

Nature of Guru

Swami Bhuteshananda

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai 600 004, India

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Confusions and differences of opinion abide in the minds of people about the theory of Guru. Our Puranas and Tantras abound with apparently many conflicting opinions about the theory of Guru. In order to understand these it is necessary to groom our mind with certain fundamental principles.

First principle -- Guru and Ishta (Chosen Deity) are one and identical, and He who is Ishta is indeed the Parameshwara (Supreme Principle): Guruh Vishveshvarah sâkshât târakam Brahma nischitam (Gurugita, 14). No matter in whatever form we accept our Ishta, which can indeed be different, but all of them are forms of Parameshwara. Parameshwara, the Supreme Principle, cannot become two. Even Upanishads state this unequivocally.

A question has been raised in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad --How many gods are there? It has been replied (3.9.1): Trayashcha tri cha shatâ, trayashcha tri sahasrâ -- 'Three hundred and three, and three thousand and three. ' It signifies that the gods are indeed innumerable. These gods are but different manifestations of the only One God. Countless may be the number of gods but they are but One in essence. Thus in the process of questions and answers gradually the number of gods is tapered down to One: Eko deva iti, prâna iti, sa Brahma tyadityâchakshate (3.9.9). All the forms that we know and see around, the others we do not know and the newer forms that may take shape in the future --all are forms of that One Parameshwara. Rupam rupam pratirupo babhuva (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.5.19 & Katha Upanishad, 2.2.9). We forget this and consider them different. That is precisely why conflicts arise in us. We tend to imagine certain god more powerful, some other god less powerful. But if we remain firm in our conviction that all gods are but one, that they are different forms of Parameshwara then all conflicts are set at rest.

In this regard we should bear in mind another principle. We began by saying that Guru and Ishta are one. Ishta is the form that we accept for our sâdhanâ. That Ishta is only different manifestation of that One and second-to-none Parameshwara. It follows thus --if Guru and Ishta are identical, then everyone 's Guru is that One Parameshwara. But normally we identify an individual human being as our Guru. We think --my Guru is one, someone 's Guru is another. Thus in imagining individual Guru for individual persons, the number of Gurus becomes innumerable. But the truth is that the One Parameshwara is manifested in all the Gurus like the One is manifested in all the gods. Thus Guru and Ishta are identical --if we remain firm in this conviction then no confusion shall ever visit us.

We assume corporeal forms according to our samskâras. We leave this body and assume new body that takes shape following our samskâras and fruits of our Karma. What does it really mean when it is said that man assumes body? It means that I identify my physical being qualified with a special set of samskâras as 'I '. I identify my being at times associating it with

my body, sometimes with my mind and even at times with my 'Self ' beyond body-mind. When viewed in association with the body it is called Atman which cannot, however, exist as the body is dissolved. When it is identified with the mind I feel I am happy or I am sad. Thus I feel that my Atman undergoes changes in different changed states of mind. Nonetheless that 'I ' exists throughout in all states. If that 'I ' is considered so changeable then who is it that experiences the changes? If the knower itself suffers so many changes it shall fail to remain steady in its true nature. Therefore there should be a knower who shall experience all the changes, a witness to the changes. It is verily the true Atman.

'Sâkshi cheta kevalo nirgunashcha. ' Like the piece of thread that passes through all the flowers in a garland, the Atman remains inherent through all the changes. Mayi sarvamidam protam sutre maniganâ iva -- 'in Me all this is strung like gems in a string ' (Gita, 7.7). Atman is vyâpaka. Vyâpaka means He remains pervaded in selfsame form in us throughout all changes. He is beyond the comprehension of the ordinary people. Only the Jnanis (Illumined souls) can realize Him. 'The deluded do not see Him departing (from this body) or residing (in it) or experiencing (objects), being associated with the senses; but they who have the eye of knowledge see Him (Gita 15.10). ' If we analyze this Atman derecognising the changeable variables being not Its true nature, but is a witness to the changes, then the Atman is indeed birthless and deathless. 'Yatanto yoginashchainam pashyantyâtmanyavasthitam --The Yogis striving (for perfection) behold Him dwelling in themselves (Gita 15.11). ' Atman associated with body is subject to birth and death.

Thus what we mean by Prârabdha bhoga (Enjoying or suffering the accrued fruits of Karma) has no physical relationship with the body of the previous incarnation. Thus the present body does not even have the memories of Diksha (spiritual initiation) nor the physical impressions of the previous birth. Then how does the relationship with the Guru sustain? We should therefore understand here that Guru is not an embodied individual. It is because every embodied individual is subject to birth and death. In our scriptures Guru is said to be eternal. Nityam shuddham nirâbhâsam nirâkâram niranjanam (Gurugita, 50). With this understanding Guru can be said to be Nityam (Eternal) and his relationship with the Jivatma (Individual being) is never alienated. Nityaguru is omnipresent in the same sense as God is omnipresent. Thus this Nityaguru is one with God.

Scriptures ordain to pay obeisance to Guru: Gururbrahmâ Gururvishnuh Gururdevo Maheshvarah, Gurureva param Brahma tasmai Sri Gurave namah. (Gurugita, 26) It is further said: Mannâthah Sri Jagannâtho madguruh Srijagatguruh, Mamâtmâ sarvabhutâtâmâ tasmai Sri Gurave namah (Gurugita, 37) Guru is Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshvara; indeed he is Parambrahma. This Guru is my Guru as much as he is Guru of everybody else, because he is not many --he is One. Failing to comprehend this we take the embodied individual as Guru. No eternal relationship is possible with an embodied individual. So scriptures do not call an embodied individual as Guru, whereas our relationship with the Nityaguru is never severed.

Thus the question comes how should we view our Guru? We should view him as the symbol of the Nityaguru. Failing to directly think about the gods and goddesses we invoke them in images. While immersing the images of the gods and goddesses after worshipping we do not really abandon them. In the same way our relationship with the embodied Guru is severed when Guru dies or we die, but such severance is not possible with the Nityaguru. Puranas imagine that after death Guru takes us to appropriate Loka (plane). Following the logic of scriptures we find when Atman abandons its identity with any particular body it imagines a transformation of the body. That transformed body does not have the least relationship with the body of the previous birth. The previous body is reduced to ashes, but the new body that takes shape following the

previous samskâras which monitor the new birth and make the new body enjoy the accrued fruits of Karma of the previous birth and add to newer fruits of Karma of the new birth.

Thus says Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.4.2) '... When it goes out, the vital force accompanies it; when the vital force goes out, all the organs accompany it. Then the self is endowed with particular consciousness, and afterwards passes on to the body that is brought to light by that consciousness. Meditation, work and previous impressions follow it. ' Or, when an individual self leaves the body the vital forces and sense-organs follow it. Then the samskâras of the previous incarnation gain strength to indicate the nature of the newer birth that shall be. Previous knowledge, accrued fruits of Karma and samskâras follow the new birth and rest with the newly begotten body. It is also said in the Gita (15.8-9) 'When the master (soul) acquires a body, he takes these from the one he leaves, even as the breeze carries ordours from their seats, and attains (the new body). Presiding over the ears, the eyes, the organs of touch, taste and smell, and also the mind, he enjoys the sense-objects. ' As the newly begotten body enjoys the accrued fruits of Karma of previous births it also carries the fruits it earned following the path of sâdhanâ taught by the Guru in previous births.

Thus it can be said that Guru indeed leads his disciple to the right path. Otherwise the physical relationship (between the Guru and his disciple) cannot be maintained uninterruptedly. Also viewed from this subtle point of view a disciple is never detached from his Guru.

Let the Almighty God endow us with the right vision that we may drive away the narrowness and impurities of our mind and realize the Supreme Principle through our purified mind.



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