

January 2015

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
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VOLUME 11 • ISSUE ONE • JANUARY 2015

Rise, O Moon

Rise, O moon,
and spread your light across the heavens;
the stars remember you in silent prayers,
their hearts glimmering with hope.

Now, like beggars,
we roam the alleyways of earthly life,
when once in our Homeland,
we were merchants of rubies.

O, may no one ever have to leave his own home,
for one is not worth a piece of straw
in this alien land!

They need not clap their hands
to startle us out of this world, O Bahu;
we are already disposed to fly back
to our long-lost Home.

Rise, O moon, and spread your light –
They are all fondly talking of you!
Even if thousands of moons like you were to rise,
without my Friend I would still be in utter darkness.

Hazrat Sultan Bahu, Sultan Bahu



The Disciple's Way of Life

The teachings of the saints emphasize the importance of the living Master. When we are with the physical Master we are struck by his patience, love and his sense of humour. Masters encourage and inspire us. And without their example and their grace, following a spiritual path would be impossible. Masters always do their duty toward us, but they also ask us to do our part.

We know that doing our part includes the four vows, and that there can be no compromising on those promises we make to him. But beyond that, there is a certain approach to life that the Masters encourage.

There is a beautiful example of this from the life of a Muslim mystic given by Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I:

One of the Muslim seers once said: "I have chosen four things to know, and have discarded all other knowledge of the world." He was asked, "What are they?"

"One", he answered, "is this; I know that my daily bread is apportioned to me and will neither be increased nor diminished. Consequently, I have ceased to try to augment it. Secondly, I know that I owe to God a debt which no other person can pay on my behalf. Therefore, I am occupied with paying it. Thirdly, I know that there is one pursuing me (death) from whom I cannot escape. Accordingly, I am preparing myself to meet him. Fourthly, I know that God is observing me; therefore, I am ashamed to do what I should not do in his presence."

So, in the first point, the Muslim mystic says: “One is this; I know that my daily bread is apportioned to me and will neither be increased nor diminished. Consequently, I have ceased trying to augment it.” The essence of this point is contentment and living in the will of the Lord – accepting with gratitude what he gives us – whether it’s on the outside in terms of health, sickness or material success or failure; or the inside in terms of spiritual experiences or darkness. If we can just learn this one thing – contentment – our lives will be immeasurably improved.

As satsangis, the longer we are on the path the more we realize how important it is to develop a spirit of contentment. Contentment is not a small thing or an optional virtue on the path. It is absolutely key and core to developing any level of spiritual understanding.

We may start out thinking the path is about rising to the inner heights, but we end up realizing that a big part of the path is learning to surrender, to accept and to be content. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh responds to the question of how we can better accept the conditions of our lives:

Well, that is what the meditation is training us to do: to accept everything which comes in our destiny. Meditation is nothing but training our mind to accept or to live in the Lord’s will. That is the object of meditation: to surrender to him, to keep us in any way he likes. We accept both joy and misery with the same balance, the same attitude.

If we take our satisfaction from worldly possessions and achievements, we will never have contentment because the list of possible demands is limitless and someone will always have more than we do.



There is nothing wrong with being successful or living a comfortable life. Contentment is an inner quality. We can have nothing and be contented and have everything and have no contentment. Saints say that our worrying about worldly things won't change our destiny, but it can rob us of our chance to make spiritual progress. Baba Jaimal Singh says in *Spiritual Letters*:

To keep the higher mind always firmly attached to the Shabd-dhun, and to wean the mind away from worldly desires. Only that which is written on our foreheads will be given to us, nothing else will come our way. Why then hanker after worldly ambitions and desires?

One approach to achieving contentment is to try to do all of our duties as if we are doing them for the Master. The logic for this is that Master is the one who recommends that we live the kind of life we are living. He recommends that we live a householder's life, that we earn our own living, that we honestly do all of our duties. If he had told us to leave the world and go to a cave or a mountain, we probably would have done that. Masters are perfect examples of how to live and they teach us by their own actions.

“Secondly, I know that I owe to God a debt which no other person can pay on my behalf. Therefore, I am occupied with paying it.” This mystic is saying that he is taking responsibility for what he owes. This is a novel approach. It's much more typical to blame others. If something is wrong in my life I can blame the government, I can blame my childhood, I can blame the Master or the Lord.

But the Muslim mystic is saying, “I owe a debt and I alone am responsible for paying it.” What is the debt that the mystic is referring to? It's the karmas, both of this life and of previous lives.

These karmas have to be paid, and we have to live a way of life that will minimize future karmas. So, as long as we owe, we come back here to experience the results of our previous actions. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that our meditation is mainly for our store of karmas – to settle that debt. The Master urges us to take responsibility for doing our spiritual work. He wants us to put in the effort even though the results aren't in our hands.

Meditation is the action he most wants from us. It may be considered a noun, but for us it's a verb! It's what we do. Sant Mat is not a theoretical philosophy. It's a path of action. Master wants us to try and to be receptive.

“Thirdly, I know there is one pursuing me (death) from whom I cannot escape. Accordingly, I am preparing myself to meet him.”

We don't have to wait until we have a medical diagnosis to understand that our life is of a limited duration. From the moment we are born, the only certainty is that we will die. The diagnosis is already in.

By remembering our death, we can have the courage to pursue the path more boldly, more bravely. When we remember our death, we realize that there is nothing to lose – we are free to focus on what matters most. We are free to do what is in our heart.

We fear death because we think we are the body. In the book *Many Voices, One Song*, Samarth Ramdas says that, “We do not achieve spirituality until we stop thinking of ourselves as just body.” Just as Master's real form is not the body, it's the Shabd; our real form is also the Shabd.

The Muslim mystic said that he is preparing for death. How do we prepare for death? Meditation. Meditation is the process that the Masters use to teach us how to practice dying daily. It is a process of slowly withdrawing from the body. Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I:

One of the benefits of the teachings of the saints is that a disciple crosses the gates of death in a state of happiness and thus conquers it.... It is not merely talk or a fable taken from some book or scripture.... Death has no fear for a follower of the path of the saints.

All saints say that this body is the laboratory where we must conduct our research. This process of dying while living is an actual process, not just a concept or a theory. It's a process of holding the attention at the eye centre and little by little withdrawing it from the entire body.

The more we experience the process of dying while living, the less fear we will have of our own physical death, and the more authentically we can live in this world. Our perspective begins to change in this very life when we realize that we are not limited to this physical body. We are walking and living in a world that is temporary and subject to change, but our real being is timeless and immortal.

“Fourthly, I know that God is observing me; therefore, I am ashamed to do what I should not do in his presence.” This is basically the definition of spirituality: to constantly be aware of the presence of the Divine. So, the Muslim mystic is saying that he has become aware of God's presence and that awareness has changed his behaviour.

But this awareness of the presence of the Lord and the Shabd in all creatures won't come without experience. Saints tell us this awareness and experience is the outcome of meditation. Like it or not, we're always in his presence – not just when we are lucky enough to see him physically. The Lord did not just create us and forget about us. Becoming aware of his presence is the goal of our life.

These four points are meaningful and real to us because we have been lucky enough to meet a living Master. Otherwise, this way of life would just be a beautiful jewel box with no jewel inside. The living Master is the jewel and the heart of this path. And the way of life as outlined by the Muslim mystic has meaning when we have such a Master who gives us a taste of his love and his light. May we digest the love and inspiration he gives us so generously and follow his advice to channelize our love toward meditation – his only order.



You are one of the lucky sons of Sat Purush, and he has chosen you to get Nam and go with the Master to Sach Khand. You must reach there. Nothing can prevent you. But you can hasten the progress or retard it, as you like. Do your utmost now to remove all difficulties within and without yourself.... Hold your attention fixed at the focus, not allowing the mind to run away or waver in the least....

You must reach the supreme goal in due time. Some reach it sooner, others later, according to their own individual efforts and karma they have to overcome.... Master is always with you, eagerly waiting for your arrival at the gates within, to receive and welcome you.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Master and Disciple

In a book called *The Soul and A Loaf of Bread*, a poem by Sheikh Abul-Hasan says:

*It is said that Master beheld the Almighty in a dream one night
and said, "My Lord, for sixty years I have lived pining for You,"
and he was told. "So you have, for sixty years, but
I chose you on the day before the first day;
that is when this Friendship was declared,
who then was first to Love?"*

This stanza reflects the true and abiding nature of our relationship to the Lord. We have heard so many times that the Master is with us from our birth and watches over us from that time. When we are initiated, that relationship becomes the active focus of our life. Then we engage in the slow transformation of becoming fully engaged in and aware of that relationship, but curiously, we often bring to it our typical way of being in worldly relationships. Our thinking tends to divide the world into notions of good and evil, happiness and sadness, and we respond to these dualities as if they are reality. Our thinking even limits how we think of the Master. We describe him by his height (short/tall), the colour of his beard (dark/light), his sense of humour (funny/not funny). We see him as separate from ourselves.

However, God is eternal and sustains everything that exists. Potentially, there is no barrier that separates us from God, and thus we can speak directly to God. If we think about it, isn't this what we have been hoping for, union with the Lord?

Sheikh Abul-Hasan continues:

*The Beloved says, "I am the Road you travel,
and I too am the Host that receives you;
when you speak, I hear; when you think, I know;
when you flee from me, I am your refuge;
when you seek refuge, I am your shelter;
Your prayers I receive, and your hopes I fulfil;
I am with you in desolation, and I am with you in your elation;
be therefore Here, Now in this presence."*

Our Friend, who chose us before our birth, asks us to "Be therefore Here, Now in this presence." This is what our Master wants for us because he knows the end result of the journey that he has put us on. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say, from the moment of initiation the Master has been contriving to help us make our way to Sach Khand. He has been asking us to remove all barriers to him.

How easy is this? How do we change our life so that we are aware of the presence of the Master in all that we do? Of course the answer is meditation. But transformation through our meditation is neither quick nor easy. Why? Maharaj Charan Singh illustrates in the following quote that while we may initially use our intellect, ultimately, it is too feeble to comprehend the ultimate:

God gave us intellect to carry on the works of this world of phenomena. Beyond that our wisdom cannot reach.... One who relies on reason alone cannot attain true knowledge (knowledge of the Lord). Reasoning is the function of our physical brain....

God and things spiritual can be realized only by the direct perception of the soul, through contact with Shabd. The soul can perceive clearly without going through the process of reasoning. Our mind is too feeble and limited to comprehend the unlimited and incomprehensible One.

Divine Light

What we are seeking is something lasting and true. We are seeking to comprehend “the unlimited and incomprehensible One”. But how can true knowledge come into a deluded and transitory mind? What if we stop on this journey upon only hearing of the Master’s greatness and beauty and do not go further to meet and experience him first hand? What if we listen to our nay-saying mind instead of the longing of our soul?

Guru Ram Das as quoted in *Jap Ji: A Perspective*, says:

*Every moment the mind rushes about in delusion
and does not, even for an instant, stay in its home.
When the Guru applies the goad of Shabd on its head,
it comes back to inhabit its own mansion.*

Guru Ram Das is saying in this stanza that the powerful mind, which is always running after material objects, beauty and sensual pleasures, can be subdued through the “goad of Shabd on its head”. While we often use the mind to operate in the illusory world, it can be converted into a mind that pulls us inward and upward, towards the unlimited and incomprehensible. But this is not so easy because of its dualistic nature. Kabir Sahib, quoted in *Jap Ji: A Perspective* says, “This mind is maya, this mind is a divine entity.”

Kabir Sahib continues:

*When the mind realizes its essence; it is contented.
One who knows the mystery understands the mind.
Let no one delay the union of the mind with its source.
One finds the Truth when one is absorbed in the Truth.
Our business is with the mind –
one who disciplines one's mind becomes perfect.*

When the mind merges with its source through meditation, all impressions are erased and the mind becomes pure. “The very mind which was dominant over the soul becomes a faithful servant of the soul and works according to the directions of the soul” (*Jap Ji: A Perspective*). The mind and soul then become obedient to the will of the Lord and as Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Divine Light*, “We should rise above cold reason and fly towards him on the wings of love and faith.” The idea that a human can achieve perfect love, perfect knowledge, may seem extraordinary, yet it is what the Master wants for us.

Master wants us to awaken and listen to God first hand. This awakening begins with the relationship of the Master and the disciple that started “before the first day”. Let us consider who it is that we are having a relationship with and let that guide us in our quest to turn our approach to the path and the Master from a mental one to that of experience. This can be done only with relentless meditation.



Start Where You Stand

Start where you stand
Give yourself to God again.
Don't look back in shame.
You should know by now
the past is a mean lover
no amount of tears
will ever change.

Start where you stand.
Give yourself to God again.
Don't look for a better time.
The future will still give you
that little come-on smile
then play hard to get
on the last day of the world.

Start where you stand.
Give yourself to God again.
Right here, right now.
And don't open with
"What's in it for me?"
That never flies with Him.

Your problem is
You always leave the party
before your Beloved arrives
and the real fun begins....

You give up on love too soon
and march off to bed muttering,
“He stood me up again.”

Listen!
Take my sage advice
on this subject
of high romance!

Start where you stand.
Give yourself to God again.
Gift wrap your soul
in a big red bow
and be the love
you want to receive.

Then stay at the party
until your Beloved shows.
Didn't anyone tell you?
This long lost love
is the One...
worth waiting for
all night long.

Original poem by a satsangi



Think Simran

Recently at a college orientation, the language professor struck a responsive chord as he explained a basic technique for acquiring skill in foreign languages. He said, “From the time that students sign up for this program, the goal is for them to think in that particular language. Then they have it, but it takes effort, practice, and patience.”

We find that all spoken languages – even sign languages – are basically interactive; they are tools of communication used when sharing our needs, desires, dreams, plans, hopes, likes and dislikes, with others in this world. We talk or sing to our children, pets and even our plants. At times, being preoccupied, we may even find ourselves conversing out loud – with absolutely no one!

Similarly, on this inner spiritual path, the process of meditation commences with loving, constant repetition or remembrance of the five holy names that the Master gives the disciple at the time of initiation. This new language, or simran as we call it, is infused with his power.

When doing simran, we are speaking directly and solely to the Master. With simran the gap between the human and Divine can be bridged. At initiation the Master tosses a golden rope to the disciple. While he holds the rope for us at one end, our task is to pull ourselves up to the eye centre, struggling intensely against the downward and outward tendencies of the mind. This is how we fight the mind – repeating one precious name at a time.

The problem is this: Our mind is heavily programmed. Our inner computer has been configured so that we automatically revert to constantly thinking in our own worldly, interactive language, even when we are not actively engaged in communicating with others.

Now we have the inner pull, the desire to see the Master, and to be with him. Is it possible to reconfigure the inner computer of our mind? Instead of squeezing a little simran into the day, can we build the day on a foundation of simran? It's a matter of resetting and reprogramming our mind to think simran – so much that it becomes our primary language within.

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

Simran is the first and most essential step. Unless its course, which is both long and tedious, is completed, we can hardly gain the other two states [that of contemplating on the form of the Master and merging with the Divine Music]. Therefore, we have to practise simran so assiduously that even while talking it should continue to roll on its course. The five holy names must spin ceaselessly around their axis. Sitting, standing, walking, eating, awake or asleep, the repetition must go on.

As we know, simran replaces the unnecessary chatter and useless hubbub that the mind constantly and ceaselessly creates. Just as we practise ABC's, we learn to do constant simran by consciously and consistently doing it, practicing it, and putting in the effort to *think simran*.

As we mature on the path, we begin to notice a subtle change. No longer do the words of simran appear dry and pointless. When silently calling the names of the inner Master, we become aware of the joyous glow of his loving presence within ourselves. Simran brings inner quiet, calm, and relief from the storms of our mind.

At one time or another, we all face the challenge of keeping our emotions in check. Baba Ji has explained that we give the mind its power to create these emotional storms. It has no power of its own.

When a situation occurs in our life and we allow the mind to react negatively, the soul suffers the consequences. We can take back the power that we have allowed the mind to exercise over us by refusing to react to its prodding. It was never meant to be master over the soul. The mind is like a spoiled, out-of-control child. It needs to be disciplined and put back in its rightful place. Silence and simran – the best solution to any situation – is a way to keep the emotions in check. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*: “When you notice the coming of anger, begin the repetition of the names. As your meditation will improve, the anger and ego will also disappear.”

Masters tell us that meditation is the cure for all of our ills. If we are to escape from this prison of the world, we must simply buckle down and begin thinking simran. It takes effort, practice and patience just like any foreign language. Let’s sacrifice all useless thoughts, imaginings and ponderings and replace them with our simran in order to know the true language of our Master. Hafiz in *The Gift*, as rendered by Daniel Ladinsky, says:

*Here’s a rope,
Tie it around me,
Hafiz
Will be your companion
For life.*

Our simran is the rope; our companion for life is our Master.



Outer and Inner Enthusiasm

Do you find it easy to be enthusiastic about the things you love in the world? Do you delight in adorable children? Are you excited about newly-found authors that you enjoy reading? Do you cry at movies and television shows that touch your heart? Human beings easily enjoy what is pleasurable.

The word *enthusiasm* comes from the Greek meaning to be inspired. More exactly, it was believed to be a “divine inspiration”, a “prophetic or poetic frenzy”. To be filled with enthusiasm, is to be full of zeal and energy and fervour, whether you are cheering on your favourite football game, offering a standing ovation at a concert, anticipating dinner with close friends, or awaiting a trip to the Dera.

Some have seen enthusiasm as a sign of grace, a gift of special favour. Others have thought it to be a much too extravagant emotional display. Yet even if we recognize enthusiasm as a useful resource, we need to be mindful about the directions that our enthusiasm takes. Some forms of enthusiasm are *not* recommended. When our enthusiasm takes the form of obsession, we lose any sense of perspective about how one small part of life fits into a much larger picture, and then our passions can blind us. Obsessions narrow our understanding. They can preoccupy our attention to such an extent that we literally lose touch with what is real.

The ancient wisdom of the *I Ching* recommends another variety of enthusiasm.

Proper enthusiasm ... is fueled by a devotion to attaining and expressing inner balance and inner truth. When your aim is

not to influence others, or to satisfy your ego, but to follow the guidance of a Higher Power in all that you do, you acquire another kind of energy: a balanced and bottomless eagerness for living in step with what is right and good. In this there is true power and grace.

The I Ching or Book of Changes, translated by Brian Browne Walker

Such enthusiasm needs no brass bands or speeches. “A balanced and bottomless eagerness for living in step with what is right and good” is a possibility for all of us. Inner enthusiasm for truth can keep us going in the most fearful circumstances. This inner enthusiasm does not depend on how the world is treating us today. When a disciple’s aim is to follow the guidance of a Master, our enthusiasm will naturally move us towards meditation. “A balanced and bottomless eagerness” will move us to follow his instructions, to obey him implicitly and to offer him our time and attention. This inner enthusiasm is meant to take us to the eye centre.

Meditation is an active engagement, a strong effort and a practice that asks for all of our heart, mind and soul. Great Master, in *Call of the Great Master*, compared our spiritual practice to a fierce battle.

Simran must be done with the full attention of the mind, as if you were attacking an enemy with sword in hand.... Realize that it is a great and constant fight with the mind. Prem or Love for the Lord helps a lot in winning this fight.... Love means total self-effacement.... It means no sacrifice is too great for a lover.

Maharaj Charan Singh, in a letter to a disciple, gives us clear indications about the forms this inner enthusiasm will take.

Sant Mat enthusiasm is to be digested within, and it has to take the form of deeper humility, of greater love and devotion for the Lord and Master. Sant Mat does not want lip service, or devotion merely to be expressed in words or emotions. It is the heart that must speak. Our genuine enthusiasm is gauged by the humility and gentleness that is produced in us.

Quest For Light



Brother, all these worldly pleasures, worldly happinesses, are short-lived. They are just temporary. They are not permanent at all. The real permanent bliss and happiness is when the soul merges back to its own source. Everything finds peace when it merges back into its own source. When the mind goes back to its own source, the mind becomes peaceful. When these five elements of which bodies consist merge back into the five elements [of the creation], the body is at peace. Now we sometimes have cancer, sometimes this problem, this pain and misery, but once all the elements merge back into the original elements, all the pain vanishes. When the mind merges into its own source, all mental problems finish. When the soul merges into its own source, it is the most blissful and best happiness one can get. All others are short-lived temporary things – they don't give you any mental peace or happiness.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I

A Balanced Life

The Masters encourage us to maintain a balance between work, family, and spiritual practice. There are times when one facet of our life seems to take on more importance than others. When we are young, our work, education or career seem to take priority. Later, we may start a family, and then the family might take precedence. When we are learning about the spiritual path, our interest in it may be of utmost importance as we are eager to make spiritual progress. But the Master tells us that we must have balance in our life and perform all these functions in a conscious, caring and determined manner. We have the capacity to choose which facet of our life takes priority. Doesn't he always ask us to be aware of where our priorities lie? In *Living Meditation* it says:

As life goes on and as the years go by, we confuse our priorities as we get more and more distracted from our spiritual purpose by the affairs of the world. Soon we may no longer distinguish between what is essential and what is not. Meditation is essential. If we were to forget everything else and remember this one essential thing, then everything would be fine in our life. If we did a thousand other wonderful things and forgot this one essential thing, we would, at the end of our life, have done nothing whatsoever.

If we examine our life, whether it be as a homemaker or out in the working world, we find family and work are where we focus the majority of our physical and mental time. It seems we devote such a

small amount of time, by comparison, to our spiritual development – or do we? Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Light on Sant Mat*:

Heavy work and heavy duties do not stand in the way of the performance of bhajan and simran. On the contrary, they cultivate in us the habit of concentration and hard work, which habit is actually helpful in meditation. When we are tired, our attention naturally tends to go in, instead of going out and thinking of things and persons. Thus also the tiredness resulting from the performance of our duties proves helpful. You will find that as you develop good concentration and proceed regularly with your meditation, you will be able to attend to your outward duties also in a better and more efficient way.

There appears to be some spiritual advantage in being occupied, busy, and working hard in this world. It helps us to focus our attention, and this is a good discipline. The ability to focus helps us in meditation, and meditation helps us perform our worldly duties more efficiently. It's a two-way street.

We have often heard that the path is a way of life to be lived. This includes all aspects of life. Sant Mat is not a path for the recluse, the hermit, or the sadhu. Just look at our Master and see how active he is with his service to the sangat. We see him appearing to be completely engaged in whatever he is doing, whether overseeing a seva activity or answering a question from a seeker. He appears to be relaxed, peaceful, content, and fully enjoying what he is doing. When asked, he tells us that he is only following his Master's directions and doing his allotted duty. He is an example for us of a balanced human being.

When we are in his presence, we realize how much we want to be with him always. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Light on Sant Mat*:



If you apply yourself earnestly and regularly to bhajan and simran, and carry on your worldly duties to the best of your ability, your worldly life too will be regulated properly. Love is the one thing essential on the path. The more you can give, the quicker and easier will you achieve results. This would also be reflected in your daily conduct and dealings with fellow men.

Here again is the idea of balance. If we do our meditation practice regularly, then it follows that our worldly life will also be regulated. Baba Ji always tells us that we have enough time in twenty-four hours for sleeping, eating, working, tending to family matters, and doing our spiritual practice. This is living a regulated life, supported by our meditation.

Of course, in order to achieve that balance, we might have to give up a few unnecessary time bandits such as Internet surfing, watching TV, gossiping, and shopping so that we can fit all the necessary duties into our day. And of all these duties, we have to decide which one has the most priority. The first choice should always be meditation.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II, Maharaj Sawan Singh addresses the idea of how to approach our worldly work:

If one is engaged in business or a profession and does his work with love, he will never cheat anyone nor deprive other persons of their rightful due. The world is always prepared to listen to the message of love because it is inherent in all of us; and if we practise it daily it becomes manifest in us.

Maharaj Charan Singh, also talking about employment, says:

The essence of the thing is that one should follow a career or profession to make one's living but should not become engrossed in it to the detriment of one's spiritual attainment. "Hand to work but mind in Satguru," is a saying here. Besides, one has to balance the karmic account too. Destiny cannot be evaded, but if gone through with full understanding and under the guiding and protecting hand of Satguru, it can be made to subserve the great end.

Light on Sant Mat

How can we have full understanding of everything that happens to us? To do so, we would have to realize that every moment, every instant, the Master is directing the karmas that we are undergoing. If we can keep this in mind, we can undergo even the most difficult situations and still be conscious that the Master is our constant companion and guide.

In our family situation, we know that we are karmically bound to those closest to us – our parents, siblings, children, and spouse. Sometimes the saints refer to these relations as beloved thugs. In *Light on Sant Mat* Hazur says: "You must take all reasonable care of your family and make provision for their education and maintenance, for it is your duty."

Hazur explains further in *Light on Sant Mat*:

Members of a family are grouped according to their karmas and previous relations. A number of people with different backgrounds and different temperaments live together in the same hotel or home. They have their lodging and boarding in common but not necessarily their aims and outlook in common.

It is karma that brings us together for reasons that we do not remember. As family, we could have been friends, lovers, or enemies in a past life, and we are together only because we owe each other karmic debts. We may be born into a family in which we feel nothing in common. Many of us may be the only satsangi in a family who does not understand why we have any interest in a spiritual path. Others may be born into a family of all satsangis and yet feel they have no interest in the path. Regardless, we have a duty to each other and an obligation to be helpful, respectful, loving, and caring.

Our Master explains that we are here only for a short time; and these souls pass out of our lives in one way or another when the karmas are over. If we keep our focus in the right direction, that is, if we focus on our meditation, then we are more helpful to our families, and we also are more removed from the pain and emotions of our attachment to them.

In *Science of the Soul* Maharaj Jagat Singh clarifies further the nature of these relationships:

Regarding worldly relationships, it may be pointed out that all relationships are based on selfish motives on this material plane. Husbands, brothers, wives, sisters, other relatives and friends are attached to us because of the advantages that accrue to them from us, and are apt to cool down in their zeal and love towards us when they feel that we are of no use to them. Do not expect much from them, but do your duty towards them and care for them, even if they fail to reciprocate your love.

While balance in our lives is not an easy task, worldly priorities will not fulfil our deepest yearnings. Whether we have family or worldly responsibilities – our meditation and focus on the Master helps us

keep our lives running more smoothly. Focusing on our spiritual life will strengthen our kind and loving response to the “duties” of our karmas. To attain and maintain a balance, we need to think clearly and not waste our entire life in useless activities beyond what our karmas bring before us. We can set our priorities straight and change the direction of our mind, but this requires that we choose to live the life of a true disciple. Meditation must take top priority. In *Light on Sant Mat* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

You should gradually turn your back upon the world and follow a life of the spirit if you really want to achieve anything in this lifetime. This does not mean that we are not to perform our duties and obligations, nor are we to run away into forests and mountain caves. In fact, we can make progress on the path only if we also perform our worldly duties. But living in the world, we should not be of the world.

It is not the doing of our worldly work at the expense of our spiritual work, it is the simultaneous doing of both that will take us home.



Peace

When asked how we should conduct ourselves in our interactions with others throughout the day, Baba Ji once replied that each situation is different and has to be addressed separately, but that the important thing is that we maintain “peace of mind” in our interactions with people. How do we accomplish this?

Thomas Merton, a twentieth-century monk and poet, gives this advice in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*: “If you are yourself at peace, then there is at least some peace in the world. Then share your peace with everyone, and everyone will be at peace.”

Maharaj Charan Singh further addresses this point:

Everybody wants happiness. There is hardly anybody who does not want peace. But the question is whether the place where we are trying to search for peace is the place where peace can be found. If we want peace politically, economically, socially, we will never achieve it. History does not encourage us. We will always be at war with each other.... If we are to find peace, we have to seek peace within our body. Unless you seek peace within yourself, you will never find peace outside. The nearer we humans are towards the Lord, the closer we all will be to each other.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

All spiritual teachers bring us the same message: Peace is found within. Lord Krishna is quoted in *Buddhism: Path to Nirvana* as saying:

He who abandons all desires, who acts without cherishing any worldly things,

*Who is free from I-ness and mine-ness,
he indeed attains peace.*

A primary opponent in our search for peace is the restless mind. The mind is that part of us that constantly seeks more interactions with the world. It confuses us and identifies itself as separate from the Lord. The mind is only doing its job.

Our Master tells us that, for reasons beyond our current understanding, the Lord created this creation and sent “drops” of his essence – his energy, the Shabd – as souls into this creation, clothed in minds and bodies. Our minds and bodies make us appear to be individuals and separate from each other and the Lord. Our minds keep busy in this creation by desiring, acting and creating karmas.

All of our desires, possessions, attachments and actions keep us from finding the peace that we seek. Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

What is peace? When we have no desires. When we have no anxiety. As long as your mind is creating desires and you are trying to satisfy those desires and you are not able to satisfy those desires, you can never be at peace. Only when you become desireless can you be at peace. And you can become desireless only if you get something better than the sensual pleasures, because the mind is always wanting something.... As long as the tendency of the mind is downward from here toward the senses, howsoever much we may indulge in those senses, we will never be at peace. But when we are able to withdraw ourselves from the senses to the eye centre and become one with that audible life stream or that Shabd, with that divine light within, then automatically your mind will be at peace.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



So only by attaching our attention to the Shabd within can we find peace. In order to do this we have to stop letting our mind and our desires lead us into a series of actions that continue to ensnare us in the tangle of this creation. But how do we go about living our lives and performing our duties in this world as the Masters encourage us to do? In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Maharaj Sawan Singh discusses how we can accomplish this crucial step on the road to peace:

All religions have laid great emphasis on desireless actions. The Bhagavad Gita, or the Song of the Lord, is replete with teachings of desirelessness or desireless action. It says: "In this world one should take refuge in God after renouncing all desires and all actions arising therefrom." ... So long as a man has not achieved such a state of desirelessness, he should act and leave the results of all his actions in the hands of his Almighty Father. In that way he will not be subject to the consequences of his actions. In addition to this, he should engage himself in spiritual practice according to the instructions of a perfect Master, because when he has made some progress on the spiritual path, his karmas will begin to disappear.

The way to peace is described in a well-known prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;*

*Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.*

This beautiful prayer emphasizes that we have to give up putting ourselves at the centre of everything. In fact, on this path, when we focus on the Master and follow his instructions as prescribed at the time of initiation, we become detached from this world, and ultimately we achieve the goal of “dying” to the self and merging our soul back into the Lord. It is in this way that, the Masters tell us, we will find lasting peace.

Rumi in a poem about a reed flute, reminds us that it is the soul’s separation from the Lord that prevents us from finding the peace that the soul needs:

*Listen to the story told by the reed,
of being separated.*

*“Since I was cut from the reedbed,
I have made this crying sound.*

*Anyone apart from someone he loves
understands what I say*

*Anyone pulled from a source
longs to go back.”*

*The Essential Rumi,
as rendered by Coleman Barks*

Rumi’s reed flute is filled only with the longing to return to its source. The saints tell us that the way to peace is within; it is by leaving our ego behind and cultivating the “emptiness within” that we leave space for the longing to return to the Lord.

When we follow the teachings of the Masters, when we cultivate that emptiness and desirelessness through the practice of meditation, then we will find peace. There is no other way. The peace that we find with the Lord will then shine through us, and we will automatically share that peace with others in the interactions of our daily life.



Peace of mind? The purpose of meditation is nothing but to obtain that peace of mind. Actually, all this tension and depression that we feel is due to the scattering of our mind.... The more we concentrate at the eye centre and the more our attention is upward, the more peaceful we become, and only then we enjoy that bliss and happiness within.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Put Your Hope in God

Discourse by Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh

*Like a thirsty man without water,
my soul deeply yearns for the Lord's vision.
The shaft of the Lord's love has pierced my mind.*

Guru Ram Das as quoted in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II

When love is of this intensity, it is something real. If love is for the world, what can it achieve!

What would true love be like? Like the summertime, and you're on a long journey, crazed with thirst because of the sun. If someone offered you thousands of rupees to walk just one more mile, you'd say, "No! Give me water!"

Until you reach that state, the door will not open. We do have that kind of love, but it's for the world. So how will the door ever open? Think of the pain of a bird shot through the heart by a hunter. When that intensity of pain is in your heart, the door will open.

My God Lord alone knows my malady and the pain within my heart.

Whatever I'm going through, only I know – and my Lord. The world? They have no idea. A Persian poet says: I'm lying here sick, the physician is feeling my pulse. Poor man, what does he know? If there's a remedy for the sickness of love, bring it. Otherwise, don't waste my time! If you gave the riches of the entire world to him, he wouldn't even turn his face. He would say, "My sickness is something else. I can relate it only to someone who has experienced it himself"

He who narrates to me the anecdote of my Beloved God; He alone is my brother and he the friend.

My only friend is the one who tells me things about my Lord – he is my family, my friend. He shares my pain. I have no connection to the rest of the world.

Join, join, O my mates, sing the praises of my Lord and follow the counsel of the patient True Guru [adopt the Satguru's way of patience].

The realized soul advises her friends: Listen, dear souls, go to the Satguru. His is the way of patience. Advice from all others is incomplete. Make him alone your friend: he is supreme. Without thinking and analyzing, accept his teachings and do your inner practice!

Fulfil Thou, O Lord God, the desire of slave Nanak. By beholding Thee my body abides in peace.

Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II



The Final Chapter

Maharaj Charan Singh used to say: “Don’t curse the darkness, light the candle.” So instead of concentrating on our weaknesses and failings, why not focus our attention on our Master and the goal of meeting his Radiant Form within? Since we use this mind to create the complicated crazy chaos we call our daily life, why can’t we use it to create a new life that is drenched in the love, peace, and living presence of our Master?

Our Master has taught us how to live and how to achieve our goal. We have to saturate our minds with simran in order to transform our restless, worldly thoughts and change our destination in life. Simran is the only train of thought that can actually transport us out of this physical world, lead us into the Shabd, and carry us beyond the peaks and valleys of the mind to the stars of the inner sky where we long to go.

The events of our future are brighter than we could ever dream! As we journey on, veil after veil will be torn away, revealing more and more light within ourselves. On and on we will travel, drawn deeper and deeper within by the magnetic ringing radiance of the Shabd, until we meet the Radiant Form of our Master. From then on, we will walk with him through the inner realms until we enter the gates of Sach Khand, the realm of light and love from which we came so long ago.

If we could rise up and look down at our millions upon millions of lifetimes in the creation as if on the pages of a huge book, we would see that the story of our life is almost over. All the wild escapades and lost loves, new births and painful deaths in the long novel of our lifetimes, must come to an end. Our protagonist soul has gone through the pits of hell, struggled and suffered in the drama

of creation, but in the end, has received the brightest and best of all fates, that of finding a Master.

When we look down at these last few pages of the book of our life, we see that the pages are shining, glowing brighter and brighter the nearer we get to the end. Then we turn the last page and reach the most wondrous, thrilling, happy ending imaginable. We turn to the last page and find that we have won the ultimate prize: a one-way ticket home to the ocean of light, a permanent residence in a realm brighter than billions of suns – where the lover merges into the Beloved, the endless sea of resplendence and bliss. This is the final result of meeting a living Master, falling in love with him, and *living* his teachings. No greater destiny can befall a soul.



*With your inner eye see him,
With your inner ear hear him,
Contemplate on him with your whole mind...*

*Realize him in his totality,
Let him permeate your entire being –
Let this, O Nama, be the consummation of all your effort.*

Saint Namdev

The Floating Twig

*Creation in unison screams,
“There is no one but the One.”
The worldly clever is busy trying to
determine where he can cash in.
The ocean’s bosom heaves in Love,
the floating twig takes the waves personally.*

Abu-Saeed Abi'l-Kheir, *Nobody, Son of Nobody*,
as rendered by Vraje Abramian

Hazur often tried to tell us that we look at the Lord’s love, grace and mercy from a very limited perspective. Baba Ji has said we need to open up our parameters. To hear the way most of us talk about grace, we sound as if our parameters are about as narrow as the twig’s in Abu Saeed’s poem.

For example, if something good happens, we say it is his grace. Maybe I got a promotion, maybe the weather is lovely, or maybe in the crowded streets a parking place opens up. We say this is his grace and mercy on me. And the words, “Thank you, Master!” escape our lips.

If our perspective becomes a little bit broader, we begin to notice “blessings in disguise”. Something terrible happens – maybe we are in a car accident, maybe we lose our job. We’re very unhappy for a while. Then something good comes our way, and we realize that this good thing never could have happened except for the loss and misery we suffered. So *now* we say the tragedy was his grace; it was a blessing in disguise. And we say, “Thank you, Master” for the very thing we were earlier cursing.

If we mature spiritually just a bit further, we might begin to see his grace in disaster itself. We lose our job, our money, our health; we lose everything, and in our desperation we turn to prayer and meditation like never before. And now we say that all these painful things that happened were his grace, because they forced us to turn to him.

Our parameters are opening up. But we are still trying to map his grace against events and circumstances – things we can observe and feel and judge. We are trying to use the finite to measure the infinite. As Hafiz puts it, we are trying to find the depth of the ocean with a six-foot pole. There we are, poking and jabbing down into the ocean with our six-foot pole of an intellect, hoping to find the ocean floor.

We form concepts about what is utterly beyond our understanding. We're like the young ocean fish who swims over to another fish. "Excuse me," says the young fish, "you are older and wiser than I. Can you tell me: where is this thing they call the ocean?"

"The ocean," says the older fish, "is what you're swimming in right now."

"This?" says the young fish. "But this is just water." And he swims away, disappointed.

What are our concepts about grace? Do we think he sends his grace to us when we are good and withholds it when we are bad? Do we think his grace is for some and not for others? The *Tao Te Ching* describes beautifully how the sage gives and gives without condition:

*The Sage is like Heaven and Earth
To him none are especially dear
nor is there anyone he disfavors
He gives and gives without condition
offering his treasure to everyone.*

In another verse it says:

*He sees everything as his own self
He loves everyone as his own child
All people are drawn to him
every eye and ear is turned toward him.*

Maybe we don't know what his grace looks like, what it feels like. Most importantly, we don't know what it is supposed to feel like. We have no way to judge what's going on.

Maybe all we can say about his grace and compassion – if we're going to say anything – is that it is vast, unfathomable and utterly beyond our ability to measure or judge.

Is it possible that his grace and mercy surrounds us, in abundance, all the time? In that case, if our hearts actually were open to his grace, then every breath, every step would be filled with a silent, wordless “Thank you” welling up inside us. Could it be that all the ever-shifting circumstances of our lives, the ups, the downs – all those movements – are nothing but his grace? As Abu Saeed put it, “The ocean's bosom heaves in Love.”

And what of the twig riding those ocean swells? What does the twig know but that it is supported? Deep currents and vast forces beyond the twig's paltry imagination move the waters. Resting on the ocean's bosom, the twig could let go and enjoy the rising and falling motion. The wave supporting it will certainly carry the twig wherever the wave is going.

We, too, are supported. The ocean of Oneness swelled and formed a wave. And perhaps the “wave” that is the perfect Master took shape simply because “the ocean's bosom heaves in Love.” We can't comprehend the oceanic movement that raises us up, then drops away

beneath us, the ever-fluid motion that tosses us. But we can know that we are supported, and that the Master, like a wave on that incomprehensible ocean, will carry us wherever he is going.



The whole life of a disciple is a special occasion. When the marked soul takes a new birth, the saint becomes responsible to take the soul back to the Father... The Lord's blessing and grace is always there with the disciple, but it is up to us to be receptive to that grace. If a cup is upside down, however hard it rains, not a drop can get in. If the cup is in the right direction, it can be filled.

Master's grace is always there. He doesn't withhold his grace after initiation. A gardener does his best to see that a tree yields fruit. He puts the right type of nutrients in the soil and waters, cuts and prunes the tree because he is anxious for it to yield fruit once he has taken responsibility for it. The Master is always anxious that the disciple should go – the sooner the better – back to the level of the Father. When he's so anxious, he doesn't withhold his grace. We have to make use of that grace by becoming receptive, and meditation makes us receptive to his grace. Whenever we attend to meditation, that's a special occasion to get the grace. Otherwise his grace is always there.

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

World Peace

Maharaj Charan Singh Answers a Question about World Peace

Sister, if this creation is to continue, we cannot get rid of these wars, because if the creation has to continue, it has to be imperfect. The moment anybody becomes perfect, he goes back to the perfect one. That soul doesn't stay in the imperfect world at all. We are only here because we are imperfect. If he doesn't want this creation to continue, then of course, we all become perfect and go to the perfect one. But if this creation is to continue, then you can't help it, mind has to be here. It has to be imperfect. As long as we're imperfect, there'll always be feuds and wars. You can't help them. At least history doesn't encourage us. Whatever history we have been able to trace or know, it has always revealed one against the other, in one form or another.

Because that is the mind – the mind has always been at war. Nations to a great extent can come nearer to each other on the platform of spirituality, never on the platform of social reforms, economic reforms, or political reforms. We can never have the same way of thinking economically, politically or socially. We can never all think alike. But on the spiritual platform we are one and we can become one; we can come nearer to each other because our pivot is one God, and everyone looks to him. On the platform of spirituality, we are one. Then we don't appear as belonging to certain races, countries, social orders, economic orders, or political orders. We just appear as all lovers of one Beloved, and then we are all nearer to each other.

So if we really want peace in this world, we have to come together on the platform of spirituality. No matter how politically developed a nation may become, no matter how much it may raise its standard of

living – that doesn't mean that those nations with a very high standard of living don't create war. Rather, they are responsible for creating more wars because they want to keep their own standard of living high. And how can they keep it unless people fight? So their standard of living is high at the cost of other people's loss. They always want to sell their goods so that their standard of living remains high; so they always like other nations to fight. Actually, nobody is sincere about creating peace in this world.

If we are filled with love and devotion for the Father, all qualities of compassion, of being kind and good to each other, loving each other, automatically come in us. One who is filled with his love, he will never hate anybody, because he will see the Lord in everybody. He will never notice that someone is a Russian, an American, a South African, an Indian. He sees only the Lord in everybody. We are ignoring this spiritual side today, and trying to build peace on political platforms, and they have no base. It's like building on sand. Otherwise, rich nations would have been able to obtain peace, but they have not. Probably there is more crime in them than in poor countries... They have compromised with certain spiritual truths in order to raise their standard of living. If we build a spiritual platform – but it is impossible for the whole world to build one spiritual platform – only then can we come nearer to each other.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I



Gratitude

From the time we are children, we are taught that it is polite to say “Thank you” to someone who has offered us a gift. This simple phrase perhaps has become overused and almost automatic. However, when we express this phrase of gratitude in regards to our Master, it becomes unfathomably deep.

Gratitude is born of awareness of our many blessings, seeing what treasures we have been given. Baba Ji suggests that it is a result of a shift in our perspective. Along with grace, gratitude is the result of awareness of our connection with the Master. In *Living Meditation* it says we can have:

Gratitude to the Master for giving us initiation, for teaching us to meditate, for teaching us what to do with our mind and how to live our life; gratitude for putting us on the right path, for giving purpose and direction to our life, for teaching us, by his example, to love beyond our self without thought of reward. As we look back on the time before he called us to him, we will remember with gratitude the many things done for us even then to transform, and spiritualize, our life.

Understanding our good fortune in having met a Master who bestows these gifts upon us is a pathway to experiencing gratitude. In *Buddhism: Path to Nirvana* it says:

The work of the enlightened teacher inspires inexpressible gratitude in his disciples. From his blissful abode the teacher comes down in a human form and lives on earth amidst all kinds

of difficulties for his disciples' benefit. He has no selfish purpose of his own. He leaves no stone unturned to awaken, teach, guide, and accompany his disciples, constantly protecting and showering his grace upon all through the inner regions up to his ultimate blissful abode. This is out of sheer love and compassion. Can anyone be a greater benefactor than the Master?

Essentially, the Master comes into this world, becomes like us in appearance and calls to our souls to return with him on the final journey to liberation. He is persistent in this task. If we go astray, he pulls us back; if we turn from him, he turns our face back toward him. Even in adversity Hazur says in *Treasure Beyond Measure* that, "Whether the turn of events appears to us to be good or bad should be no concern of ours. We do not know the spiritual good which may be hidden behind the apparently bad." If we can accept this all in gratitude and live in his will, he releases us from the dominance of the five passions. But regardless of our attitude, he remains our true friend for life.

So how can we express our gratitude and thanks to the Master for this great boon? Meditation. Maharaj Charan Singh in *Light on Sant Mat* says, meditation is "the only way in which we can properly express our gratitude to our Master." Meditation dissolves all the barriers between the Master and us. Then there is nothing but gratitude because we know our insignificance and his greatness first hand. The words "Thank you" take on their true, deep and abiding meaning for the great gift we have been given.



Book Review



Meditation: A Simple 8-Point Program for Translating Spiritual Ideals into Daily Life

BY EKNATH EASWAREN

PUBLISHER: TOMALES, CA: NILGIRI PRESS: 1991

ISBN: 0-95132-66-4

In this book Eknath Easwaren discusses eight spiritual principles and practices which he considers essential for cultivating a spiritual life. Easwaren, who is perhaps best known for his translations of and commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Dhammapada*, and the *Upanishads*, says that the principles discussed in this book are universal and can be found repeated in many different spiritual traditions the world over. He presents them as an eight-point program for living a spiritual life. For him each point is dependent on the others, in the sense that success follows best when they are practiced together, each reinforcing the others.

Interestingly, although the book is titled *Meditation*, only the first chapter – on the first point of the eight-point program – deals with the daily practice of sitting meditation. Easwaren defines meditation as

a systematic technique for taking hold of and concentrating to the utmost degree our latent mental power. It consists in training the mind, especially attention and the will, so that we can set forth from the surface level of consciousness and journey into the very depths.

The overall journey of meditation has three main stages of discovery, all to be accomplished only by inner experience: the first, when we realize that we are not the body; the second, when we realize that we are not the mind; the third, when we discover and experience who we really are. This Easwaren terms “the great discovery,” though he also says, “what we discover cannot be put into words, but thereafter we are never again the same.”

Easwaren advocates that readers meditate by repeating a prayer or a mystical verse slowly, not with the purpose of pondering its meaning, but to

attain a deep level of concentration. He recommends sitting every day, and sitting at the same time every day. He also explains that if the practitioner sticks to one place to sit for meditation, that place will gradually take on a sacred atmosphere, which in turn will support the meditation practice.

The author considers it a mere misconception to associate progress in meditation with gaining psychic or occult powers. He says, “If you want to know how people have progressed on the spiritual path, just watch them in the little interactions of everyday life. Are they patient? Cheerful? Sensitive to the needs of those around them?”

The second chapter deals with repeating a mantram. He says it is important to choose a mantram that has been used by spiritual practitioners over the centuries; such a mantram carries a unique spiritual power, resonating with a sacred atmosphere. He suggests using every opportunity to repeat the mantram silently as we go through life. If we repeat it at night before going to sleep, we will enjoy deep, relaxing, healthful sleep. In addition, he says, “The mantram is of inestimable help when negative emotions sweep through our minds.” The mantram brings equipoise and harmony. “Extreme oscillations of the mind like elation and depression can be controlled by the mantram.” If we repeat the mantram as often as possible throughout the day,

the tension in our bodies ... ebbs away ... We toughen our will, too, which signals the end of addictions that may have enslaved us for years. Internal divisions are healed and our purposes unified ... We gain access to inner resources – courage, patience, compassion – which are presently locked up within ... Gradually, if we repeat it often, the mantram permeates and utterly transforms our consciousness.

If we repeat the mantram often enough, for long enough, he says we will reach a stage where “the mantram repeats itself ceaselessly without any effort whatsoever.” He calls this a “glorious state.”

The third chapter discusses the need to slow down. In modern society, he says, we easily slip into the habit of hurrying. “When we go faster and faster, we grow more and more insensitive to the needs of everyone around. We become dull, blunted, imperceptive.” The mind that whirs

along at high speed, he says, loses the ability to reflect or to notice its own patterns. Easwaren says, “This is what happens to speeded-up people. They become automatic, which means they have no freedom and no choices, only compulsions.” The spiritual life requires us to reflect, to make conscious choices, and to recognize our own patterns of behaviour so as to be able to change them.

The fourth chapter, titled “One-Pointed Attention,” discusses the importance of doing one thing at a time and giving full attention to the task at hand. It is a matter of training the mind which has the habit of running in many directions at once. “If we are to free ourselves from this tyrannical, many-pointed mind, we must develop some voluntary control over our attention. We must know how to put it where we want.” The habit of splitting the attention (in today’s parlance “multi-tasking”) leads not only to physical exhaustion, poor learning, errors, accidents, and many tasks done badly and without enjoyment, but also carries over into split attention in meditation.

The fifth chapter, titled “Training the Senses,” deals with the need to make conscious choices, rather than simply being led by the pull of the senses. Easwaren does not advocate austerity but, taking the example of food, he recommends developing the self-control to avoid over-eating or eating things that are unhealthy for the body. Training the senses, however, takes a high level of vigilance, because the senses have been in unquestioned control for so long.

For a long while we are so vulnerable that we can be caught at any time. The senses will be comfortably seated inside when some of their former pals – sense objects – come to the door and call, “Can the senses come out and play?” At this point, of course, we can always say no. But if we are napping upstairs, the senses will jump up, look around, grin at each other, and rush right out.

The sixth chapter is called “Putting Others First.” Here Easwaren discusses how compassion and thinking of others’ needs and wishes ahead of our own is a fundamental aspect of a spiritual life. We put others first “any time we refrain from self-centred ways of acting, speaking and

even thinking.” For Easwaren, “putting others first is the easiest and most natural step we can take towards developing love of God” – which is the supreme goal of the spiritual life. Love of God, he says, is the only power that can overcome what he calls “elephantiasis of the ego.” Ultimately, he believes, everyone can learn to love.

The spiritual life is marvellously fair: it is open to everybody. No favouritism, no hereditary class. No matter where you start, you can learn everything you need to learn, provided you are prepared to work at it. So too of love ...

The seventh chapter, titled “Spiritual Companionship,” deals with the support and encouragement for spiritual effort that comes from joining together with others who are also striving toward a spiritual goal. “Truly, we need every bit of support we can get; we need friends, loyal companions on the journey ... The burdens are shared, easing them; the joys are shared too, multiplying them.”

In the eighth and final chapter, Easwaren recommends reading the writings of mystics. He recommends reading widely: “the treasures of mysticism can be found in all religions, and we should not confine ourselves to the tradition most familiar to us.” Reading thus widely, we will see “the universality of the mystical outlook.” He makes an interesting distinction, however, in noting that when we read the writings of many different mystics, we are reading for inspiration, but when we read the writings of our own teacher, we read for both inspiration and instruction. That is, mystics from different cultures and periods of history may give instructions for their disciples that are not appropriate or helpful for us. For practical instruction, we must rely on the guidance from our own teacher.

While Easwaren has written the book for a modern readership with contemporary life-styles and pressures in mind, he says that the disciplines he describes are universal. “They come recommended to us by men and women down the centuries who experimented with them and discovered their potency in the crucibles of their own lives. That is their guarantee.”



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

