

Orthodoxy and the Master

Texts presented by Whitall N. Perry

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THE citations given below form an element of a mosaic from a comprehensive anthology in preparation that deals with Traditional Wisdom. They constitute a section called *The Spiritual Master* in the chapter entitled ORTHODOXY — RITUAL — METHOD.

In briefest outline, traditional regularity or orthodoxy implies attachment to an authentic living tradition with a legitimate line of representatives ("apostolic succession"). Adherence to the laws of the tradition—loosely "exoterism"—is incumbent on every mortal seeking salvation. Within a tradition (and actually constituting its essence) is normally found an "esoteric" way reserved for a relative few who have the necessary intellectual or spiritual qualifications, and which envisages sanctification more especially as its goal. The word "normally" is used advisedly, because the twentieth century has seen such an upheaval in traditional patterns that anomalies and exceptions have inevitably resulted. For the rest, it is indispensable to study carefully the works of the contemporary authorities on these questions in order to evaluate things in a proper perspective. The principle to remember in all this is that the Universal Order is not subject to change. Whatever the modifications and upheavals in sublunar existence, the dichotomy between this world and the next remains constant and quasi-absolute, and so accordingly will the basic laws of the spiritual life for bridging this gulf remain necessary and valid. We live in the *formal* realm, where performance necessarily precedes *transformation*.

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If thou see a man of understanding, go to him early in the morning, and let thy foot wear the steps of his doors.

Ecclesiasticus, VI. 36

The teacher is he who knows the Eternal Wisdom, the Veda, who is devoted to the All-Pervader Vishnu, who knows not arrogance, who knows the method of yoga, ever stands upon yoga and has become yoga itself; who is pure, who is devoted to his teachers and who has witnessed the Supreme Person, Purusha. He who possesses all these virtues is called a "dispeller of darkness," a guru.

The syllable "gu" means darkness, the syllable "ru" means dispeller; he is therefore called a "guru" because he dispels darkness.

The guru is the Supreme Cause, the guru is the ultimate destiny, the guru is transcendent sapience, the guru is the supreme resort, the guru is the final limit, the guru is the supreme wealth. Because he teaches "That" (the Supreme Essence) the guru is most

great.

Advaya tāraka Upanishad, 14-18

Beloved Vedas and Tantras handed down to us by tradition, as also Mantras and usages, become fruitful if communicated to us by the Guru, and not otherwise.

Kulārnavā Tantra, XI

It is said even God cannot grant Moksha (Deliverance), but only the Guru.

Swami Ramdas

If you do not meet a transcendental teacher, you will have swallowed the Mahāyana medicine in vain !

Chih Kung

He who works at the prayer (of Jesus) from hearsay or reading and has no instructor, works in vain.

St. Gregory of Sinai

Can the water of the (polluted) stream clear out the dung? Can man's knowledge sweep away the ignorance of his sensual self?

How shall the sword fashion its own hilt? Go, entrust this wound to a surgeon.

Flies gather on every wound, so that no one sees the foulness of his wound.

Those flies are your thoughts and your possessions: your wound is the darkness of your states;

And if the Pir (spiritual master) lays a plaster on your wound, at once the pain and lamentation are stilled,

So that you fancy it is healed, (whereas in reality) the ray of the plaster has shone upon the spot.

Beware! Do not turn your head away from the plaster, O you who are wounded in the back, but recognize that that (healing of the wound (proceeds from the ray: do not regard it as (proceeding) from your own constitution.

Rûmi

Only that knowledge which issues from the lips of the guru is alive; other forms are barren, powerless, and the cause of suffering.

Shiva Samhitā, III.1 1

Our Art is good and precious, nor can any one become a partaker of it, unless it be revealed to him by God, or unless he be taught by a skilled Master. It is a treasure such as the whole world cannot buy.

THE GLORY OF THE WORLD

A man who reads about the doctrines of the Jôdô without receiving oral instruction will miss the thing really necessary to the attainment of Ojô.¹

Hônen

The mistaken impression of the reality of the world is never to be effaced without the knowledge of its unreality derived from the *Shastras*² and the living lips of a Teacher.

Yoga-Vasishtha

Since there is no connection between the (mere) sound and the true meaning, ...a wise man must resort to a good master, for without him the truth cannot be found even in millions of ages...So good men who desire their own perfection always pay with their whole being full honour to their master, who is the bestower of infinite rewards. They abandon envy and malignancy, and pride and self-conceit, their determination set on enlightenment and the concept of weariness renounced, and thus they always honour their guru, master of the world, who bestows success in all things...Thereby they gain by the grace of their guru and without any obstruction that truth supreme which is taught by all the Buddhas. It is eternal, resplendent and pure, the abode of the conquerors, the divine substance in all things and the source of all things. Just as a sun-stone shines brightly from the proximity of the sun-light which dispels the enclosing darkness, even so does the jewel of a pupil's mind, freed from the murkiness of impurity, light up from the proximity of a world-teacher who is bright with the fire of the practice of truth.

Anangavajra

Stand in their multitude of ancients that are wise, and join thyself from thy heart to their wisdom, that thou mayst hear every discourse of God, and the sayings of praise may not escape thee.

Ecclesiasticus, VI.35

And with how many a prophet have there been a number of devoted men who fought (beside him). They quailed not for aught that befell them in the way of Allah, nor did they weaken, nor were they brought low. Allah loveth the steadfast.

Qur'ān, III.146³

You should keep to one place, one master, one method, and one system of yoga. This is the way which leads to positive success.

Swami Sivananda

God and the *Guru* are not really different: they are identical. He that has earned the Grace of the *Guru* shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaws will never be allowed to escape. But the disciple, for his part, should unswervingly follow the path shown by the Master.

Sri Ramana Maharshi

If thou desire (spiritual) poverty, that depends on companionship (with a Shaykh): neither thy tongue nor thy hand avails.

Soul receives from soul the knowledge thereof, not by way of book nor from tongue. (Even) if those mysteries (of spiritual poverty) are in the traveller's heart, knowledge of the mystery is not possessed by the traveller.

Rûmi

Even if your intelligence is above that of Yen-tzû and Min-tzû (two of the most clever pupils of Confucius), yet, merely with constrained conjecture, you will not be able to succeed unless you have a true teacher. For the work of *chin tan* (gold medicine) in case oral instructions are lacking, where and how can you fertilize the fecund womb?

Chang Po-tuan

If you wish not your head to be lost, be (lowly as) a foot: be under the protection of the Qutb (spiritual Pole) who is possessed of discernment.

Though you be a king, deem not yourself above him: though you be honey, gather naught but his sugar-cane ...

As you have no strength, keep making a lamentation; since you are blind, take care, do not turn your head away from him that sees the road.

Rûmi

To attain tranquillity of spirit and avoid inconstancy, one must have initiation and the aid of a guide. The spiritual path is the most dreadful there is; it is strewn with innumerable pitfalls. Unless he is guided by an experienced hand, a man no matter how intelligent is sure to make some false moves...

In this world, even to learn the art of stealing one needs *a guru*. How much greater is the necessity of a *guru* if one is to acquire the supreme knowledge of Brahman!

Swami Brahmananda

It is very important for a person who wishes to "lament" to receive aid and advice from a *wichasha wakan* (holy man), so that everything is done correctly, for if things are not done in the right way, something very bad can happen, and even a serpent could come and wrap itself around the "lamerter."⁴

Black Elk

(The) Guru simply helps you in the eradication of ignorance. Does he hand over Realisation to you?...The ego is a very powerful elephant and cannot be brought under control by anyone less than a lion, who is no other than the Guru in this instance; whose very look makes the elephant tremble and die.

Sri Ramana Maharshi

It is necessary to seek a teacher who is not himself in error, to follow his instructions, and so learn to distinguish, in the matter of attention, defects and excesses of right and of left, encountered through diabolical suggestion...If there is no such teacher in view, one must search for one, sparing no efforts.

Nicephorus the Solitary

It is impossible for us to study all the Sāstras and learn all that is laid down in them...Further, as the defects inherent in us are numberless, it is impossible for us to find out all of them or to seek to get rid of them by ourselves. A Guru is therefore necessary to know about our spiritual equipments, to find out the stage in which we are

at present, to decide what course of action will take us to the next higher stage and to teach and guide us aright...When the Sāstras prescribe what courses of action have to be pursued by aspirants in the several stages, a Guru is necessary to know what the Sāstras prescribe and to teach us the particular course of action suited to our qualifications.

Sri Chandrasekhara Bhāratī Swāmīgal

There is no other way for overhauling the vicious worldly Samskaras (tendencies left from former actions) and the passionate nature of raw, worldly-minded persons than the personal contact with and service of the Guru.

Swami Sivananda

The fleshly soul is a dragon with hundredfold strength and cunning: the face of the Shaykh is the emerald that plucks out its eye.

Rûmi

Would you know the perfect Master? It is he who understands the regulation of the fire, and its degrees. Nothing will prove to you so formidable an impediment as ignorance of the regimen of heat and fire; for our whole Art may be looked upon as being concentrated in this one thing, seeing it is all important for the proper development of our substance that the degree of heat which is brought to bear on it should be neither too great nor too small. In regard to this point many learned men have gone grievously astray.⁵

Thomas Norton

I bow down to my most adorable Teacher who is all-knowing and has, by imparting Knowledge to me, saved me from the great ocean of births and deaths filled with Ignorance.

Srī Sankarāchārya

Never should (a student) think ill of him (the teacher). For the teacher gives him a (new) birth in knowledge. And that is the highest birth. Mother and father engender his body only.

Apastamba Dharma Sutra, I.i.15-18

The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru is Siva; the Guru is the supreme Godhead itself in the visible form; Obeisance to that Guru.

Invocation preceding Hindu prayer recitals

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

Ecclesiastes, XII.11

The learner ought to share in his teacher's thought; he should be quicker in his listening than the teacher is in his speaking.

Hermes

The supreme mystery in the Veda's End (Vedanta), Which has been
declared in former time,
Should not be given to one not tranquil,
Nor again to one who is not a son or a pupil.
To one who has the highest devotion (*bhakti*) for God, And for his spiritual
teacher (*guru*) even as for God, To him these matters which have been
declared Become manifest (if he be) a great soul (*mahātman*)—Yea,
become manifest (if he be) a great soul!

Svetasvatara Upanishad, VI, 22.3

To live and act in such a manner that the Guru is highly pleased with the disciple is a
sure condition for the working of grace...A true aspirant seeks always to please his Guru
by moulding his life in accordance with his teachings.

Swami Ramdas

Who can finde such a *Master* out,
As was my *Master*, him needeth not to doubt:
Which right nobil was and fully worthy laude,
He loved Justice, and he abhorred fraude;
He was full secrete when other men were lowde,
Loath to be knowne that hereof ought he Could;
When men disputed of Colours of the Rose,
He would not speake but keepe himselfe full close;
To whome I laboured long and many a day,
But he was solleyn to prove with straight assaye,
To search and know of my Disposition,
With manifold proofes to know my Condition:
And when he found unfeigned fidelity,
In my greate hope which yet nothing did see,
At last I conquered by grace divine
His love, which did to me incline.⁶

Thomas Norton

He who fills duly both ears with the Veda is to be considered (like one's) father and
mother; him one should never injure.

Mānava-dharma-sāstra, II.144

Now the Brahman who obeys his Guru till the end of his body goes straight to the
eternal abode of Brahma.

Mānava-dharma-sāstra, II.244

O Lord (Krishna), thou art self-effulgent, the embodiment of Truth. Thou art the
Atman, the innermost Self in all beings. Thou art the teacher of teachers.

Srimad Bhagavatam, XI.ii

He (the *brahmacārin*) should look upon his Guru as God. Verily is the Guru the

embodiment of divinity. Accordingly the student must serve him and please him in every way.

Srimad Bhagavatam, XI.x

Despite the identity of the master with the Self, the scriptures categorically declare that however learned or endowed with superhuman powers, one cannot realise the Self without the master's grace. What is the secret of this?

Though in reality the master is the very Self of all, the soul having by ignorance become differentiated and individualised, cannot find out its original Pure state of Being, without the master's grace. Hence the scriptural statement.

Sri Ramana Maharshi

For there is One alone Who hath no need of doctrine (or learning) that is to say, God, Who is over everything, for He existeth of Himself, and there is no other being who existed before Him. Now all rational beings are learners, because they are beings who have been made and created. The ranks of the celestial hosts who existed first of all, and the orders of beings who are the most exalted of all possess teachers in the Trinity, Who is exalted above everything. The orders of beings of the second group learn from the beings of the first group, and those which belong to the third group learn from those of the second group, which is above them, and in this manner each of the later groups learneth from that which is above it, even down to the lowest group of all; for those among them who are superior in respect of knowledge and excellence teach knowledge unto those who are inferior to them. Therefore those who imagine that they have no need of teachers,⁷ and who will not be convinced by those who teach them things of good, are sick with the want of the knowledge which is the mother and the producer of pride. Now those who are princes and the foremost ones among these in respect of destruction are those who intentionally (or wilfully) fell from sojourning in heaven, and from the service thereof, and these are the devils who fly in the air because they forsook the heavenly Teacher and rebelled.

Palladius

The guide of those who have no spiritual guide is Satan.

Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī

Wherever thou seest one (that is) naked and destitute, know that he hath fled from the (spiritual) master.

Rûmi

Do not delay lest you become worthless. Find a teacher as soon as possible, in order that you may acquire the principle of *hsüan* (mystery). If you do not learn the truth in your present life, how will you know in what womb you are going to be born in the next life? When you have decided to take up the subject, you must stick to it through to the end. The greatest of human events are life and death.

Chang Po-tuan

If a person has a sincere fervour for the Lord and is eager to follow a spiritual path, he is sure to meet a true *guru* through the grace of the Lord. Consequently, the spiritual aspirant should not be troubled about the coming of a *guru*.

Swāmi Brahmānanda

If you go on working with the light available, you will meet your Master, as he himself will be seeking you.

Sri Ramana Maharshi

Is it right to receive investiture from the hands of more than one? Yes, it is right, provided that the second investiture is not accompanied with the intention of annulling the first.

Muhammad ibnu'l-Munawwar

Disciple—Mahārāj, the Scriptures speak of service to the *guru* as a necessary means for spiritual realization. Up to what point is this true?

The Swāmi—It is necessary in the preliminary stages. But after that it is your own spirit which plays the role of *guru*.

Swāmi Brahmānanda

The grace of a Saint who is accepted as a Guru is essential to the progress of a spiritual aspirant.

Swami Ramdas

Love for the dervishes is the key which opens the door into Paradise and those who hate them are worthy of anathema.

'Attar

The disease of worldliness has become chronic in man. It is mitigated, to a great extent, in holy company.

Sri Ramakrishna

The knowledge which has been learned from a teacher best helps one to attain his end.

Chāndogya Upanishad, IV.ix.2

An Index of Sources including biographical references is appended to the anthology in preparation, but their inclusion seemed disproportionate to the brevity of this one section of a chapter as given here. Editor.

¹ Enlightenment.

² The Hindu scriptures.

³ This passage in the anthology itself contains three marginal cross references to the chapters on *Holy War*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Faith*, which help elucidate for the interested reader the inner and spiritual significance of "prophet." Among other things in *Qur'anic* symbolism, a "prophet" is none other than the Master himself—of whom Muhammad is the prototype—who leads his devotees on the Spiritual Journey and helps them combat the Inward Dragon of the fallen soul barring access to their True Self; steadfastness is the mark of

fidelity to the Pact they have undertaken with the Master.

⁴"Lamenting" or "crying for a vision": spiritual retreat in an isolated spot, such as a mountain top.

⁵In the anthology under preparation there are numerous marginal cross references to other passages in the same book to help make meanings more clear. As that cannot be done within the scope of this article, it can only be said here that the Alchemical perspective is an objectification of the spiritual work in terms of the "chemistry" of the soul's constitution and processes, and the modifications, sublimations, and transformations it undergoes when submitted to "Mercurial" or spiritual influences. The "fixation" in Gold represents the terminal goal of the Art, when the soul is stabilized in the image of its uncreate Archetype.

⁶ Shinran always spoke of himself as Hōnen's disciple, and he had such an absolute confidence in Hōnen as his Master, that he once said, that if being deceived by Hōnen meant his own dropping into hell, he would never regret it" (Coates and Ishizuka : *Honen the Buddhist Saint*, Historical Introduction, p. 49).

⁷ There are people ready to invent anything as an excuse for a teacher, even including an imagined contact with some dead person supposed to be in paradise, or the idea of an infallible voice that guides from within. But the doctrine is unequivocal: there is no spiritual master outside of the orthodox channels, and no amount of self-interested rationalizing can bring one into being.