

THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

(Spoken on Guru Purnima)

God Himself is the Guru

The Guru is one who dispels ignorance. One who dispels the darkness of ignorance and stands before us as a luminous sun of knowledge is Guru, and it is God Himself, finally, that appears before us as a human Guru. As a Guru, God shall teach us the necessary spiritual lessons as and when they are needed for our higher evolution, and He may take any form that He requires. God takes infinite forms, and the infinite forms may be our Gurus. This fact is very beautifully portrayed in that immortal anecdote of the conversation between sage Dattatreya and King Yadu, as delineated in the scripture, Srimad Bhagavata. The great Dattatreya recounts several Gurus of his. He does not say that any particular human being alone is his Guru. He went on recounting and came to 24 Gurus in number. He said, "All these are my Gurus", and all Gurus were not necessarily human. That was the special feature which Dattatreya emphasised in his teachings to King Yadu. There were even animals; there was even a bee; there were inanimate things like earth, water, fire, air and so on. In short, everything was a Guru to sage Dattatreya.

It does not mean that Dattatreya required any Guru. He himself was the Guru of all Gurus, but his teachings were

meant for humanity as a whole. They were not meant merely to King Yadu, even as the Bhagavadgita was not given merely to Arjuna. We all, as human beings and seekers, stand in the position of Arjuna and in the position of King Yadu. Dattatreya's teaching goes deep into the problem of the relation of a disciple to the Guru and lays out before us the tremendous fact that Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, the Trimurtis, and Ishvara Himself are our Gurus. Ishvara is the Guru, and the Guru is Ishvara. There is no difference between Guru and Ishvara. God and the preceptor become one to the student, and in this inner mystic spiritual relation between the Guru and the disciple the personalities are overcome. The bodily relations are slowly transcended and the disciple never feels that he loses his Guru at any time. There is no such thing as losing a Guru. He *never* becomes lost. Only he changes his form and he changes also the mode of his working. He works in different manners under different circumstances and at different levels of the students' consciousness. Sometimes he may be visibly working. Sometimes he may be invisibly working.

There is a very beautiful work called *Guru Gita*, and another called the *Ribhu Gita*, which give us a detailed account of the inner way in which the Guru works for the benefit of the disciple, and the unimaginable manners and the methods which the Guru employs for the good of the disciple. The Guru's work and duty is to bring about the ultimate good of the disciple, and not necessarily what is pleasant to the disciple. Most of the Gurus were hard taskmasters, even as God Himself is. We say Bhagavan is Karuna-Sagara, Kripa-Murti and so on. He is the ocean of compassion. He is more tender than a mother. But when necessity arises, He is hard like a diamond. The saints are like that. They are harder than a diamond and more tender than a lotus-petal. When necessity arises they are law, and when another necessity arises they are love. Law and love work simultaneously in this creation of God, and to us the Guru is a representative of God on earth. He is Guru Deva, the visible manifestation of God. Just as Surya is Pratyaksha Devata,

soalso we may say Guru is Pratyaksha Devata, from the point of view of our spiritual aspirations.

The Guru-Disciple Relationship is Eternal

From the teachings of saint Dattatreya to King Yadu we are to understand that the variegated manifestations of God in this world are to become our Gurus, and we have to take lessons from every event that takes place in this world. Every event that occurs is an eye-opener to us, if only we are endowed with that receptive capacity, and the day of Guru worship is meant specifically to provide us an occasion to rise to this level of understanding and regard ourselves as sparks or flames of spiritual aspiration and not merely mortal bodies. We are on a flaming march to perfection. Our duty here is to work for our final salvation of the soul and not to regard this earth as a goal in itself. We have been told time and again, from time immemorial, that this earth is like a Choultry, an inn, a Kshetrain which we have to rest for a while on our march onwards to reach our destination, and that this is not to be regarded as an end in itself at any time. But nevertheless, due to Anadi Avidya, we forget this great glorious ideal before us and are apt to mistake the Choultry for a permanent residence for ourselves, but when we wake up the next day we will find that we have to walk a long distance yet, and this Choultry is no more ours, and we have to go onwards. And this onward movement from one place to another is the transmigratory life of the Jiva.

What we call the series of births and deaths or transmigratory life is the process of the march of the soul from one halting station to another halting station in this continuous, incessant march to perfection. The Guru appears to us at every level. Let us not think therefore that today in this human birth we have a Guru and when we die the Guru is lost to us, or when the Guru disappears from his mortal coil he is lost to us. The Guru is an eternal principle as God. Guru is God and God is Guru, and therefore there cannot be destruction of Guru; as also no destruction of aspiration. The

Sadhaka is not also a destructible principle. The Guru is not also a destructible principle. Both are immortal principles, and their relation is an eternal one. The student, the Sadhaka or the disciple is a seat of spiritual aspiration. It is a spark of spiritual fire which can never be extinguished. It has nothing to do with the body of the student, nor has the true Guru anything to do with the body in which he has been invoked or he has condescended to manifest himself for the good of the disciple.

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita: "Several births have I taken and several births have you also taken; but you do not know this truth, whereas I know it." That is the difference between us. Since the beginning of creation onwards this recurring manifestation of Nara and Narayana, of man and God, has been taking place for the ultimate good of the Jivas. But Narayana knows everything, while Nara does not know it. That is the difference between man and God. But in essence they are like the wave and the ocean. They are not intrinsically different. Essentially they are the one and the same. This is the relation between the Guru and the disciple. It is not the relation between one body and another. It is a relation between a spark of fire and a conflagration of fire. It is the spark that is aspiring to unite itself with the conflagration, and this conflagration is again a manifestation of that universal fire of the wisdom of God into which we have to dedicate ourselves – which is called Jnana Yajna. The whole process of spiritual Sadhana is Jnana Yajna, the sacrifice of the soul in the knowledge of God. In this respect we can say that the Guru is the intermediate principle between Ishvara and Jiva. And inasmuch as He represents to us the knowledge of God, for all practical purposes, from our standpoint at least, he is God.

The Guru Seeks the Disciple

The Upanishad says that the Guru should be a Srotriya and a Brahma-Nishtha, one who is well-versed in the scriptures and established in Brahma Jnana. Can we find such

a Guru in this world? Is it easy to find one? Many have a problem of this kind – the difficulty of finding a Guru. There is a very ancient saying that the Guru seeks the disciple, the disciple does not seek the Guru. The Guru is constantly searching for a suitable disciple and it is the burden of the Guru to seek the disciple, not so much of the disciple to seek the Guru, because of the simple truth that the disciple has no knowledge. He does not know where the Guru is, and how to find him. Suppose you find a Shakespeare sitting here. You cannot know that he is Shakespeare unless you yourself are equal to him in genius. If sage Suka is sitting here, you cannot know that Suka is sitting here.

The Guru seeks the disciple, and sometimes he works wonders for our good if only we are honest, though we are ignorant and not endowed with much of knowledge. And in the Bhakti Yoga Sastras it is also said that if honestly and sincerely a Sadhaka takes one step towards God, God comes running towards him taking a hundred steps. The Lord thinks, “Oh, he is coming to Me. I shall go and save him.” Such is the compassion of God. As rivers rush into the ocean, these aspiring centres called the Sadhakas try to rush into the ocean of God, and the Guru is something like a delta at which they merge and get expanded, as it were, just before entering the ocean. This is the principle of Guru, the Guru Tattva. It is the Eternal Being, the Sanatana Tattva that is before us as the Guru and therefore when we actually crave to have guidance from above, it shall come to us. Moses got inspiration from the bush, and light came before him. Christ got inspiration. Buddha received inspiration. All the Acharyas had inspiration in this manner, because they were open to the influx of that oceanic flood of the knowledge of God. There is only one duty on the part of the disciple, and that is to open himself fully. That is all. *Don't close your heart; open it.*

Our Sadhana consists in self-surrender to God. Do not think that self-surrender is a part of Bhakti Yoga and the other Yogas have some other techniques. All Yogas have one technique – self-surrender, whether it is Jnana Yoga or Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga or any other Yoga. How are we to

interpret the unanimity of the Yogas in having self-surrender as the main principle? Yoga is union with God. And whose union with God? It is not the union of the body with God, it is not the union of the mind with God, nor of the senses, not even the personality. It is the union of the inner essential spiritual substance with the eternal substance. This Yoga is attained by the purification of the body, senses and the mind by Tapas. Just as gold ore is purified by heating and melting in the crucible, the senses, the mind etc., are purified in the fire of Tapas. You heat up the whole system by the fire of renunciation, by the fire of self-control, by the fire of mental concentration, by the fire of Sadhana, an all-round Sadhana, Sadhana which is to take into account all the aspects and sides of the human personality. That is Tapas.

The Glory of Sanatana Dharma

You know, our religion is a universal one, not a dogmatic religion. It has no name of its own. You cannot call it Hinduism or any 'ism'. It is not Vedism, Vedantism or any such thing. It is aptly called Sanatana Dharma, eternal religion. It is a religion of eternity which will never change itself, and which will fit into every circumstance during all periods of time, and it will fit itself to every individual at every stage. This Dharma can be practised by a child as well as a genius, by a sick man and a healthy man at every level of experience, not merely in this birth but in all the series of births that one may take. That is why it is called eternal. Nothing in this world is eternal. Everything is changing. We go on amending our rules and acts. But this Dharma is never amended at any time. And therefore it is called Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion. Now, this eternal religion naturally has to take into consideration every demand of human nature, and the nature of all creation in particular. This religion is not meant merely for human beings. Otherwise it cannot be eternal. It is meant for all creation in every cycle. Therefore it is provided with facilities for the understanding of every created being at every level of evolution, and the intelligent seers who have discovered this

eternal religion have also discovered another important factor – the weakness of the mind of the human being.

The Dharma is so profound, so difficult to understand that it is not propounded to the public in the street. They will not understand it. If you give a declaration of the glory of God, the man in the street with distracted understanding naturally will have much difficulty in understanding what you say and he will put it aside as unintelligent. The greatness of the ancient seers, who have discovered this Sanatana Dharma, is that they have found out the way in which this religion has to be fitted into the various temperaments of the human beings and answer to the demands of the various emotional conditions of minds. Mostly our minds are gross. They are capable of visualising only the gross phenomena. We see the world of objects. We see space, time, etc. So they have provided with their intuitional insight certain media for the expression of the human soul in its evolution towards Godhead. This is the significance and the special value of this eternal religion. We are very busy human beings and therefore find very little time to practise religion. So they have provided us with the inner technique of externally manifesting ourselves in religious endeavour in the form of worship, Vrata, observances and so on. We have got Ganesa Vrata, Satyanarayana Vrata, Rishi Panchami Vrata and several Vratas, observances, occasions and Jayantis, Rama Navami, Sri Krishna Janmashtami, etc. Why are all these instituted? To give us an occasion to remember the glory of God and our duty to Him.

We will not, in our weak condition, be prepared to accept that the whole life is spiritual and all our activities are spiritual processes. Hard it is to understand. About the spiritual path the seers say, "O man, hard is this path to tread. Difficult it is, sharp as a razor's edge." So they have tried to smoothen this path a little bit by ameliorating the difficulties and telling us that there are other ways and means also. Well, if there are physical temptations, minimise them. They do not immediately say to cut short everything. Else you will be

upset. If you have temptations of every kind, lessen their number and decrease their intensity. How to do this? By two methods. One negative and another positive. Negatively by withdrawing your senses by the practice of Tapasya – fasting, vigilance and other forms of Tapas. The positive Sadhana is worship. One type of worship is, of course, the worship of the Guru, worship of Vyasa Bhagavan, who is the Guru of Gurus; worship of your own Guru also, and together with it, performance of Purascharana of your Guru Mantra.

Conclusion

With Mowna, Vrata, understanding the significance and greatness of the Guru, and the meaning of your relation with the Guru, feeling the immanence of God and also being assured that God will be always helping us even if we forget Him, you should do your Sadhana. Remember: even if you deny God, He will help you. He will not be angry with you, because, just as it is the nature of the sun to shine, it is the nature of God to always draw you towards Him. He is like a universal magnet and we are all like distracted iron filings, as it were, scattered everywhere. We are in His presence and are attracted towards Him, but we are not conscious of it. That is the only difficulty. So with this concentrated awareness of our ideal before us and with a worshipful and humble attitude, the Vrata of Sadhana should be carried on.