RUMINATIONS ON THE DIVINE GURU

By

Yogachemmal Smt Meena Ramanathan
Coordinator Outreach Programmes, Yoganjali Natyalayam, Pondicherry, India

Who is a Guru? What does that word mean? Is it just a terminology? Does it mean something deeper? Guess there cannot be many alive in this earth who doesn’t know the answer to all this. But me wanted to share my idea of what a “GURU” is and should be. Prostrate before the Guru because He is the One who introduces God to you. Is it not true?? The Guru is the Divine Himself in the human Form. Dedicating this with utmost soulful humility, to that Guru, Who has given me everything. Thanking that One from the deepest bottom of my being for making me, whatever me am now. What else can we really give our Teachers? Respectful everlasting gratitude is all that we truly can give them. This is my most humble dedication to my most revered Guru- Dr. Ananda, to the great tradition, Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga Paramparya and to the pillars of the tradition- Swamiji and Ammaji.

Achyutaaya namastubhyam gurave paramaatmane, sarva tantra-svatantraaya citganaananda - murtaye (Guru Gita, 3.55). Prostrations to Thee, O Guru, O Lord, the Imperishable One, the master of all scriptures, and the mass of consciousness-Bliss personified!

INTRODUCTION

The syllable “gu” means shadows, the syllable “ru” means he who disperses them. Because of the power to disperse darkness the Guru is thus named (Advayataraka Upanishad 14—18, verse 5). As a noun the word Guru means the imparter of knowledge (jñāna). As an adjective, it means 'heavy,' or 'weighty,' in the sense of "heavy with knowledge," heavy with spiritual wisdom", “heavy with spiritual weight,"", "heavy with the good qualities of scriptures and realization," or "heavy with a wealth of knowledge." The word has its roots in Sanskrit ‘gri’ (to invoke, or to praise), and may have a connection to the word ‘gur’, meaning 'to raise, lift up, or to make an effort'. In Hinduism, the Guru is considered a respected person with saintly qualities who enlightens the mind of his or her disciple, an educator from whom one receives the initiations and one who instructs in rituals and religious ceremonies. In Indian culture, a person without a Guru or a teacher (Acharya) was once looked down on as an orphan or unfortunate one. The word anatha in Sanskrit means "the one without a teacher." An Acharya is the giver of Jnana (knowledge) in the form of shiksha (instruction). A Guru also gives diksha or initiation which is the spiritual awakening of the disciple by the grace of the Guru. The Guru is the one who guides his or her disciple to become the liberated soul, able to achieve salvation in his or her lifetime.

MEANING & SIGNIFICANCE OF ‘GURU’ FROM SCRIPTURES

- Gurohanugraiivena pumanpurnaha prashantayae- (SrimadBhagavatham). A man attains the state of completeness only by the grace of his guru’s grace and blessings.
- “Sthothriyam brahma nishtam” says the Upanishads. A Guru is the one who is very knowledgeable in all the Shastras and has well understood its essence and follows the
path shown by the Shastras. A Vedic description of the true teacher is that He is the one, so well versed in Vedas that he recites with every heart beat the truth of Brahman (Atman). The Guru lives and breathes, absorbed only in Brahman (Cosmic Consciousness) alone.

- ‘Sadguru’ is one who bestows Jnana and Bhakti and propels the ‘sishya’ unto the Holy Feet of the Lord without his knowledge. If you are fortunate enough, then you will be blessed with a Sadguru. When the Lord decides to shower compassion to the jivas, he takes the form of a Sadguru. Krishna is verily the form of a Sadguru – ‘Krishnam vande jagadgurum’. Similarly, Lord Shiva, comes in the form of a Sadguru as Lord Dakshinamurthy.

- Thirumoolar in Thirumandiram says the darshan of a Sadguru will lead the mind into a peaceful state. “Thelivu guruvin thirumeni kaanal, Thelivu guruvin thirunamam sepal, Thelivu guruvin thirvarthai kettal, Thelivu gurvarul chinthithal thaane” which means, “Guru’s darshan, meditating on the Guru, abiding by the Guru’s words and always thinking about the Guru will purify you and bestow you with Jnana.”

- Thaanava naagai sworoopath Thuvandittu, Aana Swaroopangal Naangul Agattrina, Enaya Muthirai Yeendaanda Nannandi, Thaanadi Murchootrith Thaabitha Thunmaiye(1592). Meaning that Guru is God in Human Form. He assumed human form, DISCARDING forms four, And Himself as exalted Guru came, Signifying the Mudra of Jnana; He, Nandi, my goodly Saviour Blessed me;It was He who of yore Planted His Feet of Grace on me.

- If we take the life-history Ramana Maharishi, Ramana once had a question about death and that question in turn gripped him with fear. Through self-inquiry, he attained the Supreme State and yet came to Thiruvannamalai. His Guru was none other than Lord Arunachala. ‘kuttramuttraruthennai gunamaai panithaal guruvuruvaai olir arunaachalaa’. He enjoys calling that Arunachaleshwara as Guru and not as Lord!

- Akin to Ramana is Arungirinathar. He also did not have a Guru. He was ordained by Lord Muruga. Of the numerous compositions on Lord Muruga, he says, ‘Santhatham bandham thodaralae, japamal ai thantha sadgurunatha’. He calls Lord Muruga as the Sadgurunatha.

- Saint Kabirdas in one of his dohas very beautifully says that “If at all both the Lord and the Guru come and stand in front of him, he would first prostrate to his Guru and then to the Lord.” A Guru takes everyone unto his feet and bestows them with Jnana, Bhakti and Vairagya and eventually throws them unto the feet of the Lord even without their knowledge.

- In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, the teacher is a valued and honoured mentor worthy of great respect and is a source of inspiration on the path to Enlightenment; however the teacher is not generally considered to be a guru but rather a spiritual friend or Kalyāṇa-mittatā.

- Sikhism is derived from the Sanskrit word shishya, or disciple and is all about the relationship between the teacher and a student. The core beliefs of Sikhism are of belief in the One God and in Ten Gurus, enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book. The concept of Guru in Sikhism stands on two pillars i.e. Miri-Piri. ‘Piri’ means spiritual authority and ‘Miri’ means materialistic authority.
GURU-SHISHYA TRADITION

The Guru-shishya tradition is the transmission of teachings from a guru to a disciple. In this relationship, subtle and advanced knowledge is conveyed and received through the student's respect, commitment, devotion and obedience. The student eventually masters the knowledge that the Guru embodies. The dialogue between guru and disciple is a fundamental component of Hinduism, established in the oral traditions of the Upanishads (2000 BC). The term Upanishad derives from the Sanskrit words upa (near), ni (down) and şad (to sit) — "sitting down near" a spiritual teacher to receive instruction. Examples include the relationship between Krishna and Arjuna in the Mahabharata (Bhagavad Gita) and between Rama and Hanuman in the Ramayana.

RITUALS ATTRIBUTED TO A GURU

Guru Purnima is the day when the disciple wakes up and expresses gratitude. The purpose of the Guru Purnima (or Poornima) celebration is to review the preceding year to see how much one has progressed in life, to renew one's determination, and to focus on one's progress on the spiritual path.

Guru Puja (literally "worship of the guru") the practice of worshiping the Guru through the making of offerings and requesting inspiration from the Guru. Vows and commitments made by the disciple or shishya, which might have lost their strength, are renewed.

Guru Bhakti (literally "devotion to the guru") is considered important in many schools and sects.

Tantric teachings include the practice of Guru Yoga, visualizing the Guru and making offerings praising the Guru. The Guru is known as the Vajraguru (literally "diamond").

ATTRIBUTES OF A GURU

Gurus of several Hindu denominations are often referred to as Sadgurus. In the Upanishads the five signs of Sadguru (true guru) have been mentioned. In the presence of the Sadguru;

- Knowledge flourishes (Jnana raksha);
- Sorrow diminishes (Dukha kshaya);
- Joy wells up without any reason (Sukha aavirbhava);
- Abundance dawns (Samriddhi);
- All talents manifest (Sarva samvardhan).

The Shiva Samhita, a late medieval text on Hatha yoga, enshrines the figure of the Guru as essential for liberation, and asserts that the disciple should give all his or her property and livestock to the guru upon diksha (initiation).

The Vishnu Smriti and Manu Smriti regard the Acharya (teacher/guru), along with the mother and the father, as the most venerable individuals. The mother and father are the first "Guru," the spiritual Guru is the second. (Mata Pita Guru Daiva).

It is therefore not without reason that India, year after year, age after age, commemorates anew this ancient concept of the Guru, adores it and pays homage to it again and again, and thereby re-affirms its belief and loyalty to it. For, the true Indian knows that the Guru is the
only guarantee for the individual to transcend the bondage of sorrow and death, and experience the Consciousness of the Reality.

Some scriptures and Gurus have warned against false teachers, and have recommended that the spiritual seeker test the Guru before accepting him. Some have given criteria on how to distinguish false from genuine ones. The Maitrayaniya Upanishad warns against false teachers who may deceive the naïve. The Kula-Arnav-Tantra states that there are many gurus who may rob the disciple's wealth but few who can remove the disciple's afflictions. Swami Vivekananda said that there are many incompetent Gurus, and that a true Guru should understand the spirit of the scriptures, have a pure character and be free from sin, and should be selfless, without desire for money and fame.

ASSESSING A DISCIPLE

At the beginning of the Upadesa sahasri, Samkara provides a list of criteria by which the Guru assesses prospective disciples. It is clear that Samkara did not regard the examination of candidates as a mere formality. The Guru assesses the applicant using the following criteria:

- the student is not attached to anything impermanent;
- he has renounced the desire for a son
- he has no desire for wealth
- he is at peace with himself
- master of his senses and compassionate.

In addition, the Guru checks the applicant's nature, behaviour, knowledge of Veda and even earlier generations of his family. A true disciple is a Satvic. He treads he path of Dharma with his thoughts centred on the final truth, with vision clear on escape from the cycle of recurring births. He analyses that which severs the real from the unreal. Having known it, he melts in his soul for the love of God, His Guru, as his guide- he seeks the bliss in humility.

Another important seeking of every student is the blessing from the Guru, the GURUKRUPA. Knowing the fact that Guru Krupa is causeless and has no time factor attached to it. It only comes by His sheer will and wish. It is due to the good merits accrued over so many births that one may be blessed with Guru Krupa. The counsel for an ardent student has been given in Guru Gita as follows, “If Shiva is angry, the Guru saves you; but if the Guru is angry, even Shiva cannot save you. Therefore, with every effort, take refuge in the Guru.” (I-46, Guru Gita)

WHAT DOES A GURU DO?

The grace of a Guru can transform even the dumbest of the brains into most knowledgeable one. Thus, by merely thinking of a disciple, a Guru can illuminate him with Supreme Knowledge. Is every other person in saffron attire a Guru? In Tamil, a beautiful distinction exists, between a true Guru and a quack – ‘pizhaikka vandavan’ (the one who has come to earn his living) is a quack – who recommends different kinds of atonement, extorts money and feeds on all by himself. The true Guru is ‘pizhaikka vaikka vandavan’ – The one who has come to rescue others from the pangs of Samsara! A true Guru is selfless. He does not expect anything for himself, and at any cost follows ‘Swadharma’.

Some might question that when the Lord is so personal, why should there be someone between the devotee and the Lord. What is the need for a middleman, called Guru? When
the Jiva is not able to distinguish the difference between the ‘Sat’ and the ‘Asat’, (the truth and the untruth), ‘Dharma’ and ‘Adharma’, divine and the non-divine, it is the Guru who shows the right means to the Jiva and bestows upon him the discriminatory power, to distinguish and choose the right. The Guru helps one gain Self-knowledge and the dawn of this helps the Chela understand the non-difference between the ‘experience’ and the ‘experienced’. Thereby the Guru helps in transcending the mind and makes him realise the oneness of the ‘individual’ and the ‘Brahman’, which is as true as the non-difference between a snake and its coil or between the light and its source.

**HOW DOES THE GURU DO IT?**

The Guru helps theishya embrace Reality and the unreal totally fades away. It is ignorance that had created a false notion, that he is merely a part of the Whole and that he is the seeker. He helps the student by destroying the ignorance (Avidya), implants the concept that real God alone IS, and that the conception of “I” was false. The ego (Ahamkara) is shattered.

How does the veil get pulled down? How does the Guru do that? He helps with the mind control by teaching Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion. He teaches the art of discrimination by polishing the intellect with the teachings of Jnana Yoga and shatters the ego through the teachings of Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action. Even if the student follows one of these implicitly, it is enough, as by controlling one of these, the others are also controlled. By pulling down one of the walls, by weakening it, the others crumble down easily. The Guru sharpens the personality, blazes up the intellect, oils the emotions, refits the relationships, replenishes the values and then a brilliantly bright new human personality, a refreshed individual is born. But the student must be open and ready for this resurrection.

**He is a great Guru because He is a divine devotee. Everyone worships Him because He ardently worships everyone. He receives respect because He reverently values and respects all. He never has to move at all; all else moves around Him. He is the epicentre and the rest revolves around, like the planets around the sun.**

**CONCLUSION**

Ammaji tells us, “An ordinary teacher is different from the knowledge, just as science is different from the scientist. The cosmic teacher, the Guru, must be the embodiment of knowledge, not just in word but by being. The Guru is a teacher in whom the teacher and the teaching becomes one. The Guru walks his talk and talks his walk”. The greatness of a Guru is to show the Chela how capable he is. The greatness of a Chela is to live up to the capability he has been shown. With compassion in words and actions, Guru helps every student to find his solutions. Guru helps us extract that “Extra” in anything and everything and helps us become extraordinary. Guru helps improve our capability and increases the capacity thereby helping us to progress and evolve.

The glory of Dronacharya was to have developed Arjuna to the point where Arjuna was able to win the battle with his own teacher. Ramakant Acharekar was not a better cricketer than Sachin Tendulkar, yet, his coaching showed Sachin to Sachin himself, and in turn showed him to the world. O.M.Nambiar was no match for P.T.Usha, but it was he who gave India one of the greatest athletes. Your nursery school teacher may not have made it as big as you in life, but your life is built on the foundation of knowledge she gave you.

The maths teacher wrote ‘10000’ and asked the student who was constantly disturbing the class, how much it was? Confident, yet embarrassed by the simplicity of the question, the boy
replied, “Ten thousand.” Now the teacher added a zero to the left of ‘1’ and pointing at ‘010000’ again enquired, how much it was now. “The same…ten thousand,” the boy replied. When an insignificant number follows a significant number, it gains value and when the same insignificant number tries to go ahead of the significant number, it has no value. So is the relationship between a teacher and a student. *When a student follows the teacher, he gains value.* The other way round… is it necessary to state the obvious?

He is an educator, from whom one receives the initial motivation. He is the Inspiring Energy who provides the spark that sets the student zoom up. He triggers them to move forward, pushes them or rather sometimes gives a harsh strong kick in the butt (please don’t mind my language). This is absolutely essential to shatter the ego filled up to the brim, (sometimes over flowing too), to dispel the ignorance out of the student, for them to really start seeing the ray of light. Guru is always behind the student, as the strong pillar of support, to see how much the student has progressed in life, to renew his determination and to focus on his progress on the spiritual path. The Guru has pure and unblemished character, is selfless, has no desires, and is humble, His words are full of wisdom and above all *He puts into practice what he preaches.* He is a valued and honoured mentor worthy of great respect. They are never interested in acquiring and accumulating material wealth

*Guru is the one who liberates you.*

It is a relationship of deep love,

Reverence, surrender, and faith.

A guru creates, transforms

Gives new birth to the seeker.

Guru is one with inexplicable gravitation.

There is a constant pull...an invitation.

There is something truly magnetic.

Guru is a presence,

A presence that transforms

The very chemistry of your being.

We need someone outside of us, to guide us. They are the mirrors that reflect us to ourselves, that show us the strengths with which we can fight our weaknesses. We need coaches to sharpen our skills. We need teachers to expand our knowledge. We need gurus to realize our spiritual self. Let us not compare ourselves with our guiding light. If you remove the sun from the rays, nothing with remain. If you remove the mud from the pot, nothing will remain. If you remove the cause from the effect, nothing remains. If we remove the teachings of our teachers from us, nothing of us will remain.

May me always remain worthy of the benevolent blessings of the Guru.

Hari Om Tat Sat!!! Jai Shri Gurubhyo Namaha!!!