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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Master Guides His Disciple

Meditate deeply three times a day
in search of the Light
that's your soul.

Close yourself to the world
with thumbs in ears, eyes closed.

This is the way you open to meeting
the Self that shines within you –
the face of life itself,
the face that fills the universe.

But don't stop there, my son,
search for your master beyond all this....

I tell you now:

first see whiteness, then bright moonlight,
then the sun like a great firefly in the sky.

Keep on searching, sit steady at the eye centre....

Soon the Imperishable, the Lord of body and soul,
will appear in your heart.

Keep on gazing, Eknath –
finally you'll see that he is you.

Ekknath in *Many Voices, One Song*



Advice from Kabir

When one asks a Master what attribute he values most in the disciple, the answer is love. We can live without everything else, but not without love. On this path our goal is not wealth or achievements or recognition, but only to be immersed and lost in love. The saints want us to dive so deeply into our meditation that we ultimately drown in that ocean of love. That is our destiny, to merge into his love until there is nothing left of our mind, our ego, our weaknesses or our doubts.

We want that kind of love, but when it comes to drowning in it, losing ourselves in it – there is hesitation on the part of the mind. The mind is attached to its individual identity; to the body, health, wealth, and relationships; to possessions, plans, desires, and ambitions. It wants to experience that supreme love without drowning in it, while retaining its own identity. But saints say this is impossible. Hence, the spiritual path involves a struggle between the higher mind that longs to merge into something transcendent and pure, and the lower mind that wants to retain its own identity and that is addicted to sensual pleasures and worldly pursuits.

We constantly need to remind ourselves of our true purpose, to prepare ourselves for that day when the Master will drown us in his love until there is nothing left of us. In *Kabir, Weaver of God's Name*, Sant Kabir offers us some practical advice on how to accomplish this:

*If you earn devotion
Through service to the Master,
Only then consider yourself
A human being.*

A life focused only on the needs of the body and the pleasures of the mind leaves one short of the real potential of human birth. The prize of devotion is not obtained but must be earned through service to a living Master. What is the nature of this service? Hazur Maharaj Ji explains in *Die to Live*, “Seva of the soul, or connecting your soul with the Sound within... That is the real seva. Seva means that service which is done to please the Master, and what pleases the Master most is when we attend to our meditation.”

So Kabir tells us that performing this type of service, our meditation, will begin the growth of devotion for the Lord within us, and will end in our becoming a true human being. Becoming a true human being by the Master’s standard is not so easy. We desire union with the Master, yet we continue to cling to our worldly desires. Worldly desires are the primary obstacle on the path to spiritual realization. All saints, as well as many philosophers and traditional religions, agree that desire is a primary force that motivates all living beings. Desire begins in the mind with a passing thought, but with continued contemplation on an object of desire, it leads to attachment to that object. Eventually, action will be undertaken to fulfil that desire, thus forging new chains of karmic debt. Kabir describes the nature of desire when he tells us:

*The raging fire of desire
Consumes one and all; ...
Ponder and act with wisdom
That all your troubles may end:
Give up your infatuation
For what is fleeting and false.
Swayed by cravings, you are wasting
This precious chance of human birth.*

If we honestly look within ourselves, we must admit that we harbour legions of worldly desires that continually move through the mind, disrupting our attempts to lead a spiritual life. These thoughts are the result of dwelling on material objects, both in this life and from the subconscious impressions of incalculable previous births. When an attempt is made to still the mind in meditation, these thoughts appear like ripples on the surface of a pond. Because of the ingrained habit of looking outward for pleasure, the mind refuses to grasp that this short span of human life is our chance to reverse this outward flow and learn to conquer desires by turning inward. Kabir emphasizes what a rare opportunity it is to obtain the human birth. He continues:

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

Saints say that desires start out as small seedlings, which may be plucked out easily at this stage; but if cultivated and watered and fertilized, they grow into a strong, entangling, thorny vine. Sufi mystics also use this analogy when warning against spiritual sloth and indifference. They say that the thorny shrub of worldly desires continues to grow stronger and more deeply rooted, while the one whose job it is to dig it up grows older and weaker.

Mystics, philosophers, prophets, and saints of every religion and school of thought have tried to shake off the complacency of spiritual seekers by repeatedly pointing out that we all have to face death. They say that this life is transitory. Saints come to point out to us that we need to give up our mental attachment to this world and attach it to something higher, to look for that which is true and eternal if we want true and lasting happiness. Mystics tell us that our lack of interest and intensity in meditation is due to our failure to truly realize what a short time we have on this earth, and that only in this precious human birth do we have the opportunity to realize God within ourselves. Kabir describes the characteristics of a true devotee:

*He is a true devotee who is absorbed in devotion for the Lord;
He alone will obtain the Immaculate One.*

One-pointed absorption in contemplation of the Lord is the key to successful meditation. To achieve this, all thoughts except the repetition of the Beloved's name must cease, so that one's spiritual practice becomes the highest priority. However, this can never be achieved by effort alone. The grace of the Master is supreme on the path of devotion. Kabir gives very practical advice on how to conquer the mind and remain in a state of spiritual balance and equipoise. He says:

*With arms raised Kabir calls:
Repeat,
Repeat the Lord's Name
Each day, with each breath,
For Nam alone will be your saviour
At the perilous hour of death.*

The prevailing atmosphere in which we live our daily life is very important, and the right atmosphere can only be created through living a Sant Mat way of life, continual repetition of simran, and carrying out our daily meditation. With constant contemplation on the Satguru we will cease feeling that he and we are different. Living in the atmosphere of meditation all day long brings us closer to the Lord.

Through simran we rise above, and are not affected by, the affairs of the world. Constant simran will develop such willpower that we can remain on the edge of life without slipping into the sticky cup of honey. It will create calmness in the mind where love of the Master will flourish, the senses will come under control, and meditation will become much easier. This is the initial step on the path and nothing can be accomplished until it is mastered. However, because of the nature and power of the mind, the depths of our attachments, and our heavy burden of karmas, this may take a very long time. Patience and perseverance are required. We can work slowly and steadily toward the ideal.

It is not surprising that the Masters tell us they want to drown us in love until there is nothing left of us, nothing left of our separate identity. It is ultimately love that transforms us. Kabir says in *Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name*:

*I tried many alchemic recipes
But found not one like the Lord's love;
If even one drop enters the body,
Your entire being turns to gold.*



Athlete of God

Martha Graham, a famous American dancer, said:

We learn by practice. Whether it means to learn to dance by practising dancing or to learn to live by practising living, the principles are the same.... One becomes in some area an athlete of God. Practice means to perform, over and over again in the face of all obstacles, some act of vision, of faith, of desire. Practice is a means of inviting the perfection desired.

As quoted in, *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*

An athlete of God! What a wonderful way to express what is required to achieve perfection. We know that a champion in any field – athletics, dance, music, science, to name a few – gets to a level of perfection through concentrated, deliberate practice, regardless of the barriers that crop up or the difficulties that have to be overcome. By doing the activity over and over, adjusting and correcting, improving time after time, the champion seeks to become perfect. On the spiritual path, this is precisely what the Master teaches us to do. He advises us, encourages us, and supports us so that we can keep putting in our effort, and with his grace, we can gain our objective of perfection – which is union with the Lord. An “athlete of God” is indeed a fitting description for the dedicated disciple. Great Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, writes in *Dawn of Light*:

Note that mere theory of a thing does not help, unless it is actually put into practice.... To control the mind is not the work

of haste; it requires years of patient perseverance.... Apply your mind with love and keen interest to the spiritual exercises.

All the time we spend in intellectual debates and discussion, or even in being mesmerized by the poetry of Sant Mat and its elegance, will not help us. We have to “walk the talk.” Great Master draws out this contrast between theoretical understanding and real experience through action and practice. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, he says:

A person may listen to a flute and enjoy its melody, but cannot play it. He can really enjoy it only if he is able to play it. Similarly, the thoughts of saints are reduced to writing in the sacred books, but one cannot realize the Truth by merely reading these books. It is a matter of self-experience through the practice of meditation.

It is only through action that we gain experience. Rather than spending our time asking questions or engaging in futile discussion, we should simply engage in doing our practice. Instead of agreeing in principle with the theory of Sant Mat and paying lip service to the Master’s instructions, we should diligently put his teachings into practice in our daily lives. It is then that we will experience the transformation in ourselves and make spiritual progress, and as Great Master points out, we will “really enjoy the flute.”

To be successful in our practice, we need to focus on what is most vital. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, Great Master says:

It is, therefore, an essential condition of success to keep before you the ideal. Ask of yourself as to what you want to be. What ideal have you set in life?

The constant chasing after the things of this world and the pull of the urgent issue instead of the important one distract us from our true purpose of God-realization. In all this hustle and bustle, occasionally we feel the pull of the Divine – and that is when we may feel dissatisfied even when we appear to have everything. We may try out organized religion, follow rituals and observances, visit places of worship, and make an attempt at prayer, but we fail to find peace and continue to be restless. The problem is that we look for peace in the things of the world and forget that lasting peace is found within, where we will find the Lord. This is what the saints teach us: the treasure of true bliss and peace is within us – yet we expend our time and effort searching everywhere but within.

There is a story that illustrates this point. It is said that in Africa, in the early days of diamond discovery, an excited farmer sold his farm to head out to search for diamonds. He didn't find any, and his life ended in poverty and heartbreak. It later turned out that the farm that he sold to finance his unsuccessful quest was itself the site of one of the richest diamond mines in the world. He had left the treasure beneath his feet to go hunting for it everywhere else. Just like that farmer searching for diamonds, we appear to be unaware of the riches, the spiritual treasure that is very close to us. Even when the teacher shares his knowledge, we do not learn well enough to act on that information, and keep looking elsewhere. We all have the Lord within – acres of spiritual diamonds – waiting to be found, but we have to realize that truth and act on it. We have to make the effort to mine for him. We have to clearly answer for ourselves Great Master's question, "What ideal have you set in life?"

What better ideal could we have than the pursuit of true happiness through union with the Lord? It is time to turn away from the pursuit of the world and go within. We have the good fortune to have the

association of a living Master. He showers his grace on us by initiating us and constantly reminding us to attend to our practice. Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, how we can make this practice of meditation part of our lives. He says:

There are only two ways of attending to meditation. Either you have intense love and desire for meditation, or you make it a habit in your life. You tell yourself: This particular time has to be given to meditation come what may. Only then does it become a habit. Call it force, call it a habit, call it a matter of duty – ultimately it comes to the same thing. The other way is intense longing, intense desire and devotion, which forces you to attend to meditation. That is always the best, but if you are not fortunate enough to have that approach, then naturally we cannot relax in our meditation.

Many of us are not blessed with the intense longing, love, and devotion that compel us to set our priorities right and sit for our spiritual practice. Therefore, we have no option but to make an effort of conscious will to make the time to sit for meditation. We have to be regular and punctual, “come what may,” so that we make meditation a habit.

Lao-tzu says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” We have to take that step. When the mind drifts, when we find we are restless, when our bodies wriggle and squirm, when we are so uncomfortable we think it’s impossible to stay still – we have to give the body and the mind a metaphorical whack and bring them back on track. Through concentration, we have to make the body motionless and bring the mind to a standstill. Restless? Stay still! Aching knees and throbbing back? Stay still! What’s for lunch? Stay still! I can’t stand

this another minute! Stay still! Everything about this that we perceive as being difficult – our inability to find the time, our lack of concentration, or our mind wandering off – we can choose to overcome, if only we get into the habit of acting instead of thinking about how to act or how well we are doing. Great Master advises us in *Spiritual Gems*:

It is all a matter of unwavering attention.... But that is not so easy without long practice.... The mind is tricky and will run out if permitted. Conquer it.... The whole thing is attention, and then unbroken attention, at the eye centre, allowing no other thought to intrude itself into the consciousness and lead you away from the centre. This was the method by which I won my way inside, and it is the method by which you must win your way.

Practice is what will make our efforts perfect; even in matters of the world, isn't that what is required? And what a resounding assurance Great Master gives us – this is how he did it, this is how we must do it! We must, as Martha Graham puts it, perform an act of faith; that is exactly what meditation is all about, faith in the Master's instructions. We act – meditate – and practise it over and over. And then we too can become athletes of God.



The Obstacle of Ego

When Maharaj Sawan Singh was asked “What is ego?” he replied:

Ego is the feeling or consciousness of one's separate existence from God.... We strive to make everything ours. This causes strife and struggle, competition and quarrels. Then attachment, love and affection for the objects we call 'our own' enchain us to them and cloud our sense of discrimination, and we find ourselves caught in the cobweb of jealousy, greed, anger, hatred and all the evils born of ignorance.

The Call of the Great Master

In Greek mythology, there is the story of Arachne, an expert weaver, who challenged the goddess Athena to see who was the better weaver. The result was that Athena turned Arachne into a spider and she and her descendants are forever attached to the webs that they weave.

Unknowingly, we also are attached to the web of karmas that we have woven throughout millions of past lives. In the book *One Being One* we read:

Thoughts, moods, desires, attractions, aversions, images, and all the rest of it, pass through our minds like a confused and never-ending movie, with many scenes unfinished and unresolved. And each, however fleeting, grabs the attention of our self....
“We pronounce it ‘I,’ as if it were the whole of us, despite the fact that the very next moment when external circumstances change, another ‘I’ has ousted it and taken over control.”

Ego, it seems, is fundamental to our self-concept and identity. For this reason, it is so difficult to subdue and conquer it. Ego is so much more than arrogance or pride. The ego's many attributes are always lurking in the background, diligently ready to block our awareness of the truth within. It is only through a deep feeling of love that one can get a glimpse of life guided by a consciousness devoid of ego. Only when we are filled with love of the Lord is true loss of ego achieved. Only true saints and mystics can give us the method by which this love can be achieved and egoless consciousness attained, but few are willing to listen to them and act on their advice.

Saints teach us that everything belongs to the Lord and that everything in this world is given to us by the Lord. When we labour under the illusion that we own or control anything, it is really our ego and pride that are controlling us. Over time, the saints show us that meekness and humility are essential to overcoming pride. Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

What is false pride or vainglory? To be proud of a virtue we do not possess, or we possess merely as a gift from someone else, is false pride.... Another person is proud of his beautiful hair, fair face, soft hand or healthy body and walks about the streets like a bloated bag. Such pride is false: pride such as this is due to that all powerful Creator and nature which made him or to the soul granted by the Lord.

Only when we find a true Master or teacher will we be able to escape this profound obstacle of ego which fills our mind with such a false sense of identity. By following the teachings of a true Master we can eliminate our ego, see our true self, and find our origin where true peace and happiness prevail.



If You Serve the Guru

Listen, O innocent devotees,
repeat your simran without a break
and all your bad deeds will be burnt.

If you can serve the guru
this age of darkness won't harm you
and you'll come to know liberation.

The guru –
treasure-house of knowledge,
mountain of courage –
he will ferry your boat to freedom
if you practise his simran.

He is the force of life at the core of creation.
Where he is, there is liberation.

If you practise his simran
all the gods and goddesses will be yours.

Glory to my guru – my father and mother –
who helps me quit this coming and going,
this living and dying in countless forms.

Concentrating in the innermost heart,
Bodhla has come to see his own Being.

Mankoji Bodhla, in *Many Voices, One Song*



I Am Nothing

In *Spiritual Letters*, Baba Jaimal Singh says, referring to the fateful day when the disciple meets his perfect living Master:

From that day forth, the disciple understands “I am nothing. All that exists belongs to the Satguru – body, mind and wealth... I am nothing but an instrument.” That is why work performed with the body, mind and wealth will not do him any harm.

This concept of the individual being nothing but an instrument of the Lord is hard for us to grasp because we think we are separate from God and from one another. We look around us and see many different people, animals, birds, plants, and living things all separate from one another. But this is an illusion because everything that we can see with our physical eyes, along with everything that we cannot see, is a projection of the Shabd. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh talks about what there was in the beginning before this creation existed. He says:

First, there was only the Lord, who is without beginning and without end. He has projected himself everywhere. There was nothing besides him. He was the only one. All that we see is just his own projection. Everything is projected from him. If we admit that there was something besides him, then the Lord is not one. He is the only one – he always was, is and will be. He is everywhere, and everything is his own projection.

So there is the one Lord, the Shabd, the Sound and Light, the Ocean of Love, the source of everything and everyone, the Creator whom we cannot see with our physical eyes. And then there is the creation that we can see. There is this physical body that we can see and our soul within it that we cannot see. If we close our eyes and go within by our simran, with our repetition of the five holy names given to us by our Master at the time of our initiation, we can see with our inner eye the truth that our true form is soul and that our soul is a particle of the Shabd.

Our true form is Shabd. This body that we see is only a piece of clothing, a coat that we are wearing to go through our karmas, a coat that makes us look like we are all different from one another, a coat that hides the fact that we are all Shabd.

If we could only realize this fact, in the sense of knowing from personal experience, we would see that there is no difference between you and me and every other living being on this planet, other than the body we are wearing and the karmas we are going through. If we were in a position to see this oneness, then how could we ever hurt another living being? How could we hurt someone's feelings? How could we go to war? It would be like hurting our own selves, hurting the Lord.

But our mind does not allow us to go within to see this truth. Our mind keeps us busy in the world, thinking that this current life is real, is important, and needs our full attention. Our mind tells us that we are doing everything; we are in control. We are separate from everyone else. Baba Jaimal Singh Ji explains in *Spiritual Letters*:

All work, temporal or spiritual, is done by the Shabd-dhun, but the mind takes undue credit for it, which is all false. In fact, the Shabd-dhun does it all.

Our physical form is doing nothing; it is a puppet, animated by Shabd. Our mind – our ego – thinks that it is the doer. But this is wrong. Even our personality is nothing but an outcome of our bundle of karmas. The Shabd animates this body and acts through us. So this is why Baba Jaimal Singh Ji keeps saying to Great Master in his letters, remember that you are nothing. In *Spiritual Letters* he says:

Believe it implicitly my son, the Satguru has told us that man does nothing – only the means for doing appears to come through him.

We think we are doing things, we think we are making decisions, we think we are taking actions, but we are doing nothing. We think with our mind and if we can control our mind through our bhajan and simran, if we can release our mind from the senses that have it under control, and withdraw it to the eye centre where it will meet the Shabd Master within, we can experience the truth that we are soul and not the body. This is self-realization, knowing who we are from personal experience. And when we know it to be true that we are Shabd, we will understand that we are literally doing nothing here in this creation – the Lord is doing it all.

And that is what Baba Jaimal Singh is referring to in almost every letter when he says, “Wherever you go, keep your attention in the Satguru; then he himself is the doer.” He is saying: think of your Master – not the physical form of the Master – but the inner Shabd Master, and allow him to use you as his instrument, for in reality that is what is happening. Keep your personality out of your doings, keep your mind under control, and then the Master is responsible for the results, and we create no new karmas to pay off in a future life.

If we could lead our lives like this, knowing that we are just the means the Lord uses to enact his play, we could live without worrying about anything. We are not in control. This play has a script that we are following. We don't know how the story will develop, we don't know if there will be pleasure or pain in the script, but we do know that the script has been written in such a way that at the end, we will be free; we will never have to perform in another play again.

So instead of worrying about what will happen without our intervention, we should follow Baba Jaimal Singh's advice when he says, "Whenever you are free, do your bhajan and simran. Our true work is bhajan and simran; doing even a little will add up to a lot."

Our true work is meditation. Everything else is just balancing our karmas. Everything else is the destiny we have to complete in this lifetime; meditation prepares us for the future beyond our death. This is our real work; this is our own work. This is the work that should occupy our thoughts and receive the most attention in our lives because everything else is in the hands of the Master. This much we can do. We can try our best to do our simran and bhajan.

Baba Jaimal Singh writes:

My son, you are not separate from my form. This is an amazing play that cannot be understood without the perfect Satguru – merely in order to transact the affairs of the world he appears as a separate body.

The Master and all his disciples are the same. All living beings are the same. The apparent differences between us are on the surface. Let us do our own true work every day so that the Master's words become experience for us, not just concepts.



The Invisible Helping Hand

It seems that most people feel troubled when they have no apparent means of spiritual support, and yet the whole world seems to be searching for just this. Bhakti yogis say that we are all seeking that “dear sweet friend” which every soul needs. That is the one who dwells within us – the one who has the answers to all our questions, who gives us ineffable joy.

We are all struggling with five powerful passions. We all experience pride, anger, greed, lust, and attachment at some point in our life. What is behind each of these passions is a desperate and futile quest for security, power, worldly control or fame. Yet even if we attain these, we remain unsatisfied.

These five passions let us down. We are aware that there isn't anything in life that does not keep changing. We ask ourselves what will stay as a constant, dependable, permanent, and ever present means of support in our life? It is the Master and his invisible helping hand, the Shabd. His helping hand is always there. We just have to reach out for it. Each disciple has a personal connection to his Master and can, if he wishes, contact him directly. We connect with him each time we meditate, each time we do simran, each time we remember him. That's how we are able to grab hold of his invisible helping hand.

A Master is not an ordinary human being. He is the giver of all comfort, bliss, and happiness. In his company, miseries and worries are forgotten. In his company, rays of spirituality are there; we just need to become receptive.

Master doesn't tell us to earn more money, have a good family, or buy more clothes. Saints don't come to entangle us in this creation – we are already deeply entangled. They don't come to give us children;

they don't come to give us employment and good jobs; they don't come to heal us of physical and mental pains; they don't come here to give us wealth, position, and power. They want to eliminate our ties to all these things so that we may become detached – so the mind can turn inward.

The message of the saints is to repeat the Name of the Lord. If we go on repeating it, then we will one day merge into the Lord. So Master's business is to remind us that, with every breath of our life, we should try to keep the Name of the Lord with us.

We know there are two sides to life: one is attending to our outer, worldly needs, and the other is realizing that there is something besides this worldly life – a higher ideal, a greater happiness, a deeper insight into life, and a greater peace. Right now, however, our soul is being held down by our karmas – the debts that we still owe here in this life. Every time we meditate we get rid of a little of that weight. The Master tells us that the entire burden that was holding us down will one day be gone, and our soul will eventually go within. We have no idea how many debts we have yet to pay, and perhaps that is a good thing. So we have to keep trying.

If we remember the Master during the day, we impress upon the mind that his presence is with us everywhere. When the disciple meets the inner Master, all miseries and sufferings will be completely forgotten. But until then, we need to remind ourselves that he is ever by our side and holding our hand as we walk through this life.

We can also keep him close during the day by practising gratitude. The best way to cultivate this grateful heart is simply to realize each and every day all the gifts we have in life. We can train our mind to thank him for the day, for our breath, our home, our food – for everything – and to realize that he is the source of all these things.

A grateful heart is a kind, loving heart, a soft heart full of love and appreciation for the Beloved. It is a heart tempered by humility because the Lord granted us the great good fortune and grace of meeting the Master. In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, Soami Ji speaks of the grace of the Master:

*The Master has arrived to grace my home,
he has woken my destiny from its long slumber.
He has revived the withering plant of my life,
he has repopulated the deserted city of my heart.
How can I describe my situation?
I cannot contain myself....*

Soami Ji also explains:

*The state of the saints is beyond all comprehension –
no one is capable of offering them devotion,
no one is capable of singing their praises....
He has opened all the doors of my heart, through which
my soul has soared like a bird to the heavens,
singing his praises....
The unbounded love that has welled up in my heart
has made me forget my body and mind.*

We are asked to do our meditation and start moving along the road back home as quickly as we can, not allowing our mind to entice us and draw us away with its alluring temptations of the world. Yes, it may seem like a long journey, but Maharaj Charan Singh reassures us in *Quest for Light* that we are always under the protecting hand of the Lord:

Every initiate is being looked after by the Master and whatever comes to such a one, whether good or bad from the disciple's limited point of view, is all within the knowledge of the Master and is for the disciple's own good. The Lord has his own hand of protection on all those whom he has drawn to the path.



We feel his grace at every step. A child feels the guiding hand, the helping hand, of his mother at every step in his upbringing, his development. Without the mother's helping hand a child can never develop. Master's helping hand is always there for our spiritual development. We could never spiritually develop at all without his guidance, whether outside or inside. His helping hand is always there with the disciple, for his spiritual development....

Ultimately there'll be one shepherd and one fold. Everybody has to be in that fold, all those who are marked. So naturally his guiding hand is always there, whether we are conscious of it or not conscious of it. For our spiritual development, he is always there to help us in every way.

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

Guarding Our Personal Treasure

Before initiation into Sant Mat, a seeker had a very memorable dream. She was standing on the steps of a large building with several people. Suddenly, below them a group of rowdy people armed with guns started shooting at them. She turned to a satsangi who was with her and said, “Quick, do your simran.” As this person began to do simran silently, the seeker felt herself being lifted up in the air and held cradled in loving arms. In this cocoon of love she flew through the air, feeling safe and protected. After some time, she was placed on the ground and found herself in an unrecognizable place with the same people who had been on the steps with her. She knew the love she experienced in that dream is what our Satguru offers when he initiates us and allows us to feel that kind of love again and again by following this path.

When she awoke from the dream, the intense feeling of love stayed with her for weeks, until one day she told the story of her dream to a satsangi friend. As she finished relating her dream, she realized that the special feeling of love was no longer there. It had disappeared the moment she spoke of this love, and she can barely remember it. By sharing that experience of love and joy with her friend, she lost it.

The Masters tell us that Sant Mat is an individual relationship between the soul and the Master. No two satsangis will follow the path in the same way, and we cannot learn from each other’s inner experiences. So it is very important to guard our personal treasure, our inner and outer experiences with the Master, and not talk about them to other people.

When satsangis come back from being with the Master, it is natural to want to hear all about him. But so much of what one gets when being around the Master is so personal that it is neither easy nor advisable to share what has been given to us. Even those things which can be expressed are fragile, like a snowflake which is beautiful to look at, but when touched is instantly destroyed. We have to be very careful of our own and others' memories.

These personal gifts we receive from our Master – a letter he writes in answer to our pain, a teasing response at the microphone, a glance he casts our way, candy blessed by the Master – are all parshad. Let us hold on to these personal treasures and cherish them as a special gift given to us by the Master. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

When parshad is given, it is not the candy which is the parshad, it is the Master and the disciple. It is the Master's intention in giving the parshad that makes it parshad for the disciple. It is for the advantage of the disciple. The advantage is given to the disciple, and the Master's good wishes are the parshad for the disciple. The candy is just a means.... It is just personal for the person to whom it is given.

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



Spiritual Maturity

We say the goal of this path is God-realization – to realize God within ourselves. However, as much as we like the idea of merging back into God, if we're honest, we don't know what we're asking for. This is because we don't understand what God is. Each of us has his own inner concept of God, and that concept evolves as we evolve. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh asks, "What are we? Have we ever thought about ourselves?" And then he answers by saying, "We have no concept of the soul, and that means we have no concept of ourselves. Then how can we have a concept of the Lord?"

This is a very important point. We want to know God but we don't even know what we are. Masters tell us that we are a particle of God, but even this is something we take on faith. When we think, we work through our mind; when we feel, we feel through our emotions which are also a quality of the mind. How do we know what soul is? Working our way through the confusion and lack of understanding about ourselves is part of the process of spiritually maturing.

Perhaps we should think about what it means to be mature in the world. In one of her most requested articles, Ann Landers, an advice columnist in many American newspapers, outlines maturity in a very understandable way, as a bundle of characteristics and traits. Let's look at some of these traits that show worldly maturity to see how they also apply to spiritual maturity.

Addressing patience, she says, "Maturity means being able to resist the urge for immediate gratification and opt for the course of action that will pay off later." This is exactly what we do when we follow the instructions of the Master. We follow the course of action that pays off in the long term. We may wait years to see the fruit of what we're

doing right now, but the mature disciple is not bothered by results, but rather is interested in putting in the effort to please his Master.

Next, Landers says that “maturity is perseverance – the ability to sweat out a project or a situation in spite of heavy opposition and discouraging setbacks.” Our mind is the heaviest opposition we will ever face. If we can stick with meditation in spite of, or perhaps because of the doubts it presents to us, we will find that we have grown more spiritually mature. Daily meditation presents the ultimate test for perseverance! Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol II:

Whether the mind enjoys it or not, we should sit in meditation, looking on it as our duty. Little by little, the mind will turn itself towards devotion to the Lord, although in the beginning we have to keep up a constant fight with it.

Perseverance is closely related to patience because it often takes patience to persevere. But perseverance also implies continuing on our course of action – even when it’s not easy to do so. If we don’t constantly and patiently make the effort to remember our purpose in having this human birth, we can get caught up in worldly problems and concerns, which can preoccupy us until we reach the end of our lives wondering why we have devoted so much time and attention to them. If we replace our thoughts of worry and concern with simran, then when we look back over our lives, we will see that we’ve accomplished something amazing. In the book *Essential Sufism*, a Persian mystic explains how we know God is with us: “At first you act as if you’re doing the Repetition. Then you do the Repetition. Then finally the Repetition does you.”

Next, Ann Landers says the mature person can “control anger” and “can face unpleasantness, frustration, discomfort, and defeat without collapsing or complaining.” This is a really tough one! In a way it means controlling all the passions. Anger is just one of the five passions we are cautioned about. How can we think of being in control of our temper, or of any other passion, in the inner regions if we can’t control it out in the physical world? Great Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, writes about this in *Spiritual Gems*:

Regarding lust, anger, pride, and so forth your view is correct. Purity of character is the fundamental basis on which the edifice of spiritual progress is to be built. These five passions will become weaker and weaker as the bliss of the Sound Current increases. In the end, all these as well as the mind will come under the control of the soul. Now the soul is under the control of mind and passions.

Control of the passions under all circumstances is difficult, and yet, this control forms the basis for spiritual progress.

Next comes one of the most compelling and significant points of maturity: Landers says that “maturity is humility.” Humility is the cornerstone of how we should try to behave. It means controlling the last and most difficult of the five passions, that of pride or ego. Maharaj Jagat Singh writes about ego in *The Science of the Soul*:

Pride or egotism is a malignant kind of selfishness and is the most sturdy and masterful of the baneful five. It has also the greatest longevity. It is the last to surrender. Its fundamental assumption is its own infallibility.

Real humility is not forcing the mind down; it comes from a true knowledge of our unimportance. Seen in the context of the whole creation, we are so small and insignificant. When we really know how unimportant we are, humility comes naturally, but first, we have to start by being humble in our dealings in the world.

Humility comes before we lose our ego. Eliminating ego comes before surrender to the Master, and surrender comes before we can merge into God. This is the sequence of steps that starts with humility. If we don't have it, we can practise it; we can pretend to have it.

Also, Landers writes, "Maturity is the ability to live up to your responsibilities, and this means being dependable. It means keeping your word."

This responsibility can clearly be related to keeping the vows we take at initiation. How often have we heard the Masters say that we must fulfil our responsibilities in this life. We must not run away from our obligations. Part of being responsible means putting in effort when we would rather be lazy. Nobody achieves great things by being lazy. Working hard is part of being an adult and it is part of spiritual maturity.

The next point she makes is about having the courage to make decisions and act on them. "Action requires courage.... Without courage, little is accomplished." One of the most vivid images in spiritual literature is that of the spiritual warrior – one who is brave enough to face enemies bigger and stronger without question, using the weapon of simran and the shield of meditation. A word that jumps out here is "action." Masters constantly urge us to take action because without personal experience, we will never have the necessary faith in our Master to make inner progress. Great Master, in *Spiritual Gems*, writes:

An individual is endowed with intelligence and does every action knowingly. It is, therefore, incumbent on him to find a way of escape from this entanglement. To raise his spirit, he must struggle against the mind, for he lives by struggle. And where there is a will, there is a way. He cannot say that this is no part of his duty.

Landers then talks about setting high goals in life: “The mature person refuses to settle for mediocrity. He would rather aim high and miss the mark than aim low – and make it.” Even though this is referring to taking risks in the world, it applies to the spiritual path also. Aiming for God-realization means we are aiming for the highest target there is. The risk-taking for us is that we push ourselves to attain a goal that we have little or no experience of. As Master points out to us, when we want something in the world we don’t expect someone to give it to us. We put in the effort to get it. The same thing goes for spiritual goals. In *Sar Bachan*, Soami Ji writes about our spiritual goal:

The aim and object of all religions and of all ancient seers has been to take the soul, by one means or another, back to its source. Perfect is he who, by practice and meditation, lifts his soul to its real abode, freeing it from all bonds, both internal and external, gross, subtle and causal, and thus detaches his mind from the world and its phenomena.

We have the ultimate goal in Sant Mat – God-realization. Do we make our most fervent attempt to reach this goal?

Finally, Landers sums up her article by stating, “Maturity is the art of living in peace with that which we cannot change, the courage to change that which should be changed, no matter what it takes, and the wisdom to know the difference.” This is a version of the Serenity Prayer, recited at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. It can be understood as “surrender” to the will of God. It means trying to do what we think is right and accepting what happens as his will – a very difficult thing to do. In fact, surrendering to the will of the Lord is much harder than the path of meditation!

These attributes of worldly maturity are a reflection of a higher, inner, and spiritual maturity. Viewed in this way, all our obstacles and frustrations in life are really opportunities to learn and practise maturity.

By keeping our Master in mind and by cultivating the desire to please him, so that this desire becomes our first priority in life, we can never go wrong. Like a child who continues to grow and mature even if he wants to remain a child, we too will grow and mature spiritually by following our vows and doing our meditation faithfully. His help and support are always there, even if we’re not at the level where we can see it.



The open reward of the Father is that he will shower his grace in great abundance upon the soul. If someone keeps their love for God a secret, saying nothing about it to others, then God realizes their spiritual maturity and fills them with his love. He does not keep his love a secret from them.

The Gospel of Jesus

Quieting the Mind

Sant Mat is a beautiful path in which we follow a way of life and a meditation practice that enable us to quiet our mind and focus it in an inward direction. Through this quiet focus we connect with the Shabd, the sweet melody that is in each and every one of us, and find our way to the Creator.

The subject of quieting, controlling, and pacifying the mind is as old as humanity itself. It is an essential aspect of any positive journey – whether purely spiritual or material. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

The first essential thing is concentration – bringing the scattered and scattering attention in the eye focus. It is the attention or sense of feeling, mind, and so forth, no matter what name you give it (for at this stage it is a combination of all), that is to see and hear within, just as it is seeing and hearing outwardly now. The same force which is working in the world outside, through eyes, ears, and so forth is to work within, through the inner eye and the inner ear, in the inner worlds.

The first step in quieting our mind utilizes the same mechanism that we use for all our outward quests: concentration. Just as we gather information about the world through our external senses and focus on that information, so through meditation we learn to focus within. We cannot focus externally and internally at the same time. It is like reading a book and talking. Reading a book requires turning inward while talking requires turning outward. In our everyday life we can easily switch between inward and outward activities. This is

encouraging for all of us when we want to turn our attention inward for meditation. We already know how to do it! Maharaj Sawan Singh continues in the same letter:

Like the switching off and on of an electric current from one aperture to another, we should be able to switch off and on our attention from the physical, material world, or the physical body, to the inner, finer world and the inner, finer or astral body. The attention, like the current, is the same; but it is to work in different spheres. Collection and holding of the attention at the eye focus is to switch it off from the physical world and the physical body. When this is achieved, concentration is complete. We should then be entirely cut off from the material world and our own material body but conscious within.

Because our attention has been running wild, outwardly from the eye focus, not only during our present life since our birth but in our previous lives also, so to hold it at the eye focus is an arduous, uphill task. The habit of staying out from the focus has become second nature. But there is no reason why we should not be able to overcome a habit. It only needs effort and determination.

Great Master says that it only needs effort and determination. Let's look at these two qualities. Effort is something that we practise every day, all day long. We need to put in effort to do our work, to do our chores, to cook our food. Without effort we can't even get out of bed in the morning. Determination is a little bit different. It does not necessarily come into our conscious sphere of living until we want or need something specific – something that we are not getting. There are countless examples of determination in life. How about working late to

get a promotion, getting up early to exercise, getting up early to go shopping because of a specific item we want? Reading review after review of a product until we find the right one?

These two skills that we need for meditation – effort and determination – are skills that we already use all the time. We just need to redirect them. When in meditation we find that our mind wanders out, we use these tools of effort and determination in order to bring it back to the quiet place within ourselves. The Great Master says in *Spiritual Gems*:

A devotee is sometimes not conscious of his mind wandering out till later. He should keep watch over the mind, and if it goes out, he should bring it in again and again. Thus by constant practice, the mind will tire out and become motionless. It requires time and perseverance. It is not an easy task to make the mind still and to keep it motionless. But one should not despond. As the mind becomes quiet, the Sound will become clearer and the body will become numb.

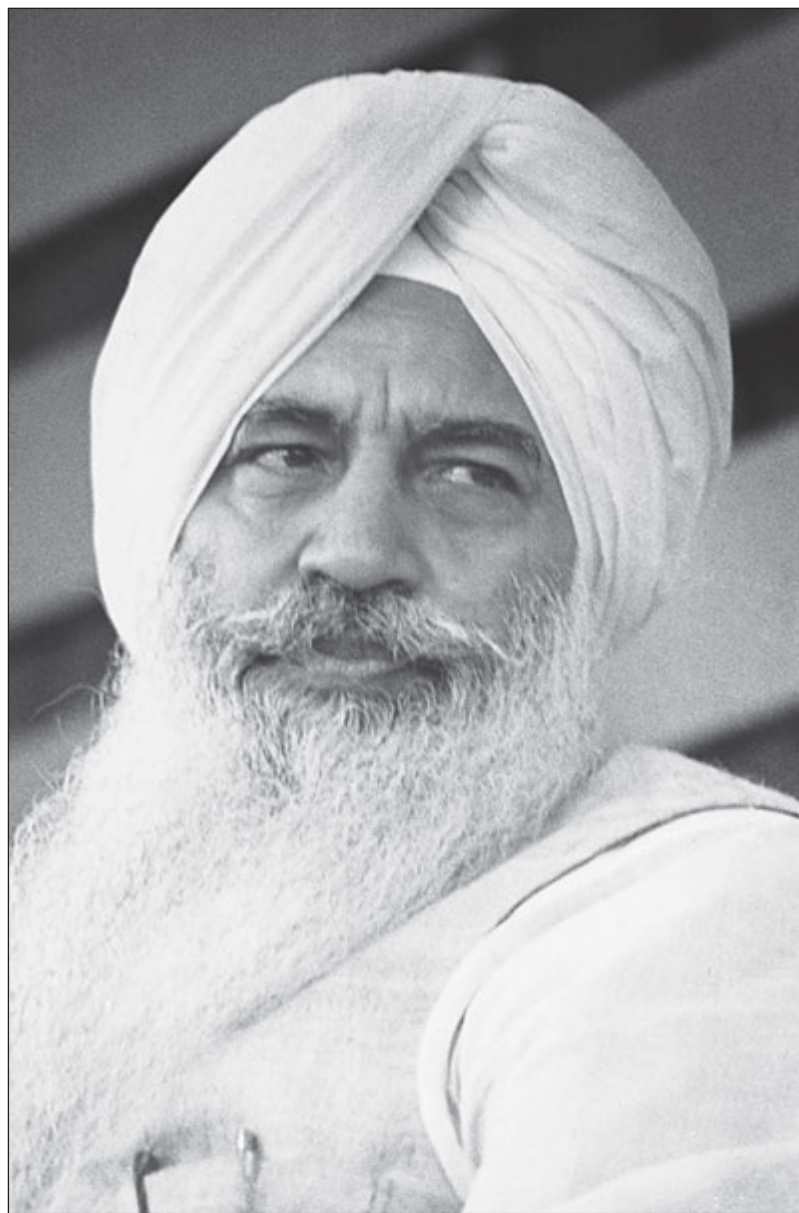
When our mind has wandered out, the only thing to do is to make the effort again with our simran to turn inward as soon as we realize it. Simran is really just a constant repetition of a simple process. It is like when we try and teach a dog to sit. We have to repeat that training many times before the dog can actually sit and not move until we give the next command. We do not give up on the first try or the second or even after many more times. Why? Because we know that the dog is perfectly capable of submitting to our commands and that it will take time, and the only way to get there is by repetition. So it is with the mind; we keep reeling it in when we realize it has wandered, and we

do not stop that effort – ever. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Quest for Light*:

The only way to subdue your mind and make it more receptive to spiritual efforts is to make more spiritual effort. For millions of ages our mind has been out of its centre. This outward and downward tendency has become such a habit that naturally it requires some time and constant effort to bring the consciousness back out of the lower centres.

When Hazur says “for millions of ages,” it seems incomprehensible. How can we be discouraged when we have only been trying to quiet our mind for five minutes, or five days, or five months, or five years or even fifty years when we have to contend with the millions of years that came before? We cannot possibly be discouraged because we know that the effort required has to be continuous. We do not simply get somewhere and then stop our effort, in this case our meditation. No matter how far we get, we still keep up with the effort. We also need to understand that the effort itself is part of the reward. And the reward of that effort and determination is that we quiet our mind and become one with the reality that is already within each of us.





Moving Mountains

Faith is the foundation of spirituality. Faith is essential to quiet our doubts and deepen our belief in the Lord. Going into the unknown takes a leap of faith. We are explorers, seeking the inner world. We know we want to journey back to the Lord, but we don't know how to travel there. In days past people had no maps and certainly not a GPS so commonly used today to plot out a journey. Travellers had to depend on the stars at night and various landmarks during the day. Adventurous travellers often were the first to explore uncharted territory and may have ended up somewhere completely unexpected. Christopher Columbus did not set out to discover America, but that is where he ended up.

The spiritual journey also takes us into the unknown and may have many unexpected twists and turns. We go through many stages. We may begin with skepticism, then hope blossoms and peace settles in. At various times we are doubters, seekers, and believers. Initially, we may doubt ourselves and question our purpose in this world. Doubt sometimes plants the seed of dissatisfaction that pushes us to seek. As we go beyond doubt, a seed of hope begins to grow. We find we want to believe in something bigger and better than what this world has to offer – whether we call it a higher power, or purpose, or the divine, or the Lord. As we seek, if we are lucky enough to have the Lord reach out to us through one of his human emissaries – a Master – we are given the opportunity to believe. As believers, we want so desperately to feel that divine power, that spark that comes from deep within. Faith in the Master lays the foundation for us to realize the Lord.

Sadly, so many things can shake our faith. Doubt creeps back in from time to time. When faced with hardship, some may ask, “Why

has the Lord deserted me?” Yet everyone has ups and downs that may test their faith. Patience, acceptance, and effort can help to steady our faith. We need patience to accept the will of the Lord. We need to turn that patience into persistence and perseverance to seek the Lord within. We have to make the effort and accept the grace of the Lord in whatever he has planned for us.

We also have to surrender to the will of the Lord. Surrender is one of the most difficult things to do because it challenges us to operate on faith without proof. We have to put in effort, but we must be patient and not expect results. We have to accept our fate. None of this is easy. People may rebel and rage at the Lord. We want him to tell us what to do. How often have we said to ourselves: “Lord, just tell me what to do, and I will do it.”

But would we really? Our ego and our mind constantly send us contradictory messages that keep pulling us back into this world. Or we think we know better than the Lord what is best for us even though deep down we know it is not. It is a constant struggle to keep trying despite our professed desire to reunite with the Lord. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

Without faith we don't make any progress at all. But first we have to build intellectual faith in the philosophy. And in the light of the philosophy, we have to weigh the Master. And then real faith will come only when you practise. Actual faith comes by experience, and faith comes from within, it doesn't come from outside at all.... The faith which we build by seeing other people doesn't have much depth at all; it's very shaky. The faith that comes from within by meditation – which strengthens our

faith, rather it creates faith – that is unshakable faith. Faith is very essential before we can put forth an earnest effort to practise.

The purpose of meditation is to sustain us and help us grow closer to the Master. Without it we will not make progress. It is said that faith can move mountains, meaning it can overcome any obstacle in our path. Meditating with faith will move the mountains that stand between us and the Lord and help us in so many other ways. It changes our attitude from negative to positive, opens our heart, and allows our receptivity to the Lord to blossom.

Meditation is that internal practice in which we are able to leave our cares and worries behind and focus our attention inward. If we attempt to do that, we have a chance to quiet our mind and commune with the Lord. At first one might be enthusiastic and excited at the prospect of going within and meeting the Lord. We may hope for, and in fact even expect, quick results. For most seekers, however, the journey within happens gradually, and we have to take it a day at a time. Sometimes our effort is weak; sometimes our effort may be very strong. Moving the mountain of our mind may seem impossible, yet we've been told we can do it. With our daily simran and bhajan we are chipping away at that seemingly impenetrable rock.

At the Dera, sevadars have literally moved mountains. Years ago, people would move mountains of earth to fill in ravines by carrying baskets of dirt on their heads – basket after basket after basket. From one day to the next there would be an entire transformation of the landscape.

Another seva was to break bricks into small pieces that would be used for construction of roads and other projects. Sevadars would sit on a pile of bricks with a hammer and break each brick until it

became rubble. Occasionally they would get a brick that just would not break. So they kept hammering away and away and away. These stubborn bricks were easily spotted because they usually had a black tinge to them. When sevadars got one of those bricks they might have felt tired and frustrated that it seemed impossible to break. Sometimes they might even have wanted to just throw it back on the pile. But if they kept at it, eventually those bricks would break with a lot of effort. Effort in meditation is like breaking those bricks. We just keep hammering away.

While our effort is essential in this quest, we also are blessed with the grace of the Master who is always supporting us, encouraging us, and pulling us home. Effort and grace go hand in hand. As we put in our effort to realize the Lord, things start to shift in our lives. What was once important becomes unimportant. Just as we broke those bricks, we have to break down our mountains of attachments to people, places, and things in this world. Our attachments can so easily consume us and we may lose sight of the Lord. If we are not careful, we can get lost in the enjoyment of the world and wallow there just like the water buffaloes in India that roll in the mud.

Rolling in the mud of this world feels good most of the time, and we like it here. But we can easily get stuck here, and then we need help to get out of the mud. Just as the farmer comes to take his water buffalo home after it has cooled off in the river, the Lord knows his marked souls, and he comes to pull us out of the mud of this world and take us back to our true home.

When that happens, our perspective shifts, and many things that were attractive to us lose their appeal. The Lord is detaching us from this world and the things that bind us here. When things start to become less alluring, doubt and dissatisfaction often set in. Then the Lord begins to reveal the way home through meditation. Through the

sound and light he guides us back to him. Every soul is a particle of this sound and light, but when we are so trapped in this world, that ringing radiance is hidden from us until we turn within.

Faith, built on the practice of meditation, unlocks everything and allows us to move mountains to find the Lord. Over and over the mystics tell us not to delay. Put your faith in the Lord, leave your doubts behind, and seek the Lord within. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

With your faith you can move the Creator of the mountains, what to say of mountains. Who created the universe? Who created the mountains? The Lord. By your faith in him, you can move him. You can become him. If you become him, you can move anything.



When you close your eyes, you are normally automatically here at the eye centre, because the seat of the soul and mind knotted together is at the eye centre. When you close your eyes, you are here in the centre of the darkness in the forehead, and being there, you do the simran. You also feel that your Master is there and that you are there in the darkness and you are doing simran in the presence of the Master, if you can't visualize his form. So be there and also feel your Master is there, and that will hold your attention there in the darkness.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

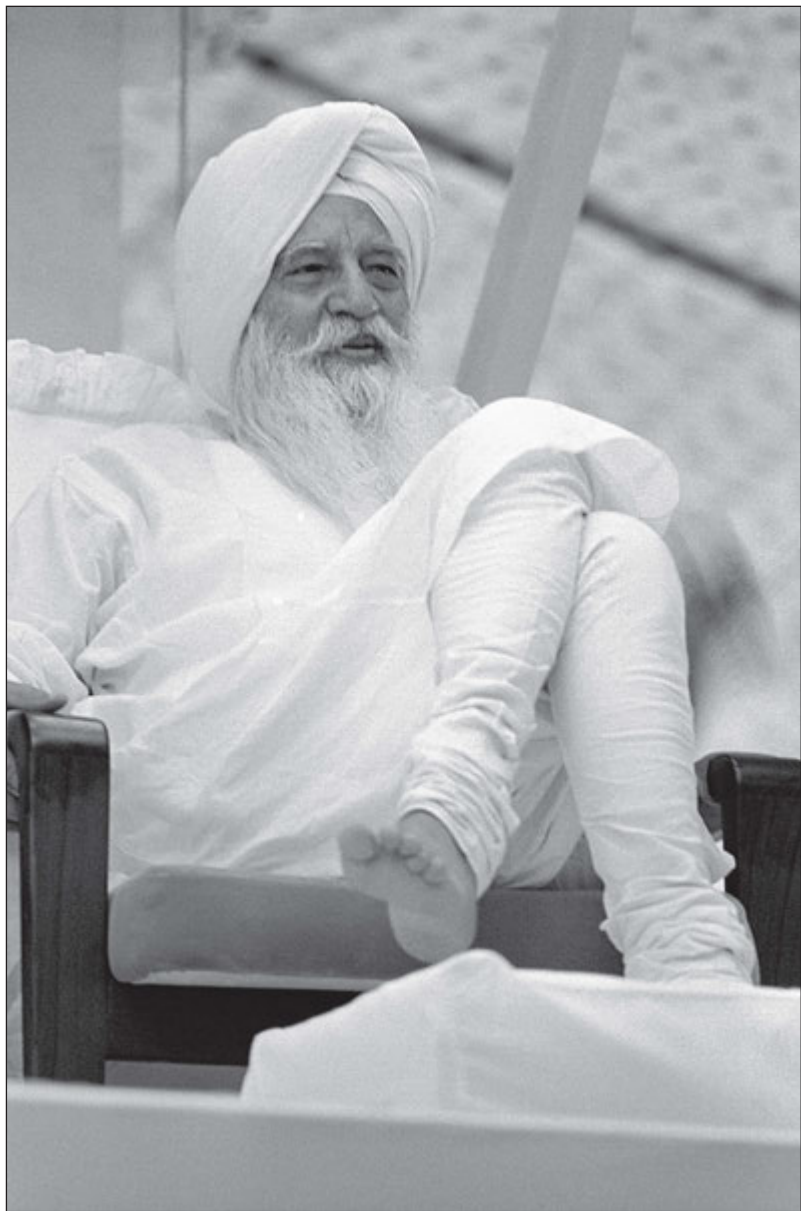
Keep Him in Our Heart

Sometimes we forget just how lucky we are. But then there are also moments when the sensation of a loving presence touches us. And there are times when the Master is absolutely real to us – sweet moments when our only wish is to remain as long as possible in the thought of him.

At other times, we get so used to the idea that we have a Master, we forget the incredible good fortune this implies – we forget his value. Sad to say, our loyalty and devotion are often quite limited. Look at how persistently we struggle to ignore the Master's message. How craftily we try to take the blessings and avoid the realities and responsibilities which go along with them! Again and again we come in contact with true love, and again and again we look for lesser loves.

Some years ago, a disciple at an evening meeting told a poignant little story. It was about a scorpion who asked a frog to take him to safety by carrying him on his back across a flooding river. The frog reluctantly agreed, but predictably the scorpion panicked in mid-stream and stung the frog, causing them both to perish in the flood. The disciple sadly told the Master that he thought the scorpion in the story depicts our own ungrateful and fickle natures. The Master nodded, then replied with great tenderness that the Master holds out his hand to us, even though he knows we will sting him, and nonetheless he carries us safely to the other shore – for that is his nature. And later, he said something quite similar: that the Master is always holding out his hand to give us everything – even if we are doing all kinds of wrong things – just hoping that one day we will get it!

So what do we do when we think we are not strong enough, when we think we cannot break free? What do we do when we get anxious



and panic – doubting ourselves, doubting the flow of grace, doubting even that he can really help? Sometimes we spend long periods in such a state, but when this happens, are we not just forgetting Master’s unfailing determination to help us? Are we not forgetting his reassurance that we already possess the strength we need to succeed? Fortunately, we are luckier than we deserve. Master knows exactly how to keep the spiritual flame alive in us. He knows when to seduce us with love, and he also knows when to shake us up and force us to see the truth. In the end, despite our fears and doubts, we come to realize that his influence is always going to reappear in our lives. The brightness is always filtering through even in our darkest, most negative moods. Naturally we cannot help feeling close to someone who is always giving us such loving support.

Sant Mat should be a fascinating adventure. And at times, that’s exactly what it is – especially when we manage to keep ourselves focused on our goal. But it gets tough when we weaken and give up the struggle, when we dilute the teachings with our own ideas and start to stagnate. Very simply in *The Gospel of Jesus* it says:

Mysticism or true spirituality is a path of action, of spiritual practice. It is something you live and do, something you experience. Essentially, it is something that happens to you, not something you believe in. It is an experience, not an intellectual philosophy.

When you think about it, there are two ways to live this path. Either we can go through it passively, expecting the Master’s grace to solve all our problems with little or no effort on our own part – or we can actively try to keep the spiritual experience alive. We may not be very good disciples, or even believe that we could ever become spiritual beings, but one thing we know for certain is the value of that sense of

happiness which occurs in his presence, and the sense of peace and fulfilment which come to us at times when we are thinking of him. We already have a relationship with the Master; we just have to work on developing it. We just have to go after that personal experience.

The path is so simple. The Master tells us to demystify Sant Mat, not to idealize it. We want to reach God, he says, but we cannot see him. God is within us. He tells us we are all potential Gods, but we cannot realize this ourselves. Alone, we can never do it. We need someone alive at the same time as we are who has achieved God-realization, someone who can teach us and guide us to that level. We have to create a relationship with that person so that he can help us channel our energies and direct our devotion towards the Lord.

The Masters tell us that our natural tendency is to worship the physical Master. But when you worship someone, you place them mentally above yourself. You cannot develop that close bond of love with someone you consider as high above yourself. You feel awe, but cannot feel that all-consuming sense of love which comes from feeling his presence in a natural, personal way. Master helps us by association. Our association with the Master is with spirituality. This eventually leads us to the Shabd within. So we have to develop an association with the Master, by building a relationship with him, rather than worshipping him.

Our actions must always reflect our purpose, if we are to succeed – and we are reassured that we do indeed have the strength to succeed. The Master at first comes and goes in our lives, but gradually the relationship deepens and the experience grows until, no doubt, it becomes such a powerful guiding force that it never leaves us. At this stage, we can try to please the Master through our meditation, and try to bring him into our hearts as a friend. His love, guidance, and response are always there.



The Practice of Meditation

Everything lies inside the focus. Your wildest dreams or imaginings cannot picture the grandeur of what lies within. But the treasure is yours and is there for you. You can have it whenever you go there. Take it from me, and once and for all, that everything, including the Creator, is within you, and whosoever has attained it, has attained it by going inside the eye focus. There is no easier method to go within than the one of which you have been informed.

Please be not in a hurry. With patience and perseverance, complete the course of concentration. Going within takes time.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

INFORMATION ON ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

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- Articles should focus on the Sant Mat teachings and may also draw on the universal teachings of other mystics.
- Articles should not be based on, or discuss, the personaity of the master or the writer.
- Articles must be your own original work. If quotations from other sources are included, complete source references must be given.
- Articles should be between 500 and 1500 words in length.

If accepted, your article will be edited according to the requirements of the magazine. You will be contacted only if your submission is accepted. Please include your name, age, postal address, and email address with your article.

Book Review



A Flock of Fools: Ancient Buddhist Tales of Wisdom and Laughter from The One Hundred Parable Sutra

TRANSLATED AND RETOLD BY KAZUAKI TANAHASHI AND

PETER LEVITT

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The One Hundred Parable Sutra (*bayu-jing* in Chinese) is known as the most humorous of all the ancient Buddhist texts. In each of the brief stories, or parables, a very foolish person does something absurdly foolish, with unpleasant results. What follows is a brief comment pointing out how we ourselves are like that foolish person.

The collection of parables can be dated back to a fifth-century-CE Buddhist teacher, Sanghasena, who selected stories from various scriptures “to help explain dharma to beginning students.” One of his disciples, Gunraviddi, traveled from India to China and there translated the text into the local language. Kazuaki Tanahashi provides an introduction tracing the various versions of the text that have appeared over the centuries the many duplicates, or parallels, between the stories included in the One Hundred Parable Sutra and those in several other Buddhist scriptures.

Some of these stories may seem ridiculous on a first reading. Yet these simple parables have carried a message that Buddhist monks and spiritual seekers – over many centuries and in different cultural contexts – have found meaningful and helpful to their spiritual practice. As Peter Levitt, who assisted with the translation, writes:

These tales magnify our foibles and folly, our appetites, impulses, and delusions, and serve as useful and accurate mirrors of our human condition. As we witness the silly, crazy, and sometimes hurtful things these fools say, think, and do, we laugh at them or shake our heads in disbelief. Yet our reaction is always tempered by the awareness that shades of our own foolishness parade before our eyes....

Since these tales are able to inspire such recognition, they help us to cultivate wisdom and compassion as we seek to develop real understanding and “do no harm” in the world.

One story tells of a poor man who worked very hard for a long time and earned enough to buy a rough-hair robe. Another man tells him to throw away the rough-hair robe and just follow his instructions, so that he could get something much better. The poor man does as instructed and ends up losing his hard-won robe and gaining nothing. The comment then explains that many people act just like this poor man. Just as the man had to work long and hard to get his robe, it took many good deeds in many lifetimes for them to gain their human body. Therefore, “they ought to protect this body with gratitude and let their practices help them to grow in virtue.” But they are deceived by people who tell them to practise penances, “throw themselves on rocks, walk into the fire.” The comments conclude, “Pity the poor ones who believe these words and throw away their lives.... Their hard-earned human body is lost and their suffering is great.”

Another parable tells of a very thirsty traveller who stops by a wooden conduit with flowing water. After drinking his fill, he announces, “I am finished drinking now. Water, stop running at once.” When the water does not stop running, he stands there getting angrier and angrier, repeating this command. Someone who witnesses this tells him he is being foolish and he should simply walk away from the flowing water, which will continue to flow regardless of his words. The comment explains:

People are like this. They develop a great thirst in the realm of birth and death and, therefore, they drink the bitter water of the five desires. Then, in time, they grow weary of these desires and, like the man who drank his fill, they say, “You forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and things I have touched, I demand that you no longer appear to me.” But the five desires continue their activities and are not affected by such words. When people see that their words have no effect, they become angry.... Then a wise person tells them, “If you really want to leave these desires behind, you must control the six sense roots and

close the mind.... There will be no need for you to tell your desires to cease.”

Yet another tale begins: “A man who was about to make a lengthy journey told his servant, ‘Keep the gate well and be sure to look after the ass and its rope.’ The servant promised he would and his master went on his way.” A few days later, however, the servant wanted to go to a fair. So he removed the gate from its hinges, and took the gate, the ass, and the rope with him. When the master returned, he found that his house and all his belongings had been plundered. The comment explains that the Buddha “teaches us to always guard the gate of the five senses and the mind . . . and to observe the ass of ignorance and the tether of craving.” But for many monks, when they

sit in meditation, their minds continue to waver with attachment to the five desires. They are confused by forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and things they can touch. Their minds are blinded by ignorance and bound by the ropes of craving. Because of this, such treasures as clear thought, awakened mind, and the path of wisdom remain lost to them forever.

In one story a king is so pleased with a particular man’s loyalty and service that he offers him whatever boon he would like. After some thought, the man says, “All I ask is that when you wish to be shaved, allow me to do it.” Everyone laughs at the man for requesting so little when he could have received a kingdom.

To meet with a Buddha or to encounter his dharma, and at the same time to have a human body, is rare indeed.... But foolish minds are weak; they keep the lesser teachings and are content, never seeking further. As a result their minds don’t develop and they practise mistaken and misguided acts. They don’t even consider pursuing the excellent and inconceivable Nirvana and, consequently, it remains beyond their reach.

The parables often illustrate how our fascination with the business of the world causes us to miss the great opportunity for spiritual realization afforded during human life. One story tells how two good friends were passing by a potter's shop, and intrigued by the skill and artistry of the potter, they sat down to watch the potter at work. After a while of watching the potter at his wheel, "one of the men said good-bye to his friend and went to a great assembly where he was served a wondrous banquet and given clothes made of rare and exquisite material." The other man stayed at the potter's shop, determined to enjoy watching "until this fine potter is completely finished." However, the potter kept working "even after the sun had set," so the man missed the banquet. The comment for this story is in verse:

*How can we describe this man except to say:
Today he does this
And tomorrow he does that,
While Buddhas and great dragons appear
With their thunderous voices filling the world.
Though the dharma rain falls without obstacle,
Still he is attached to things and does not hear.
Not knowing that death comes suddenly,
He misses the assembly of the Buddhas.*



