

Gee You Are You

In one way of looking at things, ‘Guru’ is the name for the invisible, blissful force which guides us through our lives. One may have a greater or lesser personal relationship with this Factor, but despite our varying attitudes about its influence, it is constantly penetrating our life. Those with a theistic or exteriorized orientation tend to associate the Guru with a person, others see it as a benign form of energy, while many others merely take it for granted, carrying on as though they were the only ones “in charge” (triple pun intended). Some, like me, choose D – All of the Above.

The Guru to me is a constant benign impetus that appears throughout our lives in various guises, its existence inferable within whatever tangible events are transpiring. Since most of the so-called tangibles involve interactions with other human beings, the Guru factor is readily associated with those people who have had the greatest influence on us. Mother Nature, for example, may be a tremendous source of inspiration, but she does not deign to explain herself in the ideational terms that form the essential history of the personality. So she should be treated more as a goddess—perhaps even as the manifestation of “the” Goddess—but not as a Guru concerned in some way with an individual person.

I’m not especially metaphysically inclined, but once when I assisted in the birth of a baby I very clearly “saw” a gigantic, cupped hand bringing the child out to us, cradling it with utmost care and love. I understood that this hand would be there for the child’s entire life as a directing and nurturing impulse, guiding her through beautiful times and ugly times, assuring meaning even when to every appearance there was none. During the semi-chaos of postpartum I could feel the power of the hand but no longer see it, and later on it was no longer sensible at all. But I knew it was there. When I conceive of the Guru in concrete terms, this is the image I return to most frequently.

I don't agree with Andy Warhol that each of us is famous for fifteen minutes sometime in our life, but each of us does get a really big hand.

I suppose it is my prejudice that associates the Guru especially with the most beneficial and positive effects, instead of with the entire course of the incarnation. After all, the hand is there to guide us through all of our existence, and is in no way absent during our follies. Yet how many of us cripple ourselves spiritually by giving the Divine credit for all the plusses, while taking full responsibility for the negatives upon ourselves? I know I tilt the Balance Sheet that way all the time, and I'm not even a sinner. It must be a deeply ingrained hangover of our religious culture disguised as Right Thinking. Yet when I contemplate the meaning of the Guru clearly, the question of credit (and its corollary, guilt) dissolves into nothingness. It is a unitive relation we have, the Guru and I.

Since the immaterial Guru is only perceptible through its effects, perhaps I should review a few of the most significant changes it caused in my life, in other words, points where the Guru principle helped produce the greatest amount of growth. Some of them may even sound familiar to you too.

Like everyone else I suppose, the Guru was first manifested to me in the guise of my parents. I received a good grounding in unconditional love, which has been important to me all through my life. As I grew older, I was asked many unanswerable questions in the liberal scientific mold (what is beyond the bounds of the universe? what kind of time predates the past, and what comes after the future? etc.), which stimulated some rather oceanic contemplation in my young mind. And I was trained as a social liberal too, which was an important part of pre-television America: all beings are created equal, skin color doesn't matter, don't take anything on faith but find out for yourself, and so on. Really helpful things to know. Even though much of this was presented in the form of platitudes and wasn't an accomplished fact in the "real" world, it went deeply into my psyche and was taken very

much to heart. It could only have been the Guru who passed these koans on to me through the medium of my unsuspecting parents and teachers.

On the negative side, my father could have written the book on how not to raise children. Unthinking obedience to authority, right or wrong, was paramount. Moralisms were not explained, they were true “because I said so.” Behavior modification was from the manual *How to Train Your Dog*, by Dale Carnegie. A friend recently showed me a book on the psychology of parenting, which contained a list of what you should NEVER do to your children. I burst out laughing: every item on the list was gospel in my household. Traditional parenting is virtually the perfect recipe for producing neurotic adults with no self-esteem and no ability to realize their potential. This aspect of the Guru has had the most profound effect on me of anything, I suppose. It’s given me problems enough to work on for a lifetime—the gift that keeps on giving.

All through my school years the Guru stimulated me to ponder the human condition. There was so much petty injustice, so much meanness, so much cynicism! I was frequently beaten up, insulted and intimidated, mostly for no apparent reason. And while I was not always kind to others, kindness seemed to me such an important value to have and to practice. At about age 14, I began to seriously think about the meaning of existence, and to strive to understand all the conflicts being waged within and between people. Having no religious training at all, I had no recourse to any readymade answers. I was mostly on my own, digging down to a foundation I didn’t even know existed. I am very grateful that I never had the option to accept a pseudo-solution based on any religious or philosophical system, but could only go it alone. This rather miserable period dramatically increased my independence and self-reliance.

Late in my teen years the Guru squeezed itself into a tiny drop of LSD, and eradicated a lot of confusion in the twinkling of an Eye. I saw directly the substratum of existence as love in the

form of light. I understood the meaning of my life, with all its vicissitudes, and could clearly see the geometry involved in convoluted as well as linear thinking. So many doubts were overwhelmed with bliss! After wandering far and wide, I had come home to myself. This provided the impetus for my whole adult life, and it would be foolish of me to give it less than its full value as the most significant single event I have ever experienced.

Soon afterwards, still feeling rather disjunct from the world from my inner travels, my future wife and always guru, Deborah Buchanan, and I launched ourselves towards a rendezvous with Swami Nitya Chaitanya Yati in Portland. Our meeting was “accidental” and extremely fortuitous. Here was a guy who had so much of the Guru infusing him that someday people would call him one himself! We had a brief fling as Guru and disciple at the Overton Gurukula in Portland, which gave him an upset stomach and gave me years of work to do. But mostly I hung out on the sidelines and listened to the wisdom pouring out of him. It was all wonderful stuff, and best of all it made sense. Finally, someone who knew what he was talking about! And someone who lived what he taught, rather than treating it as a kind of academic exercise to be hypocritically laughed off in private. What I learned from those classes kept me from many blind alleys and led me out of many others, for which I am eternally grateful.

One day as I was chauffeuring the Swami around in my Volkswagen (no Rolls Royces for us!) he said to me, “Meditation is not just sitting somewhere with the eyes turned up, it can be anything you do. Music, for instance, is an ideal form of meditation.” The Guru was speaking of something that had been dormant for awhile in me, my intense love of playing the piano. The person squeezed into the little car could have no way of knowing of my musical interests, but the Guru guiding us certainly knew. For many years I had considered attaining realization through traditional yoga practices to be my sole motivation in life, and music had been dumped in a heap with so much of the other worldly junk I was abandoning. In a short time, though, I was

ecstatically involved with the piano again, learning from the profundities of the Masters of composition just as I was learning from the Masters of Oriental philosophy. Thanks to the Guru music was then and there restored as a major theme in my life. My wrong notions about it had been dispelled.

Intellect was another thing I was trying to abandon in favor of a hypothetical spirituality that was supposed to be unencumbered by it. Obviously my steps carried me to the wrong personification of the Guru in this regard! Right from the start my intellect was being strongly challenged to wake up and get to work, but it was many years before I wholeheartedly signed on to that program. In America, intellect and spirit are to be kept as separate as church and state. Even highly intelligent Americans snub Vedanta philosophy as “too intellectual” to be spiritual. So they willingly give up thinking for themselves. The Christian Church eats those people for lunch, with barely a burp. “Climb aboard the salvation bus, and leave the driving to us!” Although I too exhibited the classic schism, I certainly was not going to relinquish my birthright to some wowser dingbat, and that’s a fact.

Guru Deborah has been helping me through all my adulthood. Her impetus has been to help me overcome the neuroses of childhood and to avoid becoming complacent or satisfied in a static way. All spouses do this for each other, but she has a special ability here too. And she loves her work. Early in our relationship she sensed my defeatist attitude and attacked it ferociously, which was really the only way to get through my excellent defense mechanisms. Reluctantly, I developed a modicum of self-respect. She is always on hand to challenge any assumptions, to dump me out of the easy chair of complacency, and to inspire me to be, if not the best I can be, at least passably tolerable. Most of the time I really appreciate this aspect of the Guru, I really do. And I love her. That’s a good way to relate to one’s Spouse-Guru. All in all, I am chronically indebted to her for her help with my psyche, as well as chronically in debt from her liberal use of our credit card.

Looking back, it's amazing to me how much energy I have had to expend just to counteract a few of the typical misunderstandings I emerged from childhood with. They never seem to give up without a fight. That's because the protagonist invariably sides with his own foibles, and only his best friends and teachers will brave the storm to point out the error of his ways. Again, it was most often Deborah who took her Big Stick and her umbrella into my low pressure areas to present Guru-corrections to me, while others sensibly ran for cover. What a gal! I guess I should take her out to dinner pretty soon....

For all the sound and fury, it looks like my path so far has been to painstakingly remove some boulders out of the way so that I could just take a tentative step or two forward. My journey of a thousand miles has essentially been in one place. So much effort for so little progress! That's why I try my damndest to not block up the paths of other children. May their energies be better spent than mine have been! That is, unless rolling boulders is what we're really here for in the first place....

I remember one colossal rock that was lodged, not on my path, but directly on my head. Its name was Authority. Then one day it struck me (an insight, not the rock) that we invest authority in other people because we're taught to do so. Furthermore, only a few antisocial prigs and misfits think of themselves as authority figures; the rest of us wander through life imagining that everyone else knows what's going on while we haven't a clue. In other words, authority is something we imagine as existing in some Other, and that Other feels the same way about us. We're all in the same boat! The hierarchy of power, then, is a delusion with which we are enslaved and subordinated by those with a strong urge to bluff.

The realization that we are all equally in the dark, as well as equally in the light, dissolved that boulder instantly. The relief was so great that I laughed aloud for joy, and felt light-hearted for a long time afterwards. And I no longer fear those perennial muscle-flexes from the local martinets: hey, they're just jerks like me! It's

amazing how the tension dissipates when one party doesn't play along in that game. This was the first time that a Vedantic renormalization was responsible for untying one of life's little knots for me. I could only imagine the Guru (personified) wiping his brow with a handkerchief in relief at my *finally* solving one of the more obvious of riddles.

This idea can be conceived as a dialectic synthesis. Society has been postulating rules and notions of authority, in order to maintain the status quo, for a very long time. The antithesis to this repressive force is rebellion in its various forms. But rebellion is wholly dependent on the authority it opposes. Where there were strictures, now there are to be none. The rule is to not have rules, which breeds a kind of antiauthority authoritarianism in the name of freedom. Clearly, authority and rebellion against it are two sides of the same coin, with a similar range of moral implications and similar limitations on true freedom. But rejection of societal standards per se is not freedom, it is merely a negative relation to the same authoritarian system. The renormalized approach that achieves a dialectical synthesis between these allows the freedom to act outside of external authority while preserving meaningful behavioral patterns based on the legitimate inclinations of the individual.

It was only recently, after much work on the rock pile of self-delusion, with a few more successes, that I met the Guru as personified in Nataraja Guru and Narayana Guru. At least I met them through their written works and their ideas as interpreted by Guru Nitya. A couple of heavy dudes, it goes without saying. And they have had an increasingly powerful influence over my thinking, if not my decadent Western lifestyle.

Our initial meeting was not auspicious. In 1971, Nitya was giving an early morning class on Nataraja Guru's *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, at the Overton Gurukula. the material was dense and the commentary even denser. Maybe I was the dense one. After only a few days, Nitya called me the quasi-polite equivalent of a brain-dead Bozo, and threw me out of the class. So

for years I nurtured a kind of stinging respect for Nataraja Guru as an extremely erudite man. Seven years later, we Sipa-Shisyas dived into an in-depth study of Narayana Guru's *Atmopadesa Satakam* at Hall Street, Portland, with somewhat better results. During this period, I mentioned my awe for Nataraja Guru's incomprehensible writings to a friend, who responded, "Yes, but Nancy was reading *Dialectical Methodology* the other day as if it was *Be Here Now*. She was laughing even." So I figured it was time to try again. This time I waded through Nataraja Guru's Bhagavad Gita commentary (admittedly one of the lighter works), and was rewarded with a tremendous amount of valuable insight, so much so that I have never since been able to enjoy *Be Here Now*.

The Atmopadesa class at Hall St. was also having a profound effect on me. Narayana Guru's inimitable verses were brought home through Nitya's penetrating commentaries. In particular, the central portion of the work dealing with *sama* and *anya*, the self and the other, was a powerful blow to the subtle forms of egotism still rampant in me. Once again I was stung to the core, and again I resolved to root out those blind spots that were being so clearly pointed out to me. The overall effect of our intense involvement with the work was to bring Narayana Guru's theories of spirituality into the core of my being as a living presence, deepening my inner commitment to truth. I think that all of us who shared in that experience were profoundly affected by it.

During the mid-1980s I was privileged to do the final editing on Guru Nitya's commentary on Narayana Guru's *Darsanamala*. This gave me the opportunity to study the work carefully, for one cannot make an editorial correction until he is confident that he understands exactly what is intended. While the process of editing was an important discipline in itself, and was extremely satisfying when done correctly, the opportunity to apprentice myself to *Darsanamala* was a tremendous experience. Through it I really began to understand what an incredible mind and spirit were wedded in the person of Narayana Guru. And I finally came to see

that the value of an intelligent appraisal was more than just superficial, it was central to the renormalization I was undergoing. One of the most important themes in Nitya's commentary is the unitive basis of the apparently divergent elements of matter and spirit, of materialism and spirituality. The case made is airtight; the proof is there. I had to capitulate to reason. My intellect and my self, long rent asunder, were married to each other once again.

Well, maybe not married, exactly. Cohabiting would be more like it.

Inwardly I incline before the Guru, who has brought me so many blessings through so many wonderful people. And I incline before your Gurus, who do the same for you, and wear a new face for each and every one. For I know that these many Gurus are all one and the same principle. AUM.

(1990)