Chapter Three

The Guru

Acceptance of the Guru

The Guru should be accepted in all ways — transcendent, impersonal, personal.

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It has always been held in Indian yoga that the relation between Guru and disciple must be one of full confidence and full acceptance of the Guru by the Shishya. The latter was supposed to accept unquestioningly the guidance and to follow the instructions of the Guru without criticism or questioning; he was not supposed to criticise, to blame or to refuse adhesion or to follow in a questioning or grudging spirit: for that would stand in the way of his advance. The Indian disciple of those days would not have expected the Guru to suit his directions or instructions or ways of leading to the mental demands or vital ideas of the [incomplete]

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There are three conditions for a disciple for profiting fully from his relation to a spiritual guide.

1st: He must accept him entirely and him alone without submitting himself to any contrary or second influence.

2nd: He must accept the indications given by the Guru and follow them firmly and with full faith and perseverance to the best of his own spiritual capacity.

3rd: He must make himself open and receptive to the Guru for even more than what the Guru teaches to the mind of the disciple, it is what he spiritually is, the spiritual consciousness, the knowledge, the light, the power, the Divinity in him that helps the disciple to grow by his receiving that into himself and its being used within himself for the growth of his consciousness
and nature into its own divine possibility.

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What the Guru can do for the sadhak depends upon the latter’s receptivity — not upon any method or rule of sadhana. Certain psychological conditions or attitudes of the consciousness tend to increase the receptivity — e.g., humility towards the Guru, devotion, obedience, trust, a certain receptive passivity to his influence. The opposite things — independence, a critical attitude, questionings — go the other way and make it necessary for the Guru to help only indirectly or behind the veil. But the main thing is a kind of psychological openness in the consciousness which comes or increases of itself with the help of the will to receive and the right attitude. If there is that then it is not necessary to pull anything from the Guru, only to receive quietly. Pulling from him often draws untruly or things for which the consciousness is not ready to assimilate.

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It is a deficiency of psychic perception and spiritual discrimination that makes people speak like that in a depreciatory way and ignore the importance of obedience. It is the mind wanting to follow its own way of thinking and the vital seeking freedom for its desires which argue in this manner. If you do not follow the rules laid down by the spiritual guide or obey one who is leading you to the Divine, then what or whom are you to follow? Only the ideas of the individual mind and the desires of the vital: but these things never lead to siddhi in Yoga. The rules are laid down in order to guard against certain influences and their dangers and to keep a right atmosphere in the Asram favourable to spiritual development; the obedience is necessary so as to get away from one’s own mind and vital and learn to follow the Truth.

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Yes, it [obedience] is difficult, but once achieved it is immensely fruitful.
You are putting the cart before the horse. It is not the right way to make the condition that if you get what you want you will be obedient and cheerful. But be always obedient and cheerful and then what you want will have a chance of coming to you.

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Up to now no liberated man has objected to the Guruvada; it is usually only people who live in the mind or vital and have the pride of the mind or the arrogance of the vital that find it below their dignity to recognise a Guru.

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One has to learn from the master and act according to his instructions because the master knows the subject and how it is to be learnt — just as in spiritual things one has to follow the Guru who has the knowledge and knows the way. If one learns all by oneself, the chances are that one will learn all wrong. What is the use of a freedom to learn wrongly? Of course if the pupil is more intelligent than the master, he will learn more than the master, just as a great spiritual capacity may arrive at realisations which the Guru has not — but even so, the control and discipline in the early stages is indispensable.

The Guru in the Supramental Yoga

The Guru is the Guide in the Yoga. When the Divine is accepted as the Guide, He is accepted as the Guru.

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It is not usual to use the word Guru in the supramental Yoga, here everything comes from the Divine himself. But if anybody wants it he can use it for the time being.

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The relation of Guru and disciple is only one of many relations which one can have with the Divine, and in this Yoga which aims at a supramental realisation, it is not usual to give it this
name; rather, the Divine is regarded as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation and all that one receives is felt as coming from there and the whole being remoulded by the Divine Hand. This is a greater and more intimate relation than that of the human Guru and disciple, which is more of a limited mental ideal. Nevertheless, if the mind still needs the more familiar mental conception, it can be kept so long as it is needed; only do not let the soul be bound by it and do not let it limit the inflow of other relations with the Divine and larger forms of experience.

**Surrender to the Guru**

Because through it [surrender to the Guru]\(^1\) you surrender not only to the impersonal but to the personal, not only to the Divine in yourself but to the Divine outside you; you get a chance for the surpassing of ego not only by retreat into the Self where ego does not exist, but in the personal nature where it is the ruler. It is the sign of the will to complete surrender to the total Divine, *samagram māṁ mānuṣīṁ tanum āśritam*. Of course it must be a genuine spiritual surrender for all this to be true.

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When one takes sincerely to surrender, nothing must be concealed that is of any importance for the life of the sadhana. Confession helps to purge the consciousness of hampering elements and it clears the inner air and makes for a closer and more intimate and effective relation between the Guru and the disciple.

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No [surrender to the Divine and surrender to the Guru are not two different things]. In surrendering to the Guru, it is to the Divine in him that one surrenders — if it were only to a human

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\(^1\) The correspondent asked, “What makes the surrender to the Guru so grand and glorious as to be called the surrender beyond all surrenders?” — Ed.
entity it would be ineffective. But it is the consciousness of the Divine Presence that makes the Guru a real Guru, so that even if the disciple surrenders to him thinking of the human being to whom he surrenders, that Presence would still make it effective.

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Yes [surrender to the formless Divine would leave parts of the being subject to the gunas and ego] — because only the static parts would be free in formlessness, the active nature would be still in the play of the gunas. Many think they are free from ego because they get the sense of the formless Existence, they do not see that the egoistic element remains in their action just as before.

Other Gurus

All true Gurus are the same, the one Guru, because all are the one Divine. That is a fundamental and universal truth. But there is also a truth of difference; the Divine dwells in different personalities with different minds, teachings, influences so that He may lead different disciples with their special need, character, destiny by different ways to the realisation. Because all Gurus are the same Divine, it does not follow that the disciple does well if he leaves the one meant for him to follow another. Fidelity to the Guru is demanded of every disciple, according to the Indian tradition. “All are the same” is a spiritual truth, but you cannot convert it indiscriminately into action; you cannot deal with all persons in the same way because they are the one Brahman: if one did, the result pragmatically would be an awful mess. It is a rigid mental logic that makes the difficulty but in spiritual matters mental logic easily blunders; intuition, faith, a plastic spiritual reason are here the only guides.

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To respect the spiritual attainment of X [another spiritual teacher] is all right, but it is a rule of this Yoga not to mix influences (and what he [a sadhak] has described is very much
like undergoing an influence). Otherwise there may be harm
done by two different methods getting mixed together — e.g.
the vital being awakened to a Bhakti-Ananda influence on that
plane before it is purified and ready.

The Guru’s Help in Difficulty

I think this saying of Ramakrishna’s\(^2\) expresses a certain char-
acteristic happening in sadhana and cannot be interpreted in a
general and absolute sense; for in that sense it is hard for it to be
true. All difficulties disappearing in a minute? Well, Vivekananda
had the grace of Ramakrishna from the beginning, but I think his
difficulty of doubt lasted for some time and to the end of his life
the difficulty of the control of anger was there — making him say
that all that was good in him was his Guru’s gift but these things
(anger etc.) were his own property. But what could be true is that
the central difficulty may disappear by a certain touch between
the Guru and the disciple. But what is meant by the \(kṛpā\)? If it is
the general compassion and grace of the Guru, that, one would
think, is always there on the disciple; his acceptance itself is an
act of grace and the help is there for the disciple to receive. But
the touch of grace, divine grace coming directly or through the
Guru is a special phenomenon having two sides to it, — the grace
of the Guru or the Divine, in fact both together, on one side and a
“state of grace” in the disciple on the other. This “state of grace”
is often prepared by a long tapasya or purification in which
nothing decisive seems to happen, only touches or glimpses or
passing experiences at the most, and it comes suddenly without
warning. If this is what is spoken of in Ramakrishna’s saying,
then it is true that when it comes, the fundamental difficulties
can in a moment and generally do disappear. Or at the very
least something happens which makes the rest of the sadhana —
however long it may take — sure and secure.

This decisive touch comes most easily to the “baby cat”
people, those who have at some point between the psychic and

\(^2\) “With the Guru’s grace all difficulties can disappear in a flash, even as an elong
darkness does the moment you strike a match.” — Ed.
the emotional vital a quick and decisive movement of surrender to the Guru or the Divine. I have seen that when that is there and there is the conscious central dependence compelling the mind also and the rest of the vital, then the fundamental difficulty disappears. If others remain they are not felt as difficulties, but simply as things that have just to be done and need cause no worry. Sometimes no tapasya is necessary — one just refers things to the Power that one feels guiding or doing the sadhana and assents to its action, rejecting all that is contrary to it, and the Power removes what has to be removed or changes what has to be changed, quickly or slowly — but the quickness or slowness does not seem to matter since one is sure that it will be done. If tapasya is necessary, it is done with so much feeling of a strong support that there is nothing hard or austere in the tapasya.

For the others, the “baby monkey” type or those who are still more independent, following their own ideas, doing their own sadhana, asking only for some instruction or help, the grace of the Guru is there, but it acts according to the nature of the sadhak and waits upon his effort to a greater or less degree; it helps, succours in difficulty, saves in the time of danger, but the disciple is not always, is perhaps hardly at all aware of what is being done as he is absorbed in himself and his endeavour. In such cases the decisive psychological movement, the touch that makes all clear, may take longer to come.

But with all the krpa is there working in one way or another and it can only abandon the disciple if the disciple himself abandons or rejects it — by decisive and definitive revolt, by rejection of the Guru, by cutting the painter and declaring his independence, or by an act or course of betrayal that severs him from his own psychic being. Even then, except perhaps in the last case if it goes to an extreme, a return to grace is not impossible.

That is my own knowledge and experience of the matter. But as to what lay behind Ramakrishna’s saying and whether he himself meant it to be a general and absolute statement — I do not pronounce.
All that is popular Yoga. The Guru’s touch or grace may open something, but the difficulties have always to be worked out still. What is true is that if there is complete surrender which implies the prominence of the psychic, these difficulties are no longer felt as a burden or obstacle but only as superficial imperfections which the working of the grace will remove.

It has always been said that to take disciples means to take upon yourself the difficulties of the disciples as well as your own. Of course, if the Guru does not identify himself with the disciple, does not take him into his own consciousness, keeps him outside and only gives him upadeśa, leaving him to do the rest himself, then the chance of these effects is much diminished, made practically nil.

The Knowledge Given by the Guru

I do not know what you mean by indirect knowledge. The knowledge given by the Guru, if that is what you mean, is in the nature of experience and becomes part and parcel of the experience. Mere instruction is not knowledge but only an intellectual indication of what must be realised by experience.

According to Yoga, as it is known in India, the mediation of the Guru is almost indispensable. It is not a crutch. It is a direct action of the Divine who is realised by the Guru. It is an opening of the consciousness to spiritual experience without which few can open at all or go very far. If they advance by themselves, they can fall into all sorts of perils and errors of which they have no knowledge and no idea how to guide themselves among these things.

All experience is direct — there is no such thing as an indirect spiritual experience. But after the consciousness is sufficiently opened and matured, a knowledge and guidance can

3 The correspondent wrote, “It is said that if a disciple receives his Guru’s touch or grace, his main difficulties very often disappear.” — Ed.
come from within and above and the sadhana proceeds by Divine working within. But the sadhak has to be very careful, for he may easily mistake the guiding of his own mind, ego or vital or the guiding of some inferior Power that flatters his ego for the Divine guidance. It is by the inner experience and consciousness that one knows a spiritual result — one feels and sees it happening.

There are two kinds of knowledge — mental knowledge such as you describe here which is usually necessary as a mental preparation or for guidance and the real knowledge which is spiritual. One receives the mental knowledge from the Guru in the shape of instruction and guidance, but that is only a part of what he gives — for the man who gives only mental or what you call indirect knowledge is not a Guru but only a teacher, Acharya.

As for spiritual knowledge, it consists of two elements, experience and a direct knowledge which is not mental but is of the nature of a light showing the deeper truth of things, a direct vision and perception of the Truth.

The ordinary consciousness is not capable of receiving it as knowledge except in a fragmentary way because it belongs to a deeper consciousness within or a higher consciousness above the mind. The ordinary consciousness has therefore to open to the deeper and the higher consciousness. It has to receive the knowledge from within and above. It cannot do this if it does not open. There must, therefore, first necessarily be an opening, however small, before any direct knowledge can come. As the knowledge comes the opening also can widen and so admit a greater and greater direct knowledge and experience. In some, however, the opening comes first very wide and then the knowledge comes afterwards in a great stream, some light of the Truth and many experiences.

If one has merely a mental idea about the Divine, that is not knowledge. It is with the experiences and the inner light of knowledge that the realisation of the Divine begins. As for example, one may have the mental idea of the Divine Peace but that is nothing, only a mental conception. It is only when one
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has the feeling of the Divine Peace descending from above or in oneself or surrounding one that one begins to know what it is. That is what is called experience. Afterwards one begins to have a direct vision in knowledge of what the Peace is and what is its place in regard to the Divine Realisation; that is direct knowledge.

The Capacity of the Guru

One can have a guru inferior in spiritual capacity (to oneself or to other gurus) carrying in him many human imperfections, and yet, if you have the faith, the bhakti, the right spiritual stuff, contact the Divine through him, attain to spiritual experiences, to spiritual realisation, even before the guru himself. Mark the “if”, — for that proviso is necessary; it isn’t every disciple who can do that with every guru. From a humbug you can acquire nothing but humbuggery. The guru must have something in him which makes the contact with the Divine possible, something which works even if he is not himself in his outer mind quite conscious of its action. If there is nothing at all spiritual in him he is not a guru — only a pseudo. Undoubtedly, there can be considerable differences of spiritual realisation between one guru and the other; but much depends on the inner relation between guru and shishya. One can go to a very great spiritual man and get nothing or only a little from him; one can go to a man of less spiritual capacity and get all he has to give — and more. The causes of this disparity are various and subtle; I need not expand on them here. It differs with each man. I believe the guru is always ready to give what can be given, if the disciple can receive, or it may be when he is ready to receive. If he refuses to receive or behaves inwardly or outwardly in such a way as to make reception impossible or if he is not sincere or takes up the wrong attitude, then things become difficult. But if one is sincere and faithful and has the right attitude and if the guru is a true guru, then, after whatever time, it will come.
What X quotes about the limitation of the power of the Guru to that of a teacher who shows the way but cannot help or guide is the conception of certain paths of Yoga such as the pure Adwaitin and the Buddhist which say that you must rely upon yourself and no one can help you; but even the pure Adwaitin does in fact rely upon the Guru and the chief mantra of Buddhism insists on śarāṇam to Buddha. For other paths of sadhana, especially those which like the Gita accept the reality of the individual soul as an “eternal portion” of the Divine or which believe that Bhagavan and the bhakta are both real, the help of the Guru has always been relied upon as an indispensable aid.

I don't understand the objection to the validity of Vivekananda's experience; it was exactly the realisation which is described in the Upanishads as a supreme experience of the Self. It is not a fact that an experience gained in samadhi cannot be prolonged into the waking state.

* Ramakrishna had the siddhi himself before he began giving to others — so had Buddha. I don't know about the others [Vivekananda, Ramatirtha, Ramdas, Mahavir, Shankara]. By perfection of course is meant siddhi in one's own path — realisation. Ramakrishna always put that as a rule that one should not become a teacher to others until one has the full authority.

The Bhakta and the Disciple

It does not strike me that Krishnaprem's letters are admirable as an aperçu of current thoughts and general tendencies; it was rather his power to withdraw so completely from these thoughts and tendencies and look from a (for him) new and an abiding source of knowledge that impressed me as admirable. If he had remained interested and in touch with these current human movements, I don't suppose he would have done better with them than Romain Rolland or another. But he has gone to the Yoga-view of them, the summit-view, and it is the readiness with which he has been able to do it that struck me.
I would explain his progressing so far not entirely by his own superiority in the sense of a general fitness for Yoga but by the quickness and completeness with which he has taken inwardly the attitude of the Bhakta and the disciple. That is a rare achievement for a modern mind, be he European or “educated” Indian; for the modern mind is analytic, dubitative, instinctively “independent” even when it wants to be otherwise; it holds itself back and hesitates in front of the Light and Influence that comes to it; it does not plunge into it with a simple directness, crying, “Here I am, ready to throw from me all that was myself or seemed to be, if so I can enter into Thee; remake my consciousness into the Truth in thy way, the way of the Divine.” There is something in us that is ready for it, but there is this element that intervenes and makes a curtain of non-receptivity; I know by my own experience with myself and others how long it can make a road that could never perhaps, for us who seek the entire truth, have been short and easy, but still we might have been spared many wanderings and stand-stills and recoils and detours. All the more I admire the ease with which Krishnaprem seems to have surmounted this formidable obstacle.

I do not know if his Guru falls far short in any respect, but with the attitude he has taken, her deficiencies, if any, do not matter. It is not the human defects of the Guru that can stand in the way when there is the psychic opening, confidence and surrender. The Guru is the channel or the representative or the manifestation of the Divine, according to the measure of his personality or his attainment; but whatever he is, it is to the Divine that one opens in opening to him, and if something is determined by the power of the channel, more is determined by the inherent and intrinsic attitude of the receiving consciousness, an element that comes out in the surface mind as simple trust or direct unconditional self-giving, and once that is there, the essential things can be gained even from one who seems to others than the disciple an inferior spiritual source and the rest will grow up in the sadhak of itself by the Grace of the Divine, even if the human being in the Guru cannot give it. It is this that Krishnaprem appears to have done perhaps from the first; but in
most nowadays this attitude seems to come with difficulty after much hesitation and delay and trouble. In my own case I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance. He himself was astonished and said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper. The result was a series of transmuting experiences of such a radical character that he was unable to follow and had to tell me to give myself up in future to the Guide within with the same completeness of surrender as I had shown to the human channel. I give this example to show how these things work; it is not in the calculated way the human reason wants to lay down, but by a more mysterious and greater law.