

[The Perfect Spiritual Apprentice](#)

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From the Agamas

The Perfect Spiritual Apprentice

Lord Vishnu describes the ideal qualities of a worthy student

Satvata Samhita is the first of 108 Samhitas, or texts, comprising the Pancharatra Agama. The following is drawn from chapter 22 on the "Characteristics of the Disciple." It has been edited for readability from Dr. Apte's near literal English translation of the Sanskrit.

The Sage Shankarshana said, "O God! I wish to know the distinguishing characteristics of the apprentice (or beginning) disciple."

The Venerable Lord Vasudeva (Vishnu) replied: He is one who is endowed with wealth, who absorbs faith, who is talented, who holds fast to his vows and speaks only what is true. He is the Lord's devotee. He consumes a moderate diet, refrains from attachment and is dedicated to the adoration of the preceptor. He is steady of mind, not absent-minded. He is born into a Vaishnava family who are true devotees. He is brought up with the proper sacraments and carefully made eligible at a young age by his mother and father, free from unholy admixtures of faith. He is restrained in mind and wary of the post-death plight. He aspires to be in the company of saints. He is avid in reading the scriptures and collects them constantly.

He is set on the path of righteous people who are absorbed in auspicious deeds. He has integrity, forgiveness, courage and compassion. He favors virtuous people. His clothing is spotless. He speaks with endearing language and bears a pleasant countenance. He does not covet others' money and is free from passion toward other's wives. He has attained a state of proper spiritual discrimination. He may belong to any of the social orders: martial, commercial or menial. He is not addicted to liquor or meat. He is deeply absorbed in self-study, content and energetic. He avoids eating leftover food. He bears the discus mark [of Lord Vishnu] branded on his body. He avoids pride and jealousy; hence he is great. He is ever ready to perform the ceremonies honoring Gods and ancestors.

He is free from hypocrisy. He is affectionate to his pious kinsmen and faithful to his mother and father. He keeps promises. He is fearless. He is humble. He sets a high moral standard for himself. His intentions are always good. He is singularly interested in the upliftment of his family dynasty.

He is blessed by the sight of the mantra within the mandala design, just as he is blessed by the glance of the guru. Having received such blessing, the disciple concludes, "Now I have become one whose mission is fulfilled." From that time onward, he desires to learn the proper interpretation of the scriptures through the lessons given by his well-pleased preceptor. After listening to those lessons, he meditates on their meaning, seated alone in a secluded place.

Such a disciple does not become arrogant, even though he is taught perfectly. He does not teach others out of greed or any selfish interest. He does not force a particular interpretation of a scripture, but tranquilly seeks unbiased insight, day and night. He maintains his serenity even when attacked in an assembly of scholars. Nor does he presume, at that moment, to think, "I shall decisively beat the debaters."

He should prostrate at the feet of elders when so instructed by his teacher. He should not express so much curiosity that they would be annoyed. Having pleased them properly, he may ask about what he has not understood or has forgotten. When encouraged by the elders, he may offer his own viewpoint in a humble manner. The disciple with these inherent characteristics is considered by the teachers as a samayi, an apprentice. He should then pray to God and his preceptor to attain the second status, putraka, or most loved son.

Dr. Prabhakar P. Apte translated this Agama as part of a project by the Academy of Sanskrit Research, Melkote, inspired by Sampathkumar Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami. The project was funded by a grant from the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam and published in 2005. To order the book, e-mail K.P. Umaphy, sastra1000 _@_ yahoo.com.

The Vedas and Agamas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures,

Shruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). There are two principal Vaishnavite Agamas, the Pancaratra and Vaikhanasa. Dr. Apte dates the Satvata Samhita of Pancaratra Agama between 300 and 500ce.