

## MASTERS AND GURUS

By Radha Bunier

Theosophical literature speaks about the unfolding of consciousness through the evolution of forms and organisms. When the form is primitive, unorganized, and crude in its response to the environment, consciousness is unable to manifest fully through it. As the form evolves, its ability to respond increases. There is greater sensitivity in the sense organs, the nervous system, and the brain. Thus better organization of form enables the consciousness to reveal itself more fully.

Humanity—as it is today—is not the end of the process of evolution. Theosophical writing declares that there is further unfoldment before us. Truth, wisdom, love, bliss, peace, and goodness are inherent in consciousness. In the Upanishads, Brahman is described as absolute universal consciousness, perfect in peace, beauty, and the other powers mentioned above. In the Liberated Adept or Master, these virtues, which are of the very nature of consciousness, have flowered into perfection as their consciousness has blossomed fully in perfect measure, revealing powers as yet latent in the average person. They are perfect in wisdom, compassion, love, and selfless purity. Purity implies the total absence of the sense of a separate self. Perfect love implies not choosing, not giving love in return for something else.

It is said that when a human being reaches perfection, he is no longer under compulsion to reincarnate, for he has transcended Karma. It is attachment and selfishness—they are the same—which draws one into birth. Because there is the desire for experience, for stimulation from outside, the ordinary person is caught in the wheel of rebirth. But those who are pure and free from attachment, because there is no self in them, are under no such necessity. Yet out of compassion they may remain in touch with the human world. We may say, “Why do not the Masters meet us? If we invite them, will they come?” In fact they may not act according to our ideas or in any way that we may imagine. However, when there are people who are ready, the Wise Ones afford opportunities for contacts, guidance, and teaching.

The word *Guru*, like many other words, can mean different things to different people. It is said to denote someone who dispels darkness. People often think the Guru is one who imparts knowledge. Knowledge that is mundane—the lesser knowledge—can be imparted; this is not possible with spiritual knowledge. No subjective, inner experience can be borrowed from another. The *Viveka Chūdāmani* makes it clear that one cannot have a substitute to perform the actions which will bring *bodha*, or awakening, in oneself. The awakening has to take place in each individual as a result of their own preparation and work. Very often people think that

they do not have to do anything, that they have only to attach themselves to a so-called Guru, touch his feet or sit in front of him and then he will take over the responsibility. This is a very convenient philosophy, for it allows people to go on with their worldly life of ambition, jealousy, money seeking, desire for power, and so on.

Because so many people find this way to their taste, there are others ready to play the complementary role. There are pretenders who call themselves Gurus, who will give a feeling of security to those who ask for it. "Turn your thoughts to me," says the self-styled Guru, "and you will be protected from all trouble. If you want to indulge in pleasure—it does not matter what kind—go ahead and enjoy yourself, but turn the beads of the rosary with my photograph on it and wear the uniform that I prescribe for you." The real Guru, on the other hand, is a true dispeller of the darkness in a person's mind and consciousness; he will not offer diversions or take away the sense of responsibility for one's own actions. One of the "Three Truths" of Theosophy is that

Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.

It has been made clear by the sages what conditions must be fulfilled in order to receive their instruction, help, and guidance. In *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* we are told that only a person's evolving spirituality can draw him near to the Masters—can "force" their attention—and that wisdom comes only to the those who apply themselves to the "daily conquest of the self." They must approach the Masters unconditionally, free from worldly and prudential considerations. But we do not want to go unconditionally. We want to keep our comforts, pleasures and ambitions and, at the same time, reach the world of the Holy Ones.

According to Theosophy, the Wise Ones never impose their will on a disciple. They do not tell him what he must believe, because believing has no meaning. They want the disciple's consciousness to *awaken* to the truth, which is something different. There are millions of people who believe that Jesus and the Buddha taught love, yet they themselves have no love. Indeed, belief creates rigidity and fanaticism and is productive of harm, not good. In *The Mahatma Letters*, it is pointed out that religion is too often used as a crutch; instead, we must learn to be self-reliant and free.

One of the greatest of Masters, the Lord Buddha, said, "Be a lamp unto yourself." He taught: do not make an authority out of tradition, the scriptures, other people, or me; find out for yourself what is the truth. The importance of enquiry (*vichāra*) is emphasized also in Vedānta.

In *At the Feet of the Master* it is said that one must listen carefully to what the Master says for "He does not speak twice." Lecturers on a platform may repeat their ideas, because they want to make their audience agree with them and think as they do. An advertisement is repeated again and again in order to condition the reader's mind.

But true Teachers do not try to impose their ideas; they do not want conformity or blind obedience. They give a hint or make a suggestion in order to help the person's intelligence to grow. If the student has learned to think for himself, if he has listened carefully, he finds out for himself what is the implication of a statement. If somebody else tells him what to think and believe, he does not touch the depths of the teaching.

The average Guru directs people what to do, what to think, what to wear. There are Gurus who like personal worship, who like their feet to be washed, who like being attended upon. There are some who claim to be greater even than the Buddha Himself. On the other hand, the letters of the Masters reflect the humility and the anonymity in which they prefer to remain. Real teachers indulge in no self-publicity or self-glorification because there is no self in them. So, there is a difference between those who are usually considered Gurus and the Masters as they are described in Theosophical literature. Personal worship, self-glorification, telling other people what to do, making them dependent, teaching them beliefs, imposing ideas on them, collecting money and becoming rich, having swimming-pools and private airplanes—all this is accepted as part of present-day Guru-dom but it is entirely incompatible with being a true spiritual Teacher or Master.

Real teachers do not even consider themselves to be teachers. True teachers see no difference between others and themselves; they do not make a division between the taught and the teacher. A Guru cannot make another see what his eyes are not capable of seeing. No true Guru will pretend to do it or want to do it. But a Wise One can be helpful if the disciple is receptive. It has been said that when the gods want to punish man, they listen to his prayers. Most people's wants are foolish. A person may want a Guru to do something for him but it may not be to his spiritual benefit. Trouble comes to us, and we generally would like to be free from it, but everything that comes as a result of Karma brings a lesson with it. In looking back on her past, Annie Besant once said that while she would willingly let go of the pleasant things, she would not wish to forego any one of the difficulties, because she had learned so much from them. Spiritual teachers may not, therefore, give the sort of help that a person might wish for. Their way of helping might be from a completely different point of view.

J. Krishnamurti pointed to something important when he asked why we think that *only* the Guru can help? Everything in life can help—the people around us, the leaf that falls from the tree, the beauty that is everywhere—everything can help us if we are sensitive and receptive. Our receptivity must be equal to the Guru's desire to teach. Einstein's physics cannot be grasped by an individual who is totally ignorant of mathematics. Even the greatest of musicians cannot teach a person who is too lazy to learn. One who plumbs the depths of what a teacher says (which may not be conveyed verbally at all) must be receptive. And it is not possible to be insensitive to life in

general and receptive to the Guru alone. Either a person has receptivity or they do not. Again and again, those who are not receptive have abused the spiritual teacher; they do not listen to his words; they reject him because they do not recognize him.

How many of us would be able to recognize a truly holy person, were he or she to appear in our midst without a label? Labels may be false. To recognize a holy person, there must be something within us that vibrates in harmony with such a holy person—there must be the capacity to respond. If this is lacking, how can we profit from a teacher?

A Guru cannot help the man or woman who is not ready to be helped, and it is only when the disciple is ready that the teacher appears.