

## Benefiting from Teachers, Thinkers, Saints, and Sages

### Spiritual Wisdom

*Arise, awake! Approach the great beings and know the Truth!*

—Katha Upanishad

Saints and sages are like waterfalls of divine grace and portholes to heaven right in this world. Their inspiring wisdom is like a fishhook that takes you — not to be fried up as a meal — but to be lifted out from what Indian sages call the *ocean of samsara*, the ocean of illusion where you suffer all the pains associated with forgetting your true nature.

This fishhook that pulls you out of the dark waters of illusion and into the light of higher spiritual awareness is a hook that you *want* to clamp onto tightly.

In the company of great spiritual teachers and masters, your own wise, great being can be elicited and awakened, even without your having to do a lot of practices or study all kinds of books. Just be open to resonating with their elevated energy and level of vibration.

Whether you're with a great master in person, or reading their writings, listening to their voice, or thinking about them, their elevated energy and level of spiritual vibration resonates with your own palette of being, calling forth elevated states of awareness that you may have never imagined you would be able to experience — but which have always existed, though perhaps latent, inside of you.

One analogy used for this spiritual alchemy in the company of great ones is of the resonance between one violin and another. If the “master” violin sings a note, the strings of a second “student” violin near it will also begin to vibrate at the same note. The second violin’s tone won’t be as strong or clear as the master violin, but (metaphorically) it may be the first time that violin ever experienced that particular note.

In the same way, the presence of a great spiritual being can inspire and invoke in you levels of spiritual insight, awareness, and sensation that you may not have ever imagined. Then it is up to you to keep that note alive if and when the master violin stops playing it outwardly in your presence.

The purpose of a spiritual teacher or guru is to teach you how to be with the Divine, how to relate to the Divine, and how to receive, learn, and grow from your connection with the Divine. From a personal relationship with a spiritual teacher or guru, you should also learn how to relate to the universe or God.

For example, through challenging interactions with your guru, you may discover how to receive criticism in a positive way, or how to continue loving even when that love doesn’t seem to be returned, or how to receive an avalanche of love and blessings at another time without becoming greedy or egotistical. You may learn how to keep your trust alive and your heart open without fear of being hurt even when your feelings could be hurt.

*Living with a saint is more grueling than being one.*

—Robert C. Neville

Respecting the attainment of a spiritual teacher, pastor, rabbi, monk, or guru doesn't mean that you have to believe they don't have any faults. Rather, you see the sun of divine wisdom, love, and grace shining brightly behind, in spite of, and perhaps even *through*, their apparent faults.

### **Buddha describes the signs of a sage**

In this excerpt from the Dhammapada, Buddha shares some of the qualities of a spiritual master. Even if you don't consider yourself to be a saint or sage (yet!), you can still imagine how it would feel to experience these qualities.

*The master looks deeply into things and sees their nature. He discriminates and reaches the end of the way. He moves with love among the unloving, with peace and detachment among the hungry and querulous. He wants nothing from this world and nothing from the next. He is free. He has moved beyond time. He is calm. In him the seed of renewing life has been consumed. He has conquered all the inner worlds. With dispassionate eye he sees everywhere the falling and the uprising. The way he has taken is hidden from men, even from spirits and gods, by virtue of his purity. In him there is no yesterday, no tomorrow, no today. He has come to the end of the way, over the river of his many lives, his many deaths. All that he had to do, he has done. And now he is One.*

### **Be Careful**

If some spiritual teacher comes along and tells you that they know everything and can tell you without any doubt exactly why you're here, what you're supposed to do, where you've been in previous lifetimes, and exactly where you're going after you leave this world, then this so-called teacher is most likely either a fool or a scam artist trying to fool you. Such overcertainty may be a sign that this person doesn't even know the simplest truth that everything is much bigger and more complex than any human being can know in their mind and express with words.

Good spiritual teachers can be the key to unlocking new levels of your journey. You may learn from personally available teachers, from distant teachers with large groups of followers, or from teachers who have already left this world, leaving behind their teachings for future generations.

In my case, the guru or teacher found me. It happened during a college course I took with one of the guru's followers. This professor brought our class on a field trip to the local ashram in Ann Arbor, Michigan and later drove me to New York to meet the guru.

I encountered my guru just as I was ready to dive deeply into spiritual life, although if you'd told me this at the time, I would have probably balked at the idea. I was right in the middle of my university studies of neuroscience and film-video, and had been delving into all kinds of meditative-style practices on my own, with more of a psychological than spiritual focus. Unknowingly, I had become ripe inside for letting go of worldly interests and jumping into the ocean of deep spiritual immersion.

I could have looked for a very long time and never found a guru who was such an amazing match for my eclectic mixture of interests, qualities, contemplations, and levels of consciousness. Muktananda was a brilliant philosopher with a primo sense of humor, an intelligent grasp of both science and spirituality, and the power to deliver spiritual goods in a way that inspired even world-absorbed students to be naturally drawn into living a disciplined spiritual life.

During my subsequent monastic years, I watched as many devotees would leave their busy lives in every kind of profession you could possibly imagine to spend a day, week, month, or year coming together in our ashram with other incognito spiritual sages to focus deeply on spiritual practices and teachings.

### **Don't Forget**

The path that was right for me is not necessarily the one that is right for you. What's most important is for you to find whatever teachers and teachings are right for you.

As you proceed on your spiritual path and learn from the many good sources available to you, remember that the goal of learning from teachers, thinkers, saints, and sages, and the teachings they have brought forth, is for you to become a fountain of grace and wisdom unto yourself.

### **Don't Forget**

Also remember that ultimately, wherever you are is your spiritual path.

### **Spiritual Wisdom**

*People want to run away from where they are to go find their Jerusalem — as if elsewhere they will find perfection. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing there, make that a Jerusalem.*

—Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson