

Our Swamiji

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Incomparable

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, while attempting to describe his teacher, says in one place that he finds no illustration adequate to describe *sadguru*, the giver of the knowledge of the self. How about a philosopher's stone? Is it not great that it converts a piece of iron into gold? Yes, a philosopher's stone is indeed great, but not great enough to stand as a comparison to the *guru*. Why? Because a philosopher's stone cannot create another philosopher's stone, while my teacher converts the disciple into a teacher like himself. And so this teacher is incomparable.

We were no better than a piece of iron, all dark about the purpose and truth of life, when we went to our teacher. We did not know where we were going and what we were worth. Simply by the grace of God, we happened to take refuge at the feet of Swamiji and were stunned by what was revealed to us: “You already are what you have been searching for all along. There is no question of acquiring something you do not have; it is a matter of recognizing what you have---what you are—and owning it up. There is nothing to be done; there is something to be known in life. You are already full, complete. Incompleteness and inadequacy are merely notions arising from ignorance of the true nature of the self, the self that is constantly being experienced but not recognized. The self is to be known; it is not to be experienced because the self is constantly being experienced—no experience can take place without the self being there. The experiences you already

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have are to be understood. So stop searching or looking for the self. Recognize the self that is ever present, self-evident, self-shining.”

This direct and clear teaching lifted the veil. All of a sudden, life became meaningful. After all, I am not worthless, which so far I thought I was. There had been a constant struggle to achieve something, to become something, to prove myself. There had always been an undercurrent of self–condemnation, self-rejection. The mind was instantly relieved of this entire burden and was poised to see the beauty, the glory, of the self. Thus the teacher first converts the iron, dark and worthless, into gold, shining and precious, by unfolding the fact that iron is false and gold is the reality. Then he proceeds to convert this gold, the enlightened student, into a philosopher’s stone, a teacher, by giving him an insight into the methodology of unfolding the vision of the scriptures.

The Guru

Swamiji fills up the word *guru*. It is said that the letter *gu* stands for darkness or ignorance and the letter *ru* stands for light or knowledge that dispels the darkness. *Guru* is therefore the one who dispels the darkness of ignorance in the heart of the disciple. This great task requires a teacher who is a *śrotriya*, one having an in-depth knowledge of the scriptures and possessing the art of communication, and a *brahmaniṣṭha*, one who is rooted in the Truth, reflecting the beauty of the Truth in word and deed. For such a teacher, teaching is a joy because he has only to unfold himself. The Truth is unfolded as the self of the teacher that is non-different from the self of the taught. Therefore, the student finds his own self being unfolded by the teacher; he finds his own reflection in the words of the teacher. This is what we found while listening to Swamiji.

The teacher is the embodiment of the Truth. Swamiji stands before the student as an embodiment of what the student is seeking, of what the student wants to become. Therefore, as students, the task is easy: simply compare notes with the living illustration. The joy and simplicity radiating from the personality are a source of inspiration as well as solace when needed.

Ocean of Compassion

What makes such a *mahātmā* teach, organize, constantly act, and thus apparently undergo a lot of strain? It is the love for people, for teaching, and for the tradition. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya describes a teacher as an ocean of compassion for no reason. What reason can we assign to the spring that comes and spreads freshness and joy and enthusiasm all around? Compassion is natural for a *mahātmā* who reaches out to people to help them.

When our Swamiji talks to an audience, every one is taken as one qualified to learn. Swamiji used to say, “Never dismiss a listener as incompetent to learn. Everyone can learn.” And so we find Swamiji taking great pains to communicate the ideas. And teaching does not merely stop at communication with words. It is molding the personality of the student, like a sculptor who carves a beautiful form out of rough stone. A sculptor only deals with a stone that is inert, that yields, that does not offer any resistance, while here, the teacher has to deal with live people who very often resist and react. But we never saw Swamiji losing his patience with anyone. Swamiji does not dismiss even one who is openly hostile. Very often, Swamiji even takes all the blame upon himself, to protect the student, so that the student is not discouraged. Swamiji emphasizes accommodation, just as space

accommodates everything, the good and the bad. But here we find something more: a concern that shows the heart of a mother.

Torchbearer of Tradition

Swamiji has a deep commitment to the scriptures and the tradition. *Śruti* is the only *pramāṇa*, the only valid means of knowledge to reveal the Truth. *Śruti*'s statements are couched in the language of paradoxes and so the teacher must handle them properly, must create a proper context, and make the student see the meaning. The one who is blessed by Mother *Śruti* alone can do this. To that one alone does *Sruti* reveal herself. Swamiji obviously enjoys the grace of the *Śruti* and the mother freely flows from the tongue of this worthy son in the form of *jñāna-gangā*.

Swamiji takes pride in declaring that he belongs to the age-old tradition of *guru-śiṣya-paramparā* and that none of his ideas is original. Very often Swamiji used to point out Upanishads and *bhāṣyas* as the source of various ideas. The deep love and reverence for tradition inspires, in the hearts of the students, a similar love and respect for the scriptures and tradition.

Swamiji's words exhibit a great clarity, firmness, and conviction arising from the intimate knowledge free from doubts and vagueness. Swamiji is able to adhere to the tradition without taking refuge in technicalities. Every word is used deliberately and appropriately. Teaching, for Swamiji, is an art, a deep insight into the scriptures, a keen observation of life, a thorough understanding of the human mind, a love for life, and a joy of teaching—all these make listening to Swamiji a treat.

A great deal of confusion prevails regarding the true significance of all the important concepts of Vedanta such as *karmayoga*, *bhakti*,

knowledge, and meditation. *Karmayoga* is often interpreted as performing action without expectation of results; *bhakti* is thought to be a separate path for emotional people; knowledge is thought to be a mystical experience and so on. These misconceptions create tension and conflicts in the minds of people. Swamiji takes pains to clarify these concepts, a proper understanding of which is absolutely necessary. Thus, the tradition gets a new lease through Swamiji.

A Sadhu

What is most important is that Swamiji is a *sādhu*. *Sādhu* means a simple person who has a heart free from conflicts and angularities and a conduct that shows an alignment between thought, word, and deed. Life is open and simple. There is no stiffness, and love and kindness are just natural. Further, there is an acceptance of the other person as he or she is so that no one has any difficulty in relating with Swamiji. Everyone has an “entry” with Swamiji and whoever comes in contact with him experiences a warmth and concern. The very presence of the *mahatma* relieves the mind of worries and anxieties.

In the words of *Kāthopanisad*, the teacher is a wonder and we are indeed privileged to be the disciples of this great teacher. As a *brahmacārini* once said “There is one wonder that even Swamiji does not know—that of being Swamiji’s disciple.”

Om Tat Sat