

Chapter 20

The Need for a Human Guide

Though we are on our own with our own direct experience of the Awesome Mystery and our own participation in the Awe of Holy Spirit, we also need Spirit guidance from other human beings. Sometimes a whole community of people guide us by their presence, words, and examples. Sometimes we need to study with, consult with, work with one or two talented Spirit teachers who provide the guidance we need during a particular period of time.

When I reflect back over my own life, I can see that I have been very fortunate to have great guides of many types in each period of my life. I recall an eighth grade english teacher, a student pastor in college, three seminary professors, a mentor I lived with for decades, a whole group of people in a family order, several therapists, several Buddhist mediation teachers, some Diamond Approach teachers and therapists, some Radical Honesty therapists, two Hindu satsang leaders, my wife, my own weekly meeting Christian group, numerous working colleagues, and more.

Why are these human guides needed? Each culture of humanity and each human person is entangled in patterns of habitual living about which we are largely unconscious. If another human being is more conscious than we of the patterns that limit us, that person can be our guide. This is especially true of those core patterns in our lives. We are often almost completely unconscious of our most serious patterns of escape from Spirit living. Even if we are somewhat conscious of them, we are often so consumed by them that we forget them and thus fall into states of unconsciously living in these chronic patterns.

The job of the Spirit guide is to assist us to notice or remember what we already know; namely, that very specific patterns restrain us, very specific excuses are used by us to avoid our experiences of Spirit. The Spirit guide may also lead us on "trips" that enable to experience over a period of time specific aspects of Spirit and are modes of avoiding that Spirit. We take such direction because we trust these persons to lead us toward real experiences of our own Spirit Essence.

We often tolerate tough Spirit guides because we know that our escape routes are toughly defended and that our aversion is strong toward the most important next steps on our Spirit journey. I think of the Zen teacher who strikes slouching meditators with a bamboo stick. Amos, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Jesus were all tough teachers. It is compassion to be tough when strong patterns persist. Most of us can remember with gratitude many sharp words or actions that have rocked us to attention.

We also tend to choose as our Spirit guides, persons who are onto us, persons who see beyond what we see, persons who are skilled in visioning for us the next steps on our road ahead. Many of us have spent considerable money and traveled many miles to sit with workshop leaders and retreat masters who we anticipated were capable of seeing further than we into our own lives.

Sometimes we find that whole communities of people are serving as our Spirit guides. When we are in group meetings with alive Spirit people, we do not know which person will be our guide on each occasion. We may not even know at the time that guidance happened to us. Perhaps later, we notice that we are operating differently, that Spirit is flowing, and that our chronic patterns are sitting in the corners of our being with dunce caps upon their heads.

When we rerun our Spirit journey in slow motion and look at it carefully, we can see what our Spirit guides do for us. We can become more clear about the process and thus appropriate our next steps more easily. Here, in slow motion, is a view of what a Spirit guide does for us:

(1) The Spirit guide assists us to be aware of some specific pattern of un-Spirit. In the end we may be grateful for this, but in the first instance it can be extremely embarrassing to see what a dunce at Spirit living we have been. We may be defensive; that is, our habitual patterns with which we identify defend themselves from exposure as the patterns of destruction that they are. An expert Spirit guide assists us to see these defenses and to see them for what they are – silly attempts to hang on to delusions we have felt comfortable harboring. A guide does not have to be harsh with us to be effective, but sometimes our stubbornness needs a certain amount of firmness, even harshness, to break its hold. Usually, a skillful Spirit guide, in addition to challenging us, also maintains contact with us and exudes good will toward us. A skillful guide may communicate a patient understanding, reassuring us that breaking old habits of living may require time and persistence. Yet our slowness to change may also prompt a guide to reject being our guide any longer. This may be the action needed to communicate to us the extent of our obstinacy. The guide is free to use any methods that seem appropriate. When we choose our guides, we should look for guides who have the wild freedom to be as outrageous as they need to be. At the same time, those who are guided need to be willing to investigate for themselves the truth and the error in the guide's guidance.

(2) In addition to assisting us to see our patterns of un-Spirit, the Spirit guide assists us to see the welcome home that Spirit-rich Reality has for us. The guide may do this by simply being happily present in her own Spirit-rich living. Or it may take spoken words for us to hear the promise and glory of returning to our Spirit Essence. We may need a big push to overcome our fears of doing so. We may need direction for accessing our courage to hang in there with some purgatory process that brings us from spirit death to Spirit life. The Spirit guide may need to articulate over and over again the truth of our welcome home to our true nature, to our Spirit selves. Perhaps this is done with the guide's own celebration of our progress. But the guide may not know what our actual progress has been. We need to share our perceptions of Spirit progress with our guide and listen to our guide's responses. And then we need to decide for ourselves what is guidance and what is not, what is progress in being ourselves and what is more illusion that we need to move beyond. The guide can help us see when we are not home, when we are home, what home is like, what next steps toward home might be appropriate for us. The guide can guide because the guide has experienced home and the process of arriving home in his own life. But the guide may not know how to apply that wisdom to each person. And the guide can never take the place of the solitary autonomy of each Spirit journeyer.

(3) Finally, the Spirit guide assists us to see that it is we alone (you alone, me alone) who must decide to be on this Spirit journey. We alone have to accept our welcome home. We alone have to be home. We alone have to choose to stay at home. The guide cannot make these choices for us. The guide might yell at us for not making them. The guide might beckon us to step out. But however forceful or gentle the guide may be, the good guide removes herself from being in the way of each of us making the choices that we and we alone must make.

We each need to find our own midpoint in this paradoxical situation. We need human guides, but they cannot take our journey for us. We need to be on our own,

and yet we do not know where we are or where to head next without our human guides. We may not even notice the number of human guides we have. We may have thousands of voices in our inner council of human relations that are in some measure Spirit guides to us. But we have to choose which of these voices to listen to now. We need to seat these voices near and far in relation to our present journey of living. We need to discern help and no help, truth and untruth, in each of our inner voices. We are on our own, and yet we have centuries of human adventurers who stand ready to counsel us. And most important of all, there are still living in the world today many Spirit persons who may be willing to be present with us and be our guide in a personal fashion.