

# An Authentic Spiritual Teacher

By Richard Harvey

As in all things – the seed for instance – the essence is invisible; it is only visible to the inner eye. It is rather like the egg in the eggshell or peeling the layers of the onion. For many what is invisible is not real, untrue, and does not exist. It is and has always been the task of the spiritual teachers, the gurus, the sages, the rishis, and the realized adepts to teach, reveal, and transmit in sacred testament the truth of the invisible world, the world of the source, the transcendent and the realm of the spiritual.

For the way to be taught it is not enough to have a glancing acquaintanceship with the spiritual plane, some ideas, or a point of view. First you must have experience. But even if you have experienced enlightening insights and spiritual events, this does not necessarily make you a teacher. Teaching is not an inevitable outcome of spiritual experience. Teaching is a functional gift, a blessing of life that you are given... or not. Thus many enlightened beings remain hidden, withdrawn, and away from public scrutiny. Correspondingly, many unenlightened beings put themselves forward as teachers and teach, but what they teach is not Truth. It is merely what they have learnt along the way, often extending their particular experience into generalizations.

Today much of what passes for spiritual teaching is a pale version of the truth. The truth in any case is itself a ripple on the ocean, as it appears in this relative world in which humanity struggles for enlightenment. I don't say that popular spiritual teachers of today are malevolent or intentionally misleading, but what causes the confusion is that many are unconscious and the seductions of power and other material and physical rewards are enormous.

Spirituality is less a matter of knowledge, more a matter of wisdom, and knowledge is not wisdom. The popular spiritual guides and teachers who have either intentionally or intuitively picked up minor methods of hypnotism and/or manipulation, both collective and individual, cannot by any means be assumed to possess any wisdom whatsoever.

I have thought long and hard about this problem of criticism of modern day "spiritual" teachings and teachers, which is concerned with a watered-down, materialistic version of the personal and transcendent liberation of human beings and I have concluded that these teachers are confusing spirit with soul. They are not the same. They are different. The soul inside every person is the means to experience, to reach to the earth, to savor life, to experience sublime identification through our true nature in time, if we tread the path of wholeness to the end. The collective soul denotes our etheric connection with others, the human race, and collective humanity. Through the soul we are in touch with irrational forces of great depth and mystery. But the spiritual – the spiritual is beyond time, outside of time, prior to time and space too, and therefore the usual parameters of thought and reason and relative world orientation become irrelevant. The soul is your root, your reaching downward into the source and the earth mysteries. But the spirit is your wings, your reaching upward to the higher spiritual source and the mysteries of transcendence and divinity, to Reality itself.

I didn't embark on this journey of discovery to let go of the endeavor halfway. I have noticed today that spiritual seekers, acolytes, students, teachers, and guides take refuge after a while in a compromise of

the soul and spirit. When it all gets too hard they find a position, for example, the ego is good or I am still learning or I remain humble in the mystery. While all or any of the positions they adopt may be good in themselves, it is as ever the reasons we adopt them that are important. Do we compromise out of fear or self-aggrandizement or do we compromise because it is true? Is the ego inherently good or is it merely that our hard work of inner discovery has brought us to such a place that we resist going on?

In relationship to each other, to the world and to God, we struggle with our left brains of intellect, reason, and logic to understand, to gain insight, to become wise through the portals of knowledge. But there is no such thing as becoming wise through knowledge alone, because knowledge is not inherently wise. It is inherently information only. Our left brain functioning accrues knowledge and is of great use to us in all kinds of endeavors, like a dishwasher, an automobile, or a shovel may be.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, wisdom is not in and of itself of any use whatsoever. Wisdom leads us to Truth and Truth is. It has no inherent use, it IS... and that's it.

To discover Truth you must live it, you must be in it, like the fish is in the sea, like the bird is in the air. It must become your water, your air and your ground. There's a halo around your head, lotus blossoms bloom beneath your feet and every breath fills you with the spirit and the flame of enlightenment. This condition does not come about through self-interest or self-remembering. This condition comes about through self-forgetting and an almost total lack of self-interest. That is why in effect it is incorrect to speak of an individual becoming enlightened. Enlightenment is; the individual is not. Or the individual is: enlightenment is not. Or enlightenment and the individual are One! Since the individual is himself or herself the ocean and the drop – the whole great sea of Consciousness – there is no individual entity whatsoever standing outside of the whole. Therefore it is the goal of the individual life to realize and transcend the limitations of self, the delusion of individuality, the illusion of separation and division, and the snares of the ego.

There can be no compromise with the ego. Spiritual teachers today who confuse the soul forces, the life force, the physical, emotional, energetic, and mental functioning of the human being with the realm of the spirit do not seem to understand this. So they speak of material advance, self-aggrandizement, kindness between human beings, love shared and love withheld, extending our national, familial, personal identities into meaningful relations. All of this is perfectly valid from the soulful point of view, what I call the second stage of awakening, but it is all complete nonsense from the point of view of the truly spiritual and from the viewpoint of Truth.

The reason it is crucial now to understand this distinction before we batter and blend the two into mush, is that we cannot know, teach, or guide anyone to the Heart unless we understand the difference and know which one precedes the other. I propose that a robust psychological foundation is needed to sustain genuine spiritual endeavor. I have been told that you can build a foundation beneath an existing building; it's called underpinning. However I don't think you'd find a builder who would choose to do it that way. I am sorry to say, but this is how the present day rash of spiritual teachers looks to me. And I am not alone in seeing it this way. They look like people who would rather not engage in the task of foundation building which is after all simply the task of establishing some sort of ground level. Today, we are swamped with the endless offerings of methods, approaches, workshops, weekend courses promising to give you the solution you have been looking for and change your life. These quick fixes sound surely very attractive to the seeker of the present era, where everything is about efficiency and going ahead as fast as possible. But as it is with everything around us, if there is no proper and well

prepared ground, nothing will grow or if it looks like it does, it will fade as fast as it was put there. So make sure that the teacher you choose does not confuse soul with spirit and cares about the foundation.

Finally, when you are looking for the right teacher, also consider this. A great deal of spiritual teachings, since time immemorial, has been art. But beauty for beauty's sake is not real beauty. It turns into ugliness. When it deteriorates, it turns into its opposite. Arguably, spiritual teaching is necessarily metaphor and symbol. Since it attempts to describe what cannot be spoken, it can only be a finger pointing at the moon and not the moon itself. But words in the delivery of a true teacher can be transcendent. You may meet either a poet or an adept. The two are different. Many spiritual teachers are merely poets. They are the finger pointing at the moon, but ultimately they are not really spiritual teachers, not adepts, not the moon. Teachers of spirituality should know the difference and proclaim themselves as poets or adepts, so you know what you are getting. Because as students, you get what you are inwardly prepared to accept. If it is the moon, that's one thing; if it's the finger pointing, that is another.

At some point, if you can, wean yourself off the poems, the beauty, the lovely inspiring quotations, the art for art's sake, the metaphors and symbolism. If it doesn't serve the greater reality, the real "experience," it will be ultimately unsatisfying and you will be upset, disappointed. You may even fall into despair or disillusionment. You may even die believing that God, existence, or the Divine has failed you.

As I have said so often before, you have to be extremely careful and aware when choosing a spiritual guide or teacher. Your devotion to the teacher, the teaching, and the way you "choose" is an extraordinary event – extraordinary, even disorientating, because when the relationship to the teacher is completely authentic, the feeling is prior to your identity with your bodymind-self patterning. You encounter a depth of unworldly familiarity that challenges the reality of your ego-processes and the life you have built around your separate identity.

Your relationship with Spirit, Reality, and the Divine and its reflective relationship with your spiritual teacher is a more profound and a authentic life event than anything you have previously experienced. All experience so far in your life has been patterns of mind and thought forms. You have been indoctrinated from the very beginning of your life in a dynamic of conflict. You have been taught to identify with a self-image and to pit this image against obstructions and hindrances to achieve hopefully successful outcomes. These successful outcomes are themselves associated with the physical, mental, emotional organism you identify as yourself. Your early education and conditioning simply reinforced the predominance of physical, emotional, mental, and social interactions as the means to happiness and success. Your life is a complex interrelationship of thought forms with selfidentification providing a basis for attachments to the entire fantasy of a self-centered egotistical world.

[1] For some, however, knowledge may be part of the structure that dispels ignorance and creates a stable access to truth e.g. science as a spiritual path.

This article is an excerpt from Richard Harvey's book [Your Divine Opportunity](#).