

December 2014

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Now Whole
- 6 The Human Form
- 11 A God in Swaddling-Bands
- 16 Keeping a Balance
- 20 The Law of Cause and Effect
- 25 Initiation in This Dark Age
- 26 The Home Stretch
- 32 Searching for God
- 38 Loneliness
- 42 Four Things
- 46 A True and a False Identity
- 50 Book Review

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
Copyright © 2014 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

Articles and poems that appear without sources have been written by the contributors to this magazine.

VOLUME 10 • ISSUE TWELVE • DECEMBER 2014

Now Whole

*When I saw my Master,
all my ways were turned upside down.
I lost everything, became silent,
was no longer aware of things that are seen.
The ground of duality slipped away,
now even the skies are overflowing
with the bliss and happiness of God.
My inner eye has fixed on
That one everlasting face –
I'm astonished!
Absorbed in God,
my words have lost themselves,
and all I held dear has left me.
Bahina's been given the presence
of her Master – she's filled with his love.
Everything else has broken,
but she is now whole,
filled with the One.*

*Bahinabai, Many Voices, One Song
The Poet Mystics of Maharashtra*



The Human Form

Thirty-seven years ago the Voyager One space probe was launched to expand our knowledge of the solar system and now even of interstellar space. During its mission it has been sending back to earth incredible photographs of some of the planets and their moons. And in 1990 it sent back a photograph of the earth itself – showing it as a tiny blue dot, insignificant compared to other stars and planets whirling through space. At the time the American astronomer Carl Sagan had this to say:

We succeeded in taking this picture from deep space, and if you look at it, you will see a dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you've ever heard of, every human being who ever lived, lived out their lives:... Every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilizations, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every hopeful child, every mother and father, every inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there, on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and in triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of the dot on scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner of the dot. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our

posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light.

That photo of our planet, astonishing enough in the history of the earth, is more than matched by something that Guru Nanak said: that this pale blue dot – this theatre of life for all humankind’s achievements and all its follies – was created by the Lord as a home for his devotees. And the rest of human history, momentous though it might be, is nothing but a sideshow. Guru Nanak says in the Adi Granth:

*To nurture the Guru’s devotees
The true Lord has created the earth –
the drama of birth and death is only a sideshow.*

Gurbani Selections I

If we think again about what Carl Sagan had to say about humankind, then it’s hard to believe what so many Masters have said: that man is the top of creation. It’s hard to comprehend that all the atrocities perpetrated by humans on other humans are nothing but a sideshow. And yet, in the greater scheme of things, they are. They are all part of the karmic play. They’re all part of the illusion, something we find so very difficult to understand. And against the backdrop of all this bloodshed and brutality, man still stands out as the top of creation. Why? Because he alone has the potential to become more than man. He alone, in all the creation, has the potential to reach God-realization.

Great Master tells us in one of his letters:

*God made man in His own image. ... It is only in human form
that man is endowed with superior faculties and is better off*

than the lower creation.... 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.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

And if we don't take advantage of being in this human form, then we'll have wasted this precious opportunity. Each of us here came into this life with a fixed destiny, with a parcel of karma which we have to go through. But while all this is going on, we have to always remember our primary purpose: to realize God.

What is the essential factor enabling us to take advantage of this opportunity? We have to find a Master and be accepted by him for initiation. Or rather, a Master has to contact us – the privileged souls marked to be rescued from the endlessly revolving wheel of birth and death. The Masters, perfect God-realized beings, come here to show us the way to go back to our original glorious home and oneness with the Creator that once we knew.

How stupid it would be not to grab at this chance! How grateful we should be to the Masters for finding us and teaching us that we don't belong here. Most importantly, the Masters teach us how to meditate, to contact the Shabd, the stream of divine power that will eventually carry us back to where we really belong.

We are here in this human form first and foremost to meditate. Great Master wrote to a disciple:

Human life is very precious and is due to past good karma. It was not granted to us for rearing children, or for enjoying ourselves. All these functions are performed even by the lowest

animals. The only difference between man and the lower creation is that man's life here was meant for seeing the Lord and reaching the highest spiritual plane, in this life.

Spiritual Gems

The trouble is that we so often forget that the main reason we as satsangis have been given this body is to meditate. We forget because we're still under the control of our minds. It's our minds that keep us unconscious of our purpose in this human form. And the only reminder is that niggling ache inside us that tells us that, even though we may have everything we need for our physical comfort, even though we may have loving families, still we're not really happy here.

Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

Unless the soul merges back into the Lord, we can never have that sense of security or happiness; we can never get release from birth and death. ... That is the only duty of the human form because only in the human body can we travel on that path to reach our destination.

The Lord has designed things so that we can only come back to him if a perfect Master accepts responsibility for us. It's thanks to the Lord's grace that we've been placed in the hands of our Master. And we need to learn the lesson of absolute obedience to him.

Let's face up to our situation here. We are like lost, bewildered children in a dark, dense and dangerous jungle. We long to get out into the light, but we can't, unless we obey his instructions to the letter. Let's face up to the fact that we are utterly dependent on him, that we are helpless to find our way without his support and help and guidance.

What is the reality of our situation? We live here in utter ignorance. What do we know about anything? We talk about God-realization, but what do we understand about God? We read and we talk about the Shabd, but how many of us know what the Shabd is? We talk about the Master being a projection of the Shabd. What does this mean to us? We don't even comprehend what the Master is when he is sitting right there in front of us in his body form. We don't even understand ourselves. We understand nothing and we know nothing. All that we know is that there's a mysterious hunger inside us crying out to be satisfied. And it *will* be satisfied – thanks to the grace of the Lord who is calling us home.

It is all his grace. The Lord is within us and he is pulling us towards him. But still, he wants our effort. This too is part of the divine design for our return journey. We have to have a Master, and we have to do what he tells us. But he's not demanding any great achievements from us. All he asks is that we try, that we at least sit and give him a tenth of our time.

And we never need to feel distressed that our meditation is too poor to meet the challenge of becoming God-realized. Of course it's too poor. But our reaching our final destination doesn't depend just on our efforts. It can't. Look at what we are. Can anybody really think we could make this quantum leap from pathetic human frailty to spiritual perfection without a great deal of help? That's what we have a Master for. It's his job to guide our baby steps, teach us and guide us all the way, nurture our inadequate efforts until we can eventually cross the great divide between our flawed humanity and divinity.

And we will cross that great divide because that is what has been ordained for us. That will happen, with our Master's grace.



A God in Swaddling-Bands

In *The Book of Mirdad* we read a proof text of the human condition:

Man is a god in swaddling-bands. Time is a swaddling-band. Space is a swaddling-band. Flesh is a swaddling-band, and likewise all the senses and the things perceived therewith. The mother knows too well that the swaddling-bands are not the babe. The babe, however, knows it not.

The babe knows it not. Only a greater being, a mature being, looking from above, sees the true identity of what lies concealed within layer upon layer of matter.

Swaddles are long rectangular strips of cloth aimed to restrict movement. A swaddle can also refer to a husk or a shell that covers and conceals a young soft pea or a bean. We identify with the covering and not the core. As all spiritual Masters explain, we are body, mind and soul. The physical body is a bipedal soul vehicle, nothing more. It struts its needy stuff upon the stage of life and then is no more.

If by an accident all the flesh were to be ripped from your face down to your shoulders, who would you see looking back at you in the mirror? Who are you now? Just a lump of flesh and automatic biological processes: neither black nor white, male nor female, old nor young, handsome nor plain. Everything on the outer layer you ever identified with and mentally prided yourself in, everything you tried to uphold and sustain in the face of time, just stripped away. And when the heart stops pumping blood through the lump of flesh and bone, there is 'death'. But what was 'life'? Who are you really? As Arthur Koestler famously put it, who is the 'ghost in the machine'?

Only one question then remains: with the precious time left are we going to put all our energy into exploring that part of ourselves which dies, or the part of ourselves that never dies? It is a spiritual no-brainer.

It is so obvious, and yet we find ourselves drowning in ignorance and distraction. Why? We must look first to this outermost layer of flesh and form, the frontier of maya, where the mind first meets creation through the five senses. Like a physical touch screen, the senses spark mental impressions of hot and cold, bitter and sweet, light and dark, beautiful and ugly, attraction and aversion, pleasure and pain. These link to emotion, which is the mind's reaction to the sensations of the body and senses. It is an ever-projecting screen of duality that is automatic and compulsive, and constitutes our false reality. The soul, our true identity, is totally lost behind layers of body and mind.

The Katha Upanishad has a famous image of a soft and delicate princess (soul) inside a carriage (the body), being drawn along by five powerful horses (the senses and passions), and all the while the carriage driver (higher mind or will) seems asleep on the job and barely has a grip on the reins. The princess is borne helplessly along, banging and crashing toward what can only be a collision with death itself. The point is that, while the wild and undisciplined horses are in control, the princess is just a silent passenger, her presence unobserved.

Quite simply, nothing can change until this process is reversed. The higher mind, empowered by the currents of soul (through meditation), must get a firm grasp on the senses, restore control and harmony, and gradually become conscious of who is within the carriage.

It is unbelievable how weak we have become. Few can resist even the grossest of worldly temptations, from food to digital stimulation to sensual overindulgence. We have to face reality and ask ourselves, 'who is running my life?' If it is true that all we are is soul, then is it

not true that so many of us have allowed our lower mind to drag our attention downward and outward into the world and scatter it in every direction? It is time to take back our innate spiritual power and to realize our royal birthright.

First steps first. We cannot expect to reach for the celestial stars when we stand on a weak and shifting foundation. In his classic *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm ends with a chapter called “The Practice of Love”. It is a bit of a shocker for those expecting a self-help quick fix. Fromm says that in order to master love (a spiritual quality), like any art, be it archery, carpentry or meditation, four things are required: discipline, concentration, patience and supreme concern.

Without self-discipline and the ability to delay gratification, we have almost no chance. A strong and clear mind learns to say “No!” to the endless demands of the senses and has the willpower to stick to the proven principles of spirituality. Discipline creates a strong and stable pipeline through which the potent spiritual currents (let alone emotions) can be channelized to even greater spiritual heights. The bird of soul flies back to the Beloved on the wings of discipline and devotion. Without either one it will crash to the ground. There is no spirituality in being an emotional wreck and tumbling from one drama to the next. As Baba Ji puts it, “Make love your strength not your weakness.”

Concentration, in essence, means to take our scattered attention from the many to the one. Our culture encourages us to multi-task – to do many things at once and to do each of them poorly. Instead we are now to put our full attention into one task at a time, and in meditation to train our attention to stick to a single focus.

Let’s think about patience. We are conditioned to expect quick results. However, nothing of any worth in this world has ever come without long, patient and persistent effort. The pay-off for

discipline and patience is long term; the pay-off for laziness is now. We literally have to remake ourselves in the image of the Lord, and yet we grow despondent if we don't arrive there after a few weeks of trying. Sant Mat is a marathon not a sprint. It is the ego that demands instant results.

The fourth requirement: supreme concern. Faced with all the legitimate and demanding concerns of modern life, we have to factor out the less important and focus on the single most important concern. One cannot be a casual or part-time satsangi. Every single aspect of life has to be made to revolve around the axis of meditation and a vow to attain oneness. When asked his secret, the greatest decathlete of all time Daley Thompson had this to say:

I firmly believe that in order to get the most out, you've got to put everything in. Put all your eggs in one basket. The way I see it there are only four things you've got to worry about: know where you want to get to, plan how to get there, prepare well, and then persist. That's all there is to it.

And transposing this on to a spiritual level, Mirdad asks, "How does a saint attain to saintliness except by purging his blood-stream of every wish and thought incongruous to saintliness, and then directing it with an unwavering will to seek no other end but saintliness?"

The operative word is 'will'. We are to take back control of our lives with clear purpose and courageous discipline so that we can steer and direct the indwelling god, the god in swaddling bands, back to his true home.





Maharaj Sawan Singh

Keeping a Balance

At some point in our lives each of us will be faced with a major life change: an event that alters our life in such a way that we are never quite the same. Major life changes could include moving house, the death of a loved one, divorce, promotion, demotion, retirement, or perhaps initiation on to a spiritual path.

When these changes occur, how do we best deal with them? In order to explore this question, let us first have a close look as to who we really are in this world and what it is that drives us to get up every morning and play out the part that has been allotted to us by destiny.

Someone once remarked that “if the stars came out only once in a lifetime, all of us would be out to see them and would be left speechless by the grandeur of that sight ... but when they shine every night, we go for months without ever looking up”.

Now we have this truly remarkable gift of human life, which we generally seem to take for granted, and yet even the most worldly of us know that we will not live in these bodies forever. Still, so many of us seem to be caught unawares when it is our time to leave the body.

Throughout human history, though, some individuals from all walks of life have committed themselves to living in a spiritual way, understanding the bigger picture regarding human life and living their lives compassionately and selflessly. As satsangis, we act on the Master's instructions to meditate every single day and to structure our lives completely in terms of the vows we have taken at initiation. We do this all as an act of faith in the Master. Our hearts tell us that to act as he instructs is the right course of action, even though our minds cannot prove it. This faith slowly enables us to develop our spiritual nature to its fullest potential, which includes discovering

our own true purpose in life, and learning how to experience love, joy, peace and fulfilment while still in these human bodies. It enables us to unwrap our real selves.

The famous French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's well-known saying that "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience – we are spiritual beings having a human experience" crisply illustrates that as humans, we have to travel two pathways in parallel to make a success of our lives. There is the easier pathway of the world and the difficult pathway of the spiritual life. Followers of Sant Mat need to balance their lives between these two pathways – fulfilling all their worldly duties and responsibilities and at the same time following the spiritual path.

Sant Mat is the path of the householder, not of the renunciant. And it is most certainly a path of action. The Masters advocate engaging with the world – but there should be a measured engagement. However, perhaps because of the strong work ethic that has been built into so many of us, this often means being intensely engaged. If we are not doing 110 percent of our best, then our guilty conscience nags us to do better. We make inordinate sacrifices to achieve worldly success, often working excessively long hours to the detriment of our family relationships, adversely affecting our health, and often resulting in completely neglecting, or relegating to the back burner of our lives, our spiritual practice.

Unfortunately, a modern lifestyle generally does not encourage stillness, reflection and simple living. We are tempted to buy, buy, buy, and to be more and more involved in projects: personal, professional and social. Speed and efficiency, bigger and better, latest and greatest: these are the values constantly thrust before us. The end result is less free time and more stress and distress.

To achieve this fine balance between our worldly and spiritual personas, a simple working life is all that is expected of us. We have to do our duty in every sphere of life, but always remembering the true nature of things in the world. Everything here is perishable and short-lived. We need to understand that we are only trustees, custodians on behalf of the Lord of all that we have – body, family and possessions. Nothing can, and nothing does, belong to us.

Our main work is our meditation and living in the atmosphere of meditation. We need more disengagement, not more engagement. We need more free time for God's work.

The Masters keep emphasizing the necessity of pruning away at those parts of our worldly engagements that are surplus to fulfilling our responsibilities, so that we can have a more relaxed lifestyle and achieve the balance between our worldly and spiritual lives.

Maharaj Charan Singh gave us clear guidelines when he told us that in whatever circumstances we might live, our meditation should be our main concern and should not be sacrificed to anything. And Baba Ji has said that our yardstick for anything in our lives should be this: will it take me towards the Lord or away from him? We have to live in the world to pay off certain karmas and we have to meditate. And we need to find a balance between the two.

In *Sar Bachan Poetry* Soami Ji poses this question: “The mind has created worldly entanglements – why have you strayed into this net?” Until we come across a Master, we think that this net, this physical world is all that there is, and that involvement in this net is the purpose of life.

Only when we meet a Master, do we start to discover that things are very different. As Soami Ji says in a shabd:

*You are a child of Sat Purush, the true Lord,
And once you were a resident of that eternal home.
But Kal has put a noose around your neck.*

If we want what our Master is offering, we need to live a different kind of life. The absolute acid test of our character and resolve is whether or not we use this opportunity of a human life to escape from Kal's noose.

The Masters tell us that the human form is a rare privilege because only in this form can we get initiation and practise meditation to access the Shabd – that Shabd which is our only means to escape from the Creation and return to our real home. Are we taking advantage of this rare opportunity or are we allowing ourselves to be distracted from our real work? The sad truth is that it is far easier to look for outward solutions than struggle day after day with our inner practice of meditation. It has been said that if we had to choose between uniting ourselves with God or hearing a lecture about it, most people would look for a good seat!

And while we are wasting time and dallying, there is a sweet melody echoing just within the threshold of our mind's eye, too faint, perhaps, to hear – until we can focus our attention fully within. “Come home, come home,” our Master is whispering. “Let me shower a little grace on you – and things will change forever.”

Everyone to some degree has worldly responsibilities, but with courage, conviction and hard work, there is no reason why we cannot succeed in turning our attention inward. Baba Ji continually tells us that we can achieve this in this very life. If it were not possible, the Master would not have initiated us. If we believe he is the Master, then we must also believe that what he tells us is the truth.



The Law of Cause and Effect

Consider, if you will, the law of cause and effect. We can observe this law in action every day in front of our eyes, yet we seldom give it much thought. But in fact, all aspects of life are governed by it. Every action has some result or consequence. When we initiate an action, we set in motion forces that must resolve themselves, and there is no stopping that process.

If, for example, we take a rifle and pull the trigger, we have created an action. The gun goes off and the bullet goes hurtling off at a speed that renders it invisible to our eyes. At this stage we could perhaps walk away and think nothing more of it. But the truth is that there is still a bullet hurtling through the air, and it will travel on a predictable path and eventually strike the earth at some equally predictable point. As soon as we pull that trigger we set in motion a train of events that will end in a bullet striking its target, whether that target was intended or not. Furthermore, once that trigger has been pulled, it is too late to reconsider the action. It is done. We cannot call that bullet back once the rifle has been fired. Unfortunately life does not provide us with an “undo” button!

In life we are constantly generating actions without giving them much thought. Most especially we don't give much thought to the consequences of these actions.

It is very interesting, and somewhat disturbing, to realize that popular culture has it that even if you do horrendous things, you can “get away with it” if nobody catches you or can prove later that you did it. There was once a survey taken in the UK in which they asked people, if they knew for sure that they would get away with it, would they commit crimes like rape or murder? The result was an astonishing 65 percent who said yes, they would.

If you doubt the accuracy of this finding, cast your mind back to any major war that has occurred in the past or that is even going on right now. In every armed conflict there have been atrocities committed, normally by both sides. Rape, torture and murder on a massive scale are common in wartime, and it is because the rule of law has broken down to the extent that people consider it unlikely that they will ever be held to account for their actions.

Is this type of thinking justified or valid? The answer is a definite and emphatic no. We may be deceived into thinking that because we cannot always observe consequence, there may be none – but it is a scientifically verifiable fact that there is always consequence. It may be obscure, it may be delayed, it may take on forms that we don't always recognize, but consequences are as inescapable as night following day.

So the moment that we actually recognize this as a fact of life, is the moment we need to start taking a closer look at our own behaviour. If we start to see that every action generates an appropriate reaction, then, if we're smart, we'll start to think that it would be a really good idea to avoid all actions that will cause us pain and grief and only do things that will have pleasant or positive results.

But even though we may have the wisdom to understand the law of cause and effect and its all-pervading influence on our lives, we may discover that this is not enough. What we need is the additional wisdom to know that once we have erred, we can rectify our thinking and never make the same mistake again. What is it, therefore, that we lack in our understanding that will allow us to solve this thorny problem?

Well, it is not sufficient merely to avoid those negative actions that have undesirable reactions. Otherwise spending our lives doing good works would be all that was necessary to secure eternal happiness. But, as Hazur Maharaj Ji often used to say, that constitutes exchanging rusty iron chains for shiny golden ones. We remain bound to the

consequences of our actions, and to the cycle of birth and death. We need to find a way of life that will lead us towards an ideal condition. And what might that be?

Many people consider a life of luxury and indulgence as an ideal condition. But if you take a closer look, these people who find themselves in the limelight all the time – the so-called glitterati – are far from happy and lead far from idyllic lives. How many of them commit suicide or die of drug overdoses? How many of them have multiple divorces? How many of them have children who are so clearly disturbed that they are constantly getting into trouble? These are obviously not the people whose lifestyle we want to imitate.

So what then? A clear criterion for success is that factor that is most frequently misunderstood: happiness. But how can we have happiness that doesn't have a negative payback? First we need to have a look at how we define happiness.

Our biggest mistake is to think that sensory indulgence provides happiness. Indulgence in fine foods or sex, strong drink, drugs and so on may have pleasurable elements, but the pleasures that indulgence brings have serious shortcomings. Firstly, they only last for a short time, and secondly, they all have a heavy price attached.

We know from experience that no matter how many of these things we indulge in, we always end up just as unhappy, or more so, than we were before. So where are we going to look for something that will meet our innermost needs, not just for a short time, but forever? What are the requirements for us to find lasting solutions? Our thinking is constrained by our experience in this life. We have only known the short-lived and temporary phenomena of this material, physical world. So to start looking for something which we have not yet experienced is a tall order.

Let's look at this from another point of view: So far we've been talking from the perspective of logic and reason. But the fact is that even before we were clear on the issues at stake here, we were already searching and seeking. At its root, this thing that was driving us was the soul's unhappiness at being in this world, at being separated from its source.

Now, we have to admit that we would never have figured all this out on our own. It was only when we came into contact with a perfect living Master that some semblance of sense started clarifying the issues for us. Up to that time we thought there was something wrong with us and that we were all alone in the world with an apparent dementia that was driving us to go poking around in all sorts of strange places, like mad people in search of a mystery that even we could not adequately explain.

Enter the Master. Eventually we came to his satsang. There we learned several new concepts – including the practical application of cause and effect in our lives. In other words, karma. This law of karma is inexorable. Down to the last detail, the universe records everything, and it must all balance out in the end. It is said that “nature abhors a vacuum”. Well, it abhors an energy imbalance even more. So we must try to behave in a way that is calculated to incur the least amount of karma.

Ultimately the task ahead of us is quite simple. The Masters say that on the one hand you have the path of the world, and on the other hand you have the path of the mystics. The path of the world you are well acquainted with, but what do you know about the mystic way? What lies in this other direction?

The Masters have a different vision of how it all works. They say firstly that there is most certainly a God who created everything, and remains at the core or centre of it all. Absolutely nothing escapes his

notice, and nothing moves without his say-so. Secondly, they tell us that the Lord manifests himself throughout the universe in the form of a dynamic power, Shabd, through which he created it all, and now sustains it. The Masters tell us that we are not this body, nor are we this mind. Our true nature is that of soul. They tell us that the soul is a particle of God, and until and unless it is reunited with its true Father, it will continue to be miserable in this world. They say that to return to our Father's house, we need to contact this power and merge with it. And it is for this purpose that the Masters have descended to our level.

The Masters exist in flesh and blood, and we can relate to them, and this makes it possible for them to teach us and show us the way. They tell us that the first step towards achieving our goal is to gather our attention and focus it at the eye centre. Our Master advises us to practise simran or repetition at the eye centre. He tells us that when we manage to focus the attention at the eye centre, the door will open, and he, in his Radiant Form, will put us into conscious touch with that power within, which will cleanse the soul and make it fit to continue its spiritual journey into the regions beyond.

The Master teaches us that by focusing our attention at the eye centre, we can invoke the grace of the Lord to such a degree that we can rise up into an awareness of a far more sublime condition, without any negative consequences. By now, if we have the initiation of a perfect living Master, we know exactly what he expects of us. And he is not asking us to do anything too difficult: just live a decent life, and meditate every day. That's all. Live a calm and untroubled life, and attain stillness within. Then see the magic begin!



Initiation in This Dark Age

A Selection from *The Path of the Masters*

In this Kal Yuga, the Dark or 'Iron' Age, the ills of life upon this planet have greatly multiplied. Hence, the mercy and loving sympathy of Sat Purush, the great Father, has led him to meet the willing-minded more than halfway. Now practically every person who feels inclined toward the Satguru and wishes to follow his path is accepted by him. To reach that momentous decision is the one thing of paramount importance in all one's life. What is the result? Many initiates, entering the path half-heartedly and but ill-prepared, naturally fall by the wayside when assailed by severe temptation. But what is the harm? Some good has been done. The precious seed has been lodged in their minds and their souls. Sooner or later they all must return to the path. ... In the meantime they have been greatly helped in their upward struggles. This is done out of great mercy and loving-kindness of the Satguru himself and the Supreme One.

The main point is that each individual who gets initiation, after ages of pain and struggle, has at last come to the decision to place his destiny in the hands of the Guru, and of his own free will and accord has asked for initiation. The final liberation of that soul is absolutely assured. Nothing in the universe can possibly defeat that end. It is only a question of a little time. What does it matter if that soul does stumble frequently before he learns to run alone?

One more significant point must not be overlooked. The critic has no right to demand perfection in the character and conduct of every initiate. ... The important point is that if they do stumble and fall, they fall with their faces towards the light.



The Home Stretch

Somebody once complained to Hazur Maharaj Ji that the path was very difficult. “No,” he said, “it’s not difficult. It’s just long.” For those of us who are a bit short of patience, that’s precisely what may make it seem difficult: it can be very long and very slow. And many are the times when we get quite disheartened and wonder whether our shaky meditation will ever bring us to the end of our journey.

Well, whether the path is long or just plain difficult, this is certainly not the time to start losing hope – because we might not have all that much time left. Many satsangis went into a bit of a flutter some time ago when Baba Ji implied that satsangis shouldn’t be thinking in terms of going home in four lifetimes – there’s only this one lifetime.

Only this one lifetime? That might be a wonderful thought – or quite a scary thought! Are we ready for this?

In a way, we’ve always known about the possibility that we could go back in one lifetime. Back in Soami Ji’s time this was what he was saying: that people could be initiated only if they could work off their karmas in this one life.

When one comes to the satsang of a Saint, he finds out the extent of his indebtedness to Kal. If his debt is not so very heavy and can be repaid in this life, he is accepted as fit for initiation.

Sar Bachan

This means that we couldn’t be initiated at all if it weren’t possible for us to go home at the end of this very lifetime. In the past we always felt comforted by the prospect of a possible four lives ahead of us – a maximum of four lives. This left us free to think: “Oh well, if

I can't get it right this time, there's always the next life. The Master can always send me back to try again next time."

But the fact is that no Master wants to send his disciples back. Great Master tells us in letter number 11 in *Dawn of Light* that once a soul has been initiated, he or she will be reborn only if they lose faith in the path, or if they do foul deeds or have very low desires. So if satsangis have faith in the path and are not doing foul deeds or have low desires, then they might not be sent back for another birth. This could be their very last life! After so many eons of birth and rebirth in the creation, after running our very long race here, we could be on the home stretch. And some of us may have very little time left.

So how should that little remaining time be spent? Let's consider this first in worldly terms. Let's imagine we have some crucial deadline looming over us – say, a big exam that we really need to pass to ensure a secure future. Ordinarily, what would we do to prepare for that exam? For one, we'd push aside all non-essential demands on our time and devote ourselves to our necessary work. We would use our time well. We would be clear about what preparations we need to make, and then put our heads down and work to meet our study deadlines. We would focus on what's important for us to pass that exam.

So here we have an even more important deadline coming up. How focused are we on it? Well, first of all, it would help to be clear about how seriously we want this to be our last lifetime. (Assuming that we have any choice in the matter.)

What would we do if the Master were to issue an invitation to us to leave this physical world for good and travel with him into the inner regions towards our true home? How many of us would jump at the opportunity to leave, this very moment? Or would there be anything that would make us hesitate? And if so, what would that be? The answer to that question might be revealing. It might just be a pointer

to where our attachments lie, those attachments that could be holding us down here

But we're talking now as if the choice is ours, whether we want to leave or not. Which of course it's not. Our Master may well have already decided that he's going to take us out at the end of this life. So perhaps what remains to be seen is whether we will go straight home with our Master, or whether we'll have to spend long ages in some inner region, doing the work we could have done here. And perhaps, as far as this is concerned, we do have some choice. So where do we go from here?

For one thing, we need to cut out unnecessary distractions and use our time well. Perhaps our social commitments and activities would become a bit less important to us if we were convinced our time was running out. And perhaps we would give more time and attention to our meditation.

Then, are we unfailingly strict in our obedience to our four principles – to be strict vegetarians and to avoid any indulgence in alcohol and recreational drugs, to live a clean moral life and to give a tenth of our time to meditation? Or do we think 90 percent obedience is good enough? Obedience is a big thing for us, especially now if we're on the home stretch. We haven't got time left to create any unnecessary karmas.

We may want with all our hearts to obey our Satguru in everything. We may be absolutely sincere in our intentions. And in some areas of our lives obedience may be fairly easy for us – certainly as far as the first two principles are concerned. And on the whole we probably do try to live moral lives. But it's that fourth principle, meditation, which brings us face to face every single day with our own inadequacy. We may try our absolute best, but nothing ever

feels good enough. And it's true that even after many, many years it may remain a struggle.

But then, let's try to remind ourselves every single day that we're not asked to succeed. We're only asked to do it. And let's trust that it's important because our Master tells us so.

If we do find meditation a struggle, we should try to remember things that Baba Ji and also other Masters have said, which should help us to be more positive about it. For example, Baba Ji has told us to attach ourselves to the effort, not the results. This shifts the whole focus. In other words, we can take pleasure in the effort itself, without looking for any reward. The effort itself becomes our reward. We can get satisfaction solely from the effort – so much so that we never want any day to pass without doing our meditation. It becomes an essential part of our day, even if we keep sitting in darkness.

We may see our meditation as worthless. We may get up from our sitting, day after day, feeling distressed because we fell asleep or because we struggled to keep our simran going for more than a few minutes at a time. And yet, we're told, that even that shoddy, ineffectual effort has value.

The Masters tell us that no meditation, no matter how poor it seems, is ever wasted, but is gaining interest in our personal account and is being saved for us. As long as we make the effort, whether successful or not, our Master can work with that – to clear karmas and break down our attachments.

Of course, there's also this to consider: perhaps we are being *made* to feel that we are failing in our meditation. Can you imagine how self-satisfied we might start to feel if we started seeing light or hearing sound every time we sat down to meditate? It's something the ego would just love to latch on to as proof of our oh-so-advanced spirituality. Signs of progress in our meditation

might just be very bad for us! The ego can feed on absolutely anything to continue its work of stopping us from merging back into the Father.

This means, then, that no matter how good or bad our meditation is, all we need to do is keep doing it, out of humble obedience, just as an expression of our submission to our Master, our love for him. We don't know what our meditation is doing. We don't know what's happening when we try to keep our simran going. But it must be important.

If you speak to any satsangis returning from Dera and ask them if Baba Ji emphasized any particular message, the chances are they'll say he impressed upon them the urgency of our spiritual work, the importance of not wasting time. If it's true that we could be approaching the exit gate and could be reaching there quite soon, then whatever time we have left is important. And what better could we do than our meditation – for at least a tenth of that remaining time, if not more? And what does it matter that we're being kept in darkness? At the time of our death we may reap all the rewards of our years of effort. We have this firm assurance in one of the satsangs of Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh. This passage appears in the third volume of *With the Three Masters*:

If, in spite of meditation, a devotee has not been able to rend the veil (of darkness within), it does not mean that he should give up meditation or think that he has made no progress. It is his past karmas that are standing in his way. His exertions never go to waste. When the past karmas are wiped off at the time of death, the Satguru will give him the return for his meditation and the veil will be lifted. Everyone should therefore continue his devotion, whether progress is discernible or not.

Here Maharaj Jagat Singh is telling us is that the effort of keeping up our meditation, year after year, decade after decade, is what is important – not seeing for ourselves the results of that effort. What we need here is to trust our Master when he tells us that he can work with that effort and that it's earning his grace. After all, only his grace can rescue us from our imprisonment in this world. We ourselves are helpless to free ourselves. And we *will* be freed because that is his will. He has already made sure of our release.

In *Spiritual Letters* Baba Jaimal Singh says that our return home is inevitable.

*Whatever is to be done has already been done, and that is what will happen – man does not do anything by himself. Believe implicitly, my son, the Satguru has told us that man does nothing – only the means for doing appears to come through him. ...
Whatever is to happen has already happened.*

Whatever is to be done has already been done. Whatever is to happen has already happened. Regardless of our failings, we will go home. That destiny is fixed.



Searching for God

When we look at the world around us with its splendid variety of life, and at the night sky with all its magnificent stars, galaxies and constellations, can any of us doubt the existence of a Creator?

It should be obvious that this universe didn't just make itself. There must have been a power that brought this creation into existence. And we cannot but be aware that this master designer, this master craftsman, this Creator, whoever he is, possesses an incredible intelligence – far beyond anything we can conceive of. There is a perfectly logical, rational sequence and design throughout the creation: the splendour of flowers that bloom in their seasons, the symmetry of a snowflake, how a tiny seed can develop into a giant tree. We just have to open our eyes and look.

But for us, the greatest miracle of all must be the human body. And here we are not referring only to the physical nature of the body, but also to the spiritual.

In *Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine*, the author says that it is through the human body that one can find the entire creation and the vast spiritual regions. The higher the region, the vaster its size, the greater its splendour, the more joyous its bliss. A disciple can, while still in this body, find the truth for himself regarding past prophets and saints, gods and goddesses, paradises, hells and heavens. He can unfold the divine mysteries, and experience the Creator himself.

The problem is, though, that there are so many conflicting opinions about the nature of this Creator that we are seeking. We don't know who or what to believe. How do we get to know this being or have a relationship with him?



Maharaj Charan Singh

But before we continue in our search for God, let's look at our life situation for a moment. When we reflect on this we normally focus our attention on our present specific birth. We never take into account that we have been around a very long time. Our time here, whether 50 or 100 years, may be a nano second compared to the length of time we have been in this creation. The mystics tell us that we have been here since the creation started – not just since the last Big Bang, which scientists estimate happened about thirteen and a half billion years ago. (Let's assume for the moment that the theoretical Big Bang actually happened.) We would have then been through all the Big Bangs, through many cycles of creation. We have been through every possible species of life; we have been kings, beggars, killers, peasants; we have been male and female. And all this time we have been unaware of our true essence, our true nature.

This is the message that the saints have tried to convey to humanity since the dawn of time: you are living in a state of unconsciousness, entirely dominated by ignorance. How did this happen? Largely because we have become encased in mind, which has given us a false sense of self: the ego.

The word "I", together with the words, "me", "my", "mine" are the most frequently used in everyday language. But in reality when we use the word "I", we are referring to something that doesn't really exist – our greatest delusion. The physicist Albert Einstein referred to this condition as 'an optical delusion of consciousness'. So we have created this artificial structure of who we think we are. And we are so proud of this identity.

Now what eventually becomes of this little "I"? When we die the ego implodes – that part of the ego anyway which has identified itself with the body. This image of ourselves crumbles. Once we pass away, when we are floating above our bodies in a hospital, or an old age

home, or at the scene of an accident, we realize that we never were the body, because the body is a separate thing lying down there. Everything we associated with the body no longer exists. We identified with an illusion. We identified with the wrong “I”.

Now, running parallel with this false identity is another problem. We can call it division or duality. When we come into the world the process of division begins. We are separated into a gender; we are given a name. We live in a specific country. We call ourselves German, Indian, English, Chinese. We divide ourselves on social, cultural and ethnic grounds. And we also divide ourselves into different levels of society according to our wealth, our religion or our language. And so the division continues. By this process of division we think that we are little islands of humanity. We are separate from everything around us. Individual. Exclusive.

And this is the delusion we labour under. All the saints from the dawn of time have tried to impress upon us our interconnectedness, our unity with everything around us – not only with our fellow human beings, but with the universe – with the animals, the trees, the flowers, and the forest. We are a particle of the whole, all part of one divine consciousness. The divinity that is at the core of our being is the same divinity that illumines the sun, the moon and the stars.

It is only when we proceed to the higher spiritual realms that this oneness will become evident – when we realize our oneness with the Creator. But now we’re still searching for that Creator.

Following a spiritual path is the most challenging, demanding task we will ever undertake. It is complex and involved. We have enormous difficulty coping even in this physical realm. We have difficulty finding our car in the parking lot after shopping at the supermarket! How can we possibly cope on the higher planes without a guide? For this we need a true Master of the highest order.

In *The Path of the Masters*, we're told of a few infallible ways to distinguish a real Master from the many who may pose as such. Among these:

- Real Masters never charge for their services
- A true Master is self-supporting - he is always a giver, never a beggar.
- He will not perform miracles to attract followers.
- Genuine Masters teach and practise the inner path of the sound current.

There are other criteria you could apply, but these are the main ones. And, most important, he must be living while we are living. We can only learn from, and love, someone at our own level.

When we find a Master, this is where our search ends – till he himself guides us further. For us, the Master represents God on earth. He is his emissary. He has merged his consciousness with that of the Lord. And he has been authorized by God to help those who are seeking liberation. His job is to awaken us to our inner self, that spark that is of the same essence as the Creator.

Sant Mat refers to this as Shabd or the sound current. What is keeping this body alive is the sound current, that God-part of us. Disconnect this life force and the body dies. So we are always, if unconsciously, connected to this life force.

At the time of initiation the Master energizes this connection so that we can begin our spiritual journey. And this is the means of conveyance out of here. This is the conveyance that brought us here and, with the aid of the Master, it will get us out of here. This stream of consciousness will propel us through the different levels of consciousness, back to our original home. When we attain the level of superconsciousness we are eligible to merge back into our source.

Then there will be no more separation. But we need to consciously connect with this sound current.

At the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London, there is the prime meridian. It is the 0-degree line of longitude, marked by a metal bar embedded in the ground. This meridian separates east from west. And when tourists visit the observatory they like to have their photos taken astride this bar, which means they have one foot in the east and the other foot in the west.

This is similar to the state that most of us find ourselves in. We have one foot in the physical and one foot in the spiritual. We want to get to the spiritual, but we have strong roots in this physical realm which drag us back. Where do we stand on this path? Are we serious or just going through the motions, leaving all to the Master? At some stage on this path, we have to step over that meridian and cross over entirely to the spiritual hemisphere.

At the time of initiation we entered into a contract with the Guru. We promised him that Sant Mat would be the main focus of our lives. Everything else would be secondary. Can we say in all honesty that we have complied with the provisions of that contract? If not, then it is time to reassess our position and get our priorities right.



When our soul grows weary in its search for the Lord, and is anxious to return to its home, when our eyes long to see the Lord and we hunger for him, then, in order to fulfil our intense desire, he incarnates as a perfect Master or Satguru. In order to release the seekers from their bonds he himself comes as a redeemer.

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

Loneliness

When we feel all alone, whether we're actually alone or in the midst of a crowd (and sometimes we can feel intensely alone while surrounded by people!), we can be forgiven for feeling that we are lost in an endless desert, a wasteland bereft of any emotional fulfilment. We feel that nobody is our true friend – no one will understand or care for us.

We may be forgiven for imagining that the resolution to this feeling may be found in relationships with others in this material creation. We may seek the fulfilment of our unrequited desires in sensory indulgence of all kinds. But this does not give us lasting fulfilment. At best we may feel a brief sense of pleasure, only to be plunged once more into an abyss of loneliness and depression. Once more we are faced with the dark demons of our deep unspoken need.

Could it be that we ourselves do not even really understand what this need might be and what it would take to satisfy it? Because no matter how hard we try, we seem to come no closer to the solution. The worst of it is that every time our efforts fail and we find ourselves once more having to confront our deep sense of loneliness, it seems to be worse than before; we feel more desperate, and our options seem to have decreased somehow. We feel diminished.

Why is it that we seem to fail continuously, and our inner need just seems to get more and more intense? What is this nameless craving that simply will not go away? The fact that we seem to get no satisfaction from even the best that the world has to offer gives us cause to wonder... When this has gone on long enough, we start to doubt ourselves and we start to think that in fact the fault must lie with us. After all, everyone else seems to be happy and contented. Only we seem to be the one who is sitting alone in the dark, feeling out of place in this material world.

What is it that separates us from the rest of humanity? In most things we are no different from everyone else, but in one important respect we seem to deviate from the common fold. We have ceased to believe that there really is anything out there for us. We have stopped believing that we will ever find happiness in this world.

And so now, exhausted after so long a journey, we have arrived at the station where we have lost faith in the pursuit of happiness in this material world, but we have still not managed to assuage the profound need within us. In fact, it could be said that only now are we actually acknowledging this need and are trying to come to terms with it. What is it this need actually? Where does it come from? Perhaps this defines what we mean by a seeker: one who has arrived at this state and now seeks to discover what his need is, where it comes from and where it is leading him.

So we search high and low. We read piles of books, we investigate religion and philosophy. We research arcane and obscure sects and beliefs in the hope that they will provide answers. But no: in each case, after we find something interesting, something that has potential – after the brief initial excitement that here is something that might be the answer – we lapse into the old familiar depression when we realize that this too is just another empty vessel, devoid of any substance or value in our quest. Eventually we get to the point where our shoulders sag and we finally reach the stage where we say, “I give up!” It seems that once again we are mistaken; perhaps this existence really is all there is. Perhaps ours was just a vain hope, a fool’s hope ...

But the truth is that there is an answer. We merely needed someone to point out that truth to us, to show us the reality of our situation. In fact, there is an ancient tradition which teaches us that our ancestry is not of this world.

We do not actually belong here. We are descended from the very Creator of the universe. We are the sons and daughters of the divine One. Our personal truth is not this body, not this mind. The true essence of our being is an immortal entity that is soul or spirit.

Way back in the beginning, we were with the Father and in a state of bliss. For reasons that we cannot now remember, we went out from our Father's house and entered the realm of his creation. We went happily, exploring all the wonders that the Creator had put there for us to discover. It was all according to his plan for our further spiritual development. So on we went, experiencing the various regions, until we entered the realm of mind. Here we started taking on coverings in order to function in these dense and dark places. As we penetrated further into this environment, our connection to the Father became weaker and weaker as our attention was absorbed in all the phenomena that we encountered and which so entranced us. At last we entered the physical domain, and the assault of the senses on our soul and mind so overwhelmed us that we totally lost any conscious connection with the Divine. We felt utterly alone.

Now the souls, covered by various layers of mind and matter, became responsible for the consequences of their actions, and so began the long cycle of birth and death, of reincarnation through all the various types of bodies into which the soul may come in this world. In the context of exploring all the possibilities for pleasure and satisfaction, the soul has pretty much gone through every different kind of experience that is possible in the creation. And although we do not, for the most part, carry any memories of our past lives, we suspect that there is nothing out there that we have not at some time been or done before.

So it is that we come to the point where we feel as though we have run into a metaphysical brick wall. We have exhausted our resources. Our intellect has finally admitted defeat. It is very much akin to the story of

the prodigal son in the Bible, where he finds himself at last exhausted, bankrupt (both physically and morally) and literally face-down in the pig swill, and wonders to himself: “How has it come to this?”

And just as in the biblical story, we now start to search for greater meaning, knowing at last that the world’s offerings are extremely limited and do not meet our soul’s requirements. We have consciously entered the state of longing. Initially we do not understand this feeling: it is the soul longing to return to the Father.

While we turned our backs on the Father and forgot about him, he never forgot us. All these long ages he has been keeping his eye on us, guiding us through the pathways of the creation, so that we could learn that there is nothing here to substitute for him. Even with the whole universe at our feet, our soul’s longing did not decrease one iota. The lesson has been learned. The wandering soul has turned around after eons of journeying through time and space, and is now homeward bound.

One could say that the moment we started seeking, we were destined to be found. And so it came to pass that we found ourselves finally on the road leading to our true home. In the final analysis we are not really alone. It seems that we never were. The Lord in his wisdom has always been keeping a keen eye on our development and progress.

And yes, there has been progress, and that progress continues, even though we sometimes feel we have cause for doubt. But now, by the fact of our initiation into the path by our Master, we are consciously engaged in travelling home. One day, we are assured, we shall enter the great hall of the divine One himself – there to experience the final reunion of the wayward soul with its Creator, there to dwell forever in the consummate bliss of union with the Beloved.



Four Things

There's a parable about a good king and one of his subjects. The king has an agreement with his subject: he wants his subject to carry out a specific task in exchange for a reward. The subject is a good servant, does many wonderful things and performs above the norm – never does any wrong. Yet while attending to the many good works, the servant neglects to attend to the one thing the king has requested of him.

The question arises then: should the servant expect the reward?

This parable is more than simply a parable, but an exact description of the relationship we have with our Master. Only there isn't just one thing requested of us – there are four.

We know what the Master wants:

- Complete vegetarianism, adopting a lacto-vegetarian diet;
- Abstinence from habit-forming drugs, tobacco products and alcohol;
- Leading a pure and moral life while performing one's duties in the world;
- Sincere meditation for two-and-a-half hours daily, as taught by the Master at the time of initiation.

We are asked to do these four things without compromise. A simple concept, one would think, but how do we attend to this? This is a serious question that we should ask ourselves daily.

The four tasks vary in difficulty, depending on the individual's personal abilities and circumstances. But many will agree that the first two are fairly easy, especially as experienced by disciples who have been on the path for a while. The third one is somewhat more difficult when one measures one's own reactions to the different situations one

is confronted with. Clear thinking is required about the right thing to do in difficult times.

It is the fourth task, meditation, which proves to be the nemesis of many a disciple. Meditation, which over time, seems to become more difficult, so that for those of us whose faith and understanding are shaky, it becomes a real challenge.

We need constant reminding of our commitments to our Master. We need to exert clear thinking about our priorities in life: how to arrange our daily routines – what is important and what not – to be able to say: “I live up to the agreement with my Master.”

The present living Master never lets an opportunity slip to remind us of the importance of attending to our meditation. Sometimes we can feel his loving frustration in his urging us to do this, and still we don't always live up to his advice. We may do good things, all the right things, but we neglect the most important thing he asks of us. Does this make us good servants? Are we entitled to the reward of his grace? A tough question!

Masters have said through the ages that they are full of love for their disciples, and their love knows no bounds. But what about our love for our Master? How strong is it? Are we hiding behind the excuse that we are ‘only human,’ that we ‘try our best but it is a constant struggle’? Or do we merely dismiss his advice without giving it much thought?

Are we facing the facts? Are we not expected to take this very, very seriously? Should we not revisit our end of the agreement and make a renewed effort to uphold it with everything we have, exerting our honest and best efforts to give our Master what he asks of us? In truth, if we do this we are really giving something worthwhile to ourselves.

Let us start now by rearranging our lives to make meditation our top priority. Let us utilize this rare opportunity of a human life, with the added gift of initiation by a perfect living Master.

The often-quoted Bible verse, I Corinthians 13:12, says: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known.”

We know we are limited and see only a blurred reflection of the truth. But the time will come when we will know fully, even as our Master knows us. Till then, humbly accepting our limitations, let us not question our Master even though our understanding remains limited. Let us start serving him as if this is our new and first day.



One does not become a satsangi simply by being initiated. One must mould his life in accordance with the principles of satsang. Every thought, speech and action must conform to them. Actions speak louder than words. Thoughts are even more potent. A satsangi's daily conduct must bear the hallmark of excellence and must reveal that he is the follower of a true Master.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*



Soami Ji Maharaj

A True and a False Identity

Here and now, in this physical world, we are human beings. The term 'human being' is made of two parts, which reflect our two identities: the human and the Being. One might say we have a false and a true identity. And both are needed in this play which we call life. Mastery of life is a matter of finding balance between our human and our true inner being.

All the roles that we play – mother, father, brother, daughter or son or friend – belong to the human dimension. They have their place: they're needed to balance our karmic account, but in themselves they're not enough to make our life feel meaningful or fulfilled. This is where the other identity, Being, needs to come to the fore. And this is to be found in the still, alert presence of consciousness itself, the consciousness that we are. To truly live up to our full potential, we need to get in touch with our inner being, our soul, a drop of God.

Eckhart Tolle writes in his book *A New Earth*:

Once there is a certain degree of Presence, of still and alert attention in human beings' perceptions, and we start sensing the divine life essence or soul in every creature, every life form, we will recognize it as one with our own essence and start loving all creatures as part of ourselves. Until this happens, most humans see only the outer forms, unaware of the inner essence, just as they are unaware of their own essence and identify only with their own physical and psychological form.

Mystics often tell us that this human form is the biggest gift that God can give to the soul. It is something rare and precious because

only in this human form can we come to know the essence of our true being and become reunited with our source. In the teachings of the Shabd Masters we learn that there are 8,400,000 different species of life forms on this planet alone, all going through the cycle of birth and death and rebirth. Each and every living being is given life through that drop of indwelling consciousness or soul.

On her downward journey from her source Soul, our true being, adopted mind when she entered the causal region. This region belongs to the three worlds that are driven by the law of karma. Without the mind soul cannot function on these lower levels of consciousness. In the beginning when soul and mind became joined, mind was still pure and clean. But as it travelled downward, it started losing touch with its purer state of consciousness. And mind soon got a will of its own, called Ego.

Eckhart Tolle describes our predicament:

The word "I" embodies the greatest error and the deepest truth, depending on how it is used. In conventional usage, it is not only one of the most frequently used words in the language (together with the related words: me, my, mine and myself) but also one of the most misleading. In normal everyday usage, "I" embodies the primordial error, a misperception of who you are, an illusory sense of identity. This is the Ego. ... That illusory self then becomes the basis for all further interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of reality, all thought processes, interactions, and relationships. Your reality becomes a reflection of the original illusion.

But the good news, Tolle goes on to say, is that if we can recognize the illusion as illusion, it dissolves. Its survival depends on our mistaking it for reality.

Who can help us to dissolve this false conception of who we are? In order to get in touch with our true being we need to conquer this ego that pretends to be our true self. How to do that we wouldn't really know, but luckily we know of Beings that are fully aware of that pure godly drop inside every living creature. These are the living Masters. And so, our next big gift in life is meeting such a perfect living saint, a God-realized soul, and getting initiated by him. By following the instructions of this spiritual guide, we can be freed from the bondage of body and mind. After eventually conquering the ego, the soul will recognize its true identity and merge back into universal love and consciousness.

Our soul, having incarnated into various bodies, has had the opportunity to experience many different forms of life. But now she starts feeling trapped in her relationship with the mind. By this time Soul is getting progressively restless and unhappy. She has finally had enough of Ego and all its dramas, and feels an inner pull to go within and become truly peaceful and happy. Let's imagine that in her earnest wish to become free, Soul writes Ego a letter:

Dear Ego,

I am breaking up with you. No more circular discussions and endless distractions – we are through. This is not an emotional decision. It actually doesn't feel like a decision at all. We've been drifting apart for some time now, and whatever once kept us together isn't there anymore.

It won't do you any good to turn on your charm. Don't bother trying to fill my head with thoughts about how great we are together or how lost I'd be without you. It took me a long time to figure you out. Like so many unhappy couples, I know we drifted into our own little worlds and for the longest time I mistook it for reality. But now I vaguely remember what life was like before I met you. Actually it's more a feeling than a memory, a feeling of freedom. It's a sense of spaciousness, the kind children must

feel, before their heads become filled with worldly nonsense, before their sense of wonder disappears, before they begin to imitate the behaviour of the troubled souls around them.

I don't expect any of this makes sense to you. It never has before. You always have to define things, slot them into categories. But this is something that is not easily explained. It's beyond words. I know, I know, you hate it when I talk like this, when I challenge your rigid view of things.

Please pack your things and leave the keys on the table. When I come home later, all I want to hear is the sound of you being gone. I'm going to lose myself in the spacious silence, forget where I begin and where I end. You said something to me once. You said I'd be nothing without you. Remember? Well, I want to end this on a positive note and tell you that you were right. Without you I am nothing. Nothing at all. If it weren't for all the hell I went through because of you, I would have never arrived at this momentous conclusion. So thank you – even if you have no clue about what I've just said.

Love always

Soul.

In truth though, what the soul needs is for the mind (which gave birth to Ego) to be on her side, to become her friend. This will happen only through the practice of the teachings of the Masters, when mind itself becomes pure and enlightened – when the nature of the mind reverts from lower to higher mind and it travels with the soul back to its home in the second spiritual region. This is when the soul will become free to be her true self, her spiritual self. And this will become possible only if we practise going within through our Shabd meditation, guided by a true living Master. Becoming one with our inner Master will finally make us free.





The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul's Ascent from the Desert Fathers and Other Early Christian Contemplatives

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY JOHN ANTHONY MCGUCKIN

PUBLISHER: BOSTON: SHAMBHALA, 2003. ISBN 1-57062-900-5

In *The Book of Mystical Chapters*, John Anthony McGuckin has selected writings from Christian contemplatives of the ancient monastic communities that sprang up in the third and fourth centuries in Egypt, Syria, Persia, Arabia, Palestine, and the highlands of Ethiopia.

McGuckin explains that these writings were composed as instructions on the mystical path. In this tradition, such instructions took the form of short texts about a paragraph in length; these were called “chapters” (from the Greek *kephalaia*). Each was “meant to be learned by heart and meditated on over and over again for a day or even a week until the paragraph had broken like a fruit on the tongue of the monk and revealed its inner flavor to the searching mind.” These instructions were organized into manuals for the instruction of monks, each composed of one hundred chapters and called a “Book of Chapters.” Since the mystical path was seen as evolving in three stages – *Praktikos* (meaning practice, or discipline), *Theoretikos* (meaning seeing, vision, or contemplation), and *Gnostikos* (meaning knowledge of higher reality) – the instruction manual was also divided into three sections: *Praktikos* for new monks, *Theoretikos* for those with more experience, and *Gnostikos* for those advanced in contemplative practice. Some of these manuals are still in use today in the monasteries of the Eastern Christian Church.

Taking his cue from this ancient tradition, McGuckin has organized his anthology as a Book of Chapters, *i.e.*, as a collection of one hundred concise, inspiring, and insightful gems of spiritual instruction arranged according to the three sections.

The *Praktikos* stage is the “purgative” stage of the mystical path during which the seeker attains a certain purity of heart. Here the instructions

stress keeping watch over one's heart, so as to attain stillness within and the freedom from obsessive thoughts and desires. For example, from the ascetic Abba Philemon of Egypt we read:

Keep a careful watch on yourself. Do not allow yourself to be swept away by external obsessions. The tumultuous movements of the soul, in particular, can be rendered quiet by stillness. But if you keep encouraging and stimulating them, they will start to terrorize you and can disorder your whole life. Once they are in control, it is as hard to heal them as it is to soothe a sore that we can't stop scratching.

Abba Philemon, like many other mystics included in the book, frequently stressed the importance of maintaining a constant repetition of the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Hesychios, the leader of a monastery in Sinai, taught:

Snow can never emit flame. Water can never issue fire. A thorn bush can never produce a fig. Just so, your heart can never be free from oppressive thoughts, words and actions until it has purified itself internally. Be eager to walk this path. Watch your heart always. Constantly say the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Be humble. Set your soul in quietness.

He also wrote, "When the heart has acquired stillness, it will look upon the heights and depths of knowledge, and the intellect, once quieted, will be given to hear wonderful things from God."

The *Praktikos* stage requires considerable effort and discipline. John of Dalyutha offers encouragement for those who feel their determination weakening:

If you are tired and worn out by your labours for your Lord, place your head upon his knee and rest awhile. Recline upon his breast, breathe in the fragrant spirit of life, and allow life to permeate your being. Rest upon him, for he is a table of refreshment that will serve you the food of the divine Father.

In the *Theoretikos* section, the focus shifts to contemplation and the experience of inner light, a stage called “Illumination.” From Sahdona the Syrian we read:

It is only by unflinching and focused gazing that the spirit gravitates to God, but when the luminous ray of the simple eye of the soul is flooded with those intense rays of light that flash down on us from on high, then it is that the fire of God flares up in a great blaze within our hearts.

But here also progress may not be steady, and the seeker must remain firm in his commitment. As John of Karpathos warns,

Sometimes people find themselves brightly illuminated and refreshed by God’s grace for a while, but then this grace may be taken away, and they can fall into depression and start grumbling and even give up dispiritedly instead of energetically renewing their prayers to call down again that assurance of salvation. Such behaviour is like an ungrateful beggar taking alms at the palace door and then walking off indignantly because he was not invited in to dine with the king himself.

The *Theoretikos* section is replete with reminders that the foundation of all mystical development is love – love of God and one’s fellow creatures. As Maximus the Confessor taught,

The whole purpose of the Saviour’s commandments is to liberate the intellect from its malice and crudeness and to lead it into his love and into love of one another. Out of this love shines the radiance of mystical knowledge that God’s holy power makes possible in us.

The *Gnostikos* section deals with mystical realization. These instructions may perhaps be understood only by advanced adepts. Irenaeus of Lyons quotes from the Gospel of Luke 18:27 to discuss the mysterious possibility that a human may be able to see God and to be enveloped “within God”:

A human being cannot possibly see God, but “things impossible for humans are possible for God.” And so God can be seen by humans when he so allows it, by those he has chosen to see, and when and how he wills to be seen, for God is powerful in all things. . . . Those who see light are within light and share the brilliance of the light. Just so, those who see God are within God and receive of his splendour, a radiance of the vision of God that gives us life.

McGuckin has provided many useful references and indexes, allowing the reader to approach the book in various ways. For those with an academic interest, each selection is carefully cited to its source. A section on “Authors and Texts” gives brief biographical notes about each writer, with references to all the chapters by that writer throughout the book. For those wishing to know how these teachings are rooted in the Bible, McGuckin provides a note in the margin each time the text quotes from, or even makes an oblique reference to, a biblical verse.

McGuckin’s own recommendation is that the reader not read this book rapidly, cover to cover, in one sitting. Rather, he hopes that the reader will take the time to ponder and digest each of the chapters, finding in each one deep wells of wisdom that surface only slowly. As Narsai of Edessa wrote, “God hides the mysteries he offers us so that he might teach us to search for them in love.” McGuckin offers the book “as a ‘practical manual of assistance’ for those who wish to climb the higher paths of mystical knowledge in the Christian tradition.”



