

Why We Need a Spiritual Mentor

An Explanatory Essay

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In our modern day 'do-it-yourself' mentality many might question the need for a Spiritual Mentor. However, if we look at the lives of any individual of high achievement in any field of endeavor we will find that they almost always have had a mentor, teacher or counselor to guide, teach and encourage them on their path of attainment. Although there are many different facets to the guidance of a Spiritual Mentor, following is a brief description of just a few of the most important reasons as to why we need a Spiritual Mentor.

1) Object of Veneration

In his book *'Knowledge of the Higher Worlds'* the great German spiritual philosopher Rudolph Steiner identified the quality of *veneration* as the foundational trait necessary to become a Spiritual Initiate. In his own words, *"We must begin with a certain fundamental attitude in our Soul. In Spiritual Science this fundamental attitude is called the 'Path of Veneration.' It is the path of devotion to Truth and Knowledge."*

Initially we enter upon the Path to Truth and Knowledge by reading books, listening to lectures and even taking classes. However, when we see the Truth and Knowledge that we are seeking come to life and embody Itself in the form of a Mentor, a deep sense of *veneration* will awaken within us. It is here that we must proceed with caution and avoid becoming attached to the human personality of our Mentor. Instead, we must remain focused on the Truth and Knowledge that the Mentor embodies and expresses through their personality.

Fortunately, the more highly evolved a Mentor becomes the less personality they seem to

possess. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to engage with them in any sort of social interactions. Instead, they will engage us with the five primary tasks of a true Spiritual Mentor, which are: 1) To enter the world of the Initiate; 2) To question their world; 3) To illumine their world; 4) To integrate their world; and then 5) To exit the world of the Initiate. This fifth task is best explained by these words of wisdom from the modern spiritual teacher Ernest Holmes, *"The teaching of Truth liberates the student from the teacher, for they will find the True Teacher within themselves."*

2) Proof of Progress

The path to spiritual enlightenment takes place in a series of steps, as opposed to a slow steady upward incline. Furthermore, the plateaus between the steps can sometimes seem to be rather uneventful, without any indication of significant progress. It is on these *'plateaus of non-progress'* that many spiritual aspirants become discouraged and abandon their sacred journey. This is where the presence of a Mentor can be of a great benefit.

Because our Mentors are ahead of us on the path to spiritual attainment, they will be succinctly aware of the subtle progress that we are slowly making towards their own state of being. Consequently, they can be a source of great encouragement by simply pointing out the many small subtle changes that are occurring within our nature that might otherwise go unnoticed within our own perception. This is because every small subtle change that takes place within our being quickly becomes *normalized*.

In other words, the incremental changes taking place within us quickly feel completely normal to us. This is because the subtle changes in our nature that occur as

a result of our spiritual practices usually become embodied within us while we are sleeping. Consequently, we awaken in the morning feeling as though nothing has changed, despite the fact that we are no longer the same person that we were the day before. Even though we cannot see our internal changes in our bathroom mirror, our Mentor can serve as a *'mirror of Truth'* that provides us with a reflection of the progress we are making.

3) The Dunning-Kruger Effect

The *'Dunning-Kruger Effect'* is an all pervading psychological phenomena that affects us all to one degree or another. It is essentially the reason why people who know a little bit about something tend to think that they know everything. Conversely, people who know a lot about something never feel like they know enough. In terms of our spiritual development, it is not uncommon for beginning students to read a couple of metaphysical books and think that they are enlightened and ready to *'take Heaven by storm.'*

It is the role of the Spiritual Mentor to pull our heads out of the *'clouds of delusion,'* and keep us grounded in reality. By having a Spiritual Mentor as a guide post on our spiritual journey we are provided with a quick and ready living example to remind us just how much we do not yet know, and still need to learn.

4) The Mere-Exposure Effect

The *'Mere-Exposure Effect'* is a psychological phenomenon by which we tend to develop a preference for things merely because they are familiar to us. This Effect also has a corresponding physiological effect of releasing endorphins that create a sense of physical well-being.

The downside of the Mere-Exposure Effect is perhaps best illustrated by the American

humorist-philosopher Mark Twain who once commented that, *"It's easy to get people to believe a lie. However, it's much more difficult to get them to un-believe that lie."*

In other words, whenever we hear a lie being told over and over again it becomes familiar to us, and creates a sense of comfort within us, especially when everyone around us is believing the same lie.

It is the role of the Spiritual Mentor to intrude upon the comfort we might experience while believing what is not True. By this intrusion they create an opportunity to illuminate and integrate our world into a higher state of being. Without a Mentor we will continue to be frustrated in all that we do as the *'lies inside of us'* play themselves out in our experience of life. These unpleasant experiences will continue until we finally surrender to a greater Truth. In this sense, a Mentor quickens our long, slow, trial and error spiritual journey through life, and serves as a shortcut to Enlightenment.

5) Cognitive Dissonance

In the field of psychology, *'Cognitive Dissonance'* occurs when a person experiences psychological distress as the result of holding two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values. In other words, when two thoughts or ideas are not psychologically consistent with each other, we will do all in our power to change them until they become consistent. When the source of our Cognitive Dissonance is another person we will often try to silence or censor that person.

In the field of modern metaphysics, Cognitive Dissonance is often referred to as *Chemicalization*, which is the psychological stress that occurs when a false belief is confronted by a Principle of Truth. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for this psychological phenomenon to produce stress in-

duced effects within our physical flesh body, as well as the *'body of our affairs.'*

Ultimately, we must come to realize that there are always three sides to every conflict that arises in our life. First, there's our side; Then, there's the other side; and finally there is God's side, which is all sides. The Buddha referred to God's side as the *'Royal Middle Road'* which is a synthesis that lies above, and is inclusive of the other two sides. It is the role of the Spiritual Mentor to help us more readily take God's side in all of the conflicts that arise in our life. This is accomplished through right guidance and real Spiritual Practice that raises our consciousness with the power of Love.

6) The Dark Night of the Soul

The term *'Dark Night of the Soul'* is derived from a poem and commentary written by the 16th century mystic St. John of the Cross. It describes the arduous journey that we must take to ultimately come into mystical communion with God. It is essentially a process of multiple stages, whereby we must intentionally engage in the purification of our very own Soul.

The great challenge of the Dark Night of the Soul is that it requires us to come face-to-face with the many flaws and ungodly tendencies that lie hidden within our own subconscious nature. This purgatory process can become extremely disheartening, and discourage many from pursuing their Spiritual journey altogether. It is a little bit like washing windows. We never realize just how dirty our windows are until we start to clean them.

The most important thing to realize about the Dark Night of the Soul experience is that it is not an optional process. It is a journey that every human soul must ultimately take. Of course, we can always choose to

temporarily forestall the challenge of having to face the Dark Night of our Soul. However, as Humanity takes the next step in It's evolutionary journey towards the Divine, we will be forced to take that same step in our own personal spiritual journey as well.

It is the role of the Spiritual Mentor to guide us through the Dark Night of the Soul. This is because they are already a few steps ahead of us on the same arduous trek. Consequently, they can keep us on the right track, and then support us through the most difficult aspects of the journey.

7) The Dweller on the Threshold

The *'Dweller On the Threshold'* is another ancient metaphysical concept that helps us to more clearly define the process involved in the Dark Night of the Soul. In essence, this Dweller is an imaginary creature made up of our own personal character flaws which consists of unresolved hidden fears and unexpressed wanton desires.

This Dweller stands guard at the Threshold of some greater good that is seeking to enter our lives. Consequently, we cannot move forward into newness without dispelling the inner demons that have been holding us back. In other words, while the Angel of the Presence of God is calling us forward, the Dweller On the Threshold is holding us back.

A clear graphical demonstration of the Dweller concept is expressed by the contention of ancient temples, cathedrals and ashrams, whose entrances are often adorned with images of demonic creatures and gargoyles. This arrangement is intended to instruct us that we must face our demons before we can enter into the Presence of God inside the temple.

It is important to understand that each one of us has a uniquely personal Dweller on the Threshold within our very own being.

However, it is our human nature to psychologically project this despicable creature out on to others, so that it appears to be a real person in the outer world that we both fear and despise. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for certain individuals to serve as sort of a *'Universal Dweller'* onto which large numbers of people project their own suppressed character flaws. Perhaps this is why wise old Benjamin Franklin suggested that we should *"Search others for their virtues, and thyself for thy vices."*

In Conclusion

Ultimately, having a Mentor is like having supernatural eyes and ears that can see the Truth of who we are, as well as hear the longings of our Soul to become more than we have ever been before.

Furthermore, it should never be forgotten that being mentored is like being a Mentor's apprentice so that one day we might become a Mentor ourselves, and thereby serve others in the way that we have been served.



*"The Mentor outside of us
leads us to the Mentor within us."*

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