

Ācāryopāsanam

service to the teacher

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Ācāryopāsanam primarily means service to the teacher. This value is one that is deeply embedded in the Hindu culture. Its intensity and universality within the culture show the high regard for knowledge and for the teacher who imparts knowledge.

Ācāryopāšana also is used to indicate specific aspects of the student-teacher relationship. **Gurukulavāsa**, living with the teacher, for a length of time in a **gurukula** and learning from him, is called **ācāryopāšana**.

MEDITATION UPON THE TEACHER

'**Meditation upon the teacher**' is another very literal meaning for **ācāryopāšana**. **Ācārya** means teacher and **upāšana** is meditation. Together these words form the Sanskrit compound **ācāryopāšana**.

Meditation upon the teacher means meditation upon the teaching by keeping the **ācārya**, the teacher, who stands for the vision of the teaching, always in one's heart.

SERVICE AND SURRENDER

'**Service and surrender**', however, is the general meaning of **ācāryopāšana**. This is the sense in which Lord Kṛṣṇa uses the term when talking to Arjuna. In this sense, **ācāryopāšana** requires certain discrimination in its exercise.

Care must be taken in choosing the teacher who will receive the service. Expression of **ācāryopāšana** can lead to exploitation of the value holder, if the teacher is not a responsible person.

ĀCĀRYOPĀSANA A GREAT PERSONAL SURRENDER

Service to the teacher implies a whole frame of mind toward the teacher, a frame of mind characterised by surrender of personal ego, subordination of personal likes and dislikes, a willingness to give without demand for return, and a general attitude of respect and devotion.

Thus, **ācāryopāšana** means a great personal surrender. This kind of surrender to another person should be made only when the person to whom surrender is made has no need for the surrender, no need for the service, no need of any kind, and no need to be the beneficiary of the attitude of **ācāryopāšana**.

Only a person, who has a clear, steady knowledge of the truth of the self, is without needs. Such a person is one who can be a real teacher, a teacher who can unfold the knowledge of the self that is the ground of all knowledge, and to whom the student can surrender completely with no fear of exploitation.

When Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that **ācāryopāšana** is one of the values constituting **jñāna**, it is understood that the teacher, at whose feet the student surrenders, must be a teacher of such integrity and freedom from need for service that only the student, not the teacher, will be the beneficiary of surrender.

WILLINGNESS TO SERVE

In **ācāryopāšana** willingness to serve is the significant aspect rather than the particular acts of service done. Willingness to serve means an inner readiness to serve whether or not we are called upon to serve. It means a happy acceptance of any way in which we are asked to serve, an attitude in which nothing asked of us is considered too small or large a service.

In this teacher-student relationship there is no give and take as there is in other relationships. There is only giving on the part of the student. Through such an attitude of unquestioning, complete service the student becomes blessed. The teacher becomes an altar at which he or she can surrender.

When the teacher is one true to his name and the nature of service is understood, **ācāryop āšana**, surrender to the teacher is a beautiful thing, blessing the student and making his mind receptive to the knowledge to be unfolded.

In gaining any discipline of knowledge, respect for the teacher is an essential element.