

Let All Creation Be Your Guru

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

*Adorations to the Guru Who is
Brahma the Creator,
Vishnu the Sustainer,
and Shiva the Destroyer.
To that Guru we offer our adorations.*

Traditionally a guru is one who is enlightened and thus possesses the spiritual knowledge to guide an aspirant on the path leading to liberation. However, as devotees develop advanced understanding and increasing sensitivity, they perceive God as the ultimate guru. Therefore, everything in the world—God’s creation—takes on a profound meaning and significance.

In Srimad Bhagavat Purana, Lord Krishna teaches His friend and devotee, Uddava, about the wisdom Lord Dattatreya had imparted to King Yadu, the great forefather of the race of Krishna. Dattatreya had related to King Yadu what he learned from each of his gurus—the twenty-four gurus of creation—which led him to abide in the Self, enjoying the bliss of liberation.

This unique and most interesting collection of gurus consists of: the earth; the air; the sky; water; fire; the

moon; the sun; a dove; a python; the ocean; a moth; a honeybee; an elephant; a honey-gatherer; a deer; a fish; Pingala, a lady prostitute; an osprey; an infant; a maiden; an arrow maker; a serpent; a spider; and finally, a wasp. Let us look more closely to see what enlightening lesson Sage Dattatreya learned from each guru.

EARTH



From the guru that is the earth, Sage Dattatreya learned the lesson of forbearance. Whether you rise from your bed lightly, jump upon the earth, or beat the ground beneath you, the earth bears it and continues to give you support.

Trees are a modification of the earth element. They provide shelter and fruit to all strangers without discrimination, without asking one’s origin, color, or caste. In performing this natural act of goodness, trees do not

expect any payment, nor are they offended if appreciation is lacking.

If a tree is ready to shower you with fruit, but you strike it as you pass by, it still showers you with the fruit. If you cut a sandalwood tree with a knife, while another person gently runs his hand over its bark, the tree rewards both of you with the same exquisite fragrance.

Poetically speaking, the aspirant should have the same quality. It is your nature to perform good acts without expectation of return. And if your goodness is not accepted or appreciated, it should not matter.

This saintly quality of forbearance continues to unfold in an aspirant’s life. In the world-process you encounter different personalities with different tastes and temperaments. Just as you value intensely your own taste and temperament, you should also value the same in others.

People may seem to be absolutely evil, but it is the disease of the world-process that renders a person helpless before the force of his negative qualities. No one wants to be negative. Even those who are negative believe

that they are positive. But knowing that you are in a hospital where people express themselves in different ways because of their sickness, one should learn the art of compassion, endurance, and forbearance.

AIR

From the next guru, the air, Dattatreya learned detachment. Air carries all types of smells, but whether they are foul or fragrant, the air remains unaffected. Internally you are as free as the air. The soul carries foul and fragrant aspects of karmas from life to life, but in its essential nature the soul is free; karmas do not touch the soul in its essential nature.

SKY

Through the sky (*akasha* or etheric space) God teaches us about the nature of the Self. When you look into an empty pot, there is space or ether in it, space which is continuous with the vast etheric space that permeates the universe. As you add water to the pot, that outward ether, or space, is reflected in it. The reflected space changes if the water-filled pot is shaken, but the space within the pot does not change. Similarly, your soul (*jiva*) is the reflection of *Brahman* in the waters of your conditioned mind. Even though you seem to "shake" with every development in the world of time and space, deep within you is the immutable space of pure awareness that is *Brahman*. That *Brahman* you are!

WATER

From water the Sage learned the lesson of purity of feeling, known as compassionate understanding. When you are thirsty, water quenches your thirst. Water tastes sweet and fills your tongue with smoothness. You should be like water so that your very presence creates a purifying effect.

All ancient religions regard water as a purifier and all pilgrimage centers are at the banks of sacred rivers like the Ganges River. Your life should become like a sacred river that purifies others and helps others to develop compassion.

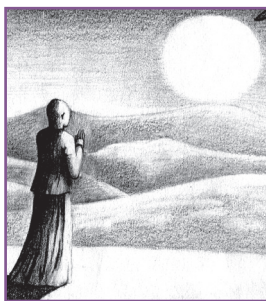
FIRE

From fire one learns effulgence, because its very presence removes darkness. If you have generated strong spiritual impressions, there's an effulgent aura around you that influences people in a positive way, providing them with warmth, fearlessness, and security.

Fire also consumes everything that is poured into it. One inherent lesson that fire teaches is not to condemn whatever food is presented to you; rather eat it and be happy about it. Like fire, develop a sense of simplicity, being satisfied with any type of food that is offered.

Secondly, negative influences that are directed towards you are like poisons poured into the fire of your personality. Like fire, you possess a lot of spiritual power to neutralize and consume all adverse or negative situations. Instead of retaliating by "spitting fire" through angry words, learn to be like fire and consume and purify everything, without reaction.

MOON



Y o u learn from the moon the philosophical truth about your Self. Although the moon appears to wax and wane, in reality the moon is ever the same. Similarly, the Self in you is ever the same. Identified with the mind, in the realm of igno-

rance, the *jiva*, or the soul, advances or degrades itself, rises and falls. Although the waxing and waning continue, the essential Self within you is ever the same.

SUN

The sun is the physical symbol of the shining Self. As the Sun illumines all things, similarly, the Self illumines all. Although there is only one Sun in the sky, different reservoirs of water create different reflections that are like countless reflected suns, but the real Sun is ever the same. In the same way there are countless souls (*jivas*), but every soul is nothing but the Sun of the Divine Self reflecting in the mind. *Jivas* are many but *Brahman*, the Reality, is ever the same.

DOVE



Dattatreya spoke of a dove as a guru, describing a family of doves living in their nest in one big tree. One day the father and mother left the young ones who were not yet ready to fly. In their absence, a fowler captured the small doves in his net, and when the mother dove returned she began to cry. Although she was safe from the reach of the fowler, in her grief she jumped into the net and became trapped. When the father returned, suffering from the plight of his family he also trapped himself in the same miserable state. Dattatreya learned from this occurrence the ways of the world. In the name of helping others you put yourself into misery. If you see a few people drowning and you don't know how to save them, you may think it is selfish to stay alive while your friends are drowning—so you jump into the water and drown yourself. The wisdom that Dattatreya learned from the dove was not to adopt

the life of foolish and sentimental worldly entanglements.

PYTHON

Dattatreya also learned from a python, a boa constrictor, who is so gigantic that often it can barely move; and yet God provides food and the pythons live for a long time. Learn from the python that God is the provider, becoming internally relaxed in a spirit of surrender, and things will be drawn to you according to your karmic need.

OCEAN

From the ocean Dattatreya learned to develop an ocean-like consciousness—a sense of fullness, neither becoming too elated or agitated by situations or circumstances. All rivers pour into the ocean, but the ocean remains within its own bounds. Similarly the senses create many different perceptions, but you must have this ocean-like sense of fullness so that you are neither elated nor agitated by different perceptions.

The ocean's lesson is one of profundity—although the waves change, in its depth the ocean remains the same. So too in your life, changes occur in names and forms, but the underlying reality never changes.

MOTH

From a moth, you learn two things. First, the moth becomes so attracted to luminous objects that it does not think of its existence and allows itself to perish. People are so dazzled by the earthy glory of *rajasic* enchantments that they don't think of the consequences. A higher lesson is that when a moth becomes enchanted by light it will enter into it and become one with the light. Similarly let your soul become a moth, so drawn to the light of

God that it spontaneously and joyously loses its conditioned individuality.

HONEYBEE



From the honeybee learn how to gather nectar from different sources. This carries a special message for the older style of renunciate or *sanyasi* who went from one house to another to get a small amount of food so he wouldn't be too much of a burden on any one household or person. In a broader context, just as bees gather nectar from flower to flower and convert it into honey, in the same way spiritual aspirants gather scriptural lessons and the essence of teachings from different sources and convert them into the honey of spiritual experience. This bee-gathering quality of constantly striving and being busy without stress to collect the honey of spiritual wisdom should develop in every aspirant.

HONEY-GATHERER

The honey-gatherer is a robber that takes away all the honey that the bees have joyously gathered in the honeycomb. After the bees have worked so industriously to fill every cell of the honeycomb, they breathe a sigh of relief and feel they can relax and enjoy the honey later. But then along comes the honey-gatherer and takes it all, leaving the bees with very little! The lesson for the aspirant is not to develop the habit of preserving things now for use in the future, when they could be enjoyed today. Utilize your resources day-by-day and do not hoard beyond your needs. This will enable you to live your life in a more purposeful, colorful, and enriched manner.

ELEPHANT

The elephant as guru teaches one not to be obsessed with passion. In India trappers capture elephants by digging a ditch or pit and covering it so it simulates ordinary safe ground. Beyond the ditch they place a statue of another elephant of the opposite sex. The real elephant pursues the statue and is easily trapped. This suggests that if you control your mind, you will not become trapped like the elephant by your passionate desires.

DEER



Hunters also capture deer by creating a type of strange music with drums that fascinates the deer and when they pursue it, they are captured. The lesson from the deer as guru is to not listen to "folk songs" called *gramya-sangeet*: when fleeting, sensory, and materialistic pleasures and experiences are enjoyed and spoken of continuously by people with uncultured minds.

A mind that is always thinking of pleasures of the senses does not have faith in God or faith in deeper philosophy. Even if people around you speak of heavenly pleasures, *swarga*, it is still *gramya-sangeet*, suitable only for lesser minds. Do not be fascinated or trapped by such "folk songs!"

FISH

From a fish Dattatreya learned another profound lesson. Even though a fish swims so beautifully and its eyes are always open, still it is trapped in a most miserable way. The fish grabs the bait of a little worm because it tastes so good, but then it experi-

ences the horrible pain from the hook. There are two implications: Do not pursue tastes of the tongue and, more deeply, do not be lured by the temptations of the world. Behind all temptations there's always a bait. What you are seeing is appearance and you do not realize what underlies it.



This is illustrated by the story of two men who saw a beautiful fur floating in a river. One of the men decided to jump in to get the fur although his friend tried hard to dissuade him. When he plunged into the river and grabbed the fur, the swift current threatened to carry them both away. The friend on the river bank cried out, "Let go of that fur and come back!" "I want to let go," shouted the man in the river, "but the fur doesn't let me go!" What he meant was that what appeared to be a wonderful fur pelt actually turned out to be a bear. That's the predicament of possessing objects of the world. You grab an object and that object grabs you. Very few people see the part of the object that is holding onto them and won't let go.

PROSTITUTE

Dattatreya also learned a profound truth from a prostitute named Pingala. Every day Pingala expected rich clients to appear, but one day no one came. She suddenly developed dispassion when she perceived that she could not depend upon people who are in themselves miserable. Reflecting also on her own miserable profession, she resolved to direct her love to God within her heart. She became very happy in the discovery that she could be close to God and attain the highest treasure: rising to a lofty state of consciousness. The simple lesson is to learn to abandon

your worldly expectations and the energy wasted in expectation. Instead, direct it to discovering God within you. The desires directed to objects of the world that come and go definitely are going to fail, one way or the other. However, when your desire becomes aspiration and is directed within yourself, God cannot go away. Your expectations are bound to be absolutely fulfilled and in that fulfillment is the greatest joy.

OSPREY

An osprey taught Dattatreya the error of covetousness. One day the bird found meat and began to fly with it until he saw large hawks and vultures coming closer and closer to get the meat away from him. When the osprey dropped the meat, all the vultures and hawks went after the meat, leaving the osprey free. If the bird had not dropped the meat, he himself would have become food for the vultures! Therefore, do not covet things that are coveted by so many "vultures." Let go. By letting go, your mind is at peace. Do not challenge people that have attained some object of desire or brag before others about what you have attained. Do not pursue the pleasures that the masses are drawn to or the "vultures" will surround you.



INFANT

An infant taught Dattatreya about placidity of mind. If you scold or shout at an infant, he may react to it but within minutes looks at your nose and smiles. The mind of the infant does not hold any grudge or discriminate over things, but remains always clear. Similarly, be childlike, possess-

ing the purity and simplicity of an infant, but do not be childish, which is a result of dull-wittedness.

MAIDEN

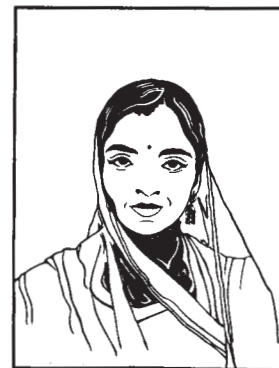
From the actions of a maiden, Dattatreya learned not to be entangled in the multiplicity of the world. The maiden, who was of only moderate means, was about to be married. One day her future relatives came to her home to meet her family. Since her parents had not yet returned home, the visitors waited outside on the veranda for their arrival.

The girl's duty at that time was to prepare food and welcome them. As they waited outside, she began the various stages of cooking, pounding the food to make a rice preparation. And while pounding, the many bracelets on her wrists produced a jingling sound—a sound that would let the relatives know that she was poor and had to do all of the chores

by herself.

Since she had to impress upon her future relatives that she has come from a high family and has a lot of resources, she had to hide the jingling sound of the bracelets. So she broke one from each wrist, then another, and still another until there was only one bangle on each wrist. As a result, she could continue to pound without the sound of the jingling.

Understanding the lesson of this incident in a broader way, so long as you have too many entanglements in the multiplicity of the world,



you are creating trouble for yourself. Therefore try to go on breaking those forms of dependence, like the bracelets, one by one. From a practical point of view if you are not always mingling with people, but stay by yourself, you are at peace. In the ashrams there's a saying: one alone you are the emperor of emperors; with two you have gone to live in a village; with three you are in a crowd. Whenever you associate with others, it's necessary to attend to and hear all they have to say, and the whole world rushes into your mind.

On the highest level, from the maiden you learn to work toward realizing the non-duality of the Self. Your goal is to transcend the illusion of multiplicity that is the cause of all the problems in the world of ignorance.

ARROW-MAKER

Dattatreya observed how an arrow-maker forged arrows and then practiced directing them to a particular target with such concentration that when a king and a royal party passed by, the arrow-maker didn't even notice them. Similarly, an aspirant must practice the disciplines of yoga with one-pointed concentration. Your soul itself is that like an arrow, and it must be so well directed towards God, or *Brahman*, that the whole world passes by and you are unaware of it. You

transcend the world, and the target—God—becomes your reality.

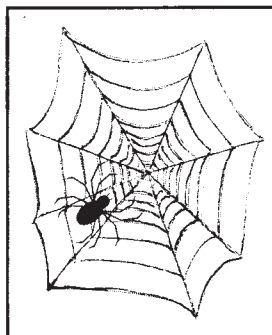
SERPENT



The serpent taught Dattatreya the lesson of independence. Serpents, after birth, go alone. Similarly, learn to

live on the basis of your own self-confidence, not always depending on others. Further, snakes do not build holes to live in. So too, an aspirant should not get overly attached to "holes" of real estate. Rather, be detached like the snake, which can come out of one hole and into another without being upset.

SPIDER

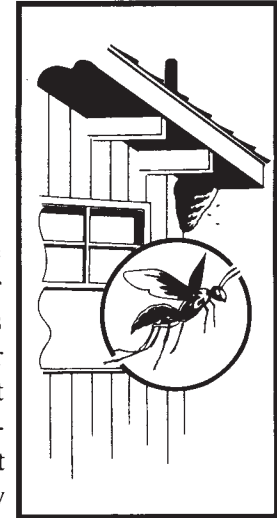


The spider, Dattatreya observed, is *Brahman*, the Divine Self. The spider creates its web out of its

own saliva and then swallows it. In the

same manner, *Brahman* creates the whole world out of Himself through *Maya* (Cosmic Illusion) and then swallows it up. The world is not material; it is made up of the substance of God.

WASP



Lord Dattatreya's last guru in this teaching is the wasp. In its life cycle, the pupa stage or cocoon is watched over by an adult wasp, buzzing over it continuously until the new

adult wasp emerges. The awareness of yourself in the state of ignorance—in which you identify with your physical body—is like the pupa stage of the wasp. But the wisdom of the sages comes figuratively over your head, buzzing like the wasp, to teach you that you are not the body, but *Brahman*.

That constant buzzing pulls you out of the cocoon state and you realize you have wings to fly beyond time and space to liberation!

As devotees develop advanced understanding and increasing sensitivity, they perceive God as the ultimate guru. Therefore, everything in the world—God's creation—takes on a profound meaning and significance.