

Guru

An Article by Swami Dayananda Saraswati | Version 1.01

The word 'guru' has a number of meanings. The one who teaches is a guru; the one who helps somebody out of trouble is also a guru. These days, the word 'guru' is also used in the English language. In the American press we find 'guru' being used very widely by journalists. They say, for instance, "He is an automobile guru", or "He is a stock market guru." Even in India, it is used in that way. When I was a boy, I wanted to learn a very complex form of martial arts in which a stick is used. It is an excellent discipline that teaches coordination and other skills. One of our family's agricultural workers was a teacher of this art. When I asked him to teach me, he said that first I had to give him the traditional offering to the teacher. So I gave him a coconut, fruits, flowers, and a small amount of money. Only then would he begin teaching. His respect for his art was so great that he called himself a guru, and I respected him as such. When a person thinks of himself as a guru, the one who learns from him also feels that is true—he evokes in you the feeling of a disciple. In addition to martial arts teachers, classical dance masters and musicians also insist on being called gurus. Many teachers of art forms that must be taught directly are considered gurus.

While I have nothing against that, the word 'guru' really can be used only for a person who teaches spiritual knowledge. A guru is one who unfolds the knowledge that you are the whole, not separate from the Lord. A guru is the one who is the teacher of the the equation revealing that you are the whole. The wholeness which you are seeking basically is not separate from you. The very fact that you are seeking that is because it is you—you want to be yourself. And the one who teaches that is called a guru. That is the final definition: *mahāvākya-upadeśa-kartā*, the one who teaches the statement revealing the identity of the individual and the Lord, the whole.

akaṇḍamandalākāram vyāptam yena carācaram

tatpadaṃ darśitaṃyena tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ

yena - by whom; *darśitaṃ* - was shown; *tatpadaṃ* - that end; *yena* - by whom; *vyāptam* - is pervaded; *akaṇḍa mandala ākāram* - this entire

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universe; *cara ācaram* – of living beings and inert things; *tasmai śrīgurave* - unto that *guru namaḥ*- my salutations.

By whom was shown that end by whom this entire universe of living beings and inert things is pervaded, unto that guru my salutations.

To that guru, my salutation; by whom that end, that abode, was shown very clearly. And what is that end? Here, it is Brahman. By which Brahman, by which reality, this entire universe of living beings and inert things is pervaded. To that teacher, by whom that Lord, that reality, who is in the form of this great universe, was shown, my salutations.

The gaining of any knowledge is the greatest miracle. How is the mind able to grasp a totally new fact or concept? If you are ignorant by nature, you cannot know. If you are knowing by nature, you need not know. And you cannot see more than you know, yet you keep increasing your existing knowledge; you keep on shedding ignorance. That is because under certain conditions you are able to see. The teacher is the one who creates those conditions. He has to create the necessary inner conditions for knowledge to take place, and he does so by using reason and by citing your own experiences. In that way, he helps you see. In fact, the teacher creates a condition from where you cannot but see. That's what teaching is about. And it's a miracle, an impossibility that happens. You cannot see more than you already know, yet you always do. That's how you keep knowing more and more. How can that happen? The answer is very simple: you are all- knowing.

Your essence is pure knowledge. We say that the Lord is all-knowing, that all knowledge is in the Lord. Yet who is this Lord? If the Lord were to say, "I am the Lord," that "I am" is not going to be any different from the meaning of the statement "I am" that you make. When you say, "I am," that is exactly the same as the "I am" of the Lord. There is one limitless consciousness. Consciousness cannot be limited because it is one, and it is formless. The Lord is a conscious being, and the limitless consciousness is the same for the Lord and for you. I am limited only with reference to my body, mind and sense organs. As consciousness I am limitless.

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The Lord ‘also’ is limitless consciousness, for being limitless, there is only one consciousness. If the Lord is all-knowing, that all-knowledge rests in that consciousness. Which consciousness? The consciousness that is one, that is limitless, that is you. And that means all knowledge rests in you.

If all knowledge rests in me, why don’t I know everything? With reference to the individual, the knowledge is inhibited. With reference to the Lord, it is uninhibited. This inhibiting factor is what we call *āvaraṇa*, something that covers knowledge. When we create the conditions for knowledge to take place, the *āvaraṇa* goes. That *āvaraṇa*, that ignorance, that veiling power goes, so that knowledge is unveiled. Interestingly, the English word that refers to any new finding is ‘dis-discovery’—dispelling the cover, dismissing the cover. Whether intentionally coined in that way or not, the word is amazingly apt. The cover is the veil — *āvaraṇa*. Knowledge need only be uncovered, discovered, because it is already there. You don’t really know anything on your own. All knowledge is only from the Lord, whether it is knowledge of how to make an enchilada or knowledge of physics. Every form of knowledge is in the all-knowledge. And the removal of the inhibiting factor is what we call knowing. Like a surgeon who removes cataracts so that you can see the world, the *guru* creates the conditions for ignorance to be dispelled, so that you can see the truth of yourself and the world.

There are two types of blindness. One is not repairable; the other is. This second type of blindness is pointed out in the following verse as an example.

ajñānatimirāṇḍhasya jñānāñjanaśalākhayā

cakṣurūnmilitaṃ yena tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ

tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ— to that guru my salutations. *yena* – by whom; *cakṣuḥ*— the eye (of knowledge); *nmilitaṃ* - is opened; *ajñānatimirāṇḍhasya* - for the one who is blind due to ignorance; *jñāna-añjana-śalākhayā* – by applying the ointment of knowledge.

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My salutations to that guru by whom the eye (of knowledge) is opened for the one who is blind due to ignorance by applying the ointment of knowledge.

Here the example is a blind person. What is the cause of the blindness? Cataracts. Due to cataracts, the person is not able to see. What is to be done? The surgeon removes the cataracts. In India, in the days in which this verse was composed, they seem to have had a remedy in the form of an ointment to remove cataracts. By applying this ointment, the malady was removed. So too, here, even though you are a knowing person, essentially an all-knowing person, that knowledge is covered by ignorance. But, like a cataract, the ignorance can be removed. Therefore, everybody is blind due to the cataract of ignorance. Ignorance alone is the cataract; because of that cataract, one becomes blind. This ignorance alone is the cataract, because of which, knowledge is inhibited. That inhibiting factor is removed by whom? To that one by whom the inner eye of knowledge is opened, my salutation. Therefore, the *guru* does not really 'deliver' anything. He is the one who removes; he is the surgeon who removes that inhibiting factor and helps you see. It is a highly responsible job and it can only be done by one who knows the truth and the method of teaching. If the teacher doesn't know, he will only confuse others with his words.

A teaching method is required because the problem is a very peculiar one. In one book it is said that the guru must be a person with a little extra compassion. Ordinary compassion is not enough. An ordinarily compassionate human being will feel empathy when he sees a person who is really suffering, and may begin helping that person in whichever way he can. That is natural human compassion. But if he sees someone suffering for no reason at all, empathy-born compassion will not be evoked. It is through the gate of empathy that compassion and the desire to help are evoked. Since a person who suffers for no reason may not evoke empathy, it takes someone with extra compassion to choose to help that person. You can help a person who suffers for a reason by taking measures to remove the cause of the suffering, but how can you help a person who suffers for no reason?

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He is like the person who mistakenly believes he has been bitten by a snake. If he were really bitten by a snake, you could help him by taking him to the hospital for an anti-venom injection. And perhaps you could administer first aid by tying a piece of cloth above the bite and making an opening for the poisoned blood to escape. These are the practical steps that you could take, all of which are induced by your empathy. But what can you do for him when he screams, “Help! Help! I’ve been bitten by a snake!” When asked where he was bitten, he points in the direction of his foot, saying, “There!” He refuses to even look in the direction of what he feels to be a deadly wound. But when you look at his foot, you see only a thorn lodged there, which you remove. “Do you feel better now?” you ask. “No, no!” he cries. “I was bitten by a snake!” In fact, what had happened was that he stepped on a thorn and at the same time, he looked down near his foot and saw a water hose. In his panic, the hose became a snake, and the thorn became its deadly fangs. Now the fellow is showing all the effects of fear—he really is sweating, his heart is really pounding—and he may even die of fright, all due to his belief, “I was bitten by the snake!” True or not, since he thinks so, it is true for him. Yet knowing that he is not in danger, you can’t help but feel some amusement, rather than empathy. So, how will you help this person? Since there is no danger, you could walk away, but still, you see how he is suffering.

That’s why an extra ounce of compassion is required. That compassion comes from the realization, “I was once like that; I went through that experience, too.” If I had gone through the same blessed thing, I can easily appreciate the person’s lot and I can be of help. That is why the **guru** is described as *ahetuka dayāsindhuh*—an ocean of *dayā*, compassion, without any reason. There is no reason. The student may ask, “Why you are so compassionate? Why should you teach me at all? What have I done?” Nothing. “What do you expect of me?” Nothing. You ask why I teach you. Why should I not teach you? You need to be taught, so I teach.

This knowledge is not like a discrete academic subject that you can learn simply by reading a textbook. It is a complete unfoldment and the teacher-student connection is necessary in order to make the knowledge work for the student. It is similar to a relationship with a therapist in which trust and a certain amount of time are necessary.

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The guru is more like a super-therapist. He must re-orient the student over a period of time, directly or indirectly, so the student sees through ingrained self-beliefs. But what makes the extraordinary difference is that the *guru* is also the one who opens up your heart and gives you an insight about yourself, a self that is totally acceptable. There is no other relationship that will do that.

In experiential love, you are given that kind of feeling, because when somebody says “I love you,” you feel totally, unconditionally accepted. Everything about you is accepted—your height, your nose, your mind. That experience gives you an inner opening to see that you are acceptable, at least to one other person. But that is not real self- acceptance because it is based on the other’s approval of you. You think you are okay because the other person says, “I love you.” The approval does not come through your own eyes but from the eyes of the other. And later on, you both discover a lot of things about each other that are not acceptable at all. Then you find you are adding clauses to “I love you.” “I love you...even though”. “I’d be happy loving you if you could...get up a little earlier...if you stopped snoring...if you could think a little differently...if you were not a Republican.” Afterwards, we tack on conditions, and thus, the unconditional acceptance that I need is not gained through the eyes of others. Yet, since I do not feel totally acceptable in my own eyes, I go on seeking it in the eyes of others. That is why it is so very important to have an insight about yourself as totally lovable and acceptable. That is what the guru does—he helps you see yourself as lovable. He frees you. Then that vision is yours, and you become a source of love to everyone else. That’s why the relationship between teacher and student is entirely different from an ordinary relationship and why the *guru* is given so much praise in the Upanishads and in the tradition.