



On Guruness

Student: You have talked a lot about guru in the philosophy classes. I'm interested to know how you see Gurukula, the students and your relationship with them after 15 years of running this place. And you are also a guru for many.

Some people say that you are your own guru and Guru is not so needed. How do you see this statement? In the end we also have the guru inside, you can find that guru within you. So what does that mean?

Guruji: What you have said is very true. I don't consider myself a guru. I feel like I am just helping somebody who needs it. It's not like I consider myself a guru. Somebody is considering me a guru. That's a different issue. I'm not announcing that I am becoming a guru from today. It's not that way. I feel like I am a practitioner on this path. I can help somebody when they ask, when they need (support). Maybe I can help with my experience and share knowledge with them.

So that's why, just like a helper on the spiritual journey, I can help some people who have the same kind of mentality and want to cross the same journey.

Where is the real guruness or Guru thing? I think it's in the knowledge. It's nowhere else. So when somebody becomes noble, then the gurutva takes place in him, naturally. Guru means heavy, heaviness, weight. And the weight means not any other physical weight. It is all about knowledge, how noble you are. Through that, people can get support or are influenced by the guru's energy and knowledge.

I don't consider myself to be in the level that without speaking, I can affect people, only by this Samadhi shining. So I'm just practicing my path. I can help some people and I'm happy and satisfied with this path. I've been helping many people, and they're also very happy, peaceful, which is good. But the concept of a Guru can also be a fancy thing. Nowadays, having a guru and surrendering to Him/Her, has also become a trend and it can be a great illusion. In the same way, we don't need any gurus. We are a guru for ourselves. Having a guru or not having a guru is not in our hands. I think it happens.

Wanting too much to have a guru, can also lead to a wrong guru. We are affected by some people, and their way of teaching, their method, their presence. It can affect us a lot, and we take support from them. We surrender to them. So that's why I think people nowadays might be saying that they don't have a guru or they don't want to have a guru. Or how they are a guru for ourselves.

This is actually a very intense statement. What does that mean? In this present condition, can I be a guru for myself? I am struggling so much. How can I be a guru for myself if I am still struggling with my own body, mind, senses and emotions? That's why it is really very important to have somebody who is already a little bit more pure, more knowledgeable, more noble than you and more skillful. To have support in handling all these worldly things and when struggling. Just being around a guru has a special impact.



So that's why having a guru is not a wrong thing, but it can be a great illusion, too. You should observe real things in them, not just the name, the fame. We should enquire about them. Know who they are, what's their background, how long they have studied, all these things. Maybe it can really help a little bit of not falling into this illusion of Guru concept.

Yogagurukula means a traditional place for learning yoga. When the great yogis start to write books, they usually start with "I salute to all the previous great gurus." Through them, this path came to me. I'm surrendering. And I'm grateful. Same here also, it's not me. So many great gurus, the tradition, parampara, so many sages like Vyasa, Shankara, all of their tradition. We are just a small portion of it, and somebody else will take on in the future.



Guruness is a seat. It's a position, a character and a quality, a qualified character. So wherever, whoever has this one (seat), we have to surrender, we have to believe. We have to give our respect to it. So in that case, maybe some people think that I have some of those qualities. So that's why they respect and believe, but it doesn't mean that I am the guru here and all the rest are students. It means we are all practitioners and we are all family. You know, that's why I said, Gurutva knowledge is the real guru for all of us, we are all trying to get to that Guru seat.

Is it a heavy seat? Others put you on it. How do you feel about it?

From a very young age, from the beginning itself, I have had this kind of training in my life that I am always a little bit away from the ego. You know, everybody told me ego is very dangerous. I had less ego in my life, so that's why from the beginning when I started to teach yoga, especially after creating and building this place here, I never identified myself too much with this seat. I just come here, sit and just teach, not so much identifying myself with it. Definitely it could have been really heavy or a little bit too much to handle, but I always considered myself also as a practitioner. I have my path, they have their path. I do my job, they do their job.

You know, I don't really interfere so much with students' life and their path. So until that, I just do my things, my job, so it's not so hard to handle this seat. I think if you identify yourself with it, then maybe you calculate, you compare with your own teachings. Then confusion starts. So I never felt it's very hard seat. But I always give suggestions to everybody that this seat is very heavy, very hard to balance. You have to be very careful from the beginning itself, before you sit in that seat, you should be very sure that I am not identifying myself. Then it will be very easy, not so much strugglings will be there to handle it.

From a student's point of view, that non-identity makes it easier to receive or hear the teaching. There are less things around it or in between. And from a student point of view, there is not that feeling of being pushed, oppressed or manipulated. Then it's maybe easier to listen.



And also one thing I think is, I have a lot of Western students here. If I had only Indian students, like people in my village, maybe it would have taken a long time for people to recognize me. For some of them, it took a long time, maybe because they have a settled mindset about guru Indian people. It (guru) should be like a certain way, certain clothes, certain age, in a certain way they should behave. They should come in a posh car, and they should not touch anybody. They should be like the sannyasis in the mutt. Some people have these kinds of mindsets of gurus.

After a long time of listening to my speeches and seeing me, they really understood, it's all about knowledge. It's not about a physical, mental condition, something else it is. And people really start to respect and they believe. It's nice. But maybe with the Western people, they don't have this fixed mentality about guru. They are more ignorant or have less prejudice about a guru, which is very nice in the beginning, not to have so many ideas about guru. When they also start to have these ideas, they also struggle.



Some people already have the idea that a guru should be very old, they should behave in a certain way and if I am not suiting into that idea, maybe somebody will ignore and avoid me. That is okay for me. It's not a big thing. But when you spend some time, maybe you will realize what I can offer, what I can teach to the people who come to this place. So that's why having a ready idea and formula about guru is also ignorance, so we never know what really the guru tattva is. There is a very nice book called Guru Gita. It has many verses about guru. What is a guru? Who is Guru? So when we read that one, you will understand Guru is something big, a really big thing. It's a value. We cannot see it as a person, but more of a value and we should respect that.

And yes, we have a guru within. The Guru is around or it can be kind of formless. So we need to tap into that entity, and it will take a bit more pure mind and less ego from a practitioner to experience it or to be a student of that teaching. Whatever we have in philosophy and spirituality, it answers the basic questions. The philosophy is not for the liberated. It's for us ignorant souls.

A liberated Yogi never ever needs a guru. He himself has become the guru. So that's why many people say: we don't need any guru.

We do need a proper guide, especially in the beginning. We need to break these layers of maya, to break this ignorance and thick layers which we have been collecting from many lives. How hard it is. If you want to just cross over this journey (the ocean of samsara) alone, it's up to you. No problem, you can cross. But have a skillful practitioner, a yogi or some character who has already worked with these things very well, who knows the path well and they can help you. To break my own ego, my own constructed ideas.

That's why having too much of this non-guru concept can also make you suffer. Don't be afraid of anything. It's just a matter of how you feel inside. Matter of the heart and when a real guru appears, you will feel him/her. You cannot run away from real gurus when they appear in your life. Maybe you have to surrender. You have to really pay attention. You don't like him, maybe, and after some time, you just go away, but your heart tells you he's your guru.

That's how you know. He's a real practitioner. Self authorization (swatah pramana) happens, but it's not paratah pramana, the ultimate authorization. Swatah pramana means authentication through the self, not from outside. Nobody can certify or tell you who your guru is. It's your own thing. You should ask and your own heart will tell you.

How do you feel when you think about your guru or when you spend time with him? How is it different from another knowledgeable, spiritual person?

See, honestly, it took a long time for me to find my guru (Nyaya professori Gangadhar Bhatt) as a guru. It's not a very easy task. It took years for me to really understand him, what is his compassion level and how he really feels for me, what he is doing for me, everything. So nowadays, why are people struggling with this guru concept? They already have an idea in their mind. And how do you know somebody in one day, two days, one month, two months. How can you know what's happening?

He (Gangadhar) was just a teacher for some time. I had some issues from my side to open up.



He was busy and working with so many other people. And then afterwards I felt like he's a great, knowledgeable person, so different. He was very scholarly, I was thinking.

Then, after a long time, I realized how much he really meant what he said, speaking things from the heart, not only from the mind. His compassion and how much he helped me to get this knowledge.

Why do people really want to know the concept of Guru in a few months? I think it never happens. We struggle so much. Studying shastra, philosophy, practice you do, then guru will come. Guru appears naturally, from somewhere. You never know how it happens, you know. So that's why I also felt it was very hard for me to find a guru. I had many teachers, Gangadhar Bhatt is not only my teacher. I had so many other teachers who have taught me so many things and I'm so grateful for them. But when it comes to a guru, it's a different thing. It's an emotional heart connection with whom you can tune up better.

Somebody who is heavier than you. You feel that heaviness immediately. That's something different.

So it doesn't relate to teaching, it's something in their character, a different thing. So that's why I always consider him as a guru. But I think, still today, I think he doesn't consider me as his student of yoga, as he didn't teach me so much of yoga philosophy but more the deeper aspects of yoga through life. He does feel that he is my nyaya teacher, but he really taught me so many other things about life.

So that's why, for me, he's my guru, he has that gurutva in him.

Were you looking for one or thinking about it? Was there some kind of feeling of missing or lacking something?

I think I was just going on this path, he appeared and I started to study with him. After a long journey, when I look back on my life, his contribution is a lot. That's how to calculate, where you spent a long time, where you studied a lot and with whom, like that. In my life, I was not searching for anything. I was just doing my things and everything was nice. But after some years, when I look back it looks like his contribution is so much. I didn't know at the time I was practicing and studying, but afterwards I started to realize the big changes in my life. Whatever I am today, his contribution is a lot. So that's how I realized he is my guru, my teacher. It's not like I was looking for a guru, and then he came, and I immediately understood that he's a guru. Maybe sometimes when you see somebody, that moment itself, you feel there is a good connection. This is my part.



Well, I was looking to be a student. I wanted more and to go deeper, but I didn't realize I needed a certain "heavy teacher", a guru. I wasn't thinking about it, but I felt it instantly. So there was something that I was looking for when I first came here and I found it in you.

It took a long time for me, because I did not study with one or two. I studied in Sringeri. I studied in different places and in Mysore for a long time. There are three, four teachers I had, who taught me for two, three years. I was also calling them "Guruji". They are also my gurus. So in all of them, finding somebody as my great guide, It took time for me to decide.

Is this also the difference between the Indian traditional ways and Westerners, who are coming from totally different backgrounds?

Yes, yes. That's true. Because if you study in a traditional way, you study different things from different people. I studied Nyaya philosophy with my Guruji, which I never, ever taught anybody, which I almost forgot now. If somebody asks me now to teach Nyaya, I have to study myself once again. That's my base. That's my sharp training. He (Gangadhar) also taught me some yoga sutras, many different things we discussed.



So that's why, before I came to Mysore, maybe to choose some philosophy, I had learned a lot of basic Sanskrit things and grammar, which I learned from different people. And after studying, I went to Vedanta school for two, three years. So somebody else was teaching me that. And even in my section also, I had other two teachers also who are really good. So still they are really in contact with me. And they are very nice people, of course. So many teachers are there, but to consider somebody as a guru may mean it takes a long time, at least from my perspective, and you don't need to announce anything right away.

Now take your own time. Why? You just study, spend time, then time will tell you, it's a long process. I think building a strong relationship with a guru, it's a long process, even though you declare and you announce, he's my guru, but does he really welcome you in the same way? It's both sides, he also should really welcome you in the same way. There should be a proper connection between you both and then that guru student relationship works.

I remember many moments in the past decade when I needed to be a student and also serve my guru in a very practical way. Looking back, I feel that sometimes it was a little bit exhausting and heavy for you but you allowed that.

I'm very grateful for that. I think it is also very rare. So this guru Seva, service of the guru, was for wanting to help you but maybe it was even more for my own self-purification.

And although maybe sometimes it was heavy for you to listen and mirror back my own ignorance and projections, you allowed that. You really took time, listened and guided me. Sometimes with brutal honesty but always with compassion.

Sometimes you felt very tired. Sometimes you felt very stuck and asked the same questions. It took time for you to come out of these things (attachments, projections, emotionality). Over the years we had many strong talks, even arguments, and many times I said many things very strongly to you, you know. But I never, ever had any regrets because I said which was needed in that moment. I always spoke from my heart.

Maybe it's the spiritual connection and deep trust. What is good at the moment I tell, there is nothing to take too personally. How many times we had strong talks and yet, we are good and close friends. Now it doesn't matter, in that moment what's needed that I said from my side.



Yes and it wasn't fighting, no, I needed to hear all that, it opened my eyes. And it was actually because of you that so many things happened in the first place. You were the clean mirror that I could just throw my things into, get some clearance and I was fully accepted. But it took me months and years until I didn't need to do it so much. But I would say that the first five years were quite intense throwing!

I felt so safe and accepted, I could allow myself to be seen so fully and ignorantly. I was often embarrassed but at the same time I always had that feeling that this is the right way, that something good and right is happening while all this (crazy mental and emotional churning) journey was happening.

And then we were reading about the Bhagavad Gita, Kurukshetra and Arjuna and this fighting in the warfield and all these enemies and this is exactly what was happening to me. Inner enemies and my own patterns became visible to me. I was able to allow the change and let go because of the teaching, because of the philosophy and mostly because of your support and the mutual trust we had.

I mean, when I say fighting, I don't really mean fighting, but from the outside it might have looked like that. I never said this to anybody, but many times my mother and my wife asked me, "Why all this arguing?" You know, you came and we had a talk and they see you are not happy. They sense something is happening between us. They said to me why do I fight and make you sad. I said: I do my things in the way I want to do, please don't interfere. They didn't know what was happening and what you needed. But of course I respected them, they saw things from their angle, but this (guru-sishya - relationship) is something different.



So what you said is very true. The real guru means that he can show you yourself as it is and he accepts you fully regardless, as it is. That's the real guruness. You know, in front of whom you can be just as you are. To be accepted as you are. That's what I feel in front of my Guruji. I become small, really like a child. Whatever I do, he accepts me, that feeling I have very strongly. That's what real guruness is. So I really accept my students, maybe, as they are, whatever strugglings they have. It's a part of life.

I tell them (students) honestly whatever is needed while in the purification process, but it doesn't mean I dislike them. It's about needing to grow. I will guide you on how to grow. So in a balanced way we have to work. A guru should accept and also guide on how to grow, both. Acceptance and working with one self, both should go together. So when there is a trust built between a guru and a student, then the work becomes possible and easy.

Everybody knows everything, they think. So listening to somebody, especially on very personal things, builds trust gradually, then it naturally starts to happen. It's very important that you are accepted, without trust a change is not going to happen.



I never had any doubt about you. I knew you only had my best interest in your mind.

Yes, that's the thing. You know, people should feel it. That's why I said to build a strong guru student relationship. It takes time. You know people call me Guruji, Guruji. But how many feel this from the heart?

I remember the first time when I called you "Guruji". I was waiting for the right time and I was very clear when I said it. I meant it and I still remember that feeling, time and space when I said it the first time, because then it had such a strong impact on me.

People call me Guruji or Vijaya, Vijay, whatever they say, it doesn't matter. But the feeling, you know, that strong feeling we share, that matters. So that's why I think guru-student -relationship take some time. It's not a fixed idea, I find someone and then it happens. We have to go through many things, then it is being built very strongly. So you just need to get ready. That's all. It takes more time. But whatever I am following here in my life, in this gurukula, it's good. I feel there is a balance. That's what I am very happy about in this place. This concept of Guru, it did not become so intense here, so crazy at the same time. It's like we are all just practitioners here, it's in a balanced way.

I think it also helps that you have a family.

Yes, it's not just me. You are not seeing me only in this (guru) seat. You see me in many roles, sometimes a social worker, sometimes a speaker on the stage. You see how people treat me, how they see me, so that's why it's good, to see some different angles.



*We are living in the same house, but you have your own areas. You also have your responsibilities with the village, society and other people. You are the temple priest and you have your own life, apart from the students.
And we see all that. It's not that you are here only for us.
Thank you so much Guruji for this beautiful talk.*