

## Section 2: Discernment of student

Narahari layers this insight into discernment onto his concept of *guru* from the previous section. For Narahari, *guru* is accessible by everyone, isn't a deity, doesn't take a particular form, doesn't need to be begged for forgiveness and kindness, can be clearly seen and gives guidance through the passage of life.

Having presented this concept of *guru*, Narahari turns his attention to the *guru*-student relationship. Like a seed implanted in a field, so the *guru* implants knowledge in the student. The seed and the field are both necessary. The student-field is but a receptacle while the *guru*-seed is potential. Sprouting of the *guru*-seed comes from discernment.

An analogy of fire and fuel serves the same purpose. It is the *guru*-fire that is the active agent not the student-wood.

Narahari adds some detail to his analogies:

The student must be of the right type. Just as the sun can awaken lotuses, but not lotuses made of wood, stone or clay, so the *guru* can only awaken the true student. These true students are able to respond to the *guru*. Others can receive the *guru*'s knowledge but cannot respond. Nevertheless even the true student is just a receptacle for what the *guru* gives. Hence the *guru* is the primary agent.

Narahari then introduces a pivotal analogy of the touchstone. In the ancient antecedents of Chemistry a touchstone was a catalyst that turned base substances into pure substance; iron into gold. Just by its presence, the touchstone causes this transformation without actually being part of it. The product of this transformation, gold, is extremely valuable. But more valuable is the touchstone itself, that which effects the transformation. The *guru* is like a touchstone. But the *guru* does not just turn the student into gold. He turns the student into another touchstone. So the product of the *guru*'s knowledge is not just a more enlightened, knowledgeable student. The student becomes *guru*, one and the same, indistinguishable from his teacher.

Now having properly described the relationship between *guru* and student, Narahari changes the perspective. He will do this often throughout Bodhasāra; showing that the resolution of some consideration comes not only from understanding the fundamentals of the issue, but from changing the viewpoint. He now looks at the *guru* student relationship from the point of view of Discernment; that which in Verse 1 was said to be the cause of the sprouting of the seed of knowledge.

Divākara's commentary on verse 17 explains: by means of discernment of knowledge both *guru* and student are equally involved; both are significant for discernment. From this perspective both are equal, although very different. Discernment is the prize. It is for the manifestation of discernment that both *guru* and student exist. Nevertheless the student, accomplished in technique but blind to discernment, is simply an instrument. The *guru*, being beyond pairs of opposites is venerated. (The '*guru*'s sandal' is used here because it has traditional implications of authority).

By replacing the second line of the verse quoted from the Yogavāsiṣṭha with an alternative line, Narahari indicates his objection to the notion conveyed about the student's contribution

to understanding. The original verse from the Yogavāsiṣṭha says, “The process of instruction, O Rāma, is the observance of simple established practices. But the agency for understanding is the purified intellect of the student”. Narahari says instead: the process of instruction of traditional practices is for growth of resolve, or trust, within the student.

The last verse in the section concludes that the purpose of all doctrines is the spontaneous rise of firm conviction, conviction in the authority of guru as teacher. The implication is that this respect for guru by the student is needed to allow the *guru*-student relationship to go beyond mere instruction of doctrine and to enable discernment.

Is there a subtext here? Is Narahari alerting contemporary teachers that teaching has fallen to a level where students are taught many things, become very learned, but do not end up being discerning and knowing their own identity? Both student and *guru* are significant for discernment. A mutual respect is required. The purpose of instruction is not to produce a refined person. The purpose of instruction is to allow Discernment to issue forth, to allow the discerning touchstone to be passed on to the next cycle of life.