

The Teacher Within

Is enlightenment or awakening possible without the help of a teacher? There are many accounts of this happening spontaneously. Sometimes it is through a devastating life event, sometimes as a result of intense depression or fear, sometimes through reading a spiritual text. These occurrences are rare, but they receive attention because they are dramatic. The account of Ramana Maharshi's awakening, or that of Eckhart Tolle are well-known examples. Far more usually, awakening occurs through the help of a teacher. But in this case, it tends to go unremarked, partly because it's more likely to be gradual and undramatic and partly because it's so common. As Francis has said, you usually find that a large proportion of the students who gather around a teacher who is established in his/her true nature, are themselves awakened.

But awakening or enlightenment is just the start of the Direct Path. Francis describes it as a liberating glimpse. Before the liberating glimpse, we are on the path to the path. That glimpse marks the beginning of the path towards becoming stabilised or established in this understanding. Francis explains that a spiritual teacher can take you only up to his own level of understanding and establishment:

FL: Imagine that you have in the student a window of openness that opens and closes. And imagine that the teacher is established, which means that his light is always open, always on. So all it takes in the student is a moment of open window to get the light. Now if the teacher is not established, it means that the light he or she sends goes on and off. So then it requires a synchronicity of the student to be open and of the teacher to transmit. Now a student who is very, very open can get awakened from a teacher who is not established, because all it takes is to have a moment of truth from the teacher, a spark. We are talking about awakening here, which is different from realisation or stabilisation.

Now the question of the stabilisation to the sadhana that takes place after awakening is a different story, because a teacher can take you only up to his level of stabilisation. In India they have what is called the karana-guru who, for all practical purposes, is established in peace and happiness. So he can take you up to that state or condition. So that's the story. And this teacher is a very practical tool.

Now awakening is a much less stringent condition than getting established. And in Neo-Advaita there is a confusion between realisation and getting established. A lot of Neo-Advaita teachers have not been the student of a teacher so they don't know about the stabilisation. So some of them may have had a true awakening and then they can share it. It doesn't mean they are established. Many more may not have even had an awakening – they may have some kind of intellectual grasp, but they don't have really the perfume of it. I would be very careful of any teacher who would say that the goal of the search is not happiness, because it would mean that they have not achieved it. It would mean that they are not established. And they can't speak of it because they don't have the experience. For them, they may be awakened, so they have this experience of universal consciousness, but they are not stable in happiness. So they say: 'too bad, you get this flash of lightning and then you are as cooked as before, more or less, the way I am – but you're enlightened. You're not happy but you're enlightened, so that should be enough.' No, that's not enough, that won't do.

But in most cases, there won't even be this true awakening which is *moksha*, liberation. There will be what I would call a partial glimpse, which means they have understood something about consciousness, but they have not had the revelation of its eternity, of its universality, of its

splendour, of its love etc. Whereas, around a true teacher, we find a lot of awakened beings, and you feel the perfume. And they may not tell you anything, they may not say anything, they may not in their mind realise it, but you will feel a different quality in the sangha which is a quality of love, of peace, of easy connections, and not this stinky type of relation which is competition – there is much less of that. So that's also a good guideline.

Now of course there have been instances of spontaneous awakening upon reading a book, but if life takes us to a place where we have a desire to encounter a teacher, and the teacher comes to us, for this truth-seeker, the question 'is a teacher necessary to awaken?', this question has already been answered.

[Francis Lucille: [Advaita \(Non-Duality\) 9 of 16 - Is a Teacher Really Necessary?](#)]

Looking back on our life, we may see that many of the events that seemed to cause much unhappiness at the time, were actually what was needed to strengthen our love of truth and search for happiness. When the love of truth and search for happiness leads to the desire for a teacher, it seems that somehow the teacher we need at that time comes into our lives. But that may not be the end of the story. That teacher may not be able to take us all the way to what we seek. Many of us have moved from one teacher or teaching to another, each one giving us just what we needed at that time. Here is an extract from a discussion Francis had on this subject in a recent webinar for Bill Free's book club:

Q: I have read many spiritual books and listened to a few spiritual teachers, and when I listen to them, I experience openness in my heart. But after some time, I am back in my old world again. And sometimes I feel it as frustration. Is it really possible to change that? Is it really possible to live without the domination of conditioning?

FL: It depends how much you will it. And also it connects to the role of the teacher. Because ultimately everything is our guru. Many of us have had the loss of a loved one, the break-up of a relationship, a problem with finances, a failure in our studies. There are many events in our life that in the moment seem to be very negative, but in hindsight have put us on the path to truth. So we see them now with more wisdom and in a different light. So all events, including people we meet, including teachers – through books we meet teachers – are teaching events. Life is made of teaching events. And even those Neo-Advaita teachers we were talking about earlier, if we meet such a teacher and we follow his teaching, it's because that's what we need at that moment.

Now it is OK to move from teacher to teacher because our allegiance is not to the person. We have to understand that our allegiance is to the truth which is being taught. And the duty of the student of truth is to drink from the purest source he or she can find. In other words, it is for each of us as truth-lovers and truth-seekers to ask ourself the question 'what is the best source of truth that I have found so far?', and stick to it up until a better source shows up. And in the Indian tradition, they make a distinction between *upa-gurus* which are the ones like the two-by-four behind the neck that have hurt us in our past history, and other teachers we have met, *[and as a result]* we have changed. And then there is one – the one who takes us to wisdom, the last one. They call it the *karana-guru*. Because we may have had a glimpse before, we may have had this experience of oneness – but then the question is the one you are asking: How do I move from this experience of oneness to being established in inner peace?

[Francis Lucille, 2nd March 2021: [Bill Free's Book club](#)]

The real teacher is the teacher within. We recognise the answers that our human teacher gives us as truth, because they resonate with that inner teacher:

My question regards the role of the guru in the “enlightenment process” of the seeker. I was wondering what kind of relationship you feel is necessary and/or appropriate.

The real teacher is in your heart. This silent presence in your heart will recognize the fragrance of truth, love, and simplicity that emanates from your human teacher, just as the instinct of the bee wakes up when it perceives the perfume exhaled by the distant flower. This direct recognition already contains the essence of enlightenment. This encounter is, in many instances, necessary and is always an act of grace. Without the intervention of grace, enlightenment is impossible, because the ego can't liberate itself from itself any more than a stain of ink can be washed away in a bucket filled with the same ink.

The human teacher is merely an appearance, a shadow against the background of light which is the real teacher. Anything that can be said, any conclusion that can be reached regarding this shadow will be as illusory as the shadow itself. Don't try to qualify this shadow as being enlightened or non-enlightened, established in light or non-established in light.

Simply be totally open to all possibilities. The real teacher who speaks in your heart will never violate your deep feelings, never try to control your decisions. The real teacher within has no personal agenda. This presence will liberate you from your frustration, anger, and fear, and will help you actualize the beauty, understanding, and love that are already in you. If there is, at any moment, an apparent contradiction between the voice within and the suggestions of your human teacher, give all due consideration to your teacher's advice. However, if the contradiction persists, follow your heart.

Although the basic identification with the body-mind has been destroyed in the case of an authentic human teacher, students should understand that old egoic patterns may still reappear even in such a teacher. They should welcome these reappearances with equanimity, just as they welcome the reappearances of their own old habits. The “old man” which may reappear in the human teacher is not the real teacher. It is a reminder of the fact that the real teacher is not human. The guru is not the shadow, but the light.

[Francis Lucille, *Eternity Now*; Awakening to Immortal Splendour]

So it's important to recognise that no human teacher is perfect. As Francis points out, the teacher is not a 'special person' with access to knowledge that we don't have equal access to:

What is the role of the teacher?

The teacher does not give you a new necklace but just asks you to look in the mirror. The teacher does not give you anything new. One should be careful about any misunderstanding in this respect. ...

One has to be careful about traditions that make a god of the teacher. ... There should not be any difference between the teacher and the student. It is natural that there is respect because the teacher sees the Self in you. Respect calls for respect. Love calls for love. At the same time, the teacher should make realization seem easy. If a teacher makes it seem difficult and out of reach, then find another one!

The teacher that takes us to freedom, known in India as the *Satguru* or the *Karana guru*, wants our freedom above all else. In the *Karana guru's* presence, ... there is this total freedom. The teacher doesn't judge you. Everything is OK. You are OK. ...

Freedom is the highest good. It is that which is closest to the Self. Above love, above intelligence, above beauty, there is freedom. That is why this game we are playing is called the game of bondage and liberation.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence*; God is Very Mischievous]

It is natural when we first approach a teacher and taste the perfume of liberation, that we attribute this event to the teacher – a person, an object that is separate from ourself. But in fact, that glimpse of freedom comes not from any separate person, but from our real Self, the one Self. Devotion to a teacher ultimately becomes a block to the understanding of our true nature. It covers up a deeply-held sense of lack which may be hidden from view. As Rupert explains, a competent and experienced teacher recognises this and responds appropriately:

The purpose of a teacher is to liberate us from the dependence on objects or people for peace and happiness. So a teacher who more or less subtly encourages us either through his or her words or usually through his or her behaviour to become devoted to or dependent on himself or herself, is sending us a mixed message. I see this so often – people who are fanatically devoted to their teacher, people whose happiness depends even more than most people who are not interested in these matters, on their teacher. And I see teachers while denying this verbally, through their behaviour, encouraging this cultish behaviour. All in the name of liberation. How do you think that devotion to a person can lead you to liberation from dependence on objects for happiness? Don't fool yourself – it can't. A true teacher will take your devotion and gently but swiftly and efficiently turn it round and redirect it to its source. ...

When we approach a teacher, we approach the teacher with great trust and openness and vulnerability. And a teacher has a great responsibility not to take advantage of that trust and vulnerability.

[Rupert Spira: [The Responsibility of a Teacher](#)]

If we remain devoted to a teacher it is very easy to trust what he says and not bother to check it out fully for ourselves in our own experience. We think: 'this person is a true master, and what he says corresponds to what many other sages have said, so it must be right. And anyway, I would like it to be true'. In this way, we replace one set of beliefs with another one, and non-duality becomes a religion. If we are to become established in the non-dual understanding, we need to liberate ourselves from *all* beliefs. A *karana-guru* can help us uncover and deconstruct our hidden beliefs, bringing us back to not knowing.

Contemplation

The teacher brings the student to a state of not knowing, in which the mind gives up the search. Only in this total openness can the real teaching begin, and the beginning of the real teaching, in the silence of the heart, is also its end.

[Francis Lucille, *Eternity Now*]