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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Reasons to Be Cheerful

“You can’t always get what you want – but if you try sometime, you might just find, you get what you need ...”

There’s an unexpectedly deep truth in those words from an old rock song. Finding that we can’t get what we want – in big ways and small – is a situation we continually face, with more or less grace. Life rarely turns out exactly in accordance with our wishes, but that’s okay. Because ultimately we will get what the Lord decides we should: what he knows we need. Our role is to try our best, and then accept cheerfully what we are given.

Together these two approaches – effort and acceptance – combine into a single attitude: positivity. Being positive means that we keep striving to move towards our goal, without being discouraged when things progress slowly or even go into reverse. That we remain content with our lot, yet at the same time don’t give up on our efforts to better ourselves.

The articles in this issue of *Spiritual Link* talk in different ways about how we can maintain this positive attitude. Keeping strong in times of trouble, combating negative aspects of mind such as anger, letting go of worry and resentment, focusing on the present to make the best use of each day, and maintaining our faith in the Lord’s plan for us – these and more are discussed.

No, we can’t always get what we want; maybe even most of the time we won’t. Hey, that’s life. But in the end, as it says in the Rolling Stones’ song, if we keep on trying we will get what we need. Because the Lord is looking after us. And that’s a reason to be cheerful if ever there was one!





Let's Look at It Positively

Every day we have a choice: to be positive or negative. The essence of spirituality is to be positive: to be clear-cut, definite, forward-looking and decisive. Having a positive attitude means we are willing to commit and to do, without complaint, the work that will lead us to our objective. With a negative attitude, however, our mind is not set on the job and we have lost the race before we've even begun.

Whatever our goal, a positive frame of mind will not only help us achieve it but also allow us to enjoy ourselves along the way. It will keep us contented, whatever difficulties we face. But while an optimist looks at a rose bush and enjoys its beautiful, fragrant flowers, a pessimist sees only thorns.

With a positive attitude, our problems do not weaken us but rather make us stronger. Even when things are not going our way, we know they will get better. What is more, when we believe in ourselves and feel confident, this actually boosts our capabilities. By motivating ourselves to keep forging ahead, we build determination. But having a negative view weakens us, always. So no matter how difficult a situation we are going through, it serves us best to steer clear of negative thinking.

How can we do that? Well, every time we think negatively, we should consciously reverse that thought and turn it into something positive. All we need to do is find a positive perspective to what is going on around us. There is always something good taking place, and it is our job to find it.

The negative person is grumpy, sad and dissatisfied. He says things aren't going well for him. He moans and groans. If the weather is fine, he says it's too hot; if it rains, it's too wet. If he has a problem, he

regards it as very serious and likely to get worse; he is without hope. A positive person, on the other hand, is cheerful, smiling and pleasant. If he has a problem, he is confident that it can be overcome. If the problem is permanent, he will find ways to cope with it. He is full of hope. When faced with difficulties, he finds the challenge useful and interesting; he tries to make things easier, and simplifies things. A negative person magnifies his weaknesses, regrets his past actions, feels tense and is worried about the future. A positive person puts his faults into perspective and leaves the past behind him; he is relaxed, and looks forward to the future with confidence.

Whether our outlook is positive or negative also has a direct bearing on our experience of meditation. With a negative attitude, meditation can seem a hard struggle, in which we are making no progress; we feel alone, cling to our problems and postpone our meditation. But having a positive attitude gives us the determination to persevere in our meditation and the confidence that we are not alone; confronted with a problem, we will sit in meditation first, then try to solve it.

Positivity engenders concentration. We may feel some days that our meditation has lacked concentration, that it was “no good”; but the Master says that all meditation is good. Every moment devoted to meditation, never mind its quality, is to our credit. Being positive about our meditation means being patient, moving a little further forward every day, with each scrap of effort – but mostly with his grace. We must leave the results to him.

To be positive is to be the recipient of God’s grace. It is to be humble, which means not being conscious of anyone’s imperfections, including even our own. We trust in the Lord that we are being helped in a thousand ways. Trust is the most powerful way of getting closer to the Master, and this is the most deeply satisfying aspect of Sant Mat.

Taking a positive approach means having faith: believing that the path we follow is taking us back to the divine. Everything that happens to us along the way is coming from him, and takes us closer to home. The mind may see these things as good or bad, but we can learn to consider them as expressions of the Lord's grace. Then we can say to him: Everything you do, everything you decide, is sweet to me.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always –
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well...*

T.S. Eliot, extract from *Four Quartets*



Effort versus Anxiety

“If not now, then when?” becomes an increasingly relevant and poignant question as the years rush past.

Motivational speakers like to proclaim that “failing to prepare is preparing to fail”. This is true of life in general and of spirituality in particular. It is true also in sport – and are we not spiritual athletes training every day? How inspiring are the Olympians! What dedication to their training regime, what sheer determination to improve and succeed! They do not achieve success by being lazy.

Here’s what one gold-winning cyclist says of her training regime: “It hurts so badly. It’s like your legs are getting squeezed. You try to fight against it, but it’s horrible. You have to get past that ... barrier to feel good eventually.” Yet she also declares: “I love getting on my bike; the feeling of achieving something every day.” We can also have similarly positive feelings if we are making a real effort to achieve our goal – which is something much more glorious than a medal.

But are we instead doing “lazy” meditation? Are we just going through the motions, without focus and without love? Do we resent getting up early in the morning? Are we watching the clock, waiting for our shift to end? If so, do we honestly think that this kind of meditation will lead us to our goal?

Clear thinking is essential in spirituality, so we need to make an extra effort to be focused during meditation, to be conscious of what we are doing and why. We are not just putting in a “shift” of meditation; we are taking the greatest journey we will ever make. But are we clear-thinking enough to see through our own self-deception?

Someone once said to Maharaj Ji, in October 1987: “Master, you said yesterday that the Lord is more anxious for us to go inside than

we are to go inside. If I feel that I am anxious to go inside, how come we can't?"

He replied: "Sister, if we are really anxious to go inside, then we won't spread ourselves too much outside. If we spread our consciousness too much outside, it means we are not very anxious to go inside. If we are giving ourselves to the senses – to the worldly pleasures, and running after the worldly objects, worldly faces, day and night – we involve in these unnecessary evils, then we can't say that we are very anxious to get in. If we are trying to withdraw from all that and fighting to come back to the eye centre, then we can say that we are anxious to go in."

Focus and Fight

Notice that he uses the word "fighting". It is a fight sometimes, a real struggle, but nothing of value is ever achieved without great effort. And so, like the athletes, we have to dig deep. Hazur is saying that it's time to choose where our main focus in life should be. He points out that our apparent anxiety to go inside may be nothing more than self-deception.

We never seem to catch up with our lives. We feel we need to do more and see more, and to be fitter, healthier, wealthier and more knowledgeable.... Actually, we are managing our lives in such a way as to avoid confronting the obvious truth: that it will end soon.

When distractions and temptations come our way, we should recognize them for what they are. Thinking clearly, we know that these things will stand in the way of achieving our true objective in life. So we just need to say to ourselves: "This is not what I want. I know this will derail me, so I want nothing to do with it."

To live a conscious life means to observe and respond from the eye centre, from the seat of consciousness. To look on the drama of life

from up high in the crow's nest. The lookout always has the advantage of perspective. He can see things coming from a distance and make a measured, "conscious" response. Nothing hasty, impetuous or emotional: just level-headed, untroubled and still.

As Rumi says, here among the world's distractions and attractions, "We have become intoxicated with the echo". But we don't need those worldly pleasures. We don't need a thousand Facebook friends. We don't need a hundred actual friends. We don't even need ten close friends. We just need one real friend, the Master. And he is always with us. Who could ask for anything more?

Sooner or later, like the caterpillar transformed into a butterfly, we will cease to dwell in this earthly creation and fly joyfully and colourfully into the light of God's love. Our daily struggles until that day may be less poetic, but they are an essential stage on the path. Does the caterpillar find it easy to struggle out of the cocoon? Hard work, determination, possibly pain, even temporary disappointment, but most of all, perseverance will help us through. Meditation is, after all, the practice that makes perfect.



I'm interested in what people do with the chaos in their lives and how they respond to it, and simultaneously what they do with what they feel like are limitations. If they push against these limitations, will they wind up in the realm of chaos, or will they push against limitations and wind up in the world of freedom?

Philip Roth (novelist)

Don't Look Down

Nancy Pope Mayorga (1894 – 1983) was an American writer who kept a diary to describe her experiences in meditation and her meetings with her guru, Swami Prabhavananda. The following extracts are taken from this diary, entitled Hunger of the Soul.

Movement in spiritual growth is by no means steadily up. There are not only slumps, but also wide plateaux – peaceful but unprogressive rest periods. There are times, too, of desperate clinging, to hold the foothold won. And then, of course, periods of depression, periods of doubt. Spiritual depression is terrible, dark and bitter. But I believe doubt is worse. Because in depression you know you'll come out of it sooner or later. You even know that the fight out of it will leave you better, higher. But when doubt comes, when you begin to wonder, "What am I doing? Is this all nonsense? Does it really lead anywhere?" – That is a very bad time.

It is a bad time because you have already been convinced that the ordinary life of the world is sterile. There is no going back. If the new life you have chosen is a delusion, then you are caught between, dancing at the end of a rope with your feet in the air. Doubt is much harder to conquer than depression. Nothing works. Conviction can come only from within, and within is hollow with doubt. But Brahmananda says: "Doubt will come until you have realized God; therefore you must hold fast to God and pray." And Prabhavananda: "What you must do is pray. Pray for knowledge, for light, for guidance. It will come."

Last night I asked Swami Prabhavananda this question: “What do you do when you are depressed?” I wanted to trick him into some admission about his private feelings. But he does not reveal himself easily. He laughed a little, and then said, “It is true that all along the path to liberation there are periods of depression. This is what to do about them. Life, as I have often told you, is made up of the three *gunas*, or energies – *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. Liberation has to come through the tranquillity and light of *sattva*. Now when *tamas* takes hold of you with inertia and depression, don’t allow it to possess you. Get up and act, do something helpful for other people, make yourself active, *rajasic*. Then when you have conquered *tamas* by *rajas*, sit down to your meditation and let the tranquillity of *sattva* take over. This is the way to overcome depression.”

He: You think you are independent of God. As long as you have the sense *I am the doer*, you enjoy or suffer according to your deeds, and God just keeps watch, waiting for you. But when you take one step toward Him, He takes thousands toward you. As soon as you say ‘Not I, but Thou’, He takes interest in you, and takes away your suffering. When you think of yourself as the doer, He says ‘All right, child, do.’ From that standpoint He is indifferent. But He is not unaware. It is said that He even listens to the footsteps of an ant. So there is great efficacy in prayer, yes! He can wipe out your karma. But you have to come to Him. Prayer is important, And prayer is answered ... it doesn’t matter where you are placed in life. Learn to be contented with your outward condition, but not with your spiritual growth. Contentment outwardly, divine discontent within.



Feeling Funny

It depends how you look at it



Notes on Anger

Mind is a powerful and cunning entity. It is constantly on the move and its pursuits are endless. Without mind, it would be impossible for the soul to function in the environment of this physical world, yet some aspects of the mind are the deadliest foes in creation. There are five menaces – lust, anger, greed, attachment and egotism – at the root of all negative actions that man has committed since time began. They are not found outside in the world; they are closer than our own shadow. This article considers just one of these – anger – and what we can do about it.

Anger, when unleashed, causes so much pain and damage that the effects can be felt long afterwards. Maharaj Charan Singh writes in one of his letters in *Divine Light*:

Anger is a harmful emotion ... if you knew what great harm one moment's anger does to your liver and to your whole body, and what poison it creates in the system, you would never become angry at anything, no matter how upsetting the condition may be.

It's easy to become angry. At the time it happens we may believe we are justified in our reaction: that what we are feeling is 'righteous anger'. Afterwards, however, we usually regret having acted angrily towards someone, especially if it is a loved one or friend. It may help us to remain calm when rattled if we understand what it is that triggers anger.

A common stimulus is when we don't see our wishes fulfilled. In other words, anger is prompted when one of the other passions – lust,

greed, attachment or egotism – is frustrated in the attempt to gain its object. Unless we are strong enough to shrug off anger, or are connected to a higher power that can help guide our behaviour, then we tend to fall victim to the mind, which in turn is at the mercy of the senses.

At that moment of vulnerability, the mind can take us any way it chooses, and there's no telling where things will end up. We may take out our frustration on an entirely innocent person, speaking harshly and treating them unfairly. Or our disappointment may make us subject to feelings of despondency and rejection, playing unwanted scenes over and over in our heads. These impressions stored in the mind will hinder us from moving forward on the path.

Ultimately, keeping our mind clutter-free and relaxed will help us during our meditation time. A mind that is calm, balanced and free from anger will be far better able to help unburden us of the karmas that have kept us tied here, and to which we are always in danger of adding.

Anger has been responsible for so much suffering in the world, and its death count rises every minute. Giving in to anger will not solve our problems; on the contrary, it will make them bigger. If we are to fight the threat of karmic entanglement, we must keep a constant watch over the mind – because anger will use any means it can to disturb our inner balance in order to cause a reaction outside.

The trick is not to be disturbed by anything or anyone. This is easier said than done, and cannot be achieved overnight. But cultivating a positive outlook and a strong will, with regular meditation, will gradually help our angry tendencies to subside. It's a slow process, but if we are heading in the right direction then we will get there in the end.

Antidote to Anger

An antidote to anger might contain the following remedies:

1. When you feel anger brewing, keep quiet and do simran. You will find the anger slowly dissipates. Try it – it works!
2. Identify things that make you angry – write them down if it helps. Then promise yourself not to become upset when something on the list happens.
3. Don't criticize or slander others about their weaknesses. It's better to know your own weaknesses and improve yourself.
4. Be compassionate, because you'll find the same strengths and weaknesses in others as you do within yourself, just to differing degrees.
5. Remind yourself that getting angry causes damage to your body internally. This should be enough to put anyone off becoming angry.
6. Finally, if you find yourself on the receiving end of someone else's anger, keep cool and stay quiet. Let Mr or Mrs Angry blurt everything out before you respond – if there is a need to respond.

Forgiveness

“To err is human; to forgive, divine.” So said Alexander Pope, one of the greatest poets of spiritual enlightenment. The mystics agree that forgiveness is a divine quality. What we seek on this path is divine forgiveness for all our sins, so that we can escape the cycle of reincarnation and return to our true home. We need to awaken consciously within ourselves that holy quality, which is the essence of our soul.

We often think of forgiveness as something that someone who has wronged us should actively seek from us. But the mystics tell us that true forgiveness is when *we* focus on offering forgiveness to that person, whether they seek it or not. The very word “forgiveness” is built on the root word “give”. Giving means extending one’s love with no conditions, no expectations, no boundaries.

Mystics say: give *yourself* the gift of forgiveness. It is not something we do *for* someone else: rather, forgiving others actually benefits ourselves. Having identified the situation to be forgiven, we should ask ourselves: “Am I willing to waste my energy on this matter?” If the answer is “No”, then that’s it! All is forgiven.

Forgiveness challenges us to give up our destructive thoughts about a difficult situation. It builds confidence that we can survive the pain and grow from it. Forgiveness has little or nothing to do with the other person involved in the situation, because it is a personal matter.

There is nothing so bad that it cannot be forgiven. And we need to remember: we always have a choice to forgive or not to forgive, whether the other person asks us to or not. That is their choice, whether or not to seek forgiveness. Either way, they did what they did and must live with the consequences. But our hurt won’t heal until we forgive. That is our choice.

Forgiveness helps to refocus our energy on the healing, not the hurt. However, recovery from wrongdoing that requires genuine forgiveness takes time. For some, it may take years to reach a real state of genuine forgiveness.

Imagine the following exchange between a husband and wife. The husband refers to a past misdeed by his wife, who responds: “Why are you bringing this matter up *yet again*? It happened so long ago, and you said you had forgiven me.” Her husband replies: “Well, yes, darling, I have forgiven you. But I would now like to *remind* you that I have forgiven you.” Remind her? As the saying goes, we must forgive *and* forget. If we haven’t forgotten, then we haven’t really forgiven.

A creative act of freedom

Forgiveness is a creative act that frees us from the past. It liberates us, so that memories of past injury no longer detain us and drain our energy. Such memories, by holding our attention, form an obstacle to meditation. It is impossible to walk the spiritual path until we learn to let go of our past hurts, misunderstandings and resentments.

It requires courage to forgive. Hazur used to say that we always greet those who greet us, but only those who walk the path of love will greet first before being greeted. But the mind is weak, and the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. Forgiveness is not surrender. It is, rather, a conscious decision to stop holding on to resentment. Holding on to anger just strengthens the mind, which thrives on conflict and strife. The mystics advise us that the moment we truly forgive, we reclaim the power from the mind.

If we do not forgive, we must face the consequences. Refusing to forgive, holding on to anger, resentment and a sense of betrayal, can make our life miserable. Not forgiving means continuing to suffer for what the other person did (or didn’t do). It is like taking poison.

Moreover, the person we have not forgiven owns us mentally, because we are still thinking of them.

One who cannot forgive closes his heart. So if we are to improve our relationship with the Master, then we must make peace with whoever has done us wrong, whether that is our partner, relations, parents, children, friends or former friends, work colleagues or whomever.

A process towards peace

Forgiveness is the single most important process that brings peace to our soul and harmony in our lives. Living in resentment takes so much effort. It saps our energy. All the toxic feelings of hatred and resentment that we bottle up inside will eventually seep into other areas of our life, with the result that we become bitter, angry, unhappy and frustrated. A spiritual life becomes impossible.

Sometimes our grievance is so great that we think we cannot forgive, and even that we have a right to our indignation – because we feel we have suffered an injustice. What do mystics say about injustice? As you sow, so shall you reap. We are all sinners. The very fact that we are in this world, the lowest plane of the cosmos, means that we are carrying a heavy burden of sins. Our lives are fabricated from our sins.

Every time we find fault with others, that same fault, in some form, lies within us. What we see outside is just a reflection of what is inside us. That stage of perception when we focus only on improving ourselves is what Baba Ji calls spiritual maturity. If we truly want to walk with the Master, then we have no business looking at other people's faults.

Mother Teresa said that if we truly want to know what love is, then first we need to learn how to forgive. Forgiving someone is to agree *within oneself* to overlook the wrong they have committed against us

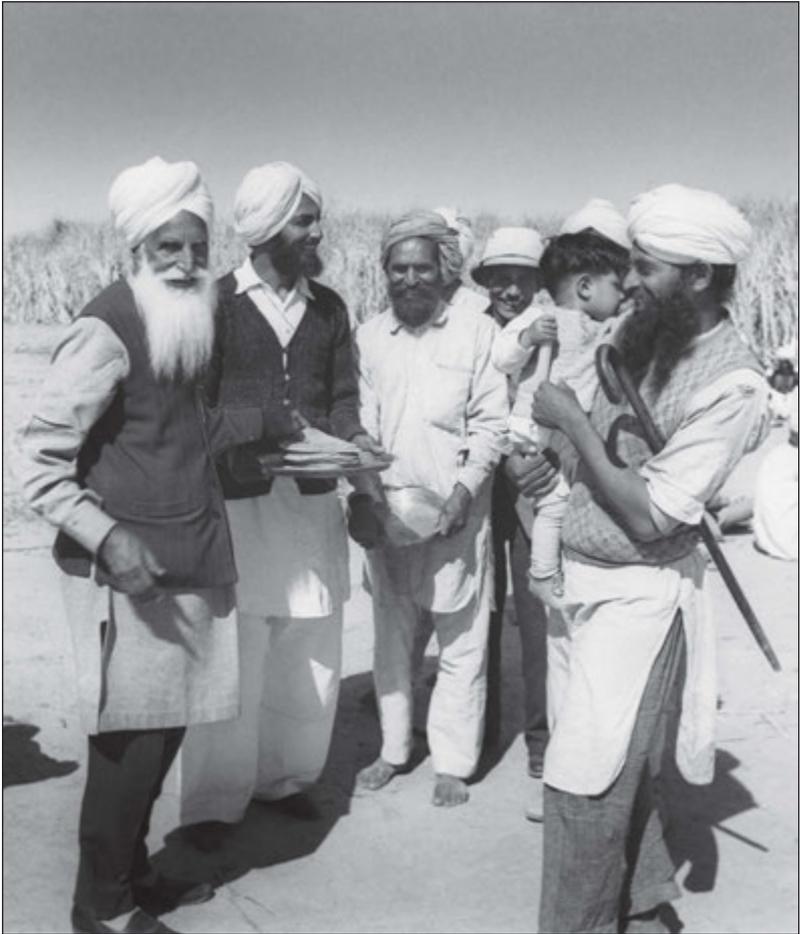
and to move on. Being willing to forgive can bring a sense of peace, whereas not forgiving keeps us in the struggle. If we are at war with others, how can we hope to be at peace with our self? To forgive means to give up, in the sense of letting go. This does not mean surrender. Rather, it is a conscious decision to stop holding on to anger and resentment. No one benefits more from forgiveness than the one who forgives. Not that forgiveness is easy – but it is a necessity if we are to progress spiritually.

As Alexander Pope said, “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” By forgiving, we allow this divine nature to express itself through us. Then we feel the warm rays of divine love dissolving all hurt, all bitterness, all sense of injustice.



When we want to clear up a misunderstanding, the question of pinning the blame on one person or another does not arise. When we want to finish that topic, when we want to forgive, we should never try to decide whether you were wrong or whether I was wrong. We should always try to say that you forgive me and I forgive you, and we had better forget whatever unpleasantness has happened between us. The question of thinking and trying to analyse whether you were wrong or whether I was wrong will lead to another type of trouble again. So if we want to forgive ourselves and forget, it is better to express our regrets sincerely and then forget what has happened between us.

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



Great Master at his farm in Sirsa

Help!

There is an old Charlie Brown cartoon that goes something like this: “We are put on this earth to help others.... Okay, but what are the others here for?” Part of what makes this funny, as with most jokes, is that it contains a little piece of odd truth.

What the joke touches on is the circularity in the idea of altruism, of living life in the service of others. Because if *we’re* only here to help *them*, and *they’re* only here to help *us*, then what is the point of all of us together? Don’t those two purposes seem to cancel each other out? Saying I’m here to help you implies that I must be here to help you do something – but if that something *you* are doing is that you are helping *me*, then aren’t I actually just helping myself?

What’s up with altruism?

Somehow the idea behind that joke ends up making altruism seem almost hypocritical – am I helping you only because it’s going to help me, ultimately? In which case, I’m not really doing it *for you* at all, am I?

Looking at the world today, altruism might seem to be in decline, anyway. Thanks to the internet, all the world’s disasters are right in our face, and this information overload can make us feel that nothing we do will ever make a dent in the global misery, so we stop caring.

Instead, we focus on our own immediate wants and needs. *Me, me, me* is the order of the day – or at least the theme of social media. It’s all about what *I* want – how to get more money, more respect, more attention. But more love is probably what we’re hoping for, deep down.

Was it always like this? Were people more selfless and community-minded, in the past? It’s hard to answer that. Certainly, particular aspects of modern life seem to encourage self-obsession. But perhaps

it's just how you use these things. Social media can clearly be used as a tool for self-promotion – for some, it's all about how many followers you have, how many people know your name. But it can also be a tool for connectedness, for sharing. On one of the final pages of the book *Legacy of Love*, we find these words, quoted from Rumi:

The current of love from the one God is flowing through the entire universe. What do you think when you look at the face of a man? Look at him carefully. He is not a man but a current of love, the essence of God which permeates him.

Circular thinking

Perhaps, after all, the circularity of us each being here to help others does make sense – if we recognize that at the centre of that circle is love. If I help you and you help me, not only is it love that motivates us to help, but the thing that we are helping each other to do is also, in fact, to love. What is more, when we really immerse ourselves in love, then there is no more you, and no more me. The circle is not a fragmented collection of many individuals but a solid circle made of soul. We are all one.

By helping each other, we can learn to understand the truth that we are all connected, that we are all one. That what I do for you, I do for me. That you are me, in a sense, because we are all part of the same circle of love. The Dalai Lama has said that if you want to make others happy, the answer is compassion, whereas on the other hand if you want to make yourself happy, then the answer is ... compassion. In other words, it's in serving others that we best serve ourselves and find true happiness.

We all know how the experience of helping other people, without thinking of our own gain, can make us feel better about ourselves. It

makes us feel happy, in fact. But do we understand why that is? We can easily assume it's just because we feel pleased with ourselves for doing something good. But perhaps it's something much bigger and better than that.

By serving others we actually come to know ourselves better. Doing something for someone else gives us an immediate and intuitive understanding of how we and that other person are joined: that we are part of each other, in both being part of something bigger, which is the divine. Serving others is perhaps the most reliable of paths to truly seeing ourselves in others, identifying ourselves with them and thereby all of us with God.

So let's all help ourselves by helping each other. Whether that is through seva, or through fulfilling our responsibilities to others at home and at work, or through random acts of kindness. By doing so, we bring ourselves closer to God.



At some ideas you stand perplexed, especially at the sight of men's sins, asking yourself whether to combat it by force or by humble love. Always decide: "I will combat it by humble love." If you make up your mind about that once and for all, you may be able to conquer the whole world. Loving humility is a terrible force, the strongest of all, and there is nothing like it.... Brothers, love is a teacher, but one must know how to acquire it, for it is acquired with difficulty, it is dearly bought, one must spend a great deal of labour and time on it, for we must love not only for a moment and fortuitously, but for ever.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

The Difficulty of Being Here

The difficulty of being 'here' is that it can, and usually does, seem the most uncomfortable place in the universe. We would rather be somewhere else than here; in some other time than now. By 'here' I mean the place in which you find yourself at this moment. The comfort we yearn for always seems to be over the hill and far away, somewhere else.

'Here' is where the dark demons of our selves are found. But 'here' is also precisely where God can be found. It is difficult to be here, in the moment, because here is where we discover that our worldly selves have no substance. And that is difficult to experience and comprehend.

There are people who understand where 'here' is, and how focusing our attention is the route to it. They have mastered the tendency that overwhelms most of us: that of running away, and keeping ourselves distracted from the present moment. They have mastered their emotions, their minds. They are here, now. Completely. Such adepts are masters, realized souls.

The hunger before the feast

The difficulty of being here is not to be dreaded, though; it is to be relished. It is our recognition of the absence of love; and knowing this absence is the beginning of knowing its presence. We cannot know that the core of us is love without knowing the long, dark night of the soul. We cannot appreciate the feast without first knowing hunger.

To be here in this moment, and to know it to be the safest and most comforting place in the universe, we must find someone who is here, now, who lives in the present, to teach us how to overcome our terrors

and temptations. He can show us how to rescue the damsel of our souls by slaying the dragon of our rampant outward tendencies.

How is such a being to be found? How can we be sure he is real? We must keep on doing what we were doing when we first asked the question: searching and searching. The first step is grasping the possibility that there is such a being alive in the world today, a human being with both the complete authority and the complete humility that come from self-knowledge.

Finding an exemplar

This same exemplar can absorb all our misery in his love, all our fear in his certainty. He encourages us to make such certainty real right here in the middle of our lives. He is a mystic, one who practises the 'mysteries' of knowing God. He tells us we can do it too, right now.

Then comes the creeping understanding that your life has a purpose which has nothing to do with worldly success, worldly relationships, or any other kind of worldly fulfilment. Such goals crumble – they no longer satisfy us. You can't take them with you when you go. But once we begin to grasp that the secret power of life is inside each one of us and can be known in this lifetime, then we start to use words like 'life' and 'purpose' in a new way.

The next step is to put our new use of these words into action, to graduate from being theoretical *philosophers* (from the ancient Greek: lovers of wisdom) to being practical mystics. We might coin a word for ourselves: "mysticonauts", for those who travel the mysteries, the inner space – as opposed to astronauts or cosmonauts who travel to the outer reaches of physical space. To enter inner space we have to get a pilot's licence, which means being instructed in the fundamental mysteries of consciousness. We can then learn how to be connected

with the very stuff of life, which is called Shabd in India and Logos in ancient Greek.

Going back to the beginning: we are absent, we are not here, because we have forgotten who we are. We think our totality is 'out there' in the nitty gritty of life, the soap opera of our gritty lives. We imagine we will be happy when we get those lives right. We imagine successful people are those whose soap operas dazzle with the trophies of their successful selves: wealth, power and relationships. We too want those trophies, but when we don't attain them we feel more trapped than ever.

Meanwhile death hovers, ever present in our vacant lives, making a complete nonsense of all our worldly aspirations. When we enter the last few hours of our lives, we are not going to be worrying whether we spent enough hours in the office, earned enough money, or got enough respect for our talents. What we might regret is that we haven't learned to do something very simple and utterly essential: to focus our consciousness to remove ourselves from elsewhere, from yesterday and tomorrow, to bring us into the shimmering present, here and now.

We forget who we are because we keep imagining we are human beings, replete with histories and personalities, looking for a spiritual experience to lift us out of the trap. In fact, we are spiritual beings who have forgotten who we are. Those fully realized beings, masters, are here now in order to show us the way to here and now – to help us remember who we are and why we are here. What matters is that we know a master, a bringer of light. What matters is that we ask him for our mysticonaut's licence through initiation, enabling us to start the mystic journey (or is it 'complete the journey?').

This is the journey to the heart of our being. The trek to here. It starts outside and ends when we are dead to the world and fully alive to the sound that resounds inside. The vehicle in which we make the

journey is our attention. The way we get into the ship of attention is two-fold: simran (practising remembering where we are going through the power of language); and dhyan (practising seeing where we are going through the power of inner sight).

Once we are in the ship of attention, we are not elsewhere or else-when; we are here and now. The vagaries of the world cannot touch us, because we are not in it to be touched; we are on our way home.

Here is the pivot between outside and inside. You have to go through here to get from outside to inside. When you are inside you can become a master. Baba Ji has described Sant Mat as the path upon which we can become masters. To go home is to master the mind, the outward tendencies.

The difficulty of being here, in the centre, is ultimately the difficulty the soul experiences being in the world, being trapped in an illusion. It does not want to be in this time and space, however tempting the exigencies of the physical world. But we have to start from where we are; here is the only entrance into the reality of the Shabd. We must penetrate the difficulty of being here if we are to discover it is bliss.



*Seeking life without the Friend's presence,
you didn't spend a moment waiting at love's door.
My God! Sit down and mourn your loss!
That time is gone when you could have been living.*

Fakhr al-Din Iraqi in
David & Sabrineh Fideler, *Love's Alchemy*

Seize the Day

Within a short time, those of us who are young today will have become old, and those of us who are now old people will be here no more. *Tempus fugit*, the ancients said – time flies. It's even been proved that our perception of time passing speeds up as we get older – because each passing hour represents a smaller fragment of all our hours past.

The clock is ticking for us all; time marches inexorably on, taking us with it. Each tick should remind us that we are a second nearer to the last day of our lives. Stop and listen: the message is loud and clear. We are here in this human body to turn our face from the world towards the Master in meditation every day, and go home with him to Sach Khand at the end of this life. Each tick of the clock is telling us we haven't much time left to do this. We have to make every day count.

A verse from a childhood poem called *The Way to be Happy* is a reminder of how important it is to give focused thought to how we spend each day. It says:

*How pleasant it is at the end of the day,
No follies to have to repent;
But reflect on the past and be able to say,
My time has been properly spent!*

Ann Taylor, *Original Poems for Infant Minds*

The message is simple – for each day, we have only one chance to choose how we spend our time so that we can end the day contented. We cannot put time into a box and save it to use later. Once past, we cannot ask for a day back so that we can rewrite it and present a

perfect page to our teacher. There is no ‘restore’ button to let us start the day again, deleting the thoughtless errors of our previous attempt.

Our time is not properly spent unless we attend to our real work: the two-and-a-half hours of daily meditation, which we promised on the day of our initiation. We are given only one day at a time to do this. There is nothing we can do about days past or in the future, but we can take action that affects the present day.

The present day is all-important. In *Anam Āra*, the book of Celtic spiritual wisdom by John O’Donohue, there is a perceptive description of the short time we have in a day:

You are so knitted into a day. You are within it; the day is as close as your skin. It is around your eyes; it is inside your mind. The day moves you, often it can weigh you down; or again it can raise you up. Yet the amazing fact is: this day vanishes. When you look behind you, you do not see your past standing there in a series of day shapes. You cannot wander back through the gallery of your past. Your days have disappeared silently and for ever. Your future time has not arrived yet. The only ground of time is the present moment.

Seize the day – use it or lose it forever. Maharaj Jagat Singh reminds us of the importance of using our limited time for our real work in *The Science of the Soul*. He says: “Life is short. Time is fleeting. Take full advantage of it, and if you have not done ‘your own work’ already, start doing it now.” Time is something we cannot control or even fully understand. It is the indefinite, continued progress of existence and events. The arrow of time points from past to future; it only runs in one direction and cannot be reversed or stopped. Although it is a construct, it is a force of creation like the seasons, day and night, and the weather.

Experts on time management say it is impossible to manage time; we can only manage ourselves. We are all given the same measure of time in our day; the crux is how we choose to use it. *We have to manage our choices, not our time.*

Many of us blame time for our laziness: “It’s not my fault – I didn’t have time” or “Time ran away from me!” Although it’s true that the time we have is short and fleeting, what matters is what we make of it. Time likes priorities, and it is well within everyone’s capabilities to decide our own priorities for this one day.

We are not in this life to pursue fame and fortune, or to seek fulfilment in human relationships or transient pleasures. It could all disappear tomorrow. As the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius says in *Meditations*: “Every instant of time is a pinprick of eternity. All things are petty, easily changed, vanishing away.”

We are here to strive for something lasting – to merge with our Creator and never to return. We have been given the means to do this, and it should be our first priority in each day we are given. How ashamed and sad we should be at the end of a day, if we have wasted this treasure. Each new day offers the chance to leave behind the hopelessness of failed good intentions and start anew, as described by A.E. Housman:

*Today I shall be strong,
No more shall yield to wrong,
Shall squander life no more;
Days lost, I know not how,
I shall retrieve them now;
Now I shall keep the vow
I never kept before.*

Collected Poems of A.E. Housman

Something to Think About

Was It a Loss?

A crow once flew into the sky with a piece of meat in its beak. Twenty crows set out in pursuit of it and attacked it viciously.

The crow finally let the piece of meat drop. Its pursuers then left it alone and flew shrieking after the morsel.

Said the crow, "I've lost the meat and gained this peaceful sky."

Said a Zen monk,

"When my house burned down I got an unobstructed view of the moon at night!"

Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*



Life itself is very simple, but we have complicated it so much that we now find it hard to live.... What do we really need in this world? If we look broadly at our needs, how few we have! How much can one eat? How much can one wear? How many places to sleep do we need? These things are good if you gain time for yourself, if you can live a relaxed, happy life.

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



The Glad Game

It was an opportune moment for the birth of the archetypal optimist. Pollyanna, an eleven-year-old orphan who is cheerfully determined to find “something to be glad about” in everything life throws at her, was first brought to life in the writings of Eleanor H. Porter in 1913.

Such has been Pollyanna’s influence that a century later she is still inspiring optimists among the youngsters of today, having scarcely been out of print since her inception. Generations of children have tried to follow her example by playing her famous “glad game”, which makes looking on the bright side into a challenging but fun game.

The *Pollyanna* books are set in Vermont, USA, where the young heroine goes to live with a most discouraging aunt after the death of her father. It was he who had invented the “glad game” after his daughter received in a charity donation a pair of crutches instead of the doll she had hoped for – his positive thinking response was that they could be glad they didn’t actually need the crutches. From then on, father and daughter make it a game to find something to be glad about in every potential disappointment.

The very day she arrives at her aunt’s house after the loss of her father, Pollyanna is banished from the dinner table for some misdeed. But far from being upset, she is glad when told of this punishment by her aunt’s maid, Nancy. In the following extract, Pollyanna proceeds to explain herself to Nancy:

“I’m afraid you’ll have ter have bread and milk in the kitchen with me. Yer aunt didn’t like it – because you didn’t come down ter supper, ye know ... I’m sorry about the bread and milk.”

“Oh, I’m not. I’m glad.”

“Glad! Why?”

“Why, I like bread and milk, and I’d like to eat with you. I don’t see any trouble about being glad about that.”

“You don’t seem ter see any trouble bein’ glad about everythin’,” retorted Nancy, choking a little over her remembrance of Pollyanna’s brave attempts to like the bare little attic room. Pollyanna laughed softly. “Well, that’s the game, you know.”

We might all do well to give this simple philosophy a try. If, when things are hard, we indulge in self-pity and see ourselves as victims, we not only increase our unhappiness but there’s a tendency to put blame on others; this creates an unproductive spiral. The story of Pollyanna recommends not only a positive attitude towards misfortune but having a positive attitude to others. Elsewhere in the book, Eleanor H. Porter writes:

What men and women need is encouragement. Instead of always harping on a man’s faults, tell him of his virtues. Hold up to him his better self, his REAL self that can dare and do and win out! The influence of a beautiful, helpful, hopeful character is contagious, and may revolutionize a whole town.... If a man feels kindly and obliging his neighbours will feel that way too, before long. But if he scolds and scowls and criticizes – his neighbours will return scowl for scowl. When you look for the bad, expecting it, you will get it. When you know you will find the good – you will get that.

Long live the Pollyannas of the world who resolutely turn towards the light. They create an upwards spiral which spreads out and catches us all up.

Keep on the Sunny Side

*There's a dark and troubled side of life;
There's a bright and a sunny side too;
Though we meet with the darkness and strife,
The sunny side we also may view.*

*Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side,
Keep on the sunny side of life;
It will help us every day, it will brighten all the way,
If we keep on the sunny side of life.*

*Though the storm in its fury break today,
Crushing hopes that we cherished so dear,
Storm and cloud will in time pass away,
The sun again will shine bright and clear.*

*Let us greet with a song of hope each day,
Though the moments be cloudy or fair;
Let us trust in our Saviour always.
Who keepeth us all in His care.*

Popular American song



A Question of Choice

For all of us on a spiritual path there can be moments of doubt, when we lose our connection with the Master and our practice. Saints tell us that in such times of trouble we should hang on in there. They remind us that they are here with us, to stir us from our sleep, pull us to our meditation, and continue to bring us to the Lord. They tell us not to lose heart, not to despair, to be positive, and to remain in his will.

On many spiritual paths, prayer is the means by which people ask the Lord for help when in trouble. But the Masters explain that we do not have to pray to God for specific things. Maharaj Charan Singh said that if we truly believe in the Lord then we have nothing to ask for, because we will understand that He is already doing everything for us. An explanation of the idea of prayer is given in *Die to Live*:

Q: *In the Book of Mirdad it says either every thought or every word should be a prayer, and every deed should be a sacrifice, and I would like to understand what is meant by that – every deed should be a sacrifice.*

A: *Actually, what Mirdad means is that our whole living should be a prayer. There's no question of devoting half an hour or an hour of praying to the Lord – our whole day should be passed in prayer, in devotion and love for the Father. Prayer means just to live in love and devotion for the Father, that's constant prayer.*

If “our whole living” can become “a prayer” (in other words, if we lovingly keep the Lord in mind), we might find that we are living in the will of the Lord – no longer desiring our own outcomes but joyously accepting life in whatever way it develops.

What does this mean for free will? Maharaj Charan Singh and Baba Ji have often pointed out that it is our past karmas that dictate the environment that we are born into and which play their part in the choices we make. The important thing is to use wisely the limited free will that is left to us, choosing to blend with the Lord's will and thus become truly free.

We might remember the words of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, when he kneeled down in prayer to God, saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

Such words show us intimately how Masters are both divine and human in a very personal way. One feels that on a human level the Masters, like us, are required to surrender to God's will. They reveal to us through their very humanness and by their example why making that conscious choice matters.

What it takes to surrender our will to his is "a condition of complete simplicity ... costing not less than everything", as the poet T. S. Eliot once put it in *Four Quartets*.

Our Masters emphasize that if we avoid making an individual choice, then we do not engage with the karma of our destiny. Moreover, the understanding of what it is to let go of *my* self-will and ego would not be there. By turning to the Lord, it is not that the Lord then makes choices for us, nor that he governs the choice, but rather that he provides the framework, the situation within which it is the individual's responsibility to act. The individual, not the Master, makes the choices of his or her life. Otherwise, the Masters say laughingly, how would we put off our karma?

So put together karma and no karma, free will, and no free will; with the responsibility of individual choice and living within the Lord's

will, and with this awareness the complex pattern deepens and widens. We see it as if for the first time.

Our task is to graduate to the next level on our spiritual path by making conscious choices and taking conscious actions. Sacrifice, surrender – and the effort of making difficult choices – all shape our attitude, helping us to graduate to a higher level of consciousness. How we choose to perceive things changes what we perceive.

William Blake, an English poet, pointed out the problems in human perception. He explained that our perceptions are compromised by our lack of understanding of what we are; by the separation of our spiritual self from our body self. He said that our perception is subjective and dominated by the five senses (which are not reliable interpreters), and that we do not open our inner eye sufficiently to see Spirit in the world around us (that transcendental energy we call Shabd).

He deplored how little we use our intuition and heartfelt discrimination and how poor we are in the use of our imagination. He reminds us that the mystery of God can only be experienced within ourselves. He said that in order to reach a level of perception where we can experience God's symmetry, we have to clean up our perceptions. Only then are we able to see the Creator in the creation of which we are a part. *In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes:

*If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would
appear to man as it is, infinite.*

*For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' [the]
narrow chinks of his cavern.*

Our perceptions are clouded by our lack of imagination. Distracted by the business of life with all its joys, sufferings and sadness, as well as

by the imminence of death, we can lose sight of the undying nature of our immortal souls. We can lose sight too of how the Master is always present in us. Maharaj Charan Singh explains the Master's relationship to his disciple using verses from the Bible:

Like a good shepherd who always takes care of his sheep, the Master helps us clear our karmas, helps us wash away all the sins from our soul until we are pure and spotless and can merge back into the father. The Master could clear all our karmas in an instant but we might not be able to stand the sudden transition from this dark pit of ignorance up to that inestimable height and indescribable light. He alone knows what is best for us and regulates our progress according to our efforts and the karmas or layers of dirt that cover our soul and mind.

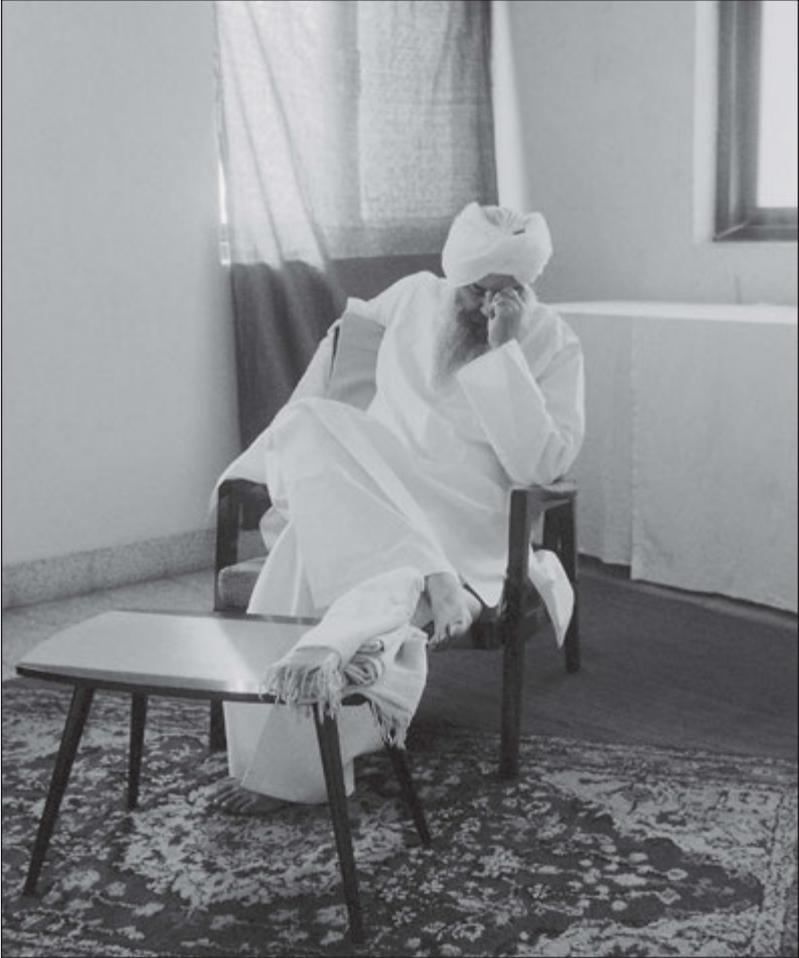
Light on Saint John

Truth is the Master; Master is the Way; the choice each day is, “how do I live it?”



Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish; but wish the things which happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life.

Epictetus



Maharaj Charan Singh

Get Ready!

There is nothing better than hearing that a friend who has been away for a long time is coming to see us. The months of waiting and preparation that precede a visit from the Master can be a wonderful time for us, and although the few days of the event will pass away quickly, the elation that comes from creating the right mood of expectancy can last much longer. Yet why should these benefits be derived only from the physical visit? Of course, it makes us so happy when we know that the Master is personally on his way to be with us. In so many ways, his visits are unique opportunities to start over again. Inevitably we begin to ask ourselves what we can do to make the most of the opportunity. Few of us live up to our best intentions and a visit may provide the impetus to work consciously on renewing a heartfelt mood of love in our lives.

Our generosity of spirit towards each other, and our desire to make the event more pleasant for others, can give us more satisfaction than anything else when preparing for a visit. Nothing will ever go entirely to our liking during these events, but we can create a special kind of relationship with the Master in our hearts when we are consciously thinking of building this happiness and peace around ourselves. Spiritual awareness can be such a fragile thing when we neglect it, when we allow ourselves to slip into negative attitudes and laziness, but it revives quickly and becomes a dynamic force again when we nurture it with our full attention. Knowing we are going to see the Master soon can spur us to do this. But we should always remember that inward attention is what matters, not outward attention. The seva we do in the silence of our own hearts is the one closest to our Master.

The thought of our Master always lingers at some level in our minds. When we have news of his coming we easily regain our sense of purpose. We are always happy to see him again. In his presence spiritual love becomes not a dream, but a personal experience, and the desire to go home is reborn in our hearts. But when we understand that the Master is there with us in our meditation, and we let go of every thought except our desire to please him with our attention, why should we not sense his presence always? It's always the right time to throw off any despondency we may be feeling in our lives and make that leap of faith.

Near or far, just call his name

Meditation can be so subtle. There seem to be no rules governing our success, the only key being our willingness to please our Master. All we can do is to call his name, as lovingly as possible, whether we feel he is near or far. We can enjoy the thought of his presence, without obsessing about the need to experience anything in particular. When the mood is right, we can even embrace his physical absence with the same warmth as the exquisite sensation of his presence. And it takes only a few seconds of clear thought, remembering him in the focused state of meditation, for all the magic of our love to revive. We can experience the Master on so many levels. We can be with him physically and enjoy the uplift of his company; we can feel great joy in doing seva in preparation for a visit, in a mood of generosity and understanding. We can plunge ourselves into the adventure of meditation with renewed excitement. Above all, we have to encourage our best intentions, allowing ourselves to be spurred on by a sense of hope and joy – sensing the closeness rather than the distance between our beloved and ourselves. The whole secret is to make yourself ready: God does the rest.

The Story of Job

A spiritual emergency, or what has been called a “dark night of the soul”, can happen to any of us. The story of Job from the Old Testament of the Bible illustrates how even those with the greatest of worldly and spiritual wealth can find themselves in a bleak place.

Job had a vast estate that was lush and profitable, herds of animals, many servants and children who honoured and loved him, good health, wise and affectionate friends, and an impeccable reputation among his countrymen. He was known as a man of great devotion, ascribing all his good fortune to God.

Yet neither Job’s great prosperity nor his renowned piety could keep him from the calamities that life may inflict. Wealth is, at best, fleeting and unstable; and living a spiritually correct life does not ensure that we will be spared misfortune. Our connection to God through our spiritual path is our only true source of sustenance.

Doing his best to live well

Job was in many ways like every one of us: someone doing his very best to live his life well, take care of his family, and serve God. He was subject to the same passions as us, and was not without sin – but he was most sincere in his devotion to God. He was a rich man, but of that rare kind who keeps his wealth in perspective. As a man of great piety and as a householder, he lived in the world but was not of it.

People thought that Job’s prosperity was so great and so firm that nothing could alter his situation. But the truth is that our temporary comforts are borrowed in this world. Our money, our families, our work – all are false security.

God loved Job, who was truly his most devoted servant. He was, in our terms, the perfect disciple. However, according to the Bible story, one day God called a meeting of his sons, including his most arrogant and troublesome son, Satan, a character also known as Kal. Nowadays we understand the notion of Satan or Kal, not as a personification of evil but as the abstract idea of worldly temptation, the influence of the mind and senses. But in the language of the Old Testament, Satan is evil personified.

God allows Satan to test Job

According to the story, as described by Matthew Henry in his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Satan jealously claims that Job is a hypocrite without genuine love for the Lord, and wants to prove this. So God gives Satan permission to afflict Job to test his sincerity – throwing at him any calamity he chooses so long as it does not hurt his actual body. God believes he will pass the test, but Satan predicts that Job “will not only let fall his devotion, but even curse thee to thy face”. By proving Job a hypocrite, Satan hopes to show God he has not one faithful disciple among men.

So Satan throws one calamity after another upon Job. They come so fast that Job has no time to catch his breath, to reason out what is happening, to make plans to stop the devastation, or to keep himself balanced. His wealth is destroyed, his servants and children slain, and Job is completely overwhelmed. This is where he enters into the dark night of the soul – a time when one’s faith and trust in God are tested to the limit.

The despairing Job tears his clothes and shaves his head, normal expressions of great sorrow at the time. Yet he keeps his temper and his faith in God, and bravely maintains the peace of his own soul, saying, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb and naked shall

I return”. He does not see himself as a victim, or as having been abandoned by God. Rather than being maimed, Job sees himself as naked: in other words, returned to his original state as a man.

There are times in our lives too when we are challenged to trust in God’s plan for us. It might be that we have lost a job and wonder how we are going to care for our family, or that we endure a chronic, painful illness or a devastating accident that shatters our world. Perhaps we’re facing retirement and frightened of financial insecurity. Or we might be struggling with our meditation. This, too, can bring on a dark night for our soul, for it is our faith in the Master’s instructions on how to return to the Lord that keeps us hopeful and inspired.

Whenever our minds are preoccupied with our problems and needs, our meditation can be affected. Just as Job’s relationship with God was under fire, so can our spiritual work and our relationship with the Master and with God come under duress. Serenity, acceptance and faith are what keep the inner light burning and our souls moving forward on the path to God realization. Like Job, we should not curse God in the darkness; rather, that is the time when we need to rely on him most, to believe that he has us just where he knows we need to be.

Job remains thankful to God

Job, stripped of his former life, acknowledges the hand of God – not only in his former, privileged life but also in his new, impoverished state. “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away”, he says, and continues to adore the Lord. Job’s story shows us that afflictions must not divert us from our spiritual journey but heighten our appreciation of God in holding us and caring for us, no matter what.

Job has passed his test. Satan, dissatisfied, goes back to God and asks to be allowed to inflict pain on Job’s body. God agrees. And so Job

becomes afflicted with horrendous, painful boils; no salve or surgery can alleviate the pain. Others urge him to curse God, but Job says, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil also?”

Here Job shows us that no matter what God sends us, good or bad, it all comes from him, and we need to submit positively to his plan for us. In addition, we must keep dedicated to our spiritual path. Just as Job holds on to his integrity by not cursing God, we need to keep our faith in the Master and be true to our promises to him.

In his sorrow, Job curses the day that he was born, but he does not curse God. He is suffering not only from his losses, but now from terrible physical pain as well. He states that he would gladly part with his life but not with his connection to God.

He trusts God to keep holding his hand

His friends come to console him, offering their own perspectives on why he has been so afflicted. They say that if he had truly been an honest man, he would not have been so afflicted, and so they encourage him to confess that he is really a hypocrite. Job will not do this, for to do so is to deny his love for God. Instead, acknowledging his miserable condition, Job begs God to pardon him for any sins that he may have committed. Job complains to God, but he does not complain *about* God. He comforts himself with the belief that no matter what he must go through, he is held by the hand of God.

Even though he is complaining, Job says (in Matthew Henry’s words) that “the soul is the life, the soul is the man, and this is the gift of God: Thou hast granted me life, breathed into me the breath of life, without which the body would be but a worthless carcass. God is the father of spirits; he made the living souls, and imbued us with the powers of reason; he gave us life and favour, and life is a favour.”

Job admits he cannot understand why God would give him so much wealth and happiness and then so much struggle and pain, but he concludes humbly: “These things thou hast hidden from my heart.” We too would love to know the mind of God when we pass through difficult times, but like Job we must acknowledge there are things man cannot know. We have to be humble enough simply to accept what God gives.

Job’s friends speak to him again. They accuse him falsely of things he never did. They count among his sins wantonness and uncleanness of heart; fraud and injustice in commerce; adultery; cruelty towards his servants; idolatry; neglect of the poor. In essence, they claim that he has indulged in the five vices of lust, anger, ego, attachment and greed. Furthermore, they cite his present sickness and poverty as proof of his sins against God.

Job’s suffering is thus increased further, for now he has no one to comfort him and help him make sense of his situation. He begs to speak to God, and when God comes to him, he angrily puts his case. Finally, he has lost his temper. But still, he does not curse God.

In order to help Job, God shows him the infinite distance between them, showing that Job is by no means a match for God. He shows Job his weaknesses and impotence in the light of God’s omnipotence. He says to Job:

“Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me if you have understanding ... have you ever in your life commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place?” ... Then Job answered the Lord and said: “Behold, I am of little account; what can I answer you? I put my hand over my mouth.”

In the end, Job recovers his temper and humbles himself before God. God then acknowledges Job’s limits as a man, especially since men are

so subject to their passions. Although Job has tried to argue with him, God knows that never once did Job curse him, and that he maintained his love for the Lord in the face of all his trials. God lets him know that he is well pleased with him.

The rest of Job's life is spent with even greater wealth, more children, and much love. But the greatest thing in his life is his continually growing spiritual relationship with God.

In the end we see that we cannot judge where God places us in our lives. Like Job, we need to accept humbly that no matter what God puts us through, whether we label it positive or negative, it is all from him and it is all given to us for our own good. Armed with our faith in God and our devotion to him through our meditation, we can face any dark night of the soul, confident that the Master is holding us close and directing us through the darkness – even when we ourselves can see no light. With such faith, humility and acceptance, we will find our way home.



*Plough your field with the Lord's Name,
Sow the seed of devotion;
Even if there's a drought
Till the end of the world,
The seed will not fail to sprout
Nor fail to yield a rich crop.*

Kabir

Book Review



In the Hours of Meditation

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In the Hours of Meditation is a compilation of articles published in *Ashram* magazine between 1911 and 1913, arranged here in 30 chapters. Since the original publication of this inspiring book in 1969, it has been continuously in print. Many of the original articles were titled simply “In the Hours of Meditation”, the title used for this book.

These articles were originally written anonymously as ‘a disciple’ or under a pseudonym, but all are by Frank J. Alexander, an American newspaper journalist. Inspired by the writings of Swami Vivekananda, Alexander went to India in 1911 and joined the Advaita Ashram at Mayavati, which was founded by Swami Vivekananda. In 1913 he went from Mayavati to Almora to “live a more intense spiritual life”. Two years later he returned to America to recuperate his failing health. Although Alexander never met Vivekananda, who had died in 1902, he always considered himself a disciple of the Swami and devoted himself to the service of his successors and to the order the Swami had founded. He died in 1917, back in America, of tuberculosis.

Alexander recounts in his articles his experiences of meditation at the ashram. The opening lines of the first chapter paint an inviting picture of that experience:

There are hours when one forgets the world. There are hours when one approaches that region of blessedness when the soul is Self-contained in the presence of the Highest. Then is silenced all clamouring of desire; all sound of sense is stilled. Only God is.

In the hours of meditation, he says, one enters the true temple, the true holy place. “There is no holier sanctuary than a purified mind, a mind

concentrated on God. There is no more sacred place than the region of peace into which the mind enters when it becomes fixed in the Lord.”

Meditation, he says, places one in a certain atmosphere, “the atmosphere of the state of meditation”, whose components are “purity, bliss, blessedness, peace”. In this atmosphere, one discovers his own real nature. “In the hours of meditation the soul draws from On High those true qualifications which are of its nature – fearlessness, the sense of reality, the sense of deathlessness.”

The spiritual consciousness dawns in these silent, sacred hours. The soul is close to its source. The streamlet of personality expands in these hours, becoming a mighty, swift-flowing river, flowing in the direction of that true and permanent individuality which is the Oceanic Consciousness of God.

At times his writing style becomes ecstatic, as if he simply cannot express the depth of his experience without many exclamation points. “Peace! Peace! Silent – Audible Peace! Peace wherein the Voice of God is heard. Peace and Silence! Then comes the Voice of God, Audible – Audible within the Silence.” He exhorts the reader, “Draw within thy self, O Soul! Seek thou the silent hour of truth. Know thou thyself to be of the substance of truth, the substance of divinity. Verily, within the heart doth God dwell!”

Throughout the book Alexander discourses eloquently on the wisdom he has absorbed from the teachings of the line of spiritual teachers that he followed. The importance of experience, rather than theory, for bringing about a transformation in the individual is stressed again and again.

A little learning has made thee an intellectual egotist; a greater learning will make thee spiritual. Remember that mind is not the Soul. So let experience pound the mind as it will. It will purify it. That is the main thing. Gradually the Sun of the Soul will pierce the dark clouds of ignorance, and then the goal shall be revealed to thee, and thou shalt be merged in its effulgence.

He emphasizes the need for effort and sacrifice for anyone pursuing the path of meditation. More particularly, he says, one needs the courage and open-mindedness to step beyond the narrow confines of traditional and culturally bound ways of thinking.

Think of the sacrifices made by the worldly in worldly pursuits. Wilt thou not make sacrifice in the spiritual pursuit? Is God to be realized by eloquence or by mere form! Get out from under all sheltering influences. Come out into the open. Make the Infinite thy horizon ... come out of thy narrow grooves.

He guides the reader toward an approach to life focused on controlling one's self, as opposed to judging others, and on developing equanimity:

Over thine own actions thou canst have sway; over the actions of another thou hast no power. His Karma is one; thine another. Do not criticize; do not hope; do not fear! All shall be well. Experience comes and goes; be thou not disconcerted ... do not expect; do not anticipate... Remember that thy true Nature is the Ocean, and be unconcerned. Know the mind to be the body in subtle form.

Alexander often strives to capture the experience of meditation in the form of a dialogue between the Guru and the soul of the disciple. He writes, for example, "When the Soul had entered the Silence of meditation, the Guru said: 'My son, do I not know all thy weaknesses? Why dost thou worry?'" Or, "The voice of the Guru, who is God, speaks: 'Lo, I am ever with thee.'" These 'sayings' of the Guru are always understood to be a communication perceived subtly through the experience of meditation, not a quote from a Guru in human form. For example, he introduces a teaching topic with the words, "And the Voice that dwells in the silence, speaking in the hours of meditation, said unto my soul ..." And what is the key message of that Voice, reiterated in one way or another over and over? "Come, My son, into the deep, deep Quiet."

According to Alexander, Guru Bhakti, or devotion to the Guru, is the key factor in spiritual realization. As he writes: "Before even thou dost

worship God, worship the God man!” Alexander makes it clear that he is not talking about worshipping a human being, but rather the subtle reality of the Guru:

Through the supreme expansion of the personality, the Highest Selflessness, which is the Self, is realized. There, Guru, God and thyself, the whole universe are made ONE. See the Guru through the perspective of the infinite. That is the highest wisdom. Through Guru Bhakti thou walkest on the highest path.

Thus, reaching a state of oneness with the Guru is equated with oneness with God and with all creation. In one of the chapters, the “blissful words” which the voice of the Guru speaks to the soul “in the Silence of the hour of meditation” are: “Let thy Mantram be thy Name. Let thy Yoga be the union of thy soul with mine, thy Realization be the conscious knowledge, that in the heart of things, I and thou are ever ONE.”

Following a series of chapters each beginning with a phrase like “the Guru spoke these blissful words to my soul”, in the final chapter Alexander sums up what he has learned through the experience of meditation:

Hearing these words of the Guru in the hours of meditation day by day, I was made conscious of the real relation between Guru and disciple. An immovable, eternal realization hath become mine; and in life, or in death, I know that a Great Living Presence is always nigh, Presence that is unconfined by Time or by Space, a Presence that can know no separation.



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