



श्री सनातन धर्म सभा – दक्षिण आफ्रिका

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GURU PURNIMA



Introduction

According to verse 16 of the Advayataraka Upanishad the syllable *GU* means darkness, the syllable *RU*, means he who dispels them. Because of the power to dispel darkness, the guru is thus named.

A GURU is one who dispels darkness or one who is the giver of light. The GURU has also been taken as PARABRAHMA, the one without attributes who turns a person's soul towards light. Swami Sivananda has stated that the GURU is God Himself manifesting in a personal form to guide the aspirant. According to the Vedic tradition, the GURU is expected to lead a life of high moral principles and is considered an embodiment of DHARMA for the disciple to emulate.

Who is a suitable Guru?

The GURU is one who has seen the truth. This means that individuals need to choose their GURUS or teachers or spiritual masters very carefully. Swami Sivananda states that he who can clear your doubts, who is sympathetic towards your spiritual practices, who does not disturb your beliefs but helps you on from where you are, he in whose presence you feel spiritually elevated – he is your GURU. An example of such a GURU is Guru Vashishta, the preceptor of King Dashratha in the Ramayana. Throughout the Ramayana we find that he was consulted by Dashratha's family. This was because he

was a fountain of knowledge. He was a reliable authority whose answers had the backing of scriptures. His answers were not ill-considered guesses intended to please the disciple. His answers and advice can be described as AAPTA VACHAN – the result of research. A guru is one who is knowledgeable and has studied extensively himself and is one with pure qualities- free from ego, honest, unselfish, austere and disciplined. In his book, Guru Tattva, Swami Sivananda declares, “Mere study of books cannot make one a Guru. One who has studied the Vedas and who has direct knowledge of Atman through Anubhav (experience) can only be enrolled as a Guru.

Who is a suitable learner?

A suitable learner is one who is eager to know the truth. Such a learner needs to be humble in her approach and must be ready to serve the Guru so that society at large also gets benefits.

The idea of a suitable Guru and a suitable disciple is encapsulated in the following verse from the Swetasvataropnishad (6.22-6.23)

वेदान्ते परमं गुह्यं पुराकल्पे प्रचोदितम् । ना अप्रशान्ताय दातव्यं ना अपुत्रायाशिष्याय वा पुनः

vedānte paramaṁ guhyaṁ purākālpe pracoditam | nā apraśāntāya dātavyaṁ nā
aputrāyāśiṣyāya vā punaḥ

This highest mysticism, expounded in the Vedaanta in a former age, should not be taught to one whose passions have not been subdued, nor to one who is not a worthy son, nor to an unworthy disciple.

The Swetasvataropnishad continues:

यस्य देवे परा भक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ । तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः । प्रकाशन्ते
महात्मन इति ।

yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ yathā deve tathā gurau | tasyaite kathitā hyarthāḥ prakāśante
mahātmanaḥ | prakāśante mahātmana itī |

These truths when taught, shine forth only in that high souled one who has Supreme devotion to God, and an equal degree to the Spiritual Teacher. They shine forth in that high souled one only!

Is a Guru Really Necessary?

The Taittiriya Upanishad- (1.11.2) advises as follows:

देवपितृकार्याभ्याम न प्रमदितव्यम् । मातृदेवो भव । पितृदेवो भव । आचार्यदेवो भव । अतिथिदेवो भव ।

devapitṛkāryābhyāma na pramaditavyam | mātr̥devo bhavapitṛdevo bhava | ācāryadevo bhava | atitthidevo bhava |

Do not neglect to do the rites in respect of God (Devatha) and the Ancestors (Pitrikriya). Treat the Mother like God, Treat the Father like God, Treat the Acharya (Guru) like God and Treat the Guest like God.

Of course, God behaves in a manner worthy of worship, so too must the Mother, Father and Guest. Guru Purnima is a day to honor the teacher and also a day where the teacher reinforces his disciplines and behaviour so that he can lead by example.

A Section of the Skanda Puran (divided into 3 chapters) is called the Guru Gita. It is a record of the conversation between Shiva and Parvathi. Hereunder are a few verses that further explain the importance of the Guru as explained by Lord Shiva.

सर्वश्रुतिशिरोरत्नविरजितपदांबुजम् । वेदान्तार्थप्रवक्तारं तस्मत्संपूजयेद् गुरुम् ॥

sarvaśrutiśiroratnavirajitapadāmbujam | vedāntārthapravaktāraṁ tasmatsampūjajayed gurum ||

The feet of the Guru is decorated with Gems of the Vedas and the highest knowledge. Therefore, certainly worship the Feet of the Guru.

गुरुसेवा गया प्रोक्ता देहः स्यादक्षयो वटः । तत्पदम् विष्णुपादं स्यात् तत्रदत्तमनस्ततम् ॥

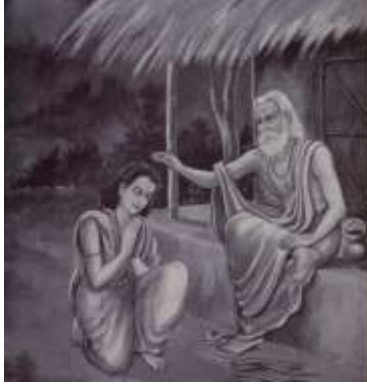
gurusevā gyā proktā dehaḥ syādakṣayo vaṭaḥ | tatpadama viṣṇupādaṁ syāt tatraddattamanastatam ||

Service to the Guru is certainly like reaching the great Gaya (Place of pilgrimage). The body of the Guru is like the transcendental tree (Akshay Vat- the tree of God as described in Bhagwad Gita). The feet of the Guru is likened to the feet of Vishnu. The mind of the aspirant should therefore be fixed there.

विध्या धनं बलं चैव तेषां भाग्यं निरर्थम् येषां गुरुकृपा नास्ति अधो गच्छन्ति पार्वति ॥

vidhyā dhanam balaṁ caiva teṣāṁ bhāgyam nirarthaham yeṣāṁ gurukṛpā nāsti adho gacchanti pārvati ||

Those with knowledge, wealth, strength and fortune- their lives are meaningless if they do not have the blessings of their Guru, they are the lowest of beings, O Parvathy!



In Chapter four, verse 34 of the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna says:

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥

Learn the Truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him with reverence and render service unto him. Such an enlightened Saint can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the Truth.

Shri Krishna suggests three important ways to obtain spiritual knowledge:

- Approach a spiritual master
- Inquire from the spiritual master submissively
- Render service to the spiritual master

The Srimad Bhagvatam also emphasises the importance of the Guru in the attainment of spiritual knowledge:

anādyavidyā yuktasya puruṣasyātma vedanam svato na sambhavād anyas tattva-jṣo jṣāna-do bhavet (11.22.10) [v29]

The intellect of the soul is clouded by ignorance from endless lifetimes. Covered with nescience, the intellect cannot overcome its ignorance simply by its own effort. One needs to receive knowledge from a God-realized Saint who knows the Absolute Truth.

There are repeated reminders in our scriptures on the importance of the Guru. The Chaandogya Upanishad says:

āchāryavān puruṣho vedah

Only through a Guru can you understand the Vedas.

In the incarnations of God, we observe that Shri Ram got initiated by Guru Vasishta; when Lord Vishnu incarnated as Shri Krishna, his Guru was Sandeepani and the Guru of the Devas is Guru Brihaspati. Tulsidasa in the Ramcharitmanas expounds in detail on the importance of the guru. He writes that it is impossible for an individual to achieve spiritual enlightenment without the grace of the Guru.

Nobody can cross the endless worldly ocean of life without assistance of a true Guru even if he has acquired the potential to create like Brahma, sustain like Vishnu and dissolve like Shankar. The entire universe, his salvation and redemption truly depends on the divine guidance from a true Guru.

The example of the teacher is emphasised in the verse 21 of chapter 3, in which Shri Krishna says,

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेतेतरो जनः । स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥

Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

It can be seen that the Bhagavad Gita makes a call on the teacher to make values livable for learners. The teacher should enhance the practice of positive values, attitudes, behaviour and skills both by the learner and in the community.

It has been stated that teachers shape learner's attitudes and values. A prominent educationist once commented that

if our professional conduct does not underscore the written content of the curriculum, then we have no alternative other than to admit that even the most relevant curriculum can become totally irrelevant if the teachers concerned are not themselves dedicated and competent professionals.

Teachers need to see themselves as influencing the atmosphere and ethos of their classrooms by their own behaviour. The teacher's values and attitudes will show through – teaching does not take place in a value-free vacuum. Teachers should be a model of outstanding character.

In the ancient Vedic tradition, the GURU was not only expected to show commitment to his professional duties, but also serve as a model in self-control, equal vision, service to mankind, non-violence and compassion. Satya Sai Baba (1995) emphasised the important role of the teacher thus:

The authentic human values cannot be learnt from books or from lessons given by teachers or gifted by elders. They can be acquired only by experience and example. You, the teacher, must be the example, and the children have to experience.

Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar the founder of neo-humanist education (NHE) movement attempts to create sadvipras - moral educators through his education system. NHE has

been described as an education system that must produce not mere intellectuals but benevolent intuitional spiritual moralists who are ready to fight against injustices and exploitation in society. In order to implement such an education system NHE lays stress on cultivating the intellectual and moral standard of teachers who must set an example before desiring and expecting the best from their pupils.

Conclusion

GURU PURNIMA celebrations should not be restricted to temples, ashrams and places of religion. We should spread the message of GURU PURNIMA to public schools where secular knowledge is imparted to learners. The message of GURU PURNIMA is that learners should be trained to be established in virtue. The education in schools and colleges should have an ethical basis. GURU PURNIMA celebrations in South Africa should become an occasion to champion the cause of moral regeneration. The professors, teachers and staff of our educational institutions should become exemplars of the way of life which they wish the learners and students to follow. They must personify in their own lives the virtues and ideals which they wish their learners and students to acquire and to grow into.

guru ke vachan pratit na jehi sapne hu sugam na sukh sidh tehi,
maat pita guru prabhu ke vaani vinahi vichar kariha subh jaani

One who cannot visualize his teacher's teachings, such a person cannot get success and happiness easily, not even in dreams; father, mother and teachers' statements are GOD'S statements, and one should follow them, without any doubt or second thought, considering them auspicious.

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