

## **Gurus and Disciples - Part 2**

### **The Guru-Disciple Relationship**

#### **The Guru**

A *guru* is a teacher. You had parents or primary care givers when you were a child, and teachers when you were in school. These people were your *gurus* throughout the various phases of your life—they taught and guided you. If you have someone to teach and to guide you on your spiritual path, a person who can provide you with guidance and knowledge of Truth, this person is your *sat-guru*, your Truth-*guru*, one who can guide you from darkness to light concerning God, Truth, Divine Love.

Gurus are of two basic kinds due to there being only two fundamental types of spiritual paths: willful and non-willful, i.e., paths that use techniques, and paths that accomplish the same thing without using techniques. The latter of these two can be difficult to find, for the few of them that exist often present themselves in willful terms, exposing the non-willful route to only a chosen few.

In light of this situation, a *guru* of the second type (non-willful) first tries to discover what it is that the disciple wants in order to give the appropriate guidance. If the disciple wants success in life, she or he will be guided in that direction; if liberation is the aim, the seeker will be taught and guided in a different way.

#### **The Relationship**

The relationship between *guru* and disciple is often misconstrued. The *guru* is seen as the big boss, the king of the hill, and the disciple as a weak, submissive pacifist who lets others control him or her. But the top dog in this relationship is really the disciple. The disciple is there by choice and can leave any time.

The *guru* tradition is not a religion but involves an experiential science called *yoga*, a means of traveling the spiritual path that acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual. As far as *yoga* is concerned, there is no conflict with any religion in availing oneself of a *guru*, though this is usually not the case from the point of view of organized religion.

Religion and spirituality are not necessarily the same thing. Religion is a collective path in which people are agreed upon the best way to live and act,

and support it with scripture; a *guru* teaches an individual path that tries to help individuals discover their true nature and experience Truth directly, and supports it with scripture.

## **Traditions**

### **Lineages**

All *guru* lineages have their roots in spontaneous actions that occur in natural, spontaneous meditation, and therefore bestow various benefits to the devotee. Traditions associated with teaching lineages are few. The primary tradition is the lineage itself.

The *guru* tradition of teaching lineages reaches back thousands of years. Because of the respect paid to individual differences, disciples often create new lines. Lakulisha, my “grandfather *guru*,” had four principle disciples. Each of these disciples had disciples, which created four branches of the lineage. Because each of these four people was unique, each of their lines may appear to the outside world as different, though the principle teachings remain the same.

### **Oral Teachings**

These principle teachings are preserved through an **oral** tradition in which students are taught directly by the *guru* in the *guru's* presence, rather than by books. In more modern times however, written texts may play a part.

### **Pranam**

A tradition that some westerners have difficulty with is the practice of bowing down to the *guru* when entering the room. This is called *pranam*. In western culture, many believe this to be a sign of weakness or defeat, but in fact, it is the opposite. To *pranam* at the *guru's* feet gives power not to the *guru*, but to the disciple.

This gesture of respect opens one to receiving the *guru's* teachings. Bowing down at the *guru's* feet, the heart is above the head, putting devotion above the ego. This gesture can calm the mind, increase devotion to God and *guru*, open the heart, increase one's progress, bestow special gifts, spontaneous *shaktipat*, ecstasy, comfort, peace, etc.

This simple act is not the worship of a person, but of the Divine that dwells within that person, just as it does in you (which is why it can be so powerful). Those who make this gesture put aside feelings of unworthiness, fear of power, fear of being controlled, etc., for it has yet another benefit: it is a means of empowerment.

The act of *pranam* is surprisingly fulfilling; it can be comforting, even blissful. Rather than feeling that something is lost, one feels that something is gained, as indeed it is, whether it is immediately obvious or not.

### **What Does the Guru Get Out of this Relationship?**

At a certain point in one's own spiritual journey, teaching others becomes part of the path. By the time this point is reached, one's path has already become the only thing of any real value in life. When the path begins to involve passing on to others what one has gained, one teaches. This is the natural way of things.

A cup can only be filled so far before it begins to run over. What the *guru* gets out of serving disciples is progress, which in turn translates into exponential progress for the *guru's* disciples.