

Twelve

Number and Change of Gurus

The number of *Gurus* is a question which can only be solved with reference to the particular subject involved and the circumstances of each case. With reference to secular education, though under the old system of *Gurukula* which involved both spiritual and secular education, there was only one *Guru*, still for those who desired varied education in several subjects, a number of *Gurus* was resorted to. The *Guru Gita* deals mainly with spiritual education, yet following *Srimad Bhagavata* it says that the number may be large.

Madhu lubdho yatha bhringah

Pushpat pushpantaram vrajet Jnana

lubdho tatha scishyo

Guror Gurvantaram vrajet¹²⁶

this means, Just as a bee anxious to have more and more of honey goes from flower to flower, so a student with a strong desire for *jnana* should or may go from one *Guru* to another. The Tamil translation adds here, in case the study is incomplete. Obviously this cannot have reference to the *Guru* who is expected to give salvation, that is, the *Paramaguru*¹²⁷. Verse 90 says, I bow to thee, *Paramaguru*, who is a combination of Siva and Sakti. The *Guru Gita*¹²⁸ set out the eminence of that *Paramaguru* who gives *Mukti* and who is the same as the Trinity. In *Jnaneswari*, the eminence of the *Guru* is said to be giving one everything. Such a person cannot and should not be given up. See *Vasishta's* curse of *Trisanku* who broke away from that *Kulaguru*. *Srimad Bhagavata*¹²⁹, also mentions the advantage of a number of *Gurus*.

Nahi ekasmat Guroh jnanam

Susthiram syat supushkalam

Brahma etat advitiyam vy

Giyate Bahudha rishibhih.

This means, Verily, knowledge is not abundant enough nor strong enough, if only derived from a single teacher. God *Brahman* is One without a second. Yet so many *rishis* sing of it in so many ways. This is the statement of the *Avadhuta* addressed to King Yadu, after mentioning that he derived his knowledge from 24 *Gurus*. The 24 *Gurus* mentioned in *Ekadasa Skanda*¹³⁰, are earth, air, ether, water, fire, sun and moon, the pigeon, the python, the sea, the moth, the bee, the elephant, the honey gatherer, the deer, fish, *Pingala* the courtesan, the king fisher *kurara*, the child, the maiden, the arrow maker, the snake, the spider, and adding to the list lastly the body. These are not *Gurus* in the ordinary sense, but from their behaviour, lessons are derived by the *Avadhuta*. Of such *Gurus* twenty four are not sufficient. Even two hundred and forty may be insufficient. But really these are not *Gurus* having *Guru-shisya* relation with the disciple. They are *Gurus* only by straining the meaning of the term *Guru* and not actual *Gurus*. A *Guru* is one who is conscious of teaching and undertaking the duties of a teacher. But in dealing with the actual physical *Guru* at the head of a *Gurukulam* or *Rishi ashrama*, the *Guru* is the only head. In the *Ekadasa Skanda*¹³¹ Krishna advises resort to a *Guru*. He says,

Mad abhijnam Gurum shantam upasita mad atmakam.

that is, Serve the calm teacher who is in close contact and who has become identified with me. Under one such *Guru*, ordinarily the aspirant for salvation can advance sufficiently and attain his object. People like Narayan Asram who got a push or some slight help cannot be regarded as Baba's *sishtyas*. They should and usually did resort to other *Gurus*. Even Das Ganu who got marvellous help from Baba did not regard Baba as his *Guru* but went to *Guru Islampurkar* for initiation and treated him as his *Guru*. In special cases, a *Guru* might not complete a student's course and might direct him to go to others. Amongst *sadhus*, they seem to recognise some as forming a particular class or group. Members of such class or group send their disciples to other *Gurus* of the group. Following this principle, Akkalkote Maharaj, when his body was about to be dissolved, sent

some of his devotees Ramachandra Naik and another to Baba. Madhavanath Maharaj, Bhidekar Maharaj, Kusha Bhav's *Guru*, the Poona Bhimasankar temple Sadhu¹³² Kaka Maharaj of Dhopeswar¹³³ acted similarly and sent their devotees to Baba. Gajanan Maharaj¹³⁴ was recognised as *Gurubandhu* by Baba.

Guru Gita points out the absolute necessity for a change when one has had the misfortune to get under a *nishiddha Guru*. A *nishiddha Guru* is one who draws the pupil to *mantras* with lower aims¹³⁵ such as *mohana*, *marana*, *vasikarana*, and kindred sordid purposes. The soul is bound to get more worldly and *tamasic* under such a *Guru*. Srimad Bhagavata¹³⁶, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*¹³⁷ and Baba deprecated these *siddhis* and warned devotees against their meretricious attractions. When one realises his mistake in getting under a *nishiddha* and has had the beginnings of *vairagya*, Guru Gita¹³⁸ says that the *sisya* being a *vairagi*, a higher *Guru*, a true *desika*, will contact him and draw him to God realisation, that- is, *Brahmanishta*. Verses 288 to 294 describe the glories of this *Parama Guru*, whose very sight will fill one with joy courage and peace. Such a *Guru* is absolutely free from all attachment to *Kamini-kanchana*, that is, women and wealth, fame, *yoga siddhis*, and even the glories of Brahma and Vishnu. They are of two classes, namely the *Vagmi*, who talks, teaches, and trains, and the *Mount*, who spreads silent influence.

So there may be desirable and authorised changes of *Gurus* as mentioned above. Without such or similar pressing causes, a change of *Guru* should not be thought of. The loyalty of a *sisya* to a *Guru* must be more powerful than the loyalty of a chaste wife to her husband. A flagrant breaking of one's ties with the *Guru* may have a serious consequence on one's spiritual progress and in some cases may involve a curse as in *Trisanku's* case. *Vyabhichara* in both the above cases leads to ignominy in the eyes of all reasonable people and thorough wreck in every respect. The pangs of *Guru droha* may also render a sensitive *sisya* miserable. Sai Baba therefore dissuaded people from leaving their own *Gurus* and seeking contact with him. But mostly as Sai Baba was and is an all comprehensive *Samartha Sadguru*, and as most people had no intense attachment to a *Guru*, there was usually no

difficulty. People felt that Baba, the *Sarva Antaryami* was their own *Guru* and their *Ishta Devata*. The first real feeling of having a *Guru* came to most only from Baba. A very interesting case of change or supposed change of *Gurus* will be found in the chapter of P.R. Avaste. He had been initiated into *Siva panchakshari* of some sort by a lady *Guru* at Poona, and he was, with difficulty, persuaded to go along with Sri M.B. Rege and see Sai Baba and Ramakrishna Ayi who also had developed some psychic powers and was acting as *Guru* to some at Shirdi. At the first visit, the oppressive feeling that he was committing *Gurudroha* in going to Shirdi upset his mental balance and made him crazy. He was behaving erratically under strange delusions and fears. Sai Baba directed Sri Rege to take him away from Shirdi. Leaving Shirdi Sri Avaste regained his normal self. By Baba's grace, in his later visits, he was free from such obsessions and he was able to adopt Sai Baba as his *Guru*. As Sri Sai Baba was a *Samartha Sadguru* with vast powers¹³⁹ God has agents everywhere, they have vast powers, I have very great powers', and as he could clearly see the exact state of ideas, feelings, and emotions of everyone coming to him. he could ease difficulties like the above. To a *sishya* of Dolap Maharaj Guru Mule Sastri, he appeared as Dolap Maharaj wearing *kashaya*, and removed his fears of *Gurudroha*. Similarly beyond just loyalty to particular Gods being affected by appro-proaching Sai, to those who had particular fondness for particular Gods, he could show himself in those forms. To a South African doctor as to the Madras Ramadasini who was devoted solely to Rama, he showed himself as Rama. To a Datta *bhakta*, he could show himself as the three-faced Datta. Most Hindus cannot escape fragmentising and localising God, not merely at the start but for their entire life. They feel compelled to adhere to a particular place and a particular form or *Murthi* in their effort to contact God. This localisation and particularisation however necessary or useful to begin the God contact ought to be out-grown and true ideas as in the case of Namdev should replace the earlier ones. Sai Baba, the realiser of *Ekam Sat* with his perfection of power of *Samartha*, could include within himself and show within himself all *Murthis* as they are all parts of God, Bhagavad Gita¹⁴⁰ says,

Angani Annya Devatah

that is, From a part rise to view the whole. Being *Nirakara*, he could be *Sahara* at any time whether he was in the flesh or beyond the flesh that is, after *Mahasamadhi*. Thus he serves as the ideal *Guru*, though he is not in the flesh, as he can and does appear in his old form to deal with his old and new devotees. Several people felt and feel that a *Guru* who is not in the flesh does not suit them, as others feel in exactly the opposite way. But by Baba's grace, all these have been drawn by him to his feet.

In some cases a person is fully saturated with the doctrines of *Srimad Bhagavata*¹⁴¹

*Yat driscyam tat Nascyam, or
Drashtam Vinashtam*

that is, all things seen are perishable and therefore not the real *Brahman* and the Upanishad teachings are that *Brahman* cannot be seen,

Yat chakshusha na pascyati,
yena chakshumshi pascyati,
tadeva Brahma tvam viddhi,
nedam yat idam upasate

which means, *Brahman* is not that which is seen with the eye but that which makes the eye see and *Brahman* is not that which people in the world worship, to such as, no seen figure commands the belief that it is Real and God or *Brahman*. Such a person cannot therefore surrender himself to any God or *Guru* that is seen. To such a person, Baba is a great boon or blessing.

Sai Baba snuffs out of him the critical spirit which says, You are seen and not God. How can I bow to you? Baba's action is not external reasoning but internal unspoken and unseen working. That takes away and clean wipes off all traces of the critical spirit and substitutes for it a humility that says in effect 'I am a worm, Thou art all power and mercy. Protect me, shed light on my path. Take me as a helpless baby in your arm and deal with me as you like'. This is beginning of that person's feeling that the Unseen *Guru* is alive, is powerful and can lead and only he can lead him right on to the goal.

The former *Gurus* of such a person whether *Kula Gurus* or adopted *Gurus* have never influenced him, as they were not *Samarthas*, interested in him. So there is no possibility in such a case of any idea of change of Guru or *Gurudroha*. Baba makes such a person feel that Baba is the same as the previous *Gurus*. Baba is *Sarva Antaryami* and makes persons like the above and like Upasani Maharaj, Mule sastri, feel that he is the same as the former *Guru*. Baba elevates the devotee and enables him to see Him as the one underlying force or personality appearing in various forms and called by various names *Vyabhichara* by resort to whom is unthinkable.

In getting Baba as a *Guru*, one is helped on to the Supreme realisation of *Jiva Brahma Aikya*. Those who refer to Baba as a single *Guru* or saint with a particular shape in one place are indulging in their tendency of materialism, localisation, and fragmentisation. The real fruit of Baba's influence is perceiving him as the All-every thing includes one's old *Guru*, one's *Ishta Devata* and oneself. When one has reached that stage, no question of the number of *Gurus* and justification for change of *Gurus* can arise.