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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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A Perfect Devotee

*One who has purged himself of ego
Is like a wish-granting gem.
He slanders nobody, hurts nobody,
Thinks ill of nobody –
His mind is as clear as crystal.
He need not go to holy places
For he is the holiest place of all.
The world comes to him,
And the sight of him gives deliverance.
Does one whose mind is pure
Need beads or any outward adornments?
He sings forever in praise of the Lord
So that his mind is filled with happiness.
He has given his body, mind and wealth
To the Lord and has no desires left.
Such a one is more precious
Than the philosopher's stone, says Tuka.
How can his greatness be described?
Tukaram, The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*



A Timeless Message

Ramdas, one of the poet mystics of Maharashtra, lived in the seventeenth century. The spiritual message he shared with seekers was the same timeless one expounded by all Masters throughout the ages. These are his last instructions to his disciples, which are as relevant today as four centuries ago:

Do not think much of your bodily wants. Have satsangs with devotees; keep the image of the Lord in your heart; repeat the Name of the Lord always. Annihilate lust, greed, anger, hatred, and egoism. See the Lord in all creatures. Love all. Feel his presence everywhere. Live for him alone. Serve him in all beings. Make total and unreserved surrender unto him. You will always live in him alone. You will attain immortality and eternal bliss.

Many Voices, One Song

Does this not sum up the path of Sant Mat? Whether we talk of the saints of Maharashtra, like Ramdas or Tukaram, or more contemporary Masters such as Maharaj Sawan Singh and Maharaj Charan Singh, their message is the same: through the grace of the Lord one is initiated by a perfect Master. Then the disciple puts in maximum effort in all aspects of life, and eventually the final spiritual goal of reunion with the Lord will be achieved.

Let's consider Ramdas' instructions and promises in more detail. Firstly, he says: "Do not think much of your bodily wants." No true spiritual Master ever advocates completely ignoring the body's needs. However, we shouldn't become obsessed with its wants. The body has a definite sell-by date – it will decay, age and perish in spite of all our efforts. It is, however, a gift from God and therefore we must take

sufficient care of it; because it is only while in the human body that we can seek reunion with God, a reunion of the soul with the source. If we see it in that light, it might help us keep our attitude towards its wants in perspective. Our focus must be on the inner self, the soul.

Then Ramdas tells us to “Have satsang with devotees”. We all know how important satsang is and keeping like-minded company. We are easily led astray when we move out of the field of Sant Mat. The Master often refers to satsang as the fence around the crop. We need to immerse ourselves within the crop as much as possible. That’s meditation. Satsang helps retain its benefits, and the company of devotees keeps us focused in the right direction.

Ramdas goes on to tell us: “Keep the image of the Lord in your heart” and “repeat the Name of the Lord always”. These instructions are crucial for us if we wish to please our Master and fulfil our initiation vows. To some extent, keeping those promises presents most of us with difficulties in one way or another every day. Repeating our simran can help us overcome these challenges.

But this help is only the beginning of what constant simran can and should mean in our lives. Simran is how we can try to obey Ramdas’ instruction to keep the image of the Lord in our hearts. Keeping constant simran going throughout the day is probably our greatest spiritual challenge at this stage and, along with meditation and the Master’s grace, it will help us reach the eye centre where the real, inner journey will begin.

Ramdas then tells us to annihilate the five passions: pride, anger, greed, attachment and lust. What a tall order! Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that the five perversions are all expressions of ego, and what a battle it is to rid ourselves of them. Even identifying them within ourselves can be difficult, because we are not always prepared to look at ourselves dispassionately and admit we have faults. So the first step in this battle is introspection and a good dollop of self-honesty.

There is a way to begin to get a controlling grip on the passions, and that is meditation. Meditation can make us calm and clear enough to begin a little introspection. Obviously nothing can be accomplished without our Master's grace, but our meditation will definitely help in this battle against the passions, provided we are sincere, devoted and never give up.

Ramdas then encourages us to develop an awareness of and an all-consuming love for the Lord. He tells us that we should "See the Lord in all creatures. Love all. Feel his presence everywhere. Live for him alone. Serve him in all beings."

All the mystics urge us to strive to develop an attitude of love that will eventually allow us to see the Lord in all creatures. It is, after all, a spark or drop from the same ocean of love that enlivens all creation. When this happens we will feel his presence everywhere and love all. What can we practically do to move towards this state of mind and level of awareness?

Firstly we must believe that Master, in his Shabd form, is always with us. We don't have to see actual air molecules or atoms to believe that air is all around us and sustains our physical bodies at all times. Why should we have any difficulty believing that our Master's Shabd form is with us all the time? Meditation, of course, is the practical thing that we can do to help us work towards a state of constant awareness of him and love for his creation. To have an intellectual belief is one thing, but to turn it into a reality within our lives is another. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Just attend to meditation quietly. And that will help you in every way. Meditation creates love, strengthens love, helps the love to grow to the extent that you become one with the Father.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

And then, only meditation and constant simran, along with his grace, are going to help us fulfil Ramdas' last instruction: "Make total and unreserved surrender unto him."

For most of us, total surrender is just a concept and we don't understand what it actually means. Surrender is all about living in the Lord's will, or specifically for us, living in the Master's will. It means that we must be absolutely obedient to our Master's every wish and command. Surrender is, in fact, what will happen if we should ever be able to fulfil Ramdas' earlier instructions. If we can go beyond our body's wants, practise constant simran, become aware of Master's presence, vanquish the passions and see the Lord in all, then the end result will be a state of surrender.

Others have achieved this exalted state of surrender. It can be done. Living completely and utterly in our Master's will must bring such security, peace, contentment and joy. Why not allow him to be in charge? After all – he is!

We know what our Master's will is for us. We must follow our four vows faithfully, live a Sant Mat way of life, keep our simran going and follow his example in thought, word and deed. Why is he here in the flesh if not to provide us with a living, breathing example that we can follow in all aspects of our life? What will happen if we really and truly apply ourselves to making discipleship our most important task? What will happen if we seriously apply ourselves to meditation?

Ramdas tells us. He says: "You will always live in him alone. You will attain immortality and eternal bliss."



Our Final Production

We have often heard Maharaj Charan Singh refer to this world as a stage. In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. 1, he says:

This world is a vast theatre. We all come to this stage to play our assigned roles – as husband and wife, as son and daughter, as creditors and debtors, but after the part is played, we make our exit as the actors do in the play. This central point must be fully grasped.

In other words, we are in this world for a short while acting out a part, whether light-hearted or dramatic, and we shouldn't take it too seriously – it is simply a play. This is, of course, much easier said than done. However, when our emotions turn our lives upside down, it helps to stand back a little – in the wings – and watch the karmic play unfold.

The production of a play takes a lot of hard work and hours and hours of rehearsals – a lot of repetition. There are many people involved: the director, the actors and a variety of backstage folk. There may even be more backstage parts, of whom the audience is unaware, than there are players on the stage. Without this background support, the play would never come to fruition.

At the time of our birth the stage of our destiny is set. The roles have all been cast: from the main actors to the least important backstage support. Everything is ready for the production to begin. When the curtain call is made and the curtains swing open, the karmic clock starts ticking. And we have no way of knowing just how long it will tick.

As the play progresses, our destiny is revealed. Various characters enter the stage of our life. They play their part, whether big or small, and then disappear again into the shadows. When the final curtain falls, our lives – like a theatre production – come to an end, each actor having played his or her allotted role. The difference is that there is no swinging open of the curtains to take a bow, no standing ovation from the audience, no bouquets of flowers. The remaining actors simply move on to the next scene in their own productions.

These individual productions are the way we act out our destiny, with what we imagine are winning performances, as we compete for the best reviews. But chasing the best roles in our acting career could prove to be simply another entrapment, tying us to the great play of karma.

In the case of most people, the director of this vast play we call creation is the power known as Kal. He was given the responsibility of managing our karmas by the Lord. The production manager is our own mind, conditioned to perform according to our karmic responsibility. So while our ego suggests that we are delivering a great performance, the reality is that we are simply going through the motions as dictated by Kal, and enforced by his agent – our own very dutiful mind.

When karmic debt is created, it must be paid. The responsibility of administering the karma and ensuring just payment lies with Kal, who like a judge, delivers our sentence in line with the actions we have created. He performs this duty most efficiently.

Fortunately, there is a way of escaping this ongoing cycle of karmic destiny and that is to meet a living Master – one who is sent to liberate us from this creation. But, for this to happen our good karma must be greater than our bad. The supreme reward of good karma is our meeting with the Master, because it is the Master who will rescue us from the trap of karmic law. Not only that, but in *The Path of the Masters* we are given the following assurance:

The very moment a person is initiated by a (true) Guru, that is, becomes his disciple, all his karmic accounts are transferred to the Guru's keeping, automatically passing from the hand of the negative power. ... His destiny in this life and in the next rests entirely in the hands of his Guru. The Master then administers the karma of his disciple just as he thinks best for the disciple.

We still have to go through that destiny. But rather than focusing on winning immediate audience acclaim, our performance should be directed at a far greater prize, on a very different stage. We are very familiar with the play and our role in Kal's production, but we have no knowledge of the Master's play and the stage on which it unfolds.

Our destiny will still bring the same characters onto the stage of our life. They will still play their parts, and then disappear again into the shadows. But if we play our part well while under the Master's direction, we will not form attachments or become entangled with these actors any more than is required by our destiny. Without them, our own production would be unsuccessful, as our karmic connections could not be adjusted or settled as required. Intellectually it is impossible for us to even begin to understand this incredible network of relationships and sanskaras. And yet – like a production on a stage – it all comes together as the various actors play their parts.

At times the role we are given in life, owing to our karmas, demands that our acting be self-centred, aggressive, even hurtful. This egotistical attitude is the result of our desire to always play the lead role, believing that the supporting roles are just not good enough for us. It is our desire to perform on the stage of life that keeps drawing us back to this world.

In the Master's production the role is played very differently. We are now directed to play the same role, but with attributes such as

compassion, honesty and most importantly, love. Love is the very heart of the Master's teachings. It is the divine cement which unites us all. In *The Path of the Masters* the author tells us that Shabd is the source of all love in the world, and it is because the Master is one with that stream that he manifests so much love.

The Master teaches that there is no place for the ego in his play. Ego separates and contaminates the mind, whereas love removes distinctions and purifies the mind. Where there is thought there is ego. Where there is love and devotion there can be no ego.

Whatever we are today is the result of what we did in the past. This inheritance – physical, astral and mental – enables us to perform within our designated role. The same karmic rule dictates that what we become in the future is determined by what we think and do now. Under Kal's direction we would remain locked in the creation. Our saving grace is that by meeting the Master, we become aware of this bondage to the law of karma and the need to change the way we act, by becoming more mindful of our actions. How we perform – how we interact with our fellow actors, how we play to the audience – this is all in our hands. It is our choice. In *Living Meditation* we read:

Through our consciousness, our sense of discrimination, we can choose at every moment to make a difference now, in this life, not only for the rest of our lifetime but for all eternity. This is our privilege.

In this the Master has given us a gem of spiritual information – a glimmer of insight. But, if we do not put into practice what he teaches us at our initiation – if we do not change our acting performance – the information will have little value. We should therefore consider which actions and thoughts take us closer to him and which hold us back.

Our good karma has now brought us to the feet of the Master, and this life should be used as a rehearsal for a far greater production. This worldly production must be toned down. Our interaction with the cast and backstage hands must be minimized. The Master's teachings must become the theatre set against which our final performance is now played.

The purpose of following the path is to convert a mental concept into a real spiritual experience. This dictates that the path we follow must take us inward. We must withdraw from the outer to take the inner stage. We should therefore go about our daily business, but we should keep our path and our Master encapsulated in our hearts, minds and especially in our thoughts. Only then will we appreciate its value and the joy of our new role.

Again we refer to *The Path of the Masters*:

In the meantime, the divine spark in each one, always struggling for freedom, striving hard against adverse currents, reaches out a feeble hand toward the Master. In great kindness the Master takes that hand, unclean though it may be.

Now his boundless love shelters and supports us. Now come the years of hard work required to build up our spiritual character to enable us to withstand the onslaught of the material world. Now come the many years of rehearsal, of patient meditation practice, which will strengthen our will and lead us from this illusory worldly production to our real destiny – a far greater role on a much bigger stage: a majestic production played on the stage of eternity.



Aligning Actions with Goals

Extract from: 'Empower Women – An Awakening'

What is our life's ultimate goal? If our goal is spiritual, then let us ask ourselves, are our daily actions aligned with this goal? Many of us tend to fall into the trap of limiting our spiritual efforts to a particular time or place: We perform a few moments of ritual at a place of worship or a few moments of prayer at a particular time every day, and then for the rest of the day we forget our noble goal. At times we may even perform acts of such callousness toward our fellow human beings that every act of worship we have performed might stand cancelled. Is such worship acceptable to the Lord?

*In the court of the Lord, an ounce of love
Weighs more than tons of religious faith.*

Sultan Bahu

To achieve the highest spiritual goal, we have to *live* the spiritual teachings at every moment. The spiritual way must become an inherent part of our lives. ... Saints teach us about the sacred nature and oneness of all living beings.

*From one Light all have emanated, then who can we call
good and who bad?*

Kabir Sahib

Our soul, the life force that enables us to live, has no gender. In the eyes of God there is no difference between men and women: all are pure spirit, all are divine, all are equal.



When You Gazed into My Eyes

*Precious moments of my life,
Cherished within my heart,
Those few breath-seconds,
When you gazed into my eyes.*

*Silently you read my soul,
And heard all my silent cries,
In those few breath-seconds,
When you gazed into my eyes.*

*I still glow from the love that I saw,
And shy at the thought of my own guilt,
That I saw reflected in those few seconds,
When you gazed into my eyes.*

*Heart full of unexplained throbbing,
Soul full of uncontainable pain,
Mind raging with furious tempests,
Brain totally overwhelmed,
Thus was I a total wreck,
Before I looked into your eyes,
And then suddenly everything froze,
In the frame of Time and Space,
Lost for those few breath-seconds,
When you gazed into my eyes.*



Maharaj Charan Singh

*And when you averted your eyes,
I found I could blink again,
And found all the tempests had subsided,
And I discovered myself afresh,
Radiant with happiness in my soul,
Something changed deep within me,
And the memory of those moments,
Is the fire keeping me alive,
And I still wonder what you did,
In those few breath-seconds,
When you gazed into my eyes.*

Original poem by a satsangi



Master is already gazing at us because he is pulling us from within to look at him. He creates a love from within – that is why we become helpless to look at the Master. So he has already done his duty; otherwise no disciple would fall in love with the Master – unless the Master wants him to fall in love with him. ... He is the one who is creating his love in our heart, strengthening it, and helping us to grow it. He's doing everything from within.

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

The Wild Geese

As his wife left for church one morning the man said: “The story of Christ is nonsense! Why would God lower himself to come to earth as a man? That’s ridiculous!”

Later that day, during a snowstorm, there were a number of loud thumps against the window. Venturing outside, the man saw a flock of wild geese in his field. Flying south for the winter, they had been caught in the storm, and were now lost and stranded on his farm with no shelter. They just flapped their wings and flew around, blindly and aimlessly.

The man wanted to help the geese and knew his barn would be a safe place for them, so he opened the barn doors, hoping they would go inside. But the geese didn’t notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them. He tried to entice them into the barn by making a trail of bread to the barn. They didn’t understand. He got behind them and tried to shoo them towards the barn, but they just scattered in every direction. Nothing he did could get them to the safety of the barn.

He exclaimed, “Why don’t they follow me?” Then he realized that they wouldn’t follow a human. “If only I were a goose,” he thought, “then I could save them.” So he went into the barn and got one of his own geese. He circled behind the flock of wild geese and released it. His goose flew through the flock, calling them, and they followed it straight into the safety of the barn.

His earlier words replayed in his mind: “If only I were a goose, then I could save them!” Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier: “Why would God want to be like us?” Suddenly it all made sense. God sends his sons, in human form, so they can show us the way back to him and save us from the sins of the world.

We are like those geese, lost and aimlessly flapping about in the creation. The stormy weather is indicative of our lives. One minute we are sailing happily along, and the next we are turned upside down and we find ourselves being battered by a fierce blizzard.

We are powerless to act against these storms, but if we heed the Master's advice, then during good weather we will persistently knock at the door to the sanctuary of our inner barn. But we don't listen. We grow complacent and think the blizzard is never going to come. But the storm is on its way and if we do not prepare for it, we will be caught unprotected and exposed, with the inner doors still tightly closed. And then, when the storms of life do come, like the geese we flap around aimlessly. We don't seem to understand the importance of opening the door and reaching the safe haven within.

By thumping into the window, the geese unknowingly sent out a cry for help, a cry that alerted the man to their plight. Similarly, many people call to God for help. When faced with insurmountable obstacles we feel we no longer have the ability to cope, and we search for something that will give us hope and belief. Something or someone that we can hold on to.

But it is not necessarily a personal disaster that brings one to the path, or points one towards God. Sometimes our longing for him is so great that it becomes unbearable, and our inner pain itself begins to send out the signal. One thing is certain: when the Lord hears our cry he responds by putting us in touch with a true Master. The Master listens for the thumps against the window – the indications that we are lost in the blizzard and are desperately trying to find our way.

The Lord sends his sons, the living Masters, to this creation for the sole purpose of helping us and guiding us. They teach us both how and why to stop our aimless circling around in the creation. In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh explains the Master's purpose:

Saints are men of God who come here on a mission of mercy, to lead suffering humanity back to the feet of God. That is their only mission in life.

As the autumn turns to winter, the geese begin their journey, using the heavens and the sun as navigational markers. Attuned to the path of light they follow, they know the direction they have to take and fly a route which leads them to the warmth of the sun. As the geese know instinctively to fly south for the winter in order to survive, so is there something inside us which longs for permanence and knows about eternity. There is an inherent urge in us to search for God – it's the natural pull of our soul towards the Lord.

As we tire of the world and our burdens, we need to change our direction, as we learn to navigate the path towards the radiant light. An inner call challenges us to find the path. When the Master connects with us he points us in the right direction. He reassures us and we are captivated by him. We trust him, not just his teachings and his physical form – something in us recognizes him and the melody of his call.

The goose from the barn knew the route back to safety, therefore it could act as a guide to the wild geese. They identified with him, they recognized his call and they chose to follow him. Similarly, we identify with the physical form of our Master; his teachings appeal to us and we commit to follow his flight path to eternity.

The Master is our friend, our teacher, our divine guide and incomparable example. His influence touches the highest recesses of our hearts as he uplifts our consciousness. He awakens in us the possibility of genuine knowledge of God as he subtly draws us towards him by his powerful vibration of love. Seeing the harmony and perfect balance of such a person, we become inspired to follow him.

There are so many complex spiritual concepts and theories in this world, that without a living example in front of us that, like the geese in the blizzard, we would get lost and confused; whereas a living example in the beautiful form of the Master can point us straight to our goal.

Charmed by the physical beauty of the Master we begin to love his earthly persona because we can relate to it. But we have little understanding of what he truly is because the mind cannot comprehend it. We accept him as our Master despite not having experienced what that means.

The wild geese surrendered completely to the call of the man's goose and followed it to safety. Similarly, we must develop the same trust in the Master and surrender to his will, following his instructions, if we are to make progress on this spiritual path. He is our connection with the Shabd and he opens the doors into a world we may otherwise never know. It is therefore in our best interest to do what he asks.

It is not only the physical form or personality of the Master which captivates us; it is something much more. When we are with him we get a hint of what it is we long for – what we are striving for. We certainly become aware of something special about him – that eternal something that is the real Master. This is the Shabd that draws us, and it is the Shabd form that we unknowingly recognize and love.

We have no understanding of the Master and, indeed, all spiritual experience is beyond our intellectual grasp. It is only by great good fortune and grace that we come to know him, and slowly begin to realize and appreciate the importance of the living Master and the extent of the gift we have been given.

The man in our story knew if he could get the geese to the safety of the barn, they would survive the storm. He persevered because he had made it his mission to save them. Similarly, the Master never gives up

on us. He never tires of helping us, encouraging us, and asking us to do our meditation. With proper practice we can open the inner door and follow the Master out of the blizzard of life to safety – but we must make it a priority in our lives.

The route from the field to the barn represents our movement from the external to the internal – the journey from aimless circling in the darkness of illusion to the light within. It is how we perform on this part of the journey that determines when and how we will reach the barn. If we keep the promises we made at the time of initiation then, through our meditation, we will turn inwards towards the radiant light.

There is nothing more precious than our meditation, because that is when we are closest to our Master. We meditate simply because we want to be with him. It is through our meditation that he inculcates in us a deeper love, that divine love with which he is infused and which we long for. Through our meditation he dispels our doubts – which vanish like the passing storm.



The flood of mystic love washes away all our dirt and filth; the storm of mystic bliss drives away all our doubt and suspicion; the sun of mystic knowledge dissipates all our delusion and darkness; nothing is left but the naked truth beaming in its own radiance, the absolute reality glowing in its own refulgence.

Mysticism, The Spiritual Path

Patience and Perseverance

In his poem: “Reveal your own real form to me, Master”, Soami Ji calls for patience; there is still work to be done by both the disciple and the Master. In *Sar Bachan Poetry* he advises:

*Have patience, keep the company of the Saints
and I shall purify you through my grace.
I shall not rest till I show you that form –
why are you in such a hurry?*

Soami Ji knows that we are all impatient for inner experiences. The question is, do we have the capacity to digest and assimilate them if we get them? Baba Ji tells us that these are the Master’s gifts to us. He alone knows to whom to give, when to give and why. In the same vein, Soami Ji tells us that the Master has to purify us through his grace before he can show us his real form and other inner experiences for which we are in such a hurry.

As seekers, we were impatient for initiation – for obtaining Nam from our spiritual Master. We had many expectations of what would happen to us within: we would see the spiritual realms, the different colours of light. We would hear and enjoy the divine melody of the Shabd, and we would see the Radiant Form of the Master. Then after initiation we enthusiastically sat in meditation. Days passed, then weeks, followed by months and years, but we experienced none of these things. We were disillusioned. Some of us might have become discouraged, our enthusiasm fading away. A few others might have given up in despair. When calamity assails us we might start finding flaws in the path and doubt may take root in our minds.

We seem to forget that we are initiated so that we can take the initial steps towards God-realization. Our initiation is the expression of our desire for God-realization. How can we think that we can realize the Lord overnight, or two or three months after initiation? How could that ever be possible? We are set to meet God, and this is a challenge not to be taken lightly. Sages and seers of the past meditated for many years and even then, when they came back into the world from their retreat, they found, to their utter surprise, that the pressure cap of their suppressed passions could be burst open by one stroke of the mind! Their mind and the five passions could not be controlled.

Let's not forget that the Lord can take us up instantly – but can we stay up there? Great Master points out in *Spiritual Gems*:

It is not difficult for the Master to take a soul upward, but premature uplifting causes harm. Just as fine silk cloth, when spread upon a thorny hedge, is torn to pieces if suddenly pulled away, so the soul, entangled in the thorns of karma, which penetrate every cell in the body, must be gradually purified by the Master's love.

Baba Ji has repeatedly stressed that we don't value or cherish anything that is given free or is easily obtained. To be impatient for inner experience is an indication that we are not yet spiritually mature.

Soami Ji questions our sincerity. In *Sar Bachan Poetry* he uses strong expressions to shake us, such as:

*Superficially you sing the praises of the Guru
but you never bring the Guru into your heart. ...*

*With so casual a relationship with the Guru,
how can you hope to attain anything, friend? ...*

*When threatened by misery
you apply yourself to meditation.
But when the misery ends,
you go straight back to your old ways.*

*One thing I have learned about you, brother,
is that you are remarkably dishonest with yourself.*

He doesn't spare our mind either, calling it 'foolish' because it dances to the tune of the senses, regardless of the consequences. It complains when suffering comes, yet continues to indulge in sense pleasures and passions. Our soul is covered with dirt. We only have to peer into the mirror of our heart to see the thousands of desires and cravings piling up and making their claim. According to Soami Ji, this means that we have not given up the path of the mind, so much so that we might even blame the Master for our failings!

After many years on the path, most of us have the same story to tell. We may feel that the Master does not hear us, even though we are reassured time and again that the Shabd Master is within us twenty-four hours a day. He is not unaware of our sincere yearning, of the call of our simran, of our remembrance. But, sadly, *we* do not have the ears to hear him. Rumi has this to say for our comfort:

*Each moment contains a hundred messages from God:
To every cry of "Oh God"
He answers a hundred times, "I am here."*

Let us recognize Master's voice of silence as his response. We are so result-oriented that expectations have become our second nature. Even seeing the Radiant Form of the Master is not an achievement that we can claim credit for – it's all his grace. For us, spiritual progress means tangible results. We would not be satisfied with occasional flashes of light or just a few glimpses of some inner regions. We want the first prize – to see the radiant Master as often as possible. That would be an achievement by any standard!

As we have not yet realized this for ourselves, Baba Ji tells us that we need to turn to the living Master of our time for comfort and guidance – to get our bearing. Actually it is all within us already, including the Radiant Form, it is only a matter of realization. How encouraging!

Soami Ji advises us not to hurry, but rather to put the initiation instructions into practice with patience and perseverance, with love and devotion. By pursuing these, we are developing our capacity to be receptive to his grace. For, as Bhai Gurdas puts it:

*Even if your devotion is as small
As a fragment of a cowrie shell,
The Master showers all benefits on you.*

Kabitt Svaiyye, quoted in Living Meditation

We need to give ourselves the required time. We need to stop worrying and instead nurture his name in our heart. We need to put in time and effort to subdue our mind by meditation, to hold our senses in check, to develop a love tempered with faith – in short, to develop the necessary relationship of love with our Master.

Soami Ji reassures us that Master will take care of our burdens and worries: all will be worked out as and when the supreme will ordains it. So all we have to do is to surrender ourselves unconditionally to the Master, or at least to try – that's all we can do.

There is no room for worry any more. Worry is a sign of mistrust, of lack of faith in the Lord. In so doing, Baba Ji says, we are placing our mind above the Lord. And Maharaj Charan Singh told us that it is a sin to worry.

At the time of initiation, we are tied to a bulldozer – the Shabd. It will keep pulling us with an irresistible force, and it is in our interest not to fight against it. We need to constantly be in the magnetic field, within the aura of the Master's Shabd. That magnetic field is situated at the eye centre, which we must reach through our power-charged simran. There is no greater power than Shabd, but we need patience, perseverance and the required effort to experience it. It is only a question of time. Then we will be able to understand fully that he is the only doer, and we have no choice but to live in his will and be happy with what he gives. He knows what is best for our spiritual upliftment.

As satsangis on the path of the Masters, we know what is really important for us – our number one priority: giving time daily to our meditation without fail. But if our daily focus does not revolve around our spiritual priorities and building that atmosphere for meditation, how can we expect to sit in meditation with a happy and positive attitude? We need to be earnest and persistent.

When the Master, through his love, is able to produce that love in us, he reigns within. There he establishes our inner life, our sustenance, our peace, our happiness and then we begin to taste that blissful existence which he enjoys. It is not a human need-based love that fades over time; rather his is divine love that increases with time. When he loves, all measures of his love are infinite. He loves us with a love that is utterly incomprehensible.

In love, patience and perseverance are implicit. To realize his love is a life-long struggle – until our last breath. But with Master on our side, victory shall be ours. This is not a hope but a guarantee!

The Nature of Fear

Many things can cause us fear, such as pain, both physical and emotional. We fear being in a situation where we have no money and no resources. We fear disgrace and the ridicule of others. We fear solitude and loneliness. We fear the unknown, the darkness that hides a multitude of imaginary horrors. We fear death.

Our fears are based entirely on the feeble nature of this human body and mental phobias – and our lack of faith in the Divine. We fear because we believe that we are in a world in which blind forces cause events to happen in random disorder, and in such a world we are victims – at any moment liable to fall foul of chance and happenstance.

Fear can only be overcome if we have a belief – one that makes sense of a universe that seems to be characterized by randomness, chaos and unpredictability. Our personal experience tells us that life can go on for many years in a fairly pleasant way, and then suddenly our whole world can be turned upside down. Business failures, divorce, political unrest, all kinds of things can happen to completely destroy our peace of mind. So much so in fact, that even when our lives are going along quite well, we start fretting over what disaster will strike us next.

So is the world we live in really as unpredictable and random as all that? The ancient sages observed life and came to the conclusion that every action had a reaction – a predictable consequence. The universe is one, a whole that must maintain balance. When an action is performed, the consequence must take place – whether in this life or the next. Now a planet full of people, all performing actions at every moment of every day, is a really complex equation and impossible for us to calculate, so we cannot really conclude what will happen next.

Fortunately it is not necessary for us to do all this calculation; what we need to understand is the principle behind it – the law of cause and effect. Life does follow predictable laws – we just need to understand how they work and to accept that consequences cannot be invalidated by death. This means that at the end of a life, the soul has a lot of actions unaccounted for. It is these actions that shape the next life. Everyone comes into this world with a predefined destiny, which allows us to account for some of our unredeemed actions. So life is not random, nor is it chaotic. We are here to render account for our past.

Unfortunately, we are not aware of this, so we have little idea of what is coming our way. The point here is that it is *our* destiny. It is neither random nor unfair. It is an *exact rendering* of actions that we ourselves have performed.

In understanding this process, we have a new grasp of how life works. This is a much more positive view of life. Where it all appeared to be random there is, in fact, absolute order and precision. Our life is progressing under the influence of our destiny, and only that which is destined to happen will happen, both good and bad. On the spiritual path we understand and accept this, therefore we need to modify our behaviour to reflect our spiritual desire. If we perform every action with that one objective in mind, we will have an absolute assurance that one day we will achieve our goal.

In this world it is hard to avoid suffering. The fact is that every objective we might entertain runs the risk of ending badly for us. The world is a trap for the unwary. Even if we achieve everything that we desire, how much good will it do us? We still have to account for our actions and our not-always-entirely-honest labours.

The overriding characteristic of the material plane is change. Everything everywhere is undergoing change at every moment. The earth beneath our feet, the stars and constellations out in space, our

very bodies are all changing and degenerating. The universe is dying around us. All that lives is born to die. So although the prospect of dying normally invokes a terrible fear in us, it is not something that we need to fear. We need to understand that death is not the end. The journey continues... beyond.

Fear of death is based on the irrational fear of the unknown. We imagine that when we die there will just be a black nothingness. If we come from a strict religious background, we may fear the possibility of ending up in some fiery hell, being tortured by demons for all eternity.

But in actual fact, there is a law that applies here too. We go where our desires take us. Nature is not extravagant, it arranges for us to be in a place best suited for working out our desires, and accounting for the consequences of our past actions. Simple really! But it does sound a warning bell for us to be wary of what desires we entertain. Will they lead us towards our spiritual objective, or will they drag us down again, into the morass of sensuality and the cycle of endless births and deaths?

The Masters tell us that the perishable world has nothing to offer us. At best it is just a thinly disguised snare that will bind us to the creation. They put forward another possibility for us to consider: what if we could escape the clutches of the mind, what if we could live in a way that puts us beyond the reach of the law of action and reaction? A life free from the cycle of endless births and deaths, and the suffering we endure when incarnating on the physical plane.

This strikes a chord in our innermost being, at a level beyond intellect or reason. Somehow we are drawn to the idea that we can be free from the bonds that bind us to the material creation and the endless repetition of birth and rebirth. The Masters point out that we have been directing our efforts and our attention into the material world in the mistaken belief that we would find a solution here to

our pain and fear. But after numerous incarnations on this plane, we have still not found one. In fact, all we have accomplished is to sink ourselves more deeply in the quagmire of the material world.

The Masters tell us that by turning our attention inwards and concentrating our attention there we may find the answers to our questions. They say that the agitation of the mind causes a kind of blindness to the inner realms. It is only by gaining mastery over the mind and making it still that the inner vista becomes visible, and we realize that there is much more to life than the limited world that we have confined ourselves to until this stage.

It is for this reason that the Masters prescribe both a specific lifestyle and specific spiritual practices. These are designed to still the mind and keep us free of further bonds to the material world. By living in the Master's will we begin to realize that there are virtually limitless possibilities before us.

As we progress on the path, we gain confidence, we start to experience the reality that they tell us about, and we shift our centre of being from this world towards the higher worlds that are the Masters' reality. As this transformation occurs, we find ourselves increasingly free of the concerns and cares of this world. We let go of the things that were the source of our deep anxieties and fears.

When we meet the Master within and come into contact with the Shabd, we become absolutely fearless, because then we know that there is no coming back – no more bondage to the cycle of birth and death. We have truly started our journey home, never to return to this dark and fearful world. Our inescapable fate is to merge into the light, to become that light, and become one with the One.



The Hole in the Soul

When I'm spiritually asleep there's always a feeling that something is missing. There's a hole in my soul that I don't know how to fill. I try to change my life so that things feel right, but nothing works. If I really pay attention, however, it becomes obvious that I'm longing for love. Without love my life is empty and meaningless.

The Buddha taught that the unawakened life is permeated by a type of suffering he called *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is an underlying unease and discontent. An existential SOS that arises from the knowledge of death. A fundamental sense of separateness from others. An alienation from the world. . . .

This perpetual sense of discomfort and alienation is hard to avoid because it arises from the fact that we are conscious individuals. To be conscious is to be separated off from the oneness of life as an observer of the world. We suffer from *dukkha* when we believe ourselves to be *only* a vulnerable human being, which is inevitably distressing. . . .

Deep down, most of us know that only love can fill the hole in the soul. Only love can set us free from the debilitating *dukkha* that lurks in the shadows on even our sunniest days. Only love can truly mitigate all that is bad in life and allow us to truly celebrate all that is good.

We all crave love as if it's rare and hard to find, but there is no shortage of love if we look within to the source of that love. The truth is, we live and breathe and have our being in an ocean of love. And when we understand this we can smile wryly at the irony of the human condition with wise Kabir who writes: "I laugh when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty."

Tim Freke, *The Mystery Experience*





Maharaj Sawan Singh

Initiation Changed My Life!

Daryai Lal Kapur, author of several Sant Mat books, was initiated at a fairly young age, an event which would change the whole direction of his life. In *Call of the Great Master* he tells of the impact it had on him:

This shower of miracles began to rain down upon me from the very day of my initiation – or, I may say, even before my initiation was completed. It was during the initiation that I had my first experience. ... It took me less than ten minutes to memorize the whole instruction. My other companions took a full hour for this purpose.

While they spent this period in full concentration, repeating the holy names, I spent mine in tediously waiting for them to finish with it. In addition, I fell prey to vain conceit. A feeling of pride about my superior intelligence and memory overpowered me. The result was that when the Great Master returned after an hour and taught us how to connect our soul with the sound current, all my companions heard the celestial music within – but I could find no trace of it.

When this fact was brought to the notice of the Master, he asked me to come forward and made me sit in the proper posture of meditation in front of him. Touching the centre of my forehead with the index finger of his right hand, he said, “Don’t you hear any sound here?” With the touch of his finger it seemed as if the reservoir of Sound had burst. Church bells began to ring loudly and clearly. There was an upward pull, and the soul current began to withdraw from the body. I do not know how long I sat there. To me it appeared a few minutes. Then I burst out into a sudden spontaneous laugh and unintentionally opened my eyes. The Great Master also laughed and asked, “Did you hear the Sound?” “Yes, Sir, by your grace,” I replied. After that, for several months the Master was always with me inside, and a sweet bell chimed day and night.

I think all this was prearranged and happened by the will of the Great Master with a purpose. I – a young man of twenty with atheistic tendencies and whose mind had been rendered totally irreligious by Western education – needed some such shock treatment. I had not come to the Dera for initiation or to seek God. It was Christmas vacation and I, with some other student friends, had come to the bank of the river Beas for a picnic and some boating. Full of high spirits and frivolity we all had attended the Great Master's discourse that evening as a matter of curiosity. My mind did not catch much of it. It went out wool-gathering as soon as the satsang started. I only remembered that some stress was laid on the great value of human life, that it was only in this life that God could be realized, and that he was not to be found anywhere outside in the world but only within the body. But who cared for God at that time? The next day was the day of initiation, when a number of people were to be given 'Nam', as they called the initiation. A relative of mine was a satsangi, and he had asked me to breakfast with him. After breakfast he said, "Why don't you get Nam? It is a rare opportunity and you should not miss it."

I said to myself, "Why not enjoy this fun also?" and agreed to go. It was with this background that I had joined the initiation. But God fulfils himself in many ways. I was frivolous, irreligious and whatnot. But the Master saw in me the soul only – a son of God that he had come to save. The initiation changed my whole life! Had I heard the inner sound at the first instance, as my companions did, I would have thought it an ordinary, automatic and normal affair. I would not have realized the great power of the Master. This experience was necessary to convince me that here before me was one who looked like an ordinary man, but who had the superhuman power in him to raise the souls of sinners to that high centre of spirituality where the celestial music resounds in beautiful harmonies.

I Do Not Know

The contemporary Jesuit mystic Anthony de Mello used a simple scenario to explain a subtle form of ego found in most of us. He wrote:

The Master once exposed his disciples by means of the following advice: He gave each of them a sheet of paper and asked them to write down the length of the hall they were in.

Almost everyone gave flat figures like fifty feet. Two or three added the word “approximately.”

Said the Master, “No one has given the right answer.”

“What is the right answer?” they asked.

“The right answer is I DO NOT KNOW,” said the Master.

One Minute Nonsense

In the case of many satsangis our education and upbringing have groomed us to pretend we know everything. We even feel ashamed if we do not know something. How often do we say “I know” when someone tells us something? Isn't it fascinating that either we feel we have to know everything or we pretend we know everything? The Great Master said: “When we do not know a thing, it is absurd to make others believe that we know it.”

We seem to associate our knowledge with what and who we are. We also associate our name, our religion, even the language we speak, the way we dress, our jobs, our homes with our personality. We define ourselves and others by meaningless social criteria and material things and consequently we suppress the real identity of who we truly are. We identify with materialism because we connect with the creation through our only means of perception, our physical senses. And

because we can perceive only physical matter, our entire world is confined to the physical. Unless we can see, feel, touch, hear, smell or taste something, we do not believe it exists.

But is there anything beyond the physical? Do we know? The answer to this question depends on the tests we apply. If we use the barometer of our physical senses, the answer will be “*nothing*”, because we have already limited ourselves to the domain of the physical plane. It is like saying that no sound exists outside the frequency range of the human ear. But if we use an instrument that perceives sound outside our frequency range, we realize the ignorance of limiting ourselves to the senses.

If we want to know whether anything exists beyond the physical, we have to rise above the physical plane by developing a sense that perceives beyond the physical. But do we have such a sense? Consider what happens when we dream. We know that we perceive and experience everything in a dream as if it is real and physically happening to us. Only when we wake up do we discover it is a dream. This means that we *can* perceive and experience things beyond the physical through a sense of perception other than the physical senses. The concept of our soul works the same way. We may believe that we have a soul but are unaware of its existence. However, the fact that we cannot perceive our soul with our physical senses does not mean that it doesn't exist – we simply do not know!

So what is beyond the physical world and how can we access and experience it for ourselves? How can we *know*? The Masters explain that there are several vast planes or regions that exist above the physical plane. These broadly include the astral plane, the causal plane and the spiritual plane. Now, just as a deep-sea diver needs specially designed diving gear to explore the depths of the ocean, we need special bodies to explore these planes. Of course, unless we are in tune

with these bodies, which are all within us, and can access and use them, we don't know of their existence either.

So how do we tune into them? Well, we access the dream state by being still during sleep and allowing our consciousness to drop to the lower levels of consciousness. Similarly, we can access the astral, causal and spiritual planes by being still and by raising our consciousness to the eye centre. This is where the inward journey begins, taking us to higher levels of consciousness. The key difference is that the dream state is accessed involuntarily during sleep, whereas travelling to the higher planes is voluntary and within our control. The Masters teach us that to travel this journey is to raise our consciousness by the practice of meditation, which focuses our attention inward and upward.

The greatest barrier preventing entry to these planes is, in fact, the very entity that will assist us in getting there: our very own mind. The Master tells us that if the mind is used properly there can be no better friend. But if the mind is used negatively, there can be no worse enemy. We need to befriend the mind by using it properly, so that the purpose of this human birth is realized – which is to know our soul.

Currently the mind dominates the soul, obscuring its light and brilliance and thereby concealing the soul's identity, which is why we are unconscious of the soul. In its place, the mind projects its own identity so that we think we are the mind; we identify with mind instead of with our soul. The mind has become our individuality, our character and our personality. The qualities of the mind have shaped who we are, while the quality of the soul, which is pure love, lies dormant. But we can reverse this identity crisis through our meditation practice.

Now that we know this, can we undertake the journey by ourselves? Most will agree that we cannot because we don't know how. To undertake this journey we need an adept such as the living Master.

The Masters have perfected the art of spiritual or mystic transport, and have become permanent residents of the highest spiritual planes while being in the physical body. They can therefore teach us the method, and guide us around any pitfalls and obstacles we may encounter on the way.

If we truly desire it and work hard for it, we too can accomplish what the Master has achieved. Then we will never again be concerned about always knowing all the answers. Then the answer “I do not know” will become part of our vocabulary, because we will realize the depths of our ignorance and helplessness. Then we can relax and let the Master do his work.



*All through eternity
Beauty unveils His exquisite form
in the solitude of nothingness;
He holds a mirror to His Face
and beholds His own beauty.
he is the knower and the known,
the seer and the seen;
No eye but His own
has ever looked upon this Universe.*

Rumi

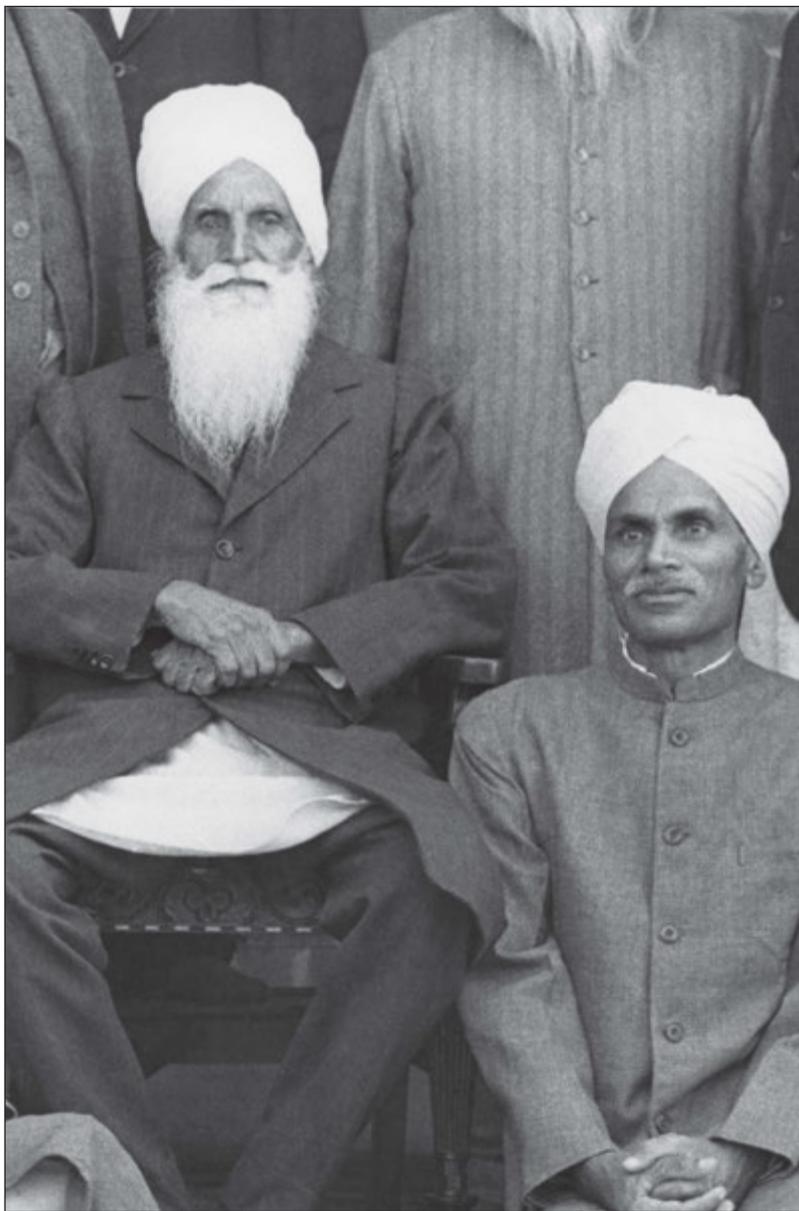
The Appointment of a Master

The path of Sant Mat is entirely dependent on a living Master, without whom the path would cease to exist. Not only that, but a prerequisite for a living Master is his appointment by his predecessor. This is crucial to the spiritual path. There are some paths that may have a living Master, while others are based on the teachings of past Masters. But it is extremely rare to find a Master who has been appointed by his predecessor.

The reason it is necessary to have the predecessor appoint a successor is simple. A true Master is one who himself has attained the highest spiritual realms, therefore he will be aware of his disciples' spiritual worthiness. If a Master is chosen by any other method, such as self-appointment, through lineage or parentage, a committee, elders or peers, a process of voting or any other means, then the worthiness of such an appointment should be questioned as it is based purely on external attributes. No cognizance is taken of the spiritual attainment of the appointee because no mere mortal can assess this.

In any discipline it is the qualified and experienced person who is able to recognize when a trainee is ready – only a qualified doctor can know whether a medical student is ready to advance to admission into practice. Similarly, even perfect Masters themselves have had a living Master to guide them through their spiritual practice. Fortunately for us, the line of Masters in Radha Soami Satsang Beas is unbroken and its authenticity can be verified to satisfy anyone's curiosity.

Centuries ago, the appointment of the successor was made personally, in the presence of other devotees, with specific instructions from the Master to his disciples. Such appointments were not recorded in any



Maharaj Sawan Singh and Maharaj Jagat Singh

testamentary document as it wasn't necessary then. In more recent times the predecessors use a testamentary will to ensure a legally binding appointment of the successor, so any doubt is removed.

The appointment of the Master is important as we entrust our spiritual salvation and a lifetime of effort, love and devotion to him. He must be someone who can take us to our eternal home with the Lord. Just as we want guarantees for everything in life, we also want a guarantee that the Master who initiates us can and will grant us eternal salvation and that he isn't a hoax.

Finding a perfect living Master is absolutely crucial for any seeker of spirituality. But with our limited spiritual insight it is impossible for us to gauge the spiritual attainment of a Master. This is similar to a kindergarten child trying to assess the competence of a university professor. We do not have this capacity, but we can compare the attributes of a living Master with those of past perfect Masters. Through this and our study and research we gain the intellectual conviction that this path is the right one for us – then we can dedicate our life to following it. However, we are still reliant on the proper appointment of a Master by his predecessor, who knows his spiritual attainment – and whether he would have the spiritual insight to recognize those seekers who have been marked for him.

There is an Indian expression: “When the disciple is ready, the Guru appears.” This means that once a disciple becomes receptive to spirituality and is ready for discipleship, the Guru or Master will find the disciple. We may think that we seek and choose a Master, but in reality it is the Master who finds us. It is only through the Lord's grace and blessings that we come into contact with a Master.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Only those sheep will come to him who have been marked for him. No other sheep will come to him at all. ... So the Master does recognize his own sheep.

This is why there is no need to proselytize to others, to try to convince anyone of the merits of this path: it is not meant for everyone. The Masters tell us that it is meant only for the marked souls.



Not of This World

*In the world yet free of the world,
the Masters do their work.
Worship them and serve at their feet –
they alone will lead you to freedom.*

*Butter never returns to milk –
even when they seemed to be one
their natures were different.*

*A lotus leaf never sinks into water,
though water was the source of its life.
It's like that, says Bahina – a mystic is born
in the world but it doesn't touch him.*

Bahinabai, in *Many Voices, One Song*

Minding the Mind

Through the Master's teachings we become more conscious of the mind and the powerful influence it exerts over our lives. We become aware of its devious tactics, designed to distract and mislead us, thereby diverting us from our ultimate objective of God-realization. However, if we employ the measures advocated by the Master, we will neutralize the mind's deviousness, turning it into a friend which will assist us in attaining our goal.

The mind's pervasive influence is not just confined to satsangis, but plays a dominant role in the lives of every human being. First we need to understand how the mind came about in the original scheme of things, and why it has such incredible influence.

Maharaj Jagat Singh gives us this explanation of the origin and purpose of the mind:

After creating human beings and others in the universe, Brahm attached to each soul his agent in the shape of mind, to confine the soul to his domain. The specific commands to the mind are, "Never let the soul go near Shabd nor reveal to it the secret thereof."

Science of the Soul

Now we can understand more readily why the mind is so determined to interfere with our spiritual progress: It has been tasked by Kal to ensure that the soul is unable to return to its true home – and it carries out this function exceptionally well. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh is asked whether Kal has the same power over initiates as non-initiates. He answers:

Everybody. That's his duty. He tempts everybody in this creation because he doesn't want a single soul to get out of his clutches. He doesn't loosen his grip after we are initiated. His grip is the same, but we are not caught by his grip.

Elsewhere he says:

Kal or Satan becomes more active with the initiate than he is with the non-initiate. When he thinks the soul is escaping from his clutches, he becomes more active; so we should also become more cautious when we are initiated, because we have to escape from his clutches.

So it is very clear that as initiates we are under pressure from the mind, particularly if we are working hard at our spiritual practice. The important and encouraging thing to remember is that it is no longer Kal but the Master who now controls our destiny. Even so, Kal's influence is huge, which is why the Masters are so insistent that our meditation is not negotiable.

The more conscientious we are about living in his will and doing our meditation, the more grace and protection the Master is able to shower on us. Although he can and does make the repayment of our karma as bearable as possible, he will not shortchange Kal. The Master will only take us out of this creation when every iota of our karma is settled with Kal. There is no compromise on this issue.

The mind uses the sense pleasures as the primary source of distraction from our spiritual endeavours, and this is the prime cause of the bulk of our karma. The result of the mind's destructive influence is the tendency to adopt a negative mindset. Once our attitude becomes predominantly negative, our spiritual practice becomes tedious and unrewarding, and this is precisely what Kal wants.

In *Spiritual Primer* the writer explains how the mind works, saying:

First of all, impressions are registered on our mind. Then, by dwelling on these impressions, we make grooves on our mind. These grooves become so deep that we become programmed by them and are then compelled to react according to our own programming. This is why we need to be very careful of what we think. We should keep careful watch over our thoughts and try to dwell upon only those thoughts which will help us develop the right attitude, and which will lead us to do actions that are for our good.

This echoes what the Masters say: that all too often our thoughts influence our attitude and behaviour, and are then easily translated into actions. Cleaning up our thoughts will improve our responses to the events in our lives, making us more attentive and positive. This is in the best interests of our spiritual endeavours.

In *The Path of the Masters* we read that the mind adores routine regardless of the consequences and whether or not that routine is good for us. It is only when a little light filters in from the spirit, that we may change our thinking and the way we act. This is extremely important information because it tells us that the mind's behaviour is modifiable, although not always by conscious effort on our part.

If we are living in the will of the Master, the deep-seated habits or 'grooves' can be smoothed out and more acceptable patterns of behaviour can replace them. This is as a result of the grace of the Master. We are not the doers on this plane; we can only go through the motions by living in his will. By obeying his instructions we can turn the mind from a fiend into a friend.

Living in the will of the mind will most certainly bring us back to this plane, so we must be aware of the direction the mind tries to steer us in. We must work hard at excluding all influence from the mind, because its smooth-talking, sense-pleasure entrapment will take us downwards and outwards, into the world of illusion and impermanence. Whereas living in the will of the Master will take us inwards and upwards, and permanently out of the clutches of Kal and his wily companion, the mind.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh gives us the following comforting assurance:

Satsangis don't have to bother about Kal at all. They have to live with the teachings of their Master. ... If you live with your path and with your Master, nobody can bother you. So we are in the realm of Kal, being here, but he is not controlling our destiny. Our destiny is in somebody else's hands, who stands as a ransom, though of course we have to pay for whatever we have sown. We have to go through our destiny. But somebody has taken responsibility for us, to clear us from all that destiny and take us back to the Father.

How heartening to hear that we are not answerable to Kal – that he is simply the accountant who has our karmic debts on his books. But he is not our debt collector. We have the comfort of knowing that the management of our repayments is in the hands of the Master. We also know that we have a responsibility to the Master, and that is to live totally in his will. This really is a small price to pay for the security of knowing that our debts are taken care of. It is so uplifting to know that we have a gentle, loving friend guiding us in everything we do, while ensuring that our karmas are settled fully, in a way that is never beyond our capacity to handle.

The Disabled Fox

A fable of the Arab mystic Sa'di

A man walking through the forest saw a fox that had lost its legs and wondered how it lived. Then he saw a tiger come in with game in its mouth. The tiger had its fill and left the rest of the meat for the fox.

The next day God fed the fox by means of the same tiger. The man began to wonder at God's greatness and said to himself, "I too shall just rest in a corner with full trust in the Lord and he will provide me with all I need."

He did this for many days but nothing happened, and he was almost at death's door when he heard a voice say, "O you who are in the path of error, open your eyes to the truth! Follow the example of the tiger and stop imitating the disabled fox."

Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*



We all have to do our best on the path and not give way to lame excuses and shirk our responsibilities. It is only when we make effort that the grace of the Lord will come to us.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Book Review



The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism

EDITED BY BERNARD MCGINN

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In this large anthology, one of the world's foremost scholars of Christian mysticism, Bernard McGinn, offers extensive selections from the writings of Christian mystics across the centuries. His idea is to enable readers, who may have often seen individual sayings of these mystics quoted, to appreciate their teachings in a larger context. As McGinn writes:

My hope is that the collection will provide a resource for those who have already tasted something of the spiritual wealth of Christian mysticism, as well as invite new readers to ponder the teachings of some of the most remarkable men and women of the Christian tradition.

The book concerns only Christian mysticism, because, for McGinn, mysticism is always “part of concrete historical religions . . . , not a religion in itself, nor the inner common denominator of all religions.” It is therefore “best understood in the light of its interaction with the other aspects of the whole religious complex in which it comes to expression.”

In the Christian context, most of the mystics describe their goal as union with God. But others avoided such language and spoke instead of awareness of the presence of God. McGinn therefore chose the “more inclusive and supple term” of presence as the basis for his selections.

McGinn organizes the texts thematically in three main sections: the preparation for mystical experience, aspects of mystical consciousness, and the effects of the mystical experience. This organization stems from his observations that “mysticism . . . is essentially a process, an itinerary or journey to God, not just a moment or brief state,” and that, while some mystics dwelt on “extraordinary forms of consciousness, such as visions

and ecstasies,” most focused on “how their encounter with God transforms their minds and their lives.” McGinn divides each section into multiple sub-sections, starting each with his own helpful introduction.

The first section of the anthology, on preparation for mystical experience, is divided into five sections: Biblical Interpretation; Asceticism and Purgation; Prayer, Liturgy and Sacraments; Inner and Outer Practices; and Mystical Itineraries. Each sub-section presents writings from mystics ranging from the early Fathers of the Church up to modern times. To take one example, Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) writes on four stages of prayer, using the analogy of watering a garden. She says that the first stage of prayer is like getting water from a well and carrying it to the plants. “This process is very laborious. ... [The beginners in prayer] tire themselves out in keeping the senses recollected, and this is a great labour because the senses are accustomed to distractions.” But it is God who provides the water in the well, which is “tears of ... tenderness and interior feelings of devotion.” The second stage of prayer is like using a water wheel. “By ... wheel and buckets the gardener may be able to draw more water with less labour and is able to take some rest without being continually at work,” because the soul has given “simple consent to become a prisoner of God, for it knows well what it is to be the captive of him it loves.” The third degree of prayer is like irrigating a garden with “running water coming from a river or brook. ... In this state our Lord desires to help the gardener in such a way that he may almost be said to be the gardener himself, since he does all the work. ... The pleasure, sweetness, and delight are incomparably greater than in the former state of prayer because the waters of grace have risen up to the neck of the soul so that it can neither advance nor retreat; it does not know how to; it seeks only the enjoyment of exceeding bliss.” The fourth stage of prayer seems impossible to describe. She writes: “May the Lord teach me the words in which to say something to describe the fourth water. ... In this fourth state there is no feeling, only enjoyment without any understanding of the thing in which the soul is rejoicing. ... How this prayer they call union happens and what it is, I cannot explain.”

In the sub-section on Mystical Itineraries McGinn notes how mystics in many traditions have used “the conception of life as a passage through

a series of stages on the way to an intended goal” to describe “what they experienced and what they wish to hand on to their followers.” The mystic Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) describes

seven states which we call states of being, after Love has come and taken hold; and states of being they are. And they are the steps by which one climbs from the valley to the summit of the mountain, which is so isolated that one sees nothing there but God.

The second section of the book, *Aspects of Mystical Consciousness*, is divided into eight sub-sections: Living the Trinity; Encountering Christ; Love and Knowledge; Positive and Negative; Vision, Contemplation and Rapture; Distress and Dereliction; Deification and Birthing; and Union with God. McGinn writes,

Christian mysticism by definition is Christological—that is to say, it is only in, through, and by Christ, the God-man, that access to God is possible. As Jesus says in the Gospel of John, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). Almost all the texts found in this anthology illustrate in one way or another Christ’s role as both the way and the goal of the mystical life.

The twentieth-century French philosopher and social critic Simone Weil (1909-1943) writes of an experience when “Christ himself came down and took possession of me. . . . In this sudden possession . . . neither my senses nor my imagination had any part; I only felt in the midst of my suffering the presence of love, like that which one can read in the smile on a beloved face.”

In the sub-section on Love and Knowledge, McGinn provides an extended introduction, framing how these two ways of coming to union with God have been viewed in different epochs. On love he quotes from Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who writes that despite the fact that the soul is

burdened with sins, ensnared by vices, captured by enticements, caught in exile, imprisoned in the body, embedded in mud, fixed in slime, bound by its limbs, assailed by cares, distracted by troubles, bothered by fears, afflicted by pains, caught in errors, made anxious by worries, disturbed by suspicions, [yet it may] dare to aspire to be married to the Word, and not fear to enter into a pact with God, nor shrink from contracting a sweet yoke of love with the King of the angels. ... Truly, this is the contract of a spiritual and holy marriage. But “contract” says too little; it is an embrace. ... Thus they are bride and Groom. What other need or connection is there between spouses than to be loved and to love?

The unique aspect of this ‘marriage’ is that “this Spouse is not only loving, but is Love itself.”

The third section of the book, on Implications of Mystical Life, is divided into two subsections, one on the many accusations of heresy brought against the mystics, and the other on the balance between contemplation and action, between the solitary inward life and the active life of service. On the life of service, Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) writes, in the voice of Christ addressing a disciple,

I charge you to love me in the same love that I have loved you. You cannot do this for me, because I have loved you without being loved. Every love that you have for me is a love that comes from duty and not from graciousness, because you ought to do it. I love you from graciousness and not from duty. This is why you cannot give me the love that I am requesting of you. And therefore I have put you in the midst of your neighbour, so that you can do for him what you cannot do for me, that is, to love him without any self-interest from graciousness and without looking for any benefit. And what you do for him I consider as done for me.



