Remembering the Gurus...

Ved Vyasa

A few weeks ago on a bright Sunday morning, I was at a local charity event, where the topic of conversation turned towards the meaning of spirituality and the confusion that exists between spirituality and the religious beliefs that one maintains. Within a few minutes, there were a few people who vociferously expressed their opinions one way or another on this highly debated topic, which lasted all of ten minutes, and then everyone moved on to the casual banter that goes with the more interesting topic of politics! After some more discussion on the topic, and political bashing which went on over snacks and refreshments, the group decided that they had enough discussion and dispersed to get on with the day’s activities.

I left the event pondering over the heated discussion of religion and spirituality and how sometimes people get attached to their strong religious beliefs without any concern or compassion for another’s belief system, often resulting in individuals becoming judgmental and intolerant of others. In my opinion, religion is more of a working guide or a path towards enlightenment, liberation or Nirvana and there may be a set of rituals and belief systems associated with each religion (Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc), as a way to allow one to commune with the Divine. To me, a spiritual person is one who is willing and able to acknowledge the existence of something greater than themselves – whether it is in the form of a deity, the vastness of the universe, the glory of nature or perhaps even something else that cannot even be named; and their actions follow this belief. A spiritual person may acknowledge a greater force or power that influences life, without necessarily belonging to a particular religious sect or following a specific religion. Sometimes religion is described as the social, the public, and the organized way by which people relate to the sacred and the divine, while spirituality describes such relations when they occur even in private, personally, or in eclectic ways. My intention here is not to debate the definitions of religion and spirituality and how people may view them. However the distinction is made, it certainly helps one to have an open mind with a good foundation or belief system, so there is an anchor as one journeys through life and understands more about the amazing mysteries of life.

The Vedic scriptures and the Bhagavad Gita indicate that there are many paths to know and experience the Absolute truth. The path one chooses depends on the temperament and personal inclination of the
individual as well as the kind of yoga or union that resonates with them at a deeper level. These methods of practice (sadhana) are called knowledge (vidyas) in the Upanishads. They delineate the many ways of attaining the Supreme Reality depending on the aspect that is dwelled upon whether it is with qualities (Sagun Brahman) or without qualities (Nirgun Brahman like Self, Consciousness, Bliss) and the methods of approach or sadhanas are typically transferred from a Spiritual Master or Guru to their disciple through subtle means and perhaps some verbal instruction when needed. The Brahma Vidyas were sometimes communicated in silence through the influence and example of the Guru, who should truly be an embodiment of the Divine in human form.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, “the sine qua non of acquiring spiritual truth for oneself, or for imparting it to others, is purity of heart and soul. A vision of God or a glimpse of the beyond never comes until the soul is pure. Hence with a spiritual teacher, one must first see what he is and then what he says”. It is unfortunate that in modern days, sometimes spiritual teachers may misinterpret the ancient teachings to suit them or bring in certain biases based on their own conditioning, which can skew an individual’s perception of the Truth.

In Sanskrit, the word Gu stands for darkness and Ru stands for remover. So in essence, a Guru shatters the darkness or ignorance (avidya) and helps one to gain knowledge – including the power to analyze, to discriminate right from wrong and be able to take the right action at the right time. Our parents are the first teachers in this lifetime, as the baby comes from the unmanifest into the human form and relies completely on its parents for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual support. Parents teach, nourish and guide the child through the first few years of life and as the child grows, there continue to be opportunities for him or her to come in contact with spiritual teachers who provide guidance by being a living example or through their spoken words of wisdom. One must also be grateful to their ancestors and the lineage that is carried on for generations, for each of our ancestors has been a Guru to their children, imparting knowledge of the rich tradition they come from. Sometimes it is our mental conditioning that expects us to acknowledge a spiritual teacher only when they present themselves in physical form with the traditional saffron or white attire that one associates with Swamis or learned Masters. One may be oblivious to the obvious, but if we only look around us carefully with a deeper consciousness, we may become aware of many people in our lives who have played the role of a spiritual guide, but whom we may have neglected to acknowledge. Ultimately, the Guru helps the seeker overcome the boundaries of the mind and ego, and an ancient saying is that when the student is ready, the Guru appears before him or her.

Anubhyas cha mahadbhyas cha shashtrebhyah kushalo narah
Sarvatah saaram aadadyaat pushpebhyah iva shatpadah

Srimad Bhagavatam (11.8.10)

Have you ever seen a honey bee collecting nectar from flowers? Just like the bee tastes and gathers nectar from all flowers whether big or small and does not discriminate between the flowers to determine whether it is getting more or less nectar from each one, an intelligent human being should take the essence from all the scriptures and the teachings imparted by the Gurus. It is more important to learn good lessons from everyone, including people younger than us. Learning to incorporate the teachings of the scriptures into our daily lives, and working towards “living the Bhagavad Gita” is key, in addition to reading or memorizing any of the scriptures. Every waking moment is a moment of Truth and the more we can embrace it wholeheartedly, the better our lives will be! When there is life, there is love and where there is love there is peace....
Following a spiritual awakening a few years ago, I have been very fortunate to meet and be guided by many spiritual Masters who have truly enriched my life. The beauty is that as humans, we are in the unique position of having a wonderful thinking mind, strong intelligence and the power of discrimination to allow us to put into practice the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. KNOW the things that can be changed, ACCEPT those things that will not change for now, and HAVE the power of discrimination to KNOW the difference between the two. The practice of meditation also allows one to transcend the mind (manas), intelligence (buddhi) and ego (ahankar) to allow the Self Guru that is ever present in each being to be awakened, leading us towards the path of union with the higher powers in the Universe.

Dhyana moolam Guror Murtih Observe the Gurus form and know meditation
Pooja moolam Guror padam Learn the true art of prayer by surrendering at the feet of the Gurus
Mantra moolam Guror vakyam Every word spoken by the Gurus is a prayer and
Moksha moolam Guror Kripa the enlightenment comes from the Grace of the Divine and the Gurus

The true Guru is within your SELF – a true teacher can only remind you of what, on some level, you already know, but may have forgotten!

Guru Poornima which was celebrated on Fri, July 15th is a day to remember all the Gurus in physical or subtle form, who have touched our lives as well as to reaffirm that we would like to evolve into conscious beings as we continue on our journey in this lifetime. HARI OM TAT SAT

Prana Gyana Holistic Health and Wellness Center in Tempe, provides Ayurvedic consultations, Yoga, Meditation workshops and Chakra Balancing to improve physical, mental and emotional health, by harnessing the Life Force energy (prana). The founder, Anita Rangaswami has practiced Bhakti yoga, the yoga of love and devotion for over 30 years and is passionate about sharing the knowledge and insights to help people remain healthy, and experience the infinite peace and bliss that exist within everyone. She is very grateful for the guidance from the Divine and all the spiritual teachers who have come into her life including Dr Swami Gitananda Giri, Smt Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Dr Ananda Balayogi, Dr Vamadeva Shastri, Dr. Deepak Chopra and other spiritual teachers in India and US. She is a Yoga Alliance registered, Chopra Center certified Yoga and Meditation teacher. Check the website: www.pranagyana.com for the next meditation workshop in August.