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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
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Master Weaver

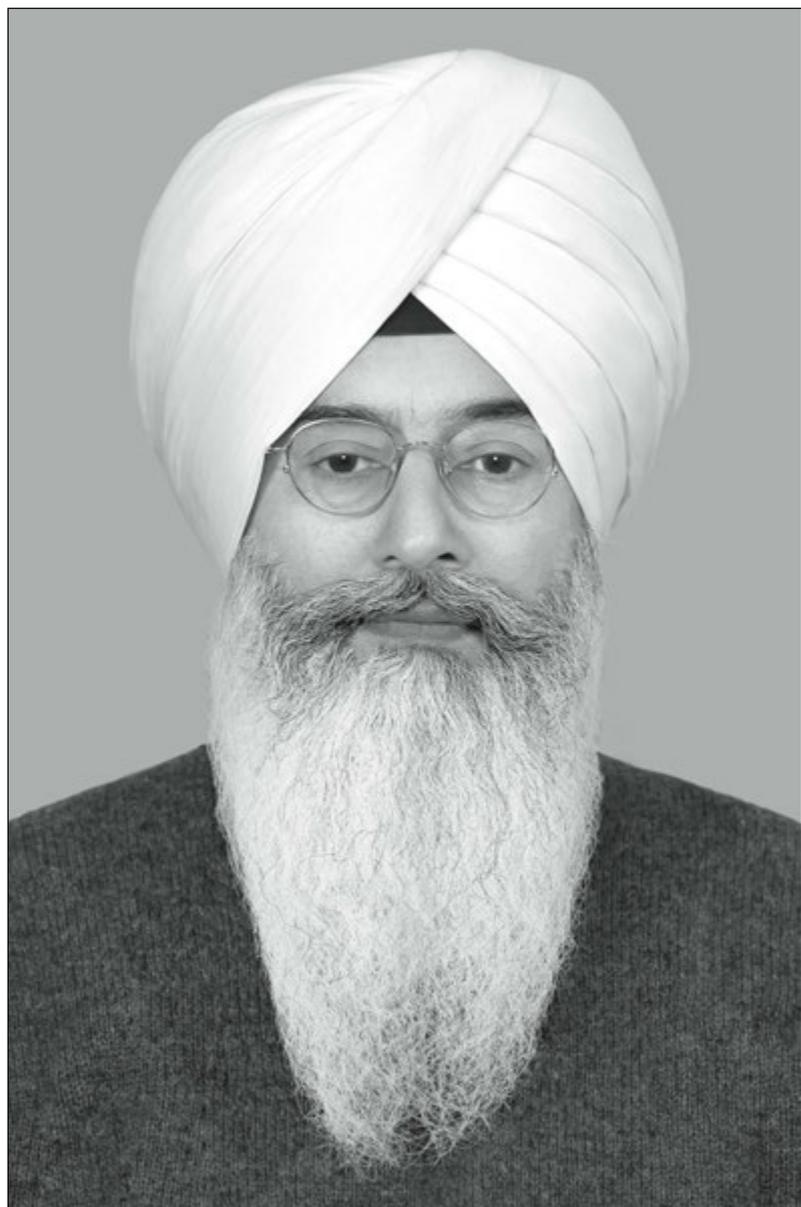
Such was the effect of his darshan
That the veil fell from my eyes,
I heard the divine melody within
And duality came to an end.
The gates that blocked my hearing
Were hard as granite,
Yet they broke to pieces
When the man of God came
And blessed my home.

One touch from my Master remoulded
The ill-shaped pot of my being;
The chains of karma
Fell from my body
When the man of God came
And graced my home.

Says Kabir: I love, I adore the Saint;
Through his grace I found the Supreme One,
The diadem of all, within my own body.

Blessed indeed is the day, the hour,
The precious moment, when
The man of God, my Master,
Came and graced my home.

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name



The Habit of Simran

When we are initiated, we may think of simran as something new that we have to learn. But it's not something new at all. We do simran all the time – around the clock – but since we usually do simran of the world, our thoughts stay confined to the world.

How do we disentangle ourselves and fight the temptations of the world? We do this by controlling our thoughts, by switching from worldly simran to Master's simran, by learning to keep it going as much as possible, and eventually all the time. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Quest for Light*:

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.

Simran moves our thoughts in a positive direction and helps us to develop our ability to steer clear of negative thoughts. If negative thoughts arise and are not cut off immediately, they will grow. A fleeting thought can become a strong desire, and a very strong desire can lead to action and new karma, which ultimately may result in a new birth.

The habit of doing ceaseless simran takes effort and determination. But those who have developed this habit tell us that once we get accustomed to doing simran, it feels both natural and pleasant. There is a quote attributed to Plutarch that says, "Choose what is best, and habit will make it pleasant and easy."

Maharaj Jagat Singh says in *The Science of the Soul*:

A young sadhu is like a young widow. Both should live in a fortress. Your Guru is your fort. Always remain under his protection.

What is a fort? A fort is something with heavy walls that keeps out the enemy. And the fort that keeps out the enemy for a satsangi is simran. So with constant simran we can maintain that mental fort, that mental habit, in which we remain throughout the day.

Perhaps best of all, this habit of doing simran during the day prepares us for the time of meditation. Masters tell us that the focus we develop through simran helps us to come to the eye centre where we are in touch with the Shabd.

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

The five holy names must continually revolve on their axis. It is only thus that the mind gradually gives up its ceaseless activity. Moreover, the practice of simran will facilitate concentration at the eye focus when we sit for meditation.

Simran gives us a huge amount of practical benefit in going through life. If we are immersed in simran, do we have time to focus on negative thoughts? Do we have time to think about and indulge in the five passions? How can we when we are busy doing simran?

In *The Way of a Pilgrim* the author says:

Suppose a man continually fulfils this one commandment of God about ceaseless prayer, then in that one thing he would have fulfilled all; for if he uninterruptedly, at all times, and in

all circumstances offers the prayer, calling in secret upon the most holy Name of Jesus (although at first he may do so without spiritual ardour and zeal, even forcing himself), then he will have no time for vain conversation, for judging his neighbours, for useless waste of time in sinful pleasures of the senses. Every evil thought of his would meet opposition to its growth. Every sinful act he contemplated would not come to fruition so readily as with an empty mind.

So what does it take to practise frequent simran? It takes a determined will to do it, a “never give up” attitude, and a recognition of the value of the practice of simran. It is essential on a spiritual path that we never quit. This is our duty and we must do it. Whether we succeed or not, our job is to strive. So we hang in there with our simran every day in hope of attracting the grace of the Master who has promised to take us to our true home.

What do we have to do to make progress on this path? What do we have to do to perfect our simran? What do we have to do to realize that precious grace of the Master? Complain less, expect less, and work more at developing the habit of carrying simran with us as we go through our life.



*Keep knocking, and the joy inside
will eventually open a window
and look out to see who's there.*

Rumi, *A Year With Rumi*,
rendered by Coleman Barks



Constancy Amidst Change

Everything in this plane of duality and impermanence changes. We experience growth and decay, sunshine and rain, heat and cold, happiness and sadness, birth and death, joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure. However, those of us with a living Master also know that he brings certain constants into our lives – things that are always present and are not subject to change and decay.

First, let us consider what brings us to the Master. We feel the homesickness, the longing for something this physical life can't satisfy. The Lord answers our soul's longing and brings us to the Master who gives us the priceless gift of initiation.

At initiation, we receive instruction in the meditation practice, which consists of simran, dhyan, and bhajan. Simran is the repetition of five holy names that redirects our attention from downwards and outwards to inwards and upwards and withdraws it to the eye centre. Dhyan, contemplation of the Master's form, helps to focus and hold our attention at the eye centre. Bhajan, the practice of listening to the Sound, the Shabd, pulls us back to the Lord, to our true home.

We are expected to faithfully devote at least one tenth of our day (two and one-half hours) to meditation, so that we gradually withdraw our attention from the senses and shift our focus to the eye centre. This is a life-long practice. The true purpose of our life is to bring our attention to the eye centre where we become consciously connected with the Shabd, which is constant, vibrant and our real Master.

The Masters tell us that simran is our primary work in meditation. Simran done with love and devotion prepares us to meet the Lord and slowly calms the mind so that it can catch the Sound at the eye centre. This process takes some time, just as it takes a certain amount

of time for food to cook. We can't just turn on the stove for a couple of minutes and expect that a delicious meal will be instantly ready to eat. Similarly, we can't sit in meditation for just twenty minutes whenever it happens to be convenient, or even to sit every day for just a year, and expect to reach the eye centre. The Masters have said that every second we devote to meditation counts, but those seconds have to multiply many, many times before we reach the place where our inner ear can hear and our inner eye can see.

After being initiated by the Master, it is only a matter of time for us to become aware of our true nature, to be consciously connected to our Father, the Creator – the unchanging reality within us. Until we have that experience, we are subject to feeling the effects of the changes that continually happen in our lives. We are sometimes shocked by the ups and downs of life. We may be happy when we have what we call “good fortune” – fame, a good marriage partner, beautiful, talented, obedient children – or when we have our dreams come true in some other way. But we are miserable if we lose someone or something.

We all have times when we think about our troubles, when we think we aren't rich enough or lucky enough to get whatever we may want to possess. The mind pulls us out into the world and makes us forget that the changes in our lives are all part of a divine plan and that the Lord is the one who is directing the play. Instead of being upset when the play of our life doesn't go as we expect it to, we might step back for a moment and reflect on the reality – we are being set up for a transformation. We can look at incidents that we find unpleasant as a message from the Lord. As Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Dawn of Light*:

Whatever good or bad happens to you, through whatever person or object, directly proceeds from our loving Father. All persons and objects are but tools in his hand.

The Lord's grace is anything that brings us closer to him. Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, that "grace is that which detaches us from the world and takes us back to the Lord, our true self." It might be something beautiful that attracts us to the Lord or some terrible event in our lives that pulls us away from the material and toward the spiritual. The Lord doesn't want us to forget him and become more attached to the creation. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Quest for Light*:

Every initiate is being looked after by the Master and whatever comes to such a one, whether good or bad from the disciple's limited point of view, is all within the knowledge of the Master and is for the disciple's own good. The Lord has his own hand of protection on all those whom he has drawn to the path. Whatever pain, suffering, fear, unhappiness and whatever else such a disciple faces is all the settlement of his karmic accounts, which means the lightening of his burden.

We have to attain a level of spiritual maturity to feel gratitude for all that happens. Those who are attached to the world and don't realize that they are puppets in this divine play want to run away. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us, "It's very difficult actually to accept the grace of the Father."

We may have a concept of grace as being about material things in life, but the Sant Mat view is different. Hazur continues to tell us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, that his concept of grace is about:

spiritual progress, about how many pitfalls we are saved from, how much we are saved at every step.... He never lets us go so far astray that we cannot come back to the path, that he cannot lead us back to the Father.

In contrast to the continual change in this physical realm, Master is always constant in his presence, his love, and his grace. We belong to the Master. When we are initiated, he takes charge of our destiny so that whatever happens to us is for our own spiritual growth and cleansing. Nothing happens without his knowledge. We can't hide anything from him. And since all that comes from him is sent with love and for our own good, we can take comfort in the fact that he is with us even in the darkest of times.

God is love and real love is a constant – it never changes and never diminishes. It is through love that the entire creation came into existence. Shabd is love. Nothing can exist without love. The Master is the personification of love, of Shabd. God is the source of love and the soul originated within that source, so the soul's inclination is to return to that source, to that love. His love is always there. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

Meditation not only creates love, it strengthens love. It helps you to grow and grow to become one with the Father. That is the love which helps us to lose our own identity, our own individuality; which helps us to become another being. That is love. And that is why we say that love is God and God is love, because love has the characteristic of becoming another being.

The Master awakens that love within us and meditation grows that love. We love him because he loves us. This may not be easy to

remember when we are faced with changes and turning points in our life, but his love is still there. Our struggles and rough patches may be a chance for him to help us realize his presence and his grace.

Keeping in mind the constancy that our Master extends to us, through the ups and downs we must withstand in this life, let us make the effort to thank him for his presence, his love, and his grace. Let us make our meditation the constant in our lives.



A Two-Way Commitment

From a spiritual perspective we are very much like children. We have desires. We have needs. We have egos. We have opinions. But we lack experience and maturity.

We would never expect children to house, clothe, feed, and educate themselves. It doesn't mean they are not intelligent or that they are inadequate – just that they are children! They need guidance. They need a parent to provide for them until they mature and develop the experience and skills to provide for themselves.

Children are often unaware that they need parental help and guidance. Ask a child if she wants to learn ballet – she will often truly believe that she already knows it. She doesn't need lessons. In her mind she can already dance, figure skate, fly rocket ships, perform surgery. But ultimately the child comes to grips with the fact that she isn't skilled at much of anything. Children have to submit to their higher power (parents) to teach them, enrol them in school, skating class, and ballet class.

God-realization is no different. In fact, our true dharma, our highest responsibility as human beings, is self-realization and God-realization. We may like to think that we can do it on our own and on our own terms. But this is just as preposterous as a four-year-old thinking she can win an Olympic gold medal in figure skating when she has never even put on a pair of skates. Who wants to work hard and sacrifice when we can just imagine success without all the hassle? Well, imagined success is empty. To achieve real success, the child needs a teacher. The teacher has the responsibility to teach and guide the student, and the student has the responsibility to follow that guidance. There is a reciprocating responsibility: the teacher's duty is to guide (teach) well and the student's duty is to learn well.

The need for a teacher is as true in spirituality as it is for a child seeking to learn any aspect of life. As for any other achievement, we need a teacher who has achieved what we are seeking and who will accept the responsibility to guide us to our goal. Then we have to take on the reciprocating responsibility to follow that guidance.

To realize God, we must live up to our responsibility as students – disciples of the Master. It's not an option; it's a must! Can you imagine thinking "I'm really tired today – I'm not going to feed my child?" With that attitude we'd most likely get put in jail and have our children removed from our home. Just as we need to care for and protect our children, we should assume a similar level of responsibility toward carrying out our meditation. By accepting initiation from the Master, we have taken on the absolute duty, the commitment, the dharma to meditate.

It's very easy to fall into the trap of becoming passive on this path. These words – taking responsibility, dharma, duty – are not passive. They are active. Remember, both the teacher and the student have responsibilities. We cannot be passive and expect the Master to do everything. At initiation, a two-way commitment is made. The Master has promised to lead us back to the Lord, while we have committed to following the principles of Sant Mat.

We may not always feel like meditating. We may not always be motivated or inspired. But we can't wait for divine inspiration before we fulfil our commitment. What is important is that we have a duty, a responsibility, a commitment to meditate. It is not an option. It's a duty. Like the reciprocal responsibility of a child to its parents, we must hold up our side of the bargain with our Master. So even if we don't feel like meditating, we are committed to doing it. And by doing our meditation every day and living up to our responsibilities and duty, our dharma is fulfilled, we become balanced – and with Master's grace our purpose in life is achieved.

A Parcel Has Arrived in the Mail

Imagine receiving a parcel in the mail: it is a box made of sandalwood, beautifully wrapped in a pink ribbon. It is obviously a gift. You open the box and find a card that says: “Congratulations, you have won a trip to Sach Khand, your true home. All expenses paid.” A note adds, “For this trip, I give you a human body; take good care of it.” Then you find a scroll; you open it and find a map showing in detail all the ups and downs of this journey – where you will go, who will accompany you, where you will stay, what you will do. It is your personal road map. It is your destiny, and it comes with a warning: “No changes allowed!”

Next to the scroll, you find a small piece of paper, wrapped tightly. You read it and it says, “You have been assigned a guide. Do not worry; he will find you.” You continue looking into this box and you find two pouches; you open the first one and it is filled with the fragrance of joy; you anxiously open the second one, and it is filled with the fragrance of gratitude. And, finally, engraved in the box are these words, “Dear child, my stream of love will bring you back to me.”

You close the box, ready to embark upon your life journey with your guide. You have a beautiful body as your armour and you hold your individualized map in your hand. Let us think about the messages in the box.

The human body! We take it so much for granted. We have been given this magnificent form after spending eons wandering from one form to another. It is an incredible piece of art and design, perfect for functioning in this world. No engine could come close to mimicking how it and our amazing brain operate. But the greatest miracle of this body is that it allows us to research and find the divine within us. While in this body, we can connect with the creative power – with the divine melody and the

divine light. No wonder the little note in our box says to take good care of this magnificent human body that the Lord has given to us. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

When we become conscious that this body ... is the real temple ... in which the Lord resides and where we will be able to reach him, you can imagine how much we have to care for this body temple. We have not to misuse it, we have not to make it dirty by eating dirty things. We have not to have any malice or hatred in it for anybody. Naturally, we have to look after this body because it is the temple of the living God.

We have a trip to go on. The journey has already been mapped out for us, meticulously and in all its details. It is our destiny. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, a questioner asks, “Is it true that our life’s destiny, the things that have and are to happen to us, had already been planned in advance?” Hazur answers: “What is destiny? Destiny is something with which we are born and which we have to face during our life’s span. We call it fate.” Actions of the past determine this destiny of ours, who we are to become, who our companions are going to be, parents and friends, emotional and physical sufferings, our attitudes towards life, our value system, the country we live in, our education, and our jobs – everything stems from what we have done in prior lives.

Our destiny is not a bed of roses. There will be pain; there will be sadness; there will also be moments of joy and happiness. What matters is our attitude toward these inevitable ups and downs of the journey we have to travel on. Hazur advises us to keep our balance and tells us that our spiritual practice, done daily and regularly, will help enormously. He says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

When you devote proper time to spiritual practice, you will become so strong that you can smilingly and calmly face your destiny. You will not feel much of the ups and downs of the world, and you will be able to account for everything quite gracefully.

On this spiritual journey, our attitude of mind matters a great deal. Maharaj Jagat Singh explains in *The Science of the Soul*, that progress on the spiritual path “is due in no small measure to your past karma and the attitude which you have adopted.” What is this attitude the Master is referring to? Remember those two pouches we found in our box? One contained the fragrance of joy, the other, the fragrance of gratitude. Joy and gratitude: these indeed are two key ingredients of a committed disciple’s makeup. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, “You can only break strong attachments by experiencing joy, joy from becoming one with the sound and light within.”

Paltu Sahib says in *Sant Paltu: His Life and Teachings*:

*Dance with abandon,
cast off your veil!
Let the whole world watch your free dance.
Your aim is to please the Lord –
Who can stop you from dancing to your own heart?
You are fortunate ... to have won his love.*

About gratitude, Hazur tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

We have no words with which to thank him [the Lord] – we cannot thank him at all with this tongue, whatever the Lord or the Master does for us in this life. We owe our very existence,

all these privileges, just to the Father. This very human birth is nothing but his grace. So at every step we must thank him. We must find every excuse to thank him.

Joy and gratitude are nurtured through meditation, and they develop as we open our mind in awe to what has been given to us.

We are just a few out of billions of human beings living on this planet who have been given the opportunity to embark upon the trip to return home. Masters say that it is only by the grace of the Father that we come in contact with any saint. We have been assigned a guide who finds us at the right time and takes us under his protection. This guide, as explained by Maharaj Sawan Singh, releases our soul from the thorns of karma that permeate “every cell of the body.” The Master touched us soul to soul at birth and told us: “Come back. I am showing you the way. It is not a matter of ‘if’; it is a matter of certainty.”

Remember the words engraved in the box: “Dear child, my stream of love will bring you back to me.” It is this stream of love that has pulled us to the Master; it is his love that we are longing for and nurturing during meditation. Such is the power of divine love. It is his love that is doing it all. It is his love that is purifying us. As we learn to let go, we will allow ourselves to be carried away on the currents of that love – all the way back to Sach Khand.



Paradigm Shift in Meditation

Meditation can be a struggle. Rather than admit defeat, we can choose to heed the advice of the saints and perhaps allow our mind to accept a paradigm shift in our approach to meditation. Maharaj Charan Singh offers the following guidance in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, regarding a disciple's effort to meditate:

Whether you concentrate or not is immaterial, but you definitely should sit in meditation because we have to pass through so many phases before we are able to concentrate and enjoy that pull within, its bliss and peace within. You can't straightaway concentrate by simran, but if we won't start, then how will we ever concentrate? ... Similarly, in meditation we have to pass through so many phases, and every phase is important for our spiritual development. So we have to continue. It is immaterial whether we are able to concentrate or whether we are able to hear the sound or see the light. Our efforts should continue.

The saints are well aware of our weaknesses, excuses, poor habits, ignorance, and the tricks the mind plays in an effort to hold us back from undertaking our meditation practice. Despite these hurdles, the saints constantly help us to overcome these obstacles of the mind and continually encourage us to keep trying.

Saints remind us that the soul and the mind are two different and opposing entities. Stilling the mind takes time and effort. We must heed the Masters' instructions to sit in meditation even when the

mind wanders and practise the art of stilling the body. Stilling the body is a significant achievement.

Hazur continues in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

To sit still is a great credit. When you learn to sit still, then you also have to learn to still your mind. The first problem is to still the body, as the body is always running out and doesn't want to sit in one place for even twenty minutes. So first you get into the habit of stilling the body, and then you get into the habit of stilling the mind. This comes from meditation.

In the beginning meditation is a fight between the soul and the mind in order to be able to control the body. Control of the body is necessary to perform both worldly and spiritual duties. In attempting to subdue and control the mind, we can easily feel overwhelmed and outmatched in this struggle. Saints know the strength and wily tricks of the mind, advising us to fight first to take control of the body. To do this we need to train the body to sit motionless for the prescribed period in daily meditation without fail, preferably at the same place and time. Saints, knowing that we are likely to fail at first, tell us that we should not worry about failure. This encouragement helps us to better understand and accept failure. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Hazur advises us that:

Failure means I have done my best, I have given my time, I have lived the way of life while I have been trying to build my treasure. From every point of view I have been keeping myself clean, but I have not achieved anything within myself. So this is my failure. That effort will not be lost – that is what is meant by failure.

Ideally, meditation should help still the mind and keep it concentrated. But the mind seldom obeys and keeps wandering wantonly during meditation. Concentration is elusive and often appears futile.

So the first phase of our fight with the mind can be won by at least showing up for our daily meditation and sitting as still as we can – even if our meditation is only mechanical or quantitative. The next phase is trying to improve the quality of our meditation – as Hazur reminds us in *Die to Live*, “quality will come from quantity.” But even quantity requires perseverance and faith, putting us in a continuous and often difficult life-long fight with the mind. With the continual encouragement and guidance of the Master, we learn to appreciate that they accept all effort as progress rather than failure and humiliation.

Once we accept and execute this paradigm shift in meditation, it becomes easier to put our focus on effort rather than results, rather than creating an expectation and need for “success.” Our job is to give full time to meditation, regardless of whether the mind sits still or wanders out. Making this commitment, to still our body and steadfastly give our time, we are ready to tread the path of God-realization and prepare the soul to soar home.



Don't Quit

At some point in life, we may have felt that the road we are travelling on seems uphill. Each of us wants a life that is without any problems. But as we all know, that is not reality. Things have a tendency to take their own course, and we end up saying, “That is not what I expected,” or “That is not the way I wanted it to turn out.”

Maybe some of us have even applied this thought process to our meditation. We all probably remember the first few days after our initiation – the enthusiasm we felt to wake up and meditate. But for many of us, meditation soon seemed to be like licking a dry stone. We lost our zeal and our concentration, and we did not hear the faintest sound or see the dimmest light. So our interest may start to dwindle. Does this mean that we should quit or relax our efforts?

We think the easy way out is to just quit. And at times it is a very tempting thought, especially when it seems that we have made no progress whatsoever. The mind always does a good job of trying to keep us in this world. It not only distracts us when we meditate, but when our meditation seemingly has no results, the mind gives us all the reasons why we should quit meditating. The mind is our worst enemy when it comes to God-realization. In the *Book of Mirdad*, it says, “Often you shall think your road impassable, sombre and companionless. Have will and plod along; and round each curve you shall find a new companion.”

So what do we need in order to keep steadfast on the path even though the road may seem uphill or impassable? We need faith, perseverance, patience and, of course, the Lord's grace.

If we have faith that the path we are following is the path for us, that the Master, our guide on this path, is the right one for us, we will be more likely to persevere in our meditation.

If we follow Master's instructions, we will automatically gain the strength to carry on when it feels uphill. In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh advises, "We are to do everything according to the best of our knowledge, but the results are to be left entirely in the hands of God." We have to remember that we have to do our duty without thinking of the outcome. In the *Book of Mirdad* it says, "Seek no reward for any labour done. The labour itself is reward sufficient to the labourer who loves his labour." As we learn to love the labour of our meditation, if we love being in the presence of the Master during the hours we sit and meditate, we will definitely want to give our allotted time to meditation and not cut it short.

Baba Jaimal Singh says in *Spiritual Letters*, "There is nothing higher than meditation. Increase this practice from day to day; never decrease it." There may be times when we think we have no time to meditate because of worldly obligations. But again, that is the mind trying to make excuses for cutting short our meditation. Baba Ji continues in the same book, "Be concerned only with meditation. Affairs of the world will take their own course. They just go on and never come to a stop."

So we have to meticulously allot our valued time to what we think is important to achieve – God-realization. We have to evaluate our goals every day before we set out every morning to do our worldly activities. Are they more important to us than our spiritual activity?

Hazur says in *Light on Sant Mat*, "The more time one gives to the repetition of the holy names and listening to the Sound, with love and devotion, the nearer he comes to his goal." Baba Jaimal Singh gives similar advice in *Spiritual Letters*:

You are to attend to your meditation every day. When you persevere in this practice, his grace will surely descend upon you one day.

An impatient mind is another reason we may compromise our meditation, if not just give it up. We are so used to ‘instant’ things in this creation, from instant coffee to instant text messaging. Why can’t meditation work the same way – instant God-realization? Because this is a path which we have to tread slowly and steadily like the tortoise does, rather than hurry along like the hare and then get tired and lag behind. Hazur says in *Light on Sant Mat*:

Yes, it is true that slow and steady wins the race. How many times do we stumble and fall when we learn to walk. But as we grow older we forget the struggles and enjoy the performance. So it is with spiritual work.

And again he tells us in *Quest for Light*, “Please remember that great things are not accomplished quickly. They require time and effort to achieve them.” Working to attain God-realization is the greatest goal we have to set for ourselves. Should not our effort match the greatness of the goal?

Our concern should be with the effort, not the results. Often we try too hard to get results – to see the light and hear the sound. Our business is just to do meditation, and leave the results to him. A German philosopher, Gerhart Tersteegen, is quoted in *The Spiritual Athlete*, an anthology of writings by and about spiritual teachers from around the world: “Just stay where you are and unite yourselves with God as with something there already that you do not need to seek! For God is certainly with you and in you.”

We intellectually know that God is omnipresent. He is not just everywhere outside, but very much inside us, and yet we cannot see him. Why is that so? The Jewish mystic Baal Shem Tov is quoted in *The Spiritual Athlete*: “There is no spot where God is not. Of course not everyone ‘sees’ him, because the physical creation is a garment the Lord has put on, whereby . . . he is both revealed and concealed.” The Baal Shem Tov goes on to explain that there is a reason that God seems to stay out of our reach.

Observe well how a devoted father, when teaching his young son to walk, stands in front of him, speaks encouragingly and holds his two hands on either side of the child. The boy goes toward his father with outstretched arms, but the moment he comes close to him, the father moves away a little and holds his hands farther apart. He does this over and over so that the child may learn to walk.

Meditation every day is our humble effort to follow the Master’s instructions. Maybe we are just taking baby steps on the path; but our effort will bring forth his grace, and in the end it is, of course, the Master’s grace which will help us walk all the way uphill to the summit. Our duty is to put in effort, like the child learning to walk, and then grace will be forthcoming.

Our effort, however meagre, is never in vain. Hazur says in *Die to Live*, “Whatever time we give to meditation, we are definitely making progress. . . . Not a single moment of meditation goes to waste.” Zeal and sincerity are the key to man’s relation with God. God desires the devotee’s heart. And if we give him our heart, he will give us everything. This is our paramount duty and even if we see no seeming

results, we have to persist with faith and devotion. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

It's not in your hands at all. It comes from within. A girl falls in love with a man. She has no reasoning. She cannot say, "To what extent should I have faith, to what extent should I have this and that?" She is absolutely blind. No matter how much you explain to her, she can't get out of it. She may be deceived, but she has faith. So love creates faith. The more love you have, the more faith you will have in the person concerned. And faith enables you to practice. Then you will follow another person's advice. If you love somebody, that builds faith in you....

So these factors are very essential for following the path. Love will create faith, and faith will create practice. Without faith, mind doesn't go straight on practice. It finds one excuse or another – a hundred obstacles come in the way. You brush them away; again they come. They come and they go. But faith makes you absolutely straight.... And the base of all that is love.

All of this is built slowly by our commitment to our meditation. Faith is strengthened by our meditation. Meditation creates and strengthens our faith. We become unshakeable in our journey within.



Our Last Lifetime?

When Maharaj Sawan Singh, as a disciple, wrote the following words to his Master, Baba Jaimal Singh, “One day my work will finish, but when will that day arrive?” was he writing about his worldly work, the work of going through this human existence or his spiritual work? Baba Jaimal Singh, referring to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, responds in a very reassuring way.

When the perfect Satguru has been found, and with it the whole secret of the saints’ path, then nothing further remains to be done. The task was finished right then and there. So no other path is to be trodden, because no other task remains to be done.

We have been searching for the Lord for many lifetimes. We may have followed many different spiritual paths, performed many penances and rituals in our seeking, but now that we have found a living Master, all that searching is over; we have found what we have been looking for. We have found the Satguru. He has given us initiation and taught us the way to return to our true home. Baba Jaimal Singh continues:

Only that as long as any worldly affairs – taking from some or giving to others – are still to be finished, the inner attention will catch the Shabd-dhun infrequently. The barrier of karma will not be broken until the account with the world is settled. That is why the Sant Satguru takes the soul across the barrier of karma only after completing the account right here, so that it may not

be born again. If any debit or credit is left out, the account of past karmas will have to be cleared by taking birth again.

What is this Shabd-dhun that he says our inner attention is to catch? The Shabd-dhun is the sound and light within us, which is the true form of the Lord and of our soul. It is the Shabd-dhun that we are trying to reach when we meditate. But until our destiny karma is finished, our attention will rise up, catch the light and sound, and fall down again. The only thing standing between us and our inner enlightenment is our karma. So there is nothing to worry about if in our meditation we are seeing and hearing nothing; it is only the karma that is in our way.

Baba Jaimal Singh continues:

From the day the disciple meets the perfect Satguru, all work takes place with the Satguru's permission – he is not going to give another birth.

This is truly an encouraging assurance. No one likes to go through difficult times, but if we keep turning to our Master, he will be there to help us go through whatever befalls us. He is there through good times and bad. We cannot avoid going through our karmas. But we have our bhajan and simran, our meditation, to help us stay balanced. When we do our meditation, we are invoking the grace and mercy of our Master. During the day if we do our simran and keep the Master in our hearts and minds, we are, as it were, walking hand-in-hand with him. Master is always there along the way.

This can be our last lifetime – as long as we complete our destiny karmas and don't keep adding to the pile. As long as we are meditating and following the Satguru's instructions, we are assured that any

new seeds will not take root. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Since all types of karma have to be cleared before you can escape from this realm of Kal, and destiny you cannot change, the saints advise that if you meditate and live according to the principles of the spiritual path, your willpower becomes very strong and you are not affected by those fate karmas. You will be able to go through all that cheerfully, without losing your balance. And, in the future, you won't sow any new seeds for which you may have to come back into this world again.

Living according to the instructions of our Master and doing our meditation protects us from sowing new seeds and allows us to go through our destiny without losing our balance. When we live our lives in this way – putting full effort in our meditation – nothing further remains to be done by us. Then it is in his hands to ensure that this is our last lifetime.



It takes time to control the senses and turn the mind inwards – reversing habits of lifetimes on end. For some disciples it may be a year, for some a whole lifetime. The spiritual seeker needs faith, courage, discipline, longing – all these qualities – to patiently maintain the rigorous practice of meditation.

Many Voices, One Song

Ordinary Words and the Word

Have you ever wondered what babies think about or how they think? They don't have words yet, so what form do their thoughts take? Do they think? Or are they simply conscious, aware, and free from thought? Consider what that would be like, if it is so, and how it might well be an enviable condition.

For as surely as newly learned words spark communication, they also begin to restrict, form, and change the child's mental workings. Not all of awareness can be reduced to words: we can bring to mind any of the sense organs and realize that the words we have fall far short of expressing our experiences with them. When we look at a garden and take in all of the various tones of leaf colours, we realize that the word "green" only weakly represents that range of the visible colour spectrum. Similarly, there are experiences within our minds, our feelings, our thoughts and our relationships that never fully correspond to our vocabularies.

As the mind learns which aspects of life have words affixed to them, it comes to believe that those aspects which are named have more value and are more deserving of its attention. How many diverse aspects of our consciousness have gone dormant from this limitation by assigning words? How much of real value has been pruned from awareness by never having been mentioned? Perhaps this is part of the process by which our minds begin to forget God. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us:

When we came out of the mother's womb and opened our eyes, we saw the world; when we opened our ears, we heard the voices of the world; when we opened our tongue, we replied

to what we heard; and thereby we established our connection with the world and became of this world.

Without words for God's presence and love, we lose touch and forget. And once we begin the process of forgetting, the momentum is perpetuated by the reinforcement of the outer and by the continued neglect of the inner.

Words are some of the most formative influences on our mentality and psyche. Words effectively or carelessly used, have the power to evoke strong feelings within us, to inspire us to greater heights, or to dash our hopes and aspirations to dreadful depths. Words can touch and reassure or bruise as no other force between two humans. Our primary communication is through words; and the words we use and how we employ them establish and bring to form the connections we make with others. In *The Science of the Soul*, Maharaj Jagat Singh warns us to use words carefully, consciously:

A wound inflicted on the body with a sharp weapon heals up in time, but not so the wound that the tongue inflicts on the heart of man. Beware of hurting the feelings of any living being. This should be given as much importance as the vows of abstinence from meat, etc., that we take at the time of initiation.

He continues in another letter:

Much physical and spiritual energy is dissipated by talking. Silence is golden. Speak as little as possible. Open your lips only when it is most necessary. And when you must speak, do so in the most kind and gentle manner. Never lose your temper over anything.

In *Divine Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh continues in the same vein:

Truth is very good and it should always be told in a sweet and pleasant manner. One should not unnecessarily injure the feelings of others. There is already a lot of unpleasantness and worry in this world, and we should try not to add to it. When, by keeping silent, one can avoid hurting another's feelings, silence is always best.

Given the power of words and the potential damage to both others and ourselves, we are counselled to choose them with care. We do well to give as much attention to what comes out of our mouth as we give to the ingredients of what goes into it when we eat. Our associations with others are not to be treated lightly or in ignorance of their importance. What effect do we want to create within the circle of our closest relationships? Our answer to this question underlines the importance of abiding by the counsel of the Masters and emphasizes the extent of our responsibilities to our families and associates.

We come to understand that we can effect changes in others, in our own perceptions, and in the world when we alter the words we use in our interactions. We have the ability to make those interactions positive or negative. This applies to our familial and social associations and to the thoughts that we entertain. What influences do we allow into our mental sphere? Which words do we repeat to ourselves?

The power of words on our mental and emotional states is common knowledge and is used by many in prayer and affirmations. Likewise, the Master gives us a repetition at initiation to take the place of the usual spinning of the mind. But the power of the simran that he bestows is beyond that of mere substitution. The words themselves are imbued with the power of the Master, and our repetition of them

establishes our relationship and our conversation with the Master, linking us inexorably to him.

This interior association with the Master is pivotal to our spiritual life. His direct effect on us is positive and elevating. Our connection to the Master raises us up as a tent is raised by its connection to the centre pole. The connection to the Master that so elevates us is the Shabd-dhun, the Word. This is what religions refer to with their use of terms such as Word of God, Logos, Tao, Nam, or the Voice within. Many of these names echo an understanding of an inner sound. There is no scriptural word, no text, no murmured prayer or song, no name of God that is whispered, written, called or in any way outwardly conveyed that confers salvation to the soul. Some traditions prohibit speaking the name of God, perhaps from an original understanding that one cannot utter the true Name, the true Word. True Word is Shabd or Nam, the active power of God.

Yet, this is how language betrays us. How many millions of seekers after God, lovers aflame with yearning, have sunk their hopes in prayers, chants, song, and reading, believing that they were dealing in the currency of Nam?

How much do our limited mental vocabularies limit our ability to perceive? How much do our limited perceptions then in turn limit our ability to understand? There is a story of a rustic villager giving shelter to a traveller fresh from the Taj Mahal. The traveller talked of the splendours of that tomb, but the terms were beyond the villager's understanding. He knew nothing of "marble" or "column" or "tower." Instead, he asked questions from his own points of reference, "Is this Taj Mahal as big as two huts? Three?" The traveller could only surrender to the villager's ignorance and abandon his description.

Our spiritual limitations are not only a lack of words, but also a lack of corresponding experience. Masters touch us in whichever way

they can, calling out to our most basic human experiences, those of love. They offer us understandings of the divine by couching our relationship with God in the language of known human loves. They speak of the Beloved, the devoted wife, the Father of whom we are all sons and daughters.

We misunderstand; we restrict their meaning or we believe their meaning is restricted and unreal. We reject the very idea of God because we think saints speak of a distant, separate, paternalistic, interventionist being – a “guy in the sky.” Still, we believe in love or an interconnecting energy of life. Masters have often used the words love, energy, and God interchangeably, which merely reflect differences in semantics at our level. In this simple way they show us how the choice of an outer word can confound even our grasp of the Divine.

Nonetheless, these outer words are necessary working limitations: the outer words are required to lead us to the inner Word. The Masters must reach us somehow, and so they use the standard mode of communication – written and spoken words. Soami Ji Maharaj writes in *Sar Bachan Poetry*:

*Whatever is uttered with the tongue
And whatever can be put in writing and read
Is called varnatmak name.*

*This is the one that points to the melody of Shabd,
But unless given by the Guru, it is totally ineffective ...*

*A disciple starts his practice with varnatmak,
But attains the named One through dhunatmak (Shabd).*

The outer words that are given by the Guru are the simran we receive at initiation. The words are not in and of themselves magic; a garden hose in and of itself is useless until it is connected to an active spigot and the water is turned on. The words of simran are that hose; the power of the Guru is the rush of water, put to use in our spiritual life by means of the hose. The value of the simran is that it has association with the inner journey; it connects us to that inner world and has no association with any other mental link. Ultimately the repetition of the simran serves to make the mind still and allow the connection with the Word to be experienced, whereby the inner thirst is quenched – and so our inner growth begins.

Ultimately, both words and the Word are about connection. We have forgotten our source, forgotten what God is like. Our Master uses his words to gently unearth our buried, dormant memory of God and bring it into his light. He prods at our feeble longing, feeds and resuscitates it and then uses it to bring us to him. We follow his words, his books, his satsangs, we repeat his words of simran and ultimately, leave all words, becoming conscious without words, without thought, innocent as babes, wrapped in the Word of his love.



*When one finds God in solitude,
it is a sign that he loves God,
but one who, in the midst of crowds,
delights in the Beloved's Presence
is Loved by God.*

Sheikh Abol-Hasan, *The Soul and A Loaf of Bread*,
rendered by Vraje Abramian

The Resonance of Love

What is this resonance of love that flows between the Master and the disciple? You can feel it, sense it, be rocked by it, and long for it when it wanes. How can it be described? How can it be understood? How can it be sustained and how can one increase the capacity to surrender to it? Thousands of people, poets, and song writers have tried to describe love. It has been described as the quickening of the heart, the weakening of the knees, the rising of the senses of every molecule of the body, and the natural and visceral attraction to the beloved.

Sometimes people spontaneously cry when they see the Master. Perhaps this crying is a reflection of the shock of love, the electric current of love that the disciple may feel in the presence of the Master. This love, which emanates from the Master, is an indescribable force. It is a force which can modify all those who are touched by it. The state of mind of Sant Charandas was described this way:

Sometimes streams of tears would flow from his eyes. When waves of love arose, he could not contain them within himself.

Precisely stated, resonance is a phenomenon in which one system is driven by another system to vibrate with greater amplitude at some preferential frequency. Resonance requires three basic conditions: an object with a natural vibration or frequency, a forcing function applied to the object which causes energy to build up in the object, and a lack of energy loss which causes the object to resonate.

We can look at our self as the object and the Master/Shabd as the force of love that is applied to our soul. Meditation provides the condition for the energy of love to build up, which allows the

resonance to grow. A reciprocal vibration of love between the Master and the disciple can then ring forth, strengthening in purity and force, much like a Tibetan singing bowl which grows in its harmonic clarity and continuous sound when it is struck.

This resonance of love changes us at the molecular level. It sets up a harmonic magnetism and begins to attune the soul to the Shabd, which is continually resounding at the eye centre. The Shabd is love in action; it is the force of love that emanates from the Master. And, it is this force that initiates and sustains the resonance of love between the disciple and the Master.

Sant Dadu Dayal is quoted in *The Teachings of Goswami Tulsidas*:

*The lover is converted into the Beloved;
That indeed is called true love.
Of that Beloved,
God himself becomes the lover, O Dadu.*

This invaluable gift of love, this sweet resonance, is the Lord's mercy and grace. It is the continuous call to turn our attention homeward. The Master has struck us with his force of love so that we can sing forth and attune ourselves each day through our meditation and keep the melody of our lives in harmony with the Shabd.



*When you offer him your existence,
He gives you His Life.*

Sheikh Abol-Hasan,
The Soul and A Loaf of Bread,
rendered by Vraje Abramian

The Master Is Always with Us

From the moment of initiation by a perfect living Master, the Master is always with us. At the time of initiation, he places his Radiant or astral form within the disciple at the eye centre. This is also referred to as the Shabd form of the Master. Even if the Master leaves his physical form before the death of a disciple, his Shabd form guides the disciple in this life and at the time of death. Speaking about this in *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

The Master is always with you. His real form is the Shabd, and that is within you, and it is for you to work your way up and contact the Radiant form.

So our Master is always aware of us and guiding us. Through our meditation practice and his grace, our consciousness rises so that we can meet the Radiant form of our Master. One day we will see him inside, face to face. Master as Shabd is our constant companion and watches over us. He is the protector of our soul, and he will see us back to our true home.

In another letter in *Light on Sant Mat*, Hazur tells a disciple:

The Master is always with his satsangis and protects them.... You put forth your best efforts regularly, then leave the rest to him and he will take care of everything.

The Master is love incarnate or the Word made flesh. As souls, we have been separated from God and our true home for ages. The Master has come to take us home. He is the great liberator.

With other relationships we part company at the end of our lives, but not with our Master. Initiation by a living Master is the greatest gift that can be given to a soul. It is the greatest event in our lives since we were separated from the Father and came into this creation.

Master is our greatest benefactor. He is our best and everlasting friend. And as this relationship grows and develops, we become more and more receptive to his infinite love for us.

In *Spiritual Letters*, Baba Ji Maharaj explains to Babu Sawan Singh that in reality the Master and disciple are one and the same, something to be realized after the gift of initiation:

You are never separate from me, my son, because our real form is the Shabd-dhun, which is never separate, and the Shabd-dhun has been bestowed upon you. Because of the physical body, the business of the world has to be carried out.

However, Baba Ji Maharaj is also saying that we still have our fate karma to go through and it must be lived out. No one can take away what is in our destiny. We will get what is in our fate, no more or no less. So, how much attention do we want to give to thinking about all of this? Isn't it better to fix our attention in simran during the day when our mind is free than to worry about what might happen in the future? After all, if our Master is with us, why should we worry?

He is letting us know that the key to living a stress-free life is to remember the Satguru with love. When we keep him in our mind, even our worldly work can be part of our spiritual growth. And as we grow spiritually, we will eventually realize that the Master is always with us because his real form and ours are united in Shabd.



The Promises of Meditation

Have you ever asked yourself, what is the purpose of meditation? In Sant Mat the practice of meditation is constantly stressed. The saints consistently and endlessly recommend meditation as the way back to God. They urge us to do it. They practically beg us to do it. Masters promise us that meditation will answer all our questions and give us everything we need.

Three aspects of the promises of meditation are worth exploring. The first is that meditation is the way to find forgiveness. Second, meditation is the way to overcome the ego that separates us from God. And third, meditation will increase our longing for the love and truth that will satisfy our deepest hunger.

Maharaj Charan Singh explained in a satsang that meditation is a path to forgiveness. He says:

Meditation provokes the grace of the Lord to forgive us [for] what stands between us and the Father, and that is repentance. To attend to meditation is to repent for what keeps us condemned in this creation.... That is a real knocking at the door of the Father, to forgive us [for] whatever may be standing between us and the Father.

If we knock at his door, if we keep our vow of two and one-half hours per day of meditation practice, if we try to do our simran, and try to be good human beings, we will be forgiven and welcomed home.

To follow the path of meditation, a certain amount of humility is required. To keep our promise to meditate, we have to surrender

enough to do this meditation that we are asked to do. Meditation is our primary duty. It is where we will encounter the Shabd, the Lord, the permanent reality, the joy we seek. The Masters promise us that they will remove what blocks our way inside. They have to turn our attention away from the selfish ego that has strong desires for this fleeting, material, and ultimately delusional world.

We are told that what makes this transformation possible is the Shabd. The saints promise us that it is possible, indeed inevitable, that their initiates will, through the power of the Shabd, go beyond the mind, the ego, and the illusion that we are separate, alone, and orphaned. They promise that we can experience the Creator for ourselves and that we can merge with the Divine Ocean that is our essence. But they don't say that the transformation will occur rapidly, painlessly or without considerable effort on our part.

The journey we have been invited to embark upon carries us away from a restless, miserable, undependable mind. Where will we go if we know we need help and forgiveness? Who will take on such a formidable project, to transform the selfish, deluded, separated seeker, and turn each of us into someone worthy to travel back to God? Goswami Tulsidas, quoted in *Voice of the Heart*, reminds us of the one we can rely on.

*You are merciful and I am destitute, O Lord:
You are the generous giver and I am a beggar
I am the most infamous sinner
And you are the destroyer of all sins.
You are the guardian of orphans
And there is no orphan like me.
There is no one more miserable than me
And there is no better destroyer of misery than you.*

*You are the Lord and I am the soul,
You are the Master, and I am your disciple.
You are my father, mother, teacher and friend –
You are my only benefactor in every way.*

Tulsidas calls himself a beggar. That is the universal condition of all disciples. Hazur reiterates and plainly says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, “We are all beggars at the Lord’s door. We have to beg. We have to ask, but he also gives.” And he encourages us when he says, “And I assure you, if we really beg from the heart, he is always ready to give.”

Goswami Tulsidas expresses this feeling of begging from the heart, as quoted in *Voice of the Heart*:

*I have sinned and you are liberator of the sinners;
Both our roles are well matched ...
Tulsi has come to you for refuge, O Lord;
Please grant him your protection.*

Baba Jaimal Singh explains in *Spiritual Letters*, just how much help and protection we are receiving when he says, “His gracious mercy is blessing you with every breath.” Similarly, Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, “He always receives us with open arms, provided we want him. We long for him.” What is asked of us is that we trust him. We are not to lose heart.

If we can accept this great gift, these simple and wonderful promises of the Master, then there can be great happiness, even before we make visible inner progress. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*What more could we want, if we can trust ourselves to the Lord?
What more do we want? We think we know more than the*

Lord? What else could we want – that he will take care of us, he will absolve us from all our planning, all our thinking, that he takes our destiny into his own hands – what more could we want in life?

With this attitude we can go through life in a much more relaxed and contented state than we imagine is possible. Hazur says in *Light on St. Matthew*, “The One who has created you is more anxious about you and takes much more care of you, and is more concerned about you than you are about yourself . . . have faith in the Father.”

We promise to meditate. The Masters promise to forgive us, clear our karmas, vanquish the mind, and take us home. But to those of us who are distracted beggars, destitute and stubborn, the saints offer another blessing, the gift of longing. It manifests as a fierce desire for darshan, for joy, for peace, for union.

As Goswami Tulsidas says:

*When will you consider me to be your own? ...
You have nurtured everyone ...
have you forgotten your inherent nature in my case?*

He expresses this kind of longing when he pleads with God and accuses God of having forgotten him. Goswami Tulsidas keeps asking and imploring his Master to respond. When will I get to see your face? When will you accept me as your own? Is this sense of spiritual urgency a cry of the soul or just another way the mind is unwilling to surrender? It is the Master who decides when, and how, and in what manner we will attain liberation. We may never know whether our impatience for inner progress is a burden or a gift. Yet how reassuring

it is to hear Goswami Tulsidas ask his Master whether he has forgotten him.

When Goswami Tulsidas begs his Master to hurry, he speaks on behalf of all of us who don't understand why this path takes a lifetime. Many of us get discouraged. Day after day, year after year, we sit in meditation with no apparent inner progress. This is an experience common among those who seek spiritual realization. The contemplative monk, Thomas Merton, describing the experience of meditation and prayer in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*, says that it is a process of waiting in the darkness, and is "often not so much one of fulfilment, as of defeat." Merton describes the rocky path of meditation, saying, "[You learn] something of your own helplessness and incapacity... Suffering submersion under a tidal wave of wild and inane images is one of the standard trials of the contemplative life." Then he offers this sound advice:

What you most need in this dark journey is an unfaltering trust in the Divine guidance, as well as the courage to risk everything for him ... to be heroically faithful to grace and to love. If God calls you to him, then he implicitly promises you all the graces you need to reach him.

The path back to God is not easy for most of us. But in the midst of our frustration, impatience, and incapacity, the mystics urge us to persist in our meditation. Merton continues in his book:

No matter how distracted you may be ... [continue] to centre your heart upon God, who is present to you in spite of all that is going through your mind. His presence does not depend on your thoughts of him. He is unfailingly there.

When we do simran, it is easier to remember that the Master is there. But even when we forget to do simran, he is always with us. Our work is to continue to ask for forgiveness by being faithful to our meditation, to be willing to undergo the crushing of the ego, and to courageously wait in the darkness and the silence until he pulls us home. Hazur assures us that the Master is always with us and always helping us. He says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

Master's helping hand is always there for our spiritual development.... Naturally, his guiding hand is always there, whether we are conscious of it, or not conscious of it. For our spiritual development, he is always there to help us in every way.

Spiritual wealth has been promised to us. The wealth we are waiting for is the Shabd, the logos. Goswami Tulsidas reminds us of just what a treasure this Name of the Lord is:

*It is provision for those who journey empty-handed
and a friend to those who travel alone.
It is blessedness for the unblessed,
good character for those with none.
A patron to purchase goods from the poor,
and a benefactor to the abandoned ...
It is parents to those who are destitute,
solid ground to the ungrounded.
A bridge that spans the sea of existence
and the cause of the essence of joy ...*

*Rescuer of the Fallen:
The thought of it makes fertile earth
from Tulsi's barren soil.*

Songs of the Saints of India

Meditation is a promise. We are receiving provisions, true friendship, blessings, solid ground, and the essence of joy. And so much more. We have been promised that through this life-long practice of meditation, we will be forgiven, our ego will be defeated, and our longing will be answered. Remember, the Master always keeps his promises.



*I have become lost in the City of Love.
I am trying to know myself.*

*I am being cleansed, withdrawing myself from my head, hands and feet.
I am rid of my ego and have attained my goal.
Thus has all ended well.*

*O Bullah, the Lord pervades both the worlds;
None now appears a stranger to me.*

*I have become lost in the City of Love.
I am trying to know myself.*

Bulleh Shah

Soul

The soul is always in love with its Lord; the soul is full of devotion for the Father. But it is helpless due to the weight of the mind. And the mind has become a slave of the senses. So, being mixed up with the mind, rather, dominated by the mind – we do not feel that love for the Father. Love is there in every soul. Potentially, every soul is God. So the more weight we remove from the soul, the more love and devotion we feel for the Father....

Satsang, discussions, meetings, good company, good literature – they are ways to create longing in us for meditation, for the Father. But achievement can only be done through the meditation.

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

INFORMATION ON ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

If you wish to submit an article for publication in *Spiritual Link*, please mail a printed, typed version by post to one of the following addresses. *Emailed submissions will not be accepted.*

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

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



Food for the Heart: The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah

BY AJAHN CHAH

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Food for the Heart is a collection of talks by the Venerable Ajahn Chah (1918-1992), a well-known teacher of the Thai Forest Tradition of Buddhism. Spiritual seekers came to his monastery from all parts of Thailand, and later from all around the world, to hear his talks and to practise under his guidance. Occasionally, someone had a tape recorder on hand, and some of the talks taped in this way became the source of this book.

In an introduction, Ajahn Amaro, a disciple of Ajahn Chah, explains certain aspects of Buddhism and the Thai Forest Tradition important for understanding the talks. He also provides background on Ajahn Chah's manner of teaching. His teaching was always done "in the reality of the moment," with spontaneity, humour, and "heart-breaking compassion." The more sustained of his talks were termed "Dharma-talks" (or "Dhamma-talks," using the Pali term). Yet even these were quite unprepared:

Not one syllable of the Dhamma teachings printed here was plotted out before he started speaking. This was an extremely important principle, he felt, as the job of the teacher is to get out of the way and to let the Dhamma arise according to the needs of the moment – "If it's not alive to the present, it's not Dhamma," he would say.

The people who gathered to listen to Ajahn Chah came from all walks of life. Monks and novices following the strict discipline of the monastery were often joined by peasants from nearby villages, nuns from Buddhist convents, and an array of visitors, some highly educated, some unlettered.

Reading these talks, it is helpful to note the audience to which a particular talk was given. For example, the talk titled “Dhamma Fighting,” which deals with sensual temptations, was addressed to monks between the ages of 25 and 30 struggling with the discipline of celibacy. The talk titled “Making the Heart Good,” about overcoming superstitious beliefs, was given to a group of peasants who believed that they collected spiritual merit by travelling to the monastery.

When speaking to simple local people, Ajahn Chah would use vivid, down-to-earth images from their daily life. “If we were to dye a piece of cloth,” he said, “we’d have to wash it first ... If the cloth is dirty, dying it makes it come out even worse than before. Think about it. Dying a dirty old rag, would that look good?” He said that running around the countryside trying to collect spiritual merit was “like the housewife washing the dishes with a scowl on her face. She’s so intent on cleaning the dishes, she doesn’t realize her own mind’s unclean!” To make the point that spiritual realization depends on developing one’s inner capacity, he said:

Suppose there was a hole, and there was something at the bottom of it. Now anyone who reached into the hole and couldn’t touch the bottom would say the hole was too deep. A hundred or a thousand people might put their hands down that hole, and they’d all say the hole was too deep. Not one would say their arm was too short!

Although Ajahn Chah taught within a monastic tradition, where practitioners withdrew from society to live and practise in a remote forest, he said that laypersons with families and worldly responsibilities could also develop spiritually. “If you really understand the practice of Dhamma, then no matter what position or profession you hold in life, be it a teacher, doctor, civil servant, or whatever, you can practice the Dhamma every minute of the day.”

Ajahn Chah insisted that spiritual practice is not confined to “meditation and listening to Dhamma-talks.” People think that these “are ‘the practice.’”

That's true too, but these are only the outer forms of practice. The real practise takes place when the mind encounters a sense object. That's the place to practice, where sense contact occurs. When people say things we don't like, there is resentment; if they say things we like, we experience pleasure ... If we just run around chasing after happiness and running away from suffering, we can practise until the day we die and never see the Dhamma.

Ajahn Chah described “sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind objects” as potential traps that “catch us and bind us fast. If you attach to the senses, you're the same as a fish caught on a hook. When the fisherman comes, struggle all you want, you can't get loose.”

Ajahn Chah taught that through disciplined practice and careful observation we can come to know the impermanence and unreality of all sense impressions:

If we understand according to this reality, then the senses cease to be substantial. They are just sensations that come and go. In truth there isn't any “thing.” If there isn't any “thing,” then there is no “we” and no “they.” If there is no “we,” then there is nothing belonging to “us.”

This realization is the beginning of the escape from suffering:

It's in this way the suffering is extinguished. There isn't anybody to acquire suffering, so who is it that suffers?... Attachment to these feelings gives rise to the concept of self or ego, and thoughts of “we” and “they” continually manifest. Here is where it all begins, and then it carries us around in its never-ending cycle.

But we cannot defeat attachment simply by avoiding sense impressions that disturb us:

Escaping from suffering ... doesn't mean running away from whatever suffering arises. By doing that you just carry your suffering with you ... The teachings say that wherever a problem arises, it

must be settled right there. Where suffering lies is right where non-suffering will arise; [suffering] ceases at the place where it arises.

Everyone must do this spiritual practice himself, for himself. In fact, Ajahn Chah goes so far as to say that “we are our own teachers: if we are wise, every personal problem, event, and aspect of nature will instruct us; if we are foolish, not even having the Buddha before us explaining everything would make any real impression.” Then how do we develop wisdom? “The Buddha can show you the way to develop wisdom, but how much of it you develop depends on the individual.”

Walking the path to reach Buddhadhamma is something each one of us must do individually, for no one can do it for us ... Teachers can only point out the direction of the Path. Whether or not we ourselves walk the Path by practising, and thereby reap the fruits of practice, is strictly up to each one of us.

In another talk he points out the difference between merely believing the teachings and actually practising them:

The Dhamma is paccattam – you know it for yourself. To know for yourself means to practise for yourself ... Even the teaching I have given you today is completely useless in itself. It is worth hearing, but if you were to believe it just because I said so, you wouldn't be using it properly. If you believed me completely, you'd be foolish. Put the teachings into practise for yourself, see it within yourself, do it yourself – this is much more useful. You will then know the taste of Dhamma.



