

Do We Need a Guru?

Nearly 50 years ago when Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī was on his first world tour, he was asked by a Westerner attending one of his lectures whether a guru was really necessary. Pūjya Swāmījī understood where the question was coming from, so he didn't answer it directly. He said, "What is required is aspiration."

Of course, without aspiration we would have no interest in a guru, and if the aspiration is sufficient and a guru is required, then we will set aside any reservations we have and welcome a guru if God brings one to us. But the question is a very important one, because not infrequently a suitable outer guru is simply not available to us. Then we have to think in terms of the inner guru.

Actually, it is said that the whole purpose of the outer guru is simply to introduce us to the inner guru; but most of us are not ready for the inner guru, so an outer guru is required. But why is an outer guru required? Why is the inner guru required? It is because as human beings we have identified with the body and mind. We see things falsely. We see separation when the scriptures declare that there are no differences here, that Brahman alone is without a second.

The truth is that, even if we believe that, it is simply another concept in our mind. The experience of oneness is just not there, and the saints tell us that it cannot be described. Either we have had the experience or we haven't. Therefore, until we have had the same experience that the saints have had—not an experience of expansion or oneness, but becoming that oneness—we are still functioning from the point of view of separation. As long as that is there, we don't understand the truth.

Therefore, we need the guidance of someone or something that knows the truth. The outer guru has seen the truth. The inner guru is the truth. Therefore, we need the outer guru in the beginning, but the goal is a total surrender to the inner guru. We say that we are seeking God, but the mind doesn't want to bow down to anyone or anything—not even to its own true Self. We say we want a guru. The test is whether we are we prepared to give up all our ideas about life and depend upon the guidance of our inner guru.

It is not an easy decision. We can say yes verbally, but we are being tested on it every day of our life. Are we listening for inner guidance—silently listening—prepared to move according to that inner guidance, or are we full of our own ideas of right and wrong and what we want to do? It isn't just a casual choice. It's a choice that we must continuously make, and it tests us right down to the core of our being.

Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī may have been diplomatic when he said that what is required is aspiration. What he meant was an aspiration that is prepared to pay any price to know the truth.