GURU PURNIMA BLESSINGS
FROM PUJYA SWAMI CHIDANAND SARASWATIJI

Dear Divine Soul

I hope that—by God’s grace—this finds you and all your loved ones in the best of health and happiness.

It is the divine time of year when we celebrate Guru Purnima, the day in which we offer our thanks, love and devotion to the Guru. The Guru Gita says that the Guru is Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Verily, the Guru is the Supreme Brahman itself.

But what is a “guru” in practical terms? While in the West, the term has taken on myriad, frequently derogatory connotations, the true meaning is pure and simple. In Sanskrit, “gu” means darkness, and “ru” means one who removes. So, a “guru” is one who removes our darkness. It is one whose mere presence emanates so much light, so much love and so much divinity that every darkness within us is alchemically changed into light. And there is no darkness too dark for a guru. Their light can shine through and transform even the darkest darkness. Even the darkness of midnight would last but a second if the sun decided to rise 6 hours early. Similarly, no darkness can last in the Divine presence of a true guru.

Unlike a “preacher” or “minister” or “rabbi”, a guru does not necessarily have to be a religious figure, nor does it have to be a person of a specific religion, gender, age or ethnicity. It is simply someone who holds the light for you if your path becomes shrouded in darkness; it is someone who will carry you if you get tired; it is someone who - after you have been in his/her presence - you are not the same. You are lighter, freer, more filled with joy. It is someone in whose light you want to bask forever.

In the West, guru is frequently defined as “teacher.” Yet, the crucial difference between a teacher and a guru is that while teachers can explain concepts and give you verbal information, they cannot actually take you to the realms of which they teach. An astronomy teacher can tell you about other planets, but cannot take you there. A science teacher can explain life on the bottom of the ocean, but cannot take you there. A geology teacher can explain the properties of diamonds to you, but he cannot fill your hands with the precious gems. In contrast, a guru not only teaches you about God, but rather, he takes you to God. He not only teaches about peace, he also gives you peace.

As I mentioned, in Sanskrit, the word “guru” means one who removes our darkness. Yet it is not merely the darkness of ignorance. It is not simply that we go to our guru with a question, ask him, he answers it and then our confusion is cleared. Rather, the mere presence of the guru in our life removes all darkness - all anger, all pain, all confusion.
HISTORY OF GURU PURNIMA

Guru Purnima is the day on which we pay our reverence to the Guru. It is a day filled with devotion, love and piety. On this day, Indians across the world pay their deepest reverence to both their personal guru, as well as to Sri Maharishi Vyasji. Vyasji is heralded as the one who classified and arranged the four Vedas, and as the author of the 18 Puranas, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita. Having brought such an immeasurable treasure chest of wisdom to the world, Vyasji is worshipped as the Great Guru. It is he who brought forth this ocean of divine light to dispel the darkness of humanity. Therefore, on this day we also pay our deepest respects to Sri Vyasji.

THE GURU QUENCHES OUR THIRST

In India, the summer is followed by the monsoon season when the skies themselves seem to open, pouring down sheets of water upon the parched land. After the long, hot, dry months of summer in which innumerable people, animals and crops may have perished, the rains finally come, quenching our thirst and bringing us life. And, in India, when the rains come it is not a mere drizzle. Rather, the rains are downpours of heavenly nectar, completely saturating the dry land.

Similarly, on this day of Guru Purnima as we find ourselves dying of thirst for knowledge, understanding and peace, as we find our hearts and minds have become dry due to ignorance, anger and darkness, the Guru comes, pouring forth upon our lives the rain of wisdom, love, light and life. Just as the flowers which have wilted and yellowed in the never-ending heat of summer suddenly stand erect and succulent as soon as the rains come, so we, who have become ignorant and "dead" to the divinity within us, are immediately born anew due to His grace in our lives.

However, the monsoon comes only once a year. The ground and soil are graced only one season a year with the divine flow of rain. However, the Guru is always with us. His grace is always showering upon us. There is only one “monsoon season” but if we allow the Guru’s grace into our lives, then every season is the season of the Guru.

Yet, just as the soil must allow the rain to penetrate its depths in order to reap the benefits of this life-giving nectar, so we must become porous vessels into which the divine nectar of the Guru can flow.

The most important quality in a disciple is humility and surrender to the Guru. If we are filled with our own ego, then there is no room for the Guru’s grace to flow.

There is a story of a man who had done many years of scriptural study but he hadn’t attained the height of spiritual progress which he was craving. He had heard that there was an enlightened master who lived on a mountain in the Himalayas. So, he travelled the great distance to find this master.
When he finally reached to the Guru’s cave in the mountains, he was filled with excitement at being so close to attaining what he had always wanted. When he beheld the Master, he bowed at the Master’s feet and started to tell the Master everything he had studied, practiced and learned. He explained where he felt that he was stuck on his spiritual path, and all of the obstacles he faced. The Master was quiet. When the man finished talking, the Master calmly said, “Let us have a cup of tea.”

“Tea???” The seeker exclaimed. “But Gurudev I have travelled weeks on foot to find you. I have spent years and years in the quest for enlightenment. I am now at your holy feet waiting for you to bestow your great wisdom upon me. I don’t want tea! Just bless me with Divine Liberation.”

“First we will have tea,” the Master said calmly, and laid out two cups for tea. The Guru then began to pour tea, from a kettle into each cup. As he filled the seeker’s cup, the man watched as the Guru poured and poured even though the tea reached to the rim of the cup. Then, still, as the cup overflowed and tea spilled onto the floor, the Guru kept pouring.

“Gurudev,” the man said. “Stop. It is enough. Can you not see that the tea is now spilling out on the floor. There is no more room in the cup.”

The Guru smiled and stopped pouring. “You are like this cup, my child. Just as the cup is so full that it can hold no more tea, so you are so full of your own ego, your own learning, your own stories, your own explanations, that there is no room for anything else. You cannot hold what I can teach you. Until you empty yourself of your ego, your preconceived ideas, your own book knowledge and your own explanations of how everything is there will be no point in me teaching you at all. You cannot hold anything right now. There is no room.

Similarly, if we really want the grace of the Guru to flow into us and transform our lives, we must become empty vessels. Only when we are empty of ego can He fill us with His divine light.

**FAITH**

Guru Purnima is a day of renewing our faith, our shraddha, in He who bestows the light upon our lives. It is a day of re-opening our hearts, our souls and our lives to His divine presence and letting it penetrate and saturate every aspect of our being.

There is a beautiful story told about a man who wanted to walk on water. He begged his guru to give him a secret mantra or a special boon so he could complete this remarkable feat. The man was extremely pious and devoted, and he had been in his guru’s service for many years. Therefore, the guru gave him a leaf, folded many times until it was very small. He told his disciple, “Within this leaf is a secret formula which will enable you to walk on water. However, you must not open it because the formula inside is a secret.”

So the man agreed, and he took the folded leaf carefully in his hands and began his journey across the river. He was walking successfully on the water when
suddenly he was overcome by curiosity and doubt. What could be this secret formula? Is there really a secret inside? Is it a powder or a stone or some holy mantra printed? Where did his guru get it? His doubts got the best of him and he began slowly to open the leaf as he walked, careful lest any of the secret formula should spill out into the water. As soon as he unfolded the last piece to unveil the secret, he suddenly sank into the water and drowned. Inside the leaf was written the simple word, “faith.” It was not the leaf, nor any secret powder or mantra that enabled the devotee to accomplish a miracle. It was the strength of his faith in his guru and in the “boon” his guru had given him. As soon as that faith wavered and doubt crept in, his life was lost. This is the power of faith.

At this time of Guru Purnima, we must look at what really makes up the Guru-Disciple relationship - what makes it so special, so unique, so powerful and life-transforming?

The key is faith. Faith can work true miracles, and without it much of life is futile. The guru might be of infinite power, knowledge and compassion. Yet, without the faith of the disciple, the guru can do very little for him.

There is a beautiful poem that says:

As children bring their broken toys with tears for us to mend I brought my broken dreams to God, because He was my friend. But, instead of leaving Him in peace to work alone, I hung around and tried to help with ways that were my own. At last I snatched them back and cried, “How could you be so slow?” “My child,” He answered, “What could I do? You never did let go.”

That “letting go” is faith. If we can surrender to the guru with complete faith, he will transform our lives. However, if we “hang around” and doubt and think that we know better than he does, then we gain nothing.

**CHOOSING A GURU**

A guru should not be chosen haphazardly. Most people say that they “just knew” as soon as they met their guru. That is the way it should be. Our hearts should fill with joy in his presence. Our entire beings should feel like they are bathed in warm sunlight. We should instinctively know that he can take us where we need to go.

So, in the early stages, before we take a mantra, or before we officially make someone our guru, that is the time to watch and reflect: “Is he (or she) really the one?” However, once we know deep in our hearts and souls that the decision is right, then we should not look back. We should offer ourselves with full abandon at the feet of the guru, and our lives will become magic.

Many people today, especially in the West, are hesitant about what they see as “blind obedience” to the Guru. They feel that somehow they will be lesser people if they become obedient to a master. They don’t want to feel like “slaves.” I hear this so frequently by people who have been over-indoctrinated by the Western ideal of individuality. And yet, we must realize that we are living our lives as slaves of our own egos and vanity. We live in blind obedience to the call of our
senses and desires. We have blind faith in that which our minds and hearts tell us and we act accordingly. Yet, these false "masters" so frequently lead us astray. We act out of impulse, emotion or vanity and later regret it.

Let us realize that we are, as it is, acting in obedience to a master. Therefore, let us choose a master who will lead us to the light, not the darkness, a master who will lead us to wisdom, not ignorance, a master who will lead us to peace instead of pieces, and a master who will never give us an order we will later regret. Let us live our lives in obedience to the divine orders of our guru instead of in slavery to the volatile callings of our egos, desires and senses.

It is through the teachings of the Guru and through the grace of the Guru that we become masters of our minds, thoughts and senses. Only then can we truly be free.

The Guru Gita tells us: "Meditate with concentration upon the Guru’s form. Worship with devotion the Guru’s feet. Take the Guru’s teachings as sacred, perfect mantras and recite them diligently. Only through the Guru’s grace will you attain liberation.”

THE QUALITIES OF A DISCIPLE

People sometimes make the mistake of putting all of the responsibility on the Guru. We expect that we can continue to live our lives exactly as we want—along with our own egos, greed and vices—and yet the Guru will come, wave a magic wand and grant us instant peace, prosperity and enlightenment. It is not like that. The disciple must be dedicated, committed, faithful and assiduous in his/her sadhana.

A good disciple:

1. Always tells the truth to the Guru and never hides anything from the Guru.
2. Practices the teachings of the Guru with faith, discipline and regularity.
3. Follows the instructions of the Guru without argument. Questions, of course, can and should be asked when there are doubts or confusion in the disciple’s mind, but prior to asking any question the disciple should first deeply introspect to see whether the question really warrants the time and attention of the Guru or whether the question is simply to satisfy the ego or desires of the disciple.
4. Continues to grow and develop each day, making a commitment each morning to be more pure, more holy, and more divine every day.
5. Vows to live as a beautiful example and representative of the Guru.
   Disciples are the reflection of the Guru. So, if we truly love, revere and adore our Gurus we must pledge to live our lives as shining examples of their teachings and as pure reflections of their Divine lives.
6. Is humble in front of the Guru, accepting the Guru’s words (and sometimes reprimands) with surrender and humility.
7. Is ever ready to serve the Guru - any time of the day, any day of the week, any week of the year. Seva given by the Guru and performed for the guru is a rare and precious jewel on the road to God Realization. In fact, selfless, dedicated seva for the Guru is one of the straightest and clearest paths to ultimate moksha. We must never give up an opportunity to perform seva for our Gurus.

THE GURU OF NATURE

Another beautiful aspect of Guru Purnima is represented by the teaching of Dattatreya, who himself is regarded as a Guru of Gurus and even as an incarnation of God Himself. Dattatreya said that he had 24 Gurus, all manifestations of nature. From each of nature’s creations, he learned a different lesson, ranging from the selfless service of the fruit-bearing tree to the persistence of the raindrops.

Let us, too, on this day, look around us at God’s natural creation and ask what we can learn from Mother Nature. Rather than look upon Her as a commodity to be used and abused, let us look upon Her as a Guru from whom we receive countless lessons and blessings.

I pray that God may bestow His blessings of health, happiness, peace, prosperity and spiritual upliftment upon you all.

With love and blessings.

In the service of God and humanity,

Swami Chidanand Saraswati

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