

*Imagine* a world where we had to educate ourselves at every moment of life. Without access to the knowledge uncovered by prior experts in the field, we would need to reinvent the wheel for even the most trivial tasks. If this were the case, we would spend a lifetime merely educating ourselves on previously uncovered knowledge. In turn, an expert or guide is very much required if we wish to progress beyond our limited boundaries, no matter which field of interest we consider. When it comes to the art of living a blissful life, the 'guide' in the field is known as a Guru.

Once, an auctioneer was auctioning a selection of valuable and priceless items. As the auction was coming to a close, he noticed an old-looking violin, covered in dust. Doubtful of its worth, he reluctantly raised the violin and commenced the bidding. Slowly, someone raised their hand and bid one dollar, then someone bid two dollars, and

after a long pause, the final bid for the violin reached a meager three dollars. Seeing the lack of interest in the violin, the auctioneer was ready to finalize the offer. Suddenly, a gray-haired man approached the auctioneer and took the violin from his hands. After wiping the dust with his handkerchief and tightening the strings, the elderly man started to play the violin. The soft, sweet and melodious music

mesmerized the crowd. Leaving the audience in awe, the old man placed the violin back onto the table. Breaking the utter silence came the first bid, "One thousand dollars!" The bidding commenced, and the violin was sold for three thousand dollars. People cheered and pondered what had just happened, as only a few minutes ago, the same violin was worth only three dollars. What changed the value of this violin? It was the Touch of a Master's Hand!



Adapted from a poem written by Myra Brooks Welch, this tale is rich and poignant in its meaning. The poem concludes with the line, 'We are also like that violin, sold cheaply to the thoughtless crowd, but there comes a Master and touches you like never before, that the foolish crowd cannot realize the worth of a soul and the change brought by a touch of a Master's hand'. **Just as the jeweler knows the true worth of a diamond, a Guru knows and can harness the potential in a youth by a simple touch.** In this edition of 'Outreach', we will explore the **Importance of a Guru** in our lives.

### Inspiration from the Great

A university professor once reached out to a Japanese Zen Master to learn about Zen wisdom. On meeting the Zen master, the professor spoke about his opinions and views, while the Zen master listened. He then offered the professor a cup of tea and began pouring the tea in the cup until it started to overflow. The professor was first amused on seeing this, but then became restless and advised the Zen master that the cup could not accommodate any more tea. The Zen master, who had silently listened for so long while the professor had mindlessly spoken about his ideals, finally said, "As long as your mind is filled with your own opinions and ideals, you have no room to welcome new ideas and true wisdom."

Almost all of us live with the "I believe in me" mind-set and thus enjoy blissful ignorance. Our society is structured such that we tend to fill our minds with so many opinions, attitudes and pre-conceived notions that there is no space left for true wisdom, real knowledge and greater success. Only a true guru lives with the



**"The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education."**

**- Albert Einstein**

understanding of "I believe in God". Such a guru can help us empty our minds and make space to accommodate new thoughts that help us achieve greater truth and move beyond the boundaries of success and failure. The best time to start emptying our minds is in our youth. As we grow older, flexibility declines and

### Affinity with a True Guru

we grow rigid in welcoming new thoughts and beliefs. Gunatitanand Swami, the first spiritual successor of Lord Swaminarayan, was an ardent and ideal devotee, expressing strong affinity towards devotion from a very young age. His father advised that young age is meant to eat, play and have fun, while the flame of devotion only needs to be kindled at later stages of life. Upon hearing this, Gunatitanand Swami went around the village to observe the types of devotional activities the elders were engaged in. As it turned out, the elders were busy gossiping and ranting about others. Gunatitanand Swami explained to his father that satsang and devotion need to be imbibed from a young age.

The flame that enlightens us comes from a guru. The word 'Guru' originates from Sanskrit, wherein the root word 'gu' means darkness and 'ru' means dispeller. In essence, a guru carries one from the darkness of ignorance into the light of bliss. **It is a guru who clears our misguided beliefs and sheds light on the right path.**

Brothers against brothers. Sons against fathers. Students against teachers. The Mahabharat scripture details the tragic war which pitted loved ones against each other. This Great War, fought over a span of 18-days, was a direct confrontation between the five sons of King Pandu (Pandavs) and the hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra (Kauravs). The war was a culmination of the dynastic struggle for the kingdom of Hastinapur, involving almost every tribal king and powerful state in Northern and Central India at the time. While both sides were struck with severe casualties, in which nearly all of the best men died in battle, the five Pandavs survived and came out victorious. Nonetheless, each day of the war brought new obstacles and challenges, leaving uncertainty in the outcome of the war.

One such instance occurred on the 14th day of the war. Duryodhan, the eldest of the Kaurav sons, declared that the fighting for the day will go on beyond sunset. Although this was in violation of the rules established prior to the war, the Pandavs and Kauravs agreed, as they were exhausted and wanted a quick end to the war. As so, the fighting continued beyond sunset.

On the same day, Ghatotkach joined the Pandavs to fight against the Kauravs. Ghatotkach was the son of Bheem (Pandav brother) and Hidimbi (rakshas [demon]), making Ghatotkach a half-demon. Since demons were much more powerful during the night, and the war extended past sunset, Ghatotkach wreaked havoc and single-handedly wiped out an entire division of the Kaurav army within just one hour. Duryodhan realized that Ghatotkach was too powerful to be defeated and that if his rampage continued, he alone would destroy the Kaurav army.



Lord Krishna, the guru of the Pandavs and Arjun's (Pandav brother) chariot, noticed Duryodhan's dilemma and passed him a message to go to Karna, the Kaurav commander-in-chief, for a solution. Karna had a very special weapon with him called the 'Shakti'. He had performed severe penances and was gifted the 'Shakti' from Lord Indra as a boon, on the condition that he could use it only once in his lifetime. The specialty of this weapon was that death was certain for the person upon whom it was used, with no means of escape.

Lord Krishna asked Duryodhan, "What is Karna saving the 'Shakti' for? Tell him to use it! Or else, you will be finished!" Duryodhan, convinced that there was no other option, urged Karna, "You must use the 'Shakti'. If you don't use it now, we will lose this war!"

Due to the dire situation, Karna was forced to use the 'Shakti' on Ghatotkach, thus ending his merciless rampage. Shocked by losing their son in battle, the Pandavs mourned Ghatotkach's death. On the other hand, Lord Krishna was smiling and appeared relieved of some heavy burden.

Arjun, who knew Lord Krishna was the instigator for Ghatotkach's death, questioned Lord Krishna, "What have you done? Are you on our side or the Kaurav side? The war was going so well for us, but you came in the way. I do not understand what you have done today." For the first time in the war, Yudhisthir, the eldest Pandav brother, was angry with Lord Krishna and said, "What you have done is wrong. You should not have done this."

Krishna then explained, "If what happened today had not happened, the war would have ended tomorrow and all of you would not be here, standing in front of me. From the beginning of the war, Karna was saving the 'Shakti' to use on Arjun. All this while, I was protecting Arjun by keeping him away from Karna. Had Karna used the 'Shakti' on Arjun, the entire Pandav army would have crumbled and a Kaurav victory would have been certain."

This is how a guru works in our lives. He has vision; he can foresee things we cannot. While the five Pandav brothers, without doubt, were highly skilled and gifted warriors, their great triumph and success would not have been possible without the guidance of their Guru Lord Krishna. **If we keep faith and submit ourselves to a true Guru, we can be assured of protection and bliss in all aspects of our life.**

### Cool Fact

Feeling down? If you go to a doctor, he might prescribe Prozac, the most popular anti-depression drug. But the same chemical found in Prozac that makes people feel happy, is also found in bananas! Bananas are packed with the natural chemical serotonin, which is commonly referred to as the 'happiness hormone'. So next time you are feeling down or need a mental boost, grab a banana!



### Lasting Thought



"By seeking refuge in God and a Saint, life's tensions will not affect you, negative thoughts will not disturb you, and thoughts of anger will subside from within you."

- Guruhari Swamiji