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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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What an Auspicious Day Has Arrived!

What an auspicious day has arrived!
The Lord has arranged the marriage of my soul.
Today marks the change of seasons at last.
After an endless winter of exile,
my soul's first day of spring is here.

Listen to the drums thunder across the sky.
Today, the bridegroom has come to take his bride.
A spring breeze is sent from Sach Khand,
wafting the jasmine of bliss from home
to grace our wedding garden.

Kal and Maya disapprove.
Furious, they tried to stand in my way,
but this wedding was divinely ordained.
No one can change such a destiny as mine.
Now I leave this world forever.

What an auspicious day has arrived!
The Lord has arranged the marriage of my soul.
Today marks the change of seasons at last.
After an endless winter of exile,
my soul's first day of spring is here.



Bubbles on Water

Saint Namdev, a poet and mystic from Maharashtra, wrote this short poem:

*One moment bubbles appear
on water – the next, they're gone.
This is life – the moment you see it, it's gone,
and in the end your hands are empty.
The magician's show lasts a few moments
and the tricks look real, says Namdev.
Life looks real, but only for a moment.*

Many Voices One Song

For the most part, we human beings are deeply rooted in this material world. Most of us have no direct experience of any other kind of reality. This is what we know, understand and experience on a daily basis. Because of this we invest heavily in what we see around us. We give our families, friends, careers and hobbies a great deal of our time and attention. We attach great importance to possessions – homes, cars, clothes, money in the bank and savings plans.

However, mystics throughout the ages have been at pains to explain that there is a great deal more to life than what our outer physical senses register. And they also tell us that life does not end at death. Life, for our immortal soul, continues for each and every one of us. They explain that our souls originated from God, are of his essence and belong with him. They also tell us that until a soul is reunited with its heavenly Father, it is subject to reincarnation and even transmigration.

Every death is followed by another life – but not always in the human form. A human life lived carelessly, cruelly and dishonestly may well be succeeded by life in a lower life form. This is the law of karma that binds us here to this level of creation.

This is not a happy picture. But there is a way out – an exit that will lead us back to God and release us from this endless, ages-old cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Happily for humans, and human beings alone, there is a path of release that will eventually lead to reunion with God and a state of permanent peace and joy.

This makes the human body the most precious possession one could ever imagine. Once a longing, lonely and weary soul in a human form has been granted God's gift of meeting one of his sons and being blessed with initiation, that soul has the treasure in his hand – a treasure that can be used to secure its passage home.

Now, we must ask ourselves: What are we doing with this gift? Are we squandering it, or using it to help us grow? What are we doing with our lives? Are we still furiously trying to add to our worldly treasure, or are we trying to invest in a different kind of future, now that we have a different kind of treasure?

We probably all need to be investing heavily in another kind of bank account altogether. We need to gather the wealth of God's Name through devotion to our Guru, and to God. This spiritual wealth can accompany us at death. It may even be enough, when added to our Master's enormous contribution of grace, to ensure that we don't have to come back here again. Surely this is the best investment we could ever make.

What our devotional practice requires of us is our attention. When our attention is on our worldly treasures and activities – more than is necessary to function in the world – then it clearly isn't on God. If we have always given worldly attachments our best attention, energy and effort, then what have we been able to devote to the Lord? The leftovers?

The mystics tell us that at the time of death we will go where our attachments are. If we have spent the majority of our years focusing on the world, then that is where we'll end up. If we're trying to become attached to the sound current, to the Shabd, then that's where we'll go. Either our worldly attachments will pull us, or our spiritual ones will. And our own effort, commitment and energy can help determine the outcome.

This is going to involve a conscious kind of effort and commitment; the kind that weighs the two options and chooses what we really want and what our soul longs for. Then, having made the decision, we need to formulate a plan that will allow that choice to govern our lives, because this is a lifestyle choice: a 24/7 approach to life.

Our souls have been in this creation for so very long. And throughout that time our minds have created webs of attachment that draw us back here life after life. We cannot sever these incredibly dense, sticky and

interwoven webs on our own. We need the intervention of a living true master to come to our aid, and then we need to participate in the process as actively as possible.

Attaching to the sound current and building up spiritual wealth in heaven are not only about his abundant grace – they are also about our effort, our attention, our seva and our meditation. When we meditate we are trying to live in the Lord's will. Meditation shifts our attention inwards, slowly but surely, away from outer distractions. Meditation will help the Master to take us home. He can use whatever bits of treasure we have laid up in heaven to secure our release from this prison.

We must prioritise our meditation time and make the world's demands fit in with meditation, not the other way around. We need to sort out meal times and sleep times so that we're ready and fresh when that alarm clock goes off every morning. And we need to be regular and punctual – trying to be in our meditation place at the same time every day.

Meditation needs to become a desirable habit rather than a boring duty. The passage of time since initiation mustn't make us lazy, despondent or complacent about our meditation. At our initiation we promised our Master to try every day to do our best, and that promise must motivate us through the good and the bad sessions. And there are seemingly bad sessions – of that there can be no doubt! But every single time we try to sit, it's to our credit. It's an act of devotion, an act of love. It may not feel like that at the time, as we struggle with the mind, but that's what it is.

The struggle with the mind will not cease until we go beyond the realm of the mind. Until then it will do whatever it can to keep us trapped here, tied up in karmas and attachments. Our job is simply to persevere with our honest efforts – knowing that time is fleeting, but also knowing that nobody wants us to succeed more than our Master.

To check this mind we need to try, more and more often throughout the day, to consciously choose our simran rather than worldly thoughts. Simran is a love-based choice. It is us rejecting the lure of habitual worldly thoughts in favour of thoughts that will lead us to the Master. Simran is indeed the vehicle that is leading us to the eye centre.

For every penny's worth of effort, love and devotion we put in the bank, we can be sure Master is matching it one thousand-fold. We cannot lose

in this endeavour. If we actually succeed in meeting the inner Master, hearing the sound or seeing the inner light in this lifetime, then we might be able to say we've won the struggle. But if we seem to be losing the battle, we are still his, still in the palm of his hand, and he has us so firmly in his loving embrace that we will have won – even when we think we've lost. We just can't lose.

The struggles and frustrations are there to make our resolve firm and make our love grow. Our little love-seedling thrives on our apparent failures as much as our successes. Every effort takes us closer to our Master who is taking us home. And as Maharaj Charan Singh says: “We have only one future – to go back to the Father. There's no other future.”



The Path that We Follow

The path of Surat Shabd Yoga, or the yoga of the sound current, is a path as old as time itself. It is the process by which the soul, the true essence of man, is awakened and reunited with its source, the Creator of all that has ever been or will be. It is only as human beings that we have the opportunity to escape the creation and to find our way back to our true home.

Kabir, a mystic of the 15th century, wrote:

*Even gods crave a human form;
You've obtained this precious body,
Now keep yourself engaged
In devotion for the Lord.
Worship him, forget him not,
For realization of God
Is the profit to be reaped
From this human form.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Why do we want to reunite with our Creator? It is true that not every human being wants to find his way back, but virtually every human being is discontented in this world and hankers for something more. As human beings we are able to suppress this feeling of discontentment by losing ourselves in the pleasures of the senses, and by investing in family, friends and our physical surroundings. But the primary cause of all our pain is our separation from our source.

We are not our mind, this ever-changing entity that chatters to us day and night; we are pure soul, a particle of the Lord. But we have forgotten our real self, we have forgotten our true Father, and we have invested more and more in a world that delivers less and less. We are born, we die and we are born again. We only know and remember this world, and so we keep incarnating in body after body, desperately trying to fill a void that can never be filled with any satisfaction through worldly things.

Eventually even the mind becomes weary of this world, and the cries of the abandoned soul grow louder and louder. For those who reach this point of disillusionment it feels like something inside them is driving

them towards the search for truth. They may attribute this to their own disillusion, but what is happening behind the scenes is quite different. This discontentment and seeking is a gift from the Lord, and we only begin to experience this restlessness when the Lord wants us back.

We are told that there is an entity who has the responsibility of looking after all the regions below pure spirit, namely the realms of mind, sensation and physical creation. This entity has been given many names, including Kal. It is Kal's job to keep souls in the creation. This is achieved by using the instruments of desire and karma.

Desire engages us in the creation and makes us act at the behest of our senses for frivolous gains. In other words, we create karma. The mind and the body are bound by the law of karma, or action and reaction. The law states that for each and every action performed by a mind or body there is an equal and opposite reaction that balances out the original action. So, we are also embroiled in credits and debits based on the actions we perform. These, and the desires that lead to actions, keep us bound to this creation, as no soul can escape the creation if it still has karmic debts.

It is not an easy process to leave this creation. The Saints tell us that the entire creation is a very powerful illusion; nothing is permanent and what is here today is gone tomorrow. Even if we accept the concept that we are trapped in an illusion, we know nothing else and our experience of it is very real, so we struggle to turn away from its attractions.

All spiritually realized souls say that man is made in the image of God. They tell us that we each have a spark of divinity within us but we don't experience this because we only know ourselves through a series of sense impressions from the time of our birth until now.

So how does one get out of this creation? How will we settle our karmic accounts and discover our true selves? The Shabd Masters explain to us that we can only find the Lord and the truth about everything within ourselves.

Everything else we learned up till now came to us through our senses and was processed by our minds, so why can't we see and know the Creator? It's because our mind and senses are too limited. The Master tells us that the only way to come to know ourselves and meet our Creator is through meditation. He tells us to close our eyes, close our ears and focus on one thing so we can still our mind.

And how does the meditation practice of Surat Shabd Yoga work? The answer is: by listening to the Shabd. We are accustomed to hearing sounds with these outer ears and our sense of hearing, but now we learn to listen to the inner sound. This is what the yoga of the audible life stream is designed to help us do. The Shabd, or divine melody, is the manifestation of the Lord. It is what the whole creation is made of, and human beings are capable of hearing it. Saints often refer to this sound as the Word or the Name.

The Master is pure spirit, his consciousness is one with the Lord, and he is above the mind and the senses. It is the Lord's design that when he wants to recall a soul to his abode, he sends a true master who draws these souls towards him like moths to a light.

The attraction between the disciple and the Master is, at the highest level, the recognition by the soul of its true self as manifested in the Master. At our level, it is experienced as admiration, emotion and love for a being who loves us unconditionally – an experience that we get from no other being in this world. Our attraction for the Master comes from deep within us.

We have been in this creation since its beginning. Our soul has been dominated by the mind and senses, and our soul is in a deep slumber. The experience of unconditional love, and the attraction to the Master's form, enables us to look away from the creation into ourselves for the first time in millions of years.

The Master tells us how to live so we can avoid entrenching ourselves further in this creation. And if we are very fortunate, the Master grants us initiation. Once we have this initiation the real work starts. Now it's up to us. The Master has given us everything we need to start our journey.

However, we should remind ourselves that, whether we are young or old, only a little time remains, and the only chance we have at salvation is while we are alive. If we never want to face birth and death again, we must practise the art of dying while living by following the meditation practice our Master has taught us. He is our guide and our saviour, and he is everything we will ever need. When we have finally had enough of giving in to our incessant desires and give him a chance to be in our lives, that is the day that our true happiness and contentment begin.



The One Guarantee

What is the single most important principle that applies to our personal lives? It is very simple: if we have a clear destination and we always orient ourselves towards it, provided that we keep moving forward, we will definitely reach our goal.

Imagine that you are on a ship in the middle of the ocean. There are no landmarks, just sea and sky, no matter in which direction you look. So you could be utterly lost and without any sense of direction. But then someone radios you the GPS coordinates of a safe harbour. You punch in the coordinates on your satellite navigation system and immediately the needle moves to a position on the dial. If your current direction is not correct, you'll be able to see the difference on the dial and make corrections accordingly, as you move in the right direction.

Then perhaps the wind comes up and the ship starts drifting off course. Or you encounter ocean currents that pull the ship in the wrong direction. Again, you make appropriate course corrections. In this manner you will definitely reach the harbour. Similarly, if we are clear about where we want to be and we persistently head in that direction, we will definitely arrive at our destination. The only real variable in this will be time.

So, in our daily lives as disciples of a true spiritual master, we need to remain clear about our primary goal and how to move toward it. Our goal is to reach the eye centre and be in the presence of our Master's Radiant Form within. This is our safe harbour, and the means by which we travel there is simran with our focus at the eye centre.

Many of us have difficulties with our spiritual practice. We sit with the intention of doing a couple of hours of good and proper simran. Instead, we find that our mind will not cooperate. We start off doing a few rounds of simran, and then suddenly we find that our mind has drifted off completely and is engaged in solving world hunger, or is imagining travelling to Mars, or wondering when the next service is due on our motor vehicle.

Immediately we remind ourselves that we're supposed to be doing simran, with our attention at the third eye. This we do for a while, and then after some time we wake up to realize that we've been fast asleep

for the last hour or so. Again, with a growing sense of frustration and disappointment, we direct our attention to doing our simran.

This kind of problem is not unusual. If we listen to our brothers and sisters on the path, many will recount their struggles with the mind and their difficulty in keeping it focused and doing simran properly. This level of frustration can get to the point where we are tempted to give up altogether, out of sheer exasperation. But is this response appropriate? What do we propose to do if we give up? How will we ever reach our destination?

If we really look at our situation in this world, if we examine our life and consider what options are open to us, then we have to realize that we have very few choices. In fact, if we're honest, there are none. It's at this point we need to ask ourselves how we came to the path in the first place. What drove us was a need within ourselves that was not being met by the world.

If someone asked what we were looking for at that time, it is doubtful that we could have answered with any degree of certainty. What we knew was that we were dissatisfied with our life, and nothing we encountered at that time had addressed the deep sense of need we felt. In truth, this need cannot be met by anything that the world can offer; it never has, it never will. And this is because the true nature of that need is not of this world; it is of the soul.

The thing that keeps us running around out here is the mind. It seems that mind and soul have different needs and unfortunately the mind seems to have the upper hand.

In fact, though, the mind is also unhappy. The mind, like the soul, also longs to return to its home, which is in the region of Trikuti. Unfortunately it is a slow learner, so we have to exercise considerable patience and perseverance to retrain it to direct its attention inward and upward, instead of downward and outward – as it has been doing since time immemorial.

There is no solution for either mind or soul in this world at all. We have spent a considerable portion of our time and our energy in developing our intellect to be a fine instrument to smoothen our passage through life in this world. We considered it necessary in order to earn a good living and enable us to solve the many problems that come our way.

But now, when we attempt to meditate, which is the only means that we have to progress towards our spiritual goals, the mind starts to become a problem – an obstacle instead of an asset. It is not a problem that is easily solved, because we have always regarded the mind as our primary asset, and it has always been through the medium of this mind that we have experienced and learned about life. Mind loves nothing more than stimulation. But our path is one of stillness and focus. If ever two concepts were inimical to each other, it is these.

It all comes back to the basic facts of life. We came to the path because we realized that there were no solutions to be found out there in the world. So when we were blessed with the awareness that there was such a being in this world as a true spiritual master, we were ready for the great truth that he had to share with us. We were ready to listen and to ingest the timeless teachings that he would impart to us.

Now, when we feel overcome with frustration, disappointment and despair, we must not succumb to helplessness and apathy. Nothing has changed about the situation in which we find ourselves. The destination remains the same. The method and direction for reaching there also remain the same. We just need to persevere. We need to remember that one fundamental principle that guarantees the outcome: if we have a clear destination and a method for travelling towards that destination, then all that remains is to apply that method correctly and consistently. Then, if we persevere, the outcome is certain.

Even if we are gravely disappointed at how feeble our meditation seems to be; even if we find it impossible to concentrate for longer than a few minutes at a time; even if it seems to us that our feeble efforts could not possibly get us anywhere, we just need to remember: If we are pointed in the right direction and we put one foot in front of another and keep doing this, we will definitely get to our destination. This is an inviolable law of the universe. And if that were not enough, we have been initiated by our Master, who stands surety for us, guaranteeing that he will one day see us to the Lord himself.

Do we need any further assurance? It is a done deal. All we need to do is keep on keeping on.



What Does It Take?

What does it take to be a good disciple? Someone asked Maharaj Charan Singh the following question: “Maharaj Ji, from a Master’s point of view, what are some of the characteristics of a good disciple?” He replied: “One who stands firm on the principles of Sant Mat and is attending to his meditation and living in the will of the Lord, naturally he’s the right type of disciple.”

It is this last requirement that might present us with some difficulties because we have never actually met the Lord, nor seen any record of his will. However, rather than leave us in the dark in this crucial area, the Lord has sent mystics and saints into this world to explain and exemplify his will.

Maharaj Jagat Singh – often referred to as Sardar Bahadur – was once described as the perfect disciple who became a true master. He had only one purpose in life: to please his Master. Sardar Bahadur’s obedience, humility and perseverance were how he demonstrated his love for his Master. These qualities completely and utterly ruled his life.

How do we, who are not perfect, go about following his example? How can we improve as disciples? What qualities can we cultivate to please him? We all understand how important it is to implicitly follow our vows taken at the time of initiation. We must be strict lacto-vegetarians. We need to completely avoid alcohol, mind-altering, dependency-creating drugs, and all tobacco and all cannabinoid products. And we must try our best to live honest, upright, moral lives.

Which leaves us with vow number four: meditation – our priority on the path of Sant Mat. It is in our approach towards meditation that we have the greatest opportunity to please our Master and become better disciples. Meditation is the route to developing obedience to his instructions, and perhaps even the beginning of submission to his will.

It’s not long after initiation that we begin to realize just what a task lies before us. Reading about meditation is one thing. Doing it – even just trying to do it – is quite another story. But the long and the short of it is that we must just show up every day – same place, same time – and give it our very best shot.

As with everything else in our lives, our best will vary from day to day. No two meditations will be the same – the vaguely good is likely to be followed by the horribly bad. But so what? Simply showing up, cheerfully and enthusiastically every morning, is often the best that we can do, and that perseverance and persistence alone demonstrate our commitment and desire to please and obey our Master.

All that the Masters want to see from us is our effort. Perhaps all they need is our effort, because that effort – no matter how pathetic it may seem to us – apparently can be used by our Master when it is needed most. And, perhaps, that bit of effort on our part allows the Master to shower us with his love and grace. The Masters look for opportunities, for excuses, to smother us in their love. Our efforts provide those opportunities.

The path of Sant Mat is a path whose ultimate goal is reunion with the Lord – with our Father in our original home, Sach Khand. It is the Shabd, God's creative, dynamic power, that will draw the soul out of this sticky mess of karmas and attachments and take it home. Our job is to try to make conscious contact with the Shabd. We can only make this firm connection once we have reached, and entered through, the eye centre. The route to the eye centre is devotion to our Guru – Guru bhakti – manifested principally through meditation.

It is only through contact with the Shabd, the out-reaching power of God, that we can become free. It is this contact that can eliminate and loosen worldly ties and attachments, burn off karmas and take us home.

Now, we all understand that our funny little efforts are probably nowhere near enough to bring any of this about. It is Master's grace and love that will do 99 percent of the job. But apparently our effort invokes his grace. Maharaj Charan Singh said:

When the disciple is putting in effort, the Master will not withhold his grace. The Lord is always there to help us.

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The true living Master is the Shabd personified. He is God's emissary on earth. When we try to meditate, we are trying to reach our Master's Radiant Shabd Form, which awaits us at the eye centre. We are trying to merge into the Shabd, which will take us home. We can do this only

through meditation – making it the most important activity in our lives. Not only does it allow us to try to live in the Lord’s will, but it can also move us towards the eye centre. It is vital on our path. It is what good discipleship is all about: meditation.

Sant Mat is often referred to as the path of love. Our devotion to our Master and our efforts to please him through obedience and meditation are our love-gifts. We have so little to offer. But we can offer our love, and we can keep trying to increase that love through meditation. So why not do it whole-heartedly and conscientiously every day? If we want to please our Master, be with him in thought, word and deed, then we need to attend to our meditation. That atmosphere of meditation, that peace and stillness, will then accompany us throughout the day. Constant simran will help us here – making us better disciples by helping to turn our thoughts, words and deeds towards the Master.

This is devotion to our Master: every morning getting up no matter the weather or our personal aches and pains; every morning fighting sleep and a wayward mind to try to move towards Master. This is Guru bhakti – devotion to and love for the Master. What a gift meditation is!

Meditation creates, strengthens and helps our love to grow so that it will become strong enough to take us to the eye centre, to Master’s Shabd form, and the Shabd that will eventually take us back home to God. In this, only our efforts matter. Only the effort is in our hands – the results are Master’s business. But surely, if meditation can grow our loving connection to our Master and the Shabd, making us better disciples as we struggle to persevere, then we really need to be giving it our best shot.

And what else, besides meditation, can we do to become better disciples? The Masters want us to be kind and compassionate; humble and hardworking. As Baba Ji says, just be a good human being. What other qualities would the Masters like to see?

Gratitude is high on the list, followed closely by positivity and cheerfulness. We have so much to be grateful for. We have been initiated by true Masters. We have been promised eventual release from this prison, and reunion with our Father. We have the Master’s Shabd form watching, guiding, protecting and loving us every second of every day. The example

the true living Masters present to their disciples says it all. We need look no further than them for all the clarity and encouragement we might need.

No doubt we all want to be the best disciples that we can be. We know what this entails from the Master's perspective. We must make our meditation the focal point in our lives. This involves strictly following the first three vows and approaching life kindly, humbly, patiently and gratefully.

So, let's be joyous and relaxed as we travel this glorious path. The Lord has showered us with gifts beyond human comprehension, and as we strive to be better disciples, better human beings, we will draw closer to him, the One who will love us always, never let us down and bring us home.

A perfect disciple who became a true master, Maharaj Jagat Singh said:

Ask only for the Lord from the Lord. With the Benefactor will come all His gifts. ... Why not put your hopes in – why not depend upon – the One who will be with you forever? Hold firmly onto Him.

In the Footsteps of the Master



Being a Good Human Being

Baba Ji often reminds us of the importance of being a good human being, which, he explains, is what it means to be human. We need to understand the importance of this and why we should take the necessary steps to ensure that we are being human, and what relevance and significance this has for spirituality.

To realize this, we need to understand what it means to be human. We are aware of the distinction between humans and animals at a physiological level. However, the fundamental difference between the species is that human beings are gifted with the capacity to think, to discern, discriminate and choose how to act or behave – knowing that their actions have consequences. Since animals generally act on instinct, they react without thinking and, unlike humans, cannot consider the consequences of their actions.

Another subtle but important distinction is that human thinking and actions are influenced by *sanskaras* or impressions from our previous lives, among which are the inevitable impressions that are carried from previous animal births. These *sanskaras* may subconsciously influence our present behaviour. It is therefore essential to be aware of the importance of this sense of discrimination and respond accordingly, so that we do not revert to animal reactions.

Ensuring that our behaviour is always acceptable lies in our perception of what the ideal human being is. If, for example, we say someone is a spiritual person, we may ask what patterns of behaviour we expect from that person, and this will show us what our own conduct should be.

Most likely, we would expect a spiritual person to have all the noble qualities of love, empathy, compassion, humility, selflessness, integrity and forgiveness, to name but a few essential attributes. If we want to be spiritual, we would need to possess these qualities also. An example of such a noble person would be any mystic or spiritual master, and Baba Ji would be our living example. It is therefore important to try and emulate Baba Ji's behaviour in every way we can.

In effect, the idea is that unless we become a noble human being, we do not qualify to be spiritual or divine. But this notion is not new. The book

titled *Be Human – Then Divine* traces the teachings of great philosophers, like Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Hierocles, spanning a period of over a thousand years from about 580 BCE. It is interesting that their teachings, too, focused on being human as a prerequisite to being divine:

And so one must become first human, and then god. The civic virtues make the human being good, while the experiential types of knowledge leading up to divine Virtue make the human a divinity.

Hierocles

Now, some twenty-six centuries later, nothing has changed. It is still a prerequisite to be truly human if we want to become divine.

On the path of Sant Mat, the first three principles are all about being human and are a necessary prerequisite for the fourth principle, which embraces divinity. Consider the first principle of vegetarianism, and how it relates to being human. Vegetarians eat only plant-based foods that incur the least amount of pain and suffering for other species.

This lifestyle ensures that we respect all forms of life. Viewed from another perspective, we may ask: Can divinity be built on mercilessly killing to momentarily satisfy the palate? Compassion gradually makes us fit to love what the Lord has created and eventually see the Lord within all his creation.

The second step is encompassed within the second principle of Sant Mat, which is remaining in control of our thoughts and actions. If we compromise our ability to think clearly by taking intoxicants like alcohol, narcotic and hallucinatory drugs, we are at risk of committing acts that will retard our progress toward being a virtuous human being. Once we commit these acts, we will bear their consequences, adding to our karma. We need to understand the consequences of our actions and this discrimination sets us apart from other species. Many religions will not allow animal flesh and alcohol to be taken into their man-made temples. So, how much more important is it to not allow these substances to enter the living temple of God, the human body?

Now we come to the most easily compromised part of being human, which is the third principle of Sant Mat – to live a strict moral life in thought, word and deed. The difficulty of complying with this principle

does not lie in knowing what is moral or not, but in applying morality to our own life.

Morality may often appear to be subtle because the society in which we live violates laws with seemingly no consequences, such as paying bribes to avoid fines or evade the legal process. Paying a bribe is an easy, quick and convenient method of avoiding the legal outcome, which is a further criminal offence with its own consequences. Only a person with a strong ethical conviction will not compromise his values and principles and will do the right thing.

Another example of morality, where many may not appreciate the consequences of their actions, is sex outside marriage. The masters place considerable significance on this aspect of morality as a prerequisite to being both human and then divine. Intuitively, we know what is right and wrong, but strong desires and personal weakness may put us at risk of compromising this principle. Other aspects of morality like honesty, not stealing and lying, loyalty, fairness, non violence, etc. are all relatively easy to understand and abide by.

There are many finer aspects to human behaviour that we should keep in mind. They are equally important, although more subtle, and include being compassionate and forgiving, serving others selflessly and being humble and contented. These characteristics are important to imbibe, as they directly affect our humanity and ultimately our divinity.

If we desire spiritual progress, we must work hard to be better humans, which will clean the vessel that we want filled with divinity. We may recall Tulsi Sahib's shabad "Cleanse the Chamber of Thy Heart," which emphasizes the importance of having a pure heart in which the Lord can reside. If we want to be filled with the Lord's grace, we have the responsibility to purify ourselves. The Masters assure us that when our vessel is clean, the Lord will not hesitate to fill it.

We need to increase our receptivity by turning our cup right side up. This simply means attending to our meditation, which is the secret to becoming divine. It is to become receptive to the abundance of infinite grace the Master has bestowed on us.

Meditation is the means by which we can focus our attention on our Beloved and express our love for him. If we love someone, we want to be with

them and give them our full attention. Meditation is just that – being with our Master and giving him all our attention. It is the precious time we personally spend with him. When we view meditation from this aspect, it takes on a new dimension and perspective, bringing enjoyment and fulfilment.

It is up to us to live our lives filled with love, compassion, humility and selfless service so that we reflect these qualities in our actions towards others, and thereby emulate our beloved Master.

The Masters bless us with their rare and exquisite gifts, but a gift is only useful once it has been unwrapped. If the Master's gifts are left forgotten in a closet, we have only ourselves to blame if we never enjoy their benefits and remain spiritual paupers. On the other hand, if we cherish and use these gifts as they are intended, we will be abundantly rewarded with their benefits of love, peace, happiness and joy.

If we aspire to spirituality, it is imperative to live our lives according to the four principles of Sant Mat, so that we may become truly human in order to become divine.



Changing Attitudes

Our attitude is the window through which we view the world, and our first-hand experience of it. We all have an attitude – sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad.

We often consider attitude to be a relatively short-term expression of our emotion relating to a particular situation, person or event. Actually, our attitudes are far deeper than fleeting emotional outbursts. Over the years they become ingrained as aspects of our personality and ego. However, our attitudes can change. And by changing our attitudes we can alter our lives. Put simply, a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude.

As satsangis we are aware that the outer aspects of our lives cannot be changed. Regardless of our attitude, we must undergo what destiny dictates because our karma must be fulfilled. Although we may not be able to change the karmic circumstances in which we live and operate, much of our environment is experienced through our attitude. So by changing our attitude we can improve the conditions we experience.

Attitude affects everything in our lives: how we interact with other people, our environment, our daily tasks and our responsibilities. In fact, attitude affects the way we negotiate our karmic circumstances, and it even shapes our success and happiness, both in life and in our meditation.

A negative attitude often perpetuates the circumstances that caused it, while an upbeat, optimistic attitude is the result of positive thinking. The way we think directly affects the way we feel, our attitude and ultimately our life. So it is imperative that we control our thoughts in order to maintain a positive attitude.

The contemporary American author Wayne Dyer put it this way: “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”

The memories of everything we have experienced in life are stored in our subconscious minds. Our past does affect our current thinking so that we tend to produce the same attitudes and reactions day after day. We need to ask how relevant our personal history and outdated habits and attitudes are to our current daily life.

We know by now that following the spiritual path is a process of reinventing ourselves, and that adhering to the first three principles of

Sant Mat will help us become better human beings. If we want to develop spiritually, we must change the old persona we created – the ego, with all its beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and unpleasant mental and emotional habits.

We often hear about letting go, and perhaps we associate this with letting go of material things – the clutter and materialistic burden of our lives. Letting go, however, is actually more relevant to our thinking, attitudes, perceptions and the impressions that we have embedded in our subconscious mind. We need to change the person we were when we came to Sant Mat – the person we persist in holding on to day after day. The person we were at the time of our initiation is simply not capable of launching us into the realms of spirituality that we seek.

We are so attached to our mental image of who we are, with its conglomerate of flawed thoughts, feelings, emotions and worldly trivia, that we simply can't let go – we seem to find the necessary change beyond our capability. Our attachment to ourselves is so sacrosanct that it is an indication of how bound we are to who we believe we are – the physical me.

We all say we want to become a better person, but seemingly, only on our own terms. We want to control what we let go of and what we keep. We want to control who we want to be. If we haven't managed significant change since our initiation, why do we think that by continuing our old habits, attitudes and conditioning we can do it now?

What if we could reinvent ourselves and become that spiritual person we so want to be? Is that not what the Masters promise us? For as Maharaj Charan Singh said:

What greater miracle can come in a disciple's life than that his whole attitude towards life is changed? What greater miracle can there be than that? He becomes blind to the world and opens his eyes towards his home. He gets life!

Light on Saint Matthew

To embrace the spirituality we seek we have to let go of the old persona with its antiquated thinking and move forward in our spiritual life. That change is inevitable. Not only can we change, but we must change, and our attitude is going to determine how successfully we do that.

Introspection is not easy. It means that we must take an honest look at ourselves, our attitudes and habits, and consciously analyze our thoughts

and feelings. We do, in fact, have the ability to choose one thought over another – to choose one direction over another. Actually, all it requires is that at every crossroad we ask the question: “Will this decision take me closer to my Master or further away from him?” And then, act accordingly.

By doing this, and with the Master’s guidance and grace, we can make the changes that are needed to redirect ourselves from the world outside to the world inside.

But it does require tremendous discipline on our part. In *Light on Sant Mat* Maharaj Charan Singh tells us “There is no habit or weakness which a man cannot successfully overcome, provided he has the grit and the right mental attitude.”

We may talk eloquently about the inner life, but do we touch it? We love to talk about the path and meditation, spouting words of wisdom borrowed from books, but the actual practice is very different from the words that slip so glibly off the tongue. The aim of our concentration is to put the persona aside for a period and practise what we preach.

Most of us would probably like to simply upgrade our mind to one that is more supportive of our spiritual aspirations. It might be rather nice to just trade it in for a new one!

Actually, that is what we are trying to achieve in our meditation. We want to break the habit of being ourselves and create a new person, free from the rigid, inflexible, stubborn and reluctant self, clinging to the habits, perceptions, ideas and beliefs that are no longer applicable.

Perhaps we also need to revisit our attitude towards sitting. Rather than meditate we may appear to practise the ‘art of laziness’ because it is easier to allow the mind to wander through a maze of day-dreaming rather than put in the effort to mobilize and engage our mind in simran.

The challenge we face is to quell the senses, calm the mind and put our constantly recurring worldly thoughts on hold. These things capture our attention, preventing us from discovering our real selves. The result is that our attitudes remain rooted in self-interest. When we come to understand this, we will realise that a more positive attitude will have a significant bearing on our experience in meditation. As Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Light on Sant Mat*: “Spiritual progress depends on our mental attitude.”



Going Home

In the following poem, Rumi urges us to turn homeward:

*The soul is a stranger trying to find a home
Somewhere that is not a where.
Why keep grazing, why?
Good falcon soul,
You have flown around foraging long enough.
Swing back now toward the emperor's whistling.*

Coleman Barks, tr., *Rumi: The Big Red Book*

Our goal on the spiritual path is to lift ourselves out of this world of illusion, to raise and cleanse our perception so that we can find our way to our true spiritual nature.

When we focus on the material world of the senses, we cannot see the subtle worlds of spirit, or even mind. Rumi says we have been foraging too long and are bogged down by external phenomena. He highlights our dilemma of being caught between two worlds.

Baba Ji has suggested we examine what it is we truly want. We claim to want liberation, truth, love and union with the inner Master, and yet most of our energy is directed into the outside phenomenal world. Saints teach that our attachment to this world is due to the mind being addicted to stimulation, and is thus enslaved by the senses. These are in turn driven by desire, ego, greed, lust and anger, which divert the soul's yearning for liberation.

We need to turn our attention in the right direction. Our minds, being consumed by the worldly circumstances of our lives, are enslaved by external pursuits. Like the falcon in the poem being called to return by the emperor's whistling, we need to turn our attention inward, back to the Lord.

Grief and hardship are great gifts on the spiritual path. They make us turn around and re-evaluate our standing and priorities in the world. They turn us inward. What is the point of this continual foraging and grazing in the outside world? Rather, follow the sound of the emperor's whistling, the holy sound, which is heard within. It is calling us home.

Mystics teach that having wandered through the cycle of life and death and of transmigration in countless lives, it is in this physical human form

that the soul can find its way out of the world of illusion and its karmic bondage to the world. Liberation can happen when we are graced with initiation by a true living master, who knows the way and has been given the mandate by the Lord to take us home.

It is not enough, however, just to be initiated. Having heard the inner call of the emperor's whistling, we have to respond accordingly. If we only pay lip service to the teachings and the thrust of our heart is still toward the world, the soul will continue to roam as a stranger here. We have to do the spiritual practice so that we can be pulled inward by the Sound Current, the Shabd, the purifying, sustaining life force within us.

The path is internal. If we want to experience something more than our habitual external programming, we need to look inward rather than outward. Masters teach that the human form is a microcosm of the entire universe, that the Creator and the creation are contained within the body. If we wish to find God we have to look within. Masters give us simran, which is designed to draw the soul currents up and out of the body to the eye centre by constant repetition of these holy words. With focused concentration and inner listening we can hear the Shabd, catch on to it and be transported out of this material world into the highest region where God resides.

With our inner devotion to the Lord and the mind clear of worldly distractions, our simran can become truly effective. We need to focus solely on the simran and not allow our thoughts to intrude. As he told us in *Spiritual Perspectives*: "You should be in those words. And not somewhere away from them."

Rabia of Basra, an 8th-century Sufi mystic, points out in her poem "Doorkeeper of the Heart" that it is the heart that is the seat of the Beloved. Our Master tells us that the heart Sufi mystics refer to is the spiritual heart, which is the eye centre. It is the seat of love and devotion, and this where we must focus our thought, energy and attention. Doing our spiritual practice with obedience, devotion and love will lead to concentration.

The true form of the Master is Shabd, the audible life stream, and that is also love, which is in all living beings. We are connected to Shabd at the

time of initiation. The Master has accepted responsibility for leading us out of the domain of mind.

It is our karmic load that keeps us bound to this world. We do not know what lies in our storehouse of karma, called *sinchit karma*. Together with our destiny for this life and our current actions, these three types of karma are a burden on the soul. We must go through our destiny and do our part, by abiding by the principles of Sant Mat to lighten our karmic load going forward and by attending to our meditation, which gives us strength to face our current karmas. In the meantime, the Master is guiding us from within.

Maharaj Charan Singh taught that we should never try to calculate in meditation: how much karma has been cleared, and how much more meditation we need to do to clear more karma. We have to leave this to the Lord. Our goal must be to meditate simply because we are in love with him and we want to become one with him, to merge into his Radiant Form.

Love is the greatest mystery and miracle of having a master. It is through his mercy and grace that love begins to grow in our hearts, healing our desecrated lives. As our longing for love grows stronger, our worldly busyness diminishes and *simran* takes hold of the mind. We begin to lead a more balanced life.

Saints tell us that by being born into a human body we have the opportunity to go back to the Father. We're told that if we withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre and become one with that spirit, that holy light within ourselves, we will be able to discharge our worldly duties better and go back to the Father. This is keeping a balance in the world.

Clearly many of us have a long way to go to achieve this balance and not be overwhelmed by our destiny. However, there is no need to despair. We have been initiated by a true Saint. He has assured us that all he wants is our best effort, then we can leave the rest to him. If we can do this we may not experience light and sound within, but we will feel the yearning of our heart. We will then find ourselves leaning within, remembering the Master and feeling his presence. Our desire to please and serve our Master will grow and we will want to sit in meditation.

With our growing longing for union comes gratitude, trust and humility, as we realize that the privilege of initiation is due only to his grace and love for us. We need only turn to the direction of love, to where we hear the emperor's whistling, as Rumi says, to where the inner sky opens wide. Then at last we can be transplanted from the world of phenomena to the inner world of spirit and union with the inner Shabd, the true form of our Master.



Faith and Loneliness

Faith and loneliness: at first glance, these terms come across as mutually exclusive. They don't belong together. If we have faith, how can we be lonely?

The truth is that our faith is at best shaky and laced with doubt. We think we have love for the Master and have undying faith in him, yet we are torn between our love for the material world and our soul's longing to merge with the Creator.

In *Quest for Light* Maharaj Charan Singh calls faith the foundation on which the whole structure of spiritual progress stands. So, how do we acquire true, lasting and unshakeable faith?

This mansion of faith is built upon numerous pillars. The first and most essential of these pillars is loneliness, the most painful of human conditions – the constant sense that we are not quite whole. We are born sensing that there is something missing, which creates in us a desperate need to find this missing something.

Shams-e-Tabrizi, Master of the poet Rumi, speaks frequently of this need, which seems to carry a variety of meanings: a deep desire for the inner Beloved and for God; a sufficient degree of self-awareness to understand one's own inadequacy and helplessness in the quest; a yearning restlessness, a sense of something missing and of not belonging; and above all, a deeply felt humility and a need for prayer, asking God for help and guidance. In *Shams-e-Tabrizi* Shams says: "When you come with an attitude of need, then that, in essence, is asking me the way to God."

And it would seem that even the Lord himself has a need. In *Spiritual Perspectives* someone once asked Maharaj Charan Singh: "Is the Lord lonely?" And he replied: "Maybe that's why he's calling us." Then Maharaj Ji was asked if the Lord needs our love. He answered that it was the Beloved who gave that love to the lover. It was the Lord who put that pull in the heart of the lover. Therefore he must feel a need for that love.

Isn't it beautiful and reassuring to know that he also wants us to love him? As our soul is of his essence, it naturally feels a pull towards him. There is a magnetic pull from the whole to the part, and from the part to

the whole. It is a great circle of love. And our Master waits for us patiently and longingly, day after day, to complete this circle of love.

Once we have acknowledged this heartfelt need, then the second pillar is to follow the instructions and teachings of our Master – the instructions that will help us fulfil our need and take us a step closer to true faith. The method and teachings of true masters are based on four fundamental principles: following a vegetarian diet, not taking alcohol, tobacco or mind-altering substances, living a moral and honest life, and giving at least a tenth of one's time daily to the practice of meditation.

How can we follow the instructions of someone diligently if we do not trust them? The third pillar, therefore, is to fully and unconditionally trust the Master – much as a passenger who buys an airline ticket trusts that the pilot of the aircraft will take him to his destination.

The mystics explain that this is an exact parallel to the plight of the soul, which is lost in the maze of mind and matter and does not know how to make its way to spiritual freedom. That is, until a compassionate and loving spiritual master comes along who not only knows how to escape, but who offers to help the soul realize its freedom. Considering the helplessness of our situation, why would we not gratefully accept his help?

True mystics teach by example. Like loving parents, they use logic, reason and love. They want their disciples to walk the path with a strong conviction derived from their own understanding and experience. But to reach that level of experience, we need to trust in the Master. We need to acknowledge that when it comes to the liberation of our soul, he is the expert and he knows best how to get us home.

Based on this trust, we must also embrace the idea of letting go. We cling so desperately to the cheap treasures of this world that we feel we have worked so hard for, but we do not make the space, we do not create the receptivity to receive the treasures that our Father has bestowed on us.

To acquire true faith we need to trust, we need to let go. But how do we build this attitude? It is built on the fourth pillar, which is love. We need to develop love for the Master. Not human love that is based on emotion, but the kind of love that the soul feels for the Creator. Does this mean there is no place for the love of the physical form of the Master in Sant Mat? Not at all.

In the book *Adventure of Faith* we learn that once during an evening meeting Maharaj Charan Singh spoke most lovingly about his own Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, who had left this world decades before. Tears welled up in Maharaj Ji's eyes and he said, "I would give my life to see him again in his human form."

If our own Master longs for his Master, then for us too as human beings it is only natural to feel great love for the physical form. On this coarse plane of material existence where the Shabd form is not easily accessible to us, it is the physical Master who teaches us how to go within and get in touch with the inner Master; and it is he who helps us develop our love, trust and faith.

And the love we may feel for our Master is far more than human emotion. In *Living Meditation* we read, "Emotion, rightly directed, becomes devotion."

The mind wants us to believe that the path of devotion is one of romance. But all the saints have told us that the path of love is both a path of devotion and of struggle. The battle we have to face is inside, and it is inside that it has to be fought. In practical terms it means we have to keep our attention as much as we can in simran, repetition of the holy words, at the eye centre. This is where we'll come face to face with the real inner Master.

The task of the physical form of the Master is to initiate us and prepare us to meet the inner Master. The physical form is a means, not an end. We need the physical to love because we cannot develop the love we need for success on the spiritual path if its object is just an idea, a concept, in our mind. Our aim has to be to direct our love for the outer Master into effort in meditation so that we reach beyond the physical to the spiritual.

As we grow in understanding of the purpose of the physical Master, we cannot stop there. We must carry on our search for the Master's real form – the Shabd form. Therefore, the seed of love can only grow with the fifth pillar: meditation, to lead us to the Shabd. All masters proclaim the same truth. The true Master is Shabd. True darshan is inner darshan. Truth is within.

The Master can point us to the truth, but he cannot experience the truth for us. Meditation is the means by which the love and natural emotions generated by contact with the Master are directed inwards and upwards, to bring us to that state where we become intimate with the real Master. In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Love for the Master comes by having darshan inside, that is, by seeing him inside. It is only then that the feeling of real love springs up. In the beginning we have to practise it more or less. If we carry out his wishes and commands and follow his instructions faithfully, ... it also leads to darshan inside.



The Ultimate Target

We read in *The Book of Mirdad*: “Aim well, and any result is a good result.” Let’s apply this to our own spiritual efforts.

Whenever an archer takes aim, he focuses intensely on the target before releasing the arrow. Naturally, his intention is to hit the target in the centre. If he misses it, he can gauge how much practice he needs. But in spirituality, the dynamics are different. We practise daily, but we are not in control of the result, and neither can we gauge our progress.

What is our spiritual target and how do we take aim? From the moment of initiation, we have been given a mystic practice that aims at reaching the eye centre and, ultimately, self-realization and God-realization. Simply put, our direct aim is to do everything possible to please our Master by following his instructions. Without him, we can do nothing. He has come to free us from the wheel of birth and rebirth, and will reunite us with the Father, who is calling us home.

Our Master teaches us to redirect our attention away from the world. He teaches, guides and accompanies us as we learn to aim our attention inwards towards the eye centre, with the aid of our simran. Mirdad says, “Aim well, and any result is a good result.” But then he adds:

What comes to you, is yours. What delays in coming, is not worth waiting for. Let it do the waiting. You never miss an aim if what you aim at aims at you.

Mikhail Naimy, *The Book of Mirdad*

When we practise spiritual meditation we slowly come to realize that a very unfamiliar set of rules applies. Who of us has ever heard of an endeavour in which it is beneficial to struggle and fail, for decades on end? And yet be assured that the practice is still perfectly on track?

The Masters explain that apparent failures help us: to overcome the unruly mind and ego. We’re not aiming for competence. Rather, our effort is the essential ingredient. It is beneficial for us to be made aware of our weakness and helplessness. All we can do is make our best effort, then trust the Master to do the rest. Only with his grace can we achieve our target. In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh has told us bluntly: “If anybody says, ‘I can reach back to the Father by my effort, by my meditation,’ he is wrong.”

There seems to be a kind of mystery around the question of effort. Why is it that we are asked to work so hard, seemingly to accomplish nothing? Why is it that our ineffectual efforts are needed? It does seem that however meagre our efforts may seem to us, the Master values them highly as a demonstration of our love and longing for him.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II: “If we really have faith in him, if we really love him, we will want to do what he wants us to do.” Maharaj Ji further clarifies:

“Meditation is nothing but love.” This means that the act of meditating is itself an act of love – the practice, not the ‘success’ of our efforts, is love.

Seva

But still, we may keep hankering for results, not realizing that we are in fact getting them – in a form which we don’t recognize. Our efforts may be cutting our ties to the world. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Ji was asked: “You say we should not expect results, but what part do results play?” He replied:

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

The questioner continued: “And that is enough at the time of death, to take us up?” The Master replied: “That is more than enough, because your tendency is not towards the creation now.” In other words, our attention will have shifted away from the world.

In the Mirdad quote, “What comes to you, is yours. What delays in coming, is not worth waiting for,” the Masters explain that we only get that which is destined to happen. Nothing can be added or removed. Nothing can be avoided or forced. If something is not meant for us, no amount of effort can make it happen.

What is it that has come to us? The most precious gift in all creation. We have been found and initiated by a living master. And that is because we have been specifically marked by the Creator to return to him. Maharaj Ji once confirmed that only those marked by the Creator would be drawn to him, and then he cannot refuse them. He is not concerned by the weight of our karmas. Which must be a relief for many of us!

Still, if we are anxious for spiritual experiences, Mirdad makes it clear that we will get only that which our Master wants us to have. These experiences will come only when the time is right. Only the Master knows what serves us best, what to give us and when. In the meantime, all we need to do is whatever he asks.

So, for us nothing is more important than obedience to the Master. At our stage we begin with obedience. Lofty spiritual goals like union, longing, surrender, humility and detachment can feel overwhelming and out of reach. It is a relief to know that love is something we can practise immediately, through obedience, from where we are, right now. At our present level, love means obedience.

Obedience is no minor consideration, compared with all the other subtle qualities we hope to achieve. Obedience is huge. Obeying the Master equates to love for the Master. Above all, we need to obey his instruction to meditate, which creates in us love for God himself. A disciple once asked Maharaj Charan Singh: “By doing meditation, we are loving God?” And Maharaj Ji replied that this was the height of love.

This is what God wants from us. He wants us to love him. In fact, we’re told that this was the very reason for the creation. God wanted all his little souls to love him as he loves us.

In *The Book of Mirdad* we also read: “You never miss an aim if what you aim at aims at you.” The Lord himself is aiming at us. He wants us to come back to him, to come back to our home in Sach Khand. That is why he marked us for initiation.

In *Spiritual Letters* Baba Jaimal Singh told his disciple Sawan Singh (who would succeed him):

When the perfect Satguru met the disciple and gave him Nam-Dhun, everything happened at that very moment.... You reached Sach Khand the very day you were initiated – that is the place for which you are destined.

That is our destination too. That is where the Lord himself will bring us – when the time is right. As Baba Jaimal Singh told his disciple:

But because the karmic account of give-and-take is still to be finished, he cannot take you there. Once it is fully settled, he will take you there at once.

Spiritual Letters



What More Could We Ask For?

No one is happy in this world. How could we be? Everything that we consider to be valuable or attractive is temporary. Everything in this world is in a state of flux. Where can we go in order to find a happy, peaceful and fulfilling life? Certainly we are not encouraged by our experience in this world.

Logically, then, since we cannot find peace and fulfilment here, we should be looking elsewhere, but for most that presents a significant problem. This world is all that we know. Where should we look? The mystics have a simple answer. They tell us to look within.

They say this because, from their own experience, they know that this world is an illusion, a passing shadow-show that can never give us the stable, dependable solution that we seek. The very things we pursue for our happiness turn out to be the cause of so much pain and suffering. So the mystics bring to us the benefit of their inner experience and say that all the answers lie within us.

But we have never been within, so we do not know this inner domain that the masters are pointing to. The reason is that we have become so habituated to directing our attention downward and outward to the world around us that we know no other way. In addition, we have become attached to the places, faces and things of this world, and this attachment prevents us from going within.

So how are we to address this dilemma in which we find ourselves? The Master explains that whatever takes you towards the Lord is good, and whatever takes you away from him is bad. That's all we need to know.

Masters explain to us that the Lord is not separate from us – in fact it is we who are separated from him. The reason is not hard to find. We identify so much with our self that we have become ego-obsessed. Believing ourselves to be this ego we act, and the consequences of our actions along with our attachments, bind us to this world and prevent us from turning within.

The solution is fairly simple. We need to detach ourselves from the external objects that fascinate us and redirect our attention to the third eye, the gateway to the inner worlds. This is not so simple to implement, but nevertheless, if we heed the Master's instructions to us as our rule for

life, then every day takes us closer to our goal. By our lifestyle we avoid the pitfalls of the world that previously occupied so much of our attention and got us into so much trouble, and by our meditation we slowly withdraw our attention from the outside and direct it within.

We don't need to go anywhere to seek the Lord. We just need to recognize the things that are standing in our way and eliminate them. He is not in some distant location on the other side of the universe, he is right here within us. Sometimes the Indian mystics say that the Lord is closer to us than our own breath, or closer than hands and feet.

This path was never going to be a quick and easy solution, but it guarantees slow and steady progress. Every effort generates a result. All that is required is perseverance. In addition, we are under the Master's constant guidance and care. He has initiated us and has guaranteed our return to Sach Khand. Could we ask for anything more?



BOOK REVIEW

Moses Maimonides

BY MIRIAM BOKSER CARAVELLA

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Moses Maimonides is the first book in a new series from Science of the Soul Research Centre, the “Free Thinkers Series.” The publisher’s note explains that the books in this series will “attempt to present the teachings of many of the great philosophers throughout history in a way that average readers without academic backgrounds can easily understand.” All these philosophers “sought, in their own way, an understanding of the ultimate truth.” The publisher submits that we readers, if we keep an open mind, “may glean fresh insights into our own understanding of the mysteries of God and human nature.”

Moses Maimonides was a medieval Jewish philosopher who remains the most widely studied Jewish thinker of all times. His masterpiece, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, reconciled Aristotle’s philosophy relying on reason with traditional Jewish belief resting on holy scriptures. Maimonides believed that the use of reason doesn’t contradict religious faith; rather it enables greater understanding of the divine. Influenced also by the Islamic mystical or Sufi tradition, he propounded a highly original and dynamic combination of Judaism, Aristotelian philosophy, and mysticism, charting a new path to understanding that still resonates today.

Born in 1138 in Cordoba, Spain, Maimonides lived his early years at a time when Jews coexisted peacefully with their Muslim and Christian neighbours under Muslim rule. When he was seven, however, the political climate changed and the state began to persecute Jews. So his family moved to Morocco, then to Palestine, and finally to Cairo, Egypt. He was eventually appointed the official physician to the sultan Saladin, as well as religious guide and judge for the Jewish community of Cairo. Among his works are medical works that were studied for centuries thereafter, and two ground-breaking works on Jewish law, *Commentary on the Mishnah and Mishnah Torah*.

But it is as a philosopher that he wrote his greatest and most enduring work, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. In his time the writings of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle had recently become available in Arabic translation, and these were seen to pose a severe challenge to Jews. Judaism held that truth resided in divinely revealed scriptures, while Aristotle asserted that by reason mankind may know the ultimate truth about the world, the self, and the divine.

Undaunted by this stark opposition, Maimonides sought and found “a common ground of a higher synthesis” beyond it. He believed that combining Jewish law as revealed in scripture with the reason of the ancient Greek philosophers would lead to a deeper understanding of the divine and of the divine laws guiding human conduct. To him, the philosopher is a compassionate physician whose primary concern is “care of the soul.” Ancient philosophy, he said, sought to “form people and to transform souls.” The synthesis Maimonides crafted became significant, not only for Jews, but also for Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas.

Maimonides explained that he had two purposes for writing the *Guide*. The first was to instruct a person who, believing both in the Jewish law and in philosophy, was perplexed by the seeming contradictions between them. Maimonides set out to explain the underlying meaning of both revealed Jewish law and philosophy.

His second purpose in writing the *Guide* was to explain the mysterious parables in the Bible and help people move beyond a literal interpretation of them. Ultimately, Maimonides wanted to replace superstitious and imaginary beliefs with a more rational awareness of the divine. He believed that a person must go through the perplexing experience of attempting to reconcile reason and revelation. For him this is not merely an intellectual exercise; rather it leads to a deep spiritual transformation and peace of mind.

The *Guide* is divided into three books, the first two demonstrating how reason and revelation can relate, and the third the synthesis that is the climax of Maimonides’ teachings.

Book One offers a commentary on biblical terminology. Maimonides points out that when scriptures use human terms to speak of God – terms like seeing, dwelling, sitting, rising, the “hand of God” – it is important

not to take such terms literally, and to use reason to perceive that God is a spiritual entity that has no shape or form.

Book Two incorporates the metaphysics of Aristotle into a worldview based on scripture. Maimonides sets out to show that the biblical account of creation is in accord with Aristotelian philosophy. He explains the language in the book of Genesis as an allegory in which God created the universe by generating the divine intelligence on the first day. From this intelligence, the “spheres derived their existence and motion, and thus became the source of the existence of the entire universe.” He believed the spheres received their power from the Prime Mover or God.

In Book Three Maimonides starts by explaining a mystical passage in the book of Ezekiel from the Hebrew Bible, in which the prophet Ezekiel ascends to the Throne of God in a chariot made of heavenly beings driven by “the likeness of a man.” Next Maimonides reviews the 613 laws found in the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, using reason to show their underlying purposes. By such investigations Maimonides seeks to show both that scriptures cannot be properly understood without reason, but more importantly, that reason alone cannot understand metaphysical realities. The author writes,

Maimonides ultimately concludes that metaphysics cannot be known intellectually with clarity, through reason, but only through prophecy, revelation, and spiritual illumination. ... [O]ne has to stand in perplexity and accept that through the intellect there is no clarity. The intellectual search for God ignites an inner passion that philosophy alone is unable to satisfy. This passion is a fuel that drives one to take steps of consciousness that lie beyond philosophy; then the understanding and knowledge of God is revealed to us as God wills.

Thus, for Maimonides, ultimate truths about God may be known only through individual spiritual illumination, the source of prophecy and revelation. According to Maimonides, prophecy supersedes intellect:

Know that there is a level that is higher than all philosophy: this is prophecy. It is a different world. Arguing and investigating are out of place here; no evidence can reach prophecy; any attempt to examine it in a scholarly manner is doomed to fail. It would be like trying to gather all

the water on earth in a small cup. ... I say that there is a limit to human knowledge, and so long as the soul is in the body, it cannot grasp the supernatural.... No matter how greatly the mind may strive to know God, it will find a barrier; matter is a powerful dividing wall.

And Maimonides further held that this spiritual illumination is not confined to the prophets of scripture but may be attained by anyone in any time period. Indeed, he ends the *Guide* with a poem:

*God is very near to everyone who calls,
if he calls truly and has no distractions.
He is found by every seeker who searches for Him,
if he marches toward him and goes not astray.*

Summing up the *Guide*, the author writes:

Book III of the Guide is the bright summit of The Guide of the Perplexed. It is about the supreme form of worship, the ultimate attainment of the truth, and the highest knowledge and love of God. In this section, Maimonides moves from the intellectual attainment of an Aristotelian rationalist to the higher mystical attainment of a true worshiper.

