

All About Mentors

An Essay by Rev. Lloyd Strom



men'tor

A wise and trusted counselor or teacher.

In our modern, '*mental culture*,' we are awash with a flood of spiritual wisdom, knowledge and information. Books, tapes, movies, lectures, seminars and spiritual retreats abound everywhere we turn these days. Yet, there is a '*hidden hazard*' to what might seem to be the abundance of wisdom available to us all.

Throughout antiquity, the Greek word Gnosis, or '*knowing*,' has been associated with esoteric spiritual knowledge in the West. In the East, the teaching of spiritual knowledge comes through what is known as '*Jnana Yoga*,' which is the '*Yoga of Knowledge*.' It is interesting to note the bizarre, yet, similar spelling of both of these exotic words, *gnosis* and *jnana*.

In the East, Jnana Yoga is considered to be the most treacherous of all the Yogas. This is because the undisciplined human mind can twist almost any spiritual truth into a personal delusion. Consequently, in Jnana Yoga it is taught that the '*Path of Knowledge*' should only be tread in the company of an '*authentic teacher*,' otherwise we will surely lose our way. Likewise, the teachings of the Gnostics has been closely guarded down through the ages, and passed along by authentic teachers of spiritual knowledge. Such authentic teachers are what we often refer to as '*Spiritual Mentors*.' These are individuals who have become living testaments of the wisdom that they teach.



The dictionary defines a mentor as a '*wise and trusted counselor or teacher*.' Consequently, a Spiritual Mentor is a trusted individual who counsels us in the '*ways of wisdom*,' and teaches us how to love. They are a welcome intruder into our lives, for with the '*light of their wisdom*' they intrude into the darkness of our souls and the misadventures of our flesh. They guide us through the difficulties of life, and teach us to discern illusion from Truth. Ultimately there are three kinds of Spiritual Mentors that we encounter in the walk of life.

Three Kinds of Mentors

Universal Mentors

Universal Mentors are the purveyors of wisdom that reveal the highest teachings of Truth about the nature of life. The essence of Truth is its unchangeable nature. Consequently, only those teachings that are possessed of Truth can endure the '*test of time*.' Such teachings are known as the '*Sacred Scriptures*,' and they have been revealed to us from every culture by the great 'world teachers' who are the Universal Mentors of humanity. Examples would be, the Gospels of Jesus Christ, the Buddha's Dhammapada, the dialogues of Plato and the Tao Te Ching of the great Chinese sage Lao Tse.

Additionally, there are many modern day Universal Mentors who simply reinterpret the teachings of the '*Ancient Wisdom*,' so that they might become more accessible to all human beings. Such individuals are people like Ralph Waldo Emerson in the West, and Sri Aurobindo in the East.



It is important for every one of us to be at least somewhat familiar with the teachings of the Universal Mentors, so that we might be better prepared to assess the nature of those whom we seek to become our '*Personal Mentors*.'

Personal Mentors

As we ponder the teachings of the Universal Mentors, our souls are lifted up by hope, and the possibility of a greater expression of life. However, as we begin to actually apply the teachings of wisdom to our daily lives, we often encounter many difficulties and pitfalls that require assistance of those who are ahead of us on the path. Such individuals take the form of Personal Mentors.

A Personal Mentor is a wise and trusted teacher of Truth who consults us in the ways of wisdom. They provide us with guidance when we encounter adversity, and give us the courage to engage the '*dark night of the soul*.' It is rare indeed to find an individual who can progress very far upon the path of spiritual attainment without the assistance of Mentors. If you were to survey the literature on this subject, you would find that all of the great modern day Universal Mentors had Personal Mentors of their own along the way.

The most important thing to realize about Personal Mentors is that their purpose is fulfilled once they reveal the '*Inner Mentor*' that is within us all.

Inner Mentors

There is an Inner Mentor within us all. It is our own '*Higher Wisdom Self*,' which is the '*Christ in us, the hope of glory*.' (Col. 1:27) This Inner Mentor speaks with the same Inner Voice that has spoken through every Universal Mentor and Master of Wisdom down through the ages. Unfortunately, the voice of our Inner Mentor is often drowned out by

the many other lesser voices in our souls that are competing for our attention. The role of the Personal Mentor is to teach us to discern the voice of our Inner Mentor, and then to listen to no other. Once this is accomplished, we become fully self-directed on our spiritual journey through life.



It is important to note that the revelation of our Inner Mentor is a long, slow and arduous process that can only be quickened by working with a Personal Mentor. Furthermore, it must be understood that whenever we attend a class, workshop or retreat, we are working with a Group Mentor, which is a modern day, lesser version of a Universal Mentor. Whereas, a Personal Mentor will always work with us individually, one-on-one.

Disciples, Initiates and Apostles

Those who partake of the blessings that flow from the wisdom of Mentors are known by many different names, depending upon their circumstance. In the arts and in the business world, such individuals are often referred to as *protégés*. In the classroom, they are generally called *students*, and in a therapeutic setting they might be called *patients* or even *clients*.

However, in the spiritual realm such individuals assume one of three distinct evolutionary titles according to the type of Mentor that they are primarily working with. Following is a brief description of each of these designations.

I. Disciples - A disciple is essentially '*one who follows*.' Consequently, such an individual will generally be devoted to a Universal Mentor. This is why in the East they are often referred to as *Devotees*, and their devotion might be placed upon the teachings of some archetypal spiritual figure such as Jesus or the Buddha. Or, they might be devoted to a more contemporary spiritual

teacher, with whom they can have direct contact and receive instruction.

The defining behavioral characteristic of a Disciple is that they tend to *'talk the talk'* of their Universal Mentor. Consequently, they are quick to begin telling others what they have heard their Mentor say. They do this in hopes of getting agreement from others in order to build their own faith in the wisdom that they have received.

This is a significant practice, since it is written that *"If two agree on earth as touching anything, it shall be done by our Father who art in Heaven."* (Matt. 18:19) Ultimately, this proselytizing effort is the first step towards the embodiment of the wisdom that the Disciple has received from their Universal Mentor.

2. Initiates - An Initiate is essentially *'one who initiates'* their own spiritual evolution. Such self-directed individuals often possess the determination and courage necessary to move beyond the slow motion growth that takes place in a group.

However, without the guidance of a Personal Mentor, Initiates can easily lose their way in the *'pathless land'* of Spiritual Truth. If we study the lives of great spiritual figures, we will find that almost everyone of them have had one or more Personal Mentors along the way.

The most significant behavioral characteristic of an Initiate is that they *'walk the talk'* of their Personal Mentor. In other words, they are quick to put into action the instructions they receive, in order to embody the wisdom that was awakened in them by their Mentor. Such actions begin with a *'daily dedicated spiritual practice'* that quickly extends into every aspect of their lives.

It is the willingness of the Initiate to act upon the wisdom that they receive from their Per-

sonal Mentor that begins to radically transform their lives. This is because we create our future by our actions, through the Universal Law of Karma. In the words of Emerson, *"Every action contains the seed of some future consequence."* Therefore, when we act in accordance with wisdom, our lives become a revelation of that wisdom, in the form of blessings that are greater than anything we can conceive of with our mortal minds.

It is important to always keep in mind that the Initiate Stage of our spiritual evolution is actually a transitional period that takes us from the state of being a *'listening disciple'* to that of a *'speaking apostle,'* Consequently, at the beginning of this stage we will frequently find ourselves taking classes, as we are occasionally being mentored. However, towards the middle of this stage we will frequently receive mentoring, and seldom take classes. Finally, towards the end of this stage we will begin to teach classes and mentor others, while we are occasionally being mentored ourselves.

3. Apostles - An Apostle is essentially *'one who is sent,'* and the one who sends them forth is their own Inner Mentor, which is their *'Higher Wisdom Self.'* As we begin to fully embody the wisdom that was received from our Universal and Personal Mentors, the *'divinity within us'* awakens, and begins to reveal itself through us into our lives. Consequently, we become fully Self-Directed, and require no further guidance from anyone *outside* of ourselves.

The primary behavioral characteristic of the Apostle is that they *'talk the walk'* of their own Inner Mentor. In other words, they become an embodiment of the wisdom that they have received from their Universal and Personal Mentors, and they begin to speak

about it with an *authority* that emanates from deep within themselves. Consequently they are called upon to teach others the great spiritual Truths and Wisdom that they have actualized within themselves.

Finding Our Mentors

There is an ancient saying that “*when the student is ready, the teacher will arrive.*” Consequently the key to finding a Mentor is *preparation*. Therefore, we must first prepare ourselves by embracing the teachings of the great Universal Mentors, as contained in the Sacred Scriptures that have withstood the ‘*test of time.*’ With this wisdom as a foundation, we can then evaluate the authenticity of contemporary spiritual teachers that might become available to us.

Keep in mind that consistency with the Sacred Scriptures, not popularity or personal preference, should be our primary criteria for selecting a contemporary teacher to serve as a Universal Mentor.



The next step to preparing ourselves to receive a Personal Mentor is to engage in ‘*daily dedicated spiritual practice.*’ Until we have begun to ‘*walk the talk*’ of Spiritual Truth, a Personal Mentor will be of little value to us, and we will find ourselves in a state of constant disobedience to their instruction. However, once we have proven ourselves to be self-disciplined and obedient, a Personal Mentor will be revealed to us.

It is also important to keep in mind that if we are not grounded in the wisdom imparted by the great Universal Mentors contained in the Sacred Scriptures, we will have no basis for evaluating the authenticity of those who would assume the role of our Personal Mentor. This is how many people fall under the influence of false teachers and spiritual charlatans. They have no basis for evalua-

tion, and simply rely upon their feelings, which can often lead them astray.



The final stage of mentoring arises when our Inner Mentor begins to find a place within us to express Itself through us into our lives. However, this is probably one of the most treacherous of all the stages, for there are many voices within us competing for our attention. This is where we must be vigilant, and realize that false voices will enter our mind at every opportunity, but the True Voice of the Inner Mentor will only enter by *invitation*.

The way that we extend that invitation is through real spiritual practice and obedience to the teachings of Truth. Additionally, we will find that the voice of the inner Mentor will *always* be consistent with the wisdom of the Sacred Scriptures.



If we follow these simple guidelines, we will find that a Mentor can be our great advantage in life. This is especially true when we come into the company of a Personal Mentor whose wisdom, patience and compassion will change our own nature from that of a willing Disciple into a wise and loving Apostle, so that we might become a blessing unto the lives of others, and make the world a better place to be.

Rev. Lloyd Strom
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