

The Sat-Guru

by

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“From darkness lead me to light,” says the Upanishad. The Guru is one who is competent to do this; and such a one was Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The Guru is the dispeller of ignorance and awakener of understanding. Throughout the ages India has produced such.

THE Sat-Guru, who is Divine Consciousness in human form, is the one guide to Enlightenment, the only bridge from the mental concepts in which the disciple is enclosed to spiritual consciousness. Said Sri Shankara: “Even though you possess learning and all gifts and endowments, it will not avail you unless your mind is protected by the Guru and absorbed in him.” And again, in Vivekachudamani, he says: “There are three things that are rare and acquired due to the Grace of God: a human birth, thirst for Liberation and the protective care of the Guru.”

Were it not for this manifestation of absolute Reality or pure Consciousness (which are the same) in human form, spiritual knowledge would be lost to the world. The Guru, who is a knower of Brahman, is equated in the Upanishads with Brahman Himself. Though living as a man in our midst, he is conscious of his Divine Identity. Were there none such as he, the doctrine of the Self would remain a mere theoretical concept for the discussion of philosophers. The mind of man has to be shown the way. For this, the pure Consciousness embodied in the Guru mingles with the same Consciousness awakened by him in the disciple. The Guru is ever ready to help and uplift those who appeal to him. To disregard such help would be folly. It is vanity and pride to suppose that one’s own unaided efforts will suffice. To accept a Guru does not mean accepting the guidance of another man, but of pure Consciousness, shining through a human psychosomatic instrument.

Spiritual tradition has always accepted the need for initiation

and guidance by a Master. “What is commonly called ‘self-reliance’ is only ego-reliance,” the Maharshi said. And again: “God, Guru and Self are the same.” Only he in whom this Divine Consciousness is awakened can lead us beyond the range of human perception. There are various ways in which the Guru can initiate and guide the disciple, but that he should do so has always been held necessary. Those who attack this tradition are really only attacking their own false conception of it.

The Guru has already trodden the path and can show it to the seeker. Even if he has arrived spontaneously at the goal, as did Bhagavan, he can still see and indicate the approaches to it. He may even transmit direct experience to the disciple as Sri Ramakrishna did for Vivekananda. However this can never be stabilised so long as the disciple’s *vasanas* or inherent tendencies remain, since they drag him away again to the illusory world of sense-perception. There is no wisdom that can be given to all alike, says the Gita: “This wisdom must not be given to one who has no *tapas*, is not a devotee and is not in earnest.” This does not mean that the Guru holds guidance or Realization back from anyone. The Maharshi once said that if the Guru could simply give Realization there would not be even a cow left unrealized. Most people do not want spiritual knowledge, and it cannot be given to those who do not try to awaken it in themselves. It cannot be grasped by reason. Therefore the Guru will not respond to those who question him or try to argue with him out of mere academic curiosity: “This wisdom is not to be had by reasoning.”

A Guru is only for those who seek contact with him for the sake of spiritual understanding, because this means seeking contact with the Truth in one’s own heart through him. One who lives at a distance and approaches him in this way may receive guidance, while one who lives near him may not know how to ask. “The real Guru is in the heart,” the Maharshi said. And “The task of the outer Guru is only to turn you inward to the

Guru in your heart.” We are told that the Divine dwells in the innermost recess of the heart, but how many of us are competent to look inward and realize it? The power of the Guru in helping one to do so is far more important than any mere verbal explanation he may give, for this latter touches only the mental understanding. The Maharshi said, “A silent Guru is very potent. His work goes on inwardly where it is not apparent to the disciple.” And he gave assurance that “As the disciple dives inwards in search of the Self, the Guru will do his part.” But can this not be done without the intervention of an outer Guru? The Maharshi admitted that it can, but he added that there are very few who are so close to Enlightenment that they can dispense with the need for an outer Guru. This is because it is not a case of something new to be discovered but of the removal of obstructions to realization of the ever-existing Self. And since these obstructions are more emotional than theoretical, rooted in the desires rather than the intellect, outer aid is usually necessary to destroy them. “Sadhana is for the removal of ignorance, which is ingrained wrong ideas. It is not for acquiring the Self, because the Self is always there, but for becoming aware of it.”[1]

Even though the disciple believes that Consciousness is One, he accepts the duality of Guru-disciple relationship in order to transcend it. He serves the outer Guru in order to realize the inner. “The disciple must work inwardly, but the Guru can work both inwardly and outwardly,” the Maharshi explained.

One should approach the Awakened and listen to his teaching, then dwell on it as a guide to sadhana. When instruction comes from a Guru it carries power. Out of the relationship of Guru and disciple realization is born, as the fire of knowledge from the former is kindled in the heart of the latter.

The Upanishad says that the knower of Brahman is Brahman Himself. This is an indication that if we are unable to meditate

on the formless Brahman we should meditate on a knower of Brahman. He teaches right doctrine but it is very different from the same doctrine learned from a book. He himself is the living teaching. His presence inspires and strengthens us. His teaching has the authority of experience. It does not matter if the disciplines prescribed by the Masters vary or even if their doctrines differ on the mental plane; the essence of their teaching is the same, just as the milk from cows of different colours is all white.

“The spirit of the disciple is moribund owing to forgetfulness of his true nature. The Guru revives him by removing his supposed identity with body and mind.” The mind is apt to deny the existence of the Self because the Self is not an object of the senses. It can never be the object of knowledge but is itself the sole knower. Therefore a search for it by the mind can never succeed. “Logical explanations have no finality. Why look outward and explain phenomena? One should learn to attend to the knower of the phenomena.” The knower of the phenomena is Reality. It just is; it is not affected by discussions or logical conclusions. It is the Grace of the Guru that enables us to realize our identity with this Reality. Since it is the Reality, it is not something to be acquired in the future; it just is, now, eternally.

So long as the disciple lives in duality and seeks to transcend it, he feels oppressed by burdens and hindered by obstacles. These are in fact mere manifestations of the tendencies in his own mind that hold him back from Enlightenment and make him cling to the duality he seeks to escape from. To such a one the Guru appears as the bearer of burdens and remover of obstructions: the destroyer of ignorance and giver of Liberation. But effort must be made by the disciple to remove the obstructions. And although it is true to say that the Guru is the giver of Liberation it is also true to say that the disciple must earn it by making himself fit to receive it.

The Guru does not add to the ideas or theories with which the mind of the disciple is already cluttered. Rather he induces cessation of thought. “The mind creates the world and life and obscures the Self. Becoming obscures Being.” It often happened that someone came to the Maharshi with a whole list of questions that he had drawn up and, sitting before him, found not so much that the answers came as that the questions faded out and ceased to be important.

Life has plunged us into a state that can be called sleep – spiritual sleep. All our life activities are done in this sleep. The Guru is the Awakened; he does not become involved in this sleep but helps us to awaken from it. You encounter life through a thing called ‘yourself’, that is through a fictitious apparatus for living. It is this which takes charge of body and senses, thinks through your mind, talks through your mouth, uses your name and mistakes itself for you. But just as it mistakes itself for you, so it mistakes the Guru for another separate self outside of you; and that is its fatal error and also your salvation, for the Guru, having freed himself from the clutches of this fiend, can free you from it and lead you to the experience of the One Self.

Thereby he gives a new meaning to the word ‘I’. Before meeting him you attributed it to this pseudo-self, but ‘I’ or ‘Aham’ is the name of Being, of God. He alone can call Himself ‘I’. You only can insofar as you are One with Him. Individual human life goes on like a dream. In a dream you mistake the dream-self for ‘I’. Similarly in this life you mistake the fictitious pseudo-self for ‘I’. The Guru helps you to awaken from this illusion. “To keep the I-thought alert is the only upadesa (teaching).” He teaches you to abide in and as the Self while apparently living in the world. “One should not lose consciousness of this ‘I’ under any circumstances. This is the remedy for all the ills of life.” “The ‘I’ springs up from the centre of our being and our only concern should be with this ‘I’.”

The true Self is qualityless and therefore beyond description or even knowledge. It is thought that obscures it. “Give up thoughts. You need not give up anything else. The body and the comforts of life are no hindrance to realization. The loss of the body is not Enlightenment, it is death. The loss of the ego-sense, the I-concept, is what is required.” The very presence of the Guru calms down the waves of the mind and brings it to that condition of stillness in which it is simply aware.

Those who saw the Maharshi sitting in samadhi were moved and awed by it. He radiated peace as the sun radiates light. His imperturbable composure impressed some, his lively explanations others, his grace and compassion yet others; some enjoyed his conversation and some his tremendous silence. Thousands flocked for a sight of Him. People felt that here was God incarnate walking on earth. He assured us when leaving the body that he was not going away. “People say that I am going away, but where can I go? I am here.” Being universal, there was no going from here to there for him. Having realized that he was not this body, there was no return to any other body. He has assured us that “he who is ready for Divine Knowledge will be led to it.”



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