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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Self-Reflection

Sometimes following the undertaking our Master has set for us seems impossible. We can become disheartened and overwhelmed, particularly if we expect visible results from our meditation. These times are opportunities to redirect our emotions into self-reflection, rather than blame others. By channelling this energy toward self-reflection, we can gain valuable insights that can help us hold on to hope and courage and strengthen our efforts on our spiritual path.

In a letter to one disciple who had an emotional reaction to her feelings of lack of progress, Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Quest for Light*:

Please remember that this emotional outburst will not help you in any way. Meditation has never been an easy thing for anyone before reaching a state of perfect concentration. How can we rise to spiritual heights within, just for the asking? It is something we have to earn.

He says we have to *earn* perfect concentration, and we do that through our sincere effort. Later in the answer, he adds, “Instead of blaming the path or the Master, see within yourself where the weakness lies.” He urges us to look honestly at the way we have been following the path – not to not beat ourselves up for our shortcomings but to look gently at our lives and identify where we might do better.

Then Hazur lists six questions for us to ask ourselves:

1. *Have you given regular time to meditation every day?*

The Masters emphasize the importance of this daily discipline of meditation. Meditation is the answer that they give us to almost every question. At initiation, we promise to devote at least ten percent of our time to meditation every single day. Masters assure us that if we do our part, they will do the rest. Even a few hours each day of turning to him on the inside adds up to a lot. Then we can look him in the eye and know that at least we have tried. But if we have not been doing our part, if we have not been keeping the promise we made to him, can we expect results?

2. *Have you been able to keep the attention at the eye centre all the time during meditation?*

That should be an easy question to answer. Mostly, we know when our attention slips down and either our mind runs wild or we fall asleep. If we are sitting because we want to out of love for our Master, not just because it is a duty, we will keep trying to focus.

3. *Have you vacated the body of all consciousness and brought it to the eye centre?*

If we have, we will probably have seen the light and heard the sound and maybe even met the Shabd form of the Master. Coming to the eye centre is the result of a high degree of continuous focus.

In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh says, "It may be said safely that if any earnest student should hold his attention fully upon the given centre for three hours, without wavering, he must go inside." Three hours of continuous focus is all it takes!

4. *Have you tried to live the Sant Mat way of life, detaching yourself gradually from the world and attaching your thoughts to the Lord within?*

Masters know that we cannot do this all at once, so they recommend a slow and steady approach. One disciple asks Hazur, in *The Master Answers*, "Supposing I work only six hours a day and spend all the other time in meditation or trying to?" Hazur replies:

I personally feel, if we are regular and punctual in our meditation and we are living in Sant Mat and for Sant Mat, that two hours and thirty minutes or three hours daily are sufficient for meditation.

He says that two and one-half hours are enough if we are living in Sant Mat and for Sant Mat. In other words, we need to live the Sant Mat way of life 24/7 and always keep our spiritual goal in mind.

5. *Have you kept the names with you most of the time?*

Doing simran during the day is a great help in living the Sant Mat way of life. If we are doing simran, we are not thinking about

the world. We are entirely in the present; we are remembering the Master. In *Quest for Light*, Hazur advises:

Try to perfect the simran to such an extent that the holy names remain with you all the time, even when you are not conscious of them. This repetition should become as much a part of your life as breathing. When the simran is perfected, light will appear, and the sound will become clear.

If we do simran all day long in addition to during meditation, it will become automatic and will run ceaselessly in the background. If we perfect our simran in this way, we may be able to make contact with the light and sound within. If we allow our attention to roam worldwide, then meditation will be more difficult.

6. *In other words, have you followed the instructions given to you at the time of initiation?*

Every question that Hazur has asked in this letter has been about the instructions given when our Master initiated us. And they all concern perfecting our meditation practice. Are we doing what we promised to do? Hazur then adds: “If we have not done our part, we cannot complain about the shortcomings of Sant Mat.”

Hazur is not asking these questions to chastise us. He is just saying that if we are not following these instructions, we cannot expect to reach the eye centre and travel within to our true home. We need to do the work that we promised to do. It is very straight forward.

Hazur ends with:

Please remember that all are struggling souls on the path. We all have to strive and do our best and then leave the rest to him. There is no need to feel so disheartened. This is a path of hope and courage. Live within the will of the Lord; do your duty every day and leave the rest to him. He is always with you.

That says it all.



The Sound Current

The Sound Current, the Shabd, Nam, the Logos is the flow of energy that comes from God into the creation. We are told it is that same current of energy that will take us back to God. Do any of us know what this mysterious divine force is? Maharaj Sawan Singh, in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV, attempts the nearly impossible – to give us some sense of what the Shabd is, and what it does. He writes:

The Shabd, Sound Current, Word, or Holy Spirit is not a subject matter for speech or writing. In order to make it understood, we can only say this much, namely that it is the quintessence of the Lord and that it sustains millions of universes and regions. It is the soul-current of consciousness. It is the celestial melody. It is the life-current which originates from the Lord and pervades everything. The Lord creates and sustains the entire universe through this current of power.... Shabd is a string which connects everyone and everything with the Lord.

While there are many names for this Sound Current – Shabd, Word, Tao – mystics in all spiritual traditions seem to agree that God is not a thing or an object. God is a current, a force, a power of love, light, and truth that moves in and around what we can see and experience.

When we think of currents, what might come to mind are tides, oceans, and rivers in the physical universe. Sometimes the image of water conveys the power of currents. Riptides along the beach can carry an unaware swimmer out to sea unless he or she knows how to swim with the flow of that current. There are also currents in the air. Hawks reach unbelievable heights by riding the thermal currents that rise vertically from the earth. One can try to measure electrical currents or electromagnetic currents. By looking at this material world, we may be able to grasp that essential forces move in, around, and through us.

Great Master uses the example of currents in this world to describe the Shabd. He says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV:

This sound or melody pervades all. It is even inside stones and wood, as these are made up of atoms and motion is inherent in them.

*Because of this motion, everything constantly undergoes change....
This world changes every hour, every minute, and every second.
Whether we know it or not, a stone continues to change. There is
motion in it. Sound is a necessary corollary of motion and, therefore, a
stone is not free from the sound.... Sound is the essence of all.*

How do we ride that Sound Current home to our true country where we will find this divine melody? Masters come into this world to teach us how to ride that current back home to the Lord. Whatever the mysterious pull of the Shabd is, most of us are at least a little conscious of the pull of the Master. To meet a saint, a Shabd Master, is to encounter the living water that bestows eternal life. The saints come to us to tell us how to merge into the Shabd. The Great Master says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV, “The waves of the ocean of Shabd are surging in each one of us. Those who drink of its waters are no longer troubled by thirst or hunger and gain eternal life.”

Thus, we are urged to listen. We are asked to meditate. We are encouraged to focus our attention at the eye centre. We have to go where the current is flowing to ride it home. We will not experience the Shabd while we are on our cell phones or watching a captivating TV series nor in the many outer distractions competing for our attention. We must turn inward to reach the eye centre. At least we must try – even though we discover that our attention keeps going out.

How do we get past the barriers of the mind and the resistance of the ego? Who is it that gets to ride this current and be carried back on the ocean of love? Great Master answers this very powerfully and directly in various parts of *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV:

The beneficent Master makes us hear the Shabd, which stills the wanderlust of the mind.... The Shabd is a boon from the Master. The Master makes it dwell in our hearts. It is impossible for anyone else to manifest it.... The Master points to this indescribable and formless Shabd and makes the disciple turn inward. With his power, he then connects the disciple with Shabd.

He gives us a glimpse of how to reach the Shabd when he tells us: “The unending music is wonderful. It cannot be obtained by our own mental processes or activities. It can only be had as a result of the grace of the Master. It is the supreme gift of a perfect Master.”

So, we arrive at the inevitable paradox of all spiritual practice – effort and grace. For us, the key is simran, and we have to work long and hard in meditation to move the attention to the eye centre where the pull of the Sound Current begins. At the very same time, we are reminded that only the grace of the Master can allow us to hear the Shabd. Human effort alone cannot take us home. It is his gift.

The supreme Lord [took] great pity on us in our extreme distress and misfortune. Seeing the soul, his beloved child, in such a sad plight, that Ocean of Mercy and Compassion surged in swelling tides and, assuming the human form, came to the world to save us.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

As initiates, we hope that we will be carried back to our original home in Sach Khand on the currents of the Master’s mercy and love. When we encounter the winds of karma, and the tides that seem to be moving us far away from the eye centre, our job is to keep rowing and keep doing our meditation. We must keep moving in the direction where he has told us to go – toward the Shabd – where our deep thirst and great hunger will be satisfied.



A Higher Perspective

Life for many of us is like looking through a peephole or a tunnel. Our vision and our perspective are limited. While living our individual and separate lives, we become caught up in our own stories, and so we believe that our life experience in this time and place is everything.

From a higher perspective, our life – our physical experience of the body and senses, which means everything to us and which we hold onto so tightly – is a small piece in a puzzle. If we look at the earth from an airplane or even a tall building, we find a different perspective than when we are on the ground. And from outer space, we can imagine the earth, looking like a tiny ball of life, slowly turning to the tune of the universe.

In the physical body, we mostly operate from our mind and senses and act according to thoughts and feelings. Influenced by family, culture, and the rhythm of our times, we live our days mostly unconsciously, swimming with the flow of those around us. Is it possible to change our perspective and find equanimity through all the ups and downs of life? Could it all be a question of how we choose to look at ourselves and the world?

In *Concepts and Illusions*, the author says:

How often have we watched the clouds lazily pass over us in the sky – each individual draws his own conclusion about its shape, and even while we are visualizing the shape, it continuously changes. The shapes the clouds form are illusions and eventually evaporate into nothingness. Our lives and relationships, wealth and poverty, happiness and sadness are the same – merely illusions. As we watch them, they slowly evaporate into nothingness.

The Masters and saints give us the perspective of a spiritual life. They maintain that life in this physical world itself is only an illusion, a dream in which we find ourselves. They tell us that we cannot find permanent happiness through external objects. In the *Bhagavad Gita* we read:

*Pleasures from external objects
Are wombs of suffering.*

*They have their beginnings and their ends;
No wise man seeks joy among them.*

Quoted in *Living Meditation*

When we experience the transient and fickle nature of the world, we search for the safety of permanence and unchanging truth. The Masters offer us an opportunity to experience reality from a higher perspective. They don't ask us to accept their words blindly; but instead, they give us a method of discovery that leads us to the understanding of how things really are. By following the practical steps taught by the Masters, we experience truth for ourselves and overcome our deep-rooted illusions. A disciple feels immensely grateful to the Master for revealing the path of meditation. Guru Angad Dev says:

*If a hundred moons were to rise,
and a thousand suns appeared –
even with such light,
there would still be pitch darkness
without the Guru.*

Quoted in *Concepts and Illusions*

Through initiation, the Master teaches us how to realize God within ourselves. He shows us how to go within through the practice of meditation and to gain an awareness of who we really are. Then we learn that we are not a drop in the ocean, but an entire ocean in a drop, to paraphrase an expression sometimes attributed to Rumi.

The Master sees our potential to evolve, and through the very act of initiation, he invites us to find a new perspective. In *Living Meditation*, the author says:

Meditation helps us reach a state where we can detach ourselves from our emotions and obsessions. Through Shabd meditation, we actually experience that we are not these ever-changing identities that we assume through our feelings and neuroses, but that we are fundamentally pure and constant.

Living in this world, yet not of it, the Master is ever in touch and present with the Shabd or primal essence of God. His words and actions

are continually steeped in the love of the Lord. While we absorb ourselves mindlessly with the ways of the world, the Master keeps his gaze and attention constantly towards the truth and light of the Shabd, and he urges us to do the same.

The Masters and Saints have the highest perspective. They have risen above the limitations of this world and are full of the greatest love. In their presence, we get a glimpse of a higher reality that shines through them, although they are in a human body like ours. They invite us to share in this higher perspective and to eliminate the distance between us and the Lord within us. Sultan Bahu says:

*Love flourishes in that heart
in which glows the Name of God.
The love of God is like the fragrance of musk –
even a thousand wrappings cannot hold it in;
or like the sun, which cannot be hid behind one's fingers,
or like a river that cannot be stopped in its course.
My Friend is in me, in my Friend am I;
there is no distance left between us.*

Our perspective makes all the difference. During this life, we have a rare privilege, a unique opportunity to free ourselves from our false and limited perspectives based on thinking that the external world is the only reality. When we devote ourselves to meditation, we begin to develop a higher perspective, and we start to get a taste of the permanent love that is the essence of our being. That higher perspective changes our experience of life in every way. Eventually, as our meditation brings us to the awareness of the love of God that glows within us, we realize that “there is no distance left between us.”



The Inseparable Companion

You alone exist! I do not, O Beloved!

You alone exist I do not!...

If I speak, You speak with me;

if I am silent, You are in my mind.

If I sleep, You sleep with me;

if I walk, You are along my path.

O Bullah, the Spouse has come to my house.

My life is a sacrifice unto him.

Bulleh Shah

In this poem, Bulleh Shah is describing the state where he sees his master all around him. His master is deep within him, and he is with his master in all his activities as well as sleeping, walking, and in silence. In short, he is saying there is no separation between the master and him.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh says, “The concept that we have of ourselves should be the same as our concept of the Lord.” But it is not, because mind creates the illusion of separateness. He says our distance from the Lord is just an illusion created by our mind. He is there at the very core of our being. The core of our being, our soul, is identical to the Lord’s.

So, if the Master is with us always, then – like Bulleh Shah – we can also experience him the whole day. When Bulleh Shah asked his master, Inayat Shah, how to realize God, his master told him, “Be uprooted from here [outside the eye centre] and planted there [within].” In other words, he advised Bulleh to value the inner life more than the outer life by giving the interior more importance than the external.

What is the inner life? It is the life or the journey that starts at the eye centre and takes us back to our spiritual home. The inner life is considered to be our real life; the time spent nourishing it will be with us even beyond the death of our physical body.

The outer life is our worldly life, which is fleeting and limited to our physical body. The inner life is living with the Divine. No matter how much we attach ourselves to the world by trying to accomplish our many goals,

it still has no reality. The outer world will continue along its merry path well after we have departed.

Saints assure us that the inner life is beautiful beyond words – far beyond anything we may experience in the outer life. The inner life makes us complete as it results in our union with the Lord. The outer life can never make us whole; in fact, our engagement with it keeps us away from the Divine.

In *The Awakening of the Human Spirit*, Hazrat Inayat Khan, often credited with introducing Sufism to the West, describes a few prerequisites for attaining the inner life:

The first condition is that one should value the inner life more than anything else in the world, more than wealth, power, position, rank, or anything else. It does not mean that in the world, he should not pursue the things he needs; it means he should value most something that is worthwhile. Second, if one really values the inner life, he should give 'his precious time' to it.

Like Hazrat Inayat Khan, all true Masters encourage us to value the inner life. The Master resides just beyond the eye centre in his Radiant Form. So at the time of initiation, we are told to focus at the third eye and repeat the Holy Names imparted to us. With this repetition, the inner gate will gradually open, and we will begin to finally see the Radiant Form of our Master and begin our journey to oneness with him.

So while we are living the outer life, we should ardently work on our meditation to pierce the veil that exists between our two lives, so that our soul can travel between the inner and the outer life at will. In this way, we prepare for our physical death, when we will leave the outer life forever and return to our source in the Lord. This preparation is essential.

In an Aesop fable about ants and a grasshopper, the industrious ants work all year long to provide food for their colony in the winter. The grasshopper does nothing to prepare and has to beg for food from the ants when winter comes. We cannot be like the grasshopper and wait until the last moment to repent for our wasted life. Instead, we should make a dedicated effort to release ourselves from our outer attachments and become acquainted with the inner path. We should build our relationship

with God and live in his consciousness so that at the end of our lives, we will be ready to go home. To achieve this, we have to take action by spending the precious time we have in practising our vows, especially our daily meditation.

But valuing and talking about inner life doesn't help – only action helps. What is that action? Follow the instructions of the Master: repeat the names, focus the attention at the eye centre, listen to the Shabd, and make a consistent attempt to be with the Master. Action is essential, as the inner gate opens only when the attention is focused entirely by our diligent practice of meditation. When we consistently and continuously apply the pressure of focused simran at the third eye, God will open the door for us. If we do our part, he will certainly do his.



The Light of His Face Is Shining Upon You

God is love, and love is God. The essence of God's love is within all human beings. Masters are sent to wake us up to the call of love so we can return to the Father, merge into love, become love forever. Such divine love is the creative force and power of the universe and sustains all creation.

It is called by many names, Shabd, Nam, Word, Logos, the audible life stream, the music of the spheres. When we are initiated by a Master into the science of the soul or Surat Shabd Yoga, this inner sound is the beginning of the soul's return to God. Rumi tells us it is our time to bask in the Lord's light.

*O heart,
Make your wish –
The gifts are ready
The King is waiting with open arms.
The Light of His face is shining upon you.*

Quoted in Rumi: In the Arms of the Beloved

“The King is waiting with open arms. The Light of His face is shining upon you.” Yet, where are we? Where is our attention? The Master is so near, but are we open and receptive to his grace and gift of love? Whether we know it or not, the Master is at the very centre of our being – he *is* our very being. His Shabd form permeates every pore of our very essence, our soul, from the moment we are initiated.

Through meditation, his grace slowly awakens us to his constant presence; we experience his divine love, which creates the longing and thirst to be in his presence and meet him within. Only in meditation can our connection to the Lord be realized. The saints emphatically tell us that meditation is a relationship of love between the disciple and the inner Shabd Master.

The only command is to meditate. There is no other shortcut to developing our love for the Master and attaining union with him. It is meditation before all else that leads us into divine love. Thus, the Masters

tell us meditation must be our objective and priority in life – otherwise, we remain asleep. As Rumi says, “The gifts are ready.”

It’s time to do our part, play our role, do our meditation practice, with love, diligence, perseverance, and effort. Ultimately, we will fly on the wings of love and grace, but we still must take action. This path is one of action. The Masters come to rouse us from our deep slumber and cut our bonds to the illusions of this world. In *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. I, Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

The saints and Masters cry aloud from the housetop and reveal the way to the tenth gate that leads inwards but it [the soul] pays no heed and like the worm in the filth ever remains confined to the nine gates that continually take it outwards. It is time that we put an end to this reckless wandering!

Only the Satguru, who has initiated us and abides within us in his Radiant Form, can break our chains to the mind, the senses, and the world. Through meditation, we awaken to the reality of the Master within us. Until then, we are dissipating our spiritual resources and energy in the world. Now is the time to put an end to this reckless wandering.

We must meditate. Only that prepares us to have a silent, listening, waiting, receptive heart. We must open ourselves and consciously be in his presence. The Master waits for every disciple to merge in him and be carried on the current of Shabd to our true home, Sach Khand. The mission of the saints is to take us back to the Father.

The Lord has given us this human birth so that we can merge in him. We need to give him our time and attention. That is how we activate our relationship with him. We need to be open, attentive, and receptive. Then we realize that Master’s grace is showering upon us all the time. All effort we put forth in meditation builds and strengthens our relationship of love with the Master.

The Masters tell us the most important factor in spirituality is *bireh* or longing. A yearning, longing heart kindles that fire of love for the Lord. This longing comes to us through the Master. It is a gift that nurtures our receptivity during our meditation. He always encourages us to be sincere, attentive, and present with him in the darkness, saying the Holy Names.

This love and devotion for the Master can't be calculated or willed. It is our effort to invoke his grace, so we try and fail and try again. There is no doubt that someday the door will open because they tell us it will open!

Open our hearts, be attentive, be receptive. The Master wants our attention. We have an opportunity, right now, to be with him. We burden ourselves with our life, our worries; we allow the mind to be negative, to desire indiscriminately. We allow ourselves to be carried away by the madness of this world. With his grace and our effort, we can be with him inside in the twinkling of an eye. We can go within in this very lifetime. We need to be ready for the pull of his grace at any moment.

The Masters tell us that God and the Master are as close as our thoughts allow him to be. The opportunity for remembrance and simran of the Beloved is here in every moment if we seize the opportunity now. So, let's ask ourselves, what constitutes the core, the centerpiece of our lives? Are we engaged in our spiritual work – are we developing love for our Master to such a degree that our time spent with him in meditation gives us our most happiness? What more can we do to receive the gifts from our Master, absorb them – become filled with them – and then return this love back to him?

Love is emanating from our beloved Master every second! Our wish is to be with him; to love him; to meet him within; to open our heart to him. As Great Master says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II, “True love is only for the sake of love itself. The only wish of a true lover is to be united with the Beloved. Love is awakened when the currents of love, which emanate from the Beloved, enter into our hearts.”

The message is clear: wake up and come to the Master on the inside, where he waits for us with open arms. Now is the time!



Homeward Bound

It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to.... There have been times I think we do not desire heaven; but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else.

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

*You have come all the way from your eternal home,
so why delay now?
Accomplish quickly the task for which you are here,
O Lord – please do not procrastinate....
Enshrine the pearl of your Name in my heart
so that I may fulfil the purpose of my life.*

Soami Ji Maharaj, *Sar Bachan Poetry*

*Where is one whose sorrow
is not from separation from You
or whose joy is not from being close to You?...
All Your qualities are hidden in every soul.
Not one vein can open or close
without Your command.*

Rumi, *Jalal al-Din Rumi: Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*

*The perfect mystic is not an ecstatic devotee lost in contemplation of
Oneness, nor a saintly recluse shunning all commerce with mankind.*

*The true saint goes in and out amongst the people and eats and sleeps
with them and buys and sells in the market and marries and takes part in
social intercourse, and never forgets God for a single moment.*

Abu Saïd b. Abī al-Khayr (d. 1049 CE)¹



Know Thyself

Maharaj Charan Singh often quoted the ancient Greek saying, “Know thyself.” Other saints have also told us about the importance of knowing who we really are. Baba Ji reminds us, paraphrasing Teilhard de Chardin that we are spiritual beings having a human experience rather than human beings seeking a spiritual experience. That statement has profound significance in terms of how we think about ourselves, and one another, and what we consider to be our goals in life and our spiritual practice.

What does it mean to be a spiritual being? According to Sant Mat, the aim of our devotional practice is the attainment of two successive levels of consciousness: first is self-realization, then God-realization. Hazur says about these in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

Self-realization is essential before God-realization. What is self-realization? Going beyond the realm of mind and maya; trying to bring the mind to the eye-centre and to its own destination, so the soul can get release from the clutches of mind. Separating the soul from the mind – that is self-realization, that is knowing ourselves.

He continues to explain why it's so important to separate the soul from the mind.

Soul has forgotten its home, ... and its identity, after taking the association of the mind. Mind, too, doesn't know itself. It has become a slave of the senses. So we have to withdraw our mind from the senses by attaching it to the Shabd and Nam within. And then, with the help of Shabd and Nam, mind becomes pure and comes back to its own source. Then soul automatically gets release from the clutches of the mind. That is self-realization.

At this level, the mind calculates who we are but has no idea of the grandeur of the soul, our real self. Jesus said, “Is it not written in your law? Have I not told you? Ye are gods!” Referring to *Psalms* 82:6, he states, “I have said, ye are Gods. Sons of the Most High. All of you.” These are the same teachings that have been repeated by the mystics throughout time.

Experiencing our true selves is the direction our meditation points us to, but this is only possible under the guidance of a living Master. The Masters, on a mission of mercy, appear in this world to bring us the truth. Still, we carry on with our ego selves as if that is who we are.

Mind and maya are the powers that have created this illusory self, and the soul is helpless to overcome its enslavement to this grand falsehood. Great Master says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

Man considers himself to be limited and feeble, and it is indeed true that one becomes what he thinks himself to be. But the soul is a particle of the Lord, and the Lord is infinite. If the particle thinks of the infinite for some time, it finds itself to be infinite.

Great Master advises us to dwell on the infinite. Through our meditation, we can begin to become aware that we are part of him. God and the soul are both comprised of Shabd. So the illusion that we are separate from God acts as a prison in which we limit ourselves to a finite perspective. When we think of worldly concerns day and night, we take them to be real and define ourselves by them. Thus, we are imprisoned by our thinking and trapped in the prison of our limited self. We are so caught up in all of the illusory preoccupations which pertain only to our outward needs, desires, survival, pleasures, security, ambitions, daydreams, and fantasies, that we neglect our real work. Hazur says in *Light on Sant Mat*, “We are too much engrossed with our little struggles, desires, and disappointments to think of the grand purpose of our coming here.” We have been given the human form, a rare and special gift. It is in this human form alone that we can find our true self, realize the Creator, and merge back into the source, free from death and rebirth. Merging back into the source is our grand purpose.

The mystic Chokha Mela, in *Many Voices, One Song*, writes:

*The Divine has no form, no name.
Within everyone, he is bound to no one.
The inner eye – there my eyes have seen him,
shining from the beginning to the end of time.*

*I am dazzled – the universe is filled
with him from beginning to end.
God has appeared within me, says Chokha,
now all my doubts have dissolved.*

We can see our true selves only in the human form and with our third eye. The great secret that it holds is that when we realize our self as the soul, then we are able realize God. We merge the drop of our spirit with the vast spiritual ocean of love and bliss that is the Holy Father and Supreme Lord. We then know who we truly are – one with God.



Commitment

In the *Seekers' Guide* on the RSSB website (www.rssb.org), we read:

At the time of Initiation, the seeker is asked to take four vows, promising to abide by them for life. The first three vows must be adhered to for a certain period of time before applying for Initiation.

The four vows are:

1. *To adhere to a lacto-vegetarian diet.*
2. *To abstain from alcohol, tobacco products, habit-forming and mind-altering drugs.*
3. *To lead a pure moral life while performing one's duties in the world.*
4. *To practise meditation with sincerity and dedication for two and a half hours daily, as taught at the time of Initiation.*

What exactly does it mean to vow to do something? Is it the same as to promise? Yes. When we vow to do something, we have given our word, we are making a firm commitment to do it. There is an old saying, "My word is my honour." I will not break this promise; you can believe me because I am giving you my word, my vow, as an honourable, trustworthy person.

Doesn't the Master give his "word" to us – in the same sense – when he promises that if we do our best to reach him at the eye centre in our daily meditation practice, he will take us home to God to be with God forever?

The Master gives us his word (with a small "w") in the form of a promise, a vow, a commitment that he will take us home with him. And, he gives us the means to make that journey by giving us his Word (with a capital "W") by connecting us – our souls – to the Shabd, the Word, that inner creative power that is Sound and Light and that created and sustains all that we see and all that we do not see.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, explains something about this Word, this Shabd:

The Shabd or divine music is the perfect Master. The Shabd is indistinguishable from the Supreme Lord. It is a conscious current of that great power which created the universe and which fully pervades it. All the universe emanated from this Shabd.

The Shabd is the true form of the Master. The physical form of the Master is the physical emanation of that power; he gives us the teachings; he encourages us on the path; he initiates us. But it is his inner Shabd form that connects our souls to his Word, his Nam. The Master promises us the liberation of our soul. He gives us his Word. And in turn, we promise to meditate. We give him our word.

Our word is our bond, our promise, our commitment. By signing the “Application for Initiation” form, we are entering into the most important “contract” of our lives. The *Seekers’ Guide* explains:

These four vows, taken at the time of Initiation, are the most serious commitments you will ever make. They are an internal commitment and not a verbal or outward promise.

So this commitment is much more than saying aloud, “Yes, I will follow the four vows.” Commitment involves dedicating ourselves to the Master and the path, wholeheartedly, single-mindedly, and with enthusiasm, diligence, resolve, persistence, tenacity, and drive.

When we commit to the Master and the path, we are all in and we don’t give up ever – no matter what. We march on with resilience and perseverance through our karmas, never forgetting for a second why we are here and what our goal is. We keep on going, doing our simran and bhajan every day, every day, every day.

Until one day, we don’t.

What happens if, after Initiation, we don’t honour our commitment, we don’t keep our word; we break our vows? In the context of a worldly contract, there are tangible and often painful consequences if we break our word: we lose money, a job, our home; we may even be sued. Not so with the Master’s contract: if we break our internal contract with him, we waste the opportunity to liberate our souls from bondage to eternal freedom.

We lose the opportunity to return to our source. Instead, we may be reborn again into another life – another set of karmas, ups and downs, pains and sorrows. A life that could be more of what we have right now, or perhaps even worse. There are no guarantees that our next life will be better.

Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh in *Divine Light* points out:

The one thing not attainable in any other form of life is God-realization. This privilege and capacity has been given exclusively to the human species. If once we let this opportunity slip by, there is no knowing when again we shall get it or whether we shall get it at all.

The Masters tell us that not everyone is given this opportunity; not everyone is meant to find this path in this lifetime. It is extremely good karma that the Master has found us and offered this deal to us. He says, don't let this opportunity pass you by; for what are you waiting?

Maharaj Charan Singh says:

If you want to live out the brief span of your life in this body in peace and happiness, if you want to return to the Lord, there is only one way: engage in the practice of the Word. Apart from meditation on the Word, there is no other method or technique.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. II

The Master is saying: Engage in the practice of the Word; do your meditation. This meditation will enable us to be happy now in this very lifetime and to free our soul so that it can fly home with the Master.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Light on Sant Mat*:

We only have to do our duty and may thoroughly rest assured that the Master will do his duty; that is, he will take us at the proper time. All that is necessary is that we turn our back to the world and face the Master. He is always there to receive and welcome us with open arms.

Master says to leave the world behind, meaning, try to detach your focus from the world. It will never give permanent happiness. Turn your back on the world and follow me, practise the Word, do your meditation, and be happy, not just now but forever.

The *Seekers' Guide* clearly states:

You are strongly advised to search your heart sincerely before applying for Initiation to make sure that you thoroughly understand these commitments, and that you are willing and able to live up to them.



Masters Work Hard and So Must We

When we look at the lives of the spiritual Masters, one fact that stands out: they work tirelessly to carry out their mission. The dedication of the Masters can be seen in their relentless schedules – working from early in the morning until late at night and frequently travelling, sometimes for months at a time. Masters travel far and wide to share their teachings with seekers and satsangis. Maharaj Sawan Singh explains the purpose of the Masters' frequent travels in *With the Three Masters*, Vol. II:

Whenever Hazur goes somewhere, he has three aims in mind: to tell the people about Nam and the teachings of Sant Mat, to increase love amongst satsangis and initiate seekers, and to make sure that in his absence they get together for satsang once in a while so that their bhakti remains intact and new seekers get a chance to learn about Sant Mat.

Masters are fully dedicated to their mission, but they also have a human body and physical limitations. While undertaking their spiritual seva, Masters are also subject to the human condition and karma. They too are subject to fatigue and illness. Yet they continue to carry out their seva in spite of physical limitations. When we consider the dedication the Master shows toward his disciples, it may also be important for us to appreciate how hard he works on the physical plane. Knowing this, perhaps we will be more motivated to participate in a reciprocal relationship and do the work he has asked us to do. This is a matter that is difficult to fully comprehend because on one level the Masters are above suffering. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, a questioner asks, “Then why should a Master suffer from any disease, or be unwell, physically?” Hazur answers:

We feel that they are suffering physically, from a health point of view. Actually, they are above the cycle of karmas and can clear any karma.... So we may think they are suffering. Really, the soul is not at all bothered with what the body is going through.

Yet, on the physical level, the body definitely has limitations. In the diary, *With the Three Masters*, Vol. II, we are given a glimpse of the

demands on the Great Master and the effect of those demands on his health. In entries dated August and September 1945, the author writes:

During the night, at about 3am, Hazur developed a stomach problem and could not sleep. He spent the whole night sitting up.... Hazur may have become ill because of stress. On the 23rd, he travelled from Kalu ki Bar all the way to Amritsar. On the way, people insisted that he give satsang.... The second satsang was a long one and Hazur became too tired even to sleep. In the morning, one of his wisdom teeth started to hurt. We advised him to have the tooth extracted, but in the evening he preferred to go to satsang instead and spent the night in pain.... This kind of hard work is responsible for his poor health.

The Master takes his seva seriously and works resolutely and tirelessly for our benefit. He travels all over the world, gives satsang, patiently answers questions, gives interviews, oversees the management of the Dera and the satsang centres across the world, and much, much more.

Master's hard work is for one purpose – to bring us the teachings and to inspire us to experience the teachings in our own lives through our meditation. Masters show us how to live a spiritual life while in this limited, temporary body that is subject to fatigue, disease, decay and death. And with that understanding we can similarly dedicate ourselves, with our utmost effort, to our most important work – to sit for two and one-half hours a day in meditation and to live a Sant Mat way of life. That is the only “work” he asks of us. That work is our duty as human beings. By devoting ourselves to that work, we discover the purpose of our human life.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Hazur says:

Don't worry about the suffering of the Master. Let him play his own role. We have to play our own role. When a tree doesn't yield any fruit, is the gardener happy? Doesn't he suffer so that the tree can yield fruit? He feeds it all sorts of nutrients, he waters it and does all sorts of things with that tree. He wants the tree to yield fruit because he has planted it. He has aligned himself with the tree.

Master has “aligned himself” with us. Let's do our work with love and determination, inspired by the tireless dedication of our Master.



Stillness

The sixteenth-century Catholic theologian Blaise Pascal wrote, “All men’s miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone.” This observation still holds true today, perhaps even more so in this hectic 21st-century environment. Masters and saints encourage us to sit alone quietly and contemplate.

Why do we find it difficult to sit quietly alone in the corner of our house for our daily silent prayer, our meditation? When we sit for meditation, many of us are faced with endless chatter in our minds, rather than the experience of stillness. The mind distracts us, and the senses pull us toward outer, materialistic attachments with the result that we grow increasingly unaware of our true nature of calm and peace.

Saints come to awaken us. They ask us to consider the purpose of our lives. When we listen to their teachings, we begin to stop the continual chatter of the mind long enough to ask: what do we want out of our lives, and what are we going to do about it? In answering these questions, we first need to determine whether we are looking towards the creation or to our Creator to achieve our goals. Each one of us has to search deep within ourselves to understand what we value most. Saints guide us to look inward and to become aware of our true selves.

Mystics explain that the source of creation is within each one of us. They tell us that the divine Shabd is present in every pore of our bodies and every part of creation. That spiritual treasure is within each one of us in equal measure. So, what is missing? The consistent application of the meditation technique, which the Master has bestowed on us at the time of initiation. Through initiation, the Master has given us a new direction, and we have to follow it to change our life.

Meditation will raise our consciousness. Over time, through self-surrender and devotion to Nam, we grow spiritually, without which we can neither know the Creator nor comprehend his qualities. We must commit to the daily practice of meditation to raise our consciousness, even when the meditation is a struggle. When we do this, our higher, finer qualities emerge, and we eventually rise above the chattering mind and the outer influences of the world. Meditation changes our focus, shapes our beliefs

and our thoughts, and ultimately transforms us. The saint Eknath said in *Many Voices, One Song*, “The mind has one great gift: if it takes hold of spirituality, salvation becomes its slave.” The saints show us the way to still our minds and break away from old habits and deep attachments. From their own inner experience, they have realized the Divine. They give us the same technique to reach our spiritual home and fulfil our destiny. They have given us the compass; they point our direction inward. Saints have given us the encouragement to put in the effort to do our daily meditation, and most importantly, they create a love for the Lord within us. Ultimately it’s that love that becomes our focus, eliminates attachments, and stills our mind. That love transforms us and is the greatest reward. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

You are meditating because you are in love with him, you want to become one with him. A lover never loves because he wants the wages of his love. If a lover wants the wages of his love, he is not a good lover at all.

With the help of our spiritual teacher and our meditation, we develop true love, and in that love, we enjoy the inner stillness in which we eventually experience what the saints mean when they quote *Psalms* 46:10 from the Bible, “Be still and know that I am God.”



Coming to Terms with Ourselves

Saints want us to be kind to others and ourselves, to accept our very messy humanity while we struggle to be good and to become one with God. Coming to terms with ourselves, being at peace with ourselves means accepting ourselves but wanting to improve. Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, “Your attitude towards yourself should always be loving.... Our thoughts should be very loving and helpful to ourselves.”

Life isn't perfect, and neither are we. It's easy for us to get tangled up in our ideals and our concepts – of how we think life should be and how we think we should be as disciples. We need to have a practical approach to life, and we do this by coming to terms with life as it is, and with ourselves as we are.

The Masters impress upon us that this is a very high path to follow. The saints lay before us the goal of self-realization and God-realization, under the guidance of a living teacher who has achieved these same goals: to realize that we are of the same essence as God. We do this by cleansing the karmas we have been collecting for lifetimes and shedding our ego so that we can merge with God and return to our spiritual home.

Loving and caring for the soul means bringing it back to the Father by way of meditation. This ultimately is how we can be at peace with ourselves and truly love the Creator. Hazur continues, “Only with the help of meditation will we be able to build peace within ourselves.” But in the meantime, Masters do not judge our failures and shortcomings. Hazur tells us:

There's nothing to fear ... because he never sits in judgment. He doesn't judge anybody. What is there to judge? He knows us. We are all struggling souls, full of weaknesses.... We are all imperfect. That is why we are here.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

We are asked simply to do our best, despite our shortcomings and failings. Recognizing our helplessness is the key to coming to terms with ourselves. We want to be good, we try to be good, and we fail over and over again. Eventually, we have to acknowledge that we didn't come into this world with a clean slate. Our karmas have determined the circumstances of

our lives – family background, challenges, strengths, weaknesses, personality, intellect. We may have a sweet and kind disposition, and then maybe we have to learn how to assert ourselves, or we may have a depressed and defensive disposition, and we may need to learn how to be more positive and how to trust other people and trust the Master. We're different from one another, with different strengths and weaknesses, and we are also alike – struggling souls wanting to reunite with our source. We all have our individual karmic journey and relationship with the Master.

We will get what the Lord wants to give us. When it is time for us to go back to him, he will pull us. However, we have to put in our absolute best effort to overcome our weaknesses. But sometimes our efforts seem to fail. Being so imperfect helps us to realize how dependent we are on the Lord's grace. We become humbled. Isn't that what Sant Mat is all about? To lose our ego, to realize that we are nothing, and he is everything? We have no choice but to lean on the Father – the Master, the Shabd – when we realize how small we are and how powerful he is.

The Master does not ask us to be perfect. He asks us to keep trying, to do our bhajan and simran and pick ourselves up after we fall and begin again. The Masters impress on us that the Lord is with us and loves us, regardless of our behaviour, how bad we think we are or how dark we may feel. Hazur wrote to one disciple, "We should never lose heart when we have pitfalls or when we have fallen or think that we are being driven from the path. He never leaves us."

The Master has initiated us. He wants us to go back to the Father more than we do. Coming to terms with our imperfections is a way for us to keep moving forward. The Masters tell us we need to go with the flow, to accept what he gives. Then we can relax and do what will help us most – our meditation. If we hate ourselves, we'll never be able to love the Master or anyone genuinely. We won't be able to meditate, to transform ourselves. When we practice kindness toward ourselves, we learn how to be kind to others. We unlock a softness in ourselves so that we can become more receptive to the Master's love and grace.

Coming to terms with ourselves, practicing kindness toward ourselves, relaxing with our brokenness, paradoxically makes us stronger, more able to withstand the storms of life. As Ernest Hemingway wrote in his novel

A *Farewell to Arms*, “The world breaks everybody, and afterward many are strong at the broken places.” We must face life with all its ups and downs. Strengthening ourselves through adversity helps build our faith and deepens our longing for the real love that is within. Hazur tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

Trust your own self, not anybody else. You must develop your consciousness to that level where you are facing yourself, where you can stand in any situation, stand on the path, and nobody can shake you. You must develop and build that trust within yourself. We have a karmic relationship with people, and we can't trust anyone. Everybody is selfish, everybody has their own way of dealing with us, and there is always a string behind us. So we should know what we want, where we stand and how to be. We must build that confidence within ourselves and develop that confidence by meditation. We must build faith in ourselves.

This is a very powerful statement about how to be in the world, how to approach life, and how to approach ourselves. At first, it might seem harsh. Don't trust anyone; everyone is selfish; relationships are need-based. It sometimes takes us a lifetime to realize this and to accept it. Once we accept this fact of life – that all relationships are karmic, need-based, and impermanent – we're free. We no longer tie our happiness to what other people can give us or do for us. The people in our lives come and go, and we learn to accept that. No one belongs to us, and we don't belong to anyone. Then only can we build that confidence, strength, and faith in ourselves through meditation – it's the only way.

All we have to do is try. We need not be perfect disciples. We simply need to follow the tenets of the path and direct our efforts inward. We need to let go and lean inside. The saints tell us not to have expectations in our meditation. We should just experience the darkness and silence, or whatever we're experiencing, and then let go.

We will be truly awake when we still our minds, raise our consciousness, and contact the Shabd within. That will happen when he wills it. In the meantime, we can just relax and enjoy our weird, unfathomable, ordinary lives. Because we're almost home.



Simply Put

*Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream.*

The expression “out of the mouths of babes” certainly rings true with this simple nursery rhyme of unknown origin. Who knew that this well-loved song many of us happily sang over and over in our childhood contained a “divine” message for living our lives?

We have been told we need to be as simple as a child. We need to trust, be enthusiastic, wake up every day expecting the best, and doing our best.

If we take this song, line by line we will see Master’s teachings in an uncomplicated way.

Row, row, row – Meditate, meditate, meditate. Just like rowing a boat, meditation is the hard, constant work necessary to reach our goal. It can be tiring but will make us stronger and with each stroke, or round of simran – repetition of the five holy names – we are proceeding closer to our destination, which is the eye centre. When we can, we need to put all our effort into this meditation practice. If we stop this rowing or repetition, we cannot move forward. Of course, rowing in calm waters is a lot less strenuous than when the water is wavy or choppy. Our meditation will help to still our mind or calm the water, so to speak.

Your boat – Our life is unique. There is no one else like us because we all carry our own individual karmic load. Only our meditation and a true Master can help rid us of this burden and free us from this body and the cycle of birth and death so we may travel home to the Lord.

Gently down the stream – Go with the flow. No amount of planning or maneuvering will change our destiny one bit. Our karma has to be gone through. It is our attitude we can change by being positive and upbeat no matter what happens.

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily – As Hazur lovingly advises us in *Die to Live*, “Live a simple, happy and relaxed life.”

Life is but a dream – As we have been told, we are spiritual beings going through a human experience. Baba Jaimal Singh reminds us

of this in *Spiritual Letters* by saying, “Always keep in mind that the world is unreal.”

Sometimes we get a day when getting up to meditate seems especially hard because we feel too tired or are too wound up from the ups and downs of life. Maybe remembering this happy little song at those times will help us to overcome the mind’s excuses for not meditating.

When a newly published Sant Mat book becomes available we can’t wait to read it. Are we expecting something new or different from what we have already read? Hazur has said that whether we read a whole book, one page or just one word, the message is still the same. Every mystic’s teaching is the same and will never be different, just as this little song has no need to be altered or added to. The truth is the truth, and sometimes the less said the better.

We are no longer children, but we can greatly benefit from being childlike in how we proceed on this path. We should do what our Master advises, knowing he loves us and wants nothing but the best for us. By doing our meditation we can be happy everyday, knowing we are rowing to shore where our true home is and where we will ever be God’s children. As always, we can take comfort in Hazur’s words in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I, “The devotee is the Lord’s child.”



Being Carefree

Master watches over us like a loving parent caring for and protecting his child. Maharaj Charan Singh compares this to the mother, who continually keeps an eye on her baby while she goes about her business. As long as the baby is content and playing with toys, she lets the child play; but when the baby tires of the toys and notices his mother's absence, he begins to cry. Then the mother goes to the child, picks him up, and comforts him. The child only thinks about his mother when he grows tired of the toys, but the mother is always watching the child even though the child is unaware of the mother's presence. She cannot be indifferent to him.

We have an even stronger connection with the Lord. The Lord is never unmindful of us for even a second. We are never alone. When we sense Master's loving presence, we know that we are safe and secure and that he is watching, guiding, and protecting us at every step. When we realize that the Lord is watching over us like the mother and her baby, then our behaviour changes. We begin to behave so that he will like what he sees, and we will win his favour.

Yet, there are times when we forget that the Master is watching over us, and cares and worries take control of our mind. Stressful situations arise, and we can easily forget him. The Master encourages us to remain positive and to refrain from fear even in stressful situations. Perhaps we first experienced this feeling of separation when we left our true home and identified ourselves as separate beings in the creation.

Fear is very different from love. In love, we feel unity with the Lord; in fear, we act as if we are separate from him. Love is the only reality. Saints assure us that love is our inherent nature. It is a spark of God that is placed within us when he created us. The remedy for fear is love.

Dr. Gerald Jampolsky writes in *Love is Letting Go of Fear*:

“To give is to receive” this is the law of Love. Under this law, when we give our Love away to others we gain, and whatever we give we simultaneously receive. The law of Love is based on abundance; we are completely filled with Love all the time, and our supply is always full and running over.

When we give our Love unconditionally to others with no expectations of return, the Love within us extends, expands, and joins. So by giving our Love away, we increase the Love within us, and everyone gains.

Master's love flowing through us detaches us from all the shadows of life – all that we fear or find hard or difficult to bear – and makes us carefree. Spiritual love is our means of rising above the false, dense nature of maya. In this love, we find abundance. Rather than feeling that something is lacking, we realize our unity with the Lord within us.

On the spiritual path, we demonstrate and grow our love by doing our meditation. Meditation is essential for us to learn to let go and become carefree. We don't know what's best, but he does. As we evolve spiritually, we learn to trust him. When we faithfully do our spiritual work – our meditation – we realize that Master is the one in charge, and he will get things done according to what is best for our spiritual development. We must devote our time to meditation and learn to let go of the world and its problems. Hazur states in *Legacy of Love*, “If you give your problem to the Master, then there's no problem. We give it to him to solve it – but we remain obsessed with the problem. That is not giving it to the Master.”

Over time, we learn to trust in the Divine and to give up our obsessions, worries, and cares. When we truly give our problems to him, surrender ourselves to him, then our problems become his, not ours, and no matter how dire the situation, we can be at peace with whatever results occur. In life we neglect many things – why not forget to worry? Instead of worrying, we can do simran and remember Master with love and faith. This attitude, born of spiritual awareness, will make us carefree and bring peace. The Master knows what we need. We can leave the results to him and focus on doing our best with faith and trust.

Paltu explains so beautifully in his poem “The Watchman,” how disciples become carefree when we develop the awareness that the Lord is always watching over us.

*Paltu sleeps carefree –
the Lord himself is his watchman....
Stretched full length, he sleeps relaxed;
at his sight, his enemies flee.*

*When the Lord himself stands guard,
who can harm a hair on Paltu's head?
Unconcerned am I- what is mine is his;
it's for him now to take care of me.
I have no further worries;
all my cares are now on his shoulders.
Not for a moment does he forget me -
he is in touch with me at all times.
One who has passed on his burden to the Lord
and cares not what others think,
Sleeps, O Paltu, carefree,
for the Lord himself is his watchman.*

How fortunate are to have a true Master to watch over, teach,
and guide us every step of the way. By following his instructions, we
become carefree.



Investment Research

Let's do some investment research. When a soul comes into this world, an account has already been opened in its name with the Bank of Karma. This investment account is referred to as a Karmic Account. Saving there is not a good deal.

The terms of our investment are:

- 0% interest on all transactions in the account – we will get back only what we put in.
- Overdraft instantly available, get money now – pay later.
- No age limit, no references required, and no credit check – after all, we've been banking here since the beginning of creation.
- There is one statement per lifetime – issued at death, paid in full.
- The bank's motto: "The only return we guarantee will be yours."

We need to open a much different type of account if we want to achieve truly remarkable investment results. Obtaining such an account is very difficult because we cannot find it or choose it ourselves – it chooses us! As with all accounts, this one has certain conditions that we must fulfil. To open this account and achieve the desired investment results, we need to find an expert financier and follow his advice, including to:

1. Eat a lacto-vegetarian diet.
2. Abstain from tobacco and all intoxicants, including alcohol and recreational drugs.
3. Live a clean, moral life, supporting oneself by honest means.
4. Meditate for at least two and one-half hours daily. Because this is a long-term (lifelong) high-interest account, it requires that we make regular payments of time and attention every day for the rest of our life.

If we commit to these basic principles, the expert financier promises the following:

- He will transfer our existing account with the Bank of Karma to the new account so that all settlements, whether debits or credits, are paid in full within the shortest possible time.

- He will enrol us in the greatest of investment programmes ever devised: simran, dhyān, and bhajan.
- Whatever we invest, he will multiply from his inexhaustible wealth.

It is at the benefactor's discretion how he manages the account. He will decide how much of our wealth will be available to us in our lifetime – if at all. However, he guarantees on our behalf to keep it safe for us at the time of death.

How do we invest in this account? By following the Masters' teachings and integrating them into our very being and, most importantly, by focusing our attention within and attaching it to the Audible Life Stream, the Shabd or Nam. This is a direct connection the Lord has kept within every one of us. It has always been within us since time immemorial, and yet we are ignorant of it. To help attach us to it, the Master tells us in which direction to point our lives and how to set our spiritual compass. He encourages us to look at the priorities we have in life and asks that we consider whether our actions reflect those lofty goals.

By following the Master's advice, we achieve investment returns that are literally out of this world.



Who We Really Are

We live in a realm of duality characterized by polar opposites. As a result, we all experience ups and downs in our lives according to our karmas. Happiness and sorrow, health and disease, wealth and poverty, are just a few of the ways these karmas manifest. We also experience duality within ourselves: generosity and selfishness, love and hate, tolerance and anger. As a result, we are continually struggling against the light and dark aspects of our personality. Generally, we feel proud of our positive qualities, but the negative ones are often hidden away in secrecy. We all have secrets; some of the good ones we've delighted in sharing with a trusted friend or loved one, and others we may have kept to ourselves out of shame and the fear of being judged. For those of us raised in a religious tradition that offered a sacramental confession (for example, Catholicism), we were given a safe haven to share those personal secrets that brought us shame. In so doing, we obtained absolution and were relieved of our guilt, at least temporarily.

Research seems to indicate a high correlation between keeping our shameful past to ourselves and substance abuse, depression, and violent behaviour. But, as one expert put it in a TED talk, "If you put shame in a Petri dish, it needs three things to grow exponentially: secrecy, silence, and judgment. If you put the same amount of shame in a Petri dish and douse it with empathy, it can't survive."

The empathy that we need to recover from the toxic shame of our past can only come from someone who can see our true essence and who does not judge us for the actions we have performed in going through our karmas. Such a one is the Master.

When we first come to the path, many of us are in such a state of disrepair that even while following the vows and attending to our meditation, we can feel as if we are struggling aimlessly and alone, trying to make sense of a creation that – from our limited perspective – often makes no sense at all. This confusion is mostly the result of not knowing our real selves. However, little by little, the Master reveals to us that we are not our weaknesses or our shame. We are, in reality, souls – pure drops from the ocean of the Divine, sparks of the Creator himself.

It is our meditation that will restore to us the awareness of who we truly are. These flawed minds, bodies, and personalities are simply coverings that hide our Divine essence. As we continue to practice our meditation, we will gradually be able to let go of all we are not and discover who we actually are. Being blessed with a human birth allows us to find out who we really are.

In *from self to Shabd*, we read about how we are stuck in identification with our personality. The author states:

While the true Master is identified with Shabd, the disciple is identified with his body and personality, and therein lies the only difference between the spiritual Master and the disciple.

The author continues:

Like most of us, the disciple is aware only of duality. We view ourselves in the context of our relationships, the company we keep, the roles we perform, the skills or possessions we have, our social status, gender, and so forth. These are just some of the ingredients that we have assembled to make up the identity of our human experience.... The identity we perceive as our 'real self' is the ultimate illusion we have to transcend in order to make conscious contact with the melody of Shabd.

We make progress toward transcending that illusion every time we sit in meditation or repeat our simran throughout the day. Little by little, the Master chips away at our illusory sense of who we are and prepares us to become conscious of all that we truly are.

In *Living Meditation*, the author explains:

We don't lose the sense of who we are by merging with the ocean of consciousness. On the contrary, we become who we really are, which is pure consciousness, perfect happiness, limitless love. What is this personality that we are so afraid to lose? What sense does it make that we remain satisfied with this dark world, separated from our true essence when our possibilities are infinite? Let us become the ocean. Let us make the effort to avoid being bottled up again. Let us strive to merge back into Shabd. That is who we really are.

To reach and merge back into the Shabd through following the Master's instructions is our primary responsibility in this life. All else is secondary. If we can appreciate this fact, we will place our meditation practice first and foremost in our lives with full faith that the Master will take care of all the rest. When we harbor secrets or regrets of the past or worry about what the future holds in store for us, we squander the attention that should, instead, be focused on our simran. It is the simran that will ultimately put us in touch with the Shabd, and the Shabd is the only power that will allow us to rise above the distractions stemming from thinking about the past or the future.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh advises:

We'll be able to get rid of our worries with a practical approach. So attend to meditation. When your mind is attached to the Shabd and Nam within, then you don't think about the past or worry about the future. It is all the mind, whether it is coming down to the senses and worrying about worldly problems or attached to the Shabd and going up. So when you positively put your mind in touch with the light and sound within, automatically you cease worrying. You get that bliss and peace and happiness within yourself.

And you are training yourself. Meditation trains you to accept what is in your destiny, if not cheerfully, then at least with a smile. That is the purpose of meditation. Unnecessarily brooding over the past and worrying about the future is not going to solve any problem at all. So we must live in the present.... We should plan for a day and then live it thoroughly and happily, and attend to our meditation. That is the only way one can get out of these worldly worries and worldly problems.

Ultimately, we will be freed from all the illusions that have broken our hearts and discover the greatest secret of all – that we are, and always have been, under the unfailing guidance and protection of a true living Master and that he will see us back to our eternal home.



BOOK REVIEW

When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times

BY PEMA CHODRON

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Pema Chodron, an American Buddhist nun, applies the classic teachings of Buddhism in straightforward language that can be easily understood and practically applied in a contemporary context. *When Things Fall Apart* is a compilation of talks that Chodron gave from 1987–1994 on the concept of *maitri* or loving-kindness toward oneself. By developing *maitri*, she says, we can awaken a “fearlessly compassionate attitude toward our own pain and the pain of others.”

In many of these talks Chodron encourages us to step into the unknown and relax in what she calls the “groundlessness” of our situation. She describes groundlessness as a point in our lives when, whether we want to or not, we let go of our beliefs, opinions, and concepts – when everything that we have held onto falls apart. “When things fall apart and we’re on the verge of we know not what, the test for each of us is to stay on that brink and not concretize.” By this she means not latching onto another set of concepts and beliefs when we experience uncertainty, but courageously staying with the experience of not knowing. She quotes her own spiritual teacher as saying: “Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news” because of the opportunity it provides for growth.

The basic human struggle that the book addresses is what we do when we are “nailed by life.” She says that we continually find ourselves coming to a point in life in which we feel pressured and want to escape from our circumstances. She calls this being “squeezed.” She describes some of the ways we try to escape: seeking pleasure, blaming others, holding tightly to our opinions and self-concept, closing ourselves off, and even trying to make meditation an escape from reality. Chodron quotes her first meditation instructor as saying, “Please don’t go away from here thinking that meditation is a vacation from irritation.”

Chodron explains that this place of being “squeezed” is where we experience the most growth if we don’t run away from it. If we stay with it, we will have to let go of rigid concepts and beliefs, and “all our usual schemes fall apart.” This is when the edges of our personalities soften, we become more tender and open, and we can in turn feel more compassion for others who have the same human experience. “This place of the squeeze is the very point in our meditation where we can really learn something.” She says that this is where we “begin to learn the meaning behind the concepts and the words.”

We continually find ourselves in that squeeze.... We liked meditation and the teachings when we felt inspired and in touch with ourselves and on the right path. But what about when it begins to feel like a burden, like we made the wrong choice and it's not living up to our expectations at all?

A sense of “squeeze” may come from false expectations we hold – whether about our practice, fellow seekers, or the path we follow – expectations that leave us unsatisfied and frustrated. Chodron encourages us to stay with these difficult experiences because they can be a place of deep learning.

So how do we relate to that squeeze? Somehow, someone finally needs to encourage us to be inquisitive about this unknown territory and about the unanswerable question of what's going to happen next.... In that awkward, ambiguous moment is our own wisdom mind. Right there in the uncertainty of everyday chaos is our own wisdom mind.

Central to Chodron’s teachings is the counterintuitive *tonglen* meditation practice in which the practitioner breathes in the emotions and thoughts associated with a painful experience visualizing it as hot, dark and heavy, and breathes out a feeling of cool, bright light. This correlates with a short saying quoted often in the book, “Use what seems like poison as medicine,” which means to use one’s own personal suffering as a path toward compassion for others. Chodron explains that, by taking in the pain and sending out spaciousness and relief, the practice of *tonglen* challenges our habitual reactions. By overcoming the fear of suffering, the tightness

in the heart dissolves, it becomes softened and purified, and one can then become more open and compassionate.

People often say that this practice goes against the grain of how we usually hold ourselves together... The practice dissolves the walls we've built around our hearts. It dissolves the layers of self-protection we've tried so hard to create. In Buddhist language, one would say that it dissolves the fixation and clinging of the ego. Tonglen reverses the usual logic of avoiding suffering and seeking pleasure. In the process we become liberated from very ancient patterns of selfishness.

The other meditation practice described in the book is the *Shamatha-Vipashyana* instruction. *Shamatha* is a stilled and stabilized state of mind, or “calm abiding,” and *Vipashyana* is a discerning and perceptive state of mind or “insight.” Chodron conveys the basic instruction on how one develops these qualities in formal meditation: “When we sit down to meditate, whatever arises in our minds we look at directly, call it ‘thinking,’ and go back to the simplicity and immediacy of the breath.... Whatever arises, we can look at with a non-judgmental attitude.” She says that this meditation practice is a way to stop fighting with ourselves, and to stop struggling with our circumstances, emotions, and moods. She goes on to explain, “Whatever or whoever arises, train again and again in looking at it and seeing it for what it is without calling it names, without hurling rocks, without averting your eyes.” She says that when difficult thoughts arise, they should not be rejected but simply acknowledged as “thinking” and let go.

Chodron recommends doing meditation daily. Among its other advantages, daily meditation “sows the seeds that enable us to be more awake in the midst of everyday chaos.” We learn to refrain from acting on the impulses of the “small mind” so that we don’t build up reactivity to life’s challenges. We can “pause for a moment, ... not just impulsively do the same thing again and again. It’s a transformative experience to simply pause instead of immediately filling up the space.”

In meditation this pause appears as a space or a silent gap in the noisy chattering of the mind.

In Nepal the dogs bark all night long. Every twenty minutes or so, they all stop at once, and there is an experience of immense relief and stillness. Then they all start barking again. The small mind can feel just like that. When we first start meditating, it's as if the dogs never stop barking at all. After a while, there are those gaps. Discursive thoughts are rather like wild dogs that need taming. Rather than beating them or throwing stones, we tame them with compassion. Over and over we regard them with the precision and kindness that allow them to gradually calm down. Sometimes it feels like there's much more space, with just a few yips and yaps here and there.

Throughout the book, Pema Chodron continually returns to the importance of meditation, which eventually leads one to the discovery of *bodhichitta* or “noble and awakened heart.”

Meditation is a totally nonviolent, nonaggressive occupation. Not filling the space, allowing for the possibility of connecting with unconditional openness – this provides the basis for real change.... When we cling to thoughts and memories, we are clinging to what cannot be grasped. When we touch these phantoms and let them go, we may discover a space, a break in the chatter, a glimpse of open sky. This is our birthright – the wisdom with which we were born, the vast unfolding display of primordial richness, primordial openness, primordial wisdom itself.



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