

THE WORLD TEACHER

When His Holiness Sri Sachchidananda Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bharati Swamigal was asked by a foreigner how He could claim to be a Jagadguru, World Teacher, when there were so many non-Hindu faiths in the world, His Holiness said, "The word Jagadguru does not mean at all that I can claim any right as a spiritual teacher over everybody in this vast world. It only means that, if anybody residing anywhere in the world earnestly seeks my spiritual guidance, I am bound to give it to him as far as it lies in my power. A person may reside in a distant country and yet be prepared to be guided by me. Another may reside in the Mutt itself and yet be unwilling to abide by my advice. It is my duty to help the former and not the latter. To the former I am his Guru; to the latter I am not. The word therefore defines only my duty; it does not signify any right or jurisdiction over others who do not seek my guidance"

His worthy successor Sri Chandrasekara Bharati Swamigal rigidly adopted this attitude and never sought to convert anybody from one faith to another and even from one mode of worship

to another, much less to increase the number of His disciples or to widen the range of His influence but contented Himself with guiding those who earnestly sought His help. A few incidents may well be cited to illustrate this.

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A Frenchman wrote to His Holiness that the teachers in Europe were all intellectual and not spiritual men and added "I have no guide on the hard path. I am alone and I implore your help. I know you have great experience and powers. I know that space and time are nothing to you in a certain plane. May I ask your honour to give me light and peace?" The reply from the Mutt contained the following pregnant passages.

"His Holiness is highly pleased to see what an amount of interest you take in Sankara in spite of the great barriers of language and distance. He is deeply touched by your spiritual earnestness.

"The pursuit of Vedantic truth leading to Atmic realisation required as a preliminary qualification in the seeker that he should have attained a certain degree of spiritual awakening as much as of intellectual acuteness which he may have acquired in his previous births. And as he advances he may meet with difficulties which he can overcome only

with the help of a Guru. It is not therefore possible to prescribe any one course suitable for all stages. The following directions would however be found most helpful to seekers who are not able readily to consult their Guru at each step and who are eager to make rapid progress. The steadying of one's mind is a *Sine qua non* for the realisation of the Vedanta goal. Keeping this in view, the practices indicated below are advised.

“Firstly, Physical: The avoidance of all stimulating food, drink, and the adoption as far as possible of the vegetarian diet.

“Secondly, Moral: The daily exercise of universal love without distinction of any kind towards all beings and the actual rendering of helpful services to them in a spirit of selfless service.

“Thirdly, Mental: The cultivation of a habit of retiring into one's own self. Daily concentration of thought upon some single object held in the highest reverence through which spiritual light is sought. Concentration should be practised whenever the mind is fresh and vigorous and it may be resorted to as often as convenient without getting tired. The mind should be guarded against falling asleep during the exercise. One may start with a

few minutes practice and the period may be gradually increased.

“*Fourthly, Intellectual: Enquiry (Vichara)* should be made everyday and the problems of truth deeply pondered over whenever they occur.

“His Holiness fully realises your difficulties especially as you are struggling in an atmosphere surcharged with materialism. But Europe is bound to seek Vedantic light in due course. Only she has to persevere in her pursuit of truth in preference to things of a lower order. She is now steadfast in seeking truth in the world of physics. (Science). She will be led to the search of truth in metaphysics also provided her thirst for knowledge continues.

“Should you adopt the practices indicated above as far as it is possible for you to do so and write to His Holiness again, He will most gladly give you such further help as may be possible in this direction.”

It is interesting to learn that the gentleman earnestly followed these directions and desired to have a picture of His Holiness or Sri Sankarācharya to fix his mind upon and have “a vivid object of daily contemplation.” In reply thereto

he was informed that His Holiness was highly pleased to learn that he was pursuing with much earnestness the practical as well as the theoretical courses indicated and that His Holiness was much pleased to send for his use a picture of His own Guru which He Himself constantly kept before Him. He was cautioned "This picture should be approached everyday only when one is perfectly clean in body and perfectly clear in mind. Absolute purity in thought, in word and in deed, is demanded. The more steadfast and concentrated the devotion with which one prays for help seeking Atmic light, the more quickly does one receive the blessings of the Guru whose spiritual existence will always be felt whenever there is a sincere seeker. Kindly continue your efforts with this conviction."

(I hear that this Frenchman is now a famous scholar and is at present professor of Indology in the University of Madrid)

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