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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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O Lord

O Lord, you have searched me,
and known me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

My travels and my rest you mark;
you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O Lord.

You hem me in – behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, “Surely darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

Psalm 139, Life Application Study Bible



Waiting

The following is a true story about a Japanese dog named Hachiko. Hachiko lived in Tokyo in the 1930's. He was owned by a Professor Ueno, who caught the train every morning to go to the University. Every afternoon, Hachiko would be on the Shibuyu train platform waiting for his master to return. And this went on for many years. Only, one day, the professor suffered a stroke at the University and died instantly. He didn't return on the train. The professor's house was sold, and Hachiko was taken to a new home to live with a new family. But every afternoon Hachiko would find his way to the old railway platform, and there he waited for his master – every day, every afternoon, for ten years. At first, young boys would laugh and taunt the dog, but Hachiko remained steadfast. Later, people would bring him food. But he never abandoned his post. When his master would not appear, he would walk off alone. But the next day, he was patiently waiting again. They say that passers-by would burst into tears seeing his devotion, his faithfulness and his loyalty. One day he was found dead at the Shibuyu Station. He died waiting for his master.

If dogs can have this focus, this steadfastness, then the question a disciple might ask is, “Where am I waiting? Where can I find the love that will set me free?” For a follower of the path of the saints, the answer is simple. Love, hope and truth lie at the eye centre. That is where the Master will appear. That is where the Master has asked us to wait for him: to wait gladly, contentedly and with faith.

This spiritual practice will require our courage, our persistence and an open heart. We are to do our meditation gladly, steadfastly and

with all the courage we can muster. Still, that will not be sufficient. In the end we must trust in his mercy. At the last, we will know our true condition and our total reliance on the Master's grace.



It is not difficult for the Master to take a soul upward, but premature uplifting causes harm. Just as fine silk cloth, when spread upon a thorny hedge, is torn to pieces if suddenly pulled away, so the soul, entangled in the thorns of karma, which penetrate every cell in the body, must be gradually purified by the Master's love.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Wait constantly at this door, for the king may unexpectedly distinguish thee with His presence.

The main thing is for thee to be present, and nothing else; thou must be present – nothing else matters.

If thou standest ready at the door, thou wilt be favoured by the king's presence.

Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Ilahi-Nama*, translated by John A. Boyle

Building Heavenly Habits

Our main purpose of living in this world should be God-realization.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

While we don't really know what the words God-realization mean, a spark of yearning responds to the idea that one day, with the grace of the Master, we will become self-realized and then God-realized. One day we will be more than the struggling souls we know we are, more than simply good-hearted people trying somewhat awkwardly to lead devoted lives; we will become completely focused, completely compassionate, completely immersed in God's will.

But, Oh, my Lord, cries the soul, what to do with this monkey mind, prattling tongue and unbounded desires until that one day arrives? How do we shape our lives, which are here and now, and suffuse them with love and discipline?

One way to shape such a life is to begin with the end in mind and build habits which support our long-term goals. As we become more conscious, conscious on a moment-to-moment basis, of what we really want from this human birth, we begin to cultivate ways that support that ultimate desire. We begin to put into practice those words we hear so often from Baba Ji about being positive and natural and non-judgmental; we begin to *catch* Sant Mat in the way Maharaj Charan Singh often spoke of when he told us that Sant Mat is not taught, but caught. As we catch the teachings and then practise what we have caught we climb the ladder to our Master's arms.

In the practice of these teachings, we are constantly reminded of the adage, "When you pick up one end of the stick, you pick up the other." Everything we do has consequences, and we can seldom, if ever, accurately predict what those consequences will be. We are compelled

by self-interest and, with his grace, by a deep moral sensibility to do what is right and leave the results in his hands.

Ay, there's the rub: How do we know what is right? We have been told that all actions which lead us to the Lord are good and all actions which lead us away from the Lord are not. How do we bring this advice into our everyday lives? What practical tools can we use to determine what leads us toward or away from the Lord?

Perhaps the ultimate measuring tool for a satsangi is simran. We might ask ourselves: Are our actions, attitudes and conversations contributing to our ability to do simran? Or do we find ourselves falling into physical, mental or emotional patterns that spin us away from the solid core of an inner life bounded by the five holy names? We can perhaps benefit from some time spent in contemplation of our interior lives. Are we holding a grudge against a co-worker? Doing simran and nursing such a grudge at the same time is a pretty precarious ledge to be standing on. Are we addicted to TV, or food, or exercise, or analysis or (fill in the blank)? We cannot crowd these addictions into the eye centre.

And we don't want to crowd them in. We want freedom, we want Guru, we want God. The beginning steps that will lead us to the end goal involve cultivating day-to-day habits that form the person we want to become. We must take the initiative to act boldly in our own lives, to be the beautiful people we are capable of being, to use the would-be worries of daily life to forge stronger links to the Master. Embedded in the habits of everyday living is spiritual gold; let us mine this gold with growing joy as we approach what Sant Mat is meant for – God-realization.



The Dance of Love

In a past question and answer session, Baba Ji said something that sounds like an ordinary maxim. It is a saying we have all heard before, maybe it is even a cliché. But it is also something that the more we think about, the more profound it becomes. And when the Master says it, all of a sudden it becomes fresh again and we begin to understand it in a whole new way.

The saying was these five simple words: love is a two-way street. He went on to say that our love is *his* strength. At another session someone had asked him, “Master, do you love me?” His answer was thorough and kind as always, and in his main message he used these five words again: love is a two-way street. He also said something at that time that was quite amazing. He said that the Master needs us as much as we need him, that he worships his Master through us.

Let’s explore this idea of love being a two-way street, that he needs us as much as we need him, that our love is his strength. This idea is startling because it suggests that our responsibility is as great as his.

There is a popular saying that goes, “It takes two to tango.” That saying comes from a song that was popular about fifty years ago that included the words, “Let’s do the tango, the dance of love.” Not that we want to dance the tango, but we *do* want to dance the dance of love. And the point, of course, is that the lover and the beloved are partners in this dance of love.

The problem for most of us is that we haven’t yet learned how to dance; we’re just beginners. And we don’t like to admit that we are beginners, still a little clumsy and awkward. Kabir says:

The path of love is easy but the difficulty lies in us. We do not know how to dance and in our ignorance we find fault with the floor.

As quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II

But once we are initiated on the spiritual path we have to step out on the dance floor and do our best. If at first we stumble and fall, what does it matter as long as the beloved is pleased with our effort? He has brought us to the dance, now we have to do our part.

There is a wonderful description in *Aesop's Fables* of a dancing camel. Everyone's laughing at the camel because he looks so ridiculous, so he says, "Go ahead and laugh. I may look pretty silly when I'm dancing, but I also look silly when I'm standing still." We also have to be willing to look silly – to admit what we are and where we are on the path. The only question that should really concern us is how do we look to our Master? How can we please our Master?

We have to be willing to accept ourselves as we are, warts and all, as the Master has! He initiated us with full knowledge of all our flaws and shortcomings. It's no good pretending to be something we're not. All that pretending will do is delay our own progress. So let's accept our shortcomings, and not worry about them. The only thing that matters now is to learn that dance of love, to step out on that dance floor with the one who brought us, and if we stumble and fall, we have to have faith that he will support us and pick us up.

Now that we have received initiation, we have to do what we promised him. What we promised him, of course, was to give ten percent of our time to meditation every day with love and devotion to the very best of our ability and to mould our whole life according to Sant Mat principles. As Master once said, the ball is in our court until we reach the eye centre.

It does take two to tango on this two-way street of love. And he tells us that for every one step we take toward him, he will take ten steps toward us. What a bargain! Of course, the corollary is if we stand still, he will too.

The primary way to express love for the Master is meditation. Meditation for two and a half hours a day, done with love and devotion to the best of our ability as we were taught at the time of initiation. The trouble is meditation is hard because we have to battle the mind.

And that's not all! This mind has been digging itself into this creation for millions of lifetimes, the saints tell us, attaching itself ever more strongly to the pleasures of the senses. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

Mind cannot be taken away from its routine course, in spite of one's best effort, in a day, a month or a year. It is a life-long struggle. Those who have undergone this struggle, or who are engaged in it, understand what it is to conquer the mind. It is son, daughter, wife, husband, friend, wealth and poverty, attachment, greed, lust, anger, pride and whatnot. It is attached to the outside world with ropes, double ropes, triple ropes, and manifold ropes, and has been held by these chains so long that it does not feel the irksomeness of its bonds. It likes them instead.

So that's the bad news about meditation and what makes it so hard. Fortunately, there's also good news. In fact, the good news far outweighs the bad news. The good news is that through the Master's help, kindness and grace we will ultimately succeed. We will realize who and what we truly are, as the saints tell us, and become one with our source, who is all light and love. We can make it easier for

ourselves by cooperating with him or harder by resisting him, but in the end we will succeed.

The reason we meditate is simply to please the Master and to love him, to take that one step toward him every day on this two-way path of love. And when he wants our mind to be still, he will still it himself. In *Divine Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh says, “Mind is a rogue elephant but the Master’s iron goad will bring it home one day.” So we meditate because he has asked us to and we want to please him.

We travel toward the Master through our effort – effort at meditation and effort at living our life according to the Sant Mat principles. But in both of these efforts the results are not in our hands. They are in his hands, thank God, because he knows far better than we do as to what’s good for us! We have to be willing to accept what we think are our failures, believing that they are just steps to our ultimate success. This is what it means to live within his will, to do our very best, with effort, sincerity, gratitude, love and the faith that he is taking care of us better than we can take care of ourselves. The end result is that he will take us home.

It’s a question of our attitude. We give our very best efforts every day to our meditation and our way of life and leave the results to him as he guides us in learning to dance the dance of love. Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Quest for Light*:

You are quite right when you say that the Master rewards disciples according to the amount of effort they put in with the proper attitude. The more we strive on the path, the more help we receive from the Master. Those who do not make an effort of their own have no idea of the blessings that are being showered on us every day of our life. The rewards that are received by a disciple

are far greater than one could ever expect or even dream of, and this realization comes only when we are doing our part of the duty. Then our heart is full of gratitude to the Master.

Notice the wonderful formula he presents us with when he says, “The more we strive on the path, the more help we receive from the Master.” (And here again is the two-way street.) “Then,” he says, “our heart is full of gratitude.” Because then we will realize how blessed we really are to have the human form, to have been initiated by a true Master, to have been given this amazing and rare opportunity to realize who we are and who we belong to. Hazur closes this letter by saying: “All good wishes for you in your sincere pursuit of the path.” This is such a sweet ending, isn’t it? In fact this is what we always have from the Master – his good wishes, and his love. He is unbelievably kind and generous. If he sounds stern sometimes, it’s only because he wants to make clear to us where we stand and goad us into action.

So we have to put in our effort with the proper attitude, the attitude of love, humility and faith in meditation and in life. Then we may know these “blessings that are being showered on us every day of our life”, as he says.

The idea of love being a two-way street, the feeling between the lover and the beloved is reciprocal. And the action to consummate this love must also be reciprocal. Both partners depend on each other to play their part.

We know that it all begins with the beloved, as Rumi tells us:

*A lover never seeks without being sought by his beloved.
When the lightning bolt of love has pierced this heart,
be assured that there is love in that heart.*

*When the love of God grows in your heart, beyond any doubt
God loves you.*

Rumi: A Spiritual Treasury, compiled by Juliete Mabey

This answers that original question of “Master, do you love me?” doesn’t it? Rumi says that when the love of God grows in our heart, it is beyond any doubt that God loves us. He also reaffirms that love is a two-way street when he says that the lover never seeks without being sought by his beloved.

It begins with the beloved. He initiates us because he loves us and he wants us to come home. From the moment of that initiation the love of God begins to grow in our heart. And the more we cooperate with him and work hard to please him, the more aware we become of his blessings and his love. And the more we submit to him, the easier the path becomes. Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

All things become easy in the presence of love. A person under the influence of love performs the most difficult tasks with comparative ease. Through love, even impossible things become possible.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II

Through love even clumsy camels like us can learn to dance. And all of our stumbles, all of our falls, all of our failures are only steps to our ultimate success because he is there every moment to support us and lift us up. And that should make us very happy.



Remembrances

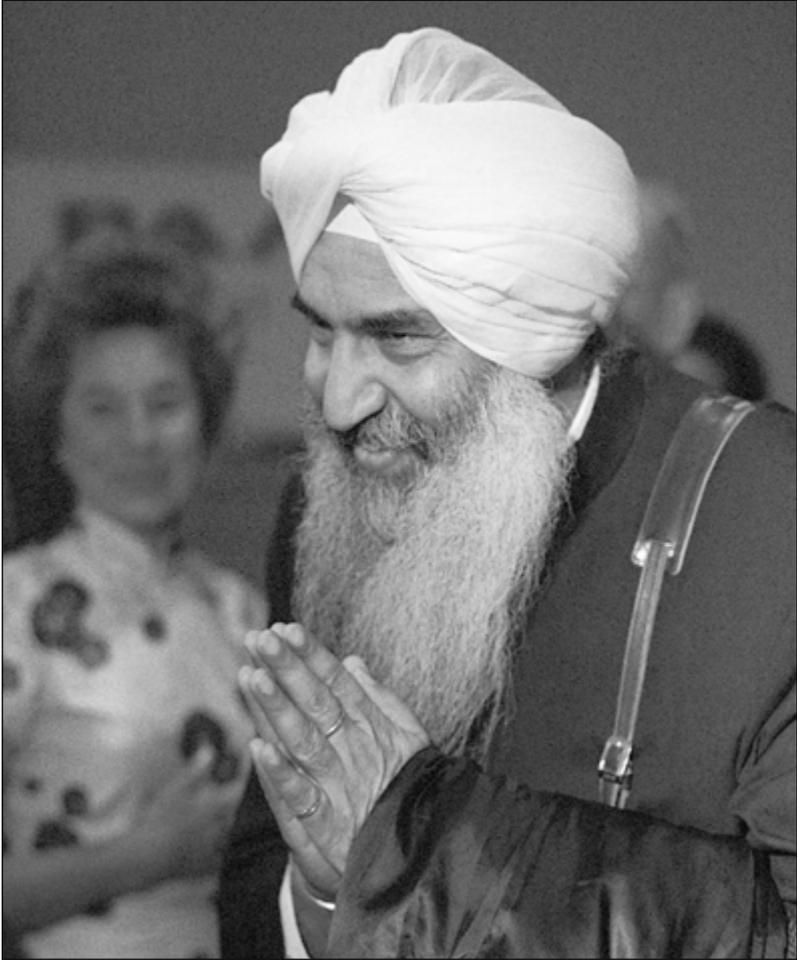
In 1970 when Maharaj Charan Singh came to Pasadena, California while on tour in the USA, the planning committee thought it would be a good idea to hold informal coffee sessions with the Master. This would allow for smaller groups of people to be in the same room as the Master and afford him the opportunity to walk about and mingle with the sangat.

A lovely hotel, the Huntington-Sheraton, was chosen for its ambience. It was felt that Master would feel comfortable in such a setting. The hotel provided a charming room in which to hold the coffee sessions. Master came in, had a cup of coffee and moved about the room. Great pains had been taken to prepare satsangis in terms of behaviour in the presence of the Master. People were to wait for him to come to them and not go after him or try to push their way into his presence. Everyone was very well-behaved and disciplined, allowing Master to move as he wished.

Two elderly satsangi ladies were sitting at the side of the room next to each other. Master walked over to where they were sitting and literally pushed his way in between the two ladies, so that he was sitting between them, next to each one. A perfect lesson in how he comes to us when he so wills it.

After the first coffee session, the Master was asked if he liked the arrangement and would like to repeat it for the next few days. His surprising reply was, "Every day is a different day." And that was precisely how it turned out for the next few days. Each day was done differently.

On the same visit, the Master, the representative and his secretary took the elevator from the headquarters room down to the lobby. The car stopped at a floor and an elderly satsangi lady came in. Hazur was standing to the side of the elevator so that he could not be seen as the



doors opened. The lady stepped in and immediately saw Master. She looked out to her friend who was coming toward the elevator and urged her to hurry up. “It’s all right,” her friend replied, “I’ll just wait for the next one.”

Four Things to Know

Hatim al-Asamm said, “I have chosen four things to know and discarded all other kinds of knowledge.”

“The first is this: I know that my daily bread is apportioned to me and will neither be increased or decreased, so I have stopped trying to add to it.”

“Secondly, I know I owe to God a debt which no one else can pay for me, so I am busy about paying it.”

“Thirdly, I know that there is someone pursuing me – Death – whom I cannot escape from, so I have prepared myself to meet him.”

“Fourth, I know that God is observing me, so I am ashamed to do what I should not.”

Farid al-Din 'Attar: Perfume of the Desert, translated by Andrew Harvey



*I wish I could show you,
When you are lonely or in darkness,
The Astonishing Light
Of your own Being!*

I Heard God Laughing, *Renderings of Hafiz*,
by Daniel Ladinsky

Progress by Practice

This is a path of baby steps.

It is human nature to want to do everything the easy way. What do they say about taking the path of least resistance? It seems to be built into our DNA, as though our genes were imprinted with 'survival of the laziest'.

Isn't it amazing that with our entire lives of experiencing that practice makes perfect, for some unknown reason many of us believe that at the time of initiation we will immediately hear the sound current and behold the vision of the Radiant Form of the Master. Where did we get that idea? It just simply does not follow the laws of nature.

The question we ask is why is it so difficult? Why does it take so much practice to make spiritual progress? Why can't we play par golf without practicing, bowl a perfect 300, paint like Da Vinci, write like Edgar Allen Poe, do math like Einstein or drive a car like Mario Andretti? Why, oh why, do we have to practice in order to succeed?

What is it that holds us back? What causes us to fail? In physical activities, it is usually a mixture of poor technique, a lack of coordination and gravity. Gravity is the part that hurts. Gravity is also the thing that provides resistance. It is the thing we are trying to overcome. Without resistance our muscles would atrophy. Without the resistance of the wind, airplanes wouldn't fly and parachutes wouldn't open. Without the resistance of water, boats wouldn't float. It is resistance that makes us stronger. It is resistance that we are trying to avoid when we take 'the path of the least of it'.

In meditation, the resistance is our own mind. Overcoming our mind is the greatest challenge of all time. Climbing to the top of Mount Everest is nothing compared to conquering our mind. The

ascent of our attention, our consciousness, to the heights beyond the mind was compared by Maharaj Sawan Singh to an ant trying to climb out of a jar. The ant makes a little progress and slides down again. It makes more progress only to slide down over and over and over again. But the ant never gives up, and one day it makes it to the top. It only makes it by its constant effort. If it just sat at the bottom of the jar, it would never make it to the top unless someone turned the jar upside down, which is what we all want Master to do for us.

The daunting task of reaching the summit at the eye centre, the threshold of our spiritual journey, is beautifully described in *The Book of Mirdad*. Mirdad provides the analogy of climbing a flint mountain to represent the journey of our meditation up the slippery slope of our mind. It is the initial stages of our meditation where the climb to the top begins. We have to be on the mountain or the guide can't help us. Along the path the guide makes sure our load is lightened. We lose our illusory provisions and are stripped of our veils of mind and matter – our ego. This process occurs on the mountain, not in the valley of the world. It also occurs on the mountain after we have taken many, many baby steps, after our hands have bled and we have tumbled down the slope a few times. If we are not even on the mountain, how do we expect Master, the guide, to lift us up?

In order to fly in an airplane to a far land, we must first get on the plane. We can only catch a plane at the airport, not at the mall, or at the theatre, or in front of our TV or in bed. We have to be at the airport – we have to be on the mountain.

Our role is to get there. To get to the airport we have to find a shuttle, a taxi or drive ourselves if necessary. If we drive, we have to find a place to park, then catch a shuttle bus from the parking lot to the terminal. Then we still have to drag our luggage to the check-in counter, then to the area where our suitcases are x-rayed, then up

to security so we can be searched some more. All of this is the small part we have to play in order to get on the plane. And if we really want to take the trip badly enough, then it's ok even if we arrive at the boarding gate crawling on all fours. Our role is to just get there; someone, Master, will help us to our seat.

Master is working behind the scenes, helping us to get to the airport – it's he who guides us up to the summit of the flint slope. It's our unseen Master who helps us catch the parking lot shuttle going to the correct terminal. It's he who is smiling through us, so the security personnel thinks twice about holding us up to inspect our carry-on. It's all these things that happen during our journey through life that we don't see. But, again, we have to make the effort. We can't expect Master to pack our suitcase for us.

Baba Ji once said something to the effect that, if we only knew what the inner Master does for us, we would be filled with an inexpressible gratitude.

It is Shabd, the divine melody, which performs the gigantic feat of pulling us out of the void of the airport terminal and into the light of self- and God-realization. It is never really our own efforts. But the paradox is that we have to be putting in the effort of daily meditation, the effort of climbing on hands and feet up the slope, in order to catch hold of the sound current.

Thirty, forty years go by, and we feel like we are the same. But if we reflect, we may be surprised to find that just maybe we are more tolerant than we were before, more loving, less prone to anger or judgment of others. Maybe our outward desires and ambitions are more subdued, and we find ourselves thinking more and more about Master and less and less about the world. If so, how can we say we haven't made spiritual progress?

Our spiritual progress is directly related to simran, the repetition of the names. Simran creates a vibration within us which links us to the Radiant Form of the Master, the Shabd form. Simran acts like a small pickaxe, removing one particle of rust, attachment, pride and ego at a time. It removes all the clutter in our heart which is so full of the objects and desires of the world that there is no room for Master and Shabd to make their home there. Before Shabd takes up abode in our heart, we must polish it clean. Our heart must be pure and worthy. Scrubbing off the muck, one round of simran after the other, day in and day out, purifies our hearts.

Doing simran is how we pay attention to our inner life. Daily meditation for the full two and a half hours is the effort we put in to get to the airport. It's what keeps us strapped in our seat ready for take off. Master makes sure the plane climbs in altitude very gently. Sometimes we don't even notice that we have left the runway.

A satsangi once compared the state of not realizing our own spiritual progress to a log she noticed one evening in her campfire. In the morning, she was struck with how all the other logs, from the previous night's fire, had turned to ashes except this one particular log. How strange, she thought, that this log, that had earlier glowed bright red, was still intact and looked no different than it did before the fire started. Curious, she poked at the log with a stick and it simply blew away. It was a log of ashes held together in its original form only by habit or because it had not yet realized the fire had transformed it. Maybe it was too mesmerized by the heat of the sound current. Maybe it was not its time to leave until the 'angel of death by poking stick' called to it. The ashes, that were once the log, flew into the atmosphere and simply merged into the universe. It became one with the 'Great Campfire'.

We may not notice the transforming heat of the sound current. We may even complain about our perceived lack of spiritual progress. But one day for certain, we will get the poke and we, our ego-selves, will vanish and be blissfully consumed by the fire of God's love.



If you can only crawl, crawl to Him.

If you cannot pray sincerely, offer your dry, hypocritical, agnostic prayer; for God in His mercy accepts bad coin.

If you have a hundred doubts of God, make them into ninety doubts. This is the way.

O, Seeker! Though you have broken your vows a hundred times, come again! come again!...

The Rumi Collection, edited by Kabir Helminski

The Grace of Longing

I watch again as you walk... no, glide
across the carpeted ground
up the stairs leading to the dais
where you gather yourself
in the graceful motions
so familiar to me.

Seeing you again after so many years
of not seeing you,
I am instantly filled with the beautiful longing
that connects my soul to yours
the longing that replaced
my sadness so many years ago.
Oh, how I have missed that face of yours
that face that quietens my restlessness,
my fears, my doubts, my disconnect
from all that is holy and whole,
you bring me back to rest inside the stillness.
I loved you almost from the first
moment I heard your call
stripped like a birch I too had been chosen,
laid open and waiting bank side
for your heart song to craft and launch
my canoe on the river of sound and light.

Out of the mist and smoke
of India you appeared and
gently handed me the rope of longing.
I hadn't understood the purpose,
the necessity of longing
until its return
just now.

There had been reminders though,
especially in the fire season,
distant smoke to me always smells like god.
I reach inside to heal myself and I am filled with gratitude
that the grace of longing has returned.



God is Love, and Love was in the beginning. The entire creation is the result of love. We have been sent down into this world through love, and the cause of our return will also be love.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II

Gratitude

Charles Dickens wrote, “Reflect on your present blessings, of which every man has many, not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.”

During an evening meeting a few years ago, Master touched upon gratitude not just once but several times within different contexts. He made a statement to the effect that human beings are the most thankless and destructive of all the species, with the least faith. What about showing some gratitude, he asked? What are the things that he is referring to that we should perhaps be grateful for?

The first thing to be grateful for is that we have received a human body. We take it so much for granted. Yet, without this mass of bones and skin, we would not have the opportunity to embark upon the inner experiences that are going to lead to the discovery of our true self. In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

The human body is a priceless gift bestowed on man through the Lord's grace. The purpose of this rare gift is to afford us an opportunity to return to our true home.

Note that in just three lines, he refers to this gift as priceless and rare. We don't realize how long it may have taken us to get this human body; how many times we were incarnated in all kinds of lower species until, finally, we were given a human form. And then, we had to go through countless human bodies, through countless karmas before we got this very body earmarked this time for our soul to travel on the inner spiritual path. In a poem entitled “Even the Gods Want a Human Birth”, Tukaram writes:

*Even the gods in the heavens want a human birth.
We are lucky to have been given this body
So that we can be his devotees.
We should take advantage of this life
To reach the highest spiritual region.
We will take the ladder to the heavens
And climb it step by step, says Tuka.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Spiritual Gems*:

*It is only man – and not even gods and angels – who has been
endowed by the Almighty with faculties, by developing which he
can attain the highest spiritual region, provided he is initiated
by a perfect Master and works hard to elevate his soul to the
higher regions.*

No wonder Tukaram enjoins us:

*Look upon this human body with great respect,
For within it lies the Name
That leads to permanent happiness.
When duality vanishes, the Lord is seen
And the self merges in the Lord....
Tuka says: give up all wanderings
And know that permanent happiness
Lies within you.*

In *Words Eternal*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Strike the bargain of Nam and accumulate this treasure while the Lord gives you the opportunity to live in this body.

The fact that we have been given initiation is another reason for us to be grateful. Maharaj Charan Singh continues:

Initiation is not the spoken word but a touch of the soul from the soul of the Master to the soul of the initiate.

This is the miracle of initiation, that transference of energy, that link between Master's soul and ours. Nam is not so cheap. It is a rare article. Only a few among billions get it in a lifetime. It is our key to entering the spiritual spheres.

Another reason to be grateful is that we live under the full guidance of a perfect living saint. He guides us and he pulls the strings, but we are unaware of it until we go within. In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

Once a Master has accepted a disciple, he never leaves him but is ever ready to guide him on the path. He does much more for us than the human mind can comprehend.

We have very little idea of what a Master does for us and how much he does and gives. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh gives an insight into this:

The power – Guru – is within you and is ever busy in making matters easy for you.... The power within is not ignorant of what you are doing. It is with you and constantly watches you and guides you.

We should also be grateful that we do not need to worry about our progress. It is all in his hands, and everything will happen in due course. He knows when. He will make it happen. What a bargain! Maharaj Sawan Singh continues:

That power is far more eager to meet you than you can possibly think of.... The power within does not err. It will open the door when it finds that the time has come. Increase your love and devotion, and entrust yourself entirely to its care.

In *Quest For Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

There is hope for every disciple on this path. When the Lord has arranged for our initiation into this science it means he wants us to come back to him one day. And if that is the Lord's wish what power can keep us back here for long? It is only a question of time until our burdens are lightened and we are pure enough to stand in his presence. This is the greatest blessing that the Lord can shower upon any human being.

We should be very grateful that we are the lucky ones who have been given the privilege, the gift of remembering God. We should not take this for granted. To even think of the Lord is a gift. We have also been given the gift of simran! Maharaj Jagat Singh writes about simran in *Science of the Soul*:

It is a wonderful talisman, the significance and efficacy of which you will realize only when you devote sufficient time (two and one-half to three hours daily) to it, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and cares.

We should be grateful that we have a destiny meant exclusively for us, guaranteed to provide the experiences that are meant to purify us and to make us grow so that we become fit to see the Light and hear the Sound.

In *Spiritual Gems*, Great Master says:

Whatever comes to man from the Lord is the result of his own actions, and the Lord makes him go through them for his own betterment.

In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh understands our plight and offers us encouragement:

There are always ups and downs in life. Things never remain the same, and we should try to face these moments of trial with patience and courage, keeping full faith in him.... To make an effort is our duty, but the results are not in our hands. Sometimes we have to learn to live with our handicaps when efforts fail. This is the time of test for us and we should not lose our mental equilibrium, but say and sincerely believe that this is the will of the Lord and we accept it in all humility. Who knows? Things could have been worse. So our feeling of gratitude to him must never be lost.

As we become aware of the multiple gifts we have been given, how do we express our gratitude?

Master said something like: You express your gratitude by doing what he has asked you to do; you do your meditation. You do it because he has asked you to. It is that simple. You do your part, he explained, for in so doing you help him do his part. It is a team: Master and disciple, disciple and Master. We learn to dance together the dance of love.

In *Science of the Soul*, Maharaj Jagat Singh confirms:

He does what he thinks proper. If we do our duty, why would he not do his? We should proceed in love and faith and see that we do not transgress his commandments. The best and most appropriate way of appreciating his kindness and expressing our gratitude is to give more and more time to bhajan and simran, so that we may go in and contact Nam, and thus have a first hand experience of everything.

Master once said something to the effect that simple people go in because they have gratitude. They understand what they have received. So somebody asked him: What is simplicity? He answered: It is letting go of preconceived ideas and living in the moment. We complicate our spiritual life by having so many preconceived ideas of what our progress should look like or feel like. We have a timetable; we worry when it is not met.

A satsangi was so worried about not meeting his own timetable that he got up and asked whether his inability to open the third eye after so many years meant that this path was not for him. Absolutely not, replied the Master.

In 2003 there was a study on gratitude done by two scholars at the University of California at Davis and the University of Miami entitled: “Counting Blessings vs. Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life.” The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of grateful thinking on psychological well-being in daily life and thereby put to test popular and classical assumptions concerning the benefits of gratitude. It was an extensive study. It is interesting to note here that the study concludes that the regular practice of grateful thinking

leads to enhanced psychological, physical and social functioning. The authors also suggest that gratitude is a form of love which is also likely to build and strengthen a sense of spirituality. So there might be something after all to the advice “count your blessings” that we might have gotten from our parents or from friends. Being able to feel and express gratitude, concludes this study, unleashes positive qualities – contentment, appreciation, happiness, hope, trust in the good and surrender to the will of a higher power.

Thomas Merton, the scholar, spiritual writer and philosopher, in the book *Words of Gratitude*, writes:

To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything He has given us – and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of his love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.

And so let us end with Master’s question: What about showing some gratitude?



Can't Lives on Won't Street

When I moved into my first classroom, the teacher who was moving out was taking his things off the wall. When he came to a poster that said: *Can't Lives on Won't Street*, he looked at me and said, "I'm going to leave this one up for you; being the rookie teacher you'll need all the help you can get."

I thanked him, and said I wasn't sure what it meant or how it would help. He replied that after a few weeks around thirteen and fourteen year olds, I would understand. Truer words were never spoken. The list of things my students claimed they couldn't do was endless:

I can't do the homework.

I can't write an essay.

I can't get to class on time.

I can't read the whole book, and on and on and on.

Nike brand shoes were just getting popular around then, as was their advertising slogan – *Just Do It!* I bought the biggest Nike poster I could find and put it on the wall under the *Can't Lives on Won't Street* poster. When students started giving me their pitiful excuses I would simply point to the two posters. End of discussion.

I wanted my students to understand that there is a critical difference between can't and won't. We believe that we aren't able to do the task, and the other implies that it is our choice not to do it. When we use the word 'can't', we are often only fooling ourselves because in most cases 'can't' is a lie. There are, of course, appropriate uses for the word, such as saying we can't sprout wings and fly.

We limit ourselves, as did the students, by thinking that things can't be done. It's the one who doesn't know it can't be done who does it. If we think we can't do something, we can't. But if we think we can, we may be surprised to discover how easily we did it. Henry Ford once said: "Think you can, think you can't; either way, you'll be right."

When we convince ourselves that we can't do certain things we may just not be confronting our true feelings. 'Can't' is always the easy way out. Instead try substituting the word 'won't' in place of 'can't', or even 'I don't want to' in its place to make the statement ring with more honesty. We can try to shape our thought processes and virtually guarantee our success with just the tiniest little shifts. Attitude and perception are everything.

Can't Lives on Won't Street flashes across my mind on certain mornings when I think I just can't get up for meditation. I might not want to get out of my warm and cozy bed, but of course I can.

Baba Ji has said that he does not understand the notion of 'I can't do my meditation,' but that he does understand, 'I won't do my meditation.' Our Master would never have initiated us if we could not do it.



The Seal of Simran

Most of us are still spiritually clumsy beginners trying to learn the dance of love. To have success we must reinforce our foundations. All Masters have emphasized that simran is the very basis and foundation of Sant Mat. They continually remind us that concentrated meditation at the eye centre will take us to the Master within, the real end to which our simran must lead.

There are three types of simran which we can do during the day while applying our hands to our work. Firstly, there is light, unconcentrated, fairly mechanical simran, which nevertheless has value because of the power innate in the words themselves. Some people do this kind of simran in rhythm with their walking, and it is usually the first sort of simran that we learn to do when we start off trying to keep it going all day. Secondly, there is fairly concentrated, steady simran which can only be kept up while doing work which does not require attention. Thirdly, there is subconscious simran, which comes after long practice.

One of the main reasons why we desperately need to use the 'seal' of simran is that we all leak like sieves; we identify with everything that happens to us, and every changing thought and feeling makes our attention run out, leaving us scattered and empty.

We are constantly losing air through the deflating pinpricks of life. Simran is the self-sealer for our leaking. It prevents the mind, which Master says is fundamentally negative, from invading and puncturing us and from making all our joy seep out. It seals us from reacting unnecessarily to small facts and events that invade us from the outside, and also from the disturbance of our own meddling mind with its constant, absurd internal dialogue. External life controls and plays



havoc with us because we do not have anything internal with which to resist it. Simran establishes an inner force that resists the outer forces of life, so that nothing can enter without our consent. It surrounds us like a protective cocoon when we keep it spinning on the axis of the mind. Without its protection and security, life can be a pain factory, but simran seals us hermetically every day.

Simran is a knack. The knack comes through thousands of experiments, through lots of trial and error. It is the essence of many mistakes; then suddenly we have the knack of doing it.

Many of us as beginners stick up cards everywhere to remind ourselves of simran – even in the bathroom. After all the reminders, the knack becomes natural and innate to us. It is permanent, and when we have it, we will always become aware of when the mind has strayed, and we will immediately yank it back to simran. Eventually we will even be able to do it while chatting, or watching a film.

Simran is a treat. It can also be described as an inner food or nourishment. We tune ourselves into Master's great stream of energy and imbibe his spirit. It is like manna in the desert of modern life which we can have whenever we want it.

Simran is a token. We are given a checkbook as a token of the fact that we have money in the bank. Similarly, we are given the five words as a token of the fact that we have the Radiant Form within us. It is our inexhaustible bank balance. It is also our passport to another world, designed to take us to a 'close encounter' with that Radiant Form, which will then lead us further on. Simran creates the magnetic attraction to get us to his Form.

At initiation, Master gives us the five words of simran, words that are outside our experience, outside our known vocabulary and free from all past associations. Why? If we say those five words just once, what can we find to associate with them? Do they conjure up

associations with our mother, father, lover, boss, our likes and dislikes? No, they are absolutely without any association with this world, or any of our past lives. They are pristine, unhooked and unloaded. No associations are stuck in them like barnacles, except a single one – our beloved Master. They *are* loaded words, but loaded with him. This is a new language: a spiritual power and Master's inexhaustible might is present in it. The words have nothing to do with this visible, tangible world because they exist beyond and apart from the senses.

We ought to carry our simran like a thread through the day, and connect it back to the Shabd during meditation. Simran and Shabd are the same thread. One reason why many satsangis do not practice continuous simran is that they start out with a big bang, but after a few days, they encounter a struggle, and then they drop it. But if we want to learn the trick and have the knack, this is the very time to continue with it. When we work through the mind's resistance soon something fundamental will change inside. Just *do* it.

Maharaj Charan Singh says: "These Names, properly repeated with devotion, stir up spiritual vibrations." These spiritual vibrations can be stirred up immediately; we don't have to wait to know them. Just try it.

So simran is a knack, a treat and a token. With simran, each satsangi is better armed than with anything our national defence forces could devise. Yet with simran as described here, something is missing. The famous conductor Arthur Rubenstein was asked in his nineties what he thought of the young pianists of the day. He replied that they were often technically utterly perfect, yet he had to ask most of them: "And when are you going to start making music?" The vital factor is love. We have not only to reinforce our foundations by using the seal of simran, but to do it with love, and soon we, too, will be making music – immortal music.

Adapted from Science of the Soul magazine

Ceaseless Repetition of the Lord's Name

One who repeats the Lord's Name with every morsel
Gets the merit of fasting, even though he eats.

One who repeats the Lord's Name

While doing daily work

Always has the bliss of meditation within him.

One who repeats the Lord's Name while walking

Gets the merit of performing sacrifices at every step.

Blessed is such a body,

It has no need of pilgrimages and vows.

One who repeats the Lord's Name

Both in the enjoyment and sacrifice of worldly pleasures

Is not bound by his actions, declares Tuka.

One who thus repeats the Lord's Name ceaselessly

Is liberated during this very lifetime!

Tukaram: The Ceaseless Song of Devotion



Music Lessons from a Maestro

Someone sent a band to my house,
And it started playing
At five in the morning.

I took this as a sign
God wanted me to sing!

Then the moon joined in
And a few of the tenor-voiced stars,

And the earth offered its lovely belly
As a drum.

Before I knew it,
I realized
All human beings could be happy

If they just had a few music lessons
From a Sweet Old Maestro
Like Hafiz.

I Heard God Laughing, Renderings of Hafiz,
by Daniel Ladinsky

This poem captures the imagination and perhaps makes us smile at the thought of our own Master as a music maestro. It is a perfect description of what is happening in our lives and in our hearts. As with many of the poems of saints and mystics, this poem takes

the abstract and makes it concrete. It translates the sublime into common everyday language and creates this beautiful metaphor of our relationship to God and to Shabd, a concept that might be otherwise incomprehensible to us.

Maybe we can't understand the concept of God, but if we've been initiated onto the path of Sant Mat, we are beginning to grow accustomed to the concept of a living Master. We have met him, been in his presence, talked with and listened to him, become infatuated and maybe even experienced pangs of love for him. We've definitely felt pangs of separation when he has not been with us physically. And we have all experienced the joyous anticipation of seeing him again.

Nor do we understand the concept of the Shabd or divine melody, or the music of the spheres or the sound current. We probably haven't got a clue what Shabd is, but we can relate to the idea of music lessons by a maestro. We often get clarity on our beliefs and our concepts through the simple stories and poems of God-realized mystics.

Perhaps many human beings could be happy if they had a few lessons from a maestro like Hafiz. What a rare boon to be offered such lessons, and what a waste it would be to not follow the directions of the maestro and practice diligently. We can study and study these music lessons and perhaps eventually grasp the meaning they contain and make the meaning part of our lives; but if the true meaning is not grasped by constant practice, the music lessons have been studied in vain. Sant Mat is a path of practice and not *just* words.

When we follow this path of love and practice the music lessons given to us by our Master, can we expect to be great musicians automatically? Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Light on Sant Mat*: "It is hard work in the beginning, but by practice everything comes easy."

We all know we have to follow all the instructions given to us by our maestro. To follow the vows and do our meditation takes constant

effort, but it is the practice that makes us great musicians. Maharaj Jagat Singh says in *Science of the Soul*: “The secret of success in this path is practice, practice and still more practice.” If we want to become great musicians like our Master, we must follow his instructions and practice our lessons unceasingly.

A famous eighteenth century pianist and composer said:

If I miss one day of practice, I notice it.

If I miss two days, the critics notice it.

If I miss three days, the audience notices it.

Ignacio Jan Paderewski



We should be serious about following Sant Mat, but that doesn't mean that we should disregard the cheerful side of life altogether. Rather, we should feel more relaxed because we are following the path.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Legacy of Love*

The Covenant That Lasts

Our covenant has been broken hundreds and thousands of times.
Thy covenant, like a mountain, stands firm and stable.
Our covenant is straw, and subject to every wind of passion.
Your covenant is more than a hundred mountains...
The Master is the one that takes your hand, and bears the burden.
Have hope, from moment to moment of receiving that breath from him.
It is no harm if you have remained long without him.
You have read that he is long in his grasp, grasping tight.
His mercy is long in gripping, and grips tight:
His presence does not keep you absent from him for one moment.

Rumi, Masnavi, translated by R.A. Nicholson



This longing for the physical form, this longing which you cannot fulfill, leads you within towards the Radiant Form of the Master, which will ultimately take you back to the Father. So this physical separation serves its purpose.

...So when we don't find the Master outside and we want to be with him, we have no alternative but to attend to meditation and see him within – and that is real darshan.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Questions and Answers

Q: Master, I'm trying to understand something a little further. You said to me the other night that everything's based on the pull of the master in meditation.

M: The pull of the Father.

Q: When we aren't able to meditate as much as we'd like to, or we don't feel the pull as strongly as we'd like to, is it our karmas that are blocking it, or is the Lord withholding that grace until certain karmas are over?

M: Well, brother, we cannot analyze these things at all. If you start analyzing that today I'm not feeling the pull – karma has come in my way so I won't sit in meditation – you will never sit in meditation. We have no business analyzing these things at all. If his grace were not there, there would not have been any marking at all. It is his grace that he has marked us, his grace that has brought us on the path, so now we have to do our job, do our duty. We cannot analyze these things, thinking that I have to wait for my pull today to sit in meditation.

Q: I'm not trying to get out of meditation, but the feeling of the pull – is it always the same, no matter how heavy the karma? Is the pull always there and always the same?

M: You see, the pull is not always the same. Sometimes it is less, sometimes more, but we have to train our mind to sit in meditation every day, irrespective of whether the pull is there or not. Sometimes willingly, sometimes unwillingly, we have to sit in meditation. The

soldier has to go out on parade every morning. Sometimes he is very happy to do it, and sometimes he doesn't want to do it, but he has to. That's part of the discipline he has to go through. So we don't have to do everything happily. Sometimes we have to do our meditation even by force – we have to force our mind to sit, we have to fight with our mind.

Q: I'm aware of the fight at this level, but I'm really scared when I look at where I am today and how long it's taken me to get even here in fifteen or sixteen years. I don't have a chance, by the time I die, to go to the eye centre. You said the other day that if our mind was always pointed in one direction, that even after we die, where else would it go?

M: Naturally. Meditation means that we are training our mind to go inward and upward. We are creating a tendency in the mind to go inward and upward, withdrawing it from outside and bringing it back to the eye centre. To create that tendency in the mind is the purpose of meditation.

Q: I know you say we shouldn't expect results, but what part do results play?

M: Results come and go. Often you may not even see anything within, but you feel so happy, so contented, so at peace within yourself. You feel the effect of meditation within yourself – you feel detached from everything.

Q: And that is enough at the time of death to take us up?

M: That is more than enough. Because your tendency is not towards the creation now.

As transcribed from a Question and Answer session with Maharaj Charan Singh

*The gate of Paradise is opened at dawn; and it is then
that His beauty is revealed to His lovers.*

Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Ilahi-Nama*,
translated by John A. Boyle

*This constant feeling of loneliness and missing
something is in reality the hidden unquenched thirst
and craving of the soul for its Lord. It will always
persist as long as the soul does not return to its ancient
original home and meet its Lord. This feeling has been
purposefully put into the heart of man.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

*Now just keep repeating the Lord's name.
When you repeat his name constantly
No sins will stay with you.
Even if you have millions of sins
It won't take a second for the Lord's name
To burn them away...
Kal has no access to that place.*

Tukaram: Ceaseless Song of Devotion

Short Takes: Excerpts from Satsangs

When we go to the beach or ocean shore and approach getting into the water, we start slowly. We just put our toe in at first to check the temperature. It's cold so we ease in, stepping over little waves, getting our balance. We keep going, jumping over waves, some that knock us completely over, but we get up and continue. Bigger waves bash us around, we persevere. Then just past the breaking surf and waves is calm water. Here we can float effortlessly and blissfully without being menaced by any disturbing waves.

The same is true of meditation. We ease into it. We dismiss little thoughts, and continue the repetition. Some thoughts sneak up on us and completely knock us off task. We go back to simran. We keep wading through whatever the mind puts in our way. Gradually our simran gets stronger. Through effort and grace and time we can eventually get to a place where we are completely enjoying our meditation, floating in the calm waters of the Shabd.



Whatever we thought we were looking for when we stumbled upon this path, it seems that we have found the real deal. This path has nothing to do with books; it is not bound by religious and social custom. It is not even bound by life and death. Our beliefs may be true or not true, but they are only useful in so far as they assist us in our efforts to perform the meditation practice.

However we integrate meditation into our lives, it isn't something we perfect in the first few months following initiation. It requires

constant adjustments as our daily lives change. But if we can learn to do this, then meditation not only meets our spiritual needs, but it can also help to both provide the body with proper rest and to create the concentration necessary to carry out our work in the world. This is how we can say with confidence that, if our meditation is done, everything is done.



We can't know at this stage what success is, nor do we know what failure is. We have a habit of judging our results harshly. Our conditioned mind has been collecting a lifetime of events and thoughts and feelings that we stir together in a boiling pot, and then we allow this emotional stew to control our perception. This is why he asks us to simply trust. Otherwise, our reasoning stands the chance of getting turned around and confused. He knows what he is doing. This is why he smiles when he says to just let go and trust in the plan. If we only knew what he knows, we would laugh at ourselves for all of the emotion we have wasted worrying about the results of our efforts. We are not just sliding down the side of a slippery slope waiting to hit the bottom and see where we land. We are in the river of his care flowing with determined resolve to a guaranteed return to the ocean of his presence. It is guaranteed. Look on a map, all rivers flow into the ocean. It is the nature of the flow of a river. Each river struggles until it has carved a path back to the ocean. We are guaranteed this same return for our efforts.



The Effect of Meditation

Meditation is a way of life. You do not merely close yourself in a room for a few hours, then forget about meditation for the rest of the day. It must take on a practical form, reflecting in every daily action and in your whole routine. That itself is an effect of meditation. To live in the teachings, to live in that atmosphere is itself a meditation. You are building that atmosphere every moment for your daily meditation. Everything you do must consciously prepare you for the next meditation. So meditation becomes a way of life, as we live in the atmosphere we build with meditation.

To live in that atmosphere is to live a simple, happy and relaxed life. The effect of that peace and bliss of meditation enables you to adjust according to the weather of life while retaining your equanimity and balance.... You accept whatever comes your way as the grace of the Master. He is the helmsman of your life now, and he has only your happiness and best interest at heart. By his mercy, he is bringing you to him as swiftly as possible to give you all he has. So worry has no place in a disciple's heart.

Through meditation we fulfil the very purpose of human life. Meditation is the only worship that pleases the Father. Through meditation we become worthy of His grace and receptive to His love. We build and grow the love and devotion which He gives us to carry us speedily towards our goal.... The effect is truly a miracle! We turn from the world, and with the same intensity that we once ran towards it, we now run towards the Father. We experience that bliss and joy of real love and real devotion, as we ultimately merge with our Master to be transformed from the drop into the Divine Ocean itself.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Book Review



Taoist Meditation: Methods for Cultivating a Healthy Mind and Body

TRANSLATED AND COMPILED BY THOMAS CLEARY

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Thomas Cleary is one of the foremost translators of Taoist and Buddhist texts, known for his simple, clear style and for the depth of his insight. In this small book he presents a selection of six classic Taoist texts on meditation. In these texts the reader is introduced to various ways that Taoist mystics have described meditation and the way of life that supports spiritual development. Familiarity with Taoist literature is useful for understanding these works. But spiritual seekers of any cultural background will find here valuable suggestions for living in harmony and balance, for stilling the mind, and for returning to the celestial source. **The Treatise on Sitting and Forgetting** emphasizes the simplicity of meditation, clearing the mind, and stilling the body. Written by Sima Chengzhen of the Tang dynasty (618–907), this text describes a method of meditation called “sitting and forgetting” or “sitting in forgetfulness.” Sitting quietly and calmly, one “forgets” everything that distracts from reality – the body, other people, things – and “remembers” the One.

When sitting and forgetting, what is not forgotten? Inwardly you do not notice your own body; outwardly you are not aware of the universe. As you mystically unite with the Way, myriad cogitations all disappear.

In the stillness of meditation one forgets those things that destroy our peaceful rediscovery of the Tao (the Way). The mind rests, and the spirit opens to oneness.

As serenity and simplicity develop day by day, worldly defilement lessens day by day. As your behavior departs further and further

from the mundane, your mind becomes closer and closer to the Way. Which of the sages and saints did not get there by this route? The classic says, “Close your eyes, shut your doors, and you do not toil all your life.”

The author explains that confusion and ignorance of the mind come from the ground the mind rests on. It is necessary to sit calmly, collect the mind, detach from objects, and dwell in nothingness. Getting out of the wheel of birth and death actually depends on this practice. He offers three precepts to guide the practitioner: simplifying involvements, not craving anything, and quieting the mind. “If you diligently practice these three precepts without flagging, then even if you have no mind to seek the Way, the Way will come of itself.”

The Sayings of the Taoist Master Danyang is an anthology of beautiful sayings on enlightenment by a famous Taoist wizard of the Song dynasty (960–1279).

Master Danyang says “If you practice conscious, deliberate exercises, these are limited techniques. If you practice the principle of mindless noncontrivance, this is unlimited clear emptiness.” Noncontrivance, or cultivating an “uncontrived” state of mind, is an important concept in both Taoism and Buddhism. He explains:

Noncontrivance means not musing or mulling. Though you may act in the midst of love, desire, anger, accumulation, gain, and loss, be always uncontrived. Even when involved in things, be always unconcerned. If you concentrate totally, moreover, clarify your mind and purify your will, nourish your energy and make your spirit complete, you will drift into the land of freedom and enter the village of nothing-whatsoever.

He explains that “The substance of the Way is no mind, the application is forgetting words.” But, he adds, “Mindlessness, or no mind, does not mean being mindless like cats or dogs or bugs. It means striving to keep the mind in the realm of clear purity, and having no warped mind.” The effort to keep the mind in “the realm of clear purity” requires ever-present awareness. Without this effort at awareness, compulsive action scatters the energy and the musing, mulling mind dims the spirit:

The energy in the body should not be scattered, the spirit in the mind should not be dimmed. How do you avoid scattering energy? By not acting compulsively. How do you avoid dimming the spirit? By not keeping things on your mind.

Secret Records of Understanding the Way is a rare and remarkable collection of talks by an anonymous Taoist known only by a devotional name. This appears to be the work of the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

The author advises, “Strive to break through material form, empty your body and mind, and become lively and fluid.” He explains that it is possible to mix with society without being infected by materialism. “Develop your character in relation to the outside world as much as you can.”

I have explained the mechanisms of mysticism ... in hopes that each individual may find out what it is to be human, and return home, to permanent realization of the state of fulfillment of higher development....

He assures the seeker that, as long as one doesn't stop walking, one will eventually reach the peak. There is no need to run. What is essential is sincerity:

True practice is total sincerity. It is not a matter of avoiding the world or leaving society. And neither does it depend entirely on deliberate sitting and reciting scriptures. The essential thing is to refine away the false within the true....

Secret Writings on the Mechanisms of Nature is a collection of excerpts from 163 sources. Here we have admonitions and instructions of great Taoist luminaries describing meditation, spiritual alchemy, Yin and Yang, the value of emptying the mind, and lifting the attention to the mystic pass. For example, Master Shouyang says:

When you go into retreat to work on the path of return, you should sit straight in a quiet room and turn your awareness inward. Congeal the spirit on the ground of the gateway of life, aware but not fixated, conscious of it at first, then afterward forgetting it. Empty the mind and solidify the spirit, not sticking

to material form yet not falling into empty oblivion. With open awareness undimmed, consciously nurture silent shining.

He explains that before you realize it, positive energy arises ecstatically, and you are as if intoxicated.

Zhang Sanfeng's Taiji Alchemy Secrets presents the teachings of a semi-mythological alchemist of the Ming dynasty. In spiritual alchemy, once the human mentality is set aside, the celestial mind comes back. Once human desires are purified, the celestial design is always present. The process of spiritual development is likened to the transformation from iron to gold. This text can be hard to decode, as the process of spiritual development is spelled out in minute detail, step-by-step, using elaborately symbolic language, such as, "When spirit enters energy, it forms an embryo; when energy cleaves to spirit, it crystallizes the alchemical pill." **The Anthology on the Cultivation of Realization**, by an unknown author, was discovered and published in 1739. It appears to be of the Ming Dynasty.

The author says that selflessness, objectivity and clarity lead to correct action:

Superior people observe things in terms of principle – right or wrong, good or bad, they deal with them accordingly. This is called selflessness. Selflessness results in objectivity; objectivity results in clarity. Clarity results in dealing with events accurately and comprehending the nature of things.

Each of the texts in this book has its own character. Some are written in complicated symbolic language, and others are utterly simple. Some make observations about physical health, and others focus on spiritual development through meditation. But overall the book impresses on the reader one indelible message – that the disciple is responsible to guard and control his mind and bodily habits to support his meditation effort, while still maintaining harmony in his daily life.



Book reviews express the opinions of the reviewers and not of the publisher.

