

December 2010

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
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VOLUME 6 • ISSUE TWELVE • DECEMBER 2010

At Peace in the Word of the Lord

*Gentle showers of the Lord came upon me, granting rest,
and He caused a cloud of peace to hang above my head,
which protected me at all times,
and became the source of my salvation.*

*Though all things were shaken and afraid,
smoke and judgment rising from them,
I was at peace in the Word of the Lord.*

*More than shelter was He to me,
and more than a foundation.
I was carried like a child by his mother,
and He gave me milk, the Dew of the Lord.*

*And I grew strong through His gift,
and rested in His perfection.
And I spread out my hands in the ascent of my soul,
and turned myself towards the Most High,
and was redeemed by Him.*

Hallelujah.

John Davidson, *The Odes of Solomon:
Mystical Songs from the Time of Jesus*



The Power behind the Words

If one accepts the major premise of a supreme and benevolent Creator, whose fundamental nature is love, then he can scarcely believe that Creator would leave untold billions of his children to wander around like babes in a wilderness, unguided, unenlightened and unprotected ... There simply must be Masters ... They are necessary to any rational order in this world.

Without them, there is chaos, only blind drifting, and chance. Nothing but hopes and vague uncertainties; groping speculations.

With a Great Master in India

What do we know about the Master? Most of us know very little about who he truly is. And more than likely he is nothing like what we think he is.

Today, when Baba Ji reaches out to us as a friend, perhaps we become a little familiar with him and forget his true identity. We see the man taking part in worldly activities and fun, and perhaps we forget to look past the man and remember the significance behind him, his inner form, the Shabd.

And because of our spiritual immaturity, we analyze the Master's words and his actions and we defy his instructions. We create our own interpretation not only of who and what he is, but also of how he should act and react.

This process of intellectual and mental analysis is the only way we know to create our own understanding of something before we can accept it – it's the way we have learnt to exist in this world for thousands of lives.

But the inner world is different. The Master's world is not measured or gained through mental or intellectual fine-tuning and understanding. It is received as a gift, a ray of light and understanding, shot directly into our hearts. It is an affair of the heart. We feel his truth, we know it instinctively – it is intrinsic to who we really are.

So what is the Master? He is our friend, our teacher, divine guide and incomparable example.

In *The Path of the Masters* Julian Johnson devotes an entire section to the Master. Among other things he tells us:

His mind must be of a very high type, keen, penetrating, quick of wit and sound of judgment ... His mind must have undergone the severest training and discipline ... In him all of the excellences of the civilized man reach their highest expression ... In him all the virtues recognized by the world are carried to their highest degree of perfection.

Dr Johnson also tells us that the Master stands alone; he comes and goes absolutely at his own will and asks favours of no man. He has all things at his command. If he suffers hardships or inconveniences, that is because he chooses to do so for some purpose. He is the supreme giver, not a receiver. His life and teachings are universal. He belongs to no race or time, but to all nations and all times.

Irrespective of what form or action the Master chooses to reach down to our level, so that he can interact with us at our degree of understanding, we should never lose sight of who he really is.

When we sit in front of the Master and the mind is in charge, it will analyze everything he says or does, and we will take with us our own analysis of him and what he says.

When we sit in front of him without the mind and simply enjoy him, then he speaks to our heart. In the gaps between the words he speaks are the messages we receive. In the gaps is his state of being. If we catch the gaps with an open heart we come away filled, wrapped in his fragrance.

When the Master speaks his words have significance, but they don't necessarily have the meaning we ascribe to them through our limited understanding. But because the Master has penetrated the divine mystery, whatever he tells us is very significant. It can transform us completely, if we listen to him. Whatever he says is pure gold.

Listening to him means we put aside our interpretations and our thinking and allow his words to settle in our hearts, for then we will feel the tremendous love he releases within us – in the inner silence.

When the Master speaks he is on a different plane. The distance between us and him is great. We are at the level of mind, and he is beyond mind.

The Master says more in silence than when he uses words. Just think of the power and intensity during darshan, when not a word is uttered; while we, even if we are silent, remain chattering within. When we listen to him speak we have to drop the mind and let the heart sing. Baba Ji asks us not to take notes during his talks because we miss what he says and we misinterpret. We hang on to his words and our interpretations and then we produce pages of words which we send speeding around the world via the Internet. Is this not a form of judgment of him – to do exactly the opposite of what he asks? To give in to the ego because we want to share our interpretation of him?

When we hang on to the words we lose the gaps – when his heart connects to our heart.

We have been told that the Masters never use words lightly or carelessly, but our interpretations happen quickly and somewhat carelessly. We hang on to our interpretations and often it is only

years later that the real significance behind his words rings a bell within us and we understand. Our interpretation serves only to keep his words in our memory until we can understand the true meaning of what he has told us. *We* need language, *we* need words to communicate. He doesn't need words to communicate with us. He touches our hearts and shows us the way through his inner connection to us, a far more subtle form of communication.

As Mirdad says:

When your I and mine are one, even as mine and God's are one, we would dispense with words and perfectly commune in truthful silence.

When we are busy with interpretation we can't listen because our focus is on the interpretation. When we start thinking, listening stops.

Have you ever sat near a waterfall, and just listened to it? We don't analyze what the waterfall is telling. All we do is listen; quietly we just absorb the beauty of it and its melody. We simply allow it to go deeper and deeper within us, calming us. That's why we have water fountains in our homes or gardens. We love the sound of water because it calms us, because the mind slows down as we listen to it. As everything becomes quiet within us, it's as though the Shabd enters us through the waterfall, through the serenity it creates.

So learn to listen – don't think. When we stop thinking and start to listen, that's when we open our hearts.

This, too, is what we try and achieve in meditation. What happens during bhajan? We sit quietly and listen for the Sound. The moment a thought comes into our mind the listening stops. The power and the importance of bhajan is that we learn to drop the mind and take delight in Shabd.

In *With A Great Master in India* Julian Johnson tells us that the Shabd is the Master's real form, consequently both the Shabd and the Master are the two vital factors in making the upward journey. Without them both it cannot be made.

The true form of the Master is Shabd. It is Shabd that we listen to in the waterfall, and in our meditation. It is Shabd that we listen to and Shabd that our soul delights in.



And I have felt

*A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of thought,
And rolls through all things.*

William Wordsworth, extract from
Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey

The Jewel of Love

*The Lord has made me his own
and I am drenched in his love.*

*Even were my body put to flames,
I would not flinch for a moment;
even were I to lose my life,
I would not break the bond of his love.*

*How can the jewel of love
be obtained for nothing?
In exchange for my very being
I bought Him, the Priceless One.*

*The Lord for whom Brahma sought in vain
I have found within my own body.
Says Kabir: I have become free
from the ties of hopes and desires;
I have met the Lord and am blessed
with unshakeable faith in Him .*

*The Lord has made me his own
and I am drenched in his love.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

We Are What We Think

A big tough samurai once went to see a little monk. “Monk,” he said, in a manner accustomed to instant obedience, “teach me about heaven and hell.”

The monk looked up at the mighty warrior and replied with disdain: “Teach you about heaven and hell? I could not teach you about anything! You are dirty, your blade is rusty. You are a disgrace and an embarrassment to the samurai class. Get out of my sight.”

The samurai was furious. He shook with rage, became red in the face and speechless with fury. He withdrew his sword and raised it above him, preparing to slay the monk.

“That’s hell,” said the monk softly.

The samurai was overwhelmed by the compassion and surrender of this little man, who was willing to offer his life to show him hell. He slowly put down his sword with gratitude and sudden peace.

“And that is heaven,” said the monk softly.

The follower of any spiritual path must seek to cleanse himself and approach his path with an attitude of humility. Only then is he fit to venture on to the path to God-realization.

So how then can we purify ourselves so that we can enter the court of the Lord?

Most of us have at some time in our lives had to attend a funeral. What is interesting about a funeral is that without exception, the family and friends speak of the deceased in glowing terms.

The deceased is always described as someone of unblemished character, and all his shortcomings are conveniently overlooked. You would think that death has suddenly exalted him to the status of a

saint. You would naturally assume that he would have no difficulty in entering the kingdom of heaven.

However, let's move the clock on a few weeks to when the will of the deceased is read out and it transpires that he has left his entire estate to some distant cousin nobody has ever heard of, or to some obscure charity. Then compare the comments with those expressed at the funeral!

Neither the will-reading nor the funeral speeches have made the deceased any different from what he was in life. So what happens after death? We are not spirited away to some heaven beyond the stars. We do not suddenly become saints; we do not suddenly become virtuous. We have the same intellect, personality and character traits, the same desires, mental state and emotions, the same thoughts, the same shortcomings, weaknesses and deficiencies we had on earth. The condition we will find ourselves in after death is what we have created for ourselves by our thoughts, deeds and actions while here on earth.

All that has happened is that we have cast off this physical envelope. Otherwise, we remain the same in all respects. We have not suddenly become the fountain of all knowledge and wisdom.

Those people who attend séances and try to contact Uncle Bill on the other side, don't believe that just because Uncle Bill has passed on to the astral he has suddenly become wise and knows everything. If he wasn't all that bright on the physical plane, he is not going to be that bright on the astral plane.

And as you approach your own time to go, don't expect people to mourn for you for any length of time. The world is moving at such a frenetic pace that those you have left behind will be too occupied with their worldly activities to grieve over you for long.

William Wordsworth, the English poet, put it quite beautifully when he compared death to a man climbing into his little boat, leaving

the shore, rowing out to sea. The watchers on the shore wait until his little boat is out of sight. Once the boat is no longer visible and disappears below the horizon, those on the shore turn to go. Out of sight, out of mind.

To get back to our need for transformation, when we received the gift of initiation we made a commitment. We undertook to pay the price. We agreed to begin our spiritual life in real earnest. We agreed to change our lifestyle, our behaviour, our conduct, irrespective of the obstacles which come our way. Initiation entails a complete transformation of our thoughts, words and deeds.

The way we conduct our lives has a direct bearing on the development of our spiritual nature. All spiritual teachers have said that sound moral conduct is the foundation of a spiritual life. So the saints give us moral guidelines to prevent us from falling prey to the traps and illusions of the world. They are not concerned with morality only for the sake of morality. But morality forms a foundation for our spiritual development.

Before a farmer can sow his crop, he has to prepare the ground, he has to plough the fields, he has to dig in the necessary nutrients and compost. He may have to fence off his field to prevent predators from invading it. He has to see that the crop receives an adequate water supply. Similarly, we have to prepare the soil before the seed of Nam can take root and grow. And the soil is our daily conduct – in other words, our thoughts, deeds, behaviour, how we interact with our fellow human beings. We have to ensure that this soil is properly cultivated and nurtured.

If we get down to basics, Sant Mat is a path of making changes. It is about purifying ourselves. At our present stage of development we are imperfect. We are not worthy to enter the court of the Lord. We all have our shortcomings, weaknesses and inadequacies. We are slaves of the mind and the senses.

A diamond, when it is removed from its surroundings, has to be washed and polished and cut. All the flaws have to be removed. Only then can it reflect light.

We are in a similar situation. At the moment we are stained with the karmas of innumerable incarnations. There are many habits ingrained in our psyche that are going to be difficult to remove. Everything about us is imperfect.

So when we are initiated we begin the process of transforming ourselves. It means a whole new lifestyle, a new way of life. It's like cleaning out the attic. Getting rid of all the rubbish that we have been accumulating for years.

We are what we think.

All that we are arises with our thoughts.

With our thoughts, we make our world.

Buddha

Of all the tools we have to work with in our journey through life, the most important is the mind. Everything that we do is governed by our thoughts, whether it is eating, working, or entering a relationship. We act through the body, but whatever we do is the outcome of a thought.

And if we look around us at what is going on in the world today, the turmoil, the chaos, the conflicts – all this is the outward manifestation of what is going on inside the individual mind. Everything that is happening had its genesis in a thought.

As research into the ailments and diseases that affect the body continues, more evidence is being produced that many of these illnesses have their origin in the mental and emotional state of the patient. There are many who discount this theory, but let's look at the following scenarios. You are enjoying a meal. A friend says something to you

which seems unkind. You are hurt by it. Up to that moment you have been enjoying your dinner, but now your appetite is gone.

Or a sudden emergency occurs. You stand weak and trembling with fear. You can hear your heart beating in your chest. Your blood pressure rises. You find it difficult to breathe. And yet you might still not believe that the mind has an influence over the body! If you would perfect your body, you have to guard your mind. Thoughts of malice, envy and disappointment rob the body of its health and grace, while pure thoughts have the opposite effect.

In our path of transformation much is expected of us if we hope to achieve our goals. Ultimately, to have union with God we have to become God-like. And that means absolute perfection. Not 90 percent, not 99 percent perfect but 100 percent perfect. In essence that is what Sant Mat is all about: becoming God-like.

We have perfect role models in the Masters. Let us study their lives. Let us see their purity, devotion, love and compassion, and imitate these in our own lives. It is only when we can become pure and one-pointed that we will penetrate the eye focus and experience the divine within our own being.



*Happy the man, of mortals happiest he,
Whose quiet mind from vain desires is free;
Whom neither hopes deceive, nor fears torment,
But lives at peace, within himself content.*

George Granville

The Mystery of the Mind

Kabir tells us in one of his poems:

*He who unravels the mystery of the mind,
Through the mind merges in Him
Who is the Bestower of bliss.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

This mind that constantly bedevils our efforts to lift ourselves spiritually is a mysterious thing – a complex, devious, obstructive thing. And there's absolutely no getting past it. We have to merge back into our Creator through the mind.

In one of the question-and-answer sessions with foreigners, Maharaj Charan Singh answered a whole string of questions on the mind. He made it clear that at our level the soul had no power whatsoever. The mind was calling all the shots, he said. And if the poor, browbeaten little soul was going to make any headway in its journey home, it had no choice but to work with the mind.

It was an unusual session in that many of the questions were from the same person. In fact, it was almost a long dialogue between him and Maharaj Ji. This person was finding it difficult to accept that just about everything in our lives happens under the direction of the mind: “As I walk through this world and live from day to day,” he asked, “that's mind?”

“That is mind,” Maharaj Ji said, “one hundred percent mind.”

The questioner was troubled by the idea that the soul is helpless, even with regard to meditation. “Is it mind or soul that has the willpower,” he asked, “the will to sit, to do anything . . .?”

“Mind,” Maharaj Ji said quite emphatically.

“So there’s actually no action in this world that’s from the soul?”

“No,” Maharaj Ji said. “No.”

This may well surprise us, even alarm us. We can sympathize with the man when he then asked: “So the ‘I – if we say ‘I want to meditate, I want to go home’, it’s not me?”

“It’s the mind,” Maharaj Ji told him. “Soul is part of the mind, soul is not separated from the mind, but now when you say ‘I, it is 99 per cent mind.”

“So,” the questioner asked, “the mind is stronger than the soul?”

“At this stage,” Maharaj Ji told him. “Till Trikuti. Once you go beyond mind and maya, the soul dominates the mind. Then soul is stronger than the mind.”

But exactly what is this mind that we’re up against? In *Spiritual Gems* Great Master defined mind as Kal on a small scale. “It is Kal’s agent,” he said, “attached to every soul to keep it out from the eye focus and keep it entangled in the world.”

So this is a formidable adversary that we’re dealing with. We’ve been told that it’ll take time, and a long struggle, to tame the mind.

Earlier in the session the questioner confessed his anxiety about being able to control the mind: “I’m really scared when I look at where I am today, how long it has taken me even to get here – 16 years! I don’t have a chance by the time I die to go to the eye centre.”

Then he remembered Maharaj Ji having said earlier that if the mind is always moving in one direction, that’s the way it’s going to keep going even after we die.

It seems that if we understand the nature of the mind, we’re better able to work with it. Elaborating on his previous explanation Maharaj Ji now told the man that’s what our meditation is for: that we’re training our mind to go upward – creating that inward tendency,

withdrawing it from the outside and bringing it back to the eye centre ... that is the purpose of meditation. But to train the mind to turn inward and upward means consciously working to hold the attention at the eye centre.

In *Spiritual Gems* Great Master told us it's all a matter of unwavering attention. So now, how to work at bringing the mind into focus, achieving this unwavering attention?

The book *Living Meditation* talks quite a lot about focusing the mind in meditation: "The first step in meditation," it says, "is to place simran at the eye centre. It takes a deliberate act to extract the mind from its involvement with its thoughts. We have to take our mind away from its thinking and consciously contain it in simran."

This conscious effort to focus the mind in its repetition of the words is important. We have to do it right from the start and then keep it going, one deliberate round of simran at a time. In fact, it's not difficult to keep our focus for one round of simran, and then focus on the next, and then focus on the next. For one round of simran at a time we can keep our attention there, in the darkness. At least for some time.

But we've got to watch this mind. It doesn't want to be pinned down and it's going to try to slip away. And when it does slip away we have to bring it back, and again bring it back. Bring it back where? – to that darkness in the forehead that we see when we close our eyes.

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Ji gave a simple explanation of how we should start our meditation:

When you close your eyes you are automatically here at the eye centre ... Being there, you do the simran. You also feel that your Master is there and that you are there in the darkness and that you are doing simran in the presence of the Master ... That will hold your attention there in the darkness.

In the same question-and-answer session he also told someone else – in just three words – how to focus the attention: simran and dhyān.

In our teachings the word ‘dhyān’ means contemplation, and that’s generally taken to mean gazing at the inner form of the Master. But most of us can’t see the inner form and we might find it difficult to visualize him. In that case, Maharaj Ji often told us, we could just hold our attention in the darkness and do simran, look into the darkness and imagine we are sitting in his presence. Simran and dhyān need to go together, he said, and this will help to hold the attention in the eye centre.

It becomes clear to us after some time that there is a proper way of doing meditation. We can meditate for years, even for decades, in a haphazard sort of way and just feel increasingly hopeless because we seem to be getting nowhere. Or else we can take a good hard look at how we’ve been meditating and consider whether we could do it better.

Ultimately everything depends on the Master’s grace. Without his help we can do nothing. And certainly we have absolutely no say over the results that might come from our meditation. We know that. But the fact remains that he does ask us to try. He doesn’t let us get away with acting helpless and pathetic. He expects us to make the effort and do the work. So it makes sense to try to do the work as effectively as possible.

We optimistically seem to think that just repeating the words of our simran in any haphazard way will produce some kind of magic, some kind of miraculous transformation that will change us from ugly ducklings into swans. But no. It’s not that easy.

In *Spiritual Letters* the Great Master wrote:

The names by themselves carry no value. It is their practice in the proper way that brings benefit. Names, if repeated at the centre of attention, will bring the attention in concentration. No more, no less.

It's the difference between just playing with a blunt kitchen knife, or sharpening it and then using it to chop up your onions and tomatoes. In itself the knife is potentially very useful, but it needs to be sharp and we need to use it properly. Let's have no doubt that if we do use our simran properly, marvellous things can happen. It can bring about real spiritual change in us, and eventually even rein in the power of the mind.

Then there's another important aspect to achieving any sort of focus in our meditation. We've been told that every bit of time we give to meditation is good. But if we want concentration, if we want to get any enjoyment and bliss out of our meditation, it should be done with love and devotion. Placing ourselves in his presence with a feeling of love for him – even if we can't see him – holds our attention there in the darkness. We want to be there with him because we love him. That makes us want to meditate, not just as a duty, but because we want to please him.

But even if we don't automatically feel that love and devotion, Maharaj Ji told us, mechanical meditation is still good – because in time it will bring that love and devotion in us.

There may be times now when we feel dry, when it seems we have little love for him. We may feel bad about that, and we no doubt feel helpless to do anything about it. After all, we can't just conjure up love out of the air!

But actually we can, although it might be so slowly that we don't see it happening. We're growing our love for him every time that we sit to meditate. And the time will come when we wake up to the fact that he is more important to us than anything else or anyone else in this whole world. And that will be when we've reaped the reward of detachment, the detachment that will make it possible for him to take us out of the creation forever.

The same anxious satsangi who asked most of the questions during the session was worried about not being able to clear enough karmas in this lifetime of meditation so as not to have to come back. Maharaj Ji told him that it's not the karmas that would bring him back. It's attachment – attachment to the creation.

When we become detached there necessarily has to be a change in the tendency of the mind from outward to inward. If we achieve nothing else with our meditation, if we can just start persuading the mind to look inward sometimes rather than outward, that will be a lot!

We need to make the mind our friend. And the really odd thing is, the mind also wants to become our friend. It's also being forced to go against its own inclinations because of its involvement with the senses.

Then Maharaj Ji said something really interesting. He'd been saying that everything we do and hear and see at this level is through the mind. And the man who'd been asking all the questions was perplexed. He asked: "So mind, which hates trying to sit in meditation, is forcing itself to sit in meditation?"

"That's mind," said Maharaj Ji.

"And it feels the yearning and the love – that's also the mind?"

"That's mind ... mind is also not happy in the creation, you see. Mind also gets frustrated from these sensual pleasures. It also becomes miserable after some time in the sensual pleasures. It also wants better peace, better happiness. So mind also gets peace when it goes back to its own source. That is why these pleasures are short-lived. They're not permanent."

So that's why the poor old mind is never satisfied for long with anything in this world. It knows it wants something else. And herein lies our hope of making a friend of the mind.

Through our persistent meditation it will eventually be made to realize that it can have something better. And that's what so much of

the path is all about. That's what Maharaj Ji said to the questioner: "The satsangs, the meetings, the books, the discussions, the conversations – it's all for the mind."

The person who'd been holding this dialogue with Maharaj Ji was distressed that his meditation was not producing any results that he could see – that it was not good enough to save him from having to come back here. And Maharaj Ji's reply was just wonderful. It showed that the results are there.

"Results do come and go," Maharaj Ji said. "Many times you may not see anything, but you will feel so happy, so contented, so much peace within yourself. You feel so detached from everything. You feel the effect of meditation within yourself."

"And is that enough at the time of death to take us up?" the man asked.

The answer was emphatic: "That is more than enough. Because your tendency is not towards the creation now."



*It has been well said that no man
ever sank under the burden of the day.
It is when tomorrow's burden is added to the burden
of today that the weight is more than man can bear.
Never load yourselves so, my friends.
If you find yourselves so loaded, at least remember this:
it is your own doing, not God's.
He begs you to leave the future to Him,
and mind the present.*

George MacDonald, as quoted by
Lillian Eichler Watson in *Light from Many Lamps*



Maharaj Charan Singh

Satguru, the Perfect Polisher

Maharaj Sawan Singh, affectionately remembered as the Great Master, served as the Satguru at Beas from 1903 to 1948. For close on half a century he gave satsang, and his discourses revealed his great love for the poetry of many Indian and Persian sages. The following is based on a discourse he gave on a poem by Saint Paltu, published in the book *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. 1.

*Hail to Thee, Great Polisher, all hail!
Remover of my stains, all hail!*

In this poem Saint Paltu pays tribute to his Master for helping him scrub off the karmic stains accumulated over lifetimes. These karmic stains, or debts, have settled like a coating on the soul, dulling its refulgence. In paying tribute to his Master, he not only recognizes the perfect Saint's role, but acknowledges his own helplessness.

The karmic account, owed by the soul, binds it to the creation and separates it from the Lord. This separation is the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega, of the suffering of the soul. This, in essence, is the plight of man.

*Like an ill-used vessel whose stains
are getting ever faster,
the soul sin-soiled its shine regains
polished by the Master.*

If a cook is too lazy to wash the pots after using them and then keeps using the same dirty pots, they'll eventually have to be

discarded. If the previous day's remains are never cleaned out, they'll harden into a crust, making the pots useless for cooking. And not only will the meals taste terrible, but they could poison the whole family.

The soul has reincarnated and transmigrated through millions of lives and countless species over aeons of time. This journey has not been a free ride, for under the dictates of the mind and the sway of the passions, the soul has accumulated layers of karmic rust. In every life the soul pays back some debts but creates many more. The net result is a steady build-up of karmas. If the soul could keep cleaning up its dirt, all the karmas from one lifetime would be settled in the next, but this is not the case.

Eventually, exhausted by this struggle and weighed down hopelessly by karmic debt, the soul recognizes that some intervention is required.

This intervention comes in the form of a God-man, a son of God, or a perfect mystic. It does not matter what name we give him, what country he is born in, his family history, education or profession. He has one task and one task alone: to free suffering souls from the chains or the cycle of reincarnation and transmigration.

When the soul is at its lowest ebb, when it is drowning in the ocean of maya or illusion, it cries out for help. This is an important step in the recovery phase, for it is at this time that the soul, weak and helpless, is ready to submit to the ministrations of the Master. In India it is often said, "When the *chela* is ready, the Guru appears!" That has now been our good fortune.

*The rust rubbed off – that age-old stain –
the mind defaced now looks so plain.
Hail to Thee, O unique Polisher.*

How is the rust rubbed off? Just as in any worldly contract, the agreement is made between two parties – the Master and the disciple. Each has his or her own role to play in this emancipatory drama. Each has a duty, an obligation, a commitment. They commit themselves to each other.

This massive task they undertake with all the weapons in their armoury. For, if one should turn back, they would both fail in their mission. After the ceremony of initiation, in which the secret instructions are imparted, the Master and disciple are linked in a relationship closer than lovers, closer than mother and child.

The disciple, guided by the Guru, begins his course of meditation – patiently, doggedly, humbly. The Master now plays the role of guide and counsellor.

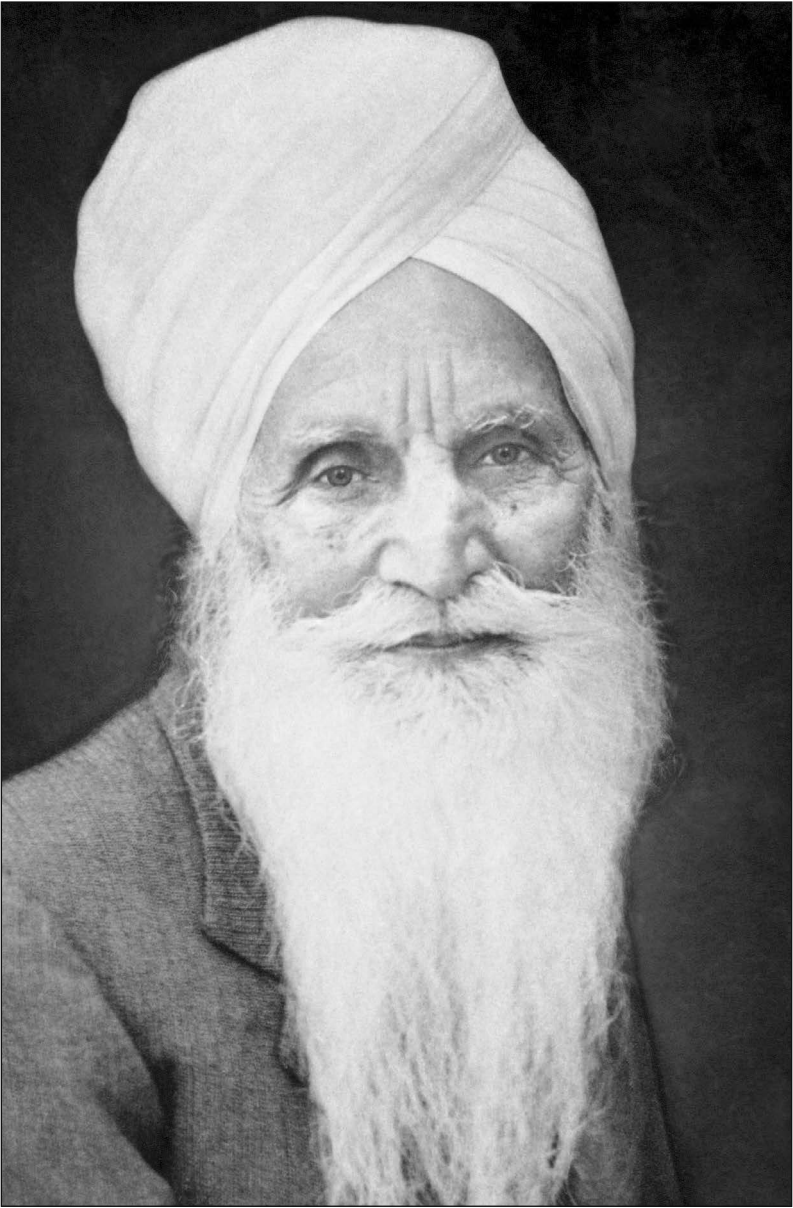
There will come a time in this meditation when the disciple's mind, polished and purified, begins to enjoy the inner bliss. At last the radiance of his beloved Master's face and the celestial sound current become his daily companions. He turns from the world and his attention becomes inward.

This is merely the beginning of this magnum opus, or great work. The defaced mind, as Paltu puts it, now finds itself pure and clean and takes no further pleasure in its erstwhile pursuits.

The soul, free and unfettered, will, in the company of the perfect Master, ride waves of pure Shabd to return to the Father. The prodigal son returns; the separation has ended as the soul merges back into its origin.

And this grateful spark of the divine flame, recognizing its true state, cries "I am, That I am!"





Maharaj Sawan Singh

No Words Can Describe Him

It was Maharaj Sawan Singh who spread the teachings of Sant Mat outside India when he initiated a handful of Americans, the first satsangis in the West. They had never seen him in the flesh. Dr Julian Johnson, who came to the Dera in 1932, wrote home to tell them about the Master.

“I wish I could really describe him to you or tell you my impressions. But did you ever try to describe a beautiful sunset? No king could be more graceful and dignified, and yet that dignity is so tempered with sweet humility that one is drawn to him. His voice is low and clear as silver bells. His smile is extremely gracious and one can see that his heart holds only lovingkindness to all ... He is to be seen and not described. Since seeing him I can think of nothing else.

“His image lingers before me all the while. I have never seen such a face before, nor imagined that there was one like it among the sons of men. If ever there was a face combining old age (he is now seventy-four years of age) with beauty, majesty and calm power, it is his. But beyond all that there is a sort of spiritual radiance which no words can describe, but which gives one a feeling of deep peace, as if the discords of earth were no longer possible in his presence. As you look into his face you lose all desire to talk, even ask questions. You simply absorb the light. His voice is vibrant with love and his smile seems as if it lights up the room.”

With a Great Master in India

Love One Another

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Bible, John 15:12

What is love? Take a look at a rose. Is it possible for a rose to say, “I shall offer my fragrance to good people and withhold it from bad people?” Or can you imagine a lamp that withholds its rays from a wicked person who seeks to walk in its light? It could do that only by ceasing to be a lamp. And observe how helplessly and indiscriminately a tree gives its shade to everyone, good and bad, young and old, high and low; to animals and humans and every living creature, even to the one who seeks to cut it down.

So this is the first quality of love: its indiscriminate character. Contemplate in astonishment the sheer goodness of the rose, the lamp, the tree, for there you have an image of what love is all about.

How does one attain this quality of love? Anything you do will only make it forced, cultivated and therefore phoney, for love cannot be forced. But there is something you can drop. Observe the marvellous change that comes over you the moment you stop seeing people as good or bad, as saints and sinners, and begin to see them as unaware and ignorant. You must drop your false belief that people can sin in awareness.

Sin occurs, not as we mistakenly think, in malice, but in ignorance. Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. To see this is to acquire the indiscriminate quality one so admires in the rose, the lamp and the tree.

Anthony de Mello, *The Way to Love*

Coal and Diamonds

A finer point that is seldom understood is that to behold the moon of truth directly, all thoughts must cease. The type of thought does not matter.

The old stone pond is completely motionless and the full moon is shining round and bright on its surface. If you drop a lump of coal or a diamond onto its quiet surface, the result is the same: the moonlight disappears.

Lumps of coal are worldly thoughts. Diamonds are spiritual thoughts. To see the light of truth directly, all thought must be suspended. The mind must be absolutely motionless.

True spirituality is not the substitution of spiritual thoughts for worldly thoughts, but the cessation of thought itself.

Positive, wholesome and spiritual thoughts definitely create a conducive atmosphere for meditation, but they must not be taken into meditation. The object of meditation is direct seeing, not thinking about seeing. In this regard the arguments of both the Atheist (coal) and the Theist (diamonds) have the same result: they disturb the essential stillness required for direct seeing. It is an argument that can never be settled because the conditions of engagement are fundamentally flawed. Those who have seen the soul know, and so do not argue.

The above analogies are complete and need to be experienced first hand. No more need be said.

Henry Mann, *Love Stream*

The Illusion of Time

Some sixty or seventy years ago a poet wrote:

*Where is the hand and the harp string, and the red fire glowing?
Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?
They have passed, like rain on the mountain,
like a wind in the meadow;
the days have gone down in the West,
behind the hills into shadow.*

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

And a contemporary poet writes:

*Like a half-remembered vision of unreality they seem,
the friends of my youth, my young lovers;
lost in time that has silently crept past.
The games of childhood, the teen-years, a vanished dream;
my life, like a story hidden between covers,
no more than a memory ... nothing will last.*

Let us cast our minds back over a period of time – say ten years. Not even a drop in the ocean in the context of eternal time, but a reasonable slice of our current lives. Where were we and what were we doing ten years ago? Now we have to try hard to remember. It is over, it has passed, like rain on the mountain, as the poet says, like a wind in the meadow.

Some dates stick and are remembered: one's wedding day, the birth of a child, the death of a dear one. A hundred years from now

not one of these dates will be remembered by anybody or be of any importance whatsoever.

My mother-in-law gave me a little round doily, a crocheted milk cover, which had been made by her mother. I recently gave it to *my* daughter-in-law who loves old things. She wanted to have it framed, so she asked the name and dates of birth and death of the woman who had made it.

This lady, Martha Maria Grobbelaar, had lived during the late 1800s and early 1900s. My mother-in-law had told me that she could remember as a very young child riding with her mother and younger brother on an ox-wagon, piled with some of their belongings, fleeing from approaching English soldiers during the South African War.

All this set me thinking about this brave woman whose little piece of handicraft now hangs on a wall in a frame with her name and the dates of her life on it. Who was she, where did she live and die, whom did she love? Was she a happy person? She certainly seems to have had courage.

But it is all over, nobody remembers her any more. It is all part of *maya* – the illusion that seems so real and tangible. It is difficult to understand and accept, unless we look at something like the forgotten life of Martha Grobbelaar, and it brings home to us with sharp impact how time passes and everything glides into history.

And let's look at history! We learn about the Incas of South America; the Pharaohs, mighty rulers of the ancient civilization of Egypt; the Romans, trying to conquer the world. But what is left except their history?

Like a story hidden between covers, the modern poet says, no more than a memory. And even that will fade.

In *With the Three Masters*, Volume II, Rai Sahib Munshi Ram writes:

Huzur has been in bed for the last six months. Pakistan has been created. People have started looking for their lost boys and girls and other relatives in all possible ways. They advertise in papers, beg and knock at the doors of officers and, knowing full well that life is not safe in Pakistan, some have gone there to try to find or meet their relatives. But all these relations are temporary, and ultimately have to be left behind in this world.

Either we ourselves will go away and leave them behind, or they will leave us and go away. Despite all this, how active and busy the people are in searching for these temporary relatives.

But how many are there who search with all their heart and soul for God, who is the Father of all and with whom our relation is everlasting? If we were to search for God with the same longing and agony with which people are now looking for their lost relatives, then God who is omnipotent and is watching everything, would definitely come before us.

This entry is dated 31 March 1948. It was only a few days before the Great Master's soul left his body to go home, on 2 April.

On the 6th Munshi Ram wrote:

Alas! In the twinkling of an eye the company of my Beloved has come to an end. I had not yet seen the face of the flower (my Beloved) to my heart's content, and the spring is over.

Many of us have experienced that feeling of loss and desolation and unreality on receiving similar news.

But even the Masters have a specific time-span that they spend here. And this brings us back to the temporary nature of this existence. We try to remember where we were ten years ago. Let us rather

consider how quickly those years have flown by – and that the only thing of permanence in our life is our Master and the fact that he accepted us for initiation. The Master is the only constant we can cling to.

Do we really want to suffer the illusion of another lifetime? How many thousands, perhaps millions of lives, have we had? We have lived through 8,400,000 species, at least once. In one lifetime after another, we have suffered agony, sorrow, pain and loss, experienced joy, happiness and sweetness, but all of these have been short-lived.

At last it is drawing to a close. Why prolong it by half-hearted attempts to reach our real goal? We should work with total dedication at becoming true disciples, with no other desire than to obey our Master's instructions and live in his will.

We can do it. But if we do not make the effort, if we do not desire this with every breath, there is no guarantee that we will not have to come back.

Is the illusion so powerful that the Master and the path we follow become only secondary? We're here now; we have to live through this lifetime, perform our worldly duties, even enjoy worldly pleasures. But let us look at our priorities.

We have two types of activities that we must perform. We have to do what is required of us to complete this lifetime – and we have to do what is required to stay focused on the real thing, the path on to which we have been initiated.

In *Divine Light* Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

Who or what is in love with and attached to the objects of the world? It is our mind. Therefore, if there is any obstacle between the soul and the Lord, it is truly our mind.

A little further on he continues:

What do we mean by the term: controlling the mind? Just as the soul is of the essence of the Lord, so is the mind no mean power. It is of the essence of Brahm, and its origin is in Trikuti (the second spiritual region). But alas! Caught in the network of illusion, it has forgotten its place of origin. The soul has become its hand-maid, and both are tied together, as it were, in a knot. So long as the soul does not give up the company of the mind, it can never know itself.

How can we know ourselves? At this stage, we intellectually accept what the Masters tell us, that we are part of God, that we are a drop of the ocean of divinity. They tell us we have the potential to be God, we can merge back into Him and become one with Him.

In truth we have no concept of what this means, because at this stage we cannot imagine God's greatness. So until we reach that stage, we do not know the greatness that is hidden within ourselves, we do not understand our potential. We accept what our Master tells us, but we do not *know*. That will only happen when we give up the company of the mind. And that can be achieved only through meditation.

So, that is the main object to aim for. We must fight the mind, we must get it under control. Soami Ji says in *Sar Bachan Poetry* that no one can describe the glory of the moment when the mind is still and the soul is in a state of complete absorption.

If we spend our lifetime trying to achieve this, with all our heart and soul, even if we don't succeed, it will be a lifetime well spent – because we will have moved that much closer to freedom from this illusion, forever!



Don't Despair

Whether an initiate of one year or an initiate of fifty, there are times when we all need a bit of encouragement.

We may be trying our best, and yet things still go wrong. We may despair when we realize that unintentionally we've broken our vows ... again. Perhaps we've neglected our meditation, or even strayed from the path. It's not uncommon to hear a satsangi confess: "I feel unworthy – how could I ever have deserved initiation?"

We love our Master and yet we constantly seem to fail him. We may wonder then whether it's worth it to keep trying – when the path seems so difficult at times and we remain under the sway of the mind and the five passions.

But giving up is never and has never been an option. When we've been given the enormous blessing of initiation, that membership is for life – for all eternity. No matter what the initiate does, or doesn't do, the Master will not let him unsubscribe from this club.

All through the good and the not so good times, the ups and downs of our meditation, times when we are full of hope and zeal and times when we despair, the love of the Master never leaves us. He tells us that once he has initiated a soul, he never leaves that soul. The person may think he has resigned, but sooner or later the Master will bring him back.

In *Thus Saith the Master* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

The Master initiates so many people. Some will go off the path, or will be led astray, but the Master does not leave them at all. He is responsible for taking the initiated soul back to the Father ... Once Master initiates a person, he never leaves that disciple.

And a little further:

Initiation is never wasted. Even if the disciple goes astray, ultimately he will again come back to the path and will again be led by the Master. The Master will not leave the disciple. He is responsible to take that soul back to the Father.

The Masters tell us that generally once we have been initiated, there'll be no more than four lives – and possibly only the rest of this present life – before we leave this material plane forever. But they also tell us that no soul gets initiated unless it has the capacity to reach the ultimate goal in that very lifetime.

Baba Ji keeps telling us we just have to 'channelise'. We have the capacity, he says, we have the strength and the power. We just have to channelise it. And we have to persevere.

So why wait? Why do we want to prolong the agony of living in an alien place where the soul will never be happy, will never feel at home?

Why do we keep seeking fulfilment in worldly pursuits, which are always only temporary? Why do we listen to the mind when it whispers false inducements of what might be achieved – when we know this whole creation is an illusion? Why do it in two, three or four lives when it can be done in one?

We are going to do it. It is guaranteed. What does it matter if we feel that by now we could have done so much more, should have been so much more devoted? It is never too late to start over. The Master is waiting for us to make that decision. He has never left us. His love has been there all along.

There is no turning back – and let us thank him for that. For we are weak, struggling souls, battling to turn the inclination of our

mind and senses around, away from the direction they've followed since we came down into this creation. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail. It's no easy task, but he says we can do it. He has shown us the way. He has given us the method, and he is with us always – even when we slip and fall.

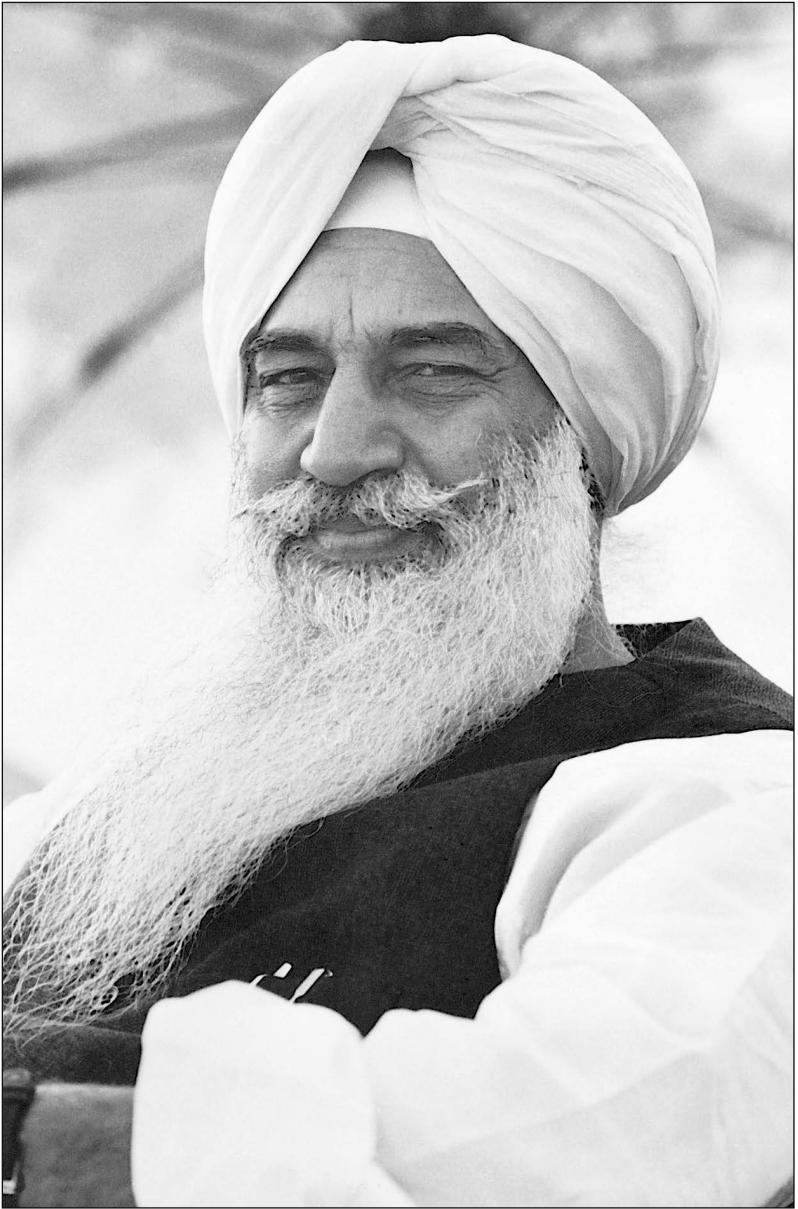
In *Light on Sant Mat* Maharaj Charan Singh makes this very clear:

Once a Master has accepted a disciple he never leaves him, but is ever ready to guide him on the path. He does much more for us than the human mind can comprehend.



*Come, come, whoever you are,
wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.
This is not a caravan of despair.
It doesn't matter that you've
broken your vow a thousand times.
Still come, and yet again, come.*

*Rumi: The Inner Treasure,
rendered by Jonathan Star*



Maharaj Charan Singh

The Phoenix

The phoenix is a unique mythical bird. Legend has it that it can carry very heavy weights and its tears have the power to heal.

When it reaches the end of its life, tattered and weary, it bursts into flame and is reborn out of its own ashes with renewed youth and vitality; glorious and magnificent, ready to start the whole process all over again.

A little bit like our glorious and immortal soul.

The Shabd Masters explain to us that at this level of creation there are 8,400,000 different species into which the soul can be reborn. We are told that at the end of each life the soul is judged and sent into a new body according to its karmas from past lives. The Masters tell us that there is no escaping this endless cycle of birth and rebirth.

There is nothing glorious, though, about the condition of the soul trapped within the web of mind and illusion. The last thing we want is to be reborn, like the phoenix, life after life after life. The idea is horrifying because most of us have become world-weary. The glitz and the glamour have faded. The fairground has lost its allure.

Now we find ourselves poised at the ending of one year, with a new year about to rise out of its ashes, and we have a golden opportunity to review the past year and think about the coming year. What kind of bird would we like to see emerge from the ashes of 2010 – a crow or a swan? What sort of egg did we lay in 2010?

As initiates of a perfect living Master, the scenario that faces our souls is happily different from that of the mythical bird. The phoenix might be called the top of the bird kingdom because of its magical powers and potential. The Masters explain that the same magical power and potential resides within the human form.

The human form alone, out of all the 8,400,000 species – including gods, angels and phoenixes – has the potential to leave the wheel of eighty-four forever. The way off the wheel is to be found only within the human body, through the gift of initiation by a perfect Master.

So it is no small thing to be born into a human body – it is not to be taken lightly. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

It is only in human life that liberation is possible, because in any other form we are not endowed with discrimination. It is only as a human being that we can follow a Teacher, understand the doctrine and practise it, and thus secure our liberation.

This is an opportunity, a privilege that is granted to us, but the privilege also carries a responsibility. To what extent have we taken advantage of this great privilege offered to us?

Light on Sant Mat

Privilege, responsibility, purpose – these are words frequently used by the Masters when talking about human life. A life spent in anything other than pursuing the goal of reuniting with God is wasted. We must make the most of the privilege, accept the responsibility it carries and work to show our gratitude.

The Masters tell us that there is one place only where we will find God, and that is within our own body. They also tell us that this voyage of discovery cannot be accomplished alone.

The soul needs a guide, a teacher – someone who has already successfully completed the journey and reunited his soul with God. Such a teacher is the perfect living Master. Without his gift of initiation the journey cannot be made.

There it is. We are human beings, we have been initiated, we have been given the gift of returning home. What are we doing with it all?

What did we do with this gift during 2010? And what do we intend doing with it in 2011?

We have that faculty of discrimination that separates us from all other species. So let's use that faculty to assess where we stand on the threshold of another year.

If, at the end of the year, we can look back on 2010 and find it blemish-free, morally, emotionally and spiritually – congratulations! (But maybe just do a quick check on the ego if that's your assessment!) However, there may be room for improvement. If so, where?

Start with the four vows we take at initiation – after all, for most of us they are what Sant Mat is all about. How meticulously and scrupulously are we trying to follow them?

Think about vegetarianism – more difficult now than it used to be, but it's still necessary to be constantly vigilant. One must never become complacent with this vow – ingredients must be checked constantly and then rechecked.

Avoiding alcohol and habit-forming drugs is for many of us the easiest of the vows, but even here we must be vigilant. Never assume that restaurant food is alcohol-free – chefs just love to slip wine into sauces.

Vow number three – to lead a pure, moral life and earn our own honest living – probably gives most of us plenty of room to clean up our act. There is a lot involved in this third vow. For instance, all living creatures contain a spark of divinity – every spark comes from the same primal light. If we are all from the same source, then we must approach all life with tact, tolerance, patience, kindness, honesty and compassion.

It's easy to say, we must live this pure moral life – but why? Why must we practice tolerance and kindness constantly? Why must we learn to think of the Master always before we speak and act?

The reason is because only in the human form can we discriminate. It is by exercising this uniquely human faculty, simultaneously with our search for God-realization, that we will become truly human and begin to know our true self, our soul-self.

Thinking back on 2010, how hard did we try at this “being human” business – really try? Are we going to drag the same tired old emotional and physical reactions with us into 2011 or could we do a phoenix-act here and aim to use 2010 as our self-improvement year – the year of discrimination? Every new day offers a chance to strive harder; to be a better creature than we were the day, the month and the year before.

Which brings us to the fourth vow, meditation. Of course, we know that ultimately everything on the path of Sant Mat revolves around meditation. It’s a package deal. Meditation helps us exercise discrimination, making us pleasanter, finer human beings. And becoming even a little bit more human makes us want to meditate and draw closer to the Master and God-realization.

But it is easier said than done, isn’t it? Still, on the threshold of a new year would we not like to rise out of 2010 with the glorious aim of devotion to our Master? If we want to make 2011 the “year of devotion to Master” – the “year of discrimination” – then we may need to take a very close look at ourselves and see where there is room for improvement.

Let’s consider the simran aspect for a moment. Simran is not only the first step in meditation, it is also our minute-by-minute connection to the Master.

When we choose to think of our five words before any other thought, word or deed, we are exercising our faculty of discrimination. Simran, throughout the day, is not only our route to the Master, but our route to becoming human and reaching

an important goal on our journey home – self-realization. So, how diligently do we use this tool?

It's not an onerous task. It's simple, requires no physical effort, no physical sacrifice. It just requires a constant and determined awareness, a choosing. And it can accomplish so much. As we aim for our spiritual objectives – the third eye, the Master's Radiant Form, God-realization – we will find real change happening within ourselves. A phoenix whose characteristics are contentment, joy, peace, compassion and tolerance is waiting to be born, every day, when we choose our simran.

Then, what about attending satsang and reading Sant Mat literature? These are aids our Master gives us to help us keep our faces turned towards God, fences around the crop of our meditation. Perhaps there is room for improvement here: trying harder to get to satsang; making a deliberate choice to read from a Sant Mat book every day?

If we want this to be the year of devotion, then we must put Master first – in thought, word and deed. There is no better way than through meditation.

Every morning the Master's love is the magic that allows us a chance at a new birth – a new start, a new effort at our meditation. This business of getting up at three or four in the morning is something of a miracle. Every morning he gives us this golden opportunity to take a step, no matter how small and faltering it may be, in his direction. To step in the Master's direction is as glorious and miraculous as the phoenix rising from the ashes.

True, one may not feel at all glorious at the end of the meditation. One may feel dejected, frustrated, sad and lonely. That is the mind and the ego trying to make a worldly judgment on a spiritual activity and lead us astray. That must not influence us.

Every attempt at meditation is a miracle, an effort to move away from the world towards the Lord. It is not for us to judge our efforts. We should try to appreciate the gift that each session represents in the history of our soul.

Our soul longs to return home. Our Master gives us a new chance every day to take a step in that direction, towards home, towards becoming a human being, towards fulfilling the purpose of the human form.

So here we are, not knowing when we will be taking the last of our numbered breaths. Maybe we should ask ourselves: What did we do with the precious gift of yesterday, and what will we do with this day?



Think often of how swiftly all things pass away and are no more: the works of Nature and the works of man. The substance of the Universe, matter, is like unto a river that flows on forever. All things are not only in a constant state of change, but they are the cause of constant and infinite change in other things. Upon a narrow ledge thou standest! Behind thee, the bottomless abyss of the Past! In front of thee, the Future that will swallow up all things that are Now! Over what things, then, in this present life wilt thou, O foolish man, be disquieted or exalted making thyself wretched; seeing that they can vex thee only for a time, a brief, brief time!

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Small Steps and Giant Leaps

Last year saw the fortieth anniversary of the moon landing. Looking back on that event might lead us to think about small steps and giant leaps.

Here are three small reflections on the meditative life that have defied the gravity of passing years and remain inspirational to this particular would-be astronaut.

It was many years ago at the Dera, with Professor Bhatnagar expounding on a poem by one of the saints, while Maharaj Charan Singh sat next to him. Professor was explaining that before you sit in meditation you need to make an agreement with your mind.

Meditation is not a time for thinking or for allowing any thoughts in, he said. Put your mind in the left-luggage area. It will be kept safe for you while you are sitting. Your job now is to do simran and only simran.

When you finish sitting, go back to the left-luggage and reclaim your mind again. No harm has come to it, and if you follow this advice you will have enjoyed a holiday from yourself, in Master's exclusive company.

The image that has stuck in mind is that of a crowded Indian railway station, with somebody carrying a huge bedroll on his head, checking it into the left-luggage area and getting a ticket to reclaim it later.

The leap was this: Meditation is simran time, not thinking time – nor list-making, day-dreaming, worrying or snoozing time.

A second reflection is from the time Maharaj Charan Singh was giving satsang to Westerners in Delhi and Bombay, while the Punjab was off limits because of civil disturbances. At that time there was a

pop hit called “Don’t worry, be happy”. Somebody got up and asked the Master if the message of the song was right. He said yes, it was right, because if you don’t worry, you are automatically happy.

Lightbulb moment: Does the Master mean that I don’t have to search for happiness – just stop worrying and happiness will be there anyway? It seems so, and has seemed so ever since.

The image accompanying the message was the beautiful Master on an informal dais, patiently explaining the deepest truths in such simple words, with so much reassurance and lovingkindness.

A third small step may yet become a leap. It was not all that long ago at satsang. This time it was somebody recalling words from Baba Ji, who said: Give up separation.

It is not difficult to visualize him engaging fully with a questioner, taking this dialogue from the particular to the universal.

Does the Master mean that spiritual separation is not a condition we have inherited but a choice we have made?

At some level, have we settled for separation, and do we resist our soul’s longing for reunion? Are we saboteurs of our own hearts?

We can’t simply choose to cease being separate, can we? Don’t know yet. But the question is swishing around the brain.

This is how these small steps seem to work, attracting, then infiltrating the mind, seeping into the corners like water finding its level. One or two may become giant leaps, ideas that motivate one’s whole life and lead to inner action.

Our scientists may have landed somebody on the moon. But perhaps it’s more about the moon in the man than the first man on the moon.



Happiness Is Relative

A disciple was complaining to his Master:

“I am in desperate need of help, or I’ll go crazy. We’re living in a single room: my wife, my children and my in-laws. So our nerves are on edge, we yell and scream at each other. The room is a hell.”

“Do you promise to do whatever I tell you?” said the Master gravely.

“I swear I shall do anything.”

“Very well. How many animals do you have?”

“A cow, a goat and six chickens.”

“Take them all into the room with you. Then come back after a week.”

The disciple was appalled. But he had promised to obey! So he took the animals in.

A week later he came back, a pitiable figure, moaning, “I’m a nervous wreck. The dirt! The stench! The noise! We’re all on the verge of madness!”

“Go back,” said the Master, “and put the animals out.”

The man ran all the way home. And came back the following day, his eyes sparkling with joy.

“How sweet life is! The animals are out, the home is a paradise – so quiet and clean and roomy!”

Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom*

Book Review



Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings

BY SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA

PUBLISHER: FORGOTTEN BOOKS, 2008 (FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1898)

ISBN: 140674817X

ALSO AVAILABLE FREE AT WWW.FORGOTTENBOOKS.ORG

Ramakrishna (1833-86), born of a Brahmin family in a poor village in Bengal, became a Hindu sage renowned worldwide as a mystic and teacher. Despite little or no education, Ramakrishna managed to acquire a profound knowledge of the Puranas, Vedas, and Hindu epics. His religious knowledge was expanded by direct experience from trance, vision, and meditation. Consequently, many of his contemporaries felt Ramakrishna's life and teachings conveyed the essence of the Hindu religion.

Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings was published two years after Ramakrishna's demise. In this book of only 172 pages, the editor and translator Max Mueller covers three important aspects of his life's work. First he describes Ramakrishna's life and cultural background, introducing the sages and personalities who influenced his work. Next he briefly explains Vedanta and Hindu religion to give a context to Ramakrishna's spontaneous experience of spiritual reality. Finally, taking up about half of the book, he presents in translation 350 sayings of Ramakrishna.

These sayings are pithy and profound:

Where does the strength of an aspirant lie? It is in his tears. As a mother gives her consent to fulfil the desire of her importunately weeping child, so God vouchsafes His weeping son whatever he is crying for.

Soft clay admits of forms, but burnt clay does not. So those whose hearts are consumed with the desire of worldly things cannot realize higher ideas.

As persons living in a house infested with venomous snakes are always alert and cautious, so should men living in the world be always on their guard against the allurements of lust and greed.

When does a man get his salvation? When his egotism dies.

As dry leaves are blown about here and there by the wind, and have no choice of their own, and make no exertion: so those who depend upon God move in harmony with his will, and put forth no effort of their own.

Ramakrishna's life story is one of continual spiritual quest and inquiry. His father told of a prophetic dream in which Vishnu announced he would be born as his son. As a young child, Ramakrishna was able to memorize the whole of a religious opera – acting, music, plot – after only one hearing. He was precocious in the arts, having a fine voice, musical sense, and an ability to draw and sculpt religious idols.

A pilgrim road passed near to his village. Young Ramakrishna would often be found there talking to religious mendicants. Once he was walking the fields on a clear blue-skied day when overhead passed a flight of white cranes. The dazzling colours and contrasts induced the first of many trances throughout his life.

In his teens he went to live in a temple to the goddess Kali in Dakshinesvara, a village north of Calcutta where his eldest brother had been appointed a priest. Ramakrishna soon became a recognized worshipper of Kali, whom he regarded as his mother and the mother of the universe. He communed with Kali through singing and weeping, often for hours at a time. Eventually, such practices led to complete loss of consciousness of the external world. Some saw him as mad, others as totally devoted to God.

Seeking to restore him to normalcy, his family got him married to a girl named Saradamani Devi. But the intensity of his devotion only increased a thousand-fold. The best physicians in Calcutta could not cure his apparent madness. It was really the intense pain of separation.

“Mother, oh my mother, another day has gone and still I have not found thee.” Then, one day as he was contemplating suicide, Kali appeared to him in a vision that was repeated throughout his life.

At times, Ramakrishna expressed doubt that these visions were true. He would say, “I would believe them to be true if such and such a thing happened,” and the desired event would take place. As the visions and trances grew longer, he discontinued his duties at the temple. Then began a twelve-year period of ascetic exercises. As he put it later, “a great religious tornado, as it were, raged within me during these years and made everything topsy-turvy.”

During this period, he came under the care and direction of several impressive individuals. “About this time,” he said, “I felt such a burning sensation all over my body; I used to stand in the waters of the Ganges, with my body immersed up to the shoulders and a wet towel over my head all throughout the day, because it was insufferable. Then a Brahmin lady came and cured me of it in three days.” This extraordinary, nameless Bengali woman stayed with Ramakrishna a number of years, teaching him many forms of yoga.

Ramakrishna next came under the influence of a philosopher named Tota-puri. Seeing Ramakrishna sitting one day by the Ganges, Tota-puri recognized him as a great yogi and initiated him into the highest truths of Vedanta meditation. Remarkably, Ramakrishna quickly attained the highest state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. “My boy,” said Tota-puri, “what I realized after forty years of hard struggle, you have arrived at in three days. I dare not call you my disciple; henceforth I will address you as my friend.”

For eleven months Tota-puri stayed with Ramakrishna. When he departed, Ramakrishna said about this part of his life, “I remained for six months in that state of perfect union which people seldom reach, and if they reach it, they cannot return to their individual consciousness again. Their bodies and minds could never bear it.”

This experience was followed by severe dysentery, the cure for which returned Ramakrishna to normal consciousness. Ramakrishna’s religious zeal then took him in a new direction. He embraced the Vaishnava ideal

of love of God, throwing himself into the practice of many religions, including Islam and Christianity. Visions and conversations with each religion's founder would follow. Ultimately, Ramakrishna came to the conclusion that all religions were true, but each only took account of one aspect of eternal existence, knowledge and bliss.

“When the rose is blown and sheds its fragrance all around, the bees come of themselves. The bees seek the full-blown rose, and not the rose the bees.” This statement was borne out in Ramakrishna's own experience. People from all walks of life came to partake of his initiation and teachings, day and night. When asked to take rest he would reply, “I would suffer willingly all sorts of body pains, and death also, a hundred thousand times, if by so doing I could bring one single soul to freedom and salvation.”

By 1885, Ramakrishna had developed a throat condition that soon turned cancerous. He was advised to keep to silence, but the throngs of people that followed him everywhere made that impossible. He remained cheerful and always kept trying to communicate. He died on August 16, 1886, at age 53.

Mueller thanks Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) for providing the text of the sayings he translates, but otherwise scarcely mentions him. In later years, Vivekananda's lectures, literary work and influence on the understanding of Indian mysticism extended the reach of Ramakrishna's work throughout the world.

For the student of Indian mysticism, the life and teachings of Ramakrishna should not be overlooked. His experience demonstrates the extraordinary features and power of inner spiritual transformation, including much that seems bizarre or incomprehensible. His validation of many diverse spiritual and religious practices made him for many an icon of modern Hinduism.

Friedrich Max Mueller (1823–1900) was a German philologist and orientalist. He is considered one of the founders of the Western academic field of Indian studies and the discipline of comparative religion. The massive 50-volume work *Sacred Books of the East* was prepared under his direction.



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