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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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In Praise of Love

A place where there is love becomes sanctified by it. In that environment there is a powerful current of exaltation, but it can be felt only by a heart that is filled with love. If we perform our domestic and other worldly duties with love, we shall enjoy our life in comfort and without any worries, because in the presence of love, the mind and intellect are powerless to disturb one's inner calmness. Love does not influence only human beings. Even the animals and birds are subject to its elevating influence.

Love is a complete cure for every kind of trouble. Maulana Rum says:

*O! the intoxication of my love, be happy, well and strong;
for you are the only physician and cure for all my ailments.*

If we could experience true love, we would be our own physicians and could bring peace and happiness to ourselves. Then all our pain and sadness because of our separation from the Lord, which are caused by our not understanding the principles of love, would vanish and the radiant currents of joy would fill and invigorate our minds.

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





A Private Journey

Sant Mat is a private, individual journey of inward meditation, practised under the guidance of a spiritual master. It is not a new path, and has been taught under different names by mystics and spiritual masters throughout history, in many different parts of the world. The goal of the practice is to fulfil the true purpose of this human life by merging our soul with the divine power within. This divine power has many different names; the masters in India have called this power Shabd, the divine melody, the sound current. In the Christian tradition the equivalent name is the Word or the Logos, which is identified with God, and in the gospel of Saint John we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” However, if we want to use a less religious sounding phrase in place of God, or Shabd, or the Word, we could talk about the supreme energy that sustains and pervades the whole universe, including our consciousness. Either way, these are just names that point to a reality we have not yet experienced for ourselves.

Many of us these days don't like the word God very much. The way people talk about God often suggests a kind of cosmic busybody with quite a temper, rather inclined to take sides, but nevertheless wanting to be thanked for everything he does – rather like ourselves, in fact. We have dragged the idea of God down to our level and made him in our own image. But this is not what the mystics and spiritual masters mean when they refer to God. By ‘God’ they mean love – not sentimental, selective love, but infinite divine love, which is actually our birthright and is already within us, like treasure in a cave. The trouble is we have no real idea what ‘divine love’ means. It has to be experienced; to be realized.

A way of life

To come to the realization of this divine love, those following the path of Sant Mat are asked to live a highly principled way of life showing, even before initiation, that they are able to do so. The path of Sant Mat sees everyone as equal, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or language. There is no advertising of the path and no attempt to persuade anyone. The path is only for those individuals who feel drawn to it and who cannot do without it. As Maharaj Charan Singh so often said, “the pull has to come from within”. It is a way of life which combines the fulfilment of our social and family responsibilities with regular, private, daily meditation. It is not an escape from life’s duties and responsibilities, and indeed, someone following this path should aspire to be a better human being in every respect.

The path does not offer disciples any material benefits or so-called blessings, such as wealth, social status, children, career advantages or parking spaces! The Masters often say that real blessings are anything which turn our attention away from the world towards the divine within, and so ‘blessings’ might well take the form of poverty, sickness or humiliation.

As long as the principles are strictly adhered to, disciples around the world live as they wish; the Master has nothing against singing, dancing, family life, fashion, sports, business, charity, rock music, going to the movies or belonging to a religion. He only asks that we bear in mind the primary purpose of this human life, so that we never compromise our Sant Mat principles or neglect our daily meditation under any circumstance.

The relationship between the disciple and the Master is a deeply personal bond; it is no-one else’s business. This is not a church, club or society that one joins or leaves. The Sant Mat teachings, summed up, are very straightforward and easy to understand. Before applying for initiation, we are advised to attend satsang, read some Sant Mat

literature and study and question every aspect of the path, until all our questions are fully answered. In Sant Mat, as in most serious projects we undertake, the design and planning stage is very important. This period of life is not time wasted but time gained, for this will become our way of life.

Slow and steady wins the race

After initiation we begin in earnest on the path, discovering that we have embarked on a lifelong struggle with the mind. In meditation we are trying to still and focus our attention and turn it within, but the mind has the long-established habit of ‘running out’ with our scattered thoughts, feelings, perceptions and sensations. We start to appreciate the hitherto unnoticed power of the five passions – lust, anger, greed, pride, and attachment. They seem to have free rein over our thoughts, emotions and actions. At first it seems an unequal battle; our mind knows us inside out and, with so many tricks up its sleeve, the part of us which is trying to still the mind can become discouraged. However, with constant perseverance over days, weeks, months and years, we gradually learn how to calm and focus our attention. The mind begins to realize that it is going to lose the struggle one day, because – with the encouragement of the Master – we will never give up.

An encouraging sign may be that our attachment to things of this world starts to fade; we find the world less alluring and realize that if we are going to find the peace and happiness we yearn for, it will only be found within ourselves, not out here in the constantly changing world. This world can be seen as a prison and a life here as a life sentence, so why would we want to incur more life sentences when we are already serving one? The Masters advise us that if we do not fulfil the purpose of finding the Lord within in this lifetime, we will inevitably be drawn back to this world once again.

However, we should not expect any quick results in the battle with the mind – slow and steady wins the race. Anyone who has persisted on the path will find that doubts and discouragement do assail us all from time to time. This is quite natural; an amateur marathon runner will start the race full of optimism and energy. Halfway through, when the initial enthusiasm has worn off and it is nothing but hard work, he may well ask “why am I doing this?” and contemplate giving up. That is when a word of encouragement and a reminder of the goal make all the difference. Many of us may think we are just no good at meditation, and perhaps never will be. Masters, by contrast, are always positive, always encouraging, always supportive, and lead from the front by their example. Their remedy for any tendency to neglect our meditation is ‘more meditation.’ They say we are stronger than we think and we can do it.

Learning our ABC

There are no failures in Sant Mat! This means that if the Master wants to teach us something then, by hook or by crook, we’ll learn it! Nevertheless, at some point we are probably going to ask: if the Master wants me to still and focus the mind, why doesn’t he make it happen? Supposedly the Lord is all-powerful, then let him take me in when he sees fit. I don’t need to do anything – and anyway I can’t do it!

As an example, a child goes to school and starts to learn how to read. The teacher introduces the letters of the alphabet and shows how words are formed. The child knows the alphabet but cannot actually read anything yet. Then one day for homework the teacher gives the child a piece of paper with a few sentences and says, “I want you to read this”. The child gets home, looks at the paper and can’t make sense of it. She thinks, “I can’t do it, so I’ll play instead”. But then thinks, “The teacher is expecting me to read this, it must be important;

I need to find out what it says.” So she asks her mother, “You can read, you are my mother, please do it and tell me what it says, then I can do some seva to make up for it – I’ll tidy my room.” What a brilliant idea! But her mother is wiser than this, she knows that the point of the exercise is not for someone who already knows how to read but for that particular child, who cannot read, to learn how. So the mother, instead of telling the child what the words say, encourages her with small hints, keeps her going in the right direction. Slowly the child makes out the words and then the sentences until she understands for herself what the words say. And it turns out not to be at all important what the words say – what’s important is that by means of these particular words she learns to read and, once she can read, a whole new world opens up; everything changes.

This might help us to understand why the path can be taught using different words and different concepts, according to time, place and audience. It also explains why there’s no short cut, no substitute for meditation. Meditation is a learning process for each disciple and so each disciple has to engage with the process himself. However arduous it is, however inadequate he may feel, he cannot delegate that learning process to the Master or to anyone else – and although seva and going to satsang keep us looking in the right direction, they can never take the place of even a minute of meditation.

Now that we have learned the ABC of Sant Mat, understanding it is a private journey of inward meditation. We know there will be ups and downs in our relationship with the path, and that the only way to go is forward. We know the Master is a spiritual teacher and that he wants us to succeed in fulfilling the purpose of this precious human life. So we can ask the Master for guidance, for encouragement, for support in our private journey, but let us above all help ourselves by adhering to the principles of the path and giving our full attention and our time to regular, daily meditation.

Truth in a Nutshell

More to life than chatter

Do not indulge in idle, frivolous talk. If you are conscious of your spiritual poverty, devote every minute in becoming worthier to receive your rich heritage. Mere light-hearted gossip (frivolity) makes a mockery of your prayers before the Lord. It brands you a hypocrite and cuts at the very root of spirituality. Extravagant spending of precious time and energy is incompatible with your pleading for grace. Think more, and talk less.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *A Spiritual Bouquet*

From childhood, Thomas Edison, the American inventor who was to accomplish so much, was almost totally deaf. He could hear only the loudest noises and shouts, but this did not bother him. "I haven't heard a bird sing since I was twelve," he once said. "But rather than a handicap, my deafness probably has been beneficial." He believed it drove him early to reading, enabled him to concentrate, and shut him off from small talk. People asked him why he didn't invent a hearing aid. He always replied, "How much have you heard in the last twenty-four hours that you couldn't do without?" He followed this up with: "A man who has to shout can never tell a lie."

Charles Edison in *The Book of Virtues* by William J Bennett

The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *If the world is becoming worse and worse, after it becomes so evil, will it destroy itself?*

A: No, sister. The world was like this, is like this, and will remain like this. History does not encourage us to believe that there was ever peace in this world. Nations always have been fighting against each other. People always have been killing each other. Tribes always have been fighting one another for existence. The fate of the world will remain the same. There will never be peace in the world, there never was peace in the world. As long as the mind is there, human conflict will remain the same. The question is one of degree, sister. Sometimes there is a little more conflict, sometimes a little less. The purpose of the saints is to take us away. We are all prisoners here. The purpose of the saints is to unlock the prison-house, to set us free. That is their mission, their purpose and that is what their teachings tell us.

The Master Answers

Q: *Is there a link in between the initiate and the Master?*

A: Yes, as you have read in the Bible, Christ has referred to it somewhere by saying that I have been sent by the Father and I have been sent only to collect those whom he has marked. I have just come to collect my sheep and take them back to the Father. Every saint is sent into this world for particular souls – allotted souls, and those souls alone will come to him. They alone will have faith in him. They alone will be receptive to his teachings. They alone will practise meditation and go back to the Father. So, it is always with the grace of the Father that a disciple is drawn to the Master, and the Master initiates him and he works his way back to the Lord.

The Master Answers

Q: *If we are marked souls and this marking is due to our past good karma, do we have any reason to be proud of our past good karma? Why are we the marked souls?*

A: The marking is done by the Lord, and he knows best whom to mark and when to mark. Rather than feel proud, we should be humble and grateful for having been marked. If the Lord's grace is there, we should be more humble and grateful. As to why he marks certain souls, he knows best. We can't limit his power, we can't limit his discrimination. He can mark anybody he likes. We should only accept and do our bit, our duty.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Q: *Master, I have heard that it's gratitude which promotes that receptivity to meditate. How can we develop a greater sense of gratitude, so that we can be more receptive?*

A: By attending to that pull from within. The more effort you make, the more receptive you will become. The more receptive you will become, the more effort you will be able to make. We have to build that atmosphere in which we can build our treasure in heaven. You see, atmosphere counts a lot for meditation. That is why there is so much literature which we read, so many meetings, satsangs, discussions. All that is just to build that atmosphere for meditation, to help us be a source of strength to each other, so that we can help each other attend to our meditation. These are all means, strong means to that end. All these things make us receptive to that meditation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II





Maharaj Jagat Singh Ji

Humility

In the early 1980s a popular song began with the words “Oh Lord it’s hard to be humble, when you’re perfect in every way”. The words made people laugh. But before we laugh too hard at those words, we should reflect on them. Are they really so far removed from how we view ourselves? A common dictionary definition of ‘humble’ is “having a low estimate of one’s importance”. That’s certainly approaching the truth. But when Masters talk of humility, they mean something much deeper. To a Master humility means understanding that none of our worldly attributes – our achievements, our possessions, our status, *belong to us* and so cannot be anything to be proud of.

How humble are we really – when it comes to the crunch? If someone insults us, can we remain unmoved and still be an impartial friend to that person? Humility is difficult. It’s also an essential part of development on a spiritual path.

The value of humility

All mystics consider humility to be one of the fundamental virtues underpinning spirituality. Maharaj Charan Singh said that humility, like love, is a precursor to developing other virtues. He told us that when love and humility come, all other qualities follow, like cream on milk. He also told us that one thing that all satsangis have to understand is the value of humility. Meekness and humility are great virtues and unless we acquire them and do away with our ego and pride, progress will be difficult. Ego is that part of our mind that gives us self-awareness – “I”-ness: “I’m separate.” “I’m me – I’m an individual.”

The fact is that we are brought up to cultivate our ego. Our ego – in this world anyway – is what defines us. When feeling insecure about something, we've all been told: "Don't be weak! Stand up for yourself!" Humility is seldom associated with material success in this world. The belief is in pushing to get on in life; in standing out from the crowd, in being proud of what you can do. This may sometimes be good worldly advice, but it's not good advice for a satsangi. We must remember that in creating this individuality and differentiating ourselves from others, we are also separating ourselves from the Lord. That has significant consequences.

First, in emphasising our individuality, we fall into the trap of giving ourselves all the credit for our achievements. We think that they are the result of *our* effort, *our* cleverness, *our* hard work. But mystics through the ages have explained that this is not so: everything that we have done – everything that we have – has been given to us by the Lord. We think that we have been diligent; we have been clever; even that we have been generous, or kind, or thoughtful. In fact, all the credit is due to him, not to us. It's very difficult for egotistical people to believe that the Lord is the doer and the giver when they themselves appear to have worked very hard and have seen such good results materialise from their plans. This is one of the mind's clever tricks.

What is our real purpose?

We even think that *we* have found the path – the way back to the Lord. But, in fact, we haven't even done that. *He* has found us! Our Master has forged that link with each one of us by connecting us to the Shabd. It is now up to us to get things in perspective, use this marvellous gift that we have received, and give it priority over everything else.

The second consequence of viewing ourselves as individuals – separate from others, separate from the creative power – is that

we think that our ego is actually our true identity. In fact it's only a temporary identity that we use in this world, and it blinds us to the true purpose of life.

Is the most important purpose of life really to be a great artist? To raise a model family? To help the poor? To heal the sick? To pass on knowledge to future generations? Those intentions may be laudable, and we should do our best while we're here, but our main purpose in life as satsangis is to find the Lord, and to become loving and sincere enough to go back to him.

Whether we are rich or poor, physically strong or weak, handsome or plain – it makes no difference. Because, in the end, each of us will die, and at that time none of those things will support us nor will we be able to take any of them with us. Only what we are in ourselves can provide support and will accompany us.

And then our own inner strength will be worth more to us than all the baubles or prestige that we have spent our lives collecting.

“Bend low thy stiff neck”

The highest and most beautiful thing that we can learn on this path is complete surrender to our Master, known as *sharan* in the Indian language. The best way to do this is to immerse ourselves in simran and bhajan, because this will develop our connection with the Shabd. Making progress in meditation is only possible when we overcome the false sense of self and cease believing that we are the doers. This is very difficult for the worldly minded. Kabir Sahib knows us so well when he says in one of his compositions, “Bend low thy stiff neck at his holy feet”.

Only Shabd practice can bring us the realization of our true identity, which is oneness with the Shabd. Masters themselves see no

separation between the Lord and everything else. They see the Lord in everything and everyone. They *know* that he is the only one who exists. And that is why they are so humble.

It seems that the mind has several separate modes. When we're thinking about Sant Mat, the mind can be said to be in 'Sant Mat mode'. It's not so hard then to think that we are nothing – that Master is everything. But when, for instance in our daily life, we are under pressure to make a decision quickly, the mind too often finds itself in quite another mode. We are convinced that it's all up to us and at that time we forget about the Master. It is only when we are able to overcome the ego that we can humbly make our decisions in a spirit of service to him, knowing that the results are in his hands. Attention to the Sound Current, through meditation, is the only way to completely surrender to the Lord's will.

Finding our true selves

Psychologists tell us that self-deprecation or low self-esteem is not good, and we would agree with that. But low self-esteem is not the same thing as devoted service to our Master. In losing ourselves in him, we find our true selves.

Humble service makes love for the Master grow, and of course it makes love for our fellow human beings grow too. Then when we look at others we see their virtues instead of their faults. And when we see nothing but goodness and sweetness in those around us, we are encouraged to grow like them. Humility lets us admire them, and we soak up their virtues and feel love for them as we grow spiritually.

Real humility can only be learnt from a complete Master. He gives us the method (simran and bhajan) and this gives us the

opportunity to purify the mind and become humble. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

“So unless the mind becomes pure, unless we are able to eliminate the ego, we cannot be filled with humility.”

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. 1

Maharaj Sawan Singh gives us an example of the attitude of a humble disciple:

*My Lord, I am ignorant, I do not know what to ask from you!
Give me that which you think best for me.
And give me the strength and wisdom to be happy about what
you deem fit to give me and about
how and where you keep me.
I have no virtues, no devotion.
My actions are all dark and sinful.
I possess no merits and the mind has thoroughly crushed me.
For a sinner like me, O Lord, there is no refuge but your blessed feet.
Please take me under your shelter.
I want nothing more.
Make me your slave, that I may be yours, and you may be mine.*

Call of the Great Master



True Wealth

Abraham Maslow was a psychologist concerned with human values. During the 1930s he visited the Blackfoot Indians in Canada to study their views on life and relationships. A few members of the tribe had considerable possessions in the form of land, cattle and other goods, but the rest of the tribe kept referring to a different individual as “rich” and not those who were seemingly affluent. Maslow was surprised to find the so-called rich person living in a simple dwelling, his only significant possession a very beat-up old car. The car was knocked about because he would lend it to anyone who wanted it.

We in modern society hold the concept of riches simply to mean the money and goods we own. This tribe had a different concept. They felt that true wealth was in *the way one used what one had*. It was demonstrated by generosity, not the market value of one’s possessions.

We can apply this thinking to our spiritual teachers. The Masters may not be rich in the way that the world assesses it, but they are infinitely rich to the disciple because they give all that they have so freely to anyone who is ready to receive. And their ‘all’ really *is* all. The vitally important thing that a Master, and only a Master, can give is the connection with the Word or Shabd within us – the ever-resounding music within that is our direct connection to the Creator. In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

Saints of all ages, countries, and climes have proclaimed with one voice that salvation cannot be secured without contacting the Shabd, the immanent power.... This is our exclusive heritage, but we can be put in possession of it by saints alone.

It is impossible to understand the height, the reach and the power of a complete Master. He is a unique being, seemingly an ordinary human being living the life of a householder – earning his own living, supporting his family, undertaking the usual worldly duties – but inside he is a fully realized part of the Creator, for whom he acts on this and other planes.

The living Master is the proof of the potential of man. He has attained his spiritual power by conquering the mind in exactly the same way that we must learn to conquer the mind. This is within our capability and in fact has been built into our very design: the soul, embedded within the human form, can be liberated. In the Bible we read in St John, Chapter 1:

And as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become Sons of God, even unto them that believe on his Name.

In the same way, any father might tell his three year-old son that one day he can be as strong and able as a grown-up. It may be difficult for the three year-old to grasp, but it's true. And the Master looks after his disciples just like a father. On our spiritual journey he continually beckons to us. However dirty we are, he overlooks it and takes our hand; he pushes and pulls us; he waits for us when we lag behind; he provides for us; he protects us; he loves us. The extraordinary truth is that we are the Master's sole reason for being here and he will not rest until all the souls in his charge have been safely taken home.

The child in his ignorance, always wanting to play about, does not understand how much he needs the father. If we as disciples want to grow up, it may help to remind ourselves of what it is that the Master offers and what he does not. It is misguided to come to a Master looking for permanent happiness in this creation. It is pointless to

expect him to deal in fame or position. It is meaningless to ask for initiation just because our families or friends are satsangis and we might as well join the club. We should be clear that the Master provides us only with those things that lead to our final destination, Sach Khand. These may result in disillusionment with the world; they may help us to see that we can rely on nothing and no one in any permanent sense, turning us to him alone. Once we get the picture and start to align ourselves with him, our good days begin.

The Master's wealth is love and that is the wealth that he wants his disciples to realize. The present Master once said that his riches are his sangat, telling us in this way about the great value he places on the love of his disciples. That love actually has been generated by the inexhaustible flow of Shabd from the Master himself. The disciple falls into step with the Master by listening to him and following his instructions.

At initiation the Master gives us simran or repetition of the five holy names, which is an activity in which we can participate at any time. Firstly, it forms the beginning and key part of our daily meditation session. The repetition is carried out to help concentrate the attention between and behind the two eyes before we switch to bhajan – listening for or to the Shabd, which will take our attention in and up. Secondly, it is recommended that the repetition of the five names should be carried out at any time of day when the mind is free. If we can remember to do this simran, then we are reminding ourselves of our need for the Master and that we should turn towards him rather than letting our mind run out to the world.

If, like the Blackfoot Indians, we are able to acknowledge that real wealth lies in the way we handle what we have been given, we will see that there is a double whammy in our situation as satsangis. We are fortunate enough to have been given a share of the true wealth of a complete Master. That happened at our initiation and can never be

taken away. But it can only be realized as a fortune if we follow the instructions : simran and bhajan, simran throughout the day, satsang and seva, all practised with as much love and devotion as possible.

We carry the Creator, the Shabd and the Master within us all the time. They are light – so light that we are hardly aware of their presence. Instead we often choose to carry the world around. That is heavy, and we feel it! Like wealthy people who can use their wealth to ensure comfort for themselves, we should spend our time close to the Master (through the methods mentioned above) and so find peace. When we are disturbed by events and lose serenity, we should cultivate the habit of running back inside to the Master. Daily practice will, over time, bring about a real change in us. Hard work brings results, and instead of wasting our time over the tawdry baubles of the world, we will realize our true riches – peace of mind, joy and selflessness as we draw ever nearer to rejoining our Father in our real home. In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I we read:

Hazur Maharaj Ji (Maharaj Sawan Singh) used to say that we are like a person who has enormous wealth buried in his house but wanders about seeking trash. If he were only to search his own house he would find the treasure and save himself the futility and difficulty of the outer search. Therefore we should detach ourselves from everything else and work within to obtain the treasure of Shabd and Nam.



Grandmother's Table

Once there was a feeble old woman whose husband died and left her all alone, so she went to live with her son and his wife and their own little daughter. Every day the old woman's sight dimmed and her hearing grew worse, and sometimes at dinner her hands trembled so badly the peas rolled off her spoon or the soup ran from her cup. The son and his wife could not help but be annoyed at the way she spilled her meal all over the table and one day, after she knocked over a glass of milk, they told each other enough was enough.

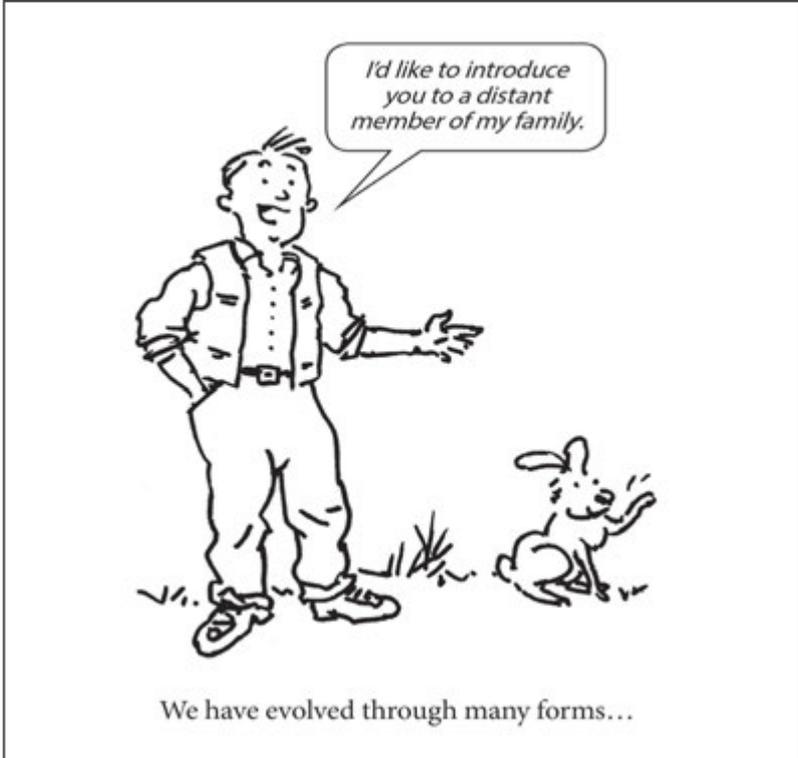
They set up a small table for her next to the broom closet and made the old woman eat her meals there. She sat all alone, looking with tear-filled eyes across the room at the others. Sometimes they spoke to her while they ate, but usually it was to scold her for dropping a bowl or a fork.

One evening just before dinner, the little girl was busy playing on the floor with her building blocks, and her father asked her what she was making. "I'm building a little table for you and mother," she smiled, "so you can eat by yourselves in the corner some day when I get big."

Her parents sat staring at her for some time and then suddenly both began to cry. That night they led the old woman back to her place at the big table. From then on she ate with the rest of the family, and her son and his wife never seemed to mind a bit when she spilled something every now and then.

The Book of Virtues, edited by William J Bennett,

Food for Thought



Wherever we can fulfil those suppressed or unfulfilled desires, wherever we can best reap the fruit of our actions, that is where we are sent. We can come back in an animal form. There are certain desires which can only be satisfied in those species. So we have to come back in those species.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. 1

What Is Simran Like?

At the time of initiation we learn the technique of meditation. This has the supreme purpose of eventually allowing us to merge with that divine creative power which brought the creation into existence and which sustains it even now.

The purpose of simran – the repetition of special words given to us by the Master – is to make the mind motionless and to achieve concentration. The purpose of dhyan, which is visualizing the form of the Master, is to hold our concentrated attention at the eye focus or third eye. When we achieve one-pointedness at the eye focus we come into contact with the Shabd, Word or Logos, which we perceive as light and sound. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

The purpose of simran is only to eliminate thoughts. The moment that you are there, that you have been able to eliminate worldly thoughts, light and shabd will absolutely pull you, will catch you there.

This is easy to read but hard to do!

Drawing close across the distance

Stilling our minds and merging with the Lord can often feel like a very distant goal. However, given the distance that we feel exists between us and the Lord, simran is the simplest technique that will draw us near to him. What else can we do? We cannot rely on circumstance to draw us near to the Lord's love. We cannot rely on people of the world to help us in our spiritual journey.

It is our efforts at simran during the time of meditation and in the course of the day that will invoke his grace. It is through this effort to focus the mind that the Master's presence will be felt. When Baba Ji is with us in his physical form, words cannot sufficiently describe that experience – every disciple has their own story to tell. But the only way we can hold on to that love is by simran. Simran is the way that we can hold on to the presence of the Master even when he has gone away.

Overcoming difficulty

In the beginning we have to force the mind to do simran; it does not appear to come naturally. Because simran of worldly topics does come naturally, we have a constant struggle with the mind.

Yet it is repetition done with love and faith that brings the grace of the Lord. Sometimes we acutely feel that we are lacking in these attributes and we wonder how our attempts at simran and bhajan can possibly invoke grace.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to reassure us by telling us that if we had no faith or love or devotion we would not even be thinking about those things. We would not be going to satsang, reading the books or even be concerned about our ability to do simran.

So if we are disappointed in the depth of our faith and love, it actually shows that we are travelling the path of faith and love. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh responds to the following question:

Q: *Could you explain to me about doing simran with love and devotion? To me these are just words, and I don't understand what they mean.*

A: Put your whole mind in these words; you will automatically feel the love and devotion. Let no other thought come in your mind. Let the whole of yourself, the whole of your mind, be in the simran. Love comes automatically.

And similarly, in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

The results of repetition will be in direct proportion to the love and faith brought to bear upon it. Carry out the simran of the Lord with love and faith. His names have a great power.

With our best effort, with our failures, comes humility and with our humility comes his grace. Simran is the way we can make an effort. Although the repetition appears dry, simran can stimulate a warm and loving feeling inside us. So the experience of carrying out simran can be compared to many of our most precious human moments.

Simran is building our relationship with the Lord

Simran is the way we build our relationship with the Lord. Simran is our call to him, our loving glance, our attention. Simran is our means to hold his hand. Simran is walking with him. Simran is sitting by his side.

Just like we sometimes take time to call our spouses or children during the day just to say hello, we can touch base with the Master throughout the day by doing our simran.

Simran is the expression of love

Simran is not only a useful way to occupy our minds, but is the highest form of expression when we converse with the Lord. What

better words are there for our conversation with him? If we want to call to the Lord, we can do simran. If we want to praise him, bow our head in submission, cry to him or laugh with him, we can do simran.

Simran is our call for help

If we are drowning we call for help – as loudly as we can. But just crying “help, help” does not save us, we are saved when someone hears our cry and comes and throws us a rope. Then we have to hold on to the rope. Simran is the calling to the Master, dhyān is holding on to the rope. And then the sound pulls us to safety.

Simran is our offering

Simran is our offering to the Master and to the Lord. We spend day and night in service to the world, to our family and friends, to our careers, to our minds. Our meditation time is our offering to the Lord; just one tenth of our time devoted to the One who has given us everything. Each name is a gift, an offering. And we can offer him our simran throughout the day as well. Just as during the day we offer a cup of tea to our friends or colleagues, we can offer the Master a bit of simran.

Breathing in God

Simran is like taking a deep breath of God. Every word is a deep gulp of his fresh air. Breathing is part and parcel of being alive. We need to breathe air to live – in and out – every second, every minute. It is not long at all before the body is irreparably damaged if we don't breathe.

Simran is like our spiritual breathing. We don't just breathe once or twice a day, but all day long, all night long, even when we are sleeping. Our respiratory engine is running twenty-four hours

a day until we depart from this earth. So too the engine of simran should run twenty-four hours a day, until our goal is reached.

Transfusion

Simran is like a blood transfusion – our worldly thoughts are replaced by the repetition of the names given to us by the Guru, and this gives us new health and vitality.

Stitching our minds to the Lord

Simran is the way that we stitch our minds to the Lord. Perhaps you have seen or taken part in the seva of stitching dhurries (mats) together to form one continuous piece of floor covering in a big satsang tent. One stitch at a time, slowly but surely the mats that are laid out are stitched together. Hard to believe how it will be done! In simran each word is a stitch.

*For all the eight watches of the day,
I meditate on my beloved.
My needle is of gold, my thread of silver –
Nama's soul is attached to God.*

Saint Namdev

Rubbing one world against the other

In a way, simran is the way that we rub one world against the other which creates the fire of devotion. Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

Fire is latent in wood, but we cannot perceive it or make use of it. If we know the technique of rubbing one stick against another to produce it, then we will be able to see it, feel it and make use

of it. In the same way ... the flame of God's Name is burning at the eye centre within each one of us.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. II

One step at a time on the journey home

Repeating the names is like taking one step after another so that we reach our destination. How can someone whose destination is London complain "I am not in London" if he hasn't followed instructions for getting to London, if he has not walked in the right direction or if he has not begun the journey at all?

We are on a journey home – each of the five holy names is a step on that journey. Each name is a step that takes us closer to our destination. With a great effort we need to put one foot in front of the other, focusing on the task at hand. It seems such a long way, but with one step at a time we will certainly get there. Shantideva says:

*Where can I find enough leather
to cover the whole earth?
But with just enough leather for a pair of shoes,
I can cover the whole earth.*

Buddhism, Path to Nirvana

With one step at a time, one name at a time, we will reach our destination.



Let's Get Real

Many jokes take as their source of fun the difference between an expected response to something and the actual response. Take for example this one:

A religious leader asked his flock, "What would you like people to say of you at your funeral?"

One of the congregation replied, "I'd like them to say I was a fine family man."

Another said, "I'd like them to say I helped people."

And another, "I hope they'd say I was a man of God."

The fourth responded, "I'd like them to say, 'Look, I think he's moving!'"

Well, yes – as unredeemed, all-too-human beings we might very well prefer the discovery that we were still alive! This ingeniously truthful answer makes us smile.

Most of us operate a mental filter and run our thoughts through it before we put voice to them. We instinctively know what is expected of us and we fall in line. But the fact that we find the amusing sayings of children collected into books and on websites shows that we find it refreshing that children are often candid and surprising in their views; the child has not yet learned to voice expected norms.

In the adult world, following conventional behaviour and conversation can be convenient. We may trot out a platitude, aware that our true feelings are a little different – and it's okay, we all do it. However, it can sometimes be the case that stock attitudes actually obscure our true needs from *ourselves*. It's then that a bit of honest self-scrutiny might do us good: honest acknowledgement of our needs as humans; honest acknowledgement of the needs of others, especially family

members; and, most importantly, honest appraisal of whether we are really doing our best to fulfil what we know to be the purpose of life.

Get real as humans

Receiving initiation from a perfect Master is the best thing that can ever happen to us in the human body. Sant Mat promises to take the disciple along a path that reaches right back to our Creator. The discipline of the four vows – lacto-vegetarianism, non-use of alcohol and mind-affecting drugs, a strict moral life, and two and a half hours daily meditation – is correspondingly rigorous and becomes a priority.

The present Master has advised that rather than thinking of ourselves as human beings seeking spirituality, we could see ourselves primarily as spiritual beings going through a human experience.

For the time being, at this end of the ladder, we are very much engulfed in the human, so ideally both needs should be met – the need of our soul for spiritual sustenance through the practice taught us at initiation, and the needs of mind and body as normal human beings. The idea is that gradually the spiritual makes the physical far less important to us – but it is a gradual process.

What do humans need? Well, food and shelter is an obvious one, so most of us need paid employment so that we can support ourselves. In Sant Mat we face up to taking responsibility for our own livelihood. It doesn't have to be more complicated than providing for the bare necessities, but equally, and depending on the extent of our responsibility for others and on our own makeup, it can be more. If opportunities for study and promotion are open to us, we may want to commit to them and reap future benefits, or we may prefer to be satisfied with less. Neither path is better or worse than the other. The key is recognizing our own needs, following the path which best fulfils them, and learning to live with outcomes that may not necessarily be what we planned.

Companionship is another human need. In a beautiful song by Bill Withers, the singer pleads, “Lean on me when you’re not strong, I’ll help you carry on.” And “Please, swallow your pride ... for no-one can fill those of your needs that you won’t let show.”

Just because we are aiming high, in fact to a level of consciousness at which our situation in life on the physical plane becomes of little concern to us, it does not follow that it is irrelevant to us in the here and now. It is natural to give and receive practical help and to give emotional support to each other. It is for this reason that the Masters recommend a settled family life within the framework of marriage. This isn’t appropriate for everybody but there is plenty of opportunity for friendship and good companionship, perhaps within the environment of seva or out in the community, including fun activities like singing, dancing and sport.

Get real to family life

When we live together in a family, respect for others has to be at the heart of our relationships. Whether it’s our children or our elders, we must be able to pay attention, listen and understand. We naturally want to pass our values and our way of doing things on to our children and it’s important that we share the benefit of our experience. However, they must also be allowed to express their own developing sense of independence. If we show them that we are always interested and if we are slow to condemn, ready to support, we will be keeping open a valuable channel of communication. It may not always be possible to like what our children do but it should always be evident that we love them. Loving sometimes means letting go, allowing someone to break the mould and move away. True family bonds don’t confine but are infinitely elastic.

Where else but in the family do we learn values that are so necessary in our spiritual life? Patience, unselfishness and humility

are difficult to acquire but we get the opportunity to dig deep and find them as we interact with our children or care for our elders. Our ego would like us to think that we are always right, always deserving, always important. But those around us don't necessarily subscribe to this opinion, so let's get real!

Get real to our real work

In *Call of the Great Master*, Maharaj Sawan Singh reminds a group of seekers that nothing that we busy ourselves with throughout the twenty-four hours of the day and night is “our own real work” – actually we are serving our body, our mind, our employers, friends and family. He advises, “Attend to your worldly duties during the whole day, but give a couple of hours every night to ‘your own task.’”

This task is, of course, our meditation. The Masters also give us striking images to remind us that we can cherish our real task even whilst carrying out daily duties. One such image is of the young girls of a traditional Indian village: in days gone by they would walk from the well, chatting with their companions and yet all the time keeping part of their mind on the pot of water carried on their head so that it never became unbalanced. Another is of a newly married girl who returns home to visit her parents, plays with younger children and works in the house, all the while keeping thoughts of her husband in her heart.

We too can be as focused as this, especially if we are alive to the fact that we came into this world with an objective. It is an objective that sometimes seems to disappear in the clouds of karma and the clamour of small needs, so this is where discipline comes in.

Let's keep those original, sincere intentions, which first brought us to the Master, alive and burning brightly. We know how to do it. It's by carrying out the practice of meditation every day, regularly and punctually, and by following the principles of Sant Mat in our daily life.

Small Blessings

*Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves;
they will have no end of fun.*

*Blessed are those who can tell a mountain from a molehill;
they will be saved a lot of bother.*

*Blessed are those who know how to relax
without needing an excuse.*

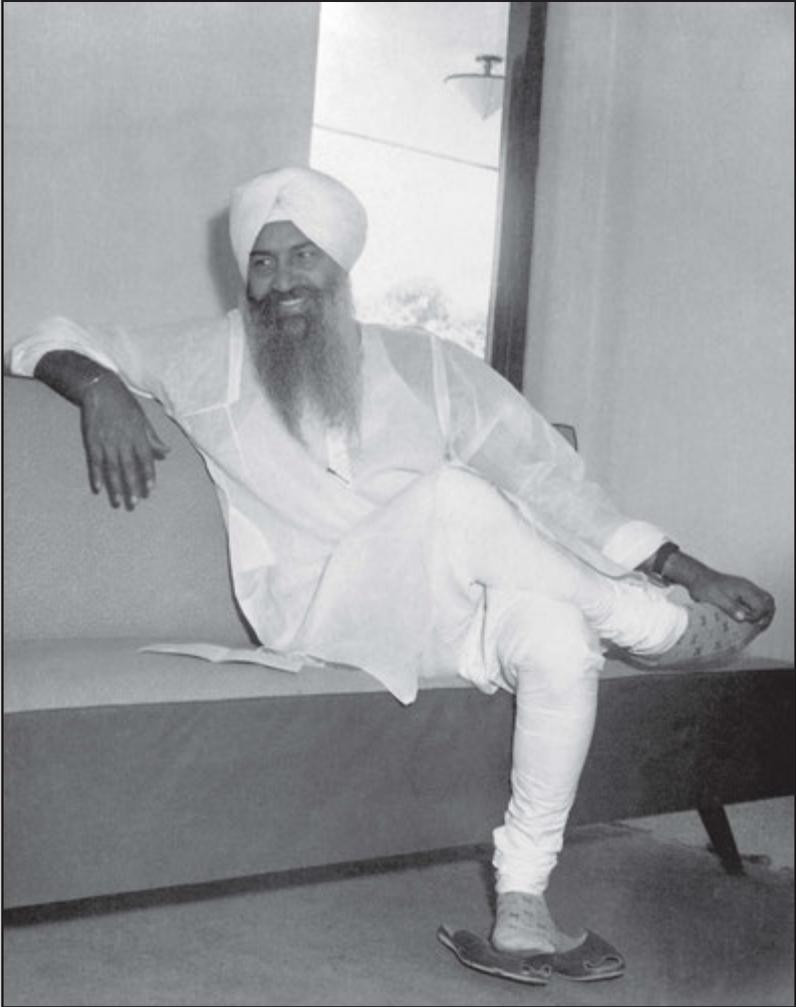
*Blessed are those who are sane enough
not to take themselves too seriously;
they will be valued by those about them.*

*Happy are you if you can appreciate a smile and forget a frown;
you will walk on the sunny side of the street.*

*Happy are you if you know how to hold your tongue and smile,
even when people interrupt and contradict you or tread on your toes;*

*Above all,
blessed are you who recognize the Lord in all whom you meet,
for you have found true wisdom.*

Joseph Folliet 1903 - 1972



Maharaj Charan Singh

No Easy Way Out

If we keep the company of lovers and devotees of the Lord, by seeing them a desire to love and worship the Lord will automatically awaken in us too.... It is essential that someone keeps hammering away at our minds, explaining things to us, reminding us what is real in the world ... directing our attention inwards.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II

What is it about the Master that attracts us? He is just so positive, so cheerful and generous! Every contact with him renews our sense of purpose to achieve our spiritual goal. His influence redirects us, reminding us that there are other possibilities, that we do not have to remain tied down and depressed by the things of the world. His message is charged with love and awakens in us a determination to achieve what might otherwise seem impossible.

If we are honest, in most cases our efforts on this path do not bear much examination. No doubt, there are times when we are fired up with devotion, but we probably also experience long periods of laziness and discouragement. But no matter how we are managing, sooner or later we are always brought back to the awareness that someone very special is travelling along with us, watching us and offering us unseen help. Though we may be weak, his will is strong. He wants us to get out of the foggy dream-life and experience something infinitely more real and pleasant. If nothing else, our recurring sense of gratitude towards him helps us to renew our efforts.

He is offering us something so wonderful – he is offering to permanently remove our spiritual darkness. And the sacrifice he asks of us in return is so little in comparison. But sometimes we do not see it that way. A gentleman once told the Master how hard he found it to follow the path. The Master acknowledged that it is difficult but followed this up by asking what the alternative is. The important thing, from our perspective, is to somehow maintain that daily contact with him and not let the world completely rule our destinies. He tells us not to worry about what has happened. We should just adopt a positive attitude today. He reassures us that as long as a person is trying hard to do the right thing, to work in the right direction, the grace of the Lord will be with him.

Sometimes we don't like to hear what the Master says, but the effect is to motivate nonetheless. Master points out that our thoughts are the seeds of our actions. Wayward thoughts inevitably lead us towards wayward actions, because at this level the mind is all-powerful. He says that if we are not careful, we will find we are digging a pit for ourselves. Then definitely, he says, we will fall in and have to suffer the consequences. Instead, we should be trying to fill the pit, developing the strength we need to confront our destiny and growing to know reality.

There is obviously no easy way out. Those who have been on the path for a while know this, because we've tried every shortcut we could dream up! But we were forced in the end to admit that the simple approach Master gave us all those years ago, was indeed the easiest. It is astonishing how effective constant one-pointed simran can be.

We must come to the third eye if we are to enjoy the Shabd. The first steps are always the hardest – when we have to struggle with

our mind at its wildest. Initially, we may feel little effect from our meditation, but inevitably a shift takes place in our lives. With a little perseverance, our attitude begins to gradually change. Even if our mind keeps bombarding us with doubts, we are gaining ground.

We may not think that we are capable of much love and devotion. But what is the battle to persist with meditation (even when it is dry), if not love? The ability to be calm in the midst of family and business problems is also love. Accepting our lot in life, and still being kind and generous to those around us; keeping a place in our lives for Master; giving him time every day – these are definitely expressions of love. Adopting the right attitude to seva is love. These things may not seem much to us at the time we experience them, but you cannot keep storing up riches without their becoming noticeable one day. Eventually true love springs up as a result of this inner struggle, and meditation becomes sweet.

We are not going to become perfect overnight. Our weaknesses may plague us for a long time before they gradually die out. We may see our present problems as a form of rejection on the part of the Master, a lack of love by the Master. We are plagued with doubt. But the Master feels our suffering more deeply than we do. He knows what is best for us. If we were to receive an apparent excess of grace when we are impure it would be like a father giving too much money to an immature son – it would bring him only trouble and confusion. The Master knows the value of our present suffering. He knows how to condition the mind to make it receptive to the Lord's grace. He loves us too deeply to take half measures.



From Form to Formless

Many of us, even those who have comfortable lives, interesting jobs and supportive families can have a sense that there is something missing in life – a gap. We make the mistake of thinking that this gap can be filled by worldly things, but no material goods or relationships can appease the deep, ancient thirst coming from within our being.

This thirst is the call of the soul, yearning to return to its divine source. It's like a water drop that belongs in the sea. The drop may travel thousands of miles from the mountain top before joining the ocean. Similarly, the soul has no rest until it finds its true home. One of Maharaj Charan Singh's last statements to his sangat was, "May your love of the form culminate in the love for the formless". This sentence provides a clue to the purpose of our existence. The "form" the Master refers to is the physical person of the Master, loved by his disciples, while the "formless" refers to the Shabd. The physical form of the Master is actually a manifestation of the inner Shabd.

When both the Guru and disciple are in the human form we have hit the jackpot. For it is only then that we can learn and be instructed *at our level* on the journey inwards towards the inner light. It is the journey of a lifetime. In a letter, Hazur Maharaj Ji writes:

The main purpose of life is to realize God. This privilege, the Lord has bestowed only on human beings. The human body is the top rung of the ladder of creation. From here we can either drop down to lower species or we can go back to the Father and escape from the cycle of birth and death.

Ravidas, the cobbler saint writes, “For myriads of births have I been separated from you. O Lord, this birth is dedicated to thee.” So this human form is coveted by many souls. To make best use of being human we must value the body’s real purpose, which is to take us beyond material forms. The journey of Surat Shabd Yoga will lead us to the divine within the human body by putting us in touch with the spiritual, celestial sound and light within.

In Hindu marriages it is a custom for the groom to give the bride a necklace called the *mangal sutra*. The meaning of *mangal* is ‘holy’ or ‘auspicious’ and *sutra* means ‘a thread’. The gift of Nam at the time of initiation is like a holy thread that weaves itself into our entire life. It supports the fabric of our being. It guides us within so that we can transcend the body and be drawn into the life of the spirit – in other words, move from reliance on forms to appreciation of the formless. During initiation the disciple is taught five holy names which he or she will repeat in meditation. In this way the disciple’s soul is connected with the divine and embarks on an inner journey towards the Lord.

When we human beings take a good look at ourselves, we have to acknowledge that we are not very far removed from animals. All physical matter consists of a number of elements which are shared by the various species of life. The difference between the human being and the animal is the fifth element, ether, which is absent in animals and all other species. This element is also known as the power of discrimination, the power to be able to discern whether something is leading us closer to the light or away into the darkness. It is this fifth element that gives the human being the capacity to perceive the divine. But perhaps we should ask ourselves whether the animal within us still requires some taming? What happens to animals which are not trained? They run wild! This is the state in which we find our minds, running wild in this world.

When we take seriously to the spiritual path, initially our entire effort has to be towards training this mind. So the saints have laid out four guiding principles which assist us:

The first principle is that of observing a pure vegetarian diet, avoiding meat, fish, fowl, eggs, or any derivatives of these. Spiritually speaking, the consumption of vegetable life incurs less karmic load than the ingestion of animal products. Naturally the idea is to lighten our karmas as opposed to increasing them. This spiritual journey is best travelled lightly!

The second principle is that of abstinence from alcohol and mind-altering drugs. These substances paralyze our sense of discrimination so that under their influence we do indeed act as mere animals, not human beings.

Thirdly, we are to earn our own living and lead a sound moral life. In essence, we should be honest in all our dealings, respecting others and treating them fairly. Sexual relationships should take place only within the framework of marriage. Each person will no doubt have their own obstacle course of karmic lessons and moral dilemmas to navigate through. Our power of discrimination will continually be sharpened as we learn to decipher what is helping us on our way and what is a hindrance.

The fourth principle is a daily two and a half-hour meditation practice, as taught by the living Master or his appointed representative at the time of initiation. The first part of this is simran or the repetition of the holy names with the aim of focussing our attention at the eye centre. The second part consists of bhajan, or listening to the celestial sound.

The first three principles create a disciplined life for this human form of ours and the fourth is our homework to take us on our way, far beyond form, to the formless. It is in the practice of these principles

that the relationship between Satguru and the disciple deepens, giving us the opportunity to become better humans and to channelize our love and energy toward the divine. Meditation is a grounding and anchoring factor, awakening us to our real purpose. It is a panacea for all ailments, the medication that tames the mind.

But it's not easy. This world of illusion constantly captivates the mind, for the senses are never satiated. We are always hankering after more more and more! More power, more beauty, more money and, before we know it, the clever mind has trapped our attention and stolen our precious time and energy. Saints constantly remind us to attend to meditation.

Once a disciple is initiated, the journey is a joint responsibility. The Satguru's responsibility is to initiate and guide the soul back home. The disciple's responsibility is to mould his or her life around the Sant Mat teachings. The Masters always keep their end of the bargain. The question we have to ask ourselves is, do we keep ours? The Lord waits patiently for us at the eye centre. Do we show up?

One tool that assists in creating the atmosphere for meditation by keeping the mind focused is to do simran during our daily activities. If we punctuate the day with simran it will prevent the attention from spreading out. Before long, the practice of simran will become automatic. Then every moment of the day becomes sacred in the remembrance of the beloved Master. Each moment becomes charged with spiritual energy and vibrancy.

The Master also emphasizes the importance of our attitude – that lens through which we view life. James Allen writes in *As a Man Thinketh*, “Man is the master of thought, the moulder of character”. He goes on to tell us, “Just as a gardener cultivates his plot, keeping it free from weeds and growing the flowers and fruits which he requires, so may a man tend the garden of his mind, weeding out all the wrong,

useless, and impure thoughts and cultivating toward perfection the flowers and fruits, of right, useful and pure thoughts.”

Good attitude is like a muscle. When we exercise it and use it, we strengthen it. If we do not use it, we lose it. The mind becomes negative because of the negative, downward pull of the world. We are trying to rise above that.

One of the most helpful attitudes to cultivate is humility. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, “In order to be deserving of the Lord’s grace we have to empty the heart of vainglory for, unless a vessel is empty, it can contain nothing.” Meditation, done with humility, is the emptying of the vessel.

On the subject of humility, there is a well-known story about a king who had a beloved minister or *vazir*, a man of very humble origins. Being jealous of this close relationship, the other ministers waited for an opportunity to bring the vazir down. Watching him closely, they noticed that every day he used to enter his room and lock it behind him. He spent a considerable amount of time there before returning. Eager to discredit the vazir, the ministers convinced the king that he must be stealing from him. So the king ordered the vazir’s room to be opened and checked. To everyone’s surprise, all they could find there were some old tattered clothes. When called to give account of himself, the vazir quietly said that he entered the room daily and held his old clothes as a reminder of where he had come from. He was a truly humble man who didn’t want to be fooled by the trappings of success.

All religious paths value the quality of humility and all true mystics demonstrate it. At the Louvre in Paris there is a painting by the sixteenth-century Italian artist Tintoretto. It shows Jesus Christ at the ‘last supper’, his final meal with his disciples before the crucifixion.

What is special about the subject matter is that Christ is bending down, washing the feet of his disciples.

How can we grow this quality of humility within ourselves? One golden opportunity that we have been given is that of seva, because in working together in the service of the sangat we gradually learn to overcome the powerful ego and transcend some of the demands of our limited, and limiting, human form.

If we look at our lives, we can see them as a pipe or conduit. Our job, once initiated, is to keep the pipe clean and clear by standing up to the ego and stepping aside from ourselves. It's then that God, the formless, can flow through us. The Persian mystic Hafiz says, "I am the hole in a flute that the Master's breath moves through. Listen to this music." In that hole, that nothingness, we find the Lord.

Let's not waste another moment. While we are charged with the spiritual love and grace of the Master, let's make the journey, channelizing our devotion to his form to help us transform into the formless.



*If He is in sight wherever you look,
why cast a blind eye
when it comes to yourself?*

*The Real said to you
I'm wherever you turn—*

*So why don't you take
a closer look at yourself?
Dara Shikoh in Loves Alchemy*

Love Knows No Law

In Call of the Great Master Maharaj Sawan Singh explains that in love, no sacrifice is too great.

“Love means total self-effacement,” said the Great Master. “Kabir says, ‘The lane of love is so narrow that it cannot contain two. If I am, He is not;’ He further says, ‘If you wish to enter the lane of love, cut off your head and put it on your hand; then enter this lane.’”

“Maharaj Ji, this is not clear,” said Sardar Kesra Singh.

“It means that no sacrifice is too great for a lover,” the Great Master explained.

“What sacrifice, Sir?” a satsangi asked.

“A lover has to sacrifice everything – his body, mind and possessions – at the altar of love,” said the Master.

“But how, Sir?” asked the satsangi.

“Assume that you are sitting in meditation,” said the Great Master. “If you were to stop meditating as soon as your limbs began to ache as a result of the withdrawal of the soul current from the body, you would not be acting like a true lover. A true lover would suffer every kind of pain in order to have a glimpse of the Lord. Assume that you love riches. The door of heaven would not then open up for you. Love of the Lord should supersede all other loves in your heart. True love consumes all impurities and cleanses the chamber of the heart for the entry of the Lord. Selfless love and devotion is the ladder that takes you straight to the palace where the beloved Lord resides. Love knows no law, nor is there any bargaining or account keeping in connection with it. You probably know the story of the milkmaid who was selling one pint of milk for an *anna* [a small coin]. Buyers came, paid their

annas and went away with the pints of milk. But when the young man with whom she was in love came, she forgot all about counting and went on putting pint after pint into his bowl. Her mother scolded her for giving away milk like that.

“‘Mother!’ she cried, ‘You expect me to keep an account with the one I love? Don’t you know that love forgets all accounts!’”

“The heavenly keeper of accounts also forgets all our accounts if we offer our true love to him,” the Great Master said in conclusion.

Continuing, the Great Master said, “A story is told about the youth of the great saint Tulsidas. When he was newly married, he loved his wife so much that he could not bear separation from her for a single day – but an occasion arose when she had to go to her parents’ home. He managed to pass the day, but as soon as the evening set in he felt so lonely and love-sick that he left for his wife’s village on foot.

“When he reached the bank of the river, night had fallen and the river was in high flood. No boatman was willing to risk his life at such a dangerous time, even for the offer of four times the regular fare, so he entered the river to swim across it. After some time he saw a dead body floating downstream and on this he managed to complete the crossing.

“When he reached his father-in-law’s house at the dead of night, he found all the doors and windows shut tight. He went round the house to see if there was any way to get in, but found none. As he sat there trying to think of some way to climb to the roof of the house, he heard a rustling sound as though someone was letting down a rope from above. On looking, he found a big rope hanging down, and with its help he reached his wife’s room and thanked her for helping him with the rope.

“‘What rope?’ she asked in surprise.

“‘Didn’t you let down that big rope for me to climb up?’ he asked.

“No, I did not let down any rope,’ replied his wife. He then took her to the wall, where they found that it was a big snake that he, in his blind infatuation, had taken for a rope. He then told her that he had crossed the river in high flood on a dead body, at which she exclaimed, ‘My beloved husband, if you had only one-tenth of this love for God, he would have opened the gates of heaven for you! What do you see in me – vessel of dirt that I am? Turn your love to the Lord, and save both me and yourself.’

“These simple words of an uneducated girl acted as an eye-opener to the saint and changed his life. He fell at the feet of his wife.

“Great woman,’ he cried, ‘you have shown me the light! May the Lord bless you.”



INFORMATION ON ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

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- Articles should focus on the Sant Mat teachings and may also draw on the universal teachings of other mystics.
- Articles should not be based on, or discuss, the personaity of the master or the writer.
- Articles must be your own original work. If quotations from other sources are included, complete source references must be given.
- Articles should be between 500 and 1500 words in length.

If accepted, your article will be edited according to the requirements of the magazine. You will be contacted only if your submission is accepted. Please include your name, age, postal address, and email address with your article.

Book Review



The Spiritual Guide: Perspectives and Traditions, Volume Two

EDITED BY BEVERLY CHAPMAN

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2 VOLUMES.

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This book, in two volumes, seeks to shed light on the nature of the master-disciple relationship across eight different “spiritual, religious or philosophical traditions.” Volume Two explores the traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, and Sikhism. (Volume One, reviewed in last month’s issue, covers Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, and Graeco-Roman philosophy.)

The reader will note vast divergences among the traditions, inevitable only because of the immense cultural differences among traditions so widely separated in time and geography. For example, even the way the living spiritual guide is understood or defined varies widely. As the editor notes in her Introduction:

In one tradition, the guide may be thought of as a mentor, a teacher, or a stern taskmaster; in another as a friend, a kindly elder, a beloved father or mother. In one tradition, the master may be thought of as someone who has advanced just a few steps further along the way than the disciple, while in another the guide may be seen as a person who has become one with the goal itself, whether that spiritual goal is called God, the Tao, God’s Holy Name, the One, the Real, or any other name.

Yet, despite all the diversity, certain patterns emerge. As the editor observes:

Again and again, we see that what is being taught by the spiritual guide is something that cannot be expressed in words and cannot be explained in concepts: it is a reality that must be experienced, and this

experience comes through practice.... The guide helps the disciples to find that reality, but cannot do the work for them.... Above all else, we see that across the many cultural differences, the relationship between mentor and disciple is one of love.

The Buddhism chapter begins with the story of how the Prince Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha, the enlightened one. His example as a teacher became the model for all Buddhist “wisdom teachers” to follow. He insisted that words could never describe enlightenment; that teaching should be practical, addressing students at their own level of development; and that teachers should use whatever means are appropriate for reaching the people of their own time and place. Ironically, this explains the extraordinary diversity of Buddhism. The chapter goes on to show how teachers in the various traditions within Buddhism – whether a Zen roshi, a Tibetan lama, or a Theravada senior monk – use remarkably different teaching methods, while all still following the model of the Buddha.

The pragmatic approach of Buddhist teachers is well illustrated by an incident with a twentieth-century teacher in the ancient Thai Forest Tradition, Ajahn Chah. He was asked why he sometimes says one thing to a particular student, and then the opposite thing to another student. Ajahn Chah explained:

It is as though I see people walking down a road I know well. To them the way may be unclear. I look up and see someone about to fall in a ditch on the right-hand side of the road, so I call out, ‘Go left, go left!’ Similarly, if I see another person about to fall in a ditch on the left, I call out, ‘Go right, go right!’ That is the extent of my teaching.

The chapter gives numerous examples and stories about Buddhist teachers and their disciples throughout all the branches of Buddhism, highlighting not only the importance of the spiritual guide in the Buddhist tradition, but also the role of the student. An important contemporary Buddhist teacher explained that there are two basic elements necessary for liberation: “finding a spiritual teacher and cultivating an effective relationship with him.”

The chapter on Christianity begins with the humble and loving example of Jesus Christ as a teacher, who got down on the floor and washed the feet of his disciples, saying to them: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” With quotes and anecdotes from the early church down through modern times, this chapter explores the Christian concept of “spiritual friendship – the bond of brotherly or sisterly love that unites those seeking nearness to God with those who provide them with guidance.” The person charged with giving spiritual guidance has been called abbot or abbess, elder, spiritual director, pastor, and many other names. Regardless of the title, the fundamental principle which Christ had modelled is that those who give spiritual guidance to others must do so in a spirit of humility and loving service.

The section on the Desert Fathers and Mothers of Egypt and Syria (third through fifth century CE) includes many powerful anecdotes. In one, an elder inspires aspirants with new zeal for spiritual practice:

Abbot Lot came to Abbot Joseph and said: Father, according as I am able, I keep my little rule, and my little fast, my prayer, meditation and contemplative silence; and according as I am able I strive to cleanse my heart of thoughts: now what more should I do? The elder rose up in reply and stretched out his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire. He said: Why not be totally changed into fire?

Throughout the chapter recurs the theme of friendship. As Saint Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, put it:

What is a friend, if not a companion in love, to whom you can unite and devote your soul and entwine it in such a way that ... two become one. You can entrust yourself to the friend as to your second self, from whom you fear nothing and from whom you demand nothing dishonourable for the sake of your own advantage.

The chapter on Sufism is organized thematically, in three sections. The first section, titled “The Quest of the Seeker,” discusses the seeker’s attempts to find his guide (murshid or pir); the second section, titled “The Commitment of the Disciple,” discusses discipleship; the third section, titled “The Power, Humility, and Grace of the Murshid,” discusses the qualities of the murshid. Throughout the chapter, many reasons are given by various Sufis about why it is absolutely essential for the spiritual seeker to find a guide. Perhaps Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak al-Jerrahi (1916–1985) explains it with the most colourful analogy:

Let us join the flock belonging to a saint. A flock is sold as a single lot, including odd specimens that happen to be underweight, sickly, mangy or scabby. The owner’s name is mentioned, and a deal is made for the lot. If we join a flock belonging to a saint, we shall undoubtedly benefit from the good bargain that will be driven on account of our betters.

Rumi warns not to “surrender your hand except to the hand of the pir, for God is the helper of his hand.” Discipleship – metaphorically, holding on to the hand of the master – requires the commitment to stay alert to his ever-present guidance. The eleventh-century Sufi al-Qushayri urges the spiritual wayfarer to find a “master from whom he can learn his path, one breath at a time.”

The Sikhism chapter is unique in that it uses quotes exclusively from the Sikh scripture, the Adi Granth, to explain the nature of the guru in the Sikh understanding. The guru is such a central concept for Sikhism that the word “guru” appears many times on every page of the scripture. The author observes that the word “guru” can refer to a human teacher or to Nam, the Creative Power that creates and sustains the universe; it can even mean God. “Guru” literally means that which leads from darkness to light, and each of these possible meanings has the characteristic of dispelling the darkness of ignorance, giving guidance toward Truth. As is said in the Adi Granth, “If a hundred moons were to rise, and a thousand suns appeared, even with such light, there would still be pitch darkness without the Guru.”



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

