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Let's Talk About Spirit

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Just as we were going to press this month, we learned of the transition of our good friend, Acharya Sushil Kumar. One of the world's most dynamic Jains, Muniji was a mystic, peacemaker and honored elder of the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders for Human Survival. We know that within the inner world he is still with us, more active than ever before, for he is spirit, and spirit lives on. Yes, the loss of a spiritual leader in a community is a great deficit, greater than the loss of all the money in all the banks, greater than failure in crops, greater than being besieged by enemies. Nothing can compare.

Each community has choices as to whom to look to for spiritual guidance. Our scriptures tell us that it must be someone, for no village is complete without a guru within it, one who can see the path ahead. And it should be a living preceptor. If the guru left a successor, then it is dharma to follow him. If there was no one so designated, then one is free to choose a new spiritual guide. Often a mentor from another community is coaxed to come, reside in the village and made happy so he will stay and give spiritual upliftment. The village without the guru looks toward its political leaders for solutions and upliftment. More than often, solutions are not soul-satisfying, and upliftment is not forthcoming.

In Hinduism spiritual leaders are not certified or licensed. They are chosen by the people, first from among those who have done great tapas, second from those who have done great service, and third from those who have manifested illumined clarity and who can convey, by example, their wisdom to all whom they contact.

It is a rare village that has attracted one of these great souls. Satguru Sage Yogaswami-lauded in this issue of Hinduism Today in honor of the Saivite Conference to be held in Toronto and Montreal, Canada-was just such a person. He and his guru and his guru's guru have kept Saivism alive in Sri Lanka for more than 140 years in the face of callous conversion efforts and political changes. You can read the remarkable story of his tradition in this month's color poster. He is still working tirelessly, 24 hours a day, as are all the great souls who have departed Earth consciousness. They are spirit, and spirit lives on.

In choosing a religious leader, the Hindu community first looks at the followers surrounding him or her. Are they spiritually shining? Are they mentally bright and energetic? Are they concerned for others more than for themselves? What is their life like? Are they dull, unhappy, mentally lazy or self-absorbed, lacking tenderness toward others? Is their daily routine undisciplined, driven by desire with few emotional controls? We can also look at what any group surrounding a guru has produced. Has it benefited us as a community, deepened our striving? Has it preserved tradition, strengthened commitment? These are questions that must be asked.

No real religion is ever truly organized. It is on the move so fast it hardly has time to become consistent. Nor is a true religion a business to be commercialized. Religion is spirit, and spirit lives on. Spirit is superconsciousness, intuition, revelation and inner sight. It survives unbounded. True religion is magic. It is firm belief founded on direct experience of the Divine, and it is an encounter with the unbelievable, too. It is dynamic action, and it is quiescent inaction. It is total freedom, yet it fosters discipline. It is un-understandable, yet it can, somewhat, in some way, be entirely understood. It is freedom from ignorance, freedom from the sluggish logic of science, from the false autonomy of existentialism and the illusory security of politics. True religion is above all these. What magic, what mystery! Only the Gods can understand. This is spiritual life-the life of happiness and obedience, self-sufficiency and bliss.

The loss of religious leaders like Satguru Sri Sri Shivabalayogi and our beloved Acharya Sushil Kumar is now being felt by their followers. These great ones have departed in the joy of release. But, alas, their followers suffer, though they have been taught otherwise. They try to call their gurus back, bind them to the earth. This is human nature. It is always difficult to let go. Yet, they must let the venerable ones go and follow the successor. If they have none, then carefully choose from the same or a similar lineage another living preceptor and give their double devotion to them.

Everyone needs a spiritual guide, a mentor, in their life, be it a swami, a jyotisha shastri, a traveling sadhu, a seated yogi or a rare satguru. But the choice must be made after much consideration, after talking with parents, consulting elders and searching the heart. Once the choice is made, don't change your mind, be loyal and give him or her all the love and devotion you have to give and more. Take advice and admonition as golden offerings and proceed in confidence. Many benefits will come from their guidance on the path of dharma for a fruitful and fulfilling life.

A heavy burden falls upon the preceptor, too. He or she must produce results and continue to do so. They are not entertainers, content to be lauded, bowed down to in adulation. Rather, they must benefit their followers' lives, lessen their karmic burdens and strengthen the family, hold marriages together, as well as seek out potential religious leaders and train them well. They must follow the karmas of each individual and each family year after year and they must be there for devotees when needed most. They must demonstrate their shanti and bask in the bliss of attainment. Well! We have talked about spirit, and spirit lives on. Aum.