



The Need for a Teacher

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The idea of a spiritual teacher is actually quite simple. Just as you need a guide to scale a mountain peak for the first time — someone who has gone before — you need an experienced guide on the spiritual path. You need someone who can show you the way and help you when you get tied up in your ropes.

The teacher should know every inch of the ascent, from the foothills to the summit. He should be able to warn the students where there are ice fields and crevasses and tell them where they can pitch their tents and rest.

I am talking from my own personal experience of traveling along this path, over many years, and through my teacher's grace reaching journey's end. The path is a gradient. In the early years it's not very steep, and we can climb, but as our muscles get stronger, as our determination and will get stronger, this gradient slowly begins to get steeper. That's why I say go slow, don't try to rush up those steep gradients, because if your body has not been well trained, if your will is not firm and your capacity to act in emergencies is not very good, then there is great danger on this path.

That is why it takes a long, long time to make this climb, and that's why an experienced teacher is always necessary. As the gradient changes, as more challenges come, the teacher will be able to guide you, help you, support you, pull you away from the precipice, not because he has read books, but because he has been along that way, and knows where the avalanches may come.

We have to do the work

But while the teacher is essential for guidance and support, we have to do the work for ourselves. Spiritual awareness is not something that just strikes us one day, like the apple falling on Sir Isaac Newton's head, and there is no shortcut to it such as taking drugs or using alpha-wave gadgets. It must be cultivated by the hard work of eliminating all that is selfish and separate in us, following a body of disciplines that is based on our teacher's own personal experience in realizing the unity of life.

The disciplines in my eight-point program are suited for life in the modern world, and they can be practiced by any man or woman capable of some resolution, some endurance, and some sense of dedication. They do not require you to withdraw into a cave and roll a rock across the entrance behind you; you can follow this program while living in the world among family and friends, while studying on the campus or working at a job.

A wiser way of living

My own approach to the spiritual life appeals to many men and women today, partly because I have not retired from the world — I live very much as a family man, a good husband, son, and friend — but also because I have tried to combine the best of West and East.

But perhaps what appeals most deeply is that I understand the difficulties of living in the modern world. Before taking to meditation, in my ignorance of the unity of life, I too committed most of the mistakes that even sensitive people commit today. As a result, I understand how easy it is to make those mistakes, and I know how to guide and support those who are trying to learn a wiser way of living.

I live in my eight-point program

I have said many times that Saint Francis lives in the words of his prayer. Gandhi may be said to live in the second chapter of the Gita, on which he based his life.

Similarly, you can say that I live in my eight-point program, and I can assure you that I live in my audio and video recordings for those who are practicing my method of meditation to the best of their ability and following the instructions faithfully with an open heart.

So if you are following this method of meditation, I would encourage you to read my books over and over and follow the instructions very carefully. That is your safeguard.

You have to remember that when I started to meditate, my own spiritual teacher, my grandmother, had already passed away. At first I felt very much on my own, but at every stage, when I turned to her for guidance, I found answers to my questions.

You see, when a person becomes aware of God, he or she is no longer just a person, but a living force. My grandmother did not die; she merely shed her body. She was — she *is* — very much alive in me. Once I knew that, I knew that I was in her hands and that there was nothing to fear. She has protected and comforted me ever since.

I am not just talking, you know. Jesus continues to guide us. The Buddha continues to guide us. These are eternal forces; their lives are eternal.

So don't ever make the mistake of thinking that I am confined to this brown body. I am not confined to this brown body; I am in every one of you.