⁴² Svami Sadananda Dasa, letter to Vamandas etc. 6 August 1955.