

Guru Purnima

Celebrating one's Guru - 23rd July 2021



Srila Vyasadeva - The Compiler of the Vedas and Puranas

Om ajnana-timirandhasya jnananjana-salakaya
caksur unmilitam yena tasmai sri-gurave namah

I was born in the darkest ignorance,
and my spiritual master opened my eyes with the
torch of knowledge. I offer my respectful obeisances unto him.

Guru Purnima is the day when the disciple expresses gratitude to his Guru or spiritual master. The purpose of the Guru Purnima celebration is to review the preceding year to see how much one has progressed in life, to renew one's determination, and to focus on one's progress on the spiritual path.

The information we have disseminated over the years on www.dipika.org.za has been rather different and unusual because we as Hindus should be looking at moving forward with the times and evolving. Being a Hindu and stagnant is not an option anymore. So, in keeping with this trend, this year for Guru Purnima we at DIPIKA would like to introduce something that hasn't been practiced much before... We are not trying to implement something new - rather when you read through the article below you will understand what we are getting at...

So on Guru Purnima many worship their respected Guru (be it Srila Prabhupada, Swami Shivananda, etc), but how many worship their first "Guru's" i.e. one's Mother and Father (Mata & Pita)? How can one worship one's Guru on this day when one hasn't even worshipped one's first guru's - their Mata and Pita - first? This article explores this train of thought.

Guru is composed of the syllables 'gu' and 'ru', the former signifying 'darkness', and the latter signifying 'the destroyer of that (darkness)', hence a guru is one characterized as someone who dispels spiritual ignorance (darkness), with spiritual illumination (light) – as per Advaya-Taraka Upanishad (verse 16).

The syllable gu means shadows and the syllable ru, he who disperses them, because of the power to disperse darkness the guru is thus named. Advayataraka Upanishad 14—18, verse 5.

The guru is seen as a sacred conduit for wisdom and guidance, and finding a true guru is often held to be a prerequisite for attaining self-realization. The importance of finding a guru who can impart transcendental knowledge (vidya) is emphasized in Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma). So we Hindus attach paramount importance to spiritual gurus. Gurus are often equated with God and always regarded as a link between the individual and the Supreme.

In the Bhagavad Gita, is a dialogue between the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Shree Krishna and Shree Arjun, who accepts Lord Krishna as his guru on the battlefield, prior to the battle of Kurushetra. Not only does this sacred and profound dialogue outline many of the ideals of Sanatan Dharma, but their relationship is considered an ideal one of Guru-Shishya. In the Bhagavad Gita 4.34, Lord Krishna speaks to Shree Arjun of the importance of finding a guru “Acquire the transcendental knowledge from a Self-realized master by humble reverence, by sincere inquiry, and by service. The wise ones who have realized the Truth will impart the Knowledge to you”.

There are two types of Gurus. Firstly the Diksha Guru. The Diksha guru initiates a person and imparts a mantra and you then become his/her disciple. You can only have one Diksha guru. And then there is the Siksha Guru. Now with the Siksha guru one can have as many as you like. A Siksha guru can be anybody who also teaches one. A tree or stone (teaches one tolerance), and so forth. On the personal front I have one Diksha guru but I have many many Siksha gurus who helped me when my guru was not around.

What and when is Guru Purnima?

The full moon day in the Hindu month of Ashad (July-August) is observed as the auspicious day of Guru Purnima (this year it falls on **Friday** the **23rd July**), a day sacred to the memory of the great sage Vyasadeva. All Hindus should be indebted to Srila Vyasadeva who compiled the four Vedas, the 18 Puranas and the Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavad Gita). Srila Vyasadeva even taught Dattatreya, who is regarded as the Guru of Gurus.

Significance of Guru Purnima

On this day, all spiritual aspirants and devotees worship Srila Vyasadeva in honor of his divine personage and all disciples perform a 'puja' of their respective spiritual preceptor or 'Gurudevs'. This day is a good time to begin ones spiritual lessons. Traditionally, spiritual seekers commence to intensify their spiritual 'sadhana' from this day. The period 'Chaturmasya' ("four months") begins from this day. In the past, wandering spiritual masters and their disciples used to settle down at a place to study and discourse on the Brahma Sutras composed by Srila Vyasadeva, and engage themselves in Vedantic discussions.

The Role of the Guru

Swami Shivananda asks: "Do you realize now the sacred significance and the supreme importance of the Guru's role in the evolution of a human? It was not without reason that the India of the past carefully tended and kept alive the lamp of Guru-Tattva. It is therefore not without reason that India, year after year, age after age, commemorates anew this ancient concept of the Guru, adores it and pays homage to it again and again, and thereby re-affirms its belief and allegiance to it. For, the true Indian knows that the Guru is the only guarantee for the individual to transcend the bondage of sorrow and death, and experience the Consciousness of the Reality." Swami Shivananda so nicely recommends: "Wake up at Brahma Muhurta (at 4 a.m.) On this most holy day meditate on the lotus feet of your Guru. Mentally pray to him/her for his/her Grace, through which alone you can attain Self-realization. Do vigorous Japa and meditate in the early morning hours. "After bath, worship the lotus feet of your Guru, or his/her image or picture with flowers, fruits, incense and camphor. Fast or take only milk and fruits the whole day. In the afternoon, sit with other devotees of your Guru and discuss with them the glories and teachings of your Guru. "Alternatively, you may observe the vow of silence and study the books or writings of your Guru, or mentally reflect upon his teachings. Take fresh resolves on this holy day, to tread the spiritual path in accordance with the precepts of your Guru. "At night, assemble again with other devotees, and sing the Names of the Lord and the glories of your Guru. The best form of worship of the Guru is to follow his teachings, to shine as the very embodiment of his teachings, and to propagate his glory and his message."

Now from the above you may have noticed that I have said the Guru as SHE/HER. So one may ask were there great female Gurus in our rich Vedic History. The answer to that is YES - absolutely. I can provide many examples of female gurus but I shall just choose one for today. Her glorious and most auspicious name is GANGAMATA GOSWAMINI. Ganga Mata Goswamini's original name was Srimati Sachi Devi. She was born in 1601CE in Puntiya, which is in the present-day Bangladesh and entered the eternal pastimes in 1721 CE. Of course being a girl her parents wanted to marry

her as soon as possible when she reached puberty but Srimati Sachi Devi was not in the least bit interested in marriage. After many years of penances in all the holy places her grace eventually ended up in Orissa in the Jagannath temple. Not long afterward, a miraculous occurrence took place. An opportune moment came for Maha Varuni Ganga bath. Many people who seek to accumulate pious credits make the trip to River Ganga for this auspicious occasion.

Many of Srimati Sachi Devi's friends asked her to accompany them, but she could not abandon her vows nor her service to the deities, so she was obliged to plead that it was impossible for her to go. Even though she did not really want to go, Lord Jagannath Himself made arrangements for her to bathe in the Ganga. That night Lord Jagannath appeared to her in a dream and told her to take bath in the Shvetaganga in the middle of the night. Srimati Sachi Devi followed Lord Jagannath's instructions, but as soon as she entered the water, she had a vision of Ganga Devi herself. She was carried away in a strong river current, which came from nowhere and suddenly found herself inside the Jagannath temple. But she continued to see herself bathing in the midst of her friends from Jagannath Puri. She not only saw the Ganga and all those who were immersed in her waters, but she could hear the joyful noise of the bathing crowds. And she was not the only one. The temple gatekeepers awakened on hearing this called Lord Jagannath's pujaris. They in turn gave a report to the King himself who ordered them to open the temple doors. When they finally flung the doors open, they saw no one but Srimati Sachi Devi standing there alone. Lord Jagannath's pujaris were confused and at first did not know what to do. They assumed that Srimati Sachi Devi had broken into the temple with the intention of robbing the Deities' valuables and that they had caught her red-handed. But by their suspicions they committed an offense to a great devotee of the Supreme Lord. As a result, various diseases and distresses attacked them--so much so that the service to Lord Jagannath was affected.

Lord Jagannath finally appeared to the King and told the king what had really happened. Being influenced by Srimati Sachi Devi's pure devotional attitude, Lord Jagannath Himself had made River Ganga flow from Lotus His feet to bathe Srimati Sachi Devi directly in the currents of His charanamrita (holy mixture of auspicious liquids). The King and the other servants of the Lord could only be freed from their offenses if they apologized to Srimati Sachi Devi and took initiation from her. King Mukunda Deva went to Srimati Sachi Devi with his entourage, the temple guards and servants. They paid her their prostrated obeisances and begged for her forgiveness. Though the King and all the pujaris, asked her for initiation, she only gave the mantra to the King in obedience to Lord Jagannath's order. The King wanted to give a large amount of land as Guru-Dakshina (fees to one's Guru after receiving initiation), but Sachi Devi refused it. When the King continued to beg for an opportunity to render service, Srimati Sachi Devi finally said that every midday he could send two containers

of Maha prasad rice and one of vegetables, a cloth and 160 paisa for the service of the Vaishnavas. From that day onward, Sachi was known as Ganga-Mata.

Devotees of the Supreme Lord may be born in any race, in any caste, or indeed in either sex. They are still to be considered the best of human beings and worshipping by all. There are many examples of women who attained the supreme achievement of pure devotional service to the Lord, such as the wives of the Vedic Brahmins who due to the demands of bhakti ignored the orders of their less-advanced husbands to serve Shree Krishna. In the Kali Yuga, also, as a result of the blessings of Shree Hari Das Thakur, a prostitute was transformed into a renowned Vaishnavi and many great devotees went to seek audiences from her in order to receive her saintly association.

A Personal note from myself: I normally don't like giving my own opinion on spiritual matters as I believe in quoting our shastras and letting our shastras do the talking. So please bear with me with this train of thought. When I perform a puja I refuse to allow anyone to bow down to me let alone wash my feet because I don't consider myself a Guru in any respect. Many are rather shocked and wonder why. Well, the reason for this is, that if a person bows down to a person, that person (whom is bowed down to) must be worthy of it... Personally I believe I am not. So, my take on who a Guru is, is rather different from the norm. These days the word GURU has become watered down to the point there is not much regard for the once revered name. Personally (and, according to my understanding), a Guru should only have two sets of clothes, one he/she is wearing now and one set for tomorrow, he/she should also be virtually penniless, homeless, have no material and sexual desires, except one (desire) - and that's "Anyabilashita shunyam" - i.o.w's without any material desire and purely - without any expectations of a reward birth after birth. Now, lets be honest here, how many Gurus - in this day in age - have the above-mentioned characteristics/qualities? Certainly not me (and I'm not being humble). To me, that person/being that fits this description perfectly is our supreme SUPERHERO himself - SHREE HANUMANJI. Give this some thought and you will realize the truth in this statement. Anyway, this is just my humble take on the definition of a true Guru. Nowadays, the word GURU has been watered down, so much so, that even popular soccer commentators are called "Soccer Gurus". This is rather unfortunate.

TOUCHING THE FEET OF PARENTS AND ELDERS

Why do we touch the feet of parents/elders? Us amazing Hindus touch the feet of saints, sages and elders, parents. There are several benefits behind this convention. According to our Vedas, the act of touching feet is a mark of kindness and in return the elders bless the person which reduces his/her misfortune and calms down the mind. There are certain physical, mental and ideological developments are associated with it. The

person is not only benefited with the blessings but unconsciously the person reveals his/her modesty and humble nature.

- It is also a sort of exercise. There are three methods of touching the feet. The first is to lean forward and touch the feet, second way is to sit on knees and the third one is the 'Sashtaang Pranaam'. Leaning forward and touching the feet stretches the waist and back bone.

- The second method relieves pain of the knees as the person bend his/her knees. All the joints of the body get stretched in the third method which removes stress and cures body pain.

- Besides these, bowing down increases blood circulation which is beneficial towards good health.

- Touching the feet reduces ego as it induces respect and subservience. When the feeling of respect and dedication arouses, it automatically suppresses the egotistic nature of the person.

- Touching the feet of elders and parents before venturing any new task or assignment ensures success and confidence. With all these benefits and advantages, the custom is being practiced wholeheartedly and it indicates India's rich heritage. But for this to happen it has to commence from birth, meaning that, from young, a child should be taught to touch one's parents feet first in the morning after taking a bath.

So on the **23rd July** in the morning after taking a bath and wearing fresh, clean clothes request your parents to sit down, then wash and wipe their feet. Then, on a thari (tray), have 3 Incense sticks which are already lit, a small clay lamp with camphor in the lamp, and some flowers. Turn this tray in a clockwise direction 7 times around your parents and then bow down to your parents – first to your mother - touching her feet and seeking her blessings - and then bow down to your father touching his feet and seeking his blessings. After your parents have given their blessings to you, only thereafter can you pray to your Guru. Some will say "oh, my mother is not a nice person, or my father is a drunkard, why should I do this?"). Firstly this is quite a terrible attitude to have. Only if you are a parent will you appreciate and respect what your parents had to go through to make you the person you are today. Remember forgiveness is the highest virtue. So, the **23rd July** to me IS the real Mothers' and Fathers' day and we should really go out of our way to make this a special day for our parents (well, every day should be parents day). I would kindly suggest this awesome idea of booking your parents for a few days at a lodge, or booking them in for Spa treatment, or book them at your favourite restaurant to have a lunch or supper. Do something really special to show your appreciation because if it wasn't for your parents I am sure you won't be where you are today. Yes, I know how this sounds, and its sounds very unorthodox, but why not? DIPIKA is all about breaking new grounds and this certainly does that. But do note this is simply a suggestion, it's not something cast on stone that you **MUST** do.

Extra points to ponder over: In many Hindus homes, Hindus generally first offer Surya-jal (water in a Lota/chumbu/pot) to the Sun-God (Suryadeva)... But this my fellow dosto is incorrect as one is supposed to light one's Lakshmi Lamp first, praying to Mother Lakshmi to lighten up one's home (to invoke the Shakti - feminine force in one's home first), thereafter one proceed to one's Jhunda/puja place, to offer Jal (water) to Surya Narayana (Lord Vishnu – the husband of Mother Lakshmi). Thereafter if one wishes, (depending on the weather) one can remain outside or one can enter back to one's home and then chant the Hanuman Chalisa. Once the Hanuman Chalisa is chanted Shree Hanumanji (GURU) then takes you to the Lotus feet on Shree Raam-ji (DEVAM). So, by offering Surya jal first, which many Hindus have become accustomed to, is, contrary to popular belief, incorrect. One should light ones Lakshmi lamp first. So, hypothetically, if the lamp is already lit then one can proceed to offer Surya jal and then chant the Hanuman Chalisa and Babaji takes you to the Supreme Lord Shree Raam.

MATA (Mother Lakshmi)
PITA (Surya Narayana)
GURU (Shree Hanumanji)
DEVAM (Lord Raam).

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