

# The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

## On Selecting A Guru

**Question:** Does one really need a guru? If yes, how does one choose the right guru?

**Answer:** If we want to seriously pursue any field, be it medicine, music, martial art, sports, or whatever, we benefit immensely by learning from a teacher who is experienced and expert in that field. Indeed, it is next to impossible to achieve proficiency in any subject without the guidance of a person already proficient in it. This is all the more true for spirituality because the principles and practices of spirituality are far more subtle and profound than those of any other field. If we insist on practicing spirituality without a spiritual guide, we will most likely get lost in the plethora of philosophies and practices and not make any substantial spiritual advancement.



Regarding choosing a guru, we can adopt the same standard and caution that we adopt in choosing a doctor when we are sick. Certainly choosing a good doctor may not always be easy, but without the doctor, we will remain sick, bereaved of the health and energy natural to us. Similarly, choosing a guru may not be easy, but without a guru, we will remain spiritually sick, being bereaved of the love and happiness natural to us as eternal spiritual beings.

A doctor capable of curing our ills should himself be free from those ills. Similarly, a guru capable of curing our ignorance and illusion and awakening our love for God should himself be free from ignorance and illusion (and the worldly attachments they produce) and should be in love with God, as evident from his words and actions. A helpful question to ask ourselves while deciding upon a guru is, "If I follow these teachings, at best I will become like this teacher. Do I want to become like him?"



When we want to choose a doctor, we implicitly understand that there can rarely be a self-appointed doctor; a competent doctor will be one who has been trained and certified by a pre-existing panel of competent doctors. Similarly, there can rarely be a self-appointed guru; that's why the first qualification of a genuine guru is that he or she has received knowledge through a succession of qualified teachers in a recognized school dating back to remote times. This chain of teachers is called the disciplic succession or *parampara*. In India, *parampara* affiliation has always been the standard for traditional spiritual movements. The *Bhagavad Gita* (4.2) tells us, "This supreme science of the soul was received through the chain of disciplic succession." To get a genuine teacher like this is God's rare and special blessing on us.

