

**INTERIORITY:
THE FOUNDATION OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY
IN ASIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**

A REFLECTION IN PASTORAL THEOLOGY

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by Francis Acharya.
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Introduction

Someone has said somewhere — perhaps in one of the meetings of the bishops of Asia — that the Asian has learned to look to the Christian Church for his schooling, his medical care, his social welfare assistance, his need for aid in times of disaster of whatsoever kind. However, the Asian turns elsewhere, to the traditional religions of Asia, in the great and serious moments of life: birth, passage to adulthood, marriage and death. It is there he finds the answers to the deep quests and longings of the human spirit.

Does the Asian instinctively assert a difference — not an opposition, of course — between goodness and holiness? Traditionally he sees holiness only where the presence of the Transcendent, or the Absolute, or God becomes manifest in the life of the servant of God. This presence and relationship express themselves also in traditional ways: deep knowledge of the sacred writings, interiority, prayer, silence, and in a kind of renunciation without which no spirituality is true and real.

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This Paper offers some examples to show that in most Asian traditions only the spiritual experience of the teacher can lay claim upon the obedience — “hearing” — of the would-be disciple. It is an enterprise in pastoral theology, for it seeks to provide some part of an answer to the question why the effort of the Christian Churches in Asia has resulted in so few seeking Christian “discipleship.” While proclaiming a message of salvation and fulfilment clothed with the authority of divine revelation, has the herald of the Gospel forgotten or tended to ignore the Asian reality of personal interiority as the guarantor of spiritual truth?

I. The Context of the Reflection

“We have hundreds of Catholic schools, hospitals, and social welfare institutions of every kind. These are served by thousands of dedicated priests, religious and lay men and women. And yet, it seems that most of the people still see the Church simply as another benevolent association, one among many others.”

Bishop Peter Lei of Hong Kong

“The Church is seen as a very efficient and powerful organization at the service of the people but not as a community which diffuses above all a spiritual message, one of religious faith.”

Dom Bede Giffiths of India

“Because our people were the poorest and least educated, the missionaries made every effort to develop them, but this hid from the Muslims the spiritual side of our work and we were seen more as a developmental organization than a spiritual body, more as a society than a Church leading people to God.”

Bishop Joachim Rozario of Bangladesh

“Those (Buddhists) who are in contact with Christians and with Catholic and Protestant institutions often admire the social work of the missionaries, the quality of the education given in the schools, their care of the sick and of the lepers in particular, their interest in ethnic groups. Those who have had access to the Bible admire the spirit of renunciation shown by Christ, even if they affirm that they have not encountered it among Christians. They regard Christianity, in general, as a religion that rests more on faith than on personal effort, on rites than on inner spiritual progress.”

Father Marcello Zago of Laos

“Though the Church of Asia and Asian Christians have been praying and have many prayers and religious practices, especially on Sun-

days, has not the general impression been that Christians are good for efficiency, organization and discipline, for education and social service and development, but not for prayer, interiority, silence, and much less for contemplative prayer? For all our efforts and preaching we are not considered (even by our own) as primarily 'men of prayer'."

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II. The Guru: The Spiritual Father in the Hindu Tradition

by Francis Acharya

Background

As an alternative to spiritual father I have chosen "guru," its equivalent in the Hindu tradition. Spiritual fatherhood is a key concept in biblical revelation. It is not absent in the Hindu tradition, even in its very strict sense, and as such it is related to the word "guru" which occurs in Vedic literature for any person of importance, such as father, mother, teacher. "To the Master who has taught them the highest *brahman*, that beyond which there is nothing, the disciples say: 'You are indeed our father, for you ferry us across to the further shore, beyond the reach of ignorance'" (Prasna Up., VI, 8). And the Code of Manu explains: "The man who teaches the Veda, be it little or much, is called guru because of the benefits conferred by such instruction. The *brahman* who is the giver of birth for the sake of the Veda and teacher of prescribed duties becomes by law the father even of an aged man, though he himself may be young" (II, 149-50). The Institute of Vishnu (Max Mueller, Vol. 7) has this to say on our subject: "He who fills the ears with holy truths, who frees from all pains and confers immortality, let the student consider as his father and mother" (no. 47).

Yet, on the whole, spiritual fatherhood does not obtain in Hindu spirituality any place comparable with that it enjoys in Christianity. With Christ himself it is at the very center of his life and mission, and we can truly speak of an identity experience. It truly sums up the religious experience of the Word of God made flesh. It is the repeated experience of the Son of Man, an experience by which he came to realize himself, to realize his true self as Son of the Father, one with him, in the Holy Spirit, as it is recorded in the Gospel: at his baptism in the river Jordan, at his transfiguration on the mountain, and repeatedly in his prayer life, as when he was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit and he sang the blessedness of his unique sonship, or when he prayed at the Last Supper that the Father might set his seal on this sonship by giving it the glory which he, the Son, had with the Father before the world was made.

Yet, in spite of the unique theological quality of Christ's experience of the divine fatherhood, the spiritual father of the Christian tradition — and more so perhaps in its Western wing — has often shrunk so as to become a very particular type of person, one that belongs exclusively to the ecclesiastical world and, more strictly still, to such ecclesiastical institutions as seminaries, religious congregations, and monasteries. His function often merges with that of the confessor, be he an "ordinary" or an "extraordinary," though in some circumstances he cannot be the confessor of his spiritual sons. In its most widespread acceptance the spiritual father must also be distinct from the religious superior — even the abbot of a monastic community. Such a clear-cut understanding with its subtle distinctions could hardly fit the Hindu tradition!

In this connection it may be useful to make a general observation concerning Hinduism. By whatever way we approach it one is struck by its complexity. The Hindu tradition is indeed a vastly complex phenomenon. The word "tradition" itself has connotations very different from its strictly defined and authoritatively preserved Christian counterpart. To the Western Cartesian mind it appears as a motley of ideas, philosophies, and sectarian beliefs. Yet Indian masters see the same reality in a different perspective, as Sri Aurobindo put it: "That vast, rich, thousand-sided, infinitely pliable, yet very firmly structured system we call Hinduism." This essay on the guru may help us to see how he can be an intermediary, a helper to solve the problems of doctrine, and a mediator in reconciling the apparently conflicting schools of spirituality (or paths to salvation) and the *sadhanas* (or spiritual disciplines).

First, the complexity is certainly there, but, under the diversity of geographical, social, religious, and cultural traditions, behind the pluralism of peoples, languages, and customs, there is an unmistakable unity resting on many values. We will mention only one here, but it is exemplary for other fields. Nature plays an important part in this unifying process — unceasingly at work in Indian culture in spite of the widely different climatic conditions. It is the land more than the sea that has shaped the lives of the people of India. Its great rivers have been invested with sacredness, while their flow into the sea continues to this day to evoke the merging of the individual soul with the universal soul (Mund. Up., III, 2.8.). India's mountains have always been considered as areas of holiness calling man to the peaks of asceticism. Its forests have traditionally been the place of *gurukuls* or *ashrams*, where men and women retire for a life of meditation after they have performed their duties of householder.

Unity in diversity remains one of the dominant features of India as a whole and more particularly of her approach to the ultimate realities. It is asserted in a Vedic aphorism — which is universally accepted and unceasingly quoted — *Ekam Sat* (Reality is one), *Vipraah bahudha vadanti* (sages speak of it in many ways). In spite of this diversity and complexity — and some would say syncretism — it remains true to say that spirituality as a value of life is a conspicuous feature of the genius of India and probably its most outstanding contribution to the life of the world community. India's pride, increasingly acknowledged by the West, though not always for its most authentic expressions, is her God-awareness. Inherited of old from her *rishis* and sages, it has been carried along the ages in the life of her people in spite of the vicissitudes of her history, and it is still very much alive today. Gurus are the most influential agents of this God-awareness, while the Vedas, the record of their experiences and their spiritual attainment, are its most revered embodiment. The Vedas are a vast complex of spiritual and metaphysical intuitions and deep psychological insights, but also of religious and philosophical agnosticism as well as magic and even superstition. The Vedas rest on a few fundamental experiences. The supreme Reality is beyond the reach of human apprehension. It is one-without-a-second, beginningless, endless. It is supreme fulness of existence, consciousness and bliss, *sat-cit-ananda*. It is at once the ground of all fleeting existence and the Self of man's own self. It is the most fulfilling experience of man, yet also a mystery of which the least inadequate human expression is: "Not this, not this" (Brih. Up., II. iii.6).

How exactly this mystery is related to man and his quest for fulfillment has been a matter for fierce controversy down the ages, some schools even rejecting the Upanishadic teaching. But the basic intuition of the transitory nature of all phenomenal existence, accompanied by its natural corollary of a profound respect for anyone, man or woman, who has the courage to translate it into action by embracing a life of total renunciation and finding joy and peace in the constant awareness of the Presence on which all things rest, remains to this day a conspicuous feature of the Hindu way of life. It shows no sign of being outmoded but witnesses even in our own days to a renewed vitality.

What Matters is Realization

Another universally shared view in India about the spiritual quest is that of the *margas*, the paths that lead to spiritual attainment: *jnana marga* — the way of knowledge or wisdom, *bhakti marga* — the way of loving devotion or commitment, and *karma marga* — the way of action

or service. The Western view of these paths has been hardened somehow. They have been cast into two patterns often experienced as conflicting: the active life and the contemplative life, and often the distinction seems to rest exclusively on rules of external behavior, of activity and rest or non-involvement. The Indian *margas*, while preserving their distinctive features, are generally considered or experienced as complementary. Though one may predominate, it is felt that they belong to the psychological and spiritual make-up of humankind. In another respect they represent different or successive phases of human life. The Western ecclesiastical classification of actives and contemplatives is not found in India. The prevailing view is rather that what matters is "realization."

This may require leaving the world, at least for a time, sometimes for a lifetime. One can withdraw from the mainstream of life and remain totally non-involved as Ramana Maharshi in our own days. Or, after some years of extreme *tapasya*, asceticism, one can turn again to the world and become involved in various activities: in spreading the message of Divine Life as Ramdas from his ashram on the West Coast in South India, or as Swami Sivananda in the Himalayas. One can consecrate one's life to higher education like Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan near Calcutta, or to the more ambitious enterprise of creating a new man, a new humanity, like Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. One can also enter the field of social uplift like Vinoba Bhave, or even politics like Mahatma Gandhi. All these are spheres of activities for true gurus, where they can reveal their ability to awaken us to a higher consciousness, their charism for helping to realize the all-pervading Presence. In all these fields, in this century, they have had a deep influence, not only on the revival of Hinduism but also on the renaissance of art, literature, and ultimately on the re-birth of India through *swaraj* — self-rule. And is it not from them also that the world movement towards putting an end to colonialism as well as other forms of domination of one person over another, one nation over another has gathered much of its strength? And is it not even now leading us all to that universal brotherhood for which we are longing, the new man, recognized by all as son of God, *harijan*, according to Mahatma Gandhi, or *amritasya putra*, son of immortality, in the words of the Vedas?

While the guru can be considered as the backbone or the skeleton of Hinduism, the spiritual quest in Hinduism has been described as hunting for the guru. It has also been said that the guru is the symbol of Indian culture, of the entire religion, of the spiritual heritage of India. In Christianity pre-eminence goes to God who takes the initiative in speaking to

man and in planning out and launching and working out his economy of salvation. And ultimately this is entrusted to the Church. In the *Sanatana Dharma*, the Eternal Order or Law, what Hinduism claims to be, salvation is realized, perceived and apprehended by *rishis*, *munis*, acharyas, or gurus. Guruship is a freely formed institution emerging from their experiences and preserved in the Sacred Scriptures and spiritual writings, as the prophetic life or the priesthood are preserved in our Scriptures and in the lives and sayings and rules of the monastic fathers. But their influence seems to have penetrated more deeply and more permanently into the personal and social life of the people. To treat exhaustively of the guru we would have to turn not only to sacred writings but also to such fields as history, arts, psychology, sociology, and even politics.

To sum up, it remains true to say that the guru is the nearest Indian equivalent to the spiritual father in the Christian tradition, yet it is far less confined to the professionally religious sphere of life which is his milieu in the West. Like God, whom he makes present, the guru is an all-pervading reality, permeating even the profane spheres of life. This was brought home to us recently. A mechanic of our neighborhood in Kerala, a Hindu and father of several children, had been working for some months at coupling a second-hand Kirloskar oil engine with a generator for operating our milk cooler. As he failed repeatedly to find his way, one day in great perplexity (he had burned the coil for the second time) he exclaimed: "I must go and see my guru." By this he meant the man who had taught him the trade. But he expected from him not simply a technical advice but also a grace, a blessing, without which he feared he would not be able to bring his work to completion.

It would not be fair, however, to absolutize the ideal of the Indian guru. Indians themselves have their own reservations about them. Answering the question, Who is the True Guru? the *Bhavan's Journal* of Bombay, the fortnightly journal of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the most influential cultural association of India, recently quoted Sri Samartha Ramadas, a Maharashtrian saint, as saying: "Talking of gurus, they are legion. Men with mantras, mystic powers, men with minds festering with desires, sorcerers and tricksters with nimble tongues. No good ever comes of them. They are surely not dispensers of liberation. One upsets our minds, the money grabber; one derides others, the curious minded; one has no devotion, the hot-headed; one is intent on pleasures and one creates troubles; these are not men to confer emancipation. One whose non-attachment is superficial, whose mind is bristling with desires, one who without practice holds forth on Vedanta, these too are no good. The one who matches his words to deeds and behavior is the right guru. One

given to true devotion, realized, discriminating, dispassionate, learned and subtle, such a guru alone can give you the highest place" (*Bhavan's Journal* XXIII, Bombay, 1977, p. 40).

Moreover, if we understand the guru in his essential function of spiritual guide or preceptor, it would not be right to describe him as an exclusively Indian institution. On the contrary, all the great religions have made a place for spiritual teachers and know accordingly the master-disciple relationship. Swami Vivekananda has brought out its central place in religion. "It is a significant fact that where this relation still exists between the teacher and the taught, there also gigantic spiritual souls grow, but in those who have thrown it off, religion is made into a mere diversion. In nations and churches where this relation between teacher and taught is not maintained, spirituality is almost an unknown value" (*Complete Works*, IV, 28).

The Guru in Vedic Society

The root of the word "guru" is the same as that of the Latin *gravis*, heavy, a word which easily takes on spiritual connotations, as the English "grave," or, in the Bible, the Aramaic *Kabod*, heavy, which came to designate the glory or the radiance of God. In the Indian tradition, when used for a person, guru designates a man of weight, a venerable or respectable person, as father, mother, or even simply a relative older than one's self. The word comes closer to the modern usage to designate a spiritual person or a preceptor, one who teaches the law and religion and from whom the student receives the initiatory mantra with the sacred thread, the ceremony by which he becomes a brahmachari, to lead the chaste life of a student of sacred knowledge. Thus the guru as a distinct person of Indian society appears first in the world of education. He is a teacher, a preceptor. Another word which designates the same function and occurs even earlier than "guru" is "acharya": "He who knows the rules of right behavior," the spiritual guide or teacher whose privilege it is to invest the student with the sacred thread and to instruct him in the Vedas, in the law of sacrifice and religious mysteries (Manu II, 140 and 171). The two words have been used indiscriminately, though acharya is often reserved for a learned person. But to this day acharyas are considered as gurus. Yet the gurus are often more charismatic figures, and they have generally stolen the show, and more so beyond the borders of India. In the Upanishads the guru is described as an elder who is to be approached with reverence by the *brahmana*, the *brahmin* student. He is the teacher from whom *brahma*-knowledge is to be sought and for this he is expected to be versed in the scriptures and established in *brahman*:

Having scrutinized the worlds won by works,
let a *brahmana* arrive at non-attachment.
That which is not made is not won by works.
For the sake of this knowledge, let him approach,
with sacrificial fuel in hand,
a teacher who is learned in the Scriptures and established
in *brahman*.

§ § §

Unto him who has approached in due form,
whose mind is tranquil and who has attained peace,
Let the teacher who knows teach in its very truth
that knowledge about *brahman*
by which one knows the Imperishable One, the true.

Mund. Up., I.ii.12-13

Buddha himself describes the guru as “The *brahmana* whose self has been cleansed of sins, who is free from conceit, whose nature is not stained by passions, who is self-controlled, who has studied the Vedanta and lived a chaste life, he indeed is the man who can expound the doctrine of *brahman*” (quoted by Radhakrishnan, *The Princile Upanishads*, p. 679).

a) The Educator of Ancient India

Education in Vedic India as all over the ancient world was not for the masses. It was generally conducted away from the cities, in sylvan retreats with the simplicity of life which this required, in an atmosphere of recollection and serenity conducive to mental concentration. Apart from the environment, the real creative force in education came from the teacher, the guru. The earliest gurus belonged to the *brahmin* caste whose exclusive privilege it was to be the teachers of the Vedas, of its rituals and its chants. But when, with the Aranyakas and the Upanishads, the interest turned from the seen to the unseen, from the sacrifices believed to support the cosmic order (while enhancing the devotees' earthly life) to the realization of the non-earthly *atman* within him, the guru assumed new qualities and so did his relationship with the students.

The guru-shishya relationship is at the heart of Hinduism, both in the early tradition which is seen as a continuous revelation based on sacred texts, *sruti*, handed on by the *rishis*, the sages who have “heard” the Veda, and in the post-Vedic era of *bhakti* which opened the path to realization to millions. In the Upanishads, traditions can be learned only

by hearing, and the guru is he who knows how to utter it, how to recite it with its correct rhythm, vibrations, and intonations. Education is based upon an individual treatment of the student by his teacher with whom he has to live in order to imbibe the inward method of the teacher, the secrets of his efficiency, the spirit of his life and work. The method he is to use is *upasana* meditation by which the student approaches his subject — the word he has heard or read — mentally, for concentrated and deep reflection. The brahmachari was living with his guru, not simply as a boarder for a set number of semesters, but as a member of his family. His routine duties provided a number of experiences. He was to go daily to collect wood from the forest and bring it home for tending the sacred fire. We see the students approaching their teacher with fuel in hand as a token that they are ready to serve him and tend his household fire, and this also is food for meditation: "The brahmachari puts on fuel to enkindle the mind with fire, with holy luster."

The brahmachari's next duty was to tend the teacher's house and cattle. Tending the house was training for him in self-help, in the dignity of labor, by manual service for his teacher and the student brotherhood. Tending cattle was education through a craft as part of the highest liberal education. The students received a valuable training in the love of the cow as the animal most serviceable to man, and in the industry of rearing cattle and dairy farming, with all the other advantages it gave of outdoor life and robust physical exercise. Another of his duties was to go out on a daily round of begging. It was not the selfish begging for his own benefit, but for the ashram to which he belonged. Its educative value is explained in the Satapatha Brahmana which points out that it is meant to bear fruit in creating in the student a spirit of renunciation and humility (XI, 3.3.5).

In these schools the brahmacharis came for their period of student-ship proper, leading to the second *ashrama* or stage of life, that of the householder. But some would prefer to continue and dedicate their whole life to the pursuit of learning and religion in the spirit of this passage in Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad: "Wishing only for that world (*brahman*), mendicants leave their homes. Knowing this the people of old did not wish for offspring. . . and they, having risen above the desire for sons, wealth, and new worlds, wandered about as mendicants" (IV, iv.22).

The influence of the *gurukuls* was not confined to the small group of students who lived with the master; it extended to society. We hear of kings who come from distant regions to sit at the feet of the master in

search of enlightenment. Sometimes the guru-disciple relationship arises between husband and wife — Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi — or between father and son — Uddálaka Aruni and Svetaketu. Sometimes it is transferred to the sphere of the gods, as in Katha Upanishad where it is Yama, the god of death himself, who leads Naciketas from the desire of earthly life to that of a life of good works and finally to enlightenment about the great transition, the crossing over to the further shore, by which man conquers re-death. We also find in the sacred writing philosophical debates in the form of competitions as they still take place today. These were a favorite practice among monks and wandering mendicants, a means by which they spread their own beliefs and views.

b) The Bestower of Initiation

The conferring of brahmacharya *diksha* or of sannyasa is one of the fundamental duties of the guru. Because no one can become a guru without having a disciple, it is true to say that one becomes a guru by giving *diksha* to the first disciple. But, at the same time, by this the guru recognizes the spiritual worth of the seeker, his fitness to embark on the path that leads to liberation. This is the formal duty of the guru, one by which he finds himself rooted in the heart of institutional religion: its *samskaras* or sacraments — sixteen in number — which mold the life of a Hindu from the conception in the womb of his mother to the burning of his corpse after death on the burial ground.

The guru's proper *samskaras* are *upanayama* — the conferring of the sacred thread — and sannyasa, the great renunciation, of which the contents are remarkably described as unsullied brahmacharya (chastity), true *vairagya* (non-attachment), perfect *jñana* (wisdom), and the desire for selfless service (*niskama seva*). As a whole, Hindu *samskaras* have remained close to nature; they make greater use of its symbolism (the physical realities of nature, of matter) than our Christian sacraments. The whole cosmos and its four elements (earth, water, air, fire) are made to contribute to the initiation of man into the most significant stages and states of life. *Upanayama* is the sacramental imparting of a new birth from which the candidate emerges as a *dvija*, a twice-born. It is also the guru's formal admission of the student which makes him into a brahmachari, a student of sacred knowledge, one who treads the path leading straight to *moksha*, salvation. Sannyasa *diksha* comes as the seal of brahmacharya *diksha*. It elevates the brahmachari to a higher sphere of spiritual attainment described as liberation from bondage, including social obligations — even the most conventional ones. Through increasing God-awareness the sannyasin becomes an embodiment of truth:

“One who craves not and hates not, one who is above all opposites and therefore is established in freedom.” “By the grace of the Spirit, he sees the Spirit in all things and therein finds fulfilment...liberty...deliverance from the oppression of pain” (Bhag. Gita, V, 2-3, and VI, 20-23).

Both these initiations consist of very elaborate rituals lasting several days: fast and *pranayama*, recitation of *jabamala* (rosary), mantras, fire sacrifice, readings, and sacramental actions. But, on the whole, the kernel of their structure is very close to, if not identical with, the consecration of the monk in use in the Eastern churches. They consist essentially of prayers, readings of the sacred scriptures, and sacramental actions. The following are common to the two traditions: tonsure, stripping, bathing, and clothing. Proper to Hinduism is the giving of the mantra, whispered in the ear of the seeker. This can be a name of God, but it is not necessarily a prayer. The sound (*sabdham*), with its vibrations, is often the determining element which will be the vehicle of the guru's grace or *shakti*, imparting spiritual energy to the disciple.

But again in this matter of guru and the initiation he gives we find ourselves confronted with that “infinitely pliable, yet very firmly structured system we call Hinduism.” Hardly any of the prominent gurus of our time perform these *samskaras*. They are left to professional *sannyasins*. At Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, the guru known as the President of the Divine Life Society, reserves to himself only the giving of the mantra and some prayers and chants. Further still, a considerable number of gurus have ceased giving *diksha* altogether. Sri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi, who saw thousands of disciples who came to them from India and overseas, never gave *diksha* nor did they receive any disciple in the traditional sense. They held that God is the only guru and that no human being can be a substitute for him. Though they did not deny the possibility of a spiritually experienced person helping another along the same path, they insisted that the real source of help is transcendent. And more, some of them, like Sri Ramakrishna, refused to think of themselves as gurus in spite of their many disciples, and this for the same reason: they saw God as the only guru. This was also the case of Gandhiji, the Mahatma, who occasionally referred to his own disciple Vinobaji as his guru. For the Sikhs the sacred scripture is the only guru: “Gurugranth.” For others guru is anyone or anything you choose to induct yourself into spiritual life or mystic experience. Anything through which one approaches illumination is guru.

The same flexibility is manifested in the diversity of manners of conferring *diksha*. It is not that the *samskaras* are depreciated or abandoned, but that they are transcended. In the ancient monastic orders which took their origin in the eighth century from Sankaracharya and the great acharyas who created the Vedantic schools, *brahmacharya diksha* and *sannyasa diksha* are still indispensable for all their members. This remains the rule in most of the modern ashrams which owe their origin to a particular guru. Yet in the world of contemporary gurus where their mission is understood consisting almost exclusively in the awakening of divine consciousness in the aspirants — even when they themselves have received a full-fledged *sannyasa diksha* — several other ways also recognized by tradition will be used, depending on the guru's own view and on the capacity or the life situation of the disciple.

A most common way of imparting *diksha* is by whispering the mantra in the ear. This mantra becomes then the center of the seeker's devotion, and it is usually kept secret. He repeats it over and over again and concentrates upon it at the time of formal initiation. This is not magic. Its nature is that it has been given by the guru to whom he has surrendered and that it is his own. *Diksha* is also given by contact or touch and by a glance which establishes a spiritual communion and by a word which awakens a sense of the Divine in the disciple. In the *shaktipath diksha* the guru's charismatic power enters into the disciple, sometimes unexpectedly even at a first meeting, sometimes after a long time, sometimes also simply by thought when the disciple is physically distant from him. What is essential and common to all such initiations is that something of the consciousness of the self-realized man enters into the eager consciousness of the disciple. This can be sudden, even dramatic. A story is told of Swami Vivekananda. One day as he was sitting in *samadhi*, a man attracted by his recollection paid homage to him by touching his feet. Vivekananda came to his normal consciousness and, realizing what had happened, exclaimed: "My dear friend! What have you done? Your whole life will now be changed." And indeed it turned out to be so. The man gave up his profession, entrusted his wife and child to his relatives, and became a sannyasin. When he touched the feet of the swami in deep meditation, a spiritual power had come to him which transformed his life. It is difficult not to think here of our Lord performing a healing miracle when his garment was touched by the sick woman whose faith literally stole away his healing power.

c) Teacher of Meditation

The guru's function is not confined to giving *dikshas*, even if they are charismatic. He is originally an educator, a teacher, and he remains

today very much so. Education in ancient India included of course the three Rs, but its aim was sacred knowledge as it had been crystalized in the Vedas. The Rig Veda, the most ancient, consists mainly of hymns to be chanted at the daily or seasonal ceremonies, sacrifices, and ritual observances. These hymns are the work of men trying to come to terms with the creation by personifying in the form of gods the powers at work in it. All along there is an underlying search for understanding these as diverse manifestations of one supreme God, of Divinity itself. This search becomes more insistent in the Brahnanas and Aranyakas where questions arise about the nature of the gods themselves. It reaches its climax in the Upanishads, which means "approaches," but they are in reality the consumation of Vedic teaching — centered on the very nature of existence. They establish the ancient equivalence felt between the human and the divine world on a new foundation, the assumed identity between the individual soul, *atman*, and the universal soul, *brahman*.

This ultimately provided the real purpose of education: attainment of the highest knowledge, saving knowledge, leading to *mukti*, salvation. But the first task of the teacher was to train the student in *upasana*, a meditation in which importance is given to various objects of meditation. The whole process of meditation was framed into four steps: *sravana*, *manana*, *nididhyasana*, and *darshana*, already found in the famous colloquy between the sage Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi on the *atman*, the Self:

Mark well, it is not for the love of the All
 that the All is dearly loved,
 rather it is for the love of the Self
 that the All is dearly loved.
 Mark well, it is the Self that should be seen,
 that should be heard,
 the Self that should be thought on
 and deeply pondered over, Maitreyi.
 Mark well, by seeing — *darsana* — the Self,
 by hearing it — *sravana* —
 by meditating on it — *manana* —
 by pondering deeply on it — *nididhyasana*
 is this whole universe known.

Brihad. Aranya. Up., II.iv.5

It may be interesting to observe here how the four steps towards the attainment of supreme knowledge of the Upanishads are close to, if not identical with, the four rungs of Western monastic *lectio divina*: *lectio*,

meditatio, oratio, contemplatio. It seems that the two traditions have discovered or created from their origins the same path towards realization or communion with God. That a similar itinerary of the mind has been devised quite independently and even several centuries earlier by the *rishis* of India suggests that we have here a fundamental experience of humankind in its quest for God.

Sravana means hearing. It is the hearing by listening to the instruction of the teacher or by reading. In its highest form it consists in receiving through the ear of the heart the knowledge that vanquishes sorrow. The knowledge thus received through the ear was aptly called *sruti*, "what has been heard," which is the term still used for revealed knowledge corresponding to our Bible. *Manana* corresponds to *meditatio*. It is the work of the *manas*, the mind, its natural activity: a searching for understanding in the process of assimilation through deliberation and reflection. It is the most active stage of meditation. It is known as *svadhyaya* when it turns to be more of a study. *Nididhasana* is the highest stage of meditation proper; it leads straight to realization, the realization of the truth. It has been defined authoritatively as "the steady stream of consciousness of the one Reality" — we could say initial contemplation. The fourth stage we have indicated here, *darsana*, is not usually included in the lists, but it is the universally acknowledged goal of the three other steps. It is known by diverse names: realization, illumination. We have chosen *darsana*, the vision, as the sacrament of the contemplative realization of God. As the Bhagavad Gita puts it: "When he sees me in all and he sees all in me" (VI, 30).

Upasana meditation is thus a mental approach which looks at things not for the sake of analysis but in the light of their relation to the ultimate reality, the light of unity. We could point to a similar experience in the Christian tradition: "A monk is one who feels himself one with all men, who sees himself in every man" (Evagrius). It is in this sense that meditation brings about an inner transformation, a becoming. The personality is elevated by an inner growth and expansion. Realization through purification and refinement culminates in identification, in oneness. The light of contemplation expands the consciousness in God, as Gregory the Great wrote of Saint Benedict. Such contemplative knowledge and communion are also experienced in the Jesus Prayer as an inner light shining in the heart which becomes thus the place of God, the place of the vision of God, as he makes himself present to his devotee. This establishes him in his full self-realization, as the image of God. The Indian tradition speaks of the "experience of pure light by concentration on the lotus of the heart," in the encounter of the Self.

The main task of the guru consists, therefore, in developing and strengthening the mind of the brahmachari student for the acquisition of the highest knowledge. This is the fruit of the training in meditation. It includes, of course, yoga, defined by Pātanjali as *citta vritti nirodha*, the arresting of the fluctuations of the mind. Yoga has its own three stages of meditation following *ekagrata*, one-pointedness, which is the stilling of the mind when the inner gaze, usually restless, is made to rest still between the eyebrows. Our three stages are: *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*. They are, in fact, three degrees of concentration. In the first the mind is still struggling to concentrate on its object. In the second the distracting images are shut out and the mind is fixed on its object, but there is effort, strain, and there remains a conscious self-direction. In the third, *samadhi*, concentration is effortless and the object alone shines in a new light while the subject appears, as it were, to have merged with the object.

d) Guide to Realization

Again here we should not take *samadhi* too easily for granted; nor should we think of all ashrams and *gurukuls* as turning out realized men every year as our colleges turn out graduates. The Upanishads themselves tell us of the shortcomings of both disciples and gurus. Svetaketu on his return home as a fully initiated brahmachari who had studied the holy Vedas for twelve years is found by his father, "proud of his learning and having a great opinion of himself." He is then told: "Have you asked for that knowledge whereby is heard what is not heard ... whereby is known what is not known?" And when the father explains this, the young man replies: "Certainly my honored masters knew not this themselves. If they had known, why would they not have told me?" And then follows the exchange of questions and answers on the essence of the fruit of the banyan tree and the salt in the water, leading to the great realization of Svetaketu. It is exemplary of the Upanishads' teaching on the indwelling Spirit:

"Bring me a fruit from this banyan tree."

"Here it is, father."

"Break it."

"It is broken, Sir."

"What do you see in it?"

"Very small seeds, Sir."

"Break one of them, my son."

"It is broken, Sir."

"What do you see in it?"

"Nothing at all, Sir?"

Then his father spoke to him: "My son, from the very essence in the seed which you cannot see comes in truth this vast banyan tree."

"Believe me, my son, an invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Atman. YOU ARE THAT."

"Explain more to me, father," said Svetaketu.

"So be it, my son. Place this salt in water and come to me tomorrow morning."

Svetaketu did as he was commanded, and in the morning his father said to him: "Bring me the salt you put into the water last night." Svetaketu looked into the water, but could not find it, for it had dissolved.

His father then said: "Taste the water from this side. How is it?"

"It is salt."

"Taste it from the middle. How is it?"

"It is salt."

"Taste it from that side. How is it?"

"It is salt."

"Look for the salt again and come again to me."

The son did so, saying: "I cannot see the salt. I only see water."

His father then said: "In the same way, O my son, you cannot see the Spirit, atman. But in truth he is here."

"An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. THOU ART THAT!

TATVAM ASI."

Chand. Up., VI.vii and viii

The gurus warn their disciples against seeking mere learning, mere book knowledge, "for that is mere weariness of the tongue" (Brihad. Up., IV.iv.2). "Not by the study of the Vedas is the *atman* attained, nor by intelligence, nor by much book learning" (Katha Up., II.23). And the disciples, some at least, are aware of it. One confesses to a sage: "I am learned in the Scriptures, *mantravid*, but I have no knowledge of the *atman*, *atmavid*. I have heard from persons like you that he who knows the *atman* vanquishes sorrow. I am in sorrow. Lead me then, I pray, beyond the reach of sorrow" (Chand. Up., VII.i.3).

In the case of Svetaketu it was actually his own father, father by the first birth, who became his guru, as he led his son to that experience which each one of us has to make and no one can make for us. By this the guru reveals himself not only as a teacher of meditation but also as a guide to realization.

The dialectic method in favor with the *rishis* for this purpose consisted in giving an enigmatic definition of Brahman, one that would

prompt questions from the listener. The puzzle of the definition proposed lay often in the restricted, sometimes minute, field of reflection it offered to the student: the little seed, the glass of salted water. But this narrowing down resulted in the concentration of his thought. As new objects appear when they are caught in a beam of light, new questions surged in his mind which led him, through deeper insights and interiorization, to a unifying knowledge of the world and of all things. And from the Self that indwells all things dawned the mysterious unity: "The Self that indwells all things is within you," the inner realization of the oneness of *brahman* and *atman*, of the ultimate reality of the universe and of his own self. "This, my *atman* within the heart, is that *brahman*."

Atman is above, Atman is below
Atman is North and South, East and West.
Atman is the whole universe.
He who sees, knows and understands this,
who finds in Atman the Spirit,
his love and his pleasure and his union and his joy
becomes a Master of himself. His freedom then is infinite.

Chand. Up., VII.xxv.2

Contrary to what was often held in the past, Western thinkers now generally agree that no school of thought understood this identity in terms of pantheism. And in that sense no school broke away from the authentic Upanishadic experience by which the mind transcends the data offered for observation to penetrate into the deeper layers of inner awareness. Yet for this, two ways were followed. One is "apophatic"; it consists in denying all the limitations or restrictions which would go against the identity of the subjects and the Absolute. It is not the individual *atman* which is identical with *brahman*, observes Suzanne Siauve, but the subject freed from all his conditionings, the idiosyncrasies that make him appear as individual, including his impression of being different from the object of his own knowledge which is precisely the ground of his being. The other path preserves the distinction between *atman* and *brahman* and understands the identity in terms of a relationship. *Tatvam asi* ("Thou are that") does not mean identity between two ultimate realities. It means that God is the soul of my soul, the spirit of my spirit, the support of my being in an eternal dependence on his love.¹

It is this last interpretation that puts more emphasis on the teaching and the role of the guru. His task it is to reveal to the disciple the unity of the Vedas, to make him aware of their convergence towards perfect har-

mony which is also perfect knowledge of God. His aim in opening the mind of the disciple to the knowledge of the greatness of God is to awaken in him *bhakti*, devotion, a devotion which is illumined through and through by knowledge. The true guru thus leads his disciples according to their capacity, regulating the hours of study and meditation, of work and service for their growth *jointly* in knowledge and love. But in the *bhakti marga* this is above all the fruit of divine grace; the guru is only the instrument of this work. From him is expected primarily the right interpretation of the Vedas. Madhva, one of the most eminent representatives of this school, gives great freedom to his disciples in the choice of their guru. If they do not find any experienced, competent, true guru, they should rather seek their own way to realization with the occasional help of devout and experienced persons. In case they discover that their guru is really not competent, they should seek a more competent guru, and for this, he adds, there is no need to ask the former's permission.

e) The Mediator of Divine Love

The *bhakti* movements conceive the relationship of the devotee to God in terms of grace and love, a relationship eminently personal. But the *bhaktas* speak also of *guru bhakti*, love and devotion for the guru, and they seek the grace of the guru. By this they do not equate the guru with God, for they hold unambiguously God's transcendence. They introduce, so to say, within the devotee's relationship with God new qualities which turn out to be channels of divine grace and love. The guru becomes God's instrument for the disciple, his representative in the strict sense of making him present to the devotee. This sacred character is bestowed on him through a *diksha*, a sacramental initiation which like the other *samskaras* both symbolizes and confers on him the capacity of being true mediator.

In *Saiva Siddhanta*, which stands closer to Christianity than any other Hindu religious system and represents the high level of India's deeply religious experience, God is love; in this school, rituals as well as beliefs make the guru a channel of divine love. The *diksha*, initiation ceremony, expresses clearly the transfer of power coming from God. And when the guru lays his hand on the head of the disciple to bestow on him the sacred initiation, this hand is no more his own hand; it is God's hand. The preparatory rituals have made his hand into a vehicle for the divine descent through a consecration comparable to that of the *murtis*, those images of stone or metal to whom daily worship is offered. The spiritual relationship of the guru with the disciple originates from a divine initiative. The disciple should not think it is he who discovers his

own guru, through his own searching. It is Siva, God himself, who comes to him through the guru who is made to meet him. The unseen Lord, appearing in visible form as guru, lends his aid with motherly love to his devotees. Sometimes God appears directly in a vision to the devotee who has been seeking without finding. It is God who seeks the devotee, indeed he literally longs for him, as much as the cow, when her udder is swollen with milk, looks for her calf and calls it. "When I knew not his form, even then he fixed his love on me, planted himself within my thought and flesh and thus made me his" (Manikkavacakar). The guru is grace incarnate. The world does not realize that Siva's appearance in the human form of a guru is like a decoy for the the purpose of snaring man to his side. The *Sastras* themselves require the divine guru for their elucidation; therefore he ought to be sought after by every aspirant who desires to be delivered. To secure this liberation God's unseen presence in the soul as its light does not suffice. His grace manifested through the guru is necessary.

In the *Vaishnavatie* school of Ramanuja that spread to North India, where it gained the allegiance of Kabir and is still very much alive today in the Kabir *panths* or ashrams, the devotion is more centered on the person of the guru known as divine teacher. He is believed to be more than a mere channel of the Divine. The short cut to God is *prapatti*, surrender, abandonment of the devotee to God, which is experienced as a gift of himself, accepted by God who takes charge of him who makes such an unconditional surrender. *Bhakti* should not be of the monkey type, which clings to God and guru by the devotee's own exertion, like the baby monkey holding his mother round her waist while she jumps from branch to branch, but of the cat type, that is, by giving oneself completely to God, like a kitten held in its mother's mouth. As a man in time of famine offers himself to be the slave of the master who would care for feeding him, the devotee makes himself the servant of God who will henceforth feed him.

The devotee who surrenders to the guru, overwhelmed by God's grace, experiences liberation from maintaining himself by force. By the constant exercise of asceticism and of good works, as well as by concentration, and in the awareness of his total powerlessness, he joyfully lays down his burdens at the feet of the guru. And God who is love feels bound, by such a surrender, to lead his devotee to salvation. In the ritual which consecrates the disciple's surrender — *samasrayana* — a challenging substitute to our monastic vows — the guru holds the part of the witness. He introduces the disciple to God, prays for him, in his name, even asking pardon for his former sins, and finally gives him a new

name, not ending with *ananda*, bliss, as is the case with many of our swamis, but with *dasa*, servant, slave. And this expresses his new condition, his new state, following the consecration. More interesting still for us Christians, this *diksha* does not simply bind the disciple to God. It creates a bond with the whole community of those who have gone through the same consecration, and particularly between the guru and the disciple. This bond is experienced as a spiritual solidarity; the *prapat-ti* — the disciple's surrender — rests on the guru's own surrender to God. His surrender to God is truly the disciple's security. He carries the burden of all his disciples and, with his own, entrusts them to God. The guru is described as *Vedanta Decika*, the fearful lion king of the mountains, moving freely, unchallenged by any other power and carrying with him in his mane all the little parasites that rest in it. Some of us would prefer another image to convey the guru-shishya relationship!

The guru's function as mediator takes on here a new dimension, unique in Indian thought which is dominated by the belief in reincarnation. According to the law of *karma*, man is the maker of his own destiny. His life is the outcome of this rigorous law; it is the sum total, or rather the balance sheet, of profit and loss of his own actions, good and evil. Strictly speaking, no one can do anything for anyone else. This view tends to leave no place for any fellowship of sharing and ultimately for any deep relation bearing on one's destiny, as our neighbor is for us only the instrument, or rather the witness, of a destiny which we have to undergo.

The guru-disciple relationship in Ramanuja's Vaishnavism does away with the law of *karma* by acknowledging the guru's role as mediator, a function for which he is consecrated. On account of this he literally takes charge of the disciple, even to the point of suffering for his sins; he has also special power to make intercession for him. As a counterpart to this and as a result of the new relationship that has been created, the disciple is expected to pray for his guru. Eventually, he has even the duty to point out his failure to remain on the right path. This relationship consecrated by the *diksha* is no more subject to external circumstances; it is rooted in the Absolute. Madhva's vision of all beings in the realm of salvation is one of interrelationships of gurus and disciples, in an increasing process of receiving the Divine Light from each other.

Deviations?

While this understanding of the guru prevailing in the *bhakti* movements — the most influential in Hinduism — shows the deepest insights into the relationship of the guru with the disciple and of both with

God, it is on account of the implications of this view that the guru tradition of India is exposed to real deviations. The common man seeks mediations and the assurance of quick advances on the path to salvation. His guru will then easily clothe himself or be endowed by the disciple with divine powers. He is made the channel through which the divine flows and reaches men, sometimes in an unexpected and sudden manner. He is not only one who has an experience of God and can therefore show the way to others. He has the power to communicate this experience, so to speak, materially.

Such beliefs are rooted in the ancient writings of Hinduism, and especially in the more popular type: the Epics, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana* and the myths of the *Puranas* which are often simply bewildering for an uninitiated person. This tradition magnifies the powers — *siddhis* — of the ascetic who has acquired by his *tapas* such tremendous energy and power that it can frighten even the *devas*, the gods! They then send temptations to the *rishi*. Only a very slight slip may suffice to make him lose in a single instant the fruits of many years of *tapas*: slackening of his mental concentration, a movement of irritation. The *rishi* curses his tempter and all at once loses his powers. But the curse works out, because his word is effective. This is an attribute of the true guru. He is *satyavac* — his word works out what is said. To this is related the power of the mantra, the short formula which often on account of its sound alone actualizes or enlivens the relationship between guru and disciples.

The Guru in the Ancient and Contemporary Traditions

Let us now summarize our enquiry concerning the guru in the Hindu tradition. And first in the words of this tradition itself.

The guru is the dispeller of darkness and the revealer of light. He is the destroyer of the sins of the disciples. He makes the disciple like himself. He is a man of vision, one who destroys ignorance and who gives knowledge. He imparts grace, bestowing joy and peace on the disciple. In a more simple manner, he must be a man of good conduct, without sin, firm in mind. He must be imbued with a *sat* character that is real and truthful, because he has experienced truth. He is God-oriented and an indefectible friend of the disciple.²

At its highest, the guru institution offers experiences and aids which the West has never enjoyed in the same manner and are now lost to a great extent. It has, if not always answered the needs, at least inspired

devotees for the last 3000 years. It has drawn to itself men of great practical and intellectual distinction from within India and even from outside. It has survived conquerors and profound cultural changes. It continues to offer its rewards — though these are sometimes elusive — to those who come to it wholeheartedly, accepting its discipline. “Most of those I met who had done so,” writes Peter Brent in *Godmen of India*, a popular yet very factual and balanced book, “seemed to me to be men and women who had benefited as a result. They were quiet, certain, happy, dedicated; their lives were rich, their inner world expanding. They did not merely tell me so, they seemed to be people of whom it was true” (p. 292).

Finally we wish to mention that the image of the guru as it appears to a keen enquirer in India today is quite in conformity with the picture we have drawn from the ancient tradition of India. It will suffice to quote the same book:

The guru is first the focus of the disciple's attention and emotion. In normal life these are dispersed, elicited by many events and people. The guru cures this condition of dispersal, draws the disciple's energies together in a way which may be a preliminary to redirecting that energy inwards. Second, the guru, human being demonstrably similar to the disciple, sets the experience within human scale. The myth of his divinity may add intensity to the disciple's devotion. The fact of his humanity allows the disciple to operate without being crushed by a constant sense of eternity, omniscience, omnipotence without feeling that he is contending with the Absolute without allies. Third, it is clear that the guru can help the disciple directly, either by explaining difficulties, helping to solve the problems met with, while practising the techniques and giving general encouragement, or by scolding or setting the disciple baffling problems, even by violence. Fourth, he is the repository of whatever doctrine, religious or scientific, is currently in use to explain the disciple's experiences. They may be very important because insanity, or at best disorientation, might be the outcome for the disciple. Fifth, he is the example, the proof that the way leads somewhere worthwhile. The guru's own sanity, detachment, serenity, strength, integration and lovingkindness show that the hard journey the disciple has to make will prove worthwhile in the end. Possibly, sixth, he may be a source of developed mental power which, when transferred to the disciple, can transform the latter's life (p. 339).

A more personal witnessing concerning the contemporary tradition of the guru, and much closer to us, comes from Abhishiktanandaji — Dom Henry Le Saux O.S.B. — in his autobiographical account published in 1974 under the title *Guru and Disciple*.³ The facts go back to the years 1950-1955 when he was an exclaustated monk and founder of an Indian Benedictine Ashram in Trichinopoly diocese, South India. He had experienced the *darsana* of Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai: "When looking deep into his eyes — eyes so full of peace and love — he sensed something of the call to the within which seemed to well up from the very depth of his consciousness, merged as it was in the primordial mystery." But he goes on to confess that he was still too fresh from Europe and not sufficiently attuned to the mysterious language of silence to make this a real turning point in his life.

This happened a few years later when he came into contact with Swami Gnanananda — a sage from the East as he calls him — who was then living in a poor unknown village of Tamil Nadu as its guru. He first narrates how the old man was venerated as an epiphany of the invisible Presence by the people who had asked him to settle down in their place. Here is the account of his first visit: "At this point the devotees began to arrive. Men, women, children, prostrated themselves respectfully, even affectionately. One could easily see that for them this was no empty conventional gesture or rite enjoined by good manners. Quite obviously the bodily prostration revealed the far deeper prostration happening ceaselessly in the secret place of the heart. One saw faith, love and complete confidence in this man who had become for them nothing less than the *epiphany of the invisible Presence*, the outward manifestation to their human eyes of the grace and love of the Lord who dwells undivided both in the highest heavens and in the deepest depth of the heart."

And now his own meeting with his guru: "Vanya — the Benedictine monk — had approached this man almost as a tourist and, lo and behold, he had taken possession of his very being. He realized that the allegiance he had never freely yielded to anyone in his life was now given automatically to Gnanananda. He had often heard tell of gurus of the irrational devotion shown to them by their disciples and their total self abandonment to the guru. All these things had seemed utterly senseless to him, a European with a classical education. Yet now at this very moment it had happened to him, a true living experience tearing him out of himself. This little man with his short legs and bushy beard, scantily clad in a dhoti who had so suddenly burst in upon his life, could now ask of him anything in the world, even to set off like Sadashiva, a dumb and naked wanderer for ever, and he, Vanya, would not even think of asking

him for any sort of explanation.” He is not afraid of speaking of the “mystery of the guru” for it is a meeting with the divine. “The experience of meeting with men in whose hearts the invisible has revealed himself and through whom the light shines in perfect purity.”

Later, reflecting on this inner initiation, he writes: “The guru and the disciple form a couple, a pair of which the two elements attract one another and adhere to one another. As with the two poles they exist only in relationship to one another.... A pair on the road to unity.... A non-dual reciprocity in the final realization. The guru is one who has himself attained the Real and who knows from personal experience the way that leads there; he is capable of initiating the disciple and of making well up from within the heart of his disciple, the immediate ineffable experience which is his own: the utterly transparent knowledge, so limpid and pure, that quite simply ‘He Is’.”

Is it not in fact true that the mystery of the guru is the mystery of the depth of the heart? Is not the experience of being face to face with the guru that of being face to face with oneself in the most secret center, with all pretence gone?

The meeting with the guru is the essential meeting, the decisive turning point in the life of a man. But it is a meeting that can only take place when one has gone beyond the level of sense and intellect. It happens in the beyond, in the fine point of the soul as the mystics say.

The most significant outcome of this is that the guru introduces the disciple to his real self: “What the guru says springs from the very heart of the disciple. It is not that another person is speaking to him. It is not a question of receiving from outside oneself new thoughts which are transmitted through the senses. When the vibrations of the master’s voice reach the disciple’s ears and the master’s eyes look deep into his, then from the very depths of his being, from the newly discovered cave of his heart, thoughts well up which reveal him to himself.

What does it matter what words the guru uses? Their whole power lies in the heart’s inner response to them. Seeing or listening to the guru the disciple comes face to face with his true Self in the depth of his being, an experience every man longs for, even if unconsciously.

Western Gurus? Gurus of other Styles?

John Paul II, in his first Mission Sunday message, reminded the

Churches of the reorientation taken at Vatican II for their missionary activity: "the young Churches borrow from ... the traditions, wisdom ... of their people everything which can manifest the grace of the Savior." The guru, in the ancient and contemporary tradition of India: educator, bestower of initiation, teacher of meditation, guide to realization or mediator of divine love, remains a remarkable asset of the spiritual heritage of India, in her age-long and relentless quest for God, offering much which is "valid and wholesome ... true values of spirituality, religion and charity which as seeds of the Word and signs of God's presence could help towards an acceptance of the Gospel."

In what manner can such functions be exercised in the West? It is not easy to say. Yet, let us first observe that there is a need for it. The wide gap created by the positive sciences between a world dominated by technology and, on the other hand, the wisdom of old with its interests centered on interiority (in India the *atman*, the inner self) must be bridged. There are signs that this has already begun. The current interest taken by the present generation, saturated with the benefits of technology, in the things of the spirit and in the interior journey — aroused partly by the impact of the spiritual disciplines of the East — will not easily be reversed. In all probability it has come to stay. Now if, as we believe, this stems from, and points to, something essentially true and real about man's nature and his destiny, then Western man must ultimately realize that truth in his own terms. He cannot simply borrow and clothe himself with exotic patterns. Hybridization of this kind invariably ends in the deterioration of both the cultural values that are made to mate. Whatever he borrows from another culture has to be grafted onto his own language and thought-patterns, that it may suck the juice and sap from the depths of his subconscious. Except, of course, in the case of a first awakening, he will require for this a master of his own, not one to be imported from a culture in which masters have a place precisely because their roots lie in that culture. In all respects the guru-shishya relationship as it is known today is heavily determined by the facts of Hindu society. If anything similar is to develop in the West, it must be equally part of Western culture. Let us not repeat, though in a reversed manner, the mistake of the Western Churches who went out to the four parts of the world to plant the Gospel and instead planted their own lifestyles with all their trappings. In spite of four hundred years of intense missionary activity and efforts of gigantic magnitude, the outcome remains minute, at least considering the scale of the task before them. Though they have made incredible investments of talent as well as of finance, of love of neighbor with utter self-sacrifice, the kind of which makes saints like Francis Xavier, the returns are very limited and certainly completely out

of line with the first expansion of Christianity across the Roman Empire, which took place with the power of the Spirit and made inculturation its rule.

It would require another symposium to picture the image of the master which is required for this new birth, but is it not presumptuous to say that it may differ much from that of the missionary guru who comes presently from the East to the West? Yet if new explanations have to be found for his power, and if the devotion for him is to be couched in new terms, if the very qualities we look for in him are altered, in essence he will still be the guru, the guide and mentor of the inward path, the bringer of light.

Notes

1. "Le Guru dans la Tradition Hindoue," *Axes*, VI/4 (1974), 13.

2. B. Bhatt, "Authority in the Guru-Shishya Relationship," *Jeevadhara*, VI (1976), 362. The relationship of this image of the guru with the spiritual father in the Catholic Church today, but also the differences, appear significantly in the following portrait made a few years ago by the late Father Danielou: "What is expected from a spiritual father is first a knowledge of spiritual things, discernment of the spirits, that is the art of discerning what comes from the Holy Spirit and what comes from the devil. Knowledge of the human heart. The spiritual father must be prudent, capable both of stimulating on the path of perfection and of warning against excessive zeal. He must be humble; he must respect the diversity of God's ways and of the spiritual vocations and not impose his own views" "Liminaire," *Axes*, VI/4 (1974), 7-8.

3. Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple* (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 26-30.

III. The Spiritual Father, Toward Integrating Western and Eastern Spirituality

by Yves Raguin, S.J.

Introduction

The spiritual father is the one who communicates the faith and guides the faithful on their way to God. He is at the same time the father and the master. This tradition, in Christianity, goes back to Christ and his disciples. Although Christ told his apostles not to call anybody "father," because there is only one father, the Father in heaven (Mt 23, 9), the tradition of calling the spiritual master "Father" started early in the Church. Then, in the monastic tradition, the "spiritual father" was at the same time the head of the monastic family and the spiritual guide of the monks. But ultimately the appellation of "Father" takes its full meaning from the unique paternity of the Heavenly Father, as Paul says in the Epistle to the Ephesians (3, 14-15).

In the same way, we have only one Master, Christ (Mt 23,10), and if we call somebody "master" it is only in reference to Christ who is the only Master, because he alone knows the secrets of the Father. Being "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14,6), Christ is the absolute Master, knowing God and man. But the Spirit is also called the master of spiritual life, because he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. He knows all the intimate secrets of God and dwells in us to make these secrets known to us.

Although in Christian spirituality there is a great insistence on the role of the Holy Spirit as the only master of spiritual life, still it is a fact that those who claim to have the Spirit as their only master and who put aside all other guides may easily fall into grave spiritual aberrations. And the fact that God came to speak to us in human language justifies fully the role in the spiritual life of those we call spiritual fathers or masters.

Such is what we may call the Western tradition regarding the role of the spiritual father. We will have to compare to it the so-called Eastern spirituality. This latter tradition is very vast, too vast to be reduced to something homogeneous. But it is still possible to put into light some of the main aspects of Indian and Chinese tradition relating to this problem of the spiritual father or master.

In Christianity the spiritual father or director is most of the time nothing more than a wise and experienced guide who directs his spiritual sons and daughters on their way to God along the path of Christ. He just helps them to be faithful to Christ and docile to the action of the Holy Spirit. But the Indian "guru" or the Buddhist "master" have to be themselves real "seers"; they must have a real experience of the spiritual or divine world. Nobody can be a master unless he has gone all the way of experience. This means that much more is normally required of the Eastern gurus and masters than of the Western spiritual fathers, as if the West were contented with having Christ as the perfect "seer," without asking the spiritual fathers and masters to be "seers" themselves.

But it is only by letting Christ take "shape" in him that the spiritual father can be a real master. He thus becomes like the visible instrumental guru, the one in whom the true guru begins to take on a form for the disciple as he awakens. This "true guru" is the inner guru who manifests himself at the moment of the ultimate spiritual experience.¹ This short quotation just opens a possible perspective of integration of Western and Eastern spirituality.

The Master and the Experience

The disciples of Jesus called him "Rabbi," which means "master." At the beginning they understood the term in the line of the Jewish tradition. Jesus was seen as the master who explained the Law. But soon Jesus claimed to be more. He was not an ordinary master of the Law. This appears clearly in his conversation with Nicodemus. "Amen, amen, I say to thee, we speak of what we know, and we bear witness to what we have seen" (Jn 3, 11). And John says in another passage: "No one has at any time seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him" (Jn 1, 18). Christ is not simply an ordinary rabbi; he is the great seer, and the one who sees him sees the Father. That is why he is the Master, the only one. Peter had the decisive word when he said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life" (Jn 6, 68).

All this shows the depth of the experience of Christ. For him to teach his disciples to pray is to tell them how to relate to his Father who is also their Father. He taught them to pray in teaching them to say "Our Father who art in Heaven..." But this prayer would not have the depth it has, had not Christ shared the experience of his own oneness with his Father. This experience of the relation to his Father at the depth of his being is in the line of Zen. For Christ, seeing one's nature (*kenshō*²) is to realize the identity of his divine nature with the Father's nature. In this respect we may see him as the greatest of all the Zen masters. No one in human history had such a deep experience of God in seeing his own "original nature."

We may say that Christ in his humanity lived "in faith" his union with God, but at the depth of his self there was this experience of who he was, the Son of the Father, sharing with him the one divine nature. This is what makes Christ a perfect master. Never has a man had such an experience of God. Buddha himself never claimed to be more than a human being. He had seen the way of liberation from *samsāra* to *nirvāna*. He had been the way and wanted to show it to others. With these limitations, he has been one of the greatest masters and spiritual fathers in human history. The ideal of the master in Buddhism always goes back to Buddha as a model.

When the Christians say they have only one master, Christ, the Buddhists say they have only one master, Buddha. But there is a great difference in language between the two. Christ speaks of God his Father. Buddha has discovered how things are. His experience is not of a God

but of Reality, whatever it may be. This Reality for him is not the transient world or the fleeting ego, but what is beyond or at the depth of them. This he has seen and experienced and he wants to help others to this experience. "The Zen Master is first and foremost one who has experienced, seen and tasted the essential world in which he himself is constantly deepening his own 'at homeness.' He does not speak of himself as one who 'has arrived,' but as the one who must continually go on from here. But at the same time he speaks with authority and has great self-confidence in the fact that what he has experienced is the real world and no one can prove him wrong. His own experience has filled him with such a deep peace that it is manifest in his personality. It enables him to move with freedom and ease and it gives him a tremendous power in being able to guide others, with great humility."³

The Master is the one who knows from experience and has tasted what most people never have tasted. In this respect Christ is a Master because he has had an experience of God nobody ever has had and never will have. This point of experience is very important. The Christians tend to insist on faith and this is true that the essential is faith because not everybody is called to this experience we are talking about. But the fact that the Buddhist way is based on experience and not on faith reminds us of the necessity of experience to be a real Master. To be a Master is a gift from beyond, and nobody can assume this title without being given that experience. But there are, as there always have been, many self-appointed "masters" who simply sell methods without being able really to show the way, because they have never travelled that far.

The seekers of God, and of their own deepest nature, have always been looking for guides. "Once upon a time, these men were called spiritual fathers or directors. Today, they are known as counsellors, gurus, Zen or Yoga masters. Whatever we like to name them, they deal with the same basic reality. There exist men who have found the way to God. There is no end to their journeyings. When they set out the first time, they were alone; it was hard going up mountains and across deserts. When they reached the end, they started going back and forth to the plains, helping others who wanted to climb God's mountain too. Solitaries they remain, but they never travel alone because their disciples go with them."⁴

This is what Christ had been doing during his whole life, first alone, then with his disciples he called "my friends" and "my little children." All the time he went back and forth from his human condition up to his Father, becoming himself for his disciples the perfect image of the

Father, and father himself. Master as he was, he showed in perfection the humility all real masters on earth are seeking for. A proud master is a non-sense, since his experience, if it is of the beyond, is a gift he received, not an achievement he can be proud of. This is the whole meaning of Christ washing the feet of his disciples and saying: "You call me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If, therefore, I the Lord and Master have washed your feet, so you also should wash the feet of one another" (Jn 13, 13-14). This is the sign of the great Master who knows that he comes from the Father to reveal his secrets. In fact, the Master is at the feet of his listeners humbly asking them to listen to his wonderful invitation to ascend the Mountain of the Lord.

When God tells his people: "Listen, Israel!", it is more a humble prayer than an order. When Christ tells the Samaritan woman: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who it is who says to thee, 'Give me to drink,' thou, perhaps, wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given the living water" (Jn 6, 10), he is in fact humbly begging her to listen to the wonderful message he has for her. This is again the humility of the Master.

In the Indian tradition the real guru is a man who prefers to be hidden. Happy the one who can discover him. It is why the search for the guru is so important. "Not many hear of him; and of those not many reach him. Wonderful is he who can teach about him; and wise is he who can be taught. Wonderful is he who knows him when taught."⁵ The man who is a guru leads his disciple along the paths he knows, until the disciple has met the indwelling inner guru. Once the inner guru has been found, the outer guru, the man, disappears. Is it not something similar Christ meant when he said to his disciples that he had to leave them: "And now I am going to the one who sent me...But I speak the truth to you: it is expedient for you that I depart. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you...Many things yet I have to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will teach you all the truth..." (Jn 16, 5; 7; 12-13)? It is why the Holy Spirit is the inner Master who makes us understand what Christ has told us. He reveals the secrets of God.

This reminds us of the Indian tradition of the two gurus, the instrumental guru, and the definitive guru who appears at the time of the inner enlightenment. This definitive guru is "*advaita*, non-dual. He alone is the guru who can make one take the high dive; he appears and reveals himself only at the moment of divine! The other guru is the guru *murti*, the guru in visible form, the one who can only show the way."⁶ In

Christianity we have the ordinary guru who is a man, the spiritual master or father, then Christ, and his Spirit who is properly the inner guru, the grand ultimate guru, the one who with Christ knows all the secrets of God.

The Spiritual Father — Giver and Master of Life

Very soon in Christian tradition the two functions of father and master became closely connected and embodied in the apostles. The apostles were the ones who called to life by conferring baptism and transmitting the message.

In Paul the two aspects are really one. But for him "fatherhood" is also "motherhood," as it is clear from the images he uses. He writes to the Galatians: "My dear children, with whom I am in labor again, until Christ is formed in you!" (Gal 4, 19). He knows very well that this spiritual paternity comes from the only Father of all. The same way, Paul knows that he is not himself the ultimate master. This real master is Christ who teaches the faithful through the interior master, the Holy Spirit who comes "into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4, 6). It is in these perspectives that Paul sees his own mission as spiritual father and master of his flock. The Father in Heaven represents the masculine aspect; the Church on earth represents the feminine aspect, and the Spirit itself can be seen here, as often in the Bible, as a "feminine" power. All these aspects of the mystery of divine life are very important to grasp the depth of the spiritual paternity, or rather parenthood, in Christian tradition.

As he sees himself as the father of his Christians Paul is conscious of being their master and model, because he has the experience of Christ. This consciousness is very deep in him and he fights to be recognized as one who has "seen" Christ. He writes to the Ephesians: "...I suppose you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me in your regard; how by revelation was made known to me the mystery, as I have written above in brief, and so by reading my words you can perceive how well versed I am in the mystery of Christ..." (Eph 3, 2-4).

Paul is very conscious of having been the father of many in their regeneration through faith in Christ. He tells the Corinthians how the apostles are the "co-operators of God" in evangelization, and he adds as a conclusion of his teaching: "I write these things not to put you to shame, but to admonish you as my dearest children. For although you

have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus, through the gospel, did I beget you. Therefore, I beg you, be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. For this very reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my dearest son and faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my ways, which are in Christ Jesus, even as I teach everywhere in every church" (I Cor 4, 14-17).

The model of the spiritual father remains God the Father, but revealed and heard in Christ through the guidance and light of the Spirit. It is not only once that, in the Gospel, Christ relates to his disciples and other people as "father." "My children, with what difficulty will they who trust in riches enter the kingdom of God!" (Mk 10, 24). After the Last Supper he calls his disciples "friends" or "my children." "Little children," he says, "yet a little while I am with you" (Jn 13, 33). Later he tells them: "I will not leave you orphans..." (Jn 14, 18). And just afterwards, he identifies himself with his Father in regard to his relation to his disciples. "But he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14, 21). Anyhow, Christ is the perfect image of the Father, and "seeing him is to see the Father" (Jn 14, 9).

This identification of Christ with the Father will have a great influence on Christian spirituality. The spiritual master is not simply the one who reveals the truth and shows the way; he is father and mother. We have seen this in the letters of Paul and we can give more examples from John's letters. John is full of love for his "children." "My dear children," he writes, "let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I Jn 3, 18).

It seems that this mystic view of paternity is specific to Christianity, because of the revelation made by Christ of his Father. Behind all this we may see the intimate connection between two fundamental attributes of God who is "love" and "light."

Among the Fathers of the Desert, the notion of spiritual paternity was very important. These men who left the world were seeking at the same time the guidance of a master they would regard as their father. It was said of the disciples of St. Pacomius that "after God, Pacomius was their father." God is the only real father, but after God these great hermits shine with all the radiance of their spiritual paternity.⁷

Before the existence of organized monastic communities of contemplatives, the seekers of enlightenment, whether in the East or the

West, were looking for a master, one who could lead them in contemplation. We know from the tradition how disappointed the five first disciples of Sakyamuni were when he put aside the ascetic practices he had been performing for years. They thought he was renouncing his quest. But he did it because he knew there was no hope of enlightenment in these practices.

Reading the liturgical texts of the time between Ascension and Pentecost, we see how the early Church saw the Ascension of Jesus to Heaven. He was the one who had opened the way to us. Having entered the kingdom of Heaven, he was going to take his faithful with him. He had not simply opened the gates of Heaven to our contemplation, but he entered himself into the Holy of Holies, the bosom of the Father. This explains the sense of exultation of those who have found a master who can lead them into the mysteries of God. This has been the joy of all those who have met someone who has entered the mystery and is able to lead others into this same mystery. This is a "joy which is rare indeed, said a *roshi*: to meet a congenial soul, a congenial living being who underwent similar experiences concerning ultimate matters. With the exception of the experiences themselves there is hardly a joy that equals this ..." This explains the hardships endured by disciples who wanted to put themselves under the guidance of a spiritual father or master, in the West as well as in the East. Nothing could deter them from seeking guidance from men whom they considered as the ones who had seen the way.

This explains the flight of thousands of people to mountains and deserts in the search for immortal life, enlightenment, or vision of God, in the East as in the West. Here we should be able to say something about the development of monasticism in China as well as in the Western world, but this is not the place.

In the West as in the East, the foundation of communities of "contemplatives" had as a result the spiritual father, the master of the origin, becoming the father of the household. In principle, at least in the Occident, the Father of the community was modeled on the paterfamilias of the Roman society. But, according to monastic tradition the Father, the Abbot or "abbas," had a double function: to be the Father of the monks and their spiritual guide. He had to be a man of deep spiritual experience, in order to be able to guide his monks individually as well as a community. But as time went on the ones chosen to be the abbots were selected more for their aptitudes for government than for their spiritual experience. That is why inside the communities there were, besides the Father Abbot, spiritual men who were the personal counsellors of the

monks. Still the discipline and the spirit of the monastery were in the hands of the Abbot.⁸

With time, contemplative life became a specific type of life distinguished from an active one, but this did not mean that the monks living in these communities were “contemplative.” Most of these groups were naturally started because there was there a holy man, a master whose experience attracted disciples. After the death of such a master, it happened very often that no other master was there to take his place, and great efforts were made to keep his spirit alive. But it is impossible to institutionalize the spirit of a master. We know from history how it is difficult to maintain alive the spirit of a great founder. If there is no constant renewal, through the mystical experience of many individuals, the best monasteries become “dead” institutions. This phenomenon is to be observed in the East as in the West. It is well known now that the great spiritual movements are built on the experience of one or a few men. A monastery, be it Christian or Zen, dies spiritually if there is no master alive in this monastery. A “dead” monastery comes back to life with the coming of a spiritual father and master.

After having been pushed to action and involvement into all sorts of works and movements, Christians are again called to inner attention by the masters of modern time...inner attention to themselves, to others and to the whole of creation.

The Search for the Father/Master and the Relation of Master — Disciple

Those who feel attracted to a deeper spiritual experience seek irresistibly for a guide who will be their father and master. The search is sometimes very painful, because masters are rare, and it seems to be by chance that we meet the one who is meant for us. There is no universal master. A mountain guide knows “his” mountain, and all the ways to the peaks and valleys. That is why it is dangerous to run after a master because many people flock around him. He may be “the one,” perhaps not. Most of the time, the meeting of the master seems to be a pure “accident.” In fact there is already something between the master and disciple before they meet. And when they meet there is in the heart of the disciple something like a voice saying: “It is he!”

There are plenty examples of the search for a master in Hinduism and Buddhism, probably much more than in Christianity, because the

human guru is more important in the East than in the West, for the reasons given above. But there are in Christianity many examples of this search or of sudden encounter between the disciple and the one who will be his master. This is God-given. In Buddhism they say that there is an affinity which draws near to one another the disciple and the master.

The problem is to find the master or the guru who can lead you. "First the disciple must find a master that suits him or her. This is very important — that the master and the disciple be on the same 'wave length' so to speak. In Zen it is not advised to change masters. When you find the one you feel you can relate to, it is best to stay with him at least until you have come to *kenshō*. Going from master to master can only hinder one's practice and confuse the disciple. After *kenshō*, however, people often go to other masters to test their own enlightenment through questions and answers."⁹

There is much that could be said about the role of the guru in Indian spirituality, and we may draw some examples from this later. Now we will speak mostly about the role of the master in Zen training. In the course of the training of the disciple, "Only the *roshi*, with his long years of experience and acutely discerning eyes, can gauge the exact degree of his (the disciple's) comprehension and give him the necessary direction and encouragement at this critical point. An accomplished *roshi* will not scruple to employ every device and stratagem, not excluding jabs with his ubiquitous baton (*kotsu*), when he believes it will jar and rouse the student's mind from dormant awareness to the sudden realization of its true nature. . . . The strategy of placing the student in a desperate situation where he is relentlessly driven from the rear and vigorously repulsed in front often builds up pressures within him that lead to that inner explosion without which true *satori* seldom occurs. However, such extreme measures are by no means universal in Zen."¹⁰

This means that the student or disciple puts himself totally into the hands of his *roshi*, because the *roshi* is the one who knows how far his disciple has gone on the way to *kenshō*. He knows also the way he will react under the kind of pressures described above. This way of acting in Zen is very similar to so many examples we find in the life of the Fathers of the Desert. Orders were given by the spiritual father to his disciple, not primarily to test his obedience, but to provoke in the heart of the disciple a total conversion and total change of mentality, as the one required by Christ from his followers. Only under such a pressure could the disciples experience the truth of the words of Christ which apparently contradict human reason. Such a pressure was placed on the apostles when Jesus, in

Capernaum (Jn 6, 22-71), explained that they should eat his flesh and drink his blood. The result was the *kenshō* of Peter, the realization that he belonged to Christ totally and that there was no other way for him. We may see in the same light the great trials of Christ, the temptation in the desert, the agony in the garden and his dereliction on the cross. We may see in these great trials three of the main steps to the realization in his humanity of who he was, the Son of God. No *roshi* ever has put his son-disciple under such a trial, and no son-disciple ever had such a *satori*. In the history of Christ it is the Father himself who puts his Son to trial. As it has been written in the Letter to the Hebrews: "he, son though he was, learned obedience from the things that he suffered" (Heb 5, 8). This "obedience" is the total "dependence" of Jesus on his Father.

This brings us to a very important point on this question of the relation of father-master with his son-disciple. In the Hindu tradition the authority of the guru is total. This may be puzzling for a Christian, because, as says Sr. Vandana, "the guru is not a mere man to his disciples. I have seen the same deference and devotion poured out at the Guru's feet and the same generous offering made there as at a holy shrine, as holy as Badrinath. The Guru by his Kripa enables a man to get direct knowledge of the Self, purifies him from sin, removes all darkness; in fact the Guru is Brahman. 'I will be with you wherever you need me, do not fear,' the Guru assures the disciple. In return, he exacts a strict obedience, prompt, willing and 'blind' without criticism or complaint. . . . But however exacting the discipline, there is a bond of love. . . . In any case as Chidananda Swami explained: 'The power is God's, not mine.' Aurobindo had also said: 'The power is not my personal property. It is a higher Force acting in the world; only one Force.'"¹¹

A Christian would probably give such an obedience and veneration to Christ alone, and never to a man. But we should not forget that the guru should be a self-less man, a man through whom God is acting directly, not with any demonstration of personal power, not making ostensible use of what we may call his "spiritual powers." But this being said, there is no difficulty in seeing in a spiritual father and master the image of Christ, and to respect and love him for what he is. Christ very often reveals himself in such a way through a man that really we can see him as Christ living here in this man for me.

The *roshi* in the Zen tradition is different from the guru of the Hindu tradition. Since there is not in Zen any background of divinity whatsoever, it is impossible to see a *roshi* venerated the way some gurus are. There is no element of "divine" in the relation between the *roshi* and his

disciple. The *roshi* appears more “human” than the guru, because the Zen experience is a human experience. It opens to the Absolute but without the religious connotation we find in Hinduism.

The Zen master does not pretend to have special powers. He is just a man who has made the ultimate experience of *kenshō*. He has realized himself at such a depth that he is totally one with himself, free from any kind of hindrances and ties, and totally open to others. This freedom is just absolute freedom and not at all communication of spiritual powers. “He cannot give his experience to another or make the disciple come to an experience. He can only help the disciple remove whatever obstacles are in the way of coming to a true enlightenment experience. Often times he speaks of the four wheels of a cart — if they are all on the track there is no problem — it rolls along right to its goal, but with most of us one or two of our wheels are off the track. This is why *dokusan* (private encounter with the *roshi*) is so important. It is very important for the disciple to be as open as he or she can in the *dokusan* room. . . Then it is very important to follow the instructions of the *roshi* as faithfully and as purely as one can. Gradually one is able to trust the *roshi* more and more.”¹²

The whole effort and attention of the *roshi* are intended to help the disciple on his way to the *kenshō*. The communication between the master and the disciple is not so much in words as in speechless communication and communion. It is the long experience of the *roshi* which enables him to follow his disciple in a way which allows little verbal communication. “The most crucial point,” says Sr. Kathleen Reiley, “is when a disciple comes to an initial enlightenment experience, that is, when the master must discern whether it truly is a real Zen experience or only a passing psychological state. If the *kenshō* is approved, then *dokusan* takes on a new flavor.” When the disciple has finished his training, the relation between the *roshi* and his disciple gets deeper and deeper. The disciple begins to walk by himself and “it is then that real Zen practice begins — deepening and deepening the practice of ‘just-sitting’ — and living in the awareness of the empty-infinite of just eating and sleeping, laughing and crying. . . . There is no way to describe the joy and depth of unity that exists in realizing that the disciple and Master are ONE in this mystery of empty-infinite.”¹³

These examples taken from Hinduism and Zen Buddhism as well as from Christianity show very clearly the importance of the human guide in the way to ultimate spiritual experience. Although we claim that the

Holy Spirit is the only Master, we know, on the other hand, that the so-called "spiritual" movements have led astray a lot of people who claimed that they obeyed the Spirit alone. In no sane spiritual tradition has there been a dispensation from human spiritual guidance. This is the general law of human spiritual experience.

One of the most striking signs of the times is this search for gurus and *roshis*. I am afraid that our spiritual fathers, directors, or masters are very pale figures in comparison with some of these non-Christian gurus and *roshis*. On the other hand we should not think that all those who claim to be gurus or *roshis* are real ones. They may be simply selling methods of prayer or "*kenshō* in four days."

But we should look more attentively to the qualities required from real gurus and *roshis*. We know that first of all they should have experience of spiritual things and of the Ultimate. They have undergone a long training, and dare to lead people only when they are sure of the quality of their experience. If we do this, I am sure that we will turn more attentively to Christ, the greatest human Guru of all times, and to the Holy Spirit, the incomparable inner Master. Both of them are together in one, the perfect manifestation of God the Father, the Ultimate mystery of God.

If we do all this, we may be able to say with Christ, and almost with the same fulness, what he said of himself to his Father: "Just Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, in order that the love with which thou that loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17, 24-26).

Notes

1. From *Guru and Disciple*, by Abhishiktananda.
2. The term *kenshō* is the Japanese reading of the Chinese *chien-hsing*, which means "to see one's nature," one's "true nature."
3. Sr. Kathleen Reiley, M.M. A note on "The Role of the Master in Zen and his relation to the disciple, from the point of view of a young disciple," (1978).
4. Y. Raguin, S.J., "The Spiritual Master, Christ's Style," *Sursum Corda* (Australia), Vol. 13, Number 7, February, 1975, p. 291.
5. *Katha Upanishad*, II, 7-9.
6. From *Guru and Disciple* by Abhishiktananda.
7. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Art. Direction spirituelle, col. 1044.
8. Cf. Rembert C. Weakland, O.S.B., "The Abbot as Spiritual Father," *Christian Monks and Asian Religions*, Proceedings of the Second Asian Monastic Congress, Bangalore, October 14-22, 1973, *Cistercian Studies*, Vol. IX, 1974; 2 and 2, p. 231.
9. Kathleen Reiley, M.M. Note quoted above.
10. Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Beacon Press, p. 87.
11. Sr. Vandana, R.S.C.J., "The Guru as Present Reality." A paper presented at a Seminar on "Guruship" held at the Christian Institute of Sikh Studies, Batala, Punjab, December 6-8, 1974.
12. Sr. Kathleen Reiley, M.M., Note quoted above.
13. *Ibid.*

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