

SEEKERS'

GUIDE

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The Purpose of This Booklet

This booklet is for sincere seekers who are at least 22 years of age and interested in applying for Initiation into the path of Sant Mat, the teachings of the Saints. The booklet is intentionally limited in scope, giving primary attention to an explanation of the four vows the seeker will be asked to take at the time of Initiation, and the procedure to be followed in applying for Initiation.

In addition to studying this booklet, the serious seeker should read widely the extensive Sant Mat literature in order to understand thoroughly the teachings of this path of God-realization. A list of suggested introductory books is included.

The Master emphasizes that one's intellect should be completely satisfied, without any doubts about the teachings, before applying for Initiation. Initiation by a perfect living Master is the most profound step one will ever take. Those who decide to apply should do so out of an unshakable inner conviction that this is the right path for them, and with a determination that they will exert every effort to live up to its lofty principles.

A Gist of the Teachings

Sant Mat – the teachings of the Saints or the path of the Masters – is a process of practical spirituality as taught by a perfect living Master. In the laboratory of your own body, by following the techniques given by the Master, you can prove for yourself the perennial spiritual truths that lie behind most religions and many philosophies, and go far beyond them.

Sant Mat, also called the Radha Soami teachings – the science of the Soul, the path of the audible life stream, and *surat shabd yoga* – is a path of love. The words “Radha Soami” literally mean the union of the soul (*Radha*) with its Lord (*Soami*). Its goal is God-realization through self-realization. At the heart and centre of the path is the Satguru, the perfect living Master.

The Master comes to this earth plane in the garb of a human being, the “Word made flesh”. He comes here for only one mission – to take souls back to the Father. When the Master initiates a person, he guarantees to take that soul back to its true home, and from that moment onwards he never leaves the disciple. The Master places his Radiant Form within the disciple, and he constantly guides and helps the disciple on both the inner journey as well as in this world. And yet despite his spiritual strength, the Master is the humblest and most devoted servant of all. All his work, both in this world and in the higher worlds, he does only for the benefit of his disciples, and he showers on them a love that knows no parallel in this world.

All Masters explain that the teachings of the Saints have been the same since the beginning of the creation; for the path of God-realization was designed by the Creator himself. They further say that because the Lord is one, and because all human beings have descended from the same one Lord, the path back to the Lord can only be one.

This path, then, is the same path to God-realization that has been taught by every true mystic, Master, or Saint, including Jesus Christ, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Guru Nanak, Rumi and many others. A living Master is necessary because a human being can only receive instruction and guidance from another human being. In the same way that a person who is ill cannot receive medical treatment from a

physician who is deceased, a living being can benefit directly only from the presence of a living teacher.

The basic tenets of Sant Mat are as follows:

1. The purpose of human life is for the individual soul to return to the Lord, its creator. This can be accomplished only by receiving Initiation from a perfect living Master, who connects the soul of the disciple to the Shabd.
2. This Shabd – also called the sound current, the word, the word of God, the audible life stream, the logos, Tao, Nam, and many other names – is the dynamic and creative manifestation of God. It resounds throughout the creation and can be contacted in every human being as beautiful celestial music at the eye centre, a point of concentration located between and slightly above the two eyes. The eye centre is not a physical point but an inner spiritual one. It is also known as the third eye, the single eye, or the *tisra til*.
3. The Shabd can only be contacted when the mind is made completely still through the practice of meditation as taught by a perfect living Master. The soul is imprisoned in the body by the actions of the mind which, through the senses, has been running out into the physical creation for countless ages, caught in the net of the five passions – lust, anger, greed, attachment, and pride or egotism.
4. Every soul has taken birth innumerable times in the cycle of reincarnation. In each birth the individual has performed both good and bad actions (karmas), which must be balanced at a later date by appropriate reactions. Because so many karmic debts are created in each life, the individual is forced to return to this plane, birth after birth, in order to balance these debts. But in the process of repaying the old karmic debts, new karmic debts are also being created.
5. It therefore becomes impossible for a soul to escape from the wheel of reincarnation by its own unaided efforts. This can be accomplished only with the help of a perfect living Master.
6. The Initiation of an individual by a perfect living Master assures the liberation of the soul; the soul escapes from the cycle of birth and death, ultimately merging into the supreme Lord, who is all love and bliss.
7. At Initiation the Master connects the soul with the Shabd, gives instructions for the practice of meditation, and provides guidelines for living the Sant Mat way of life.
8. At the time of Initiation, the seeker is asked to take four vows, promising to abide by them for life. The first three vows must be adhered to for a certain period of time *before* applying for Initiation. These four vows are commitments made by the disciple to the Master, and following them implicitly is essential for a disciple to make progress on the path.

The four vows, as explained further in this booklet, are as follows:

1. To adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet.
2. To abstain from alcohol, tobacco products, habit-forming and mind-altering drugs.
3. To lead a pure moral life while performing one's duties in the world.
4. To practise meditation with sincerity and dedication for two and a half hours daily, as taught at the time of Initiation.

These four vows, taken at the time of Initiation, are the most serious commitments you will ever make. They are an internal commitment and not a verbal or outward promise. You are strongly advised to search your heart sincerely before applying for Initiation to make sure that you thoroughly understand these commitments, and that you are willing and able to live up to them. You should completely understand the material in this booklet before applying for Initiation. Masters always advise seekers to take their time and not be in a hurry for Initiation. As Maharaj Charan Singh wrote in a letter to a seeker:

I appreciate your interest in the Sant Mat path of God-realization. But in such an important step one should not do anything in a hurry nor under emotional excitement. The Sant Mat teachings have to be understood fully and the intellect should be satisfied in every way. One must have firm convictions of his own that there is no other path for him except this one, and then only the question of acceptance should be considered.

Sant Mat has certain principles which must be followed in life and these should be well understood. A half-hearted acceptance does not lead one anywhere. Please read the books very carefully and satisfy yourself in every possible way. Try to live the Sant Mat way of life, keeping away from all forbidden foods and drinks as well as the drug habit. Lead a clean moral life according to the age-old established codes of morality. When you feel that you are ready in every way and your mind speaks from within to seek the truth, then take the next step. This advice is for your own good. Satisfactory results do not follow if we take to any path or science without giving proper thought to it.

Quest for Light, letter 419

The Four Vows

1. Adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet

As an applicant for Initiation, you must adopt a strict lacto-vegetarian diet and follow it for a minimum of one year *prior* to applying for Initiation and thereafter permanently. The lacto-vegetarian diet prohibits the eating of meat, fish, fowl, eggs (fertile or infertile), and foods containing any of these substances in any form.

The lacto-vegetarian diet provides a wide range of healthy, delicious and nutritious foods, including vegetables and fruits, dairy products (milk, yogurt, butter, cheese, etc.), grains (including most breads and pastas except egg noodles), cereals, nuts, seeds, beans, and all non-alcoholic beverages. One will

find no problem in preparing a wide variety of tasty dishes within these limitations, and the diet provides all the necessary proteins, minerals, vitamins, enzymes and so on, that one needs.

When talking with other disciples and your sponsor, you will find that there are many excellent vegetarian cookbooks available which contain a wealth of recipes. Almost all well-stocked bookstores, online book sales websites, and health food stores have vegetarian books in their cooking or health sections.

The following quotes from Maharaj Charan Singh's letters discuss the nature of and the reasons for the vegetarian diet:

As it is virtually impossible for us to exist in this world without killing, the Saints advise us to go on a strictly vegetarian diet. This enables us to live a healthy life and at the same time collect the smallest load, as we are taking life consisting of one active element only, in the form of fruits and vegetables. In this way we collect the least load possible during our life span....

But if we are not concerned about our destination at all, and just to fill our stomachs we kill – or are instrumental in having killed for us – fish or fowl or other animals, surely we will have to pay for our evil deeds. And that becomes such a heavy load that we can hardly stand, let alone walk or run. Of course, killing for sport is much worse than killing for food and results in a much heavier load....

So we are advised to be lacto-vegetarians to collect the least amount of karma. We have such a heavy store of karmas, such a heavy load with us already, that we should try to reduce rather than increase that load during our life span.

Divine Light, letter 444

As regards your interest in Sant Mat and your desire for Initiation, I have to say that no compromise can be made as to a vegetarian diet. Renunciation of meat, fish, eggs and anything containing them, as well as alcoholic drinks, is a precondition. The vegetarian diet, so far as our experience goes, has been suitable and useful to our disciples in both East and West. In fact, it cleanses the body and the mind.... Unless you can live on the prescribed diet, you cannot be accepted as a disciple on the path of Shabd.

Light on Sant Mat, letter 5

The vegetarian diet has the additional benefit of creating a reverence for all forms of life. Also, following this diet has a direct benefit on meditation:

Meat and eggs are “exciting” foods, whereas for our spiritual progress we need non-exciting foods which create feelings of calm and tranquillity. We are greatly affected by what we eat, and the food we eat conditions our mind. Meat and drinks have a tendency to scatter our attention and hinder our concentration.... Killing animals and eating meat hardens the mind and soul, and one becomes a stranger to the Lord, who is love, mercy, charity, and kindness personified.

Quest for Light, letter 501

Besides keeping to a strict lacto-vegetarian diet, there are other decisions one must make regarding a reverence for life. One must decide for oneself where to draw the line on such issues as the wearing of leather, extermination of pests, and so on. This is explained by Maharaj Charan Singh in the following quotations:

The use of leather shoes may perhaps not be justifiable technically, but one has to live in this world and a line has to be drawn somewhere. Animals are not always killed for the purpose of their leather. A lot of them die a natural death, and their leather is used for shoes. Otherwise, also, we destroy a lot of life daily. Our very breathing causes the death of many living creatures, as the air is full of life. In this world life subsists on life, and without some sort of destruction of life it is impossible to live in this world.

Divine Light, letter 125

Regarding your inquiry about the use of furs, shoes, buttons and so forth, we cannot do such hairsplitting in life. If we think this way, we may have to go bare-footed.... Sometimes we have to kill dangerous and poisonous creatures when they endanger human life, but killing just for fun and sport or for food is a different matter and is not condoned in Sant Mat. Our dwellings and agricultural fields, and wherever people congregate or are lodged, have to be kept free of vermin and other creatures for hygienic and health reasons, as their presence endangers human life.

Quest for Light, letter 219

In addition to meat, fish, fowl, and eggs, there are a number of food products and ingredients that may be of animal origin, and of which the newcomer to this diet should be aware:

- a. Products labelled "shortening" or "pure shortening" should not be eaten. Any products not labelled specifically "vegetable shortening" or "butter shortening" could contain lard or other kinds of animal shortening.
- b. Products labelled "gelatine" should not be eaten as the gelatine generally come from the limbs, bones, and hoofs of animals. Jelly (jello) is almost always made from gelatine. However, there is gelatine of vegetable or fruit origin, such as pectin and some sea vegetation (agar-agar, china grass, carrageenan), which may be eaten but should be labelled as such. Lecithin, glycerine and rennet (used in cheese) are generally derived from animal sources and should be avoided unless clearly labelled as being from a vegetable source. Halal and Kosher gelatine may also be of animal origin.
- c. Many products, often unlabelled, contain eggs or albumen (egg white). These include many breads, bread products and crackers; most bakery products and pastries (cakes, pies, biscuits, cookies, etc.); mayonnaise, marshmallows, some salad dressings, some ice creams and sherbets, and many candies and sweets.
- d. Vitamins and other food supplements should be carefully checked for animal products. For example, fish oil is often the source of Vitamin A and Omega-3 oils. Vitamin D and calcium also may be of animal origin. Several brands of pure vegetarian or vegan vitamins are available.

e. Food made with wine or other alcoholic beverages should not be eaten.

Should you wish to find out whether a particular ingredient is of animal or vegetable origin, you may request this information from the food company concerned, most of whom are glad to provide it. Any product over which there is uncertainty as to the nature of its contents should be avoided.

There is no need to be a faddist or a fanatic in regard to diet; it is solely for spiritual reasons that the Master asks his disciples not to partake of products of animal slaughter. One need not confine oneself to any extremes of diet, such as only eating fruit, only raw foods, only organically grown foods, etc. The Master suggests selecting those foods within the diet that one finds light, nourishing, and easily digestible. Like all other aspects of Sant Mat, what counts most regarding the diet is the sincerity with which you accept the commitments of living according to the Master's instructions and the effort you put forth in trying to do so.

2. Abstain from alcohol, tobacco products, habit-forming and mind-altering drugs

As an applicant for Initiation, you must abstain from all alcoholic beverages, all tobacco products (including electronic or e-cigarettes), and all narcotics and "mind-altering" drugs (marijuana, cocaine, heroin, LSD, etc.) for a minimum of one year before applying for Initiation and thereafter permanently.

On a spiritual level, any habit that has a negative effect on us should be avoided. It is our duty to take good care of ourselves, both physically and mentally. Smoking and tobacco products easily become habit-forming, which leaves a deep groove on our mind, causing mental and physical cravings which weaken our will. To follow a spiritual path we need a strong will to face life and stay focused on our principles. Smoking weakens us both physically and mentally, and this will have a negative effect on our spiritual development.

Smoking is a dangerous habit and acts as a slow poison, causing many serious diseases. Therefore, it is advisable that we refrain from such habits. We emphatically point out, by way of guidance, that any habit that makes us dependent and is bad for our health should be strictly avoided.

G. S. Dhillon

In *Spiritual Discourses*, volume I, in the chapter *The Disciple's Way of Life*, Maharaj Charan Singh describes this vow as follows:

Give up the use of alcoholic drinks, narcotics and the like, for they are verily the worst of poisons. They gratify only for a moment. The end is constant remorse and disease. Their use so clouds our vision and so warps our sense of values that we fail to differentiate between good and bad, fair and foul, right and wrong. The result is that we commit deeds that land us in insuperable difficulties. Alcoholic drinks are truly the mother of all vices. They lead us to evil actions. A moment's pleasure unmistakably weaves a long net of pain and suffering.

Sometimes a doctor will prescribe a painkiller or other medicine containing a narcotic substance. Typically such drugs, taken under the direction of a doctor, are permissible. However, this is not the

case for “medical” marijuana, even if prescribed by a doctor. The same applies for synthesized or synthetic pills containing the THC compound. It has never been permissible for a satsangi or seeker to use marijuana, and not only because of the issue of legality. Seekers who apply for initiation but are found to be using medical marijuana will not be accepted for Initiation.

We need to first look at our goal in life. The Master always says the first and foremost duty of a satsangi is meditation. To meditate effectively we need a clear and focused mind. Marijuana is considered a mild hallucinogenic. Some of its known effects include impaired short term memory, concentration, perception and mood, and motor skills. It affects our judgment and ability to reason. It greatly reduces the clarity of our mind and our ability to stay focused. No doubt there are times when we need to take certain medicines for pain relief or for other reasons, and some of these do affect our mind and our ability to concentrate. However, if we are serious in our resolve, we will seek out the medicines that have the least effect in this regard and do our best to use them for the shortest duration possible. Satsangis serious about their meditation would want to avoid these effects. Even if these drugs are prescribed by a doctor, substitutes should be sought.

The Master points out that experiences under the influence of intoxicants or drugs have no relationship whatsoever to the inner experience of meditation. Such substances are, in fact, “a great hindrance on the path ... and may stop spiritual progress altogether.”

The following are some passages from Maharaj Charan Singh’s letters concerning the nature alcohol and drugs and the reasons that abstention from them is mandatory:

Abstention from alcoholic drinks does not need much logic to support it. We all know what fools people make of themselves when drunk, and what follies and crimes are committed under the influence of alcohol.

Divine Light, letter 351

Please remember that experiences of the soul can never be achieved on a spiritual level through any material means, whether it is LSD or any other such thing, for they deal with the body and the mind, while the Lord is beyond both. Besides bankrupting one mentally and spiritually, these drugs leave the addict a physical wreck. So many young people have lost their sanity and have even committed suicide under the influence of these drugs. If one could meet the Lord simply by taking a drug, who would remain without him in this world? It would be so easy. But that is not the way to find the Lord; rather, it takes us farther away from him.

Quest for Light, letter 164

The following instructions on this and related topics can be found in a letter written by Maharaj Charan Singh. You are advised to study this letter carefully, as it includes the Master’s instructions pertaining to the first three requirements:

I quite understand your anxiety about young initiates, more and more of whom are drifting back to their old ways of moral looseness and the use of drugs. It is very unfortunate that in this present society morality has lost all value, and the use of drugs has become so common that even respectable grown-ups find nothing wrong in the use of marijuana. The modern “permissive society” has become the bane of the youth these days. In view of what you write,

I feel that a stricter scrutiny of the applicants is necessary. Examine them more thoroughly, going into their background, the atmosphere they have lived in, for how long they have been taking drugs and since when they have given them up, the company they move in, and their general interests in life. All these will give us a much better picture of their sincerity for following the Sant Mat path.

Those living on meat diets, including eggs, on alcoholic drinks and drugs like marijuana, heroin, LSD, and also leading immoral lives (unnatural and unlawful companionship) of which Sant Mat does not approve, should assure themselves before applying for Initiation that they have been able to give up all these permanently, and can now live strictly in accordance with Sant Mat teachings.

During this preparatory period the applicant will be able to judge for himself whether he will be able to live the Sant Mat way of life, and it will also give him a firmer foundation and stability so essential for spiritual advancement.

3. Lead a pure and moral life

A fundamental principle of morality concerns proper sexual conduct and, as an applicant, you must lead a life properly conducted in this respect for a minimum of one year *before* applying for Initiation and thereafter permanently.

The Master requires that one be *legally married* if sexual relations are to take place. The practice of living together as husband and wife without being legally married is not sanctioned by the Master, even if it is permitted by law, as it is in some countries.

The following are some of the Master's comments on the topic of proper sexual conduct:

Lust and sex are very potent enemies for any spiritual progress. Sant Mat does not condemn the natural instinct of sex, but wants it to be utilized within proper limits in a lawfully married life. The sex instinct is not given to us for mere indulgence in sense pleasures. It is meant for procreation within very guarded limits. An unbridled use of this instinct is very harmful for both physical and spiritual development.

Keep your thoughts clean, move in good company, read good books, keep the Lord in mind, and pray to him for his grace and mercy. Tell your mind plainly and firmly that you will not allow it to indulge in such low thoughts and desires. These are some of the ways I can suggest for a clean life. It is an attitude of mind. You can form good habits or bad habits, just as you like. The mind always wants to follow the path of sense pleasures, but with a little determination and effort we can turn its face the other way round.

Quest for Light, letter 238

Indulgence in sex means indiscriminate enjoyment of the sex impulse, which degenerates the person and lowers the tendencies of the mind. Within limits, the use of the sex instinct is not bad. Most of the Masters have been householders with families, and Sant Mat does not tell us to leave the world and become recluses. Detachment from things and people of the world is not physical renunciation. It is the attitude of the mind that really matters. We have to live in the world and yet be not of it. We should do our duty in every sphere of life, remembering the true nature of things here. Everything is perishable and short lived....

Sex, no doubt, is a strong impulse and suppression sometimes creates serious complications. It should be used within proper limits and with discrimination. Then it is no bar to spiritual progress. Everything will happen slowly and gradually. You cannot get rid of the five perversions (lust, anger, greed, attachment and vanity) overnight. Give up all worries and do your bhajan and simran (meditation) every day with love and devotion.

Quest for Light, letter 461

While proper sexual conduct is not the only aspect of leading a pure and moral life, it is the specific aspect that the Master requires seekers to adhere to for at least one year *prior to* applying for Initiation.

Other aspects of morality, which are discussed at length in the Sant Mat books and are often referred to as the “subtle requirements of Sant Mat,” include being honest and straightforward in all our dealings in the world; earning our own living and not being a burden on anyone unnecessarily; being kind, loving, and forgiving in our relationships with other people. The Master asks us to live a normal life, conscientiously performing all our duties towards our family members, friends, and business associates, while at the same time attending to our spiritual duties. Dr. Julian Johnson described this lifestyle in his book *The Path of the Masters*:

By the phrase “flawless morality”, it is meant that he must be on the level with his fellowmen; he must be honest, sincere, truthful, just and kind. He must be unselfish in his relations and dealings. He must never live off others if he is able to work, and this applies to women as well as men. It applies to everybody. He must earn his own living if that lies within his power. He must always seek to do whatever service he finds at hand to do. He must use his wealth, if he has any, to do good, and never for selfish gratification. He must lead a simple, straightforward life, and become a noble example to all others. He must be chaste, both in mind and in practice. Even in the marital relationship he must not be given to over-indulgence of his passions. In other words, he or she must be what the world generally calls a good person, not given to any form of self-indulgence. And when he has attained that much, he is ready for the next step on this path.

The Path of the Masters: A Flawless Morality

It is the responsibility of every applicant for Initiation to be thoroughly familiar with the aspects of daily life and conduct that are included in the vow leading toward a pure and moral life, and which comprise what the Master calls “right living”. However, as Johnson continues:

All students (disciples) will do well to remember that we are not to expect perfection of any beginner.... Perfection comes of long practice on the path, and not at the beginning. Therefore, it is a great mistake to demand that a person shall have perfected his life before he applies for

Initiation. He seeks Initiation that he may perfect his life as a disciple of the Master. A starving man does not wait until he is strong before he takes food. He takes it in order to get strong.

The Path of the Masters: A Flawless Morality

4. The practice of daily meditation

The first three vows serve as the foundation for the meditational life, and for the fourth vow – practising meditation for two and a half hours daily. In *Light on Sant Mat*, letter 315, Maharaj Charan Singh wrote, “Right living is the foundation of right meditation.” The instructions and techniques for meditation are given at the time of Initiation: meditation is *not* to be practised before Initiation.

Before applying for Initiation, however, you must understand what will be required of you regarding the daily practice of meditation so that you will be prepared to exert every effort to live up to this requirement, as well as the other three requirements.

Full time must be given to bhajan and simran, or meditation, irrespective of whether the mind sits still or wanders out. Practice maketh a man perfect, and regularity and punctuality in meditation slowly but surely stills the roving mind. Just as a constant flow of water wears down even the hardest of stones, so does constant simran weary the mind's running out. Every second the senses are beguiling the mind, but if we lead the life of a true satsangi we will save ourselves from their snares, begin to enjoy meditation, and succeed in overcoming the obstacle of the mind. The mind is, indeed, the root and cause of all strife and trouble. It sows discord and makes us hanker after material goods.

Spiritual Discourses, Volume I

The Master requires that disciples devote at least two and half hours a day to spiritual practice, or meditation. The following are some quotations from Maharaj Charan Singh concerning the practice of meditation:

Two hours and a half is the minimum a disciple is expected to give daily. In the beginning it may not be possible, but a day should never be missed, and the time should go on increasing gradually until you can meditate for at least two and a half hours every day. Unless we give an honest trial to Sant Mat and do our duty honestly and faithfully, we cannot expect much from the path and we also have no reason to complain. Simran should, in fact, be always with you all through the day, and the regular daily sittings of meditation should never be missed.

Quest for Light, letter 435

Everybody has to build his or her own atmosphere of meditation. You have to create that atmosphere in the home, in the place of work, in the circles of people you meet; and then you have to live in that atmosphere. Many things you have to avoid, many things you have to adopt, many things you have to create. You have to read Sant Mat books, Sant Mat literature, do meditation. Then meditation doesn't mean only closing yourself for a couple of hours in a room, then forgetting about it. Your whole day is to be spent in meditation, because we have to live that way of life. When we live the way of Sant Mat, we live that way of life – that itself is creating an atmosphere to live in. We don't forget meditation the whole day.

Meeting with Westerners, November, 26, 1985

If you attend to meditation, you will naturally build a certain atmosphere around you, and you will build that bliss and peace within you. In our daily lives, in our daily activities, in our daily dealings with people, we should try to live within that atmosphere of peace and bliss, by always remembering the principles of Sant Mat, the teachings, the meditation, the whole pattern of our life. This is how we carry the atmosphere of meditation with us.

Die to Live, question 260

Nam is our only true friend, both here and beyond. It is our only constant companion, our only sustenance, our only guiding light, our only refuge; and therefore we must assiduously practise it. The friends and relations of this world are really fair weather friends. They desert us even in our lifetime. But Nam does not leave us even after death.

Spiritual Discourses, Volume I

The Sant Mat Way of Life

Maharaj Charan Singh often said, “Sant Mat is an attitude of mind to be developed and a way of life to be lived.” In other words, it is not enough for the disciple to mechanically follow the four vows, forgetting to apply the complete scope of the teachings of the Saints to everyday life. One must become so absorbed in the Master’s teachings that daily conduct in all spheres of life reflects the highest ethical and moral principles.

The Masters continually impress upon seekers the importance of studying Sant Mat literature and attending satsang. Maharaj Charan Singh described satsang as the “fence around the crop of meditation” and pointed out that attendance at such meetings is an aid to the disciple:

If you attend satsang regularly and read Sant Mat literature, your doubts and misgivings get explained away, and longing to seek God increases.

Being a disciple and following the path should not create disharmony among family members, friends or co-workers. The following are some of Maharaj Charan Singh Ji’s comments on living in the world:

Just be a good citizen, but do not get so involved in these things that you do not live with yourself. The main thing is that we must live with ourselves. We must live with our meditation and not get so involved in these outside things that they pull us down and make us forget the real purpose of this human life. It depends on individual circumstances as to how much we should get involved and how much we have to withdraw. We cannot give a hard and fast rule about these things. We have to live in some country and we have to be good citizens of that country. But as to how far we have to get involved in these things, I think our circumstances and our feelings will tell us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Volume III, question 234

We all come to this stage to play our assigned roles – as husband and wife, as son and daughter, as creditors and debtors, but after the part is played, we make our exit as the actors do in the play. This central point must be fully grasped. Saints do not say that we should leave our hearth and home, shirk our duties and responsibilities, hide in mountain caves and forest groves. They clearly enjoin that we must learn to be in the world and yet not of it.

Spiritual Discourses, Volume I

One should be decently dressed and present a proper appearance. Cleanliness, of course, goes without saying. That is a must for any decent person anywhere in the world. Sant Mat has not laid down any specific rules with regard to dress or appearance, but a general sense of decency requires that one should not become an object of disapproval or dislike in any society, anywhere.

Quest for Light, letter 298

The Masters always point out that we are very greatly influenced by those with whom we associate and by the kind of company we keep, as Maharaj Charan Singh explained in the following letter:

There is no special definition of bad company for a satsangi. We should avoid persons with evil habits, character or reputation; people whose lives and behaviour give a jolt to our life and disturb our peace, happiness and mental equilibrium; and people who are given completely to worldly pleasures and are a slave to their senses. Such company might rouse similar thoughts in a satsangi and lead him away from meditation and the feeling of detachment which he is trying to create within himself. There are no hard and fast rules for finding suitable company. Your own heart will be able to guide you.

Quest for Light, letter 375

When in doubt about whether to do something or not, you can always apply this unfailing test: If it interferes with meditation, discard it unhesitatingly.

We should do our best under all circumstances, and then leave the results in the hands of the Master. Sant Mat is, in the final analysis, a path of love. Each disciple's relationship with the Master is an individual one. The Master who initiates the disciple has unbounded love for the disciple. As Maharaj Sawan Singh said in *Spiritual Gems*, letter 117, the disciple's duty is to cultivate the Master's love: "Your worries and cares are the Master's worries and cares. Leave them to him to deal with. Having become carefree, your business is to cultivate his love."

The Critic – My Friend

Before we decide to apply for Initiation, it is important that we make a thorough investigation of the path we propose to tread. Often a seeker hears only about the positive side of the path. Through friends, family and associates, through attending satsang or meeting the Master, we may be exposed to only that side of the picture that will influence us to ask for Initiation.

The Master encourages us to investigate this path with our eyes wide open and to question all aspects of the path before we embark on it. The more our discrimination and discernment mature, the more we will understand what it means to commit ourselves to this path of God-realization. We must first feel comfortable with the teachings and the Master, and find them logical and truthful – otherwise we will not be able to do justice to the Master, his teachings or ourselves. If our conviction is not strong, then the foundation will always remain weak. However, at no stage of our lives can we have full answers to all our questions. We will remain seekers all our lives and we can never reach the stage of "knowing enough."

Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that critics are our best friends. “Criticism of some sort or other is more or less bound to come. But criticism from true seekers and real inquirers should be welcome. True faith based upon reasoned understanding of the principles of Sant Mat is much more valuable than mere blind faith.” Our critics make us think deeply, address those things which are applicable to us, and help us to keep on the right track. Only critics raise issues that no one else dares to raise.

It would therefore be helpful for us to read even critical material before we make up our mind and commit ourselves to this spiritual path. Looking at the information dispassionately may help us reflect more deeply on our desire to ask for Nam, on what we believe Nam to be, on the role of the Master, and on why we wish to walk this path. There is no need to rush into spirituality – spirituality is always there. We just have to be ready to recognize it. If examining criticisms raises doubts that cannot be resolved, it is to our advantage – so we do not embark on a way of life that cannot be sustained. If we find that the criticisms do not alter our decision to ask for Nam, then we will surely have become clearer as to the nature of our commitment and the level at which it is made.

Having our doubts resolved will give us the confidence and trust that we are on the right path with the right teacher. This trust is essential because it will give us the confidence and determination to emulate the truth of the teachings the Master embodies. Facing our doubts will either strengthen our desire for receiving initiation or make us turn our search elsewhere.

Typical questions that may arise:

- Is the Master genuine?
- Does the Master’s conduct withstand scrutiny?
- Is this just another sect?
- Does this path deliver what it promises?
- What about former disciples who are now disenchanted?
- Are the disciples brainwashed or hypnotized?
- Does the purchase of property fit into this philosophy?
- What do we conclude from all this information?

After we have made inquiries, we should ask ourselves:

- Are we still willing to make a commitment to follow the Sant Mat teachings?
- Are we sure we still want to continue in spite of the criticism?
- Are we convinced this is the path for us?
- Has anyone coaxed, forced or influenced us in any way?
- Do we have a mature, balanced approach towards the path?

Remember, we are the ones who are going to have to make the effort demanded by the principles of Sant Mat. It is we who have to feel comfortable with this way of life, whether people criticize it or not. Initiation is a life-long commitment. The task that lies ahead of us will require perseverance and dedication.

We should take our time, ask our questions, get other opinions, read through various books. We should perhaps browse through critics' views on the Internet. We can use this process as an opportunity to reflect on what critics say, then examine and decide the truth for ourselves.

To search the various sites on the Internet that refer to Radha Soami Satsang Beas one can use a range of key words, such as: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Radha Soami, Beas Masters, Sant Mat, science of the soul, surat shabd yoga, satsang. Browsing the various sites will lead to many more sites.

Application Procedure

The sincere seeker who wishes to apply for Initiation must meet the age requirement, adhere to the first three vows as described in this booklet for one year, and must read *at least* five Sant Mat books.

1. Initiation age requirement *outside of India* (for all countries abroad)

22 years Men and women (*whether married or single*)

Initiation age requirement *in India* (for residents of India and NRI's who travel to India for Initiation)

22 years Males/Couples/Females whose husband is initiated (*single males should be either employed or a student*)

25 years Females (*if married but husband is not initiated*)

25 years Females (*if unmarried and independent*)

27 years Females (*if unmarried but dependent*)

In addition, **pregnant women** may be initiated only during the first four months of pregnancy. After the fourth month they must wait until after delivery to be initiated.

2. Following the first three vows

- You must have followed the lacto-vegetarian diet for at least one year prior to applying and thereafter permanently.
- You must have abstained from alcoholic drinks, all tobacco products, and mind-altering drugs for at least one year prior to applying and thereafter permanently.
- You must have abstained from sexual relations outside of legal marriage for at least one year prior to applying and thereafter permanently or until legally married.

3. Reading the Sant Mat literature

The Master wishes seekers to read and thoroughly study *at least* five Sant Mat books (including this *Seekers' Guide*) before applying for Initiation, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the teachings of the path, satisfy their intellect, and resolve any doubts about the tenets of Sant Mat. All the priority books on the following list and at least two of the recommended books should be read.

Priority Books (please read all):

English

Seekers' Guide

Honest Living

A Spiritual Primer

Hindi/Punjabi

Jigyasuon ke liye

Haq Halal ki Kamai

Parmarath Parichay

Recommended Books (at least two to be read):

English

Spiritual Gems

The Dawn of Light

The Science of the Soul

Divine Light

Quest for Light

Spiritual Perspectives (Volumes I–III)

Light on Saint Matthew

The Path of the Masters

Call of the Great Master

With a Great Master in India

The Holy Name

Guru Nanak

Kabir: The Weaver of God's Name

Guru Ravidas

Mira: The Divine Lover

Sultan Bahu

Hindi/Punjabi

Parmarathi Pattar II

Prabhat ka Prakash

Atam Gyan

Divya Prakash

Prakash Ki Khoj

Hansa Hira Moti Chugna

Nam Bhakti

Goswami Tulsidas

Santmat Vichar

Sant Samagam

Mere Satguru

Amrit Nam

Guru Nanak ka Ruhani Updesh

Sant Kabir

Guru Ravidas

Mira: Prem Diwani

Hazrat Sultan Bahu

4. Meeting the Master's Representative

If these requirements have been satisfied, your next step is to request a meeting with the Master's representative or a local sangat secretary designated by the representative. You can do this by asking at your nearest satsang centre or by contacting the representative directly. This meeting is to ensure that you have a clear understanding of the teachings. The representative or secretary will recommend whether you may now apply for Initiation or not. Be prepared to wait. Initiation is not one's right. Initiation is a gift and cannot be demanded.

5. Processing your application

If the representative or secretary recommends that you apply for initiation, he or she will guide you as to the procedure, which includes completing an application form. The representative, the secretary, and your sponsor must each sign the application form. Once the application is complete, the representative forwards the application to the Master. The Master will notify the representative of your acceptance or non-acceptance, which will then be conveyed to you.

6. Planning for Initiation if accepted

In most places around the world, Initiations are scheduled regularly – approximately every three to six months. At the time of Initiation, you must be prepared to travel to wherever the Initiation is being held. If you are unable to attend either of two consecutive Initiations after your acceptance, you may be asked by the representative to re-submit your application.

In Sant Mat there are no financial charges for Initiation or any organizational dues. Even the books and tapes are sold at less than cost.

One of the basic principles in Sant Mat is that disciples should pay their own way in life. One must not expect sponsors, secretaries, or local group centres to pay for any of the expenses involved in seeking Initiation. This includes buying books and tapes, as well as travel expenses to the place of Initiation.

The applicant must understand that Initiation is a rare and precious gift of the Lord and should therefore be willing to take care of these nominal costs.

Initiation is a gift of the Master and is also the most sacred occasion of one's life.

The Lord's gate is open to all. He loves to meet us even more than we can possibly long to meet him. It is he who creates in our hearts the desire to meet him.

Quest for Light, letter 118

Frequently Asked Questions

RSSB Organization

Who is the present head of the Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB) organization?

Gurinder Singh Dhillon is the present spiritual head of the RS organization and is affectionately called Baba Ji.

Are the Radha Soami teachings (Sant Mat) the only way to God-realization?

There are many paths leading to God-realization, and the common belief is that our spiritual search starts from within each one of us through the medium of meditation.

Is Sant Mat a religion, sect or cult?

It is none of these. Sant Mat is a way of life. It does not solicit members, charge fees, exploit, infringe on anyone's private life, or compel seekers and disciples to give up their religion. Sant Mat does not advocate rites and rituals nor does it expect the disciples to conform to a special dress code. It offers a way of life based on high moral principles and individual meditation. The teachings help in understanding the purpose of life and give greater insight into right living under the guidance of the living Master.

Does the Radha Soami organization charge fees for any services?

No, there are no fees charged for any services.

How are donations given to the organization used?

Donations are used for the welfare and growth of the sangat. Several charitable hospitals are also funded through donations; shelter homes and schools have been constructed in areas devastated by earthquakes and floods. Approximately five million annual visitors to the Beas colony (the headquarters of the organization) are provided with free food and accommodation.

Does the global development of RSSB undermine the basic spiritual values of the teachings?

The global development of Sant Mat is a sign of the changing times. With the tremendous growth of Sant Mat in India and around the world, it is important to respond to the needs of disciples adopting the Sant Mat philosophy and way of life. The increasing number of centres creates a sense of togetherness, opportunities for seva, and a collective consciousness among the disciples, thus strengthening the values and principles embodied in this path of service and meditation.

Which books would you recommend to introduce Sant Mat?

The commonly recommended books are – *The Path*, *Honest Living*, *Spiritual Primer*, and *Spiritual Perspectives*. The Secretary of your local satsang centre may be contacted for further information.

Is it all right for me to listen to discourses by other teachers, like Mr. Ishwar Puri?

We always encourage people to attend satsangs so that we are able to keep our minds open and have a better perspective of the spiritual teachings. However, it may be added that RSSB has no link with Mr. Ishwar Puri nor any other person or organization.

Which is the most reliable website for information on the organization?

For authentic and accurate information, the official RSSB website is www.rssb.org

Why doesn't the Master encourage participation in social networking and group chat sites about the Sant Mat teachings?

Although social media has become part of the contemporary social fabric, the Master does not think these online discussions serve the needs of the disciples. The Masters have provided a structure and means for this to happen within the framework of the Sant Mat organization. Satsangs have been established in over 90 countries. More than 100 books published by RSSB are available in English and in translation. Many audio recordings of satsangs are available on the RSSB website. These are the means by which the Master has authorized and actively oversees the dissemination of the Sant Mat teachings.

The Master

What is the role of the Master?

The Master's primary role is to "initiate" the disciple into a practice of meditation through which he connects the disciple to the Shabd or Sound Current, thus guiding the soul back to its origin – the eternal home in the divine realm. In every aspect of life we need assistance and guidance to keep us on the right track. The same is essential on the spiritual journey, where only a living Master can awaken divine truth within us.

Is it true that after initiation the Master takes over our karmas?

The Master takes the responsibility to help us return to our eternal home. He gives his love, support, and grace to go through our karmas with fortitude and equanimity. He guides us through the spiritual process which cleanses our karmas, but he does not erase our karmas. Each one of us has to pay for our own karmas – this is the law of the universe.

What is the significance of the Master-disciple relationship?

The Master's relationship with the disciple is to guide the disciple on the inner journey and help him reach the higher realms of consciousness that lead to liberation. By becoming receptive to the master's teachings, the disciple learns to live in the Lord's will. One can think of the master as a friend, elder brother, or teacher.

What does the term "perfect living Master" mean?

The term "perfect living Master" is used for spiritual teachers who have attained higher consciousness through the practice of meditation and stay connected to the Shabd within, making them 'whole' or 'complete,' which in Hindu scriptures is referred to as "puran" – complete or perfect.

What is a real Master?

The real Master is the Shabd, not the body. The real disciple is the consciousness, the surat, not the body. When we awaken our consciousness or surat through the practice of meditation, then the consciousness with the help of the divine Melody, is able to experience and realize the true Master, which is the Shabd.

Can there be more than one perfect Master in the world at the same time?

At any given time there will be one or more perfect Masters living in the world.

What happens when the Master dies?

The Masters are born in the realm of the spirit; therefore the spiritual form of a Master cannot die. If the line of saints is to continue, the present Master will appoint a successor before he dies.

Have there been any female Saints?

Yes. These include Teresa of Avila from Spain, Rabia Basri from Iraq, and Sahjo Bai, Bahinabai and Mirabai from India.

Does the Master personally benefit from the donations received for the organization?

The Masters strongly advocate "*hak halaal ki kamayi*" (to live by one's own honest earnings), which means: through their personal or family income. The Masters live the teachings by example.

Why do Masters wear white clothes?

Just as we choose to dress for an occasion, e.g. wear track suits to the gym, casual wear to a movie, business suits to work, and formals to a wedding, the Master chooses to wear what is appropriate, comfortable and simple for him. He may choose to travel in jeans or take a walk in tracks, relax in shorts, or wear white on a daily basis if he feels it is the most convenient and least cumbersome attire.

Initiation

What does it mean to be "initiated"?

To be initiated means that the Master has instructed the disciple in a technique of meditation through which the soul is connected to the Shabd or Sound Current so as to finally merge with the Creator. It is also a time of making a lifetime commitment to following the four vows of the path.

What are the vows taken during initiation?

At the time of initiation, the seeker makes a commitment to abide by four vows to enhance spiritual growth.

1. To live on a vegetarian diet – no meat, fish, eggs or any substance containing their essence.
2. To abstain from tobacco products, alcohol, and mind-altering drugs.
3. To live a moral and ethical life based on strict principles, including no sexual relations outside legal marriage.
4. To meditate daily for 2 ½ hours.

What is the significance of the five names given at the time of initiation?

The names, when given by the living Master, have the Master's power to connect the soul to the Shabd during meditation. The repetition of these names helps us to remember the Lord, still the mind during meditation, and focus our mind at the eye centre where our spiritual journey begins.

How should we prepare for initiation?

This is the time to read Sant Mat literature, attend spiritual discourses, resolve any doubts, and create an atmosphere of harmonious living among family and friends. It is the time to see for ourselves whether we can live within the first three vows. It is also recommended that a seeker conduct research into other spiritual philosophies to be sure that the Sant Mat way of life is what he or she truly desires.

Should we meditate before initiation?

We should avoid meditating before initiation. The method or technique of meditation has to be taught by a true living Master or his appointed Representative at the time of initiation. Using other words for repetition such as "Radha Soami" could lead to difficulties, as this may create a groove or habit in our mind that may be difficult to break when we start our real meditation.

Why is it important to follow the vows for one year before initiation?

It is important to test our resolve to see if we are ready to make the commitment to follow the vows.

What is the minimum age requirement for initiation and why is there such a restriction?

Generally, the minimum age for initiation is 22 years; however, in India there are slightly different age requirements for married and unmarried women. The age restriction is to ensure that one makes the decision with maturity and level-headedness.

What advice would you give to under-age seekers?

They should be committed to their studies, obey their parents, be compassionate and loving, and practise the way of life required by the first three vows – the vegetarian diet, abstinence from tobacco, alcohol and mind-altering drugs, and a clean moral life.

What should we do if we want to get initiated but our family objects?

We should express to our family our desire for initiation and discuss their point of view before making a decision.

Should we get initiated because the family is initiated?

This is a relationship between each individual soul and the Lord. Family and friends should not influence our decision whether to take initiation or not.

Should a husband and wife get initiated together?

The path of meditation is an individual's journey and experience; therefore it is not necessary to be initiated along with one's spouse.

Who finally decides whether we are ready for initiation?

The living Master is the final authority on who can receive initiation.

Is initiation given by a Representative the same as getting initiated by the Master?

The effectiveness of the initiation is not compromised in any way when one is initiated by a Representative under the authority of the Master.

Is it necessary to attend an initiation with the Master if we have been initiated by his Representative?

It is not necessary to attend an initiation by the Master (often referred to as a re-sitting), as the initiation has already been done by him even if conducted through the Representative.

Can we continue with our religious customs after initiation?

There are no restrictions in following religious customs while practising the Sant Mat teachings.

How many weeks, months or years does it take to get enlightened after initiation?

There is no set time for enlightenment after initiation. The length of time is not relevant, because we can hasten our progress or delay it depending on the effort we make. Our experience along the journey will keep us motivated, along with how perseveringly we work towards our goal.

Does initiation guarantee enlightenment?

Eventually everyone will go back to the Father. There is no set time, as our progress depends on our effort. Spiritual progress cannot be calculated by the human mind. Our goal should be to surrender unconditionally to the desire for the Ultimate.

Is it true that we live only four human lives after initiation before attaining liberation?

For those who have been initiated by the living Master into the meditation practice, they will cross the ocean of boundless and unfathomable suffering and achieve eternal liberation. Being born in the human garb is powerful and extremely purposeful if we utilize and exercise its benefits through meditation. Only human birth offers the possibility of living a conscious, awakened, and controlled life, because only humans possess intelligence and discrimination. The number of lives required for liberation eventually depends on our perseverance at being focused in the centre of consciousness through meditation, which acts as a cleansing process on the inner journey.

Can we go back to the animal world despite being initiated?

Our existence is ruled by our karmic load or destiny. We cannot alter the fact that our actions or karmas will determine whether we return in the human form or are thrown back to the animal kingdom. "If we make our consciousness like that of an animal, we will be born at that level." Our rebirth is conditioned by the nature of our actions and the state of consciousness resulting from those actions. "As the seed, so the fruit."

Meditation

What do we hope to achieve with meditation?

The purpose of meditation is to achieve God-realization. By connecting to the Shabd within, we are able to rise above mind and matter and merge with the Lord, thus reuniting with our Source.

What is the Shabd or Sound Current?

The Shabd, Sound Current or Word is the power that brought the universe into being and sustains it; it is the creative power of God. Without the Shabd or Word there would be no existence. The Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God."

Do other spiritual paths or religions refer to the Shabd?

Yes, most paths and religions refer to the Shabd. They may use different terms, such as the Word or Name of God, Logos, Holy Spirit, Tao, Divine Power, Command, Kalma, and many others.

Is the Shabd in every being or only in the followers of this path?

The Shabd is the life force that permeates every living being and the entire material creation. Without it the creation could not continue.

Will we lose our identity when we merge with the Lord?

We do not lose our true identity when we merge in the Lord. It is through losing our ego and sense of individuality that we gain our true identity and merge with the Source.

Is it necessary to complete 2½ hours daily meditation?

The foundation to anything we choose to do in life is to practice it diligently. Likewise, our commitment during initiation to complete the daily 2½ hours meditation needs to be fulfilled.

Does meditation have to be done in the early morning hours or is any time appropriate?

Any time is good for meditation, although the early morning hours are recommended as the mind is then fresh and alert, and there are fewer disturbances and distractions.

What can we do to stop ourselves from falling asleep in meditation?

Our endeavour is to stay awake and concentrated; however, falling asleep is a common problem. With perseverance and determination, we can overcome this obstacle.

There are many references to stillness in connection with meditation. What does this mean?

Total stillness is the result of concentrated meditation. Maintaining a still body is the first step in bringing the mind to a state of stillness. Meditation becomes a force that moves us from stillness of the body and mind to finally connect the soul with the Shabd.

Can we change our destiny through the practice of meditation?

Our lives are predestined due to our karmas, so our destiny does not change. However, the transformation is the inner strength and equanimity through the practice of meditation to deal positively with adversities that may come in our life.

Karma Theory

What is karma?

Karma is the law of cause and effect. As Christ said, "As you sow, so shall you reap."

Why is there so much injustice in the world?

This entire world and everything that happens in it is part of a karmic chain of cause and effect. Although it may seem unjust, the law of karma is keeping this creation in balance.

What is reincarnation and do our karmas follow us from birth to birth?

Reincarnation is the cycle of birth and death caused by the debt of karmas that accumulate on our soul, and this in turn shapes our destiny. This process continues until the soul is cleansed through the practice of meditation and, once purified, finally merges back in its source.

How do we know if we are creating new karmas or working out old ones?

We cannot distinguish between old or new karmas, but are advised to be conscious and aware of our actions, thoughts, and words to avoid creating karmas.

Do we have free will?

There is limited free will in our attitude and approach to situations, although our lives are governed by the destiny we have created during the numerous cycles of birth and death, due to our load of karmas.

What is the reason for the creation and why were we sent here?

There is no simple explanation to truly comprehend the mystery of the creation. To understand the creation, we need to take our level of consciousness to the level of the Creator.

Vegetarian Diet and Abstinence from Intoxicants

Why is vegetarianism a necessity, and why is it wrong to eat meat when we have not personally killed the animal?

The teachings explain that just as we do not have the power to give life, so we do not have the right to take life. We are advised not to kill or be the reason for killing, directly or indirectly, to avoid adding to our load of karmas. Sant Mat advises us to live on a lacto-vegetarian diet, as eating non-vegetarian foods involves us in the violence of killing and adds to our karmas. While following a vegetarian diet, we should avoid foods that contain ingredients derived from animal sources, such as gelatine, eggs and lard (animal shortening). There are various sources of information to find out if a particular ingredient is of animal origin. Recent medical studies indicate that a vegetarian diet is healthy and life-sustaining. It has the additional benefit of creating a reverence for all forms of life.

Can we eat products that are made in a factory where animal products and eggs are used?

If the animal products are not mixed in the vegetarian food, then yes. It is best to follow the rule, "When in doubt, avoid it."

What is the harm in eating eggs, whether fertile or infertile?

Whether fertile or infertile, the purpose of eggs is to perpetuate animal life, so they must be avoided.

What should we do if our spouse insists that we prepare non-vegetarian food?

We must endeavor to maintain harmony at home and not force our beliefs on our family. If we must prepare non-vegetarian food for family members we can do so, but we should ensure that we do not partake of it.

Do we incur karma if we pay for non-vegetarian food for other people or pets?

It is advised not to deal with animal products directly or indirectly. By serving these animal products to others, even to our pets, we are increasing demand for these products and taking karma on ourselves.

What should I do if my profession requires me to entertain clients who want to order meat and drink?

We can try to find vegetarian restaurants where we can entertain our clients. We are advised not to pay for non-vegetarian food; if we do, we become a link in the chain of supply and demand and we become the reason for an animal being killed. In that way we incur karma.

Is it against Sant Mat principles to own or work at establishments that deal in non-vegetarian food or products?

Owning an establishment that deals in animal products should be avoided at all costs. If one is employed to cook non-vegetarian food, alternate employment should be considered. As a server, you may do as your job requires as long as you do not eat any of the food.

What impact does it have on us if our children eat meat? Should we force them to be vegetarian?

As parents our duty is to be good examples, and we should try to raise our children on a vegetarian diet. As they get older, children will develop a negative approach if forced or coerced into our way of thinking or belief. As parents, we can at best be good examples and respect their decision.

What happens if we accidentally eat something with egg or meat in it?

Whether accidental or deliberate, it will add to our karmas. We are given the example of a person who consumes poison; the effects of the poison will take its toll on the body whether its consumption was accidental or deliberate.

Can we take medicines derived from animal sources, including those packaged in gelatin capsules?

One can try to find vegetarian alternatives, including vegetarian capsules. There is always karma in consuming animal products.

How important is it to avoid the use of leather products?

It is in our interest to avoid the karmic consequences of buying animal products. Since each of us has a sense of discrimination, we should exercise it and try to find alternatives.

Can pain-relief medicines including medical marijuana be taken if prescribed by a doctor?

Drugs for pain relief and for mental and emotional disorders, taken under the direction of a doctor, are permissible. The taking of medical marijuana is prohibited even with a doctor's prescription.

Why is smoking, drinking alcohol and taking mind-altering drugs prohibited when following this path?

Alcoholic drinks and mind-altering recreational drugs have a negative effect on our mind. They scatter the mind and make it restless and dependent. Addictions to alcohol, drugs, and tobacco are unhealthy and weaken our resolve, creating obstacles to the practice of meditation.

The Sant Mat Way of Life

What is satsang and what is the importance of attending it?

Satsang is association with the truth; keeping the company of Saints and mystics to learn from their wisdom, experience and discourses. Regular attendance at satsang is a reminder of the teachings and gives us the opportunity to be in an atmosphere that inspires and motivates us to meditate.

What is the importance and relevance of doing seva?

Seva means to serve selflessly without expectation of any reward. The act of performing selfless seva creates awareness within us to live in humility and love.

Can we be ambitious and still remain spiritual?

Being on a spiritual path does not mean renouncing the world. To live the Sant Mat way of life is to enjoy every aspect of work, play, family and friends while staying within the parameters of the vows.

Are the moral values of Sant Mat still relevant in this modern world?

Yes, these values are important in any society. They are the foundation of a spiritual life. They enable us to avoid the creation of karma and support the meditation practice in every way.

Why is it required to be legally married as opposed to having a live-in relationship?

A legal marriage provides a deeper sense of commitment. As the proverb says, "If we want the shoe to stay on the foot, it is important to tie the shoelaces."

Is it OK for us to live on a spouse's income?

Yes, in a family environment, income and wealth are shared.

Should we try to convince others to become satsangis?

We should not proselytize or try to convert others to our way of thinking. Our approach should be to respect other's views as we would like them to respect ours.

Should we raise our children to follow the Sant Mat vows and attend satsang?

If we become an example of high moral qualities in the way we live, creating harmony and understanding at home, our children will naturally imbibe the same qualities. However, children should be allowed to make their own decisions in following a religion or path without any friction or opposition from the family.

How do we handle a situation if our child wishes to marry out of our caste or community, if this creates disharmony at home?

Caste, religion and social status have no bearing on Sant Mat, which teaches tolerance, patience and acceptance. From the Sant Mat perspective, caste and community are not relevant to the success of a marriage. What are more important are the qualities of the person and the couple's compatibility. Rather than provoking arguments, it is preferable if the subject can be discussed open-mindedly and with mutual respect and understanding.

What are your views on astrologers and palmists?

There are very few people who really understand astrology and palmistry in this modern world. Rather than becoming preoccupied with trying to predict the future, one should attend to meditation and gain the inner strength to meet any circumstance. Our destiny cannot be changed in any case.

Can black magic and curses affect us?

The practice of daily meditation and the consequence of regular simran give us the inner strength to be strong-willed with a clear sense of discrimination and a determined resolve not to fall prey to misguided beliefs and superstitions. Nothing can affect us if we remain strong within.

Are there really ghosts and spirits and can they affect us?

We should not give in to fears and superstitions but keep our mind strong through regular meditation. Nothing can affect us if we remain strong within.

What is the Master's policy on living wills and do-not-resuscitate orders?

Human life is an immense privilege and we should always choose life over death. Once we understand this general principle, the rest is up to us to decide since every case has its own circumstances. If we take the responsibility for others' end-of-life decisions we should make it clear that we will not take any action that conflicts with this principle

Should we resort to euthanasia (mercy-killing) for the terminally ill?

Life and death is governed by the individual's destiny – the natural outcome of the law of karma. The time of death is preordained. Resorting to euthanasia is interfering with the law of nature and therefore not advised.

Can we euthanize ("put down") our pets if they are very old and sick?

We do not have the right to take life – any life. Pets also have a karmic destiny that must be undergone. We cared so much for them when we needed them as companions, and we should make them as comfortable as possible and care for them until their natural end.

What happens if we stop following the vows after initiation?

We are bound by the choices we make and the cause and effect of them thereafter. Ignoring the vows we have made will prolong the spiritual journey to our eternal home.