

Spiritual Link



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Living in God's Will

Thy command is over my head.
I do not question it, my Lord.
Thou art the river,
Thou art the Boatman,
Only through thee can I go across.

Embrace devotion
For the Lord, my friend,
Whether he be angry,
Whether he love you.

Thy Name, dear Lord,
Is my only support;
It sustains me
As water sustains the lotus bloom.
Kabir is thy bondslave:
Give him life or give him death –
Whatever, Lord, be thy pleasure.

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Choose Wisely, Choose Well!

There comes a time in every seeker's life when he becomes dissatisfied with the road he has travelled so far. And it's then that a mystic comes with a new way to approach life. He makes us aware that our obsession with feeding our egos is the very thing that stands between us and the experience of truth and reality. In order to discover the truth we need to let go of our obsessions and our egos.

But we have become slaves to our habits and have lost all perspective. Without the constant flow of sensory input and our endless activities, we become miserable and dissatisfied. But what is at the heart of the dissatisfaction that we've begun to feel? And what is it that we are avoiding? What exactly are we so afraid of?

Stillness and silence: this is our dread. To be still and silent is to be alone with oneself. It's a little like being locked in a small room with a complete stranger. We feel uncomfortable, we fidget, we twitch, we reach for our smartphone or the TV remote...

But why? What is so bad about that still and silent solitude? We are so used to using our activities as a reference point that we define ourselves by them. Take them away, and suddenly we are faced with our real self. And the reality of our true self is not the person we like to think we are. The reality of our inner self includes all our weaknesses and shortcomings, not just the idealized "good guy" image that we like to project to the world around us. So to be alone with this stranger is uncomfortable for us.

But there is another reason that solitude and silence is so hard for us to bear. When we are quiet, when the mad whirl of our mind's obsessions starts to slow down, our inner heart begins to remember

its source and starts to ache with an awakening sense of separation from our true home and our true Father.

For many reasons over so many ages, we have run from the reality of our inner condition. Without any understanding of what it really is, we associated silence and solitude with the experience of pain and suffering, so we immersed ourselves in the pursuit of ephemeral pleasures, which we thought would be an antidote for the pain we felt within. But not only did we not succeed in curing the apparent problem, but in fact, by running out into the world and indulging in the sensual pleasures, we actually created more problems for ourselves – by invoking karmic reactions and by developing attachments to the faces, places and things of the material world.

Now, if we had understood all of this from the beginning and attempted to deal with it instead of running away from it, we would have been so much better off. Instead, we continue to find ourselves in this state of painful separation. In addition, we are burdened by a massive load of karmas and tied down with multiple attachments, all of which combine to bind us to a continuing cycle of birth and rebirth into this material world.

If we look at the world around us, we see its many problems: war, greed, corruption, poverty and starvation – and all of these have their roots in the ego. So if we wish to pursue a spiritual life, we have somehow to deal with this ego. We have to work towards eliminating it in ourselves so that we can rise above the limitations of mind and body and into the light of pure spirit.

The Master has given us guidance in the form of four principles. The first three cover our lifestyle, and by following them we are able to improve our lot dramatically with respect to our situation in the world. But since our objective is to rise above the

material realm and enter the domain of pure spirit, we need to do a lot more than merely adopting a good lifestyle. Therefore, as the fourth principle the Master gives us meditation. It is the key to our liberation.

Without committing ourselves to these spiritual exercises, our objective continues to remain as distant and elusive as ever. It is folly to think that just by living a good lifestyle and by trying to be a good person we will one day enter the Lord's domain. And no amount of intellectual gymnastics can replace our meditation.

The path of the Masters is not an intellectual path. It is simple; so simple that a child could practise it. Why is it then that intelligent, mature adults have such difficulty doing it? The practice of Sant Mat is to get us to still this mind and be silent in our inner solitude. Our problem is that the mind is driven by all the attachments and desires that it has been entertaining for all these years, and it never stops generating thoughts, fantasies and illusions.

In order to cure this mad monkey-mind of all its bad habits, the Master has given us simran. By doing simran with one-pointed attention at the eye centre, we start to gather our concentration, and in so doing, we weaken the bonds of our attachments.

In the beginning we find it difficult to sit still and keep our mind focused. As already mentioned, the mind does not like to sit still and continues to jump around from one thing to another. But all this activity is generated by our own attachment and addiction to the things of the world. We must continue to bring our attention back to the focus and to keep on with our simran. Slowly and slowly the mind will get the idea. By constant simran, discipline and conviction we will progress, we will improve, and one day we will succeed in getting this mind to submit and remain motionless at the eye centre.

As the mind starts becoming motionless, we begin to get an idea of the immanence of the Divine. We can take advantage of this by attending to the other practice that the Master has given us to do, namely bhajan, or listening to the inner Sound, which is constantly ringing within. The Masters say that by attuning our consciousness to it through intense listening, we can merge into it and rise up into higher consciousness.

We can do this. It may seem difficult or even impossible at times, but that is just because we have not yet started getting the results that we were expecting. The fact is that with every effort, we are getting some result, and with the accumulation of many efforts, our attention will focus at the eye centre, and our mind will start adjusting to being inside.

By constant practice we will withdraw our attention from the world outside and, in the process, weaken the grip of our attachments, until one day we find that when we meditate, we become aware of the Shabd ringing loudly within. At this point we will realize that our long years of practice have brought us to the very threshold of achieving our spiritual ambitions.

As we come into the influence of that Shabd or Nam, we start to wash off the stain of untold incarnations in the material world and karmas that we have accumulated over aeons. Slowly and slowly the action of the Shabd practice removes the burdensome effects of our past lives, and makes us increasingly fit to enter into the realm of pure spirit.

In Sant Mat there is nobody standing with a gun to our heads, saying “You must do this” or “You must not do that.” There are no rules and regulations; there are no dogmas and doctrines. What we do have is choice.

The Master has explained so clearly and logically that there are two basic paths we can follow. On the one hand is a set of actions that have negative consequences. We are well acquainted with this path, because it is this option that has dominated our lives till now. The alternative path is a different set of actions that lead to spiritual evolution and, if we persist, to the conscious realization of the Divine.

When we choose the negative, we persist in our old habits which have bound us to the cycle of coming and going in this world. This means we will continue coming back to this world, bound by karmas and attachments and driven by our egos further and further into darkness.

When we choose the positive, however, we immediately start to improve our situation. Although initially this might not be obvious, nevertheless the moment we choose the positive and commit to it, our lives start heading in a better direction. With time this starts to become evident: we feel lighter, our consciousness evolves, and we start realizing that there is so much more to life than what we see on TV or read in magazines. Slowly and slowly love dawns in us, and it is this that characterizes our progress towards the light.

The Masters don't come to us to force us to do anything at all. They simply present to us our choices so that we can make an informed decision, based on what kind of future we would like for ourselves.

In the end it comes down to choice, so there is really only one thing left to say: *Choose wisely! Choose well!*



Realizing our Potential

The Masters keep telling us what rare good fortune it is to be born as a human being – an opportunity that should never be wasted. Even souls of high spirituality, they say, residing on planes far beyond this tatty and imperfect material plane, long to have a human birth, because it's the doorway to the light and bliss of God-realization. And of all the souls populating all the various planes of creation, we – who have been initiated by a true, living Master – have been singled out for this remarkable privilege.

Perhaps we ask ourselves: 'Why? Why us? We're such ordinary, deficient little creatures.' But if we think like that, it's because we're seeing ourselves as mere humans, with little to recommend us. We're not seeing ourselves as souls.

But the Masters see us as souls – with enormous potential that simply has to be realized, souls that are capable of becoming so pure and perfect that we can become one with the Creator himself. And the Masters have been given the task of helping us realize that marvelous potential. In one of his letters, Maharaj Charan Singh writes: "This limited individual soul has unlimited capacities and does not rise up to higher regions simply because it does not make use of those capacities."

We don't use our capacity because we waste it by trying to be happy and successful *human* beings. As Maharaj Ji also says in his letter:

Few men know what a great mine of happiness and bliss is to be found within themselves. Man, in his ignorance, tries to find it in wealth, women and wine. But true bliss is not to be

found in this world of senses. For that peace and bliss one has to turn Godward.

Quest for Light

That's what we're now trying to do. But our close companion, mind, is used to looking to the things of this world to find its happiness. No matter how hard we try to lift our consciousness, it pulls us outward. It does this a million times a day. It is just so firmly attached to its worldly loves and attractions. And that's what has forced us to take birth after birth in this low material world. But it doesn't have to be that way. In *Quest for Light* Hazur Maharaj Ji also tells us:

According to one's good or bad actions in this life one passes at death into the body of a higher or lower being. If one loves the world and the things of this world, he will come back to the earth and be reborn into any of the species to which his mental inclinations have led him. And if one loves to go to higher spheres, that attachment shall draw him to those regions. Even the power of becoming divine is given to man.

We've forgotten what we are. We don't know that we are souls with unlimited capacity, even the power to become divine. We've been tricked into believing that we're pathetic, limited human beings, powerless to rise higher than our present debased condition. During our descent into the material creation our souls took on the coverings of mind and these physical bodies, and now we're ruled by the senses and all the low passions and desires that even animals are prone to. So that's what we now think we are: just limited little human beings.

How to throw off these coverings that hide our true identity? Actually it's impossible. By ourselves we cannot do it. This is where the Master comes in. He has been sent by the Creator to wake us up to who we really are: spiritual beings, as he is. And he teaches us a method of meditation, which may be, quite frankly, still a bit of a mystery to us.

We try to do it – perhaps for decades – without any indication that we're achieving anything at all. But in the background, beyond where we can see, he is working silently, slowly stripping away the layers that are blinding us to our own spirituality. He is using his grace and his own enormous power to strengthen our humble little souls to eventually wake us up to the full knowledge of what and who we are.

We are helpless to do anything for ourselves without the silent help of our Master. It is the Master in his physical form that the disciple needs to be guided by, and to be a role model setting a standard for our conduct. It's the Master in his physical form that we learn to love, and this deepening love will eventually lead us to love for our Master in his Shabd form. Only with his help can we learn to transcend our limitations and function at different levels, as he does. We are made of the same stuff that he is: pure, unlimited Shabd. We just need to discover that within ourselves.

It has been explained to us that our souls were sent down into the creation in order to wake up to a knowledge of their true spirituality. But we've had to learn this the hard way. During our descent we fell under the grim law of cause and effect, administered by Kal, who became responsible for this thing called karma. What you sow, so shall you reap. We've spent life after life learning that some actions are good and bring rewards, while others are not and bring suffering. Unfortunately both the good

and the bad karmas have piled up, resulting in the need for many lives to reap their results.

Over all the long years that we struggle with our meditation, it feels to us that there's a very solid mountain of karmas blocking our way. But then, who really knows what karmas still remain? Maybe, just maybe, not too many. Soami Ji Maharaj, the first of the present line of Masters, said that for initiates the karmic debt cannot be too impossibly huge, otherwise we would not be accepted for initiation. We read in his book *Sar Bachan Prose*:

When one comes to the satsang of a Saint, he finds out the extent of his indebtedness to Kal. If his debt is not so very heavy and can be repaid in this life, he is accepted as fit for initiation. If, however, the Saint finds that he is still food for Kal (heavily in debt to Kal), he is not accepted.

If we have been accepted, then let's do what we undertook to do when we received initiation. And let's not concern ourselves with where we may be or how far we still have to go. As Maharaj Ji has told us it is not for us to judge our progress. Our job is to do our duty faithfully and leave the rest to the Master. He will do his job – if we do ours.

It is true that this is not an easy road to walk. In fact, we're engaged in the most difficult battle of all: trying to turn our attention away from the world that it's always known and been comfortable with to a world that it doesn't know at all.

But we keep trying. It's that niggling little pain inside us that makes us do this, that strange little hankering for something that will bring us real joy and fulfilment. Now the attention has to be released from whatever holds it down, so that it can be free to rise.

How to do this? Well, certainly not by force of reason. Our intellect is not going to get us there. The only way we can get to know this glorious inner reality is to rise above mind and intellect and know it with the faculties of the soul. Naturally this takes time and effort. But every moment of meditation that we do is bringing us nearer to that higher state of consciousness. And even if we struggle, we are making progress all the time, perhaps more than we know.

One of the most satisfying things about the path is that it works, provided that we cooperate with our Master's plan for us. We need to work with him – do whatever he asks us to do. This obedience to our Master's wishes is important. Without this we cannot succeed. But eventually we will succeed. Because that's what he initiated us for.

Meditation has been compared to drilling a tunnel through a mountain. We keep labouring away in darkness, not knowing how far we still have to go. We could break through at any moment and see the light. We just don't know how much effort is still needed or how many karmas still remain to be worked through. And in the meantime our Master is waiting for us to finish our work.

We will get there, because that's what our Master wants. He knows what we are under these sad and deceptive coverings that hide our true identity. In time, once this long struggle is over, we too will know.

Great Master tells us something wonderful – that ultimately the soul is divinely powerful. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Volume IV, we read:

The powers that exist in the soul also exist in the Lord. The soul is conscious and the Lord is the storehouse of consciousness. ... The soul has intelligence and knowledge, and the Lord is the embodiment of knowledge and the treasure-house of intelligence.

The soul is full of love, and the Lord is the source of all love. We are made in his image. Every particle is a part of the whole, and so are we.



The bliss of merging into the Supreme Being cannot be expressed in mortal language. There is no thought of individuality, consciousness or anything else. It is all love, all bliss, for in merging we become the Supreme Being, and he is all, he is everything. ... The Lord is one. When we merge back into him, we become the Lord. We become part of him.

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

The Word of God

The exhortation of all saints who have come down to the earth plane from their home in Sach Khand, the fifth heavenly region above the physical universe, is the same: withdraw your spirit current or soul from the nine doors of the body to the third eye or the tenth door and attach the soul to the Word of God or the Logos, described in the Bible in the opening sentences of the Gospel of St John. This Word is not, as is usually believed, a written word. Actually it is a power that emanates continuously from the Supreme Being, the Power that created and now sustains the vast universe of universes.

The saints and perfect Masters teach their disciples how to contact this power, which is everywhere present, is ringing within every human being, and is heard by initiates as the most enchanting and enrapturing harmony or melody. The music is not only beautiful, it is also purifying and uplifting. It purifies the human mind, and then draws the soul upward with an irresistible power – the power of love of the Supreme God himself. . . .

This Word of God has been called the “unstruck melody” by some of the great Masters. Its harmonies resound endlessly within the mansion of every human body. The Word of God, which is God himself in dynamic action, and which is his method of directly contacting each individual soul, existed when the world began, and it will continue as long as the world endures. It is without question the most basic and important fact of the entire universe, and was taught by the founders of practically all the world religions. Yet today, each and every religion is totally ignorant of its existence or of what it really is.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Discourses*

Going Home

There is a story about a teacher who asked her class of youngsters to talk about the great wonders of the world. Most started to talk about the Pyramids and other such things. But one child said: “My eyes, my ears, my nose, my mouth, my hands and my feet.” She was talking about the human body, truly the greatest wonder of all – but not necessarily for the reasons she was listing.

All the great mystics tell us that the pathway that can lead the soul back to its original home is to be found only within the human body. Most people spend their lives unaware of their potential. And they have no understanding of what their true purpose as human beings should be. In *Thus Saith the Master* Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

The main purpose of life is to realize God. This privilege the Lord has bestowed only on human beings. The human body is the top rung of the ladder of creation. From here we can either drop down to lower species or we can go back to the Father and escape from the cycle of birth and death. ... The privilege of going back to the Father can be achieved only in the human life. So we should always be mindful of our destination and try to follow the spiritual path which leads us back to Him.

All true Masters are very clear about this: If we do not achieve God-realization, or start on the process of doing so, then we have wasted the privilege of the human body. We are told that even gods and goddesses pine for a human birth in order to achieve release and reunion with the Supreme Lord.

But until we actually come to the path, what do we really understand about reunion with the Lord, or God-realization? Until we've travelled a lot further on this path this will remain no more than a concept for us. What to say then about the many people who have never heard anything about this, or would in any case feel no need to pursue this? So think how incredibly privileged we are to be amongst the tiny percentage of this world's population who not only know of the concept of God-realization, but also how to go about achieving it.

What do the Masters tell us about the route to becoming one with God? If we are to tread the spiritual path back to God, then someone is going to have to point that path out to us. This person must be the living Master of our time.

The whole process of going home can be boiled down into a few steps. First of all comes the grace of God who sends such a Master into this world. Then the Master initiates certain souls on to the path that leads home. And then those souls practise techniques taught by their Master at the time of initiation, and within a certain time frame those souls will be reunited with God.

It sounds quite simple... until one starts actually trying to practise the techniques. The reality of this discipline has, for most of us, proved very different from anything else we have ever undertaken, and much more difficult. Happily for us, we are not left floundering, having to rely only on our own limited strength. The first obvious source of help is our very own Master, and it is indeed his God-given task to help us on this journey.

The Master is the mainstay of our spiritual journey, but there are tools that have been provided to help us. Often these tools seem more like impediments, but viewed in a positive light, we will see how much we need them. First, this level of creation provides us

with time. And second, we've been given a mind. It is our use of time that determines whether we use this human body productively or whether we waste it. Every day has just so many hours. Every disciple needs to decide if those waking hours are being put to good use. And it is our second tool, the mind, that will help us use our time efficiently.

We are told that Sant Mat is a journey of the soul, but at our level of spiritual unawareness, for the time being, this is all about our minds. It is our mind that sets our daily programme and chooses how we will fill our time and mind-space. The mind is the vehicle that will take us to the eye centre, from where the real spiritual journey of the soul starts. It is the mind that gives us the faculties we need for the initial stage of the journey: discrimination, persistence, concentration, attention.

There are of course those wonderfully lucky souls who go within immediately at the time of initiation. But for the rest of us ours is a journey dominated by the mind. In general we tend to view the mind very negatively. But perhaps, if we viewed it more positively, seeing its attributes as necessary, then the journey in its company might be just a little easier.

Maharaj Charan Singh famously said: "Mind is the deadliest of foes, but the most useful of servants. When properly awakened and controlled, there is no limit to what the mind can do." If we think of how the mind has in fact already helped us on this journey, we might be surprised and encouraged.

At the time of initiation we are asked to make four promises: to be strict vegetarians; to avoid alcohol, drugs and tobacco products, to live honest, moral lives, and to do daily meditation. And what is it that helps us to follow these principles? None other than the much-maligned mind! It is the mind that examines food labels carefully

and says Yes or No, making good path-oriented choices for us. It is the mind that allows us to turn down the offer of a gorgeous-looking piece of cake at our neighbour's house. It is the mind that says, "I will reveal my full income to the tax authorities." And it is the mind that at least tries to repeat those five holy words. These are big steps forward on our path, and we should give the mind credit for them. Perhaps it is more of an ally than we might think.

At this level of our journey, we seem to have a choice about how we use this tool with all of its faculties. The mind has two main abilities we should try to cultivate – discrimination and concentration. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh says about discrimination:

Discrimination is a development of the mind. ... Thinking is mind, discrimination is mind, and analyzing is with the mind. The mind projects in many ways, but we have to utilize this faculty of mind in a better direction, not downward to the senses, but upwards in the love and devotion of the Father.

From childhood onwards we start to develop this aspect of discrimination. We need to allow it to help us move forward on the spiritual path. We must believe we can choose our thoughts and words and act accordingly. And then, having used the mind to make a choice, we have to make the most of our choice. We have to access our powers of concentration, our ability to focus our attention, and put them to the best spiritual use. What our Masters want is for us to apply our natural powers of discrimination and concentration to our efforts on the path. They want us to focus them on our spiritual goal.

Grace, concentration and focused attention are the key. Masters tell us that at the time of initiation we receive all the grace we need

to do our meditation. The rest is up to us. And actually, it is not even about reaching the eye centre in this lifetime. What matters is our best effort. That's all that the Master asks of us. And this requires focus, concentration and discrimination.

Even here we have been given a tool which can help us achieve, or at least aim towards, concentration. That tool is of course simran. We need to remember that the mind enjoys focused activity. Little by little we must turn it away from the mud pies of this world and towards simran – the vehicle for achieving our first spiritual goal, namely the eye centre. We must persevere with this because the mind really is on our side in this struggle – it just doesn't know it yet!

The Masters tell us that the mind would also like to return to its true home, but it has forgotten about it and been seduced by this world of sense pleasures. So it seems to be our enemy – constantly rushing to its old comfortable haunts. But to deal with it we have the power of God-given simran and Master's grace – an unstoppable combination.

Masters tell us that the object of simran is just concentration, and that through concentration we will be able to get in touch with the Shabd – that power of God that will draw our souls back to Sach Khand. Simran is a mind-tool, but it comes endowed with a power and strength we cannot possibly comprehend. Here and now we should try and grasp this tool which can eventually help us still the mind, using it as often as possible throughout the day.

In all our many lives the mind has been madly running around in the world of sense pleasures. That's become its habit. So now, every time it repeats our simran, it is a huge achievement. Be positive. New habits can be forged, even if very slowly. Every minute of simran is a gift.

Every bit of effort we put in during the day to follow the path, cultivate obedience and choose our thoughts will be to our credit when we sit down for our daily meditation. If we haven't been employing the mind-tools of simran, discrimination and concentration during the day, then what a battle we will face when we sit! Until we have penetrated beyond the eye-centre, this is a journey of mind. We have to pay attention to its habits during the day, because we will bring those same habits into our meditation.

We have the gifts, the tools to tackle this greatest of all tasks, and move, albeit slowly, towards our goal. Who knows how much time remains for us to put in our effort? And that's all that Master asks of us: our best effort.



Mind is not our enemy; it is our best friend. It is an enemy as long as it pulls us towards the senses. When it comes back to the eye centre and is attached to the spirit within, and starts enjoying the bliss of Shabd and Nam within, and takes us back to our own destination, then it becomes our best friend. Without the help of the mind, the soul would never be able to go back to the Father at all.

All your emotion, your devotion, your love to begin with are nothing but the outcome of mind. Mind is creating that love and devotion in you, and soul is taking advantage of it. So we have to win the friendship of the mind.

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

Balance

Keep a balance – these three little words, said to us so often by the Master, are loaded with meaning and are applicable to countless situations in our lives.

We get out of balance in so many ways: for example, focusing on our jobs to the detriment of our families. Often it's so late at night when we finish work that we have time only to eat a quick meal and go to bed. Or we stay up so late watching TV that we don't get up refreshed for meditation. We get so busy with being busy that we forget the importance of balance.

We tend to underestimate how much maintaining a balance contributes to living life successfully and productively. Balance gives us a perspective that can help us to make better decisions; we gain a sense of calm, and we gain the ability to see the big picture. We are able to see the entire map of where we are going and appreciate the distance we have come, as well as see how far we still want to go. Finding a balance is an important part of being the best person we can be.

All human activity is a search for a balance between survival and happiness. This is the same as saying that all human activity is a search for a balance between the logical mind and the soul. To live in balance, to survive and be happy, we must have both logic and soul. The problem is that it seems we cannot have both. The world tells us to reject the soul; spirituality tells us to rise above the mind.

We may think that, since meditation is the key to the spiritual path, perhaps it would be best to spend as many hours each day in meditation as possible. We may think it best to avoid marriage, leave

off developing any profession, not have children and live in solitude, meditating all day. But senses that are then suppressed may become more active; suppressed desires may become stronger. When we go to extremes, our God-given natural system begins to revolt.

Thus the Master says that we should generally live our life in the world as a householder. Masters also have families, yet they keep their balance. Whenever we overdo it in any aspect of our lives we lose perspective and balance. Thus, moderation in all things is the best philosophy.

Why is it so difficult to maintain a balance in life? Our culture and social situations have always encouraged us to be different, to be special, to be better than others, to be competitive. We place great store in being considered special and superior. It validates us. We feel that to be special means to have something that others do not have.

What can we do to bring about balance in our lives? What is needed here is a wider perspective. We need to take a step back and clearly define the goals and priorities in our life. Only then can we pursue them successfully. We need to consider both the physical and spiritual aspects of our lives. The physical aspect of life includes our health and the way we treat our bodies. Our body is the most precious gift we have. If we don't stay healthy, we certainly can't enjoy all the other aspects of life, including meditation.

For most of us finding our balance usually involves organizing, strategizing and maximizing. But maybe there's a different take on the subject to be found here, and that is where our spiritual lives come in. Our spiritual life is what defines our core, our foundation, our purpose, our identity and our reason for living. It permeates all that we think, say and do. So we should try to remember that we are not the centre of our own universe – we are one piece of something

much larger than ourselves, and we should prioritize making God the focus of our lives.

When we first come on to the path, perhaps in our excitement, we suddenly want to be sadhus and sanyasis – ascetics and renunciates. We want to run off to a cave or shut ourselves in a room so that we can meditate all day. But the Master cautions us to keep a balance, to live a normal life and fulfil our responsibilities. He advises us to live with detachment and weave meditation into our everyday lives – not swing to extremes, but rather to follow the middle path of moderation. We must be ordinary people living ordinary lives. We must simply make meditation a part of our daily routine and retain a balance.

Extremes cause reaction. A pendulum swings, and the farther it swings in one direction, the farther it will swing in the other. But in that still point in the middle of the pendulum's arc we rest in the refuge of the Master. Even in the midst of the intense activity of a challenging life, with professional and family obligations, we can place ourselves in the Master's refuge and remain safe.

For most of us, learning to be a true disciple is a slow process – long and gradual. Whatever transformation we are undergoing is often imperceptible to us. Slow and steady wins the race.

Maharaj Charan Singh often said that this is the simplest of paths but difficult to follow. To sustain ourselves through the long years of practice, we need help. We need the support and protection of the Master. Satsang and seva offer us a place where the atmosphere of the Master's presence uplifts our spirits and helps us to be steadfast on the path.

The Master's refuge keeps us safe from the assaults of a wayward mind; it draws us again and again back to the focus. Time and again the Master's refuge brings to our awareness the simplicity

of the spiritual path. The Master's refuge is not a structure built with bricks and mortar, nor with wood or plaster or steel. Only one material is used in its construction, and that is love. And there are only two people in the refuge – the Master and the disciple.

We live through countless fleeting relationships, seeking, finding and losing. If we do not know it yet, then life teaches us that it is folly to expect perfect love in human relationships. Human life is perishable and short-lived. The love that holds us together and the one that encompasses our entire being is the love between Master and disciple because, at its depth, it is the love between the Lord and the soul.

Our capacity to love is limited. The love the saints lead us to dissolves all separation and leads us to union. How do we grow in this love? The Master has given a simple answer. He says: love means to give, give and give. We are to give wholeheartedly, give to a point of removing the self. No expectations, just giving. That is discipleship.

So we begin by giving the only gift we possess – our time and attention. Two and a half hours of our time every day, accompanied by all the attention we are able to gather. It is a paltry gift when we consider the scattered attention we bring to the meditation practice. But nonetheless it is a gift of love.

The same applies to the time we give to our meditation. Initially we attempt to offer half an hour, an hour, maybe two and a half hours of meditation. But eventually, with perseverance and the Master's grace, meditation becomes a way of life. We do not merely close ourselves in a room for a few hours and then forget about meditation for the rest of the day. It takes on a practical form, reflecting in every daily action and in our whole routine. Meditation becomes a way of life as we live in the atmosphere we build with meditation. To live in

that atmosphere is to live a simple, happy and relaxed life. We accept whatever comes our way as the grace of the Master. By his mercy, he is bringing us to him as swiftly as possible.

So whereas initially we start off with a balancing act, where we demarcate our physical lives, our family lives, our social lives, our work lives and our spiritual lives, eventually all the actions in our life become a meditation. And then the need to find a balance dissolves as all our activities then revolve around that one focal point. We go about our daily lives, but the Beloved is always in our minds, in our thoughts, in our very being.

Our life becomes nothing more or less than a love story - between us and God. Every person, every experience, every gift, every loss, every pain is sent to us for one reason only – to bring us back to him, to bring us back to that focal point of balance.



*My mind is caught in the snares of the world,
Thrown off balance by its attachments.
Pray, deliver me from this predicament, O Lord,
And release me from the bonds that hold me fast.
I am caught in the snares of the world
And estranged from your Name and Form.
Help me to walk with confidence,
For my path is full of obstacles, says Tuka.*

Tukaram – The Ceaseless Song of Devotion

Finding the Truth

In the Bible Jesus says, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” From the spiritual perspective, this is one of Jesus’ most important utterances. This verse has profound spiritual meaning. In fact, it is the key to liberation.

Truth these days is a much-abused word. What you perceive as the truth can be the opposite to the meaning of truth to another person. In wartime, for instance, the first casualty is the truth. The combatants in any conflict are never going to give correct figures or statistics in regard to the conduct of the war. They will diminish their own losses and inflate their successes. Can we be sure that when we read about the history of a particular country that we have an accurate account of what transpired? It is said that history is written by the winners.

The Milky Way galaxy consists of over 400 billion stars with innumerable planets revolving around them. How often have scientists, physicists or astronomers had to revise their theories, conclusions and assumptions as fresh evidence has come to light? For centuries it was believed the earth was the centre of the universe. Then along came Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus who believed that the planets revolved around the sun. Fearing that his theory would be judged heretical by the Church at that time, he delayed announcing his findings until shortly before his death in 1543. Later scientists were punished for similar beliefs, including the Italian astronomer Galileo, who was forced to renounce his own theories in 1633.

And now we know that in comparison to the rest of the universe we are as insignificant as a single grain of sand on a beach. Our most

sophisticated telescopes have not yet reached the outer extremities of this physical universe.

Let us return to the utterance of Jesus: “The truth shall set you free.” By implication he meant that some component of the human being is being held captive. So let’s look at the nature of our imprisonment here. What are the chains that keep us shackled to this physical realm?

Many mystics have referred to this world as a vast prison in which our souls are prisoners. Our freedom is restricted by the inexorable law of cause and effect, resulting in our karma. The physical bodies into which we are placed, whether human, animal, or plant, are the individual cells where we work out our karmic obligations.

A factor that keeps us trapped here is our destiny. In *Spiritual Gems* we read:

When a baby is born into this world, the number of breaths he is to breathe, till his death, is already fixed, and nobody can increase or decrease it.

Suffering and poverty are also pre-ordained for everyone before his birth, according to the karma of his past birth. They have to be undergone, yet a Master’s disciple who raises his soul becomes indifferent to external surroundings.

The mystics tell us our fate karma is fixed. The only real flexibility we have is how we approach the events of life.

A major factor contributing to our imprisonment here is the dominance of our mind. The mind is our travelling companion on our journey here and on higher planes. Every action that we take originates in the mind. We think of something, and sooner

or later that thought manifests in external action. The chaos, the dysfunctional nature of the world we see around us, is an outward manifestation of what is going on in our mind. So we live in the dream world of our mental projections.

The mind never leaves us alone. It is always active. The mind is in constant motion. If only we could slow it down and bring it to a standstill, we could enjoy the present moment. For in reality that's all we have. In fact, making the mind motionless is what is required in meditation.

The mind has created the ego, and the two are so intricately woven that they cannot be separated. They work in tandem. The major obstacle that stands between us and merging with the Lord is our identification with a false self, the ego. We don't really know who we are. We define our self by the name we are given, our age, family, what we have achieved, our wealth, profession, nationality, religion and so on.

The products of this ego are our desires and attachments – direct causes of our suffering and of our return over and over again to the physical realm. Soami Ji, the first of the Radha Soami Masters, says that the major impediments to spiritual advancement are: the body, spouse, children, grandsons, wealth and possessions, vanity and self-righteousness, social customs, rites and rituals. We can safely say that the suffering we experience is directly proportional to the degree of our involvement in the world. But how to escape? How do we get out of this prison house?

The path that we follow is a mystic path. Most dictionaries define mysticism as a spiritual discipline by means of which the individual soul can make contact with the divine. When this occurs we realize our true nature. With this will come a sense of unity or totality, a sense of timelessness, a sense of having encountered ultimate reality.

The mystics tell us, however, that no words are adequate to describe mystical experience.

The essence of mysticism is a transcendental experience in the sphere of consciousness. In other words, we have to expand our current level of consciousness to a higher, more sublime, more subtle realm. It is an awakening beyond normal reasoning and mental activity. The Bible gives a beautiful description of such a state: “the peace that passeth all understanding”. The culmination of mysticism is union with the Divine. And this is not some goal to be reached after we die. We can attain self-realization and God-realization while still in the human form.

Ultimately, truth can be experienced or realized only by our soul. Nothing in this physical realm, the astral region, or the causal region can be regarded as Truth, because everything here is subject to change. In mysticism, what is changeable and perishable is false, a mere illusion.

Everything here has a shelf life: human beings and all living creatures. The sun, moon and stars, the whole universe will at some stage come to an end. What will remain is the Lord, the Supreme Being who is unchangeable, and the Shabd which sustains and maintains the entire universe. The Lord and the Truth are one and the same.

In Sant Mat we refer to Truth as Shabd. Jesus said that we can be purified only by this Word. This purification entails eliminating our karmic debts. We cannot enter the court of the Lord unless, and until, all our karmic debts have been settled.

Every moment we devote to simran and bhajan takes us nearer to our destination and goes a long way to liquidating the debt of karma that stands against us. So the more time we spend in concentrated devotion, the sooner our karmic debts will be cleared.

Thus, we will become free to ultimately merge into the Supreme Being, into peace and bliss. Let us not lose this opportunity.



*There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.*

William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

A Change of Policy

An extract from *The Path of the Masters* by Julian Johnson

One very important change in the policy of the great Masters has recently taken place and many may wonder at it. This change of policy relates to the method of accepting disciples. In ancient times, even down to the last few centuries, the great Masters were very exclusive in their choice of disciples. Hence novitiates were few. Disciples were accepted only after the most severe tests, the most trying ordeals. The select few who passed these tests received initiation. But now the policy has been modified. The Masters during the last hundred years or so, have accepted practically all who applied, unless their karmas were too bad. ...

What is the meaning of this change of policy? First, because so many more have applied for initiation in late years; and that is undoubtedly because many more are ready for the path. Second, the Masters have now abandoned the rigid tests formerly imposed on applicants and are now willing to accept disciples of lesser qualifications. Why? The Masters themselves know best. But we may offer a suggestion or two here which will explain the matter, in part at least.

In this Kal Yuga, the Dark or 'Iron' Age, the ills of life upon the planet have greatly multiplied. Hence the mercy and loving sympathy of Sat Purush, the great Father, has led him to meet the willing-minded more than half way. Now practically everybody who feels inclined towards the Satguru and wishes to follow his path is accepted by him.

Faith and Loneliness

Faith and loneliness – at first glance, these would seem to be mutually exclusive. If we have faith, how can we be lonely?

But at the human level our faith is at best shaky and vulnerable to doubt. We proclaim love for the Master, and our undying faith in him, yet our actions may tell a different story. We are torn between our love for the material world and our soul's natural longing to merge with its Creator. Every single day we stand at a crossroad – one road takes us towards him, and the other, further away from him. We want to love the Master, we want to trust him implicitly, but our frail human condition prevents us from doing so.

In *Quest for Light* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Faith is the foundation on which the whole superstructure of religion and spiritual progress stands. It is the root of the tree of godliness. Without faith there can be no achievement in any worldly art or spiritual matter. Faith is the most precious of gifts that the Lord can confer on a devotee.

So, how do we acquire true and unshakeable faith? This mansion of faith is built upon several pillars. The first, strangely enough, is loneliness itself. Loneliness might well be the most painful of human conditions – a constant sense that we are not quite whole. We sense that there is something missing, which creates in us a desperate need to find what we are lacking.

Shams-e-Tabrizi speaks frequently of this need, which implies a deep desire for the inner Beloved and for God, as well

as a sufficient degree of self-awareness to understand one's own inadequacy and helplessness in the quest. It is also about yearning and restlessness – that sense of not belonging that distinguishes those who seek God from those who are content with the world. Then too, need speaks of deeply felt humility and prayerfulness – asking God for help and guidance.

Shams says he looks for need from the needy, but only real need, not just its appearance. And, he says, “When you come with an attitude of need, then that, in essence, is asking me the way to God.” He tells us of the benefit of absolute heartfelt need. When there is real neediness, he says, “Something beyond this creation will reach you – and that is love. The snare of love comes and wraps around you.”

All the self-help relationship books of this world tell us to steer away from neediness, to be whole, not to seek from another in order to complete ourselves. Yet Shams says we cannot even take a step on the path of spirituality without being needy, without acknowledging that we are incomplete – and that we need God to make us whole. The same feeling of loneliness and need that isolates us and makes us feel insignificant can also powerfully motivate us to seek the Lord and bring us to a point of dependence on the Lord.

Once we have acknowledged this heartfelt need, the second pillar then is to follow the instructions and teachings of our Master. The method of the true Masters includes four fundamental principles: following a vegetarian diet, not taking alcohol 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. The first three principles support the fourth, which is the key to self-transformation. It is an interdependent and interlinking system: all four principles have to be put into practice rigorously, otherwise the overall system cannot work.

Through these four principles, the Masters set clear guidelines for a way of life that supports our spiritual goal. The guidelines serve as painted lines on a road. The moment we cross a line, we know we have deviated from our course and are in danger. The Masters, however, impress upon us the importance of using our personal sense of discrimination. It is up to each one of us to find out which actions or thoughts will strengthen or weaken our spiritual life; which actions and thoughts will take us towards our destination and which will take us further away.

How can we follow the instructions of someone diligently if we do not trust that person? The third pillar therefore is to fully and unconditionally trust the Master, in much the same way as a passenger who buys an airline ticket trusts that the pilot of the aircraft will take him to his destination. Alternatively, imagine being lost in a dense forest without the slightest idea of the way out. Along comes someone who knows the woods and offers to show us the way. In fact, seeing how weak and helpless we are, he even volunteers to carry us to freedom. In such a case, would we worry about surrendering our will to his? Wouldn't we just grab on to our rescuer and never let him out of our sight?

The mystics explain that this is an exact parallel of 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. Then along comes a compassionate Master who not only knows how to escape, but also offers to help the soul realize its freedom. Considering the helplessness of our situation, why wouldn't we gratefully accept his guidance?

No true Master ever enforces his will upon any disciple. He wants his disciples to walk the path based on a conviction derived from their own understanding and experience. But in order to reach that level of experience, what is needed first and foremost is trust. We

need to trust him because we acknowledge that when it comes to the liberation of our soul, he is the expert and he knows best how to get us home.

But how do we build this attitude of trust? Trust is built on the fourth pillar, which is love. We need to develop love for the Master. Not human love that is based only on emotion, but the kind of love that the soul feels for its Creator, which grows out of love for the physical form of the Master.

On this dense 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. He is the one who guides us with infinite love, patience and understanding, and it is he who helps us develop our love, trust and faith. In fact, it is only because of our love for and trust in the physical Master that we are able to move forward and progress on the spiritual path.

This is not a love based on simple emotion. The mind might want us to believe that the path of devotion is one of romance and emotion, but the lovers of the Lord go onto the battlefield with their heads on the palms of their hands, and this is how they find the Beloved. No one has found the Shabd through emotional excitement. The battle is inside, and it is inside that it has to be fought. This fight is the real purpose of our life.

In practical terms, it means to keep our attention as much as we can in simran at the eye centre. This is the way of the spiritual warrior, the way to empower the soul. True devotion is to keep our attention at the eye centre. It is the concentration of our attention, of all our longing and consciousness at the eye centre, that alone will enable us to break through the barrier of the material. This alone will give us the inner experience that will enable us to sustain true longing and devotion. Sant Mat, the path and practice of the saints, is

not a matter of lip service or emotional excitement. It is a profound way of life to be lived, within ourselves, at every moment and at every level.

True devotion is trying to please the Master by bringing our attention up to the eye centre. To help him in his work to liberate our soul is the greatest demonstration of love we can give him. The task of the physical form is to initiate us and to introduce us to the inner Master. The Master has told us where his real form is. Now it is up to us to pursue it. The physical is a means, not an end. 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.

All Masters proclaim the same truth. The true Master is Shabd. True darshan is inner darshan. The Truth is within. The journey of Sant Mat can take the disciple to the innermost level of Truth, but the disciple has to travel there. The Master can point us to the Truth, but he cannot experience the Truth for us. The task of the living Master is to show us how to make contact with the Radiant Form so that we can gradually distinguish true from false and travel the path with firmer and stronger steps.

The real Master is the Shabd that projects itself into a human form and descends to the physical level, to introduce us to that Master within. A mature level of devotion is one where the disciple realizes that the true Master is the Master that never dies. Meditation is the means by which the love and natural emotions generated by contact with one who lives by the Truth, are directed inwards and upwards to bring us to that state where we become intimate with the real Master.



Try Not to Judge

The Masters tell us that we have been here for much longer than our puny human minds can comprehend – aeons and aeons of time, innumerable cycles of the four ages. We have lived life after life in different bodies, in different forms, from simple one-cell creatures to the most complex – human beings. During that time civilizations have grown, thrived and eventually declined and disappeared, to be followed by others.

The Masters explain that our souls are little drops of the current that emanates from God and are, in fact, part of God's own substance and being – the Creator's essence that made and sustains everything on all planes of the creation. However, when our souls were sent down to this material plane they had to be provided with a mind in order to be able to function here. The mind also makes use of an effective device to cloak each soul in illusion and make it forget its divine origin. This device is the ego, which makes each person feel separate and unique. This allows it to stand in judgment of all others it meets during its earthly wanderings.

In the words of Maharaj Charan Singh:

We judge others when we think we are superior and other people are inferior to us. We think we are much better human beings.

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In other words, when we judge we're giving free rein to the ego and to the negative promptings of our mind.

What we must remember is that for all this time, through all our countless lives, our mind has stayed with us, and in every life it has

collected impressions, influences and opinions. So many times it has known happiness, ecstasy, joy and elation; and also sadness, distress, terror and agony. All these impressions may have contributed something both to our present character, and also to those of the people whom we judge. We can never understand what makes others behave the way they do.

When we judge it is so easy for us to say, for instance: “Did you hear what bad grammar that woman used?” Or perhaps: “Imagine behaving like that towards me!”

Now let us examine each of those sentences carefully, reading between the lines. In the first case one could ask oneself: “Do I know whether the language she used is her own? Is it the language she grew up with, or has she been clever enough to learn a second or perhaps a third language?” If we are honest, we will probably have to admit that we have no idea. So then we might feel a bit uncomfortable with our quick judgement. But still we might think, “It really was bad grammar.”

Let us delve deeper. What we are implying is that we know better. We’re actually saying: “I am much better-spoken and would never have used such grammar.” A nice boost for our self-esteem and our ego! If we are honest, and admit this to ourselves, hopefully we would feel ashamed and think twice the next time before criticizing or judging so easily.

In the second case, once again we were probably thinking that we would never behave like that. Again, a nice pat on the shoulder for the ego! But just as the other person’s action was prompted by karma, so can ours also be, and very often we say or do something that we bitterly regret afterwards. So, instead of judging others, let us rather watch ourselves and try to curb any unfair, unkind or wrong impulses by being aware of our own actions. No matter what the

behaviour was that prompted our remark, let us remember Maharaj Charan Singh's words:

No one does us any wrong or treats us badly. According to the layer of our karmas that comes into action, our Lord makes people act towards us in that way. So we should never blame anybody.

There are some thought-provoking insights on the tendency to judge others in *The Book of Mirdad*. The spiritual teacher, Miridad, tells the monks:

Shun every judgment seat, my companions. For to pronounce a judgment on anyone, or anything, you must not only know The Law and live comfortably thereto, but hear the evidence as well. ... To have the evidence complete in any given case the Cosmos must needs be the witness. When you can hail the Cosmos into court, you would require no courts. You would descend from judgment seat and let the witness be the judge. When you know all, you would judge none.

We would do well to heed the Masters' often-repeated words that everything is exactly as it should be; that everyone is a product of their own, unique karmas, and that we should regard our fellow human beings with empathy and affection. Let us strive for understanding and sympathetic comprehension of the fact that we cannot know another person's history or karma. And let us try to love others rather than judging them, knowing that we are – as Master Charan Singh often said – all struggling souls on the path.



Faith in the Master

As our lives unfold and circumstances and events materialize – and as quickly become distant memories – it must start dawning on us that we have no control over our lives. We are occasionally able to say, “Ah, that is what I have been working towards, and it has happened just as I had planned.” But if we analyze those exceptional outcomes realistically, we realize that our plans and actions were actually not of our making. They were merely conditioned responses – actions activated by circumstances which were part of our allotted destiny.

This becomes particularly obvious as we begin to see a logical sequence in the events that make up our existence in this world. If we were to analyze these so-called logical sequences, we would soon realize that we had little to do with them. They happened entirely outside our control, without any help at all from our own scheming or planning. It becomes clear that what the Masters tell us over and over again is true: that we are not the doers – we are merely acting out our parts on the stage of life.

The metaphor of our lives in this world, of being like stage productions is often used by the Masters to describe our situation. The script of the play is our destiny and the director of the play is the Lord himself, acting through the Master. He won't deviate from the script, but he is able to direct the movements and interpretations of the actors. Although he doesn't tamper with the events themselves, he does allow them to unfold in a manner which enables us to endure them.

This realization, that the Lord's agent, the Master, is the director – in truth, the doer who makes everything happen in our lives – is an

important milestone for us on the path. Once this concept becomes real for us, then we will have taken a quantum leap towards having faith in our Master.

But most of us are very far from accepting that we are not in control of our lives. A good indicator or test of this – of our believing our Master to be the only doer – is to check how much time we spend worrying about our problems. As our Master has said so often, we hand over our problems and worries to him with one hand and take them back with the other. If we accept the Master as the only doer, what would we have to worry about?

In one of his letters Maharaj Jagat Singh commented:

Your worrying shows that you have no faith in the goodness of God, or even God himself. Let him accomplish things in his own way, rather than in the way that you desire. Try to adjust yourself to all that he does and you will never be unhappy.

The Science of the Soul

What Maharaj Jagat Singh is saying here could be expressed differently: if we accepted the fact that the Lord or Master is the doer, we would have no reason to worry – about anything or anyone. Having this belief in the forefront of our minds all the time would make our lives far easier. And obedience and submission to his will would come naturally to us.

The Masters have repeatedly told us that we have two ways of completing our journey on the path. The first and slower method is by conscientiously living according to the four principles that we promised to obey at our initiation, foremost being regular meditation. The other is by unconditional surrender to the Master. The Masters have said, however, that surrender is the far more difficult option as it involves ridding ourselves of our ego.

Let's look at some implications of surrender to the Master. First, this means that all our earnings, possessions and other trappings are his, not ours. Second, if we extend this concept to our families, then our children are not ours – they don't belong to us. As Khalil Gibran wrote in *The Prophet*, our children are not of us but come through us. They are in fact no more than close associations, brought into our lives to complete certain karmic requirements, both theirs and ours. Third, each of our choices is not ours at all. Once we have surrendered to the Master, then he becomes the only doer, and it is he who makes our choices. Fourth, as he is fully in charge of our lives, we have absolutely no need to worry – about anything at all.

And let's also think about this: what is the use of this ego that wants to be the boss? If we own nothing, if we have achieved nothing on our own, then we are nothing. Despite all our misconceived opinions of self, we are nobodies!

But it's a tall order for us simply to toss the ego aside. We are told by the Master that we have to have some ego to exist on this plane. And although our possessions are not ours but his, we have to play the role of responsible caretakers with regard to all our worldly roles, duties and material possessions. We have the same role to play regarding our offspring. Our children require nurturing and loving support, and it is our responsibility to provide this.

In fact, we have the same duty towards the soul. We are responsible to the Lord to nurture our own soul and to do everything possible to accelerate its return to its Father – to our Father and our real home. As disciples of a true Master, we are all on a mission, a highly responsible and demanding mission: to work for the release of our own souls from whatever is preventing their return home.

So how do we go about this? How can we work at obedience and surrendering to the Master's will? Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

You can say, I am living in the will of the Master because I am steadfast on the principles of Sant Mat – I am attending to my meditation and living the way of life as taught to me. So, in a broad sense you are living in the will of the Master.

Actually, you live in the will of the Master only when you are able to release your soul from the clutches of the mind. You have to go beyond the realm of mind and maya for your soul to be absolutely pure.

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This tells us that living in his will is more difficult than we might think. We need to focus all our effort on meditation and leave the rest to him. And the faith that we need to meditate conscientiously flows from the love he creates within us – a love that comes from focused meditation. You can't have one without the other.

Maharaj Charan Singh has emphasized the importance of faith. He told us:

Faith is very important in Sant Mat. ... Faith is the first thing on which the entire spiritual edifice is to be built. When once you decided to come on the Sant Mat path after study and research, why should your faith now shake and fail you? This tendency of the mind has to be fought and an unshakeable faith built if any progress is desired.

Quest for Light

Clearly then, unshakeable faith is an essential prerequisite for spiritual progress. Implicit faith in the Master is the key. Our

understanding will grow significantly only with focused, regular meditation, but the initial faith to do that is planted in us by the Master. We are his responsibility and he sets us up, enabling us to do our meditation with this most important initial foundation of faith.

We don't need to understand every aspect of the teachings before starting on the journey. We require only sufficient understanding to start doing our meditation. With this bare minimum we can take our first steps. When we start doing our meditation, our understanding of the teachings will be basic and our faith may be shaky. It's true that in the early stages of our discipleship our understanding of the path was very limited. Although at the time we may have thought we knew what it was all about, over time we found that there was still a long way to go. But the little bit we did know at least gave us enough faith to get started on our meditation.

The fact remains, though, that until we have some evidence in the form of direct experience in our meditation, our faith remains shaky. So the Masters may provide us with small glimpses of a little light or a hint of sound to encourage us to continue with our spiritual work. And while we struggle on against the mind, we can take courage from these words of Great Master:

A practitioner should have firm belief that he will surely succeed on this path, and he should go on struggling with faith until his last breath, for no path seems to be better than this. It is better to die in sincere effort than to attain all worldly success. Do not be anxious; the Master is taking care of you every instant. You cannot see it now, but as you advance in your journey, you will see it yourself.

The Dawn of Light



Looking for Meaning

What is the meaning of our life on this earth? We live, we die, and in between we rush around looking for some kind of happiness, some kind of pleasure and some kind of meaning, before this brief flame is snuffed out. We experience sadness at the prospect of death before we have really lived; yet if we ask what it means to really live, we have no idea.

To live life to the fullest – what does that mean? To have as many experiences as we can? To conquer countries and build empires? To saturate ourselves in the indulgence of all possible sensual pleasures? None of the usual answers can withstand the stroke of death, which may come at any moment. Death renders all our achievements and aspirations meaningless. ‘We can’t take it with us’ is the old expression. So what meaning can exist in the face of death? What joy can we take in life, when it must certainly end?

If we were to say that there are things that endure beyond death, and that we ourselves also endure beyond death, then maybe we would have something to work with. Then there would be some grounds for considering that maybe there is a way to obtain meaningful peace and joy out of life. But to the best of our knowledge nobody gets out of here alive. If anybody ever did, he certainly didn’t come back to tell the tale! As far as we know, that is...

But the mystics assure us that there is indeed life beyond the grave and the crematorium. If we subscribe to this view, then we have to take a longer view of what has real meaning, beyond the short span of this life we’re living. One can hardly find satisfaction in the frantic space between birth and death. It’s impossible to be

serene and composed if one has no certainty of tomorrow. But if one believes in the eternal life of the soul, then one can take the longer view and work toward developing a higher state of consciousness that will persist beyond our current limitations, and give us access to our as yet unrealized potential.

By raising our consciousness, we move inexorably towards the Absolute, which is the core and source of all existence. By stripping away the superfluous, by rising above the limitations of the temporal self, we reveal the essence within that is our true self, the immortal soul that longs only to return to the Great Spirit within that is its Father.

Until we reach this point we search in vain for meaning and peace. Only by contacting that spiritual essence within ourselves can we start to realize our true nature and our divine heritage.

But do we possess the necessary tools for the job? Is this something that we can do by reading books and having discussions and by leading what most people call a 'good life'? Many people believe exactly that, but this belief does not stand the test of logic nor indeed of our own experience.

Whenever we have tried to develop new skills or acquire new knowledge, we have always needed a teacher or instructor. If we need a teacher to learn a language, play a piano or understand quantum physics, why wouldn't we also need a teacher to learn spiritual science, the most arcane of subjects? Not only would this be foolhardy, but downright dangerous.

As with all worldly pursuits, we need a teacher. We need a teacher who, by way of qualifications, has travelled this road before us and is familiar with all the obstacles and difficulties that stand in our path, and will help us to either avoid them altogether or to deal with them in the best way possible.

The highest path is the one that leads straight to our divine source and ends with our total immersion in and union with the Lord. For this purpose, only a teacher who has already achieved this goal will do. The pathway that achieves this is the path of the sacred Sound. This Sound or Word of God is the essential element behind the entire creation. It is this power within that is the key and the fundamental essence of the path that leads us back to him.

It is only by contacting a living teacher who is qualified to show us the way that we can learn the proper method of progressing in our aspirations. Only such a one can teach us the method by which we may come in contact with the divine essence, this sacred Sound that will lead us directly to the very feet of the Primordial One.

No matter how futile life may seem to be, in the context of this one life we are living, when we come into contact with a true spiritual Master, we start to realize that life, in fact, is eternal. We can then see the longer view – that this life is merely a step on the way of the soul's journey home to the Lord.



Book Review



Markings

BY DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD, TRANS. LEIF SJÖBERG AND W.H. AUDEN
PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: ALFRED A KNOFF, 1973.
ISBN: 0571060153

Never let success hide its emptiness from you, achievement its nothingness, toil its desolation. And so keep alive the incentive to push on further, that pain in the soul that drives us beyond ourselves. Whither? That I don't know. That I don't ask to know.

Dag Hammarskjöld was a Swedish diplomat who rose to the position of Secretary General of the United Nations, which he held from 1953 until his death in 1961 at age 56 in a plane crash. Respected, acclaimed, and honoured on the world stage, nominated for a Nobel Prize (which was awarded posthumously), one might assume he was the most worldly of men.

His deep spiritual life was revealed after he died when friends found his spiritual journal. Knowing that others would want to write his biography, he left instructions for this journal to be published, because it contained “the only true profile that could be drawn” and was on the vital subject of “my negotiations with myself – and with God.”

When *Markings* appeared in print, the world was astonished. The book makes no reference whatever to Hammarskjöld's career or professional achievements. Instead it is a fearless description of his struggle to find union with God, in the midst of his own egotism, impatience, and other shortcomings. While carrying on his worldly

functions, Hammarskjöld sought to remain focused on his highest priority: the life of the spirit. His hope was to live his life “so that my whole being may become an instrument for that which is greater than I.”

I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics for whom “self-surrender” had been the way to self-realization, and who, in “singleness of mind” and “inwardness,” had found the strength to say “yes” to every demand. ... Love – that much misused and misinterpreted word – for them meant simply an overflowing of strength with which they felt themselves filled when living in true self-oblivion.

W.H. Auden, one of the translators, expressed disappointment that Hammarskjöld had never participated in institutional Christian religion. But Hammarskjöld believed with Rumi that “the lovers of God have no religion but God alone.”

Dag Hammarskjöld was raised in a privileged Lutheran family in Sweden. His father was prime minister. His mother came from a family of clergy. While Hammarskjöld never revealed the specifics of his spiritual path, we do know that he regularly studied the Bible and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. In his writing he calls his spiritual path “the Way.”

It is not we who seek the Way, but the Way which seeks us. That is why you are faithful to it, even while you stand waiting, so long as you are prepared, and act the moment you are confronted by its demands.

It is not sufficient to place yourself daily under God. What really matters is to be only under God: the slightest division of allegiance

*opens the door to daydreaming, petty conversations, petty malice—
all the petty satellites of the death instinct.*

*The best and the most wonderful thing that can happen to you in
this life is that you should be silent and let God work and speak.*

Few spiritual writers have been as brutally honest as Hammarskjöld about how difficult the spiritual journey can be. He admits that the primary source of the challenge he faced was himself, not outward circumstances. His candour and insight are piercing. A few examples:

*Your cravings as a human animal do not become a prayer just
because it is God whom you ask to attend to them.*

*You cannot play with the animal in you without becoming wholly
animal, play with falsehood without forfeiting your right to truth,
play with cruelty without losing your sensitivity of mind. He who
wants to keep his garden tidy doesn't reserve a plot for weeds.*

*How dead can a man be behind a façade of great ability, loyalty and
ambition! Bless your uneasiness as a sign there is still life in you.*

In the face of spiritual challenges, nothing is more essential than to persevere.

*Life only demands from you the strength you possess. Only one feat
is possible – not to have run away.*

*Forward! Thy orders were given in secret. May I always hear them –
and obey.*

Forward! Whatever distance I have covered, it does not give me the right to halt.

Forward! It is the attention given to the last steps before the summit which decides the value of all that has come before.

The longest journey is the journey inward.

Hammar skjöld grasps that the official work he has to accomplish in the world is always to be done while remembering his true purpose.

“Thy will be done” – Admittedly you have allowed self-interest to supply the energy for your little efforts to assist fate; admittedly, to others you have tried to paint these efforts in the most glowing colours – no matter, provided only that you allow the final outcome to be decided entirely over your head, in faith.

“Thy will be done” – To let the inner take precedence over the outer, the soul over the world – wherever this may lead you. And lest a worldly good should disguise itself as spiritual, to make yourself blind to the value the life of the spirit can bestow upon life in this world.

Humility is a central theme in his diary, and he offers eloquent descriptions of what humility requires, and how much he needs to learn those lessons.

To be humble is not to make comparisons. Secure in its reality, the self is neither better nor worse, bigger nor smaller, than anything else in the universe. It is – is nothing ... yet at the same time one with everything. It is in this sense that humility is absolute self-effacement... Yet for the sake of the task ... to give ... as the one who has been called to undertake it... Praise and blame, the winds of

success and adversity blow over such a life without leaving a trace or upsetting its balance. Towards this, so help me, God –

*“What?! **He** is now going to try to teach **me**?” – Why not? There is nobody from whom you cannot learn. Before God, who speaks through all human beings, you are always at the bottom class of nursery school.*

If he wants to feel God’s presence, he has to learn to forgive.

Forgiveness is the answer to a child’s dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean. The dream explains why we need to be forgiven, and why we must forgive. In the presence of God, nothing stands between Him and us – we are forgiven. But we cannot feel His presence if anything is allowed to stand between ourselves and others.

In the midst of his humbling, challenging journey, he keeps the joyful goal in mind:

*For him who has faith,
The last miracle
Shall be greater than the first.*



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