

Gurus and Disciples - Part 1 of 5

What Is a Guru?

Today, the word *guru* is used with absolute abandon, but where does this word come from, what is its origin?

Guru is a Sanskrit word. If you look it up in a Sanskrit dictionary, here are some of the things you'll find: heavy, weighty, heavy in the stomach, great, high in degree, important, highly prized, venerable, a venerable or respectable person, a father, a mother, or any relative older than oneself, a spiritual parent or preceptor, an honorific appellation of a teacher.

In the time-honored tradition of *yoga* teaching lineages, a *guru* is a spiritual master who can guide seekers on the path to Truth. In this tradition it is also taught that the true *guru* is within—if there is an external *guru*, there must be a *guru* within, and visa versa.

The following is taken from an ancient mystical text called the *Guru Gita* (Song of the Guru), in which Parvati (goddess) is perplexed at seeing her *guru*, Shiva (god) bowing down to someone else.

Parvati asks:

"Oh Lord, you are the only guru of all the world. Please tell me: Who is there for you to bow down to?"

Shiva answers:

"Oh dear goddess, you are my very Self, and because I love you I'll grant this boon: The Self and the Guru are truly One. For this reason, those who are wise seek the guru who is meant for them. God and Guru are but two names; the truth is they are forever one."

Shiva, *guru* of all the world, is bowing down to someone else. On the other hand, Parvati is Shiva's "Self"—but if Parvati is Shiva's Self, how can they be having this conversation?

If Parvati is Shiva's disciple, how can she be his Self since the Self is the *Guru*? This seems to make Parvati the *Guru*, so how can she be his disciple? To top it off, God and *Guru* are two names for the same thing...and if you're wise, you'll run right out and find your *guru*. Whew!

The *Guru Gita* seems to be giving equivalent meaning to the words God, Guru and Self (masculine, feminine, neither, and both). This idea alone is worthy of contemplation.

The word *guru* consists of two syllables, *gu* and *ru*: *gu* is darkness and *ru* is light. The most familiar translation of the word *guru* is "one who can guide you from darkness, ignorance of Truth, to light, direct perception of Truth."

Now let's try looking at the word *guru* as a formula: $gu + ru = guru = 0$. By uniting these two opposites into one word—*gu* and *ru*, darkness and light—they cancel each other out as opposites and we are left with nothing: *nothing*, zero. Truth is absolute and is not a thing—not a body, not a thing in the mind, or even the mind itself. Knowing what Truth *isn't* is a good start.

We live in a world of opposites, a world of duality—up and down, yes and no, north and south, male and female, this and that, you and me, etc. It is this duality that is behind the illusion of this world (the world is real, but it isn't what it seems). It is the *guru's* job to guide one to the realization of what is real, and what *you* really are. So, whatever or whomever can guide you from unTruth to Truth in this matter is *guru*.

If you are able to find someone who already has this awareness, this light, all the better—you can be lead to realization of Truth without having to do it the hard way: all by yourself, bootstrapping your own way in the dark.