

Excerpt from the Upcoming book

Evolution Revolution:

Yoga, Ayurveda, and the Rise of the Soft Power Culture

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The Real Meaning of Finding the Guru

The word “guru” is probably the most recognized Sanskrit term of the yoga tradition, second probably to the word “mantra”, both of which have been bastardized by the media. In India, many sincere teachers are connected to the country's vast spiritual heritage through lineage (parampara) in an unbroken transfer of knowledge extracted from states of supreme consciousness. These individuals become part of a monastic order (sampradaya) and take vows as a renunciate (sanyasi). They renounce materialism and dedicate their life in service of the teachings of their lineage.

All types of people are recognized as gurus; however, while some are focused on promoting spiritual evolution, others are appreciated on a more academic level. Some gurus are highly regarded for their lofty levels of consciousness and their knowledge with respect to the practical reality. One such person was Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, a powerhouse of consciousness credited for initiating the modern renaissance of Vedic culture while also leading an inspiring social movement. This movement encouraged the youth of India to reclaim the soft powers of yoga, martial arts, and other great Vedic arts to overcome colonialism. Another such a person was Rabindranath Tagore¹ who was an author, poet, and educator.

¹ This prominent and pivotal figure left an indelible mark on modern history of India. His educational principles are still being practiced today and his poems became the national anthems for both India and Bangladesh. He was the Noble Peace prize winner for literature in 1913. The father of yoga in the west, Paramahansa Yogananda dedicated a chapter in his famous *Autobiography of a Yogi* to Tagore, entitled, “Rabindranath Tagore and I Compare Schools.”

Traditionally, a guru can either be married and regarded as part of the Brahminical caste, or a guru can be regarded as a sanyasi who renounces any material belongings, practices chastity, and lives a more secluded life in a monastery or ashram. Those who follow the monastic path can eventually become a Swami, one who has been initiated into the Swami Order of India that is linked to the Shankaracharya, the spiritual figure head. Dashanami Sannyāsins, ten-subdivisions, are associated mainly with the four maṭhas, sacred temples, established in four corners of India by Adi Shankara who reorganized an old heritage going back many millenniums. There are several stages of the monastic life before one finally becomes a sanyasi, one that has renounced attachment to the material world. This type of renunciation is also a metaphor that any aspirant can embrace by renouncing the idea that anything from the relative world will bring inner contentment or happiness. Generally speaking, the teacher-guru student relationship is the most sacred of the Vedic-Indic culture. Their relationship sustains the extensive and sacred Sanskrit literature of Vedanta and the other five main philosophical expressions, (shad darsanas) as well as all the many subbranches (Upa-Vedas) of the Vedas, keeping them intact, for thousands of years, until today.

As a result of the law of karma and rebirth, one's biological mother is considered the first guru and reflects the deepest human bond which exists between mother and child. For many obvious and obscure reasons, it is a relationship that influences most people for their entire lives. Just as the moon is closest of all the major planets to the earth, so it is between the human mother and her child. However, the mother-child relationship is not always rosy and can sometimes reflect a difficult relationship between two souls in previous lives. For example, a husband who treats his wife poorly in one life, through either personal neglect or disloyalty to his so-called beloved, may in the next life be born as the son of a mother who abandons him. Through this and various circumstances, he creates a distant relationship with the mother. The way a relationship begins is not as important as what the relationship becomes; of highest karmic importance is where they end.

The sun, as the largest planet, is the most distant from earth, although all life depends on it. In the same way, the inherent nature of every human being propels a search for truth and happiness that may be distant, far from one's current location on the evolutionary pathway. Happiness and fulfillment in life depends on the sun (soul connection) as the indwelling soul; this inner sun is often referred to as the Self or *sva*. The search for a guru has more to do with an inner process of awakening to higher consciousness by connecting to the soul, rather than with actually finding a person who will teach us everything we need to know about getting enlightened.

Certainly, a guru can transmit great wisdom to their student-devotees as well as provide specialized methods from the vast yoga tradition that one can resonate deeply with. However, and more importantly, the guru, whomever this person may be, is facilitating a process that has already been put into motion by

the aspirant's own search for truth. A well-known saying resonates with this point, "When the student is ready, the teacher appears."

It is the guru–shishya (disciple) tradition, or parampara, that has preserved the profound body of yogic knowledge the world has come to know. In a complex world with many different priorities, it's important to understand that becoming a sanyasi (monastic) and striving towards attaining samadhi (enlightenment) are two very separate things. Taking vows of renunciation does not guarantee one enlightenment, regardless of the courage required to choose such a life, the sanyasi still must work for liberation just as does the householder (grihastha), although the vows and the lifestyle between a householder and a monk will differ substantially. Anyone can live an evolutionary life if it includes a balanced blend of adhering to practical selfcare practices, family and social responsibilities, work, and career and equally integrates spiritual disciplines. The spiritual path is equated with one's inner relationship with God and requires commitment, concentration, and consistency. In other words, one can follow the path as taught by a guru and their lineage while living in the ashram or living in the world. Regardless of the path one chooses, the world is the living guru, and this will provide countless opportunities listen to and learn. This is why the guru is highly celebrated in India. Honoring and respecting teachers and elders is a highly regarded custom in Asian cultures because knowledge has always been embraced with reverence as an essential part of moving towards enlightenment.

India each year honors the Guru with one of its many important festivals on the full moon day in the month of Ashadha, correlated to the early monsoon period and around the summer solstice. Originally, the Guru Purnima day was marked to honor Veda Vyasa, author of the Mahabharata, son of Sage Parashara, however, the event now honors all gurus. Sage Parashara was raised by his grandfather Vasishtha (Guru of Rama of Ayodhya). Sage Parashara authored one of the most comprehensive texts on Jyotish (Vedic Astrology) called Brihat Parasara Hora Shastra. One of the main guru mantras, *Sri Gurave Namaha*, is a homage to the guru. The term *Sri* is a prefix used to purify the name of any person and is connected to the Goddess Lakshmi. *Gu* refers to darkness or the cave of the heart, *ru* means to remove with light, *Na* is negation, and *Ma*, is me or mine. This mantra offers reverence to the guru and explains that negativity is overcome with the light of pure consciousness.

The opening of the heart center (chakra) signifies the initial glimmer of light that invokes the dormant (unconscious) person as they begin the gradual movement towards conscious living. This energetic movement awakens one's power of inquiry (vichar) into the nature of one's existence. It is considered a blessing when anyone experiences this as it represents a break from the regressive patterns of conditioned consciousness towards a new evolutionary life. These inner experiences are sacred and should be kept private or shared only directly with the guru or spiritual counselor otherwise they lose their upward momentum. Inner experiences can take many years and even lifetimes before they manifest and for this

reason one must continue to strive consistently in their meditations and spiritual practices, otherwise the momentum is lost.

I often refer to these experiences as “spiritual candies,” gifts presented to us by Goddess Lakshmi to encourage us to keep ascending our consciousness through increasing devotion and knowledge for the Divine in all living things. One never knows when these spiritual primers will occur and it does not guarantee the discovery of a Sat-Guru immediately, the presence of the supreme Guru who takes responsibility for the soul. The guru initiation may not take place until the aspirant has attained some harmony with nature, with their own body, and with other lifestyle principles as taught in ayurveda. The guru comes when the aspirant is ready to become a disciple, one who is devoted to their spiritual evolution, when the end of the path to liberation is near. The guru alone is not enough; the guru relies on the disciple to eventually develop the understanding that the entire world is part of their evolutionary process, that it is a projection of one’s own mind and reflects one’s current state of consciousness.

One’s silent inner prayers transform from pleas into a powerful grace that beckons. These inner prayers become a kind of surrender and a call for inner change. That supreme guru is within, guiding the devotee’s consciousness through intuitive glimpses of truth as the witness (sakshi), enlivening the inner guru into all the moments of life. It is also true that such awareness can be aided by cultivating a relationship with an outer guru (in physical form or not) and nurtured through attunement to the guru in the present moment. As Vedanta proclaims, nothing else exists but the present moment and the more conscious one can become, the greater the supreme Reality alone will exist as pure consciousness. The entire world process is thus dismantled to reveal the One supreme Reality behind all matter and all living things. Violence to any aspect of the world does not hurt the world as much as it hurts you. “One who possesses this Art of Living is a Rishi, all the world harmonizes with them, they are met with no obstacles, because they keep themselves in accord with the One.”²

² Swami Rama Tirtha, *In the Woods of God Realization, Notebook VII* (Swami Rama Tirtha Pratisthan, Lucknow, India).

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