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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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An Invocation

*Come, pray, come, O Lord of mine;
I await Thee, I long and pine.
Oh come to my mansion, come, I pray,
I stand with eyes glued on thy way.
I'll shed with the coming of the morn
All fineries that now me adorn.
On the path of life, forlorn I stand,
For Satguru to come and hold my hand.
I hold a goblet of love for thee;
Oh come, my Master, hearken to me.
The Saint is my life, my soul is he;
He pervades within, he dwells in me.
In my every pore does he reside,
As does rain in the clouds abide.
My soul is attuned to name divine;
Oh come, pray come, dear Lord of mine.
Mira is the Lord's beloved now,
And, O Lord, her only love art Thou.
Mighty Lord, to Mira in Thy grace
Hasten to grant a glimpse of Thy face.
My attention in Nij Nam does stay;
Come, dear Lord of mine, oh come, I pray.
Come, I beseech Thee, O Lord of mine;
Come, I await Thee, I long and pine.*

Mira Bai, The Divine Lover



The Ideal of Service

*My Lord, I would rather be a disciple than a Preceptor.
I would rather be a humble servant than a Master.*

*I care not whether I possess worldly knowledge,
so long as I am blessed with spiritual knowledge.*

*I would not hanker after the material things of life
if you confer upon me peace and contentment.*

*I care not whether I have a conveyance so long
as I have the gift of a pair of strong and sturdy legs.*

*If you give me good appetite,
I care not whether my meal is sumptuous.*

*Give me the power to enjoy good sleep
even if my bed be not comfortable.*

*I do not care for the worldly applause,
but I esteem your approbation more
than anything in the world.*

The prayer above appears at the beginning of the first volume of the diary of Rai Sahib Munshi Ram, published by RSSB in English as *With the Three Masters*.

Rai Sahib had served from 1942 to 1956 as Secretary to three successive Masters. He had been an important man in the legal profession, having been District and Sessions Judge for the Punjab before his retirement to the Dera. He was in a position to enjoy status and respect and all the accompanying benefits. But this endearing prayer holds our attention because of its insistence on a very different

set of values. He is overflowing with gratitude for the opportunity to be a lowly servant – without ‘worldly knowledge’, without ‘the material things of life’, without ‘worldly applause’ but with the protection and favour of a true Master.

This simple philosophy is almost a blueprint for a sevadar’s life.

Becoming Sevadars

When a group of sevadars were together recently someone asked, “How does one become a full-time sevadar?” It would be easy to get side-tracked by possible answers involving a number of actions, perhaps winding up various external responsibilities, putting one’s finances in order, being approved by the Dera and so on. But that would be forgetting that, most importantly, seva is the Master’s gift. And secondly, that this gift is there for all of us, all the time. Maybe the answer should be, “In the same way as one meditates – by just doing it.”

Because here’s the thing: seva is not reserved for those with time or money or no commitments. Everybody can be a “full-time” sevadar – why not? We are all full-time sevadars if everything that we do, we do as if it were for our Master. It may be going to work for the wage that supports us; it may be caring for our family. Becoming a sevadar is something that happens through the heart, by putting a set of values into place and sticking to them. It is not primarily brought about through external circumstances.

It’s true that there is a difference between actions which have the physical purpose of looking after ourselves and our family, and actions which have the purpose of serving the Master and his sangat. These latter are what we usually call seva. But ultimately seva is identified by that golden thread of inner intention and dedication.

So, a sevadar given a particular position, perhaps to help look after a property, will have his letter of appointment in his pocket, but the real story of how he got there began long ago when he became a sevadar in spirit – and that is always full-time.

Living the Life

When we want to know more about physical seva and what it entails, we can't do better than to look at Rai Sahib's prayer, so deceptively simple on the surface but offering such deep meaning. Having been a member of the judiciary, Rai Sahib had known what it was to be a 'preceptor' or someone who gives precepts or orders. Yet he preferred to turn his back on this privilege in favour of the position of a humble servant who must follow whatever orders are given to him.

We do not need to have been a judge to know what it is to be a preceptor. Most of us are able to be little kings or queens of a tiny domain of one kind or another, even if it is no more than our own backyard or our iPod. Do we really understand what it means to be a servant without such autonomy? There is the story of the king and the slave – the king asked his favourite slave:

“What would you like to eat?”

“O king – whatever you give me.”

“What will you wear?”

“Whatever you choose.”

“Where will you live?”

“Wherever you put me.”

“Then what is it that you desire?”

“My Lord, 'slave' and 'desire' – how can these two ever go together?”

Even our 'worldly knowledge', something Rai Sahib is ready to relinquish, feeds a sense of pride in our autonomy. Don't we love indulging in knowing better than anyone else, even if (or perhaps

especially when) we are powerless to put such knowledge into action? Can we give that indulgence up? Can we swallow our pride and accept decisions in which we haven't been asked to share? Can we carry out orders with a positive and loving spirit? If we hold on to our 'spiritual knowledge', i.e. our understanding of Sant Mat and the opportunity to do simran, we'll be able to answer yes to those questions and we'll be on the way to performing our physical seva well.

Practical Choices

Then there are the material things of life which Rai Sahib prays not to 'hanker after'. Contentment with simple things is a practical necessity if our energy is to be directed towards the service of the Master, because we're not necessarily going to have the resources to spare for the accumulation of material things. Does our 'conveyance' i.e. 'the kind of car' we drive matter to us? How necessary to us are life's luxuries? Do we live to eat or eat to live? Can we put up with occasional discomfort and still keep our balance?

Lastly, and most important of all, whose approval do we seek? All of us have some reference point in life, whether it be another person or a social 'norm', and we tend to mould our actions with an eye to how we think we'll measure up against this yardstick. That's often why we want material things in the first place – to reinforce our sense of self in the eyes of the world.

If the Master and his teachings become our point of reference, choices become simpler and outward things fall into second place. Making this shift doesn't imply that we don't consult the wishes of our family. Recognizing our responsibility for others' welfare is not the same as seeking 'worldly applause'. But with the energy that comes from the Master's grace we can often do both. We can keep our family happy and still have time to serve his sangat.

An Old Magic

The world has become more complicated, more sophisticated, than the world in which Rai Sahib lived. The sangat has grown to a size which he might have found unimaginable. Seemingly miraculously, but in reality because of the compassion, foresight and hard work of the present Master, this has not separated the ordinary satsangi from the Master but brought new opportunities for service. In those seva opportunities the relationship between Master and sevadar still has its old simplicity, its old magic. The gratitude of sevadars cannot be expressed better than in the tender last line of Rai Sahib's prayer, when the writer says to his Master:

*I do not care for the worldly applause,
but I esteem your approbation more
than anything in the world.*



*The resounding of the primal Sound was heard:
catching which, I ascended like a spider on its thread....
To pass through the sunn region,
I took the support of the sat Shabd,
reaching the court of the Guru.
Absorbed and lost in the love of the true Master,
I became entirely oblivious of the world.
I found the real, essential Sound
where the splendour of the nameless being prevails –
He who is beyond all name and form.*

Soami Ji Maharaj, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*

Through the Eyes of a Seeker

As a young seeker who is drawn to the teachings and the path of Sant Mat, I am inclined to write the following article, which hits upon what I feel every sincere seeker is going through. I hope it will reassure these seekers all that they are not alone. And I hope this article will give insight into my personal thoughts and feelings, whilst addressing how one should try to conduct oneself before plunging into the path and getting initiation. My advice will be on the basis of what the past and present Masters have stressed and advised.

I am a beginner on this path. I have not got initiation, but most of my family have. Never have they forced the path on me – they simply took me to satsangs from the time when I was very young. Back then satsang and the teachings seemed to make no sense, and everything that was said usually went in one ear and out the other. It's only as a young adult that anything remotely 'spiritual' seems to have taken hold of me.

Like any other seeker, I feel I am on a spiritual quest which sometimes feels quite daunting. Daunting in the sense that I am unsure if I am truly heading in the right direction. I have been and still am searching into many different belief systems, just to satisfy my mind and compare them to these teachings. At times, I thought maybe this was a wrong way to approach things. Was I abandoning the teachings? Not so, is the answer, as Maharaj Charan Singh so wonderfully states in *Light on Sant Mat*:

Let me tell you at once that instead of discouraging, we encourage a thorough study and investigation of the various spiritual disciplines, for it is only by impartial, comparative

study and investigation of the various teachings that one comes to know the true value of any system.

This great quote gives me so much hope. It makes me feel that it's all right to be searching into different religions, philosophies and belief systems if my heart feels the need to. We seekers should not feel that this is wrong. In fact, it is quite the opposite – we should do it if we feel the desire to. These sorts of concerns and issues I believe are best dealt with before initiation to give us a strong foundation we can build on, if we decide to become firm followers of this path.

I understand and sympathize that some youthful seekers on the path of Sant Mat, or any other path for that matter, may feel that they are under pressure to adopt a particular path. Perhaps, for some seekers, their family members are following this path and therefore they may feel compelled to do so as well.

Others may be feeling pressure from friends and are only pursuing the path in order to fit in and not feel left out. Or lastly, to those who might be similar to me, perhaps you are putting a little pressure on yourself about where you stand on the path. For instance, I occasionally feel time is passing by and I still have not moved forward in my mind and am still contemplating on certain things. Should I get initiation? Is this path for me, and do I really want to pursue it and make it a part of my life? These are just some of the questions that I ask myself.

Nonetheless, it is in these specific moments that I take great comfort in what the present Master often says. He frequently reminds us seekers that we should be comfortable with the path we choose to follow, and that he does not want disciples to have blind faith. This advice always strongly resounds in my mind.

Therefore, we seekers should open our hearts and ask ourselves ‘am I heading into this path for the right reasons?’ We need to be patient until our hearts reveal the answer.

So, to all seekers reading who may also be unclear about whether they should follow the path, please don’t despair. We can take refuge in the words of Maharaj Charan Singh in *Quest for Light*:

This path is not to be followed just ... because someone known to you is on it. You yourself must understand the science thoroughly and see what it is, what it expects of you, and what it has to offer.

The urge to follow this path is to come from within you. No other person can tell you if you are fit to follow the path or not. Your own heart must speak.

Everything comes at the proper time. Please do not be in a hurry to receive Initiation. Have no worry. First get yourself fully satisfied mentally. Your questions and doubts are quite genuine.

And again in *Light on Sant Mat* he says:

It is perfectly correct for you to make sure that you really want to tread this path.... Even if you spent half your life in investigating the truths and possibilities of Sant Mat, I would not be sorry. I would even add that you will get credit for any honest and sincere inquiry.

As seekers, we may ask ourselves what practical steps we can take to develop a deeper understanding of the path. In *Quest for Light*

Maharaj Charan Singh gives us some beautiful advice that I feel we should try to take on board:

The right thing for you to do at this stage is to read and study books on this science and try to understand the teachings fully. This understanding of the subject is very important and the time spent in this endeavour is well utilized. Try to live up to the principles of Sant Mat. Effort can and should be made to mould your life according to the teachings of the saints.

And in *Die To Live* he says about seekers:

They should try to understand the philosophy thoroughly and make a full investigation, and once they're convinced about the path, then they should try to follow the path.

All the above advice is so positive and practical. If we are enthusiastic to follow this path, we can get a great head start by understanding what the key principles are. We can then try to apply all that we read and understand to every aspect of our daily life. For example, we can follow the lacto-vegetarian diet, refrain from alcohol, attend satsang and generally be a good person. As seekers, we have the opportunity to mould our life in accordance with the teachings of the saints right here and now. So why not try to begin.

The personal and private journey to discover one's spiritual path is not easy and straightforward. In this period we seekers should try to be positive, patient and be brave enough to ask ourselves tough questions. This, I firmly believe, will eventually lead us to the place and path where we are meant to be.

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds;
and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Bible, Matthew 7:7–8



*What we look for beyond seeing,
and call the unseen;
Listen for beyond hearing,
and call the unheard;
Grasp for beyond reaching,
and call the withheld –
Merge, beyond understanding, in a oneness
which does not merely rise and give light,
does not merely set and leave darkness –
But forever sends forth a succession of living things
as mysterious as the unbegotten existence (Wu)
to which they return.*

Lao Tzu, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*

Our True Value

An auction was being held and one lot was an old violin. The wood was stained, the strings were slack and the bow was un-tensioned. It looked pretty worthless. The auctioneer had to drop the suggested first bid price to £25 to get anyone to take an interest. A few dealers made some desultory bids and the violin was about to be sold for a knock down price of £45 when a man got up, walked to the front and took the violin from the auctioneer. This was unusual and the crowd stirred. The man spent a few moments to re-tension the strings and then started to play. He produced the most beautiful and captivating music from the violin for about a minute, then gave the instrument back to the auctioneer and sat down. The bidding re-commenced and finally closed at £2,000.

The dealers were amazed and later asked the purchaser why he paid so much for it. He replied simply that he realized its true worth in the hands of the musician.

From a spiritual standpoint we may view ourselves as shabby and grubby, however the Master can see our true essence. He sees our inner spark, the Shabd. For our part if, like the old violin, we are fortunate enough to be in the hands of a Master, we will be re-tuned and hear the most beautiful music. This re-tuning is attending to our meditation with all the love and devotion we can muster. Once we are able to still our minds through meditation, we will experience the Shabd within us and appreciate our true value.

*Come faqirs, let us go to the fairground,
and hear the Music of the mystics;
Listen there to the unstruck Word of many colours,*

*and cast away the saffron robes of the ascetic.
The unstruck Music brings only oneness,
and knows no enmity.
It comes from the opening in the head....
You must still your mind in that Music.*

Bulleh Shah, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*

*He who closes his nine doors and restrains his wandering mind,
Obtains an abode in the Lord's own tenth home.
There, the unstruck Music plays day and night:
Through the Guru's instruction, this celestial Strain is heard.*

Guru Amardas, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*



*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,
where moth and rust doth corrupt,
and where thieves break through and steal:
But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt,
and where thieves do not break through nor steal:
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Bible, Matthew 6:19-21

Letters on Spirituality

The following are excerpts from letters written in reply to seekers and disciples by Maharaj Charan Singh, taken from the book, *Light on Sant Mat*. Please note that the numbering follows the letter numbers in the book.

2. Our aim is to achieve God-realization by going in and drawing our consciousness up, through mystic practice and discipline, to the centre behind the two eyes, but without interrupting our daily duties. We are to live in the world, but in a detached manner. The Shabd, the Divine Melody, is the link between man and God, and the Guru or the Master simply gives you the technique and joins you to the Shabd.

8. A Master not only guides the student in this physical world, but also instructs, advises and helps the disciple on the inner planes when the disciple is able to go in. Our aim should be to realize God or Truth within ourselves, but we must know the technique first, as to how and where to go in. These instructions are imparted to the applicant either personally by the Master or through one of his representatives.

The real awakening which you are seeking comes not by sending the attention to the solar plexus but by concentrating it at the centre between the two eyes. It is not the eyes which are to concentrate, but the attention of the mind which is to do the work. It is from this centre that our real spiritual journey begins. At present our soul and mind currents are scattered throughout the body. We have to learn to draw them up and to concentrate them at the eye centre. This does not in any way interfere with the normal routine of one's life, nor is it necessary or even advisable to give up one's profession or home. Our worldly duties and obligations are to be fulfilled along with the

spiritual practice. But one has to take a vow to live on a vegetarian diet and to eschew alcoholic drinks. The prescribed diet includes all vegetables, fruits, cheese and milk.

You realize your own true form when you rise above mind and matter. The soul is encased in three bodies – the physical, the astral and the causal – and only when we have been able to detach ourselves from these three bodies can we realize our true form. All that is required is to work at the spiritual practice according to directions, for a minimum of two and a half hours daily. If you persist in this with faith and devotion, within a few months or even a few weeks, you can feel that you are making progress. But the actual goal is reached after a very long time, depending upon the previous background and the amount of effort put forth in individual cases. The grace of the Master, which is very necessary, is of course there all the time.

You will be happy to know that in this science you do not need to study philosophy or to do any reading unless it be to satisfy your own mind. What is needed is all the *practice* you can put in. I may add that the first step for initiation is to go on a strictly vegetarian diet. Try this for a few months and see if you can conveniently follow it. I would also advise you to thoroughly study Sant Mat literature to enable you to make up your mind that this is really what you want, and thrash out any questions that you may have, before applying for initiation through the representative. You may write to me whenever you feel like it.

12. It must have been quite a shock to you to learn of the sudden death of your mother. Souls come and go. This world is like a river and we are like logs floating in it. A current in the river brings us together – some for a long time and some for a brief meeting – and another current in the same river parts us. Of course, the closer the association,

the sadder the parting. But at its best it is only a worldly relationship. The soul never dies. Please accept my sympathy in your bereavement. I hope that God will give you strength to bear it and to realize that all life in this world is transitory. We come here for experience and with a definite purpose, and when that is finished, we go.

Your travels and experiences give you a good opportunity to study comparative religion first hand. I think that all religions point to the same fact, namely, that everything is within and that we must search within ourselves. Every religion teaches that there is a God and that we have a soul. And that the soul is a part of Him. The very word *religion* means that relationship of the soul with God. We have been born as human beings to know God, to love Him and to serve Him. We know that God is omnipresent, yet we can find Him only within ourselves. That each individual has to do for himself – of course, under the guidance of one who has himself attained God-realization.

31. It is the nature of the mind to be flitting from place to place, to create doubts and difficulties and then occasionally sit down to solve them, thus keeping you involved in a more or less useless activity. The proper thing is to draw up the mind by concentration and hold it at the eye centre as long as possible. There alone is peace. Below that is only strife and discord.

We are accustomed to pick out faults in other people. But this is not the way of spiritually inclined people. A satsangi or anyone keen on spiritual progress should try to find out his own faults and endeavour to give them up, one after the other, rather than find faults in other people. It is only a sense of superiority and of being above others that induces this habit in us, which is the very opposite of humility.

As for free will, it is an old controversy. The best and most satisfactory solution and the one which brings an element of certainty

with it, comes when one goes in and sees the workings of karma. We seem to have a free will but it is hedged in by so many circumstances that there is really very little of it after all, and it is no exaggeration to say that we are puppets in the hands of the Power that rules the world, that is, as long as we have not come to the Satguru and Nam. It is also to be remembered that what we call fate or destiny is not something which has been imposed on us by some outside power against our will, but is the natural result of what we have done in the past. We must reap what we have sown.

As concentration improves and withdrawal is more complete, the ringing of the bells will become clearer. Laziness should be avoided at all costs, for it cuts at the root of meditation.

43. Please do not mind the fact that you live so far from the Dera. The real Satguru is the Shabd, and when the surat goes into Shabd, we not only meet him but become one with him.

107. According to Sant Mat we have to turn our attention inside and gradually weaken our love for external things. The course of simran or the repetition of the five holy names, with attention at the eye centre, is very necessary as it is only with the help of simran that our attention currents are turned inwards.

The mystic vision, the love, the Shabd are all there inside and have always been there, but we have to go in to contact them. This also evokes His blessings and love. The first part – the simran – which enables us to come to the eye centre, has to be done with effort. Then the fountain of love and grace will begin to flow. I am not angry or displeased, but you have to work your way up. Faith is a good thing, but it must be turned into a living faith.

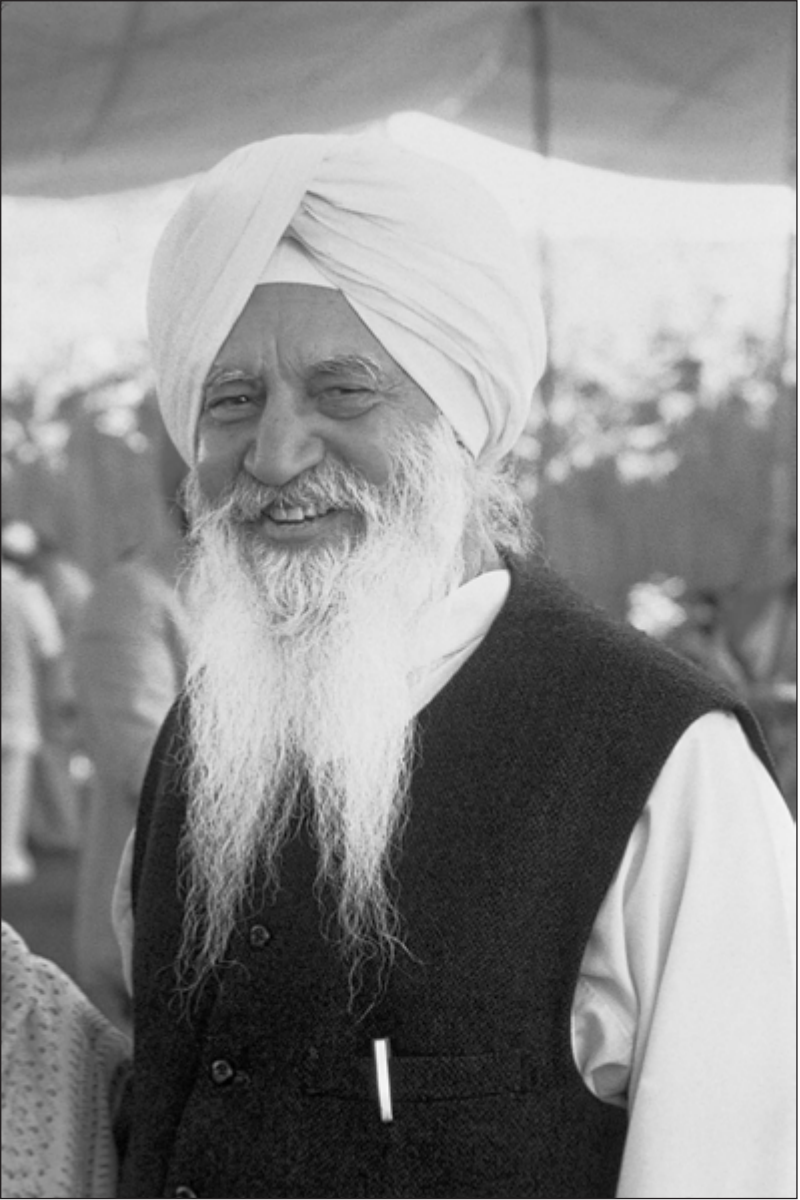
286. Master is within all of us and hears our cries and prayers, but we should pray to be granted strength to face calmly what is in store for us, and to enable us to keep our attention in simran and bhajan. You can refer your problems either in meditation or in a letter to me, just as it suits and pleases you...

Probably you are putting too much strain on the eyes in trying to see within. This should not be. You do not see inside with these eyes. Please adopt the posture which is convenient and comfortable, and do not put any strain on your eyes. This is the path of slow and steady progress. *Regularity* is a great thing. Persevere on steadily, without trying to force things or even dwelling upon whether all the karmas can be wiped out in this life. This is the Master's responsibility. He will do what is proper and correct. The disciple should carry on the meditation according to instructions and leave the rest to Him.



*After this I looked,
and, behold, a door was opened in heaven:
And the first voice which I heard
was as it were of a trumpet talking with me,
which said, "Come up hither,
and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."
And immediately I was in the spirit.*

Bible, Book of Revelation 4:1-2



Maharaj Charan Singh

Our Life Support System

Time and again we have heard in spiritual discourses phrases such as *make meditation the most important thing in our lives* or *meditation is our life support system*. These fundamentals of Sant Mat that the Master imparts to us during his visits make us realize the lack of attention that we are giving to the path.

If the Master refers to meditation as our life support system, this implies that our lives depend on this. Just as a patient who can't breathe on his own depends on respiratory machines, the Shabd sustains us in this creation. But *most* importantly, meditation is the link that allows us to be connected to the creator whilst we enjoy his creation.

The first step is to acknowledge how vital this meditation process is for our existence. In order to realize this, all we have to do is to take a look at our Master. To get to his stage, he too must have made meditation the most important thing in his life. If we want to achieve any goal in life, we must give it priority. If our goal is to get to the top of spirituality, that is, Sach Khand, it is fundamental to give priority to the daily practice of meditation.

The curious thing is that we sometimes think that meditation is something imposed on us as a daily punishment. However, this is a requirement entirely for our benefit, in which we are re-establishing our link with the Lord. Not only does it help us to go back to our home, but it also provides us with the support to live life with peace and stability. The energy derived from the Shabd allows us to ferry across the sea of life without drowning in the waves of our karmas.

This contact that we can make with the Shabd through our daily practice helps us to get to our ultimate goal – to reunite with the

divine. This was the reason that we came on to the path. This was the reason we wanted to dedicate our life to the spiritual practice.

Let us now do some self-analysis. Do we still want to attain that objective? If we do, are our actions in accordance with what our aim is? If we wish to be a pianist, we must give regular time to practise playing the piano. If we waste time in other activities and do not practise playing the piano, then our actions defeat our goal. The same can be applied to the practice of meditation. We can't fool ourselves into believing that we are serious on the path without doing what we are asked to do.

Our link on the path is the Master – he is our contact. In the outside world we look for contacts that can help our jobs to be carried out efficiently. We, lucky souls, have an inner contact who does not require anything other than our meditation. And that too so that we can be successful in what we chose as our goal. We just have to make him happy by carrying out our task in the best possible way. That is making meditation the *most* important thing in our lives, and by moulding our lives in accordance with this.

So let us stop and contemplate on the lifestyles we are living. Are they reflecting what the Master wants for us or what *we* want? Are we living according to what society demands from us or following what the Master expects from us? Let us set our priorities right and recognize that meditation is our life support system; let us make it our top priority and craft our daily engagements according to this so that we can please our Master, experience the Shabd within and reach our goal.



Feeling Funny



A keen, young disciple called Fred
Had problems in leaving his bed



When he went to extremes
By mechanical means



He was, sadly, tossed out on his head.



The stars that he saw made him shout
“I have reached the first region – no doubt!”



But his Guru said, “Fred,
It’s good luck you’re not dead,
Do your simran, that’s what it’s about.”

Attitude Conundrum

How often do we turn around and question the Lord, “Why me?”

In times of sorrow, it’s almost like an instant reaction. We may be experiencing physical pain, relationship problems or a financial crisis. Whatever it may be, we’re always quick to whine.

Have we ever thought what our beloved Master must be going through having to listen to everyone’s complaints?

We may have been on the path for years, attending satsang and participating in seva regularly, but in times of pain or suffering, just when we’re supposed to put into practice what we hear, we may lose our balance. We seem to forget our Sant Mat basics and become consumed by our circumstances.

The answer to our complaints, as we know, lies in the inexorable law of karma. We know perfectly well that as we sow, so shall we reap. Perhaps due to the fact that the reaction tends to follow the action with a certain lag, possibly after many lives, we don’t perceive it as a direct consequence of something we’ve done. Regardless, everything we receive is according to our own doings. Blaming fate or protesting to the Lord about it being unfair will not change this.

Thankfully, we have a very powerful tool which can help us combat these situations: our own attitude. As Baba Ji has often emphasized, we must cultivate a positive attitude. Let’s look at this logically. Our life is like a mathematical equation we have to solve. We can only solve this equation using the parameters and factors we have been given. Whilst most of the factors in our lives are fixed, we can change one of them – our attitude. When we find ourselves going through a tough period in our lives, we have two choices. Either we moan and wail our way through our karma or we accept what we’re given and change

ourselves to adjust to that particular situation. In either case we can't change our karma – we have to go through it. But what we can choose is how we do so.

And, of course, we've got to remember that the downs in our lives are temporary phases, which no doubt will pass in time. Life is all about ups and downs. Whether we decide to pass through our low periods happily or crying is up to us. What we must realize is that by not changing our attitude, we're the ones to suffer. It is a shame that depression and anxiety – symptoms of being unable to adjust to our circumstances – are increasingly frequent in modern society.

The best way to illustrate this attitude conundrum is with the example Maharaj Charan Singh often used to give. He used to relate the alternating seasons, summer and winter, to the ups and downs of our life. Summer has to come, just as the winter must come too. We cannot change the season, but we can always make appropriate preparations. When winter comes, we may obtain warm clothes and arrange for heating to endure it in relative comfort. If we do not adequately prepare, we suffer the cold. We do not say, "Why has winter come?" nor do we refuse to prepare for winter.

In a similar manner, we can change our mental attitude to prepare for and endure challenges in our lives. We can mould ourselves to adjust to those circumstances, which we have to face, which we cannot avoid, and which are already destined.

We can derive a lot of comfort from the knowledge that our karma is administered by our Master. What could be more comforting than that? Who could better manage our destiny than our Master? However, we must realize that the Master can help us only if we allow him to do so. We can't keep interfering in his work. Let's try to make things easier for him by placing a little faith in him. When things go the way we want them to, we're quick to recognize his grace.

But precisely when things aren't going our way is when we should strengthen that faith. When we feel that pain is coming our way, let's sit back and say, "Master, you know best, do that which you think is best for me." Let us be positive and remember that going through our karmas is part of our journey back home to the Lord.



*He who pursues learning will increase every day;
He who pursues Tao will decrease every day.
He will decrease and continue to decrease,
till he comes to non-action;
By non-action everything can be done.*

Lao Tzu, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*

* * *

*Know, O comrade, that your sleep
And waking (in this world)
Is as though a sleeper should dream
That he has gone to sleep.
He thinks, "Now I am asleep,"
Unaware that he is really in the second sleep.*

Rumi, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*

Something To Think About

Humility

A man went to Wahab Imri and said:

“Teach me humility.”

Wahab answered:

“I cannot do that, because humility is a teacher of itself. It is learnt by means of its practice. If you cannot practise it, you cannot learn it. If you cannot learn it, you do not really want to learn it inwardly at all.”

Idries Shah, *Wisdom of the Idiots*

* * *

We should make our hearts the source of love for the entire universe and should have so much humility that even if a person does evil to us, we should return love for the same. In truth, one who is embellished with humility loses the capacity of stinging others. Even if anyone harms him, he does not think evil of him. Sheikh Sa’adi says:

*I am like an ant which is trampled,
I am not like a bee which stings.*

Egotism or pride is not liked by the Lord. He showers his grace on those whose mind is full of humility and meekness. Water does not gather at the top of hills but flows down and accumulates there. He who bends drinks water, but he who holds his head high remains thirsty.

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

My Master, My Mentor

If a friend were to ask us who our Master is and why he is important in our lives, what would we respond? What would we say? After all, not all friends are aware of our spiritual beliefs; they might not know much about the path of Sant Mat, and maybe more than one of our friends is an atheist.

How can one explain who the Master is?

Many of us might say he is a friend, someone who is very special to us. Others might say he is a spiritual teacher or a guide. Or we may even say he is family: our father or brother. Who exactly is the Master? What role does he play in our lives?

In a recent face to face with my boss, he referred me to a mentorship programme. He said I had been in the company for many years now and that it was high time I started finding some direction in my career. And who could guide me better than a mentor?

Some of us may work in companies and are aware of this concept. The presentation I attended at work defined what a mentor was, how we can find one and how we can become a mentor ourselves.

In the modern context, a mentor is a trusted friend, counsellor or teacher, usually a more experienced person. Some professions have mentoring programmes in which newcomers are paired with more experienced people, who advise them and serve as examples. A mentor has usually been in the same situations and positions as the mentee and he shares these experiences with his protegee in order to facilitate his job and help him progress.

Initially the mentee has to find a suitable mentor and request him to give his time. Soon a close relationship is established. The mentee develops until he/she learns how to be more and more independent.

Gradually, the relationship comes to that of equals, like a father who trains his son in business and life so that he can eventually run the business by himself.

While I listened to this presentation I simply couldn't avoid finding similarities and parallels between the corporate world and Sant Mat. Just as the professional mentor guides us in our career development, the Master helps us with our spiritual development. In the great multination of this creation, we are all employees and our guru is the mentor who guides us towards our true home.

Anything we learn in this world, we learn through a teacher who masters that subject. We can take the example of doctors, engineers or lawyers: they have not become experts in their fields only by reading books. They all needed a teacher or a subject matter expert to guide them.

The easiest way to learn any discipline in life is from another person. That's why saints always remind us that reading books about spirituality and attending satsangs are not enough to obtain God-realization. We need the help of someone with first-hand experience, which only the true living Master has. A Master can make us understand how we can return to God, what it is that keeps us away from him and how we can overcome all these obstacles.

We can refer to him however we want: friend, brother, teacher, guide. These are just physical names. The important thing is that he is the one who inspires us to follow the path and shows us how to walk it. There are so many temptations in life that if it wasn't for the Master who keeps us on the right track with the Surat Shabd Yoga, we would succumb to them. After all, the company we keep has great influence over us. The good inspire us to be good and the bad influence us with their negativity. This is why saints help us channelize our attention and

focus in the right direction. The Master inspires us to be better human beings.

When we want to travel to a foreign country we are not familiar with, we do not depend solely on our intelligence; we consult travel agents and use travel guides. However, the best and most reliable information will only be obtained from someone who has already travelled where we want to go. In the same way, the Master has been to that 'country', to Sach Khand. He, like a mentor, has worked in all the departments in the company of life, starting right from the bottom, where we are. He acts as an example to us; if he can do it, so can we.

Our relationship with the Master also evolves and deepens with time and practice, just like the mentor-mentee relationship. Baba Ji always says that the relationship between Master and disciple starts the minute we place our trust and faith in him. To begin with we may view him as an acquaintance, then as a close friend and role model and then finally as our Master. He is our beloved, but very few fortunate souls realize that he is the personification of the Shabd and that we are a drop of the same divine ocean of love.

The Master, like a mentor, invites us to walk shoulder to shoulder with him. The Master is a mentor who is always available 'on-line' for us. We can approach him whenever we want and he will willingly help us. However, just as the role of a mentor is not to do our job for us, but to guide us, the Master too is there to guide us rather than walk the path on our behalf. Ultimately, we must attend to our meditation to reach our goal and become like our mentor, the Master.

It is very hard to describe and explain what the Master means to us. He is the way and the destination, at the same time. He is here in this world mentoring us, but at the same time is connected to the Shabd.

Next time someone asks us that million dollar question, 'Who is that gentleman?' perhaps we could say, 'He is my Master, my mentor.'

Board, Relax and Enjoy ...

Flight Number: RS 1055

Standard Time of Departure (STD): 0300

Flight Destination: Sach Khand

Boarding Gate: 10

Boarding Time: Passengers are welcome anytime

Pilot-In-Command (PIC): Master

Baggage Allowance: None

En-route Estimated Time (EET): 2 hours 30 minutes

Delay: Passenger dependent

Attention please, passengers on flight RS Airways 1055 to Sach Khand, please proceed to board through Gate 10. Please make sure you have your boarding cards and passports ready for inspection.

Just imagine what it would be like actually to be on this fictitious flight. In reality, we have our boarding cards in hand for this flight: our meditation! We just have to get up, or rather wake up and board this flight. This announcement is our inner voice, the satsangs, Master and sometimes even friends or relatives, encouraging us to sit in meditation. At the gate is our mind, who will not let us through unless we have all the necessary documents, especially our boarding cards – our simran. No baggage is permitted on this flight. We must leave behind all our desires, worries and thoughts before boarding.

Flight 1055 is a direct one, straight to Sach Khand. Starting from the tenth door above the eyes, reciting the five holy names given to us at the time of initiation, and listening to the inner sound, we will reach our true home. Ideally we should meditate in the early hours, but it is

the only flight where we can board at our convenience. Master accepts us on to his flight at any time of the day.

What better way to fly than with the Master himself? What a tension free flight! Having Master at the flight controls is like having the 'best' and without doubt the most experienced captain one could have. He knows our past, and our future and he is the only one who knows what's truly good for us. And he is the one who will make sure that our journey on this flight is smooth.

Now, there will be turbulence at times in our lives. That is, we will face hard times. We will have to go through our karmas, may get worried and anxious, but we must realize that our captain is doing everything possible to reduce the jerks and bouncy movements. In any case, after a period of turbulence is over, the flight will resume its smooth trajectory.

Now, we all will reach our final destination someday. But how soon we get there will depend on our daily efforts coupled with his grace. The only thing in our hands is our effort, and this will make us more receptive to his ever-present grace. So our flight will land in Sach Khand eventually, but our estimated time of arrival clearly depends on our effort.

Finally if we really want to get to our destination, we must board the flight ...

Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain welcoming you on board flight RS Airways 1055 straight to Sach Khand. Make sure to fasten your seat belts and stay strapped in during the flight. Please switch off all electronic devices and tune your thoughts to simran. En route weather is pretty good overall, although some turbulence is expected now and then. Flight time is two and a half hours, so sit back, relax and enjoy the flight. We are now ready for take off!

Seven Steps to Salvation

Music has no language and God is not restricted to any one religion, hence it is often said that inner music is the universal language of God. When in tune, it elevates the conscious state of the soul and creates a conducive environment for it to connect with the spiritual world.

Outer music is based on seven notes, wherever you go. In Indian music the combination of these seven notes of the scale is known as *Sargam* (similar to Doh, Ray, Me, Fah, Soh, La, Te, Doh in Western culture). Sargam starts at the note Sa (the lowest note) and ascends to Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha and Ni (the highest note). Now, as inner music is said to be the language of God, we can look at Sargam from a Sant Mat point of view. The interval between every ascending note is a step that takes us closer to God.

SA for Satsang

In music theory, the base note of a chord is the lowest note played forming the fundamental of the chord. Likewise satsang, which literally means association with the divine, forms the foundation of our spiritual quest. Mind is often influenced by the company it keeps. By association with the people of the world, our worldly tendencies will predominate. However, keeping the company of spiritually elevated souls will allow one to become more spiritually inclined. So satsang helps us to touch base with our true inner self, and discover our true objective.

RE for Rescue

Moving one step up, the definition of rescue in the dictionary is to 'set free from danger or imprisonment'. Our ultimate goal is to be rescued

from this world of illusion. The question is, how do we get from here to there, from being tangled up in the maze of the mind and senses to becoming one with the Lord and his ocean of bliss?

The first requirement to attain liberation is a human birth. And the importance of human birth comes from the fact that this is the only form in which we can ultimately attain God-realization. This is where grace comes in as, in order to reach our objective, we need to be blessed with a human birth.

GA for Grace

There's a tendency to measure grace by how many of our desires are fulfilled. However the saints explain that grace is anything that pulls us closer to the Lord. So in essence, having got a human birth is nothing but grace and it's with grace that we realize we are separated from the Lord. Nevertheless, the biggest sign of grace by far is having met a true living Master.

With nothing in our pocket and the Father with us – this is the best grace we can have from the Father.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Legacy of Love*

This takes us to the next step, which is the Master.

MA for Master

The Master has been sent here by the Lord to take us from here to there. Maharaj Charan Singh, quoted in *Legacy of Love*, says:

To go back to the Father's house is the main purpose of our coming into this life. All other things we do simply to maintain

ourselves in this world. But while doing so, we should not forget the Father who has given us all these things.

The Master does so much for us; it is beyond our comprehension. In the following verse we are reminded of how little we do and how much he does for us:

*If you take one step to take refuge in the Master,
The Master meets you on the way by taking hundreds of steps.
If you remember the Master just once,
The Master remembers you again and again.
Even if your devotion is as small as a fragment of a cowrie shell,
The Master showers all benefits on you.
The Master is all merciful,
His praise is beyond understanding;
I bow again and again to the one and incomprehensible Master.*

Bhai Gurdas, as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III

We should feel lucky that we have a Master who takes such good care of us; the least we can do is express our gratitude through prayer, and take that step closer to him.

PA for Prayer

Prayer is universal. From the beginning of time, people have been praying. However, rather than remembering the Lord, our prayers usually are restricted to asking for worldly help. Maharaj Charan Singh used to illustrate this point by saying that we are beggars at the door of the Lord, that the Lord is a very good giver but we are very poor beggars; the Lord has nothing but jewels to give us, but instead we ask

for worthless stones. This kind of prayer will not take us to the Lord – a different kind of prayer is needed:

Never pray for any mortal thing ... I vow I will not pray to God for gifts nor worship him because of gifts bestowed, but I will entreat him to make me worthy to receive, and worship him for being of the essence and of the nature that must give.

Meister Eckhart, edited by Ursula Fleming

Real prayer, then, is anything that reminds us of the Lord. Every religion has some holy word: God, Ram, Christ or any other word with which devotees can remember God. Likewise, we go to our Master. He gives us the five holy names to repeat, which is our simran, and thus these words become sweet to us. They become supercharged because they remind us of the person who has shared them with us. Simran creates a magnetic attraction between us and the Radiant Form of the Master. It creates a yearning to be with the Master all the time.

DHA for Darshan

Darshan is the helpless gazing at the Master by the disciple and can be of two types – outer and inner. When we look at the physical form of the Master we are not able to take our eyes off him, because we are in love with him. However, as Maharaj Charan Singh says in *The Master Answers*, “The real darshan is inside. Everyone has to work for that. The outside darshan is good, but then we have to take a practical view.” On another occasion, when Maharaj Charan Singh was asked by a foreign disciple to go with him on his return back home, he replied with characteristic humour:

You want to abduct me to the United States? There's a lot of checking at the immigration department. They won't allow me like that. So you have to conceal me in such a place that nobody knows you are taking me.

As quoted in *Legacy of Love*

A lot of importance is given to inner darshan because it is the darshan of the Master that will help to take us to true liberation, to the state where we will be free from all suffering.

NI for Nirvana

The word literally means 'blowing out' – referring, in the Buddhist context, to the blowing out of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion, being free from suffering, as nirvana means the union with the Supreme Being. In *The Master Answers*, Maharaj Charan Singh, when asked about the state of nirvana, said:

Nirvana means release from birth and death, salvation. God-realization or salvation are different terms to explain the same thing.

Salvation or God-realization, which started off as our goal, is the highest note on our Sargam ladder. It is union with the Lord. Some of us are just embarking and some are already on this musical journey. What we must always remember is that the Master is with us at every step to help us merge with the divine power.



The Divine Weaver

This article is based on a beautiful, anonymous Christian poem called “The Divine Weaver”.

*Man's life is laid in a loom of time
To a pattern he does not see.
While the Weaver works and the shuttles fly
till the end of eternity.*

Here the poet uses the analogy of God as the Divine Weaver, who weaves the tapestry of our life using the loom of time.

We do not know the pattern of our life. It is the Lord who has delicately designed our life according to our very own individual karmas. The Lord works behind the scenes in order to liberate our soul and return it to our ultimate eternal home, the divine ocean of love.

*Some shuttles are filled with silver thread
And some with threads of gold;
While often but the darker hue
Is all that they may hold.
But the weaver watches with skilful eye
Each shuttle fly to and fro,
And sees the pattern so deftly wrought
As the loom works sure and slow.*

Some threads are made of silver and some of gold. Here he explains that in the tapestry of our life, there is a mixture of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ karmas. This world is one of duality; we see it in night and day, positive and negative, happy and sad times, health and ill-health,

wealth and poverty, and yin and yang. Often we find ourselves being tossed physically, emotionally, mentally from pillar to post by our karmas. It is easy to lose our balance and this makes our search for inner peace all the more important.

In *Divine Light* Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

All our pains are due to our evil karmas in past lives, the consequences of which we are bearing now. And whatever moments we have of pleasure are due to our good karmas.

He goes on to explain, “Everyone has his own individual karmas, the account for which he is settling in this world.”

The poet further explains that the Lord carefully weaves our karmas surely and slowly. It is all under his ‘skilful eye’. This is most reassuring to us, knowing that he is aware of all and is keeping a watchful eye on us. That watchful eye is the divine protection, the comfort, the shoulder to lean on, the guidance, the refuge and, above all, the love he has for us.

Our work is to create that awareness of the divine in all our day-to-day interactions. It is up to us also to be weavers – to weave his name into our lives. This is best done with meditation.

*God surely planned that pattern
Each thread – the dark and the fair –
Was chosen by his master skill
And placed in the web with care.
He only knows the beauty
And guides the shuttles which hold
The threads so unattractive,
As well as the threads of gold.*

It is beautifully explained in these lines that our lives are planned in the smallest detail by our beloved Lord. He is aware of the mixture of karmas we must go through and the journey we shall follow to reach him. He recognizes the beauty of the 'pattern' or combination of circumstances, as this is required for our soul to find its true home.

Here the poet also re-emphasizes the 'unattractive threads' as well as the 'gold threads'. The dark threads symbolize the tough or unhappy times we may have to go through. Yet it is within these times that our searching and yearning for the Lord is paramount. Times of poverty, pain, ill-health, loss of a loved one, are all regarded by sages as boons from the Lord. They keep our mind engaged with God and prayer. This important point is made in this extract from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran where he says:

*Your pain is the breaking of the shell
that encloses your understanding.
Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its
heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.*

The Divine Weaver ends as follows:

*Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the pattern
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skilful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern he had planned.*

The writer then emphasizes that it is only when the loom is silent and death occurs that the Lord unrolls this tapestry of our life and reveals and explains all to us. We then come to learn that the seemingly dark periods in our life were all held together by the most beautiful threads of silver and gold.

These gold and silver threads are not only symbolic of 'good times' in our life but also symbolic of God's grace and his hand in everything.

Our work is to remember that this life is God's divine design, in which we can complete our journey back to him. Meditation, satsang, seva and positive thinking are tools in our hands which will enable us to keep that objective in front of us. These help us view the bigger picture in our life and identify what our goals and values should be.

We need to be conscious of God all around us and within us. This is done by cultivating inner peace through our meditation, which then comes to serve us as our inner refuge and shelter. This inner anchorage enables us to cope with our day-to-day karmas – the dark threads and gold threads. Our lives then become woven with light and love.



*Poison and nectar are both found within,
but only a rare one knows it.
Those who took the poison, died;
Those who drank the draught of Immortality
became immortal.*

Dadu, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*

Sorry, I Have No Time!

“Sorry, I have no time”: this is probably one of the most common phrases of today’s time. We live in an age where almost everything is instant. One can do almost anything by just clicking some buttons, from making coffee and food, to mailing, shopping and booking tickets. Man has worked hard to save time, with remarkable technological advances. Modern machinery can definitely make life easier but cannot add hours to our day. We will always have a maximum of twenty-four hours each day. Technology can save us time; we can do a lot more with our days. Today we can do so much more than we could in the past, but the question is, do we?

In the past we complained and today we still complain that despite all of these technological advances, we have even less time. But the fact is the time has always been there and hasn’t changed at all. We had twenty-four hours before and even today we have twenty-four hours. In fact we are at an advantage today as we have the help of all this new equipment to help us with our work and save us all those hours. So if everything is quicker today, why do we still complain? Where has all the so called ‘saved’ time gone?

Ask anybody and you will find that he has no time. The labourer has no time; the engineer has no time; the doctor has no time; the industrialist has no time. Who has time to relax?

Who has some moments of leisure? No one.

What then have we gained from all this progress, from all these developments? We cannot find an hour for ourselves, not even half an hour in which to relax.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Treasure Beyond Measure*

These words apply to us even today. In this rat race for money, fame and what we think of as success, we are sacrificing 'living'. Not only do we find that we have no time for all the little things in life, we don't even make time for the most important aspect of our lives, our meditation. We don't realize how lucky we are to have been initiated by a perfect living Master. Sant Mat is our path to real success, yet we are not ready to give the necessary time to this practice.

The day we were initiated we made a promise to our Master that we would dedicate at least two and a half hours of our day to meditation. So if we think about it, from that day onwards our days don't have twenty-four hours anymore, they only have twenty-one and a half hours. Two and a half hours of our day is booked for meditation and we have no right to use that time for worldly pursuits. For these purposes we have 90 percent of the day !

So now we have to re-manage our twenty-one and a half hours of the day to fit in our daily activities. Two and a half hours of the day is pre-booked, for the Master, and is not for our use. This is precious time; it is a daily meeting, a one on one with the Master, which we are most privileged to receive. What would we do if we got a call today saying that Baba Ji is coming tomorrow and we have been given a personal interview with him? Will it even cross our minds to say: "Sorry, I have no time"? No, we would leave everything aside and make time for that interview.

Well, this is an everyday scenario. Luckily for us the call has come, and we are the fortunate ones to be invited by the Master himself. Let's not let this opportunity go. Let us tell him, "You have all my time."



Antidote to Worrying

We worry about children, money, health and almost all other subjects. Sometimes we even worry about worrying!

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ addressed his worried disciples and seekers in the same vein:

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Bible, Matthew 6:26

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Bible, Matthew 6:30

We fear adverse circumstances and worry before things actually happen. Experience shows that most of the things we worry about never come to pass. Since we do not know our future, how can we prepare for it except to live in the Lord's will? All the same, the vast majority of the problems are of our own making. Our expectations may be unrealistically high despite our limitations. It is also our tendency not to live in the present moment. We are full of regret about the past and worry about the future. Nothing can now be done about the past and who knows the future? Someone rightly observed, "Yesterday is history and tomorrow is mystery." Resignation to the supremacy of the Lord's will helps to moderate and mould our

thinking so that we can come to terms with the events of life without losing our balance. In this connection, Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Divine Light*:

There is no use worrying about the past. Take care of the future now. Ups and downs do come in the life of everybody, but one should not lose heart. The Lord is within you and He is ever merciful. Turn to Him and He will shower his grace. Attend to your meditation most regularly, with love and faith. Whether your mind likes it or not, look upon it as your paramount duty.

Answering a letter to a person worried about his financial position, Maharaj Charan Singh in *Divine Light* advises:

I am sorry to hear of your deteriorated financial condition. But a satsangi should never allow such things to weigh upon his heart. Please do not fall prey to worry. Worry never did help anyone and it never will. Rather, it puts one in a still more negative condition and depletes one's energy. You will get what is in your destiny, but you must work for it. No one has ever received more than his share, nor can one receive it before it is due; so why fret and worry? Apply that energy to some practical work, with the proper mental attitude. Real happiness and peace are within you, and not in outer objects. So, do your duty in this world and do not fail to carry on your bhajan and simran regularly, every day.

As disciples, treading the path of Sant Mat, there is only one thing that we should rightly worry about and that is the lack of regularity and effort in our daily meditation. Everything else is secondary. Due

to our unclear thinking and lack of resolve, we are tied down with the dead weight of worry upon our heart, preventing our attention from rising to the eye centre. Without a doubt, life on this plane can be tough and that is why the gracious Master wants us to lay our worries aside and focus on experiencing the Shabd within. He has equipped us with the necessary means to fight the mind and gain mastery over it. Drawing from the army tradition, the following song was popular amongst soldiers during World War I:

*Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,
And smile, smile, smile.
What's the use of worrying,
It never was worthwhile.
So pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,
And smile, smile, smile.*

George Henry Powell



*Without cymbals, without drums,
The anhad jhankar is present everywhere.
Without a tune, without a sound, without a pause,
The melody resounds, filling every pore of my body.*

Mira Bai, as quoted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*

Book Review



Pray without Ceasing: The Way of Invocation in World Religions

EDITED BY PATRICK LAUDE

PUBLISHER: WORLD WISDOM BOOKS, 2006.

ISBN: 1-933316-14-4

This book, edited by Patrick Laude, is an anthology of writings from many religious traditions on “ceaseless prayer.” Laude explains ceaseless prayer as “the methodical, trusting, and virtually – or actually – permanent invocation of a divine name or a sacred formula.” The expression “to pray without ceasing” comes from the writings of Eastern Orthodox Christian mystics in *The Philokalia*. This practice is known in other traditions by various names, including *japa* (repetition), *dhikr* (mention, remembrance), invocation, and centering prayer.

By presenting writings from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism Native American and other traditions, Laude shows the universality of ceaseless prayer. The selections range from excerpts from ancient scriptures, such as the Bhagavad Gita, to passages by medieval Kabbalists and modern spiritual leaders.

*Therefore, at all times
Meditate on Me (or: Remember Me)
With your mind and intellect
Fixed on Me.
In this way, you shall surely come
To Me.*

Bhagavad Gita

*Remember God and God's love constantly. Let your thought not
be separated from God ... so that by means of such continuous*

contemplation you attain incessantly the world that is coming, and so that God be with you always, in this life and the next.

Rabbi Isaac of Akko (1250-1350)

Each repetition carries you nearer and nearer to God. This is a concrete fact and I may tell you that you are talking to no theorist, but to one who has experienced what he says every minute of his life, so much so that it is easier for the life to stop than for this incessant process to stop.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

The writings come from East and West. They range from scholarly essays to ecstatic personal testimonies. Laude, in his introduction, draws out some of the common threads found in these varied sources. For example, he notes that “the methodical practice of the invocation normally requires an authorization in the form of an induction or initiation into a spiritual rule or contemplative order under the guidance of a spiritual instructor.” He therefore cautions against undertaking this practice on one’s own.

Pray Without Ceasing is divided into three parts. Part One, “Foundational Texts”, provides a sampling of eighteen texts considered by Laude to be classics “that have nourished the spiritual life of generations of faithful.” Here we read the wise counsel of Saint Symeon (949-1022) in *The Philokalia*, who writes, “To those who have no knowledge of this practice, it is oppressive and laborious... To start with you will find there darkness and an impenetrable density. Later, when you persist and practice this task day and night, you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy.”

Another selection is from *The Way of a Pilgrim*, by an anonymous Russian pilgrim who practiced the repetition so assiduously that it became impossible for him to stop. “I grew so used to my prayer that when I stopped for a single moment, I felt, so to speak, as though something were missing, as though I had lost something.” This sense of

missing something drew him back to his repetition. “Early one morning the Prayer woke me up as it were.... My whole desire was fixed upon one thing only – to say the Prayer of Jesus, and as soon as I went on with it I was filled with joy and relief.” A Muslim Sufi, Ibn ‘Ata Allah Al-Iskandari (1259-1309), states that invocation “is a cure for the invoker from every malady and symptom... [It] strengthens the heart and the body, puts inner and outer affairs in order, gladdens the heart and face.” The Indian mystic Kabir celebrates the pain that forces the practitioner to return to the prayer: “All praises to pain: that moment by moment compels us to repeat the Name. The True Name is the only thing to repeat. It is the best gift to make.” Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534) speaks of the same pain: “O Lord! Without Thee, a moment of separation hangs upon me like countless ages and my eyes shed tears incessantly while the whole world appears to be a veritable desert, O Govinda.”

Part Two, “Contemporary Doctrinal Essays,” consists of writings by scholars describing the principles underlying invocation. For example, Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984), author of works on metaphysics, psychology, and art, explains:

The Divine Name ... implies a Divine Presence which becomes operative to the extent that the Name takes possession of the mind of him who invokes it. Man cannot concentrate directly on the Infinite, but by concentrating on the symbol of the Infinite attains to the Infinite Itself... Thus union with the Divine Name becomes Union with God Himself.

Marco Pallis (1895-1989) expresses in Buddhist terms the transformation of consciousness that results from invocation: “Where that remembrance has been raised to its highest power, there is to be found the Pure Land.” Lev Gillet (1893-1980), who often wrote under the pseudonym “a monk of the Eastern Church,” calls for “loving adoration” while practicing repetition: “Having begun to pronounce the name with loving adoration, all that we have to do is to attach ourselves to it, cling

to it, and to repeat it slowly, gently, and quietly.” But, he counsels, “let us not think that an hour during which we have invoked the name without ‘feeling’ anything ... has been wasted and unfruitful.” Mir Valiuddin, a professor at Osmania University in Hyderabad, India and author of works on Sufism, emphasizes “alertness of the heart” during the practice of *dhikr*.

Part Three is “Contemporary Testimonies.” These selections, as Laude explains, “suggest the relevance, actuality, and accessibility of this way in the modern world.” Thomas Yellowtail (1903-1993), a priest of the Native American Crow tribe, writes, “I am always praying and thinking of God. I am so used to it that I just can’t stop, and I think that it is the best thing a person can do.” Vandana Mataji – a nun, head of a Christian ashram in Rishikesh, India and the author of *Nama Japa* – says, “In this age of modernity in everything and weakness of will, generally speaking, *japa* or the constant taking of the Divine Name may be regarded as the best and perhaps the only means of maintaining a spiritual awareness in one’s daily life.” The Hindu mystic Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) extols *japa* or repetition: “*Japa* uttered even once has its own good effect, whether the individual is aware or not... If you are not aware of the *ajapa* (unspoken chant) which is eternally going on, you should take to *japa*. *Japa* is made with an effort.”

This book offers encouragement to seekers of all backgrounds who want to develop a practice of ceaseless remembrance or prayer. Some of the writings may be unfamiliar, dense or challenging, but most are accessible and inspiring. They all point to a mystery: that the invocation of an “utterable” word or expression can, with due guidance, lead to realization of an “unutterable” transcendent reality. Laude concludes that ceaseless prayer “tends to be understood, at its summit, as the very end and essence of the spiritual path, all other practices converging into its synthetic, unifying, and interiorizing power.”



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