



The Teacher-Student Relationship

by the Grand Master, Mir Hadian

In the Name of the Beloved, the Compassionate and the Merciful.

In the spiritual journey,
whoever travels without a guide,
needs two hundred years
for a two-day journey.

- Rumi

In Sufism, the teacher has no face and no name. A lot of people are persuaded by the validity of something when they see a large following attracted to one person, such as with the hysteria around pop stars. Given more fame and more publicity, more people follow them and feel justified in their actions to do so – since everybody else is doing the same. The spiritual path doesn't rely on publicity or hysteria. In the beginning, it's about gut feeling – what the heart feels – but thereafter you're much more likely to experience constant hesitation, continuously combating your progress.

I've mentioned several times that in Sufism, the teacher is a facilitator, someone who has experienced the path, who is aware of the pitfalls and the ups & downs. But he or she is also a human being.

Unfortunately, in the West, we have been conditioned to believe that the more intimate a relationship is, the more personal it becomes. That is true in terms of relationships between individuals, but spiritual relationships are not the same. The real intimacy is unification experienced on the level of soul; that's the most intimate it can be. Because spiritual relationships are deeper than personal relationships, personal intimacy can actually be a barrier to reaching that intimacy – the ego could use that personal intimacy to prevent the spiritual intimacy being achieved. It's something one has to be aware of. In the beginning, personal intimacy is important and it brings about union, but it does not give the full union.

I would like you to reflect upon the experiences that you have had so far with your teacher, to try to identify the part that your ego and conscious play in your relationship with the teacher. Sometimes the ego causes us to hesitate, question or look upon our teacher as not being totally competent; it is the ego's job to use the intelligence to put those questions in to the mind.

For a moment, try to recall any incident or occasion you have had in your thought, at any time in the months or years that you have been coming here. Acknowledge those – don't be upset or unhappy about them – just acknowledge them and recognise why they came to you and where they came from. Is it because our individual conditioning allows us to look at the behaviour of a teacher and then to compare between our perceived ideal of a teacher and what we actually see in front of us? Is that the way

the ego uses the intelligence to separate the spiritual union between you and your teacher, or is it just a matter of human logic? If it is so, is it justified, or could that be a hurdle between you and your teacher?

When you have had a few moments to reflect upon your own experience so far, your entry into the path and to recall an incident, I'll then take you through the perception from the teachers' point of view and perhaps by the end of this session, you'll have a better understanding of where your relationship should be. So take a few minutes to think and reflect, recall an occasion when you may have had that doubt or hesitation and review the event. If you can find the stem of it, fine, but if not, don't worry, I'll take you further into the other side of the relationship.

Following a pause for reflection ...

One important fact is that without a teacher one would be left stranded with the ego. In your time here you have, I hope, had the experiences to allow you to see the importance of having a teacher. But at the same time, don't be too hard on yourself; we are all human beings. When hesitation or questioning comes to you, it is not part of a sinful process; it is part of being human. As long as one acknowledges that, becomes aware of those doubts and deals with them sooner, then it's a positive step forward. That's much better than hiding them inside oneself, letting it quietly brew, only to someday let it emerge in an almighty explosion that halts your further spiritual ascension.

Now let's look at the teachers point of view. The first question would be what reward does a teacher have by taking students on-board? Essentially, it's like taking a child who wants to learn the alphabet, showing them patience, going through things over and over again individually, putting in all that effort to train the student, making them aware of some of the pitfalls and showing them the light at the end of the tunnel.

Obviously, if it is a Sufi teacher, they are not dependent and require no reward in providing this training. Their motivation can only be the love of the Beloved in their heart and their seeking union with the beloved for other human beings. That's the only reward and bonus that a teacher has.

A teacher feels responsible for the student and though a student may not realise it, the teacher accompanies them through their pain, because he's been through it before. He accompanies them and he feels that pain again and again. It's very emotional. The teacher may not show that emotion at the time, indeed, because of his experience, he may seem cool or unaffected. In some cases – depending upon their stage on the path – a student may feel that the teacher is abandoning or ignoring them, but one has to remember to recognise that sensitivity and the inherent spiritual experience. One has to get to that level.

Students who are progressing well become aware and realise in their heart the importance of having a teacher. They can then relate to that teacher more intimately without talking about daily affairs. They find that talking is not important any more, because they can communicate with their teacher on a higher level.

For the teacher, the beginning and the end are the same; it is a closed circle. Of course, for the student it is very different because the student must complete the whole circle. Over time, as the student progresses, they feel the teacher nearer and nearer. But the teacher is not nearer and his love for the student has not increased – rather, he was always near but the student didn't know it.

I recall from my own experience, when I joined my Master, I was initially eager to talk about what was happening in my life, and I did so, because it was a beginners step. And he, with patience, entertained that. I talked about dreams and anything in life that appeared unexplained and he was happy to deal with that.

But there came a time when I found that talking about these personal matters, as I used to, wasn't important any more. Through experience, I came to realise that talking about these things was halting me and wasting the precious time that I had with him. When talking about personal matters, such as work, it become increasingly apparent that he already knew about these things, even without me talking to him – and it wasn't required for me to talk about them.

The relationship became more and more in-tune; just sitting next to him and feeling his presence near me, that was enough comfort – more than enough – without talking to him at all. And sometimes, sitting in silence with him was more joyful than a session talking with him. But that comes; hopefully it will happen to all of you at some stage. You may find that both talking and silence give you the same pleasure, and that will gradually grow with your progress on the path.

You must remember that your teacher is a mirror, reflecting your own inner-side. If your inner-side becomes clear, then you get a clear reflection, therefore, the hesitation one may have is a reflection upon one's inner-side; it's not because the teacher is not experienced or does not fit to the image that we initially require him or her to fit. But this understanding comes through experience and you've already gone some way to experience both aspects.

As explained already, spiritual intimacy is the most intimate relationship but it is not like a conventional relationship. With our partner, we like to talk about all kinds of issues and we like our partner to know our thoughts and feelings. But in developing spiritual intimacy, you reach a stage where you don't require that, because you know in your heart that everything is known to the teacher.

The relationship with the teacher is practice for having a relationship with the Beloved; that's why you require a teacher. The Beloved is very vague, very abstract. It's easy to say, "I have submitted to the Beloved", but one has to practice that submission. If you don't have a teacher with whom to practice that submission, how else would you know that you could submit?

Perhaps an analogy is that of a baby who must play with its parents to understand the use of its muscles, learning co-ordination and its capabilities. It's the same with the student and teacher; you practice the servitude, the submission and the sincerity with your teacher as a practice for you to know you are submitting to the Beloved. Otherwise, in human terms, it's very difficult to move toward something so vague,

abstract and difficult to comprehend.

It's very easy for the ego to say to you, "Yes, you have submitted totally; yes, you are spiritually ascended; and, yes, you serve Him totally by your heart." But in reality it may be a disguise of the ego to assure you of what you're doing – or not doing – if you're not showing that submission and service through practice with your teacher or with your group.

Like many other teachers, I'm not expecting service from individuals because that's not what a teachers' role is actually about. If a teacher asks for service, it is for the benefit of the student rather than a help to the teacher. A good teacher doesn't need the service of anybody – they are independent. But if the teacher asks you to do a service, that is based on his wisdom and designed to get you through an experience that you are required to have.

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