

## The Guru



This month we prepare to celebrate the 80th birthday of the most exalted of gurus, Pujya Sri Swamiji Dayananda Saraswati. The extended celebrations of Pujya Swamiji's life planned in all

the gurukulams are not really for his benefit, but for our own, whereby we take the time to really understand and reflect on the wonder that Pujya Swamiji is~ and on our great fortune to be blessed with such an illustrious guru.

Understanding the guru is understanding oneself'. Gaining this understanding poses an interesting catch~22, similar to the statement in the Veda, which says, "svadhyayo'dhyetaavyah." The mandate that one must study one's own Veda is contained in the very Veda that one is supposed to study; Until one studies the Veda~ he or she does not know that the Veda is to be studied. Once a person studies the Veda~ the advice to study the Veda becomes redundant. Similarly, until one fully understands oneself: one cannot comprehend the guru; understanding the guru as *parabrahma* renders the pursuit of self-knowledge redundant.

The key to resolving this apparent *anava.vtha do.S'ha*~ the fallacy of infinite regression, lies in observing and following *vrddha vyavahara*, conventions practiced by elders, which they learnt from their elders. We rely on observing and learning by example from the actions of

the guru, the exalted *vrddha*, elder. The personage of the guru embodies what the guru teaches and represents. The guru embodies the knowledge of oneself as Ishvara, and teaches that the student is also limitless and whole.

The guru is defined as one who is a *mahavakya upade~akarta*, the unfolder of the identity between the *jiva* and Ishvara. The one who is able to effectively show that you are non-separate from Ishvara is a guru. That is why in the tradition, the guru is worshipped as Ishvara incarnate. Although the guru has a human form, when relating to the guru, the human element is not taken into consideration. For the teaching to bear fruit and be assimilated in the heart, the student has to learn to transcend any initial fixation on the "personality" of the guru, and instead shift the focus onto the person of the teacher as Ishvara. This change in the student's vision is brought about by *shraddha*, a devotional reverence to the words of the guru and the *shastra*, pending clarity and understanding. Contrary to popular belief, the student, not the teacher, benefits from the reverential attitude towards the guru. This is because *shraddha* is an important precursor in the gain of the knowledge. It equips the *shishya* with the infrastructure required for the suspension of all erroneous notions, beliefs, and complexes about oneself, so that the knowledge can take place without being impeded by one's own resistance.

In this manner, the guru-disciple relationship offers for reflection a series of interesting paradoxes. The guru is approached by the student to solve a problem that does not really exist -the problem of self-inadequacy. The self is not only eminently adequate -in fact it is whole, and complete, and the only

thing that exists that is worth reckoning. From the teacher's standpoint, the teacher is addressing a non-existent problem, that is much like being approached by a person who thinks he has been bitten by a rope-snake. When such a person approaches you screaming in agony, you look for signs of snakebite on his body. Not finding any fang marks on his person, when you ask him for more details about this snake, he takes you to the garden and identifies a piece of rope lying in the grass as the "snake." For the one who is convinced that he has been bitten by the rope-snake, no amount of contradicting this belief with reason or logic is going to work. The only thing there is to do is to humor the person's belief even as you get him to calm down enough for you to reveal to him that the "snake" that "bit" him is actually a piece of rope. This would require great patience and compassion on the part of the one who is free of the erroneous belief.

Likewise, when the student approaches the guru for freedom from *sam sara*, a life of constant striving to "become" acceptable, the guru being a fulfilled being, content with himself or herself has no agenda to teach other than a sense of compassion. To agree to teach the knowledge that "frees" the one who was never really bound in the first place, using words that the student recognizes and comprehends indeed demands extraordinary compassion. The guru does not see any problem; and the *shishya* does not see any solution that can be arrived at by one's self. The guru unfolds the nature of the *atma*, oneself, which is not an object of one's perception, as *Ishvara*, the cause of the universe. The teaching itself contains

many paradoxes -the knowledge is in the form of words used to convey that which is beyond words; the knowledge of oneself as Brahman happens through a thought form, *vrtti* in the mind, but the mind and intellection do not play any part as "agents" of the knowledge. In other words, since the self is already self-

revealing, self-knowledge is not "created." Therefore, one can say that the knowledge of oneself as a non-wanting person takes place in the mind, but not by the mind.

Being non-separate from the teaching, the guru is venerated as an embodiment of *Ishvara*, and becomes an altar of trust and surrender. In the *shishya*, at whose feet all complexes, fears, and ego-acrobatics are laid to rest. The guru becomes an effective altar of surrender precisely because he or she does not require this surrender.

The fourth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita says, "*tadviddhi pranipatena ,nariprasnena sevaya*" (4.34). Know that (*Ishvara* as yourself) through surrender, proper questioning, and *seva*. *Guru-seva*, or service to the guru as an integral part of the learning of oneself as a non-doer is perhaps the ultimate paradox. Often what leads one to the spiritual pursuit, much like Arjuna in the Gita, is being besotted with difficult choices. When one arrives at the teachings riddled with guilt and hurt, the knowledge that one is not a doer is as welcome as an oasis in the desert. Although the student acquires the knowledge, it is often riddled with doubt, vagueness, or error due to *raga-dvesha* (unbridled likes and dislikes) still reigning in the heart. *Guru-seva* is really self-*seva*, —it is offered to the one who does not need it, benefiting, instead the one who gives it by providing a myriad opportunities for emotional and spiritual growth. *Seva* helps the aspirant for spiritual knowledge to grow from doing whatever one likes, to liking whatever one does. In such a heart alone, freed of *raga-dveshas*, the knowledge abides. *Seva* opportunities, therefore, must be eagerly coveted and embraced. Such is the regard for *guru-seva* in the tradition that it is the only thing that is not renounced even after *sannyasa*, where one renounces everything. The *seva* to the guru continues, because of what the guru stands for in the tradition.