

In his *Bhakti-sandarbha* (283–84), Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī describes the importance of deity worship and initiation (*dīkṣā*) as follows:

“It is *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*’s opinion that the process of deity worship is not actually necessary, just as the specific prescriptions of the *Pañcarātra* and other scriptures do not have to be followed. The *Bhāgavatam* enjoins that even without practicing deity worship one can achieve the complete success of human life by any of the other devotional processes, such as simply offering oneself at the Lord’s feet for His protection. Nonetheless, Vaiṣṇavas following the path of Śrī Nārada and his successors endeavor to establish a personal relationship with the Lord by receiving the grace of a bona fide spiritual master through initiation, and in this tradition the devotees are obliged at the time of initiation to begin engaging in deity worship.

“Although deity worship is not essential, the material conditioning of most candidates for devotional service requires that they engage in this activity. When we consider their bodily and mental conditions, we find that the character of such candidates is impure and their minds are agitated. Therefore, to rectify this material conditioning the great sage Nārada and others have at different times recommended various kinds of regulations for deity worship.”—Madhya 15.108