



The Role of a Spiritual Guide

No one can walk the path alone: this is a simple fact. Those who think that they do not need a teacher because they have their 'own' truth are either arrogant or deluded; in most cases they are just not desperate enough to truly begin their spiritual quest. While the desire to discover our true self on our own is fundamentally positive, as it points to our inquisitiveness and autonomy, any seeker on the path must sooner or later realize with humility their fundamental limitations. There are areas of the path that cannot be accessed by any form of meditation or inquiry, for they cannot even be imagined. Saying this, the subject of spiritual guidance remains entirely abstract unless we have a clear view of what the role of a spiritual guide really is. What is the true nature of the relationship between the seeker and the one who holds the knowledge of the self and of the path?

There are two extreme views about the role of a teacher. The first is to see him or her as a friend who merely offers advice and suggestions. The second is the stereotype of a 'guru': a master, a powerful being, a giver of grace. In some cases the guru is viewed as superhuman, a messiah or avatar. In this latter case, it is easy for those who are uninformed and gullible to project such a person into a position of unimaginable greatness, especially if that teacher is deliberately cultivating this type of image in order to manipulate his followers. Some teachers cleverly use the false assumption that after enlightenment there is 'no more ego' in order to put themselves in a position of personal power, inflating their ego via the concept of having no ego. When awakening is not aligned with the purification, surrender and transformation of ego, it can actually be used by the ego for its own purposes. Instead of having no ego, one becomes a super-ego. The borderline between self-realization and megalomania is often very thin.

Many seekers sit at the feet of a guru and wait for a miracle to happen or enjoy the emotional gratification of being connected to another human being who they view as a god of sorts. It can be deeply comforting to give away one's power and responsibility to somebody else, as relinquishing the burden of free choice can offer a false kind of security. Even the word 'master' can carry connotations of social hierarchy, like a servant addressing his lord, though ideally it should be translated as being the master of oneself, or having mastered the inner path. Some gurus behave like kings, sitting on their thrones as in the olden days, only that theirs is not a political but a spiritual power. In certain cases, even that line becomes blurred.

On the other hand, there are those who teach more as an act of relaying concepts and information to others. This type of spiritual 'guidance' is more common in Buddhism, where at some point one becomes a dharma teacher or a lama, someone who can conduct meditation meetings and teach others how to use various meditation techniques while explaining Buddhist philosophy. A person like this is, unlike a guru, not usually putting himself in a position of authority. Rather, his teaching is seen as a very good way to help his own progress on the path. This can be true, assuming that one does not develop a teacher's ego of some sort or does not lose focus on one's own practice. Overall, while this type of teaching is useful to an extent, it should not be taken as truly representative of the path. When placed in this higher context, it is more a case of the blind leading the blind.

How we perceive the spiritual teacher is related to how we see the nature of our spiritual path as a whole. For instance, it is directly connected to how we perceive the balance between the need for help on the path and our ability to reach various goals through our own effort. Is it that a spiritual teacher is just pointing us in the right direction while we do all the work? Or is he supporting us in each and every step of the journey? These questions point to two essential truths regarding the spiritual path: firstly, that it is extremely deep and difficult and without help we have little, if any, chance to go beyond our basic ignorance. And secondly, that we must take responsibility for our evolution. If we are not able to use our resources to help ourselves, no one else will be able to help us either.

The difference between a spiritual teacher and a spiritual guide is that a teacher is someone who has a certain knowledge of the path but has not fully actualized his or her pure nature, while a guide is someone who teaches from his or her higher being. He not only possesses both the knowledge of the intricacies of the inner path and the ability to teach them: he teaches in essence through the very power of his light. A teacher can describe the theoretical dimension of reality, like a professor of geography who can describe different landscapes even though he himself may never have seen them. A guide, on the other hand, is walking with the seeker into the wilderness of the inner realm, taking him into the unknown. He is not doing the walking for the seeker, but he is showing him the way while indicating various dangers and pitfalls in order to ensure a positive outcome. At times he removes the obstacles in order to open the path, or he creates a new path. He is not just representing a religion or a tradition – he represents the truth, ever unfolding. He is himself an explorer of truth, not an imitator of past understanding.

A spiritual guide must be evolving himself. If he is not evolving, he is not one with the evolution of existence. If he keeps repeating the same concepts over and over again, as many teachers do, without diving deeper into the understanding of the inner dimension and the complexity of spiritual unfoldment, it means that he is no longer representing reality but more the understanding that he has acquired, whether it be through his own past or his learned tradition. As a guide continues to evolve internally in the real time of



the inner realm, he continues to evolve as a teacher, mastering the art of teaching and helping others, which is the highest art of assisting human beings into actualizing their spiritual purpose.

The original meaning of the word 'guru' is someone who has knowledge, a bestower of knowledge. The knowledge here is not merely conceptual information; it is the knowledge of the self. However, to possess that knowledge alone is not enough to become a spiritual guide. One has to know how to bridge ignorance with awakening, how to open the doorway to the inner realm for those who have forgotten their true nature. In addition, a guide should know the limitations of each seeker and how to modify their personal path according to their spiritual capacity and predispositions. In this way, a guru becomes a guide.

Within the great way, each one has a unique path. That is not to say that everyone's path is completely different. We all travel in the same direction and have very similar requirements in order to reach peace and become whole. However, there are always slight differences in the makeup and constitution of each human being, based on their inimitable design, their evolutionary past and their potential. A guide has to take these elements under consideration.

Some seekers have a fear of becoming overly dependent on a spiritual guide. A certain level of dependency cannot be avoided, for when travelling through unknown territory, one must rely on the expertise of someone who already knows these subtle areas. As such, dependency needs to be accepted as part of that relationship. Indeed, even in ordinary human relationships there is a level of emotional dependency and a need for trust. If one wants to be completely independent, one has to live alone, and this is not always the best choice. However, this requisite trust should not be blind; it should be verified through our evolution. If one is sincere in one's own efforts and yet is not making real progress on the path, not transforming, the teacher is probably incompetent.

While a certain level of dependency must be accepted as a natural element of the relationship between the disciple and the guide, this dependency needs to be balanced with taking responsibility for one's evolution. Those who wish merely to surrender to a master refuse to take this responsibility; such surrender is not real but fake. It is this fine balance between our dependency on and independence from our guide that is the foundation of a healthy teaching relationship. Each seeker must make the necessary sacrifices to progress on the inner path, be ready to do the hard work, and cooperate with his evolution in the most efficient way. His responsibility is to follow the higher intention of his soul and to have enough strength and integrity to conquer his lower nature. Each one needs a guide and yet each one must walk alone. Only a baby is totally dependent on its parents; it does not know how to walk, so it must be carried. Learning how to walk alone through the great way of life is part of becoming a mature human being.



This too is one of the functions of the spiritual guide: to nurture a seeker into independence by activating his intelligence and helping him to develop a sense of orientation in the inner realm. By guiding him within, he helps the seeker to grow in sensitivity and understanding of those subtle states and experiences so that he can clearly distinguish between what is real and what is illusory and, thus, fully grasp the nature of his inner reality and identify his next step on the path. Additionally, when faced with the struggles and difficulties that are natural part of the path, a seeker has to be taught how to help himself in the most efficient way so that he can use his difficulties as the material of his growth and transformation.

The relationship with a spiritual guide is out of the ordinary in the sense that it is sacred. He or she represents that which we seek from our soul. A guide represents our future; he is *of* the future. His role is not to give us psychological comfort but to break the structure of our false identity so that we can open up to our inner light. This can often be challenging because ego resists relinquishing its own agenda. Hence sincerity and humility are the requisite qualities for those who aspire to walk the path of the soul.

Furthermore, it is the role of the spiritual guide to transmit certain states of awakening to his disciple. In this way, he is gradually opening the doorways to reality for the seeker, showing him his next step. The issue of transmission has to be properly understood. Transmission is not a simplistic transfer of the awakened state from one person to another. If this was so, every disciple could easily become awakened by a qualified teacher. In reality, even masters of high degree, like Ramana Maharishi, left only a handful of awakened disciples after years and years of teaching, and even those attained a lower degree of self-realization than he had himself embodied. The true meaning of initiation is to convey into the being of the seeker the energetic information of the higher state, which then needs to be recognized and met as his or her own self, and then embodied and stabilized. If the particular soul is unable to contain the meaning of this information, due to it being beyond her capacity to grasp or due to the absence of the proper energetic foundation, it cannot serve as a key to open a new dimension of realization. In this case, transmission cannot take place.

There is another scenario where, even though one may be too immature to grasp the higher state, some portion of the information of that state can incubate in the being of the seeker. However, this is obviously a realization of a much lower degree. In fact it is not a realization at all, but a type of energetic expansion. Some may call it the grace of existence, but it is more like mercy. This is often the case for those who do experience some kind of awakening but who can never embody their awakening because their soul remains unawakened. Transmission is a meeting of souls, a sharing of light from one soul into another. For that meeting to happen, many elements need to be in place: there has to be love, a sense of sacredness and devotion and the ability to surrender to a higher truth. Above all, the disciple has to be ready to receive and meet that which is being transmitted. In fact, he has to be at the threshold of the next step in his evolution, the threshold of meeting the higher definition of his true self.



Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that evolution happens in steps. As such, it is impossible to transmit the complete state from the start. For instance, one cannot be initiated to the transcendental state (vertical samadhi of consciousness) without first having properly awakened consciousness in the horizontal plane.

Transmission is basically an initiation into a new and higher dimension of self. However, it is the responsibility of each seeker to reach completion within this specific dimension on the level of stabilization, integration, and understanding. Only then can one proceed to the next step. If the previous step is not completed, and one rushes prematurely to the next one, the common scenario is that the previously attained state deteriorates or is even completely lost. Here again we see the delicate balance of dependence and responsibility that constitutes the correct teaching relationship.

One should not project unrealistic expectations onto the spiritual guide or see him as a savior or redeemer of those who are lost. Even if this was possible, it would go against the law of free will which is directly tied to becoming responsible for our own salvation. By entering the inner path, a man or woman agrees to become spiritually adult, taking charge of his own evolution. And yet, our relationship with the spiritual guide is sacred. A guide is not merely our spiritual friend: he is a friend indeed, but of our soul, not of our human personality. He is the voice of our inner being, the outer manifestation of our very inner self. Our relationship with a guide should be based on natural gratitude, love, and respect. If there is no love between a guide and his disciple, there is no meeting between their souls, and spiritual transformation cannot happen. It is that love which opens the new doorways of evolution. Initially, a relationship between a guide and disciple is similar to the relationship between our lower and higher self, between me and the soul. As the seeker awakens more to their soul, he can relate increasingly to the guide from the soul, and their relationship becomes one of souls: one soul guiding another into the deeper dimensions of truth and light.

With blessings,

Anadi

** For a glossary of the terminology used in this teaching and for further resources, you may visit our website www.anaditeaching.com*

