



S.K.S. SWAMINARAYAN TEMPLE (LONDON) – BAL YUVAK MANDAL

Westfield Lane, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 9EA Est. 1966 Charity Reg. No. 271034

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LORD DATTATREY'S 24 GURUS

Once King Yadu saw Lord Dattatreya (*Avadhoot*) in a forest and addressed him "Sir, you are indeed quite capable, energetic and wise. Such as you are, why do you live in the forest, free from all desires? Even though you have neither kith and kin nor even a family, how could you be so blissful and self-contented?"

The Avadhoot replied, "My bliss and contentment are the fruits of self-realization. I have gained the necessary wisdom from the whole creation, through 24 Gurus. I shall elaborate the same for you".

Shri Dattatreya had twenty-four teachers from nature "many are my preceptors," he told King Yadu, "selected by my keen sense, from whom acquiring wisdom freely, I wander in the world.... The earth, air/breeze, sky, fire, the sun, pigeon, python, sea, moth, elephant, ant, fish, Pingala the courtesan, arrow-maker, infant/playful boy, the moon, honeybee, deer, bird of prey, maiden, serpent, spider, caterpillar and water are my twenty four preceptors.

1. Earth: All creatures, in accordance with their previous store of *karma* (action) assume different physical forms and live on earth. People plough, dig and tread the earth. They light fires on it. Still, the earth does not swerve from its course even by a hair's breadth. On the other hand, it feeds and houses all creatures. Seeing this, I learned that the wise one should never swerve from his vow of patience, love and righteousness under any circumstances and one should dedicate his life for the welfare of living beings. The earth along with its mountains and rivers is my first guru.

2. Air: I observed that air is pure and odourless in itself. And it blows on both sweet and foul-smelling things without any discrimination or preference. Though it momentarily seems to take on the smell of its surroundings, in a short while, it reveals its pristine quality. From this I learned that a spiritual aspirant should live in the world, unaffected by the dualities of life like joy and sorrow and by the objects of the senses. He should keep his heart's feeling and his speech unpolluted by vain objects. As I have learned all this by observing it, air is my second guru.

3. Sky: The soul is also like the sky, which is omnipresent. I have noticed that sometimes the sky (or space) gets thickly overcast, or filled with dust or smoke. At sunrise and during night, it apparently takes on different colours. But in fact, it ever retains its colourless self, and it is never touched or stained by any thing. From this I learned that a true sage should remain ever pure like the sky or space, untouched or unaffected by anything in the phenomenal universe in time, including his own physical processes. His inner being is totally free from emotional reaction to things and events even like the space. Thus I accepted the sky or space as my third guru.

4. Fire: My fourth teacher is element of fire. Sometimes, it manifests itself as blazing flames; sometimes as smouldering embers, covered by ash. But it is always present in all objects as latent heat. The god of fire accepts the offering of everyone, irrespective of his moral worth and burns down his sins; and it still remains the ever-pure divinity as the fire-god; he is untainted by the sins of such devotees. So, a sage of perfect realisation should accept food of everyone, burn down his sins and bless the giver. Though fire has no specific form of its own, when it is associated with fuel that burns, it assumes such apparent forms. So too, the true Self, though formless in itself, appears in the forms of deities, human beings, animals and trees when it is associated with the respective physical structures. The source of all forms in the universe remains ever mysterious. All the things are manifest only in between their origin and their end. Their source and end is the true Self, which is eternal, unchanging, unmanifest and omnipresent. The nature of the element of fire is such. The manifest fire transforms the various things it consumes into the same ash. So too, the wisdom of self-realization rejects the manifest forms and properties of things as illusion and realises their one original essence as itself. Thus the element of fire is my fourth guru.

5. Sun: My fifth guru is sun. Though the sun we see in our daily life is one, it appears as many when reflected by water in different vessels. Similarly, the one real Self manifests itself as many selves of living creatures when reflected by their physical structures. As Sun illuminates the many forms in nature to our visions, the sage too illuminates the true nature of all things to his devotees.



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6. Pigeon: I have gained wisdom from a pigeon too. Once a pair of pigeons lived together on a tree. They bred their young and were bringing them up with deep affection and love. One day, a hunter caught the young fledglings in a snare. The ladybird, which returned from the forest with food for its young ones, saw their plight and, unable to leave them, she leapt in the snare to share their fate. Shortly after, the male pigeon turned up and, unable to bear the separation from its sweetheart, it too jumped in the snare and met its end. Reflecting on this, I realized how, even after being born as an intelligent human being, man is caught in the coils of possessiveness and brings about his own spiritual destruction. The self, which is originally free, when associated with the body sense, gets identified with it, and thus gets caught in the endless cycle of birth, death and misery. Thus the pigeon was my sixth guru.

7. Python: The python is a sluggard, unwilling to move out briskly for its prey. It lies in its lurch and devours whatever creature it comes across, be it sufficient to appease its hunger. From this I learnt that the man in search of wisdom should refrain from running after pleasures, and accept whatever he gets spontaneously with contentment. Like the python, he should shake off sleep and wakefulness and abide in a state of incessant mediation on the Self. Thus the python was my seventh teacher of wisdom.

8. Sea: Contemplating the marvellous nature of the ocean, I have gained much wisdom. Any number of overflowing rivers may join it, yet the sea maintains its level. Nor does its level fall even by a hair's breadth in summer, when all the rivers dry up. So, the joys of life do not elate the sage of wisdom, nor do its sorrows depress him. Just as the sea never crosses its threshold on the beach, the wise one never transgresses the highest standards of morality under the pull of passions. Like the sea, he is unconquerable and cannot be troubled by anything. Like the unfathomable ocean, his true nature and the depths of his wisdom cannot be easily comprehended by anyone. The ocean, which has taught me thus, is my eighth guru.

9. Moth: I often observed that the moth (or, more precisely, a grasshopper) is tempted by fire to jump in it and get burnt down. So, the unthinking man is enticed by the illusory pleasures of the senses and thus gets caught in the ceaseless cycles of birth and death. On the other hand, the wise one, when he catches even a glimpse of the fire of wisdom, leaves everything aside, leaps in it and burns down the illusion of being a limited self. Thus the moth was my ninth guru.

10. Elephant: The elephant was my tenth guru. The human beings raise a stuffed cow-elephant in the forest. The wild tusker mistakes it for a mate, approaches it and then skilfully bound in fetters by the cunning human beings. So too, the unregenerate man is tempted by the opposite sex and gets bound by the fetters of infatuation. The seekers after liberation should learn to be free from lust. The elephant was thus one of my teachers.

11. Ant: The ant stores up lots of food materials which it neither eats nor gives away in charity to any other creature. In consequence, other more powerful creatures are tempted to plunder the ants. So too, the man who lays by treasures of merely material things becomes a victim of robbery and murder. But the ant has something positive to teach us. It is a tireless worker and is never discouraged by any number of obstacles and setbacks in its efforts to gather its treasure. So, a seeker after wisdom should be tireless in his efforts for Self-Realization. This noble truth has the little ant taught me and became my eleventh guru.

12. Fish: The fish greedily swallows bait and is at once caught by the angle-hook. From this, I realized how man meets his destruction by his craving for delicious food. When the palate is conquered, all else is conquered. Besides, there is a positive feature in the fish. It never leaves its home, i.e. water. So too, man should never lose sight of his true self, but should ever have his being in it. Thus the fish became my twelfth guru.