

Guru-Disciple



Swami Venkatesananda

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"I always bow to the Guru who is bliss incarnate, who bestows happiness, whose face is radiant with joy. His essential nature is knowledge. He is aware of his true self. He is the Lord of yogis, he is adorable, he is the physician who cures the disease of birth and death."

Sri Guru Gita-verse 93

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1. Who is a Guru? Or, What is a Guru?

There is a beautiful text called the 'Guru Gita'. If you read it, you will probably dismiss all these Gurus as non-Gurus. What you and I often refer to as Guru is in fact a teacher. There are millions of teachers in the world. There are academicians, professors, school masters. Then there are your own parents - they teach you something or the other. But Gurus? No. They are not found in such profusion as we pretend they are. A Guru is a very rare phenomenon. On the other hand, I may contradict myself by saying that, if the disciple is ready, it is possible he finds the Guru, not in the conventional sense, but in a different sense.

There is a beautiful story in the 11th section of the 'Srimad Bhagavatam', where a king encounters a naked ascetic, and he says: 'You appear to be a vagrant, a mendicant, a madman, but the radiance of your face belies all this. You have found something. What is that? If you are an enlightened person, tell me, who was your Guru?' The naked ascetic says, 'Gurus, I have many. I have twenty-four Gurus. So, I learn from everybody and everything.' When can that happen? When I am a good disciple. You must seek wisdom from several Gurus, only then is the knowledge complete.

Who is a Guru? What is a Guru? A Guru is one who removes the darkness of ignorance. Ignorance refers to ignorance of God or ignorance of the self. Has anyone done that to you? If not, you have not met a Guru. You might have met a dozen of Swamis, but that is of no consequence whatsoever. If he has not touched your heart, sorry, leave him alone. Of course, learn from him as a teacher, but not as a Guru. Guru is one who has been able to remove darkness of self-ignorance, or ignorance of God, from your heart, and enabled you to attain self-knowledge.

Why am I labouring this point about the Guru? If we do not understand this, the relationship becomes terribly perverse. It starts when you say: 'He is my Guru.' Why is he your Guru? God alone knows, for nothing has happened to you. A Swami said once that a stone lies at the bottom of a lake. You take it out, put it in the sun, and it dries immediately, because it has not been influenced by the water. So, it is possible that your heart is like the stone. It does not respond to this Guru, and yet, because you have decided that he is your Guru, you have forged this kind of relationship. You are convinced that you are the proper seeker. Then you find some kind of Swami and decide that he is your Guru.

One lady said to me in Sydney: 'I would like to be your disciple because I think I can work in harmony with you. It is easy to work with you, so I would like to be your disciple.' This is a very clever way of looking at it. The other people are hard task masters, but you seem to be an easy man, cheap. So I would like to be your disciple. I told her: 'I am only a disciple myself, I am still trying to be a disciple to my Guru. I do not know what it is to be a Guru.' Why do you appoint the other man as your Guru? Because you think he is easy to please, or he is cheap, inexpensive.

The whole thing was a hoax right from the start. You are not a proper disciple and the other person is not a qualified Guru. These two people enter into a funny relationship, which is based on falsehood, on untruth. Then begins the tug-of-war. I will obey my Guru as long as he tells me what pleases me. If he says something that does not please me, then I begin to doubt. Probably he is not the right type of Guru. Then perhaps you pick up one of Swami Sivananda's books and quote from somewhere where it says: 'Be careful in your choice of a Guru, and accept him only after testing him severely, and finding out that he is the proper one to be your Guru.' First he says that you cannot become a Guru without attaining self-realisation. Secondly he says you must obey your Guru implicitly. Thirdly he says that you must examine your Guru before accepting him.

I keep these three quotations in three different pockets, and pull each one out where it is applicable. When I look at you as my Guru, I pull out the quotation that says a Guru is necessary. When I am endeavouring to obey you, I pull the one out that says I must obey the Guru implicitly. But when the third period comes along and I am given some instructions which I cannot obey, I pull the third one out and say, 'I am sorry, I did not examine my Guru properly. Now that I have examined him thoroughly, I dismiss him.' The whole thing is ridiculous.

He must be the man who has opened my inner eyes. In his presence, it is like the sun. In his presence, the inner darkness must go. If it does not go, he is not my Guru, he is a teacher. I learn from him.

In the Bhagavad Gita, this becomes very clear and beautiful. In the 1st chapter, the person who later became a disciple, Arjuna, literally and actually teaches Krishna. He says, 'I know what is right, what is wrong, and I am telling you that this is not right. What you are asking me to do is not right. I want to stop this whole game.' Then, early in the 2d chapter, Arjuna says: *sisyas te' ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam. (II.7)* I am your disciple, please instruct me.

He does not say: 'You are my Guru.' The expression 'Guru' comes later, when in the 11th chapter Krishna reveals the cosmic form to him. Then he says: 'Jagat Guru, Hey Bhagavan. You are not only my Guru, you are the Guru of the whole universe.'

That is the sequence. First I must realise my inadequacy, and then I must look for someone who will dispel the doubts in my heart, who will show me the inner light, who will enable me to attain self-knowledge. The person or the event, or the thing, or the object that enables you to attain self-knowledge, is the Guru. If it has not taken place, sorry, wait. Do not declare: 'You are my Guru, I am your disciple.' It leads to unnecessary complications. That is the most important thing to remember. Until then, go on learning.

You see a great master like Swami Sivananda. So many people go to him and suddenly their lives are transformed. A rogue suddenly becomes a saint, a fool becomes a wise man. You are standing looking at the whole thing and you say:

'My God, nothing has happened to me.' This means I am still the same old fool. He seems to be alright because the others are benefiting by his teaching, but nothing is happening to me. This means there is something wrong with me. So, I must work a little harder on myself - because the knowledge that the Guru imparts to the disciple is essentially non-verbal, it is incapable of being verbalised.

2. Non-verbal Communication

There is a very beautiful incident in the 'Yoga Vasistha', when Vasistha goes on hammering the same idea into the heart and mind of Rama. 'All this is your own thought. You think you are so and so, you think you are this. You are not this. You think the world is this, the world is not this. All this is your own thinking process, mental activity. Drop that.' Suddenly Rama turns around and says: 'In that case, are you also my mental creation, my imagination? If so, why are you teaching me. Who are you teaching?' Vasistha keeps quiet. Rama turns to him again and says: 'Hey, what kind of a Guru are you? I ask you a question and you are not answering.' And Vasistha responds in a very beautiful way. 'It is not because I could not answer that I was quiet, but because silence was the answer to that question.'

Ramana Maharishi has also said quite often that silence is the most eloquent language. But am I, the student, the aspirant - I am not yet a disciple - capable of listening to that silence or not? That is the problem. So, instead of appointing somebody as the Guru, I realise that Gurus are extremely rare in this world.

If I am a perfect disciple, then it is possible that the first person I meet may become my Guru. He may be a tramp, or it may not even be a human being; it may be an animal, it may be a tree or a plant or it may be a natural phenomenon. So, if I am an ardent disciple, an ardent seeker, then it is possible for me to reach enlightenment with the help of human and non-human beings, because I have trained myself in non-verbal communication.

When is this non-verbal communication possible? Only when I have learned to remain absolutely silent within myself, when I have trained myself in such a way that I am able to enter into this inner silence, is it possible that even a stone might teach me, even a stone might become my Guru.

There is a story, which I will give you in brief. A hunter, during the time of the Mahabharata, went to the Guru of Arjuna, the great archer, and requested him to teach him also. This old man refused. So the hunter went away, but his impression of the Master was so clear that he built a clay model of him and learnt everything from that clay model. His zeal, his devotion and his aspiration was so intense, that the clay model could teach him. We are very far away from that discipleship.

Here, both these seem to be necessary and both must arise simultaneously. I must be an ardent aspirant, a first class disciple and I must be entirely receptive. I must have entered into this inner silence which means that my ego must have been completely destroyed already. Then, when I go and stand in front of an enlightened person, there is instantaneous non-verbal communication, otherwise there is danger. This danger is pointed out in one of the Upanishads, where Brahma himself was the teacher - not the Guru, but the teacher. The gods and the demons - this distinction exists only in our dictionary, in reality they were all

God's children - were sitting and listening to Brahma, the Creator. Brahma was telling his children to strive for self-knowledge, because, if they attained self-knowledge, they would go beyond hunger and thirst, pain and sorrow, and they would be the rulers of the three worlds. The demons only heard the last part of the sentence, that they would be the rulers of the three worlds. So, as soon as the discourse was over, the chief demon approached Brahma first and said: 'Father, please tell me, what is self-knowledge. Because I want to be the ruler of the three worlds.' And the Upanishad says that Brahma asked him to look at the mirror. 'What do you see there?' 'I see myself,' said the demon. 'That's it,' said Brahma. 'You said so.'

Do you understand the trouble of using language? The Guru is supposed to impart self-knowledge. So he asks the disciple to look into the mirror. 'What do you see?', he says. 'I see myself,' says the disciple. 'That's it,' says the Guru. But then, what is the disciple's understanding of 'that's it?' The demoniacal disciple's understanding was that the body is the self.

So, eat, drink and be merry, fight, quarrel, and kill others, and you will be powerful and rule the three worlds. What he forgot was the comprehensive definition - that the self is beyond hunger and thirst, pain and sorrow.

A little later, the other fellow, the chief of the gods, comes along and asks the same question, and Brahma the teacher also gives him the same instruction. 'Look into the mirror. What do you see?' Indra replies, 'I see myself.' 'That is the self,' says Brahma. 'Go.' So, Indra goes away, but begins to reflect. 'I can fight with all and become the emperor of the three worlds, but this old man mentioned that the self is beyond hunger and thirst, pain and sorrow. This body is not like that. It is subject to all these and more.' So he goes back to Brahma and asks: 'Please can I have some instruction.' Brahma replies: 'If you want to ask another question, go into the backyard and serve me for the next 30 years, then you will be allowed to ask a question.' Did Brahma the creator need a domestic servant? No.

3. You must Serve the Guru

There is something in you which misunderstands, misinterprets. What is it? Your mind. Your mind is not on a level with the Guru's mind, with the other person's mind, never mind whether he is a Guru or a teacher. Your mind is not on the same wavelength. Your face may be beautiful, but when you hold a funny little thing in front of you, it distorts your figure. Why? The mirror has not been ground and polished. If that mirror had been ground and polished, it would reflect your beauty entirely. Therefore, service of the Guru was prescribed, not because the Guru wanted your service, not because he wanted to enslave you, but because it was the only way in which this mirror could be polished.

There was something marvellous in our Gurudev, Swami Sivananda. He insisted on Guru Seva. He insisted that if you wanted to be a disciple, if you wanted to attain enlightenment through the instruction of a Guru, you must serve the Guru. The Guru, not me. How do we know that he did want people to serve him?

Two stories illustrate this. A Swami, who had already established an ashram in South India, visited Swami Sivananda once. While talking to Swami Sivananda, he expressed some difficulty - that, although he did not lack good ideas, he did not have workers, somebody to execute his ideas. Swami Paramananda was there with Swami Sivananda at that time as his disciple, but there was no ashram in those days, they were both mendicants. It seems that Swami Sivananda looked at Swami Paramananda and said: 'Go with him and serve him as you would serve your own Guru,' - the idea being that Guru Seva is necessary. It does not mean that I want your service, but service of the Guru is necessary. Serve the Guru, whoever it is.

There is another example which is the reverse. A disciple of some other Swami in South India came to Gurudev's ashram, liked Gurudev and stayed as Brahmachari. Later the Swami from South India visited the ashram and told Gurudev he would like to initiate his disciple into sanyas. Gurudev said: 'Very good, he is your disciple, initiate him.' He did not say that the disciple was now with him, so he must initiate him. Even after that the disciple continued to stay with Gurudev until the end of his life.

So, there is no distinction here between 'I am the Guru' or 'You are the Guru' or 'So-and-so is the Guru'. But this much is definite - that you must serve the Guru. Why? Only then is this mirror ground and polished nicely, otherwise it does not reflect the truth. Here we are talking of non-verbal communication. The inner spiritual experience cannot be put into words, cannot be communicated by means of language. Language is totally inadequate. This is a realm in which language has no application at all. You may read all the books in the world, you may listen to a million talks, all this is useless. You may meet thousands and thousands of Swamis, holy men and prophets, even avatars, incarnations of God himself. All this is also totally useless.

I am not trying to discourage you. I hope you realise that, in the time of Jesus, how many were enlightened? How many believed in him? He only had a small bunch of people. Ten of them ran away, one of them betrayed him, and the other one denied him. If this could happen to Jesus, how many real disciples do these Swamis and Gurus have?

The same thing happened to Krishna. Only two or three people were able to respond to him. His divinity was recognised by half a dozen people and he had two proper disciples whom he taught. Arjuna, who learnt the Bhagavad Gita from him, and there was another wonderful man called Uddhava, who learnt from him later, just before Krishna left the world.

Even Arjuna, it seems, came back to Krishna much later after the war and said: 'You know, I remember that you gave me some marvellous instruction during the war, but I have forgotten the best part of it. It was inspiring, that much I remember, but I have forgotten it. Can you repeat it?' Here I am not telling you the story of Mr. So-and-so, who listens to Swami So-and-so and then forgets the story. We are both mortals and subject to error. But here was God almighty teaching Arjuna, who was supposed to be a fantastic person, and Arjuna says: 'I have forgotten what you taught me.' What kind of a disciple is that?

4. In oneness, There is no Relationship.

So, it is not easy. I am not saying anything derogatory about us or the Guru. This thing is extremely sacred and extremely difficult. Otherwise millions of people would be claiming to be disciples of Gurus, and all of them would have attained enlightenment. So, service is necessary in order that the heart may literally reflect the Guru's teachings, so that from there on you are one. It is the most sacred and beautiful relationship. There is no relationship, you are one. In oneness, there is no relationship. Oneness is not called a relationship, and only when that oneness has taken place, does the other person become a Guru, not until then.

In the famous 11th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna sees the cosmic form of Krishna and himself. A moment before, Krishna was standing in front of him as a human person, and suddenly he had become a cosmic being. In that cosmic being he says: 'I see myself also. I see you. I see myself standing on the battlefield and I see all these people. All beings in the universe are seen in your body, including me.' Only when that vision is had, does the teacher become a Guru, or anyone becomes a Guru.

Does service stop at that point? No. Does devotion stop at that point? No. Because then your eyes are open. You are looking at this person in front of you, and suddenly you realise that your own self-limitation has not completely gone. You had a glimpse of this truth and therefore the Guru is there, but you are not completely free. It is then that perhaps some teaching, some verbal communication may be useful, at the point where you have had a glimpse, and therefore he has become a Guru, and you are a disciple. But the illusion has not completely gone. You need some more instruction, verbal and non-verbal. Then this relationship continues very beautifully.

From there on, his instructions are reflected in your heart. There is devotion and almost total emptiness of ego. Purity, and the Guru's teachings and commands are reflected in your heart. Service is natural then. The Guru's instructions should not even be reflected upon. You should not even think: 'Is that right or wrong?' This is not a commandment. If I am told I should obey, and I obey because I am told, there is no obedience, there is hypocrisy.

But when I have had a glimpse of the truth, then the Guru's commands seem to come out of me. In that glimpse, the ego has become misty. It has not gone, but it has become like a transparent glass. It is still there, but transparent, and it reflects the Guru more and more perfectly, correctly. You are not going to say, 'My Guru wants me to do it and therefore I am doing it.' The 'I' is not there - or, if it is there, it is there like a mirror, perfectly clean and perfectly ground, so that there is no distortion. If the Guru has to think about something, it is reflected in you and it shows.

When this relationship begins to manifest in one's heart, obedience becomes natural. When the Guru says something, it is not up to me to investigate it, to ask:

'Is it right, is it wrong?' If that is allowed, then you are resurrecting the ego with all its force, you are sitting in judgement over the Guru. Then, he is not the Guru, drop him.

I was told once that a Guru might test you. Unfortunately I do not believe in this, just as I do not believe that God can punish us. I do not believe Gurus are supposed to test us. Even if the Guru does test me, and I instinctively and implicitly obey him, he will find out that this fool does not deserve to be tested. I am going to do exactly what the Guru tells me to do, and therefore the Guru will modify his attitude.

I go to the Guru because I am unable to find the reality. I have tried my best, and it is not possible. So, I go to him and surrender myself at his feet. To say then that I am still going to test him, find out who he is, is arrogance.

There is a story in one of the Upanishads of a man who goes to a great sage for instruction, for self-knowledge, and the sage responds in a very strange way. He says, 'I have got one cow. Take it away and look after it and come to me when this one has multiplied into a thousand. Then I will tell you what self-knowledge means.' The man does not question this or say: 'I came to you for self-knowledge and you are treating me like a cowherd.' It is not your business to argue with the Guru, no one forced you to go to him. The Guru did not ask you to come and be his disciple. You went to him.

So the man implicitly obeys. He drives the cow away and patiently attends it. The cow multiplies, there are other cows, and eventually they reach the number one thousand. The man then returns to the Guru's ashram with the one thousand cows. On the way, he is instructed by various beings. He drives the cows into the Guru's backyard and approaches the Guru. The Guru says, 'Hey, you shine with splendour, with self-knowledge, who taught you?' 'By beings other than humans, sir,' the man replies.

If you learn to obey, your heart is instantly pure. What is your problem? Your problem is the ego, isn't it? It is the ego that says: 'I will not obey', or it is the ego that says, 'Well, was the Guru in his proper mind when he said that? Maybe he was joking, or maybe he was not serious, or maybe he was not in full possession of all his facts. I know something more and so it is my duty to tell the Guru. After all, he is from the Himalayas and these people do not know our civilisation, our culture. So, it is better to educate him.' One moment you are feeding the ego, the next you are asking the Guru to please remove the ego. Our mind creates innumerable reasons why we cannot or should not implicitly obey the Guru. 'Well, supposing he gives the wrong instruction and I implicitly obey it and it leads to disaster? My life may be ruined, or his life may be ruined, or the whole mission might collapse.' All this is subject to end in any case, all these things will crumble one of these days.

5. The Ego

What is it that says 'no'? The ego. Can I surrender that? I am reminded of a beautiful saying of Jesus in the Bible: 'You have seen me and still you do not believe in me. How are you going to believe in God whom you have never seen?' The Guru is real and I do not want to obey him. So, how am I going to obey some kind of God whom I have never seen?

The ego is the enemy, the only obstacle on the path to self-realisation. I am repeating day in and day out that the world is an illusion, a projection of my own mind, my own thought, and all the time I am worried about 'me'.

So, there is something tremendous in this implicit obedience. Those of you who do not have a Guru may have to take your own inner self as a Guru, or treat everybody as your Guru. If I have no Guru, then you become my Guru - which means I am prepared to obey everyone, which means I enshrine obedience in my heart. That obedience is a supreme virtue. Just as love is enshrined in my heart, the love flows towards all. So, if I enshrine obedience in my heart, this obedience flows towards all. Everyone becomes my Guru, or my Guru instructs me through all.

Even when a person has a Guru, if he has learnt to obey that Guru, it is natural for him to obey. He has learnt the art of obedience, and it is now possible for him instantly to overcome the single major obstacle on the path to realisation - the ego. I have learnt to obey my Guru, and therefore I have learnt to obey you, anyone. What happens if someone says one thing and someone else says another? I keep quiet until you decide between yourselves whom I should obey, and I obey.

Sometimes, when I look at this modern world, it is pathetic. You obey the traffic lights. They are not your Guru, not God, yet everybody religiously obeys them. Even at midnight, when there is no traffic, you obey them. I do not say you should disobey traffic rules, but you are obeying a thing called rule, and at the back of your mind stands a traffic officer ready to pounce on you and issue a ticket. You obey a rule, but you are not prepared to obey someone who instructs you or requests you: 'Please do this.' It is a pathetic story. He who has learnt the art of obeying the Guru first, knows how to obey. It is a great virtue.

6. Questioning the Guru

A question was asked after last Sunday's satsang, that if we should implicitly obey the Guru, are we not allowed to question him? Questioning is of two types at least. One, a genuine wish to know, to understand, to clarify an instruction. The other type of questioning is: 'Who are you to tell me?', that sort of question. In the Bhagavad Gita, 'we are specially asked to question in order to gain greater clarity. If there is doubt in your heart, the heart is closed, and you will gain nothing.

It is possible to question with a view to gaining greater clarity, but it is disastrous to doubt. This is really possible only if we go one step further. I know that this is a fairly controversial issue. One is asked to deify the Guru, to see God in the Guru. It was a common experience in the ashram literally to worship the Guru as we worship God, to bathe his feet in milk and water, and to drink that milk and water, to offer flowers at his feet, repeating mantras which suggested that I, the disciple, regard you my Guru as God. That is the meaning of the verse: 'Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Guru Devo Mahesvara.' The basic idea is that this Guru, who is the source of my inspiration, who leads me to enlightenment, who shows me the path to enlightenment, who opens the door of enlightenment, is enlightenment itself.

If you study the Guru Gita, you will understand more about this. Sometimes there are statements which are fairly surprising. If God is cross with you, the Guru will somehow get you out of that, but if the Guru is cross with you, even God cannot save you. How can I see God in someone whom I am conditioned to regard as inferior to me, someone whom I regard as wicked, as vicious? How am I going to acquire the vision which will see God in all, if I cannot see even in that person who to me represents the highest ideal of a human being, and whose aid I seek in order to realise God? If in him I cannot see God, if I cannot see God in one whom I realise knows the path, then what is God to me? Your own heart, your own intelligence might suggest that this physical form of the Guru is not God, and he does not say so either. God is not contained in any physical form; but to me, with eyes blunted by ignorance, he is the proximate of God.

7. The Defect is in the Eye

If you want to see God, look at a holy man. You will see God reflected in him. Just as the light of the sun is reflected in a clean, well grounded mirror, so God's light is reflected in the guru. You may not be able to see the light of the sun with naked eyes, but you may be able to look at the reflection in a mirror.

It is also possible for our eyes and our mind to see something not so divine in the personality of the Guru. How do you deal with that? You worship him, knowing that God is not confined to that body. Even the Guru is not confined to that body. But then, when your mind sees some defect in that personality, how do you deal with it? It is simple. I realise that the defect is in my vision, not in the Guru.

How do you deal with people who say that God is not perfect? Look at the world. You realise that there are some eyes which can only see evil. It is an extraordinary pastime. Such person will see something faulty, something defective even in God, let alone the human personality of the Guru. How do we deal with it? You and I are sincere spiritual aspirants, but we realise that, if our eyes see a defect in the Guru, the defect is in the eye. If my mind sees a defect in the Guru, the defect is in my thinking. So, once again, even that triggers an introspection, an inward turning - meditation. 'Why do I see this?' When this inner fault-finding nature is removed, the God-finding nature manifests itself. It is only a matter of habit. We have formed the silly, wasteful habit of allowing the mind constantly to dwell on evil amongst ourselves, so that now we have become used to it.

8. The Need for a Human Guru

Now there is a problem. There are those of us who do not have a Guru in flesh and blood near us, or those of us who do not believe that we need a human Guru. As with some great sages, they believe that the Guru is within, or the Guru is everywhere, nameless and formless. What do we do? With us, it becomes a bit more difficult, but not impossible. As I have said repeatedly, to one who does not have a Guru, all are Gurus. If you do not want one Guru, the only other alternative is to regard everyone you come into contact with as your Guru. You learn something from everyone, and all I have been saying during the past few minutes applies to everyone you meet.

From everyone I learn, and everyone I regard and adore as God. Only then is my spiritual evolution possible. I have rigorously to train my mind not to see any evil in anyone, because he is my Guru. If I meet someone who is ill-tempered, I regard him as my Guru, and realise: 'This Guru is a mysterious being, he teaches me that losing one's temper is bad.' He says: 'Look at me when I am furious. Do you feel happy, in front of me? No. Do not lose your temper like I am doing now, for you will drive all your friends away. Be careful.' That is what he is teaching me.

From some Gurus I learn what to do, and from other Gurus I learn what not to do. That does not mean that that person is evil or wicked. He comes to me, and he teaches me by his own example what is desirable for me and what is undesirable. I am not saying he is a short-tempered person, but I learn from him that to be roused to anger is an evil to be avoided. So, I learn how not to see evil in others. If my eyes detect something which my mind calls evil in others, it is obviously in me, otherwise I cannot recognise it. The very word 'recognise' means to know, to see, to cognise again, which means that first I have to see it within myself, and then re-cognise that in you.

So, in order to see God, one must learn to see good. The exercise at cultivating this new habit might just as well start with him whom you call Guru, whoever it is. When the mind is trained constantly to dwell in seeing only good, it grows in goodness. When the mind is allowed to see evil in others, it grows in evil. Every thought that arises in the mind leaves an impression behind, and that forms the habit. Once I have cultivated the habits of seeing what is evil in others, I will also grow in that evil, and that is adding to the evil that is in me already. Instead of dealing with the defects in my character, I keep on dwelling upon them and also adding to them.

Let us assume that jealousy is not one of my weaknesses, but anger is. I meet a person who does not get angry, but who is full of jealousy. I say: 'I have no jealousy at all, but look at him, he is full of jealousy.' Every time I look at him and think of jealousy, that creates an impression in my mind. So, that whereas he has got only one defect, jealousy, I have got two, anger plus jealousy. I do not improve at all.

So, one who wants rapid spiritual progress, should learn first of all to see God in the Guru, and thus train oneself in the art of seeing God in all eventually. Secondly, one should overcome this nasty habit of seeing defects in others, whoever it is, and thus learn to focus all one's attention on one's own defects.

9. No Reservation

Total and implicit obedience or surrender to the Guru, and devotion to the Guru, which are pre-requisites for the Guru Seva - service of the Guru, are based upon faith and devotion. Surrender does not happen if there is a reservation. That is when I approach the Guru with the attitude that I have a little problem and maybe he can fix it. I feel here is a nice fellow who is easily available, who does not charge too much. Let me go and ask him. If one does that, true surrender does not take place. There is no devotion, and therefore the rest is useless. You are treating the Guru more than a psychological counsellor, someone whose advice you buy for a few rupees. You say to yourself: 'Well, it is not worth very much. If it seems to be sensible I will adopt it. If not, it has only cost a few rupees.' This does not open your heart and the light is not seen. As long as the sneaking feeling exists that this is a problem or an issue which I can resolve, devotion does not arise, and surrender is impossible. Can I surrender myself, thinking that the Guru is not a lot more clever than me and I may be able to fix it? Impossible.

Something is indispensable here. You must have struggled and struggled and striven hard to arrive at the dead end. If the dead end has not been reached, there is no Guru. You might have reached the dead end by experiencing something in your own life, by being placed in a situation where you are absolutely desperate, and there is no door, no window at all in your cell, and you cannot see anything. Then you are prepared to knock your head against any corner, with all your heart and with your whole being. This is possible.

Or, like Buddha or Jesus Christ, or like some other great saint or saviour, you might have seen the tragedy called human life here, and you might also have realised the impossibility of seeing the truth by your own effort. But you must have arrived at that point. 'It is not possible for me God, please help.' You do not even know who or what a Guru is. You are praying to some being, but you do not know who it is. You are in despair, and in that despair, your heart bleeds, cries, weeps for help, for assistance. 'Whoever it is that created this world, why did you create the world like this?' I do not know what formulation your despair might take, but that point must be reached. This is the lesson of the 1st chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. You must reach that state of despondency. That also is called yoga - Arjuna visada yoga in the Bhagavad Gita. I do not know what to do. Whichever way I turn, there is a dead end. What must I do?

Of course, since we have all been taught and conditioned already that God created the world and there is God who is in charge of this universe, who orders this universe, who regulates the affairs of this universe, naturally this despondency and the consequent prayer is an appeal to God. What God is, you do not know. In a manner of speaking, it is that God who comes to you as the Guru. You ask him and his words are inspiring, they revolutionise your outlook on life.

If that does not happen, there is no Guru. You still have to pray, and you still have

to seek, even when you have had a glimpse of this life-transforming message, hint, advice - it is not advice, it is something burning. That is why advice is called a mantra. Mantra not only means chanting: 'Om nama Sivaya, Om namo Narayana,' 'Hari Om Tat Sat'. Mantra also means life-transforming advice.

10. There is a Trick

You might have had it, but there is a trick. Unless you have reached that state of despondency, your mind, your heart, or your intellect is going to suggest to you: 'I went and asked him and he said something interesting. Just then something clicked in me and I found it.' Something in you wakes up again and refuses to surrender. It says: 'No, no. He is a clever chap of course. I have talked to him, poured out all my heart to him, and there was a catharsis, and in that cathartic process this whole thing became clear.' You still refuse to admit that the light came from him.

I do not know if you have been in such a situation and observed yourself. The ego is so hard, it seems to surrender, and then it wakes up again. 'Oh, no, I am a tremendous being. I have been to a doctor, a psychiatrist, a primal therapist, and I cried and yelled and wept, and then I went to a Swami. What a marvellous man he is, a charming personality. I poured out my heart to him exactly as Freud predicted. There was a catharsis and lo and behold the solution came from within me!'

Your ego is awake again, and you go round and round and round. As long as you are in the cocoon, you cannot get out of it. You will have to get into the hot water. You know what the silk worm does? It weaves a cocoon around itself and then gets into the hot water. That is its destination, and from that comes a silk dhoti or sari. So, you weave this cocoon around yourself. 'I am finding a solution and I do not need any help.' You go on weaving this cocoon, and you are caught, trapped in it. However free you feel inside it, you are not free, until again from that hot water you are going to cry: 'Please God, is there any way out of this?'

So, one must arrive at that desperate dead end, and then comes prayer. We do not know what prayer is until we come to that point. All of us pray and we do not know what prayer means, just lispng some words. For prayer to come from the heart, that despair, that despondency is necessary. Unfortunately for us, we are not subjected to that kind of life and death struggle. Our life is so easy. It has become so luxurious and comfortable that we do not reach that point at all for a long time to come. Probably when death knocks at the door, there will be something else to think about, and it will be a wash-out. That point of despondency must be reached where you find absolutely no light, and then you pray: 'God will you help?'

That light of God itself comes to you as the Guru. With this despondency, you go to him and his words serve as a flaming torch which illumines your path. It is not that he becomes the Guru, he is the Guru. In that light, you see the path. 'You' see the path. This is a bit risky. Even if you admit that he is your Guru, you then say that, in his presence, you had a marvellous inner resolution of the problem. But still you see the path. The ego is just stirring, it is seeing with one eye, it is about to wake up. It is not easy at all to find complete surrender. He is a great man, he illumined the path of my life, but why should I surrender to him?

11. How then will that Faith or Devotion arise?

Often, unfortunately for us again, through some sort of supernatural power that is detected in the Guru. I still remember one meaningful event in the life of Gurudev. I had gone to the ashram, joined him in 1945 after having been there a couple of times previously, and in December or January something happened. Two people were quarrelling in the ashram and I happened to see it. They were both Swamis for whom I had the greatest veneration. I thought that all those Swamis were super enlightened beings. When I looked at them, I felt shocked. I was a novice, and I had my own image of what Swamis should be and what an ashram should be. What are these people? I seem to be better than that.

I came back to my room and I was reflecting within myself: 'Shall I stay or shall I return to Delhi and carry on working there, do some kind of service to Gurudev as some of you are doing now? I could go on working for the government, earn money and also do some seva.' Nobody saw me going there and nobody saw me come back to my room.

In a few minutes, Gurudev came to my room. Unceremoniously He dropped His bag, sat down and looked at me. I did not know what to do. It was the first time I had seen Him at such close quarters and alone. He looked straight into my eyes and said: 'There is a river which runs between the ashram and the town. Do not think that, just because you have crossed that river and come here, you are in heaven and the other place is hell, that you are free from maya, that this is all paradise and that is something else. Maya is everywhere. Even in heaven you will find all this illusion and all this delusion, lust, greed, anger and all the rest of it.'

He went on to say: 'I have created this place. If you look at it, take a bath in the Ganges, do some meditation on the Ganges bank or in the forest, go to the temple, attend the puja, do some service, go to the library, study, take a walk and so on, you will find all the facilities here for a good life, for a spiritual life, if you are discriminative and wise. But if you want to get involved in lust, anger, greed, and all the rest of it, there is plenty of it here also. Choose what you want'. He picked up His bag and walked out.

I said: 'My God, who told him all this? How did He come, like some super clairvoyant? This man seems to know what I am thinking about while I am sitting in my room'. There is danger in this. Why? From then on, you are scared to think. I was sitting in my room all alone, nobody watched me, nobody bothered me. I had not discussed it with anybody in the world. Suddenly he comes and gives me a direct answer to my question, without any ceremony, no good morning, nothing at all. He comes inside, says what has to be said, and walks out.

It is possible that we wait for such an incident. But to realise that this is so already needs faith. I do not know if you see this. If you do not have this faith, this devotion, then you think: 'Ah, someone must have seen me there, somebody must have told him that I saw two people fighting and that I might go home.'

Your own vicious mind creates all sorts of excuses - or, if you see that this is it, then surrender is natural. There is nothing for you to surrender, he has taken everything. You feel at that moment that you are a completely impotent being. I could not solve the problem of life, the problem that I have made of life. I could not understand the truth concerning the world here, the world and all its relationships, and here is a person who solved it and he has taken everything away. I do not exist anymore.

Then devotion becomes natural and your whole life becomes Guru Seva, service of the Guru, whatever you do. I have heard many great Swamis say that their Guru comes and talks to them in their sleep, in their dreams. That may all be true. In a manner of speaking, even that is not necessary. It is the Guru that works through you all the time.

But - there is a big 'but'. It is possible that what are known as samskaras or some scars, left on the mind by previous experience, expressions, actions, are still there, and they may occasionally revive. This is the danger.

12. So, for How Long shall I be Devoted to the Guru?

For how long shall I be vigilant that this devotion is sincere, total, and unreserved? Until you are fully established in cosmic consciousness, in God consciousness, until the very possibility of the resuscitation of the ego ceases to exist. Which is when? For as long as the body lasts. While the body lasts, this devotion to Guru, this service of the Guru must continue, otherwise it is possible to fall again. It is possible to allow the ego to be revived again. It is possible for the ego to grow strong again, wake up again and bring about the same old problem.