



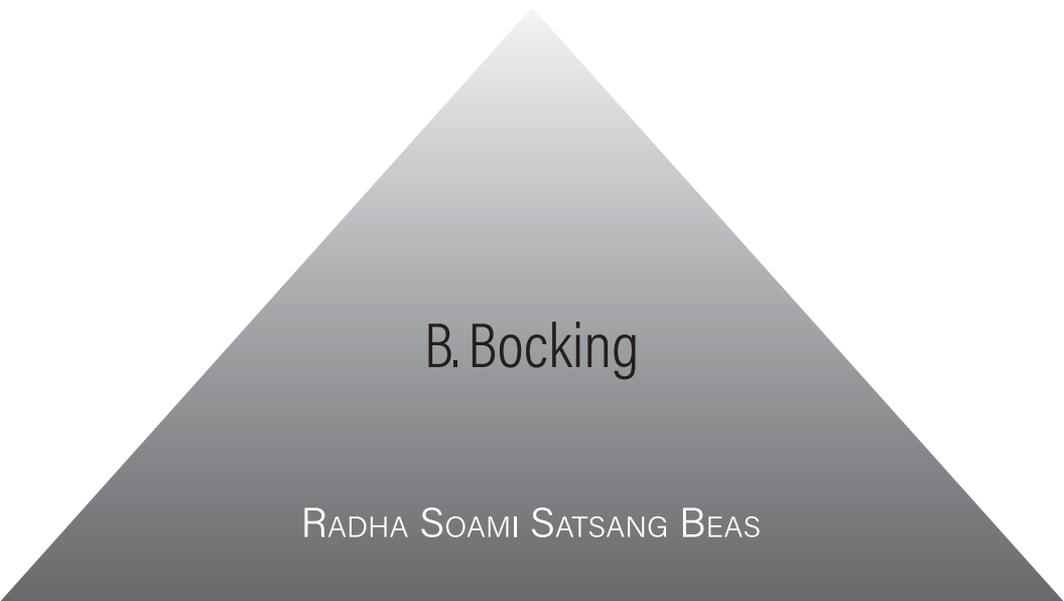
ESSENTIAL

Sant Mat

RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS



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PREFACE

This small book briefly explains the teachings of the lineage of the spiritual masters of Radha Soami Satsang Beas, India, who have conveyed the Sant Mat teachings throughout India and the world for more than a century. Using terms and language familiar to local people, they teach a universal path of devotion that may be found at the heart of humanity's search for truth. 'Radha' stands for soul and 'Soami' for the divine. Sant Mat teaches that the essence of every human being is the soul, and the privilege and purpose of human life are for the soul to become aware of its identity with its divine source. This realisation can be achieved through meditation on the emanation of divinity, which resounds inside every human being and is referred to as the Shabd, the 'sound current' or 'Word.'

The spiritual masters of Beas have not only taught this truth in words, they have demonstrated its luminous reality in their own lives. Through their extraordinary spiritual bearing, their wisdom, humility, nobility, and kindness, they have inspired and encouraged multitudes of disciples to follow the spiritual path known as 'Sant Mat' or 'teachings of the true masters.' These topics are further explored in the following pages.

We hope that this short introduction to the 'essentials' of Sant Mat will help answer many of the questions raised by those

interested in the spiritual path. For those looking for more detail, there are many books which can be obtained at local gatherings (*satsangs*) throughout the world as well as films, articles, and e-books available on the www.rssb.org website.

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Sant Mat

What does 'Sant Mat' mean?

Sant Mat is an Indian term meaning the teachings (*mat*) of a true one (a *sant*). *Sant* is often conveniently translated into English as 'saint,' but the two words, though similar-sounding, are unrelated. *Sant* is derived from the Sanskrit word *sat* (true, truth) while 'saint' is from the Latin *sanctus* meaning 'holy' or 'set apart.'

Any respected religious leader in India may be called a *sant*, but the meaning of *sant* conveyed here is one who has realised what is true (*sat*) and can convey that truth to others. A *sant* therefore means a true guru (*sat guru*), true teacher, true exemplar or true master. A true guru or master is one who leads us to the understanding of how things really are, a true perception without illusion. This is not the kind of truth that can be expressed in words. It can be realised only through experience. A true master shows us the practical steps needed to experience truth for ourselves and overcome our deep-rooted delusions.

The teachings of a true master comprise more than words. Once the spiritual teachings are put into practice, they are experienced in the interaction between living master and disciple. This

process begins with initiation (acceptance of the disciple and instruction by the teacher) and then through resolute adherence by the disciple to the way of life and spiritual practice taught by the living master.

How can we be sure someone is a true master?

A true master is not easily found. There are thousands of well-publicised gurus or enlightened masters in the world today. Googling ‘sat guru’ generates 20 million results, including innumerable ideas about what makes someone a true teacher. We can however look for specific traits in anyone who is said to be a sat guru.

Firstly, anyone who claims to be a true master lacks the humility required to fulfil that role. A true master, being genuinely humble, never claims to be superior to anyone else and indeed sees himself or herself as a servant of others, crediting any achievements to his or her own spiritual master.

A true master charges nothing for his or her teachings and accepts no donations from disciples for personal use.

A true guru does not advertise and does not seek to attract or convert anyone. A true master makes no claim to be anyone special, steadfastly resists the cult of celebrity and indeed avoids publicity and politics.

A true teacher is loving and compassionate to all. A true teacher does not merely ‘talk the talk’ but also ‘walks the walk’ by living a normal life in an exemplary way consistent with his or her own teachings.

A true master is unmoved by anybody’s rank or status, high or low, and conveys the same teachings with equal clarity, power and compassion to people from any part of the world and from

every walk of life, from the poorest illiterate peasant to the most powerful ruler.

Finally, a true master devotes his or her life to conveying truth freely, fearlessly, and lovingly to those who genuinely seek it.¹

Even if an individual seems to embody every one of these traits, can we be sure that he or she is a true master before we make the decision to ask for initiation? The present master, Baba Gurinder Singh, has sometimes asked disciples, “how do you know I’m not a fraud?” to which the honest answer is that we don’t. Doubts about whether a teacher is genuine or just a very convincing fraud are inevitable. “It takes one to know one” applies in spiritual matters as in many areas of life. A virtuoso musician can discern a pupil’s level of skill in playing an instrument, but the pupil cannot expect to assess the teacher’s full ability. In the same way, a would-be disciple cannot assess the inner spiritual level of his or her intended master. A true master advises anyone interested in the path to study the teachings thoroughly and to resolve his or her doubts as far as possible before applying for initiation. This process of inquiry may well include looking at what critics of the path and the master have to say, whether online or in print.

Are we taking a risk in seeking initiation?

Would we willingly follow someone who, despite our best investigations, might still be a fraud? This would certainly involve a risk if initiation meant that the disciple gave up his or her freedom of expression and action, or possessions, and came under the control of a power-seeking individual or cult. However, a true teacher does not work by compulsion. He or she teaches only out of love and compassion, not with a desire to control others’ lives, make financial gains or gain power and influence in society.

There is a story of a starving peasant who in a dream saw a *sadhu* (holy man) sitting beneath a tree and offering him a gift. The peasant recognised the tree and knew where to find it. When he awoke he went there and found the sadhu, just as in the dream. The sadhu said, “I have a gift for you,” and gave him a huge diamond, clearly worth a fortune. “It’s yours,” he said. The peasant, overjoyed at his good luck, went back to his hut and gazed at the precious gem. With it, he could obtain all he could possibly want for the rest of his life. That night he could not sleep. He knew something was wrong. Finally he realised what it was. The next morning he returned to the sadhu. He said, “Here is your diamond back. If you can give me a priceless diamond as if it were nothing to you, then you must possess something far more valuable even than diamonds – and that is what I want.” The sadhu lovingly accepted him as a sincere disciple and taught him how to find the true spiritual wealth within himself.

The initiation bestowed by a true teacher is for the benefit of the disciple, not the master. Moreover the meditation the master teaches is always a private, individual activity; there is no group meditation or assessment of progress. A satsang (meeting) is not an act of worship. Disciples of a true master come to a satsang only to listen to and to understand better the master’s teachings, not to perform rituals, discuss personal experiences or celebrate anniversaries, or because there is any obligation to attend. As the current master at Beas, Baba Gurinder Singh Ji, often says, “No one records your attendance at satsang.”

Nor does a true master encourage or allow any external symbols such as special clothing, prescribed gestures or other forms of ritual behaviour that a disciple must observe. Manners, dress, and customs vary enormously from culture to culture. In one place

respect is shown by taking off one's headgear and keeping shoes on; in another, by wearing a head covering and taking off one's shoes. A true master attaches no significance whatsoever to such external marks and observances. A true spiritual master is interested only in developing the disciple's awareness of truth, which lies within every human being regardless of any external differences.

What if I change my mind after initiation?

If a disciple for any reason decides to stop following the teachings, that is a personal decision freely made and no one else's business. Equally, if someone decides to return to the practice after six months, six years or even sixty years, that is also a personal decision. The master on the other hand will never abandon a disciple, once initiated. However long we may have been away, the master will always lovingly welcome a disciple who wishes to resume his or her practice.

The inner path is nothing new

The decision to follow the path is entirely personal because Sant Mat is a private, individual journey of inward meditation, practised under the guidance of a true spiritual teacher. It is not a new path, for the simple reason that the path to awareness of truth is intrinsic to being human. The present master often refers to the path as simply becoming a good human being. The goal of the spiritual practice is to fulfil the highest potential of being human, by merging our consciousness with the creative energy or divine power which permeates every human being and indeed the entire cosmos. This loving energy or power, which the Sant Mat masters refer to as shabd, literally meaning word or sound, is always there, but most of us are not aware of it.

Initiation provides us with the method, the technique, to 'go within' through meditation to make contact with the shabd. Our progress towards this goal after initiation depends on how much effort we put into following the teacher's instructions. In this respect, following a spiritual path is like learning a musical instrument or becoming proficient in a craft such as pottery, or learning a new language. We can improve, we can progress, we can even excel, but progress depends on practice.

I'm an atheist/believer/agnostic – does it matter?

Students of a true teacher may belong to any religious background or none. Pursuing the truth of what it is to be fully human has nothing to do with being religious – or indeed anti-religious – nor with ethnicity, gender, social position, politics, nationality, or language. Everything depends on our commitment and the action we take to follow the path of inward meditation. It makes no difference whether we describe the practice of turning the mind inward as a 'religious' or 'spiritual' activity, or we prefer to think of it as 'knowing oneself' or 'achieving inner calm' or 'gaining enlightenment' or by any number of other terms. The essence of the path is practice, not words. Words are the menu, meditation is the meal.

The spiritual path here called Sant Mat has been taught under different names by true teachers in many different parts of the world throughout history. Often, but not always, spirituality has been taught within a particular religious context – Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and so forth – albeit often despite opposition from the dominant 'orthodox' religious institutions. There are always true teachers somewhere in the world. To tread the path of spirituality we need a living guide; otherwise we

will easily lose our way. People readily venerate great prophets and saviours of the past, missing the point that the disciples of those teachers were devoted not to a figure from the past but to a living master, a person like them in the here and now, able to give them pragmatic guidance.

The divine creative energy or power – the shabd – has also been given different names by different teachers in diverse languages and cultures over thousands of years. Masters in India have generally called this divine power *Shabd*, *Nam*, or *Nad*, all meaning the Word, Name, or Sound Current. Shabd implies not only the spiritual vibration which draws and directs the disciple's attention inwards, but also the most subtle frequencies of light and radiance, the manifestation of growing inner spiritual awareness. As Jesus said, "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light."²

In Christian-based traditions an equivalent name for shabd is the *logos*, also meaning word. Logos is widely identified with one God in three aspects: God the Father (the word as the invisible or formless creator), God the Son (the word as true teacher in human form), and God the Holy Spirit (the word as spiritual power). In the gospel of John in the Christian Bible we read, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." Within Islam and Judaism we find many teachers who have revealed the path of inner contemplation. The tomb in Delhi of the Jewish saint Sarmad still attracts thousands of pilgrims of all religions. The Sufi mystic and poet Rumi has become a household name across many cultures in modern times. Stated in religious terms, the universal teachings of all these mystics have been to find the one God within.

It seems to be all about God

There's a problem. Many of us these days don't like the word 'God' very much. The way people often talk about God may suggest a kind of cosmic busybody who has quite a temper and is inclined to take sides but nevertheless wants to be thanked for everything he does – rather like ourselves in fact. We have dragged the idea of God down to our level. We have made Him (or Her) in our own image. The idea of God as a separate superhuman individual who interferes in world events is not at all what mystics and spiritual teachers mean when they talk about God. When true teachers talk about 'God' they mean love – a loving power, a loving energy – and not a sentimental or selective love restricted to a particular person or object, but infinite divine love. That universal love is actually our birthright. It is already within us, like treasure in a cave. It is what we are. It is our essence.

If we want to use a less religious-sounding phrase in place of God (or Shabd, or the Word, etc.) we could talk about the supreme energy or power of love that sustains and pervades the whole universe, including our own consciousness. Whatever terms we use, and whether we think of 'God' as male, female, both or neither, these are just names – words that signify a reality we have not yet experienced for ourselves.

A questioner once asked Maharaj Charan Singh, "Some people refer to God as the divine mother. Isn't the world a beautiful place when you see that divine spirit everywhere?" To which the master replied:

Well, brother, that mother or that power or that God, whatever name you give it, is within every one of us. Unless we

realize that power or that mother within ourselves, we won't see that power or mother within anybody else at all. Once you realize it within yourself, then everywhere you look, you will find that love, that affection, that devotion, that mother and that father in every one of us. But to come to that stage – living in the world and not being affected by it, not being attached to it – we have to work our spiritual way within the body. Then whatever you see, you will find that bliss, that love within every one of us. You have to realize that within yourself in order to realize it in the world.³

Attachment love and true love

So long as we are preoccupied 24 hours of the day with 'outer' concerns – such as our possessions, relationships, reputation or career – we can have no real understanding of what 'divine love' means. We may love someone or something, but that love always has as its object something in the world. Nothing in the world is lasting, so our love is tainted by fear of loss and by wanting to possess what we know deep down can never be ours. Real love, say the true teachers, lies complete but unseen within every human being, like magnetism in iron. It has to be experienced; it has to be *realised*, and to realise it – to make it a reality rather than just a concept – we have to learn how to still and withdraw our mind, our attention, from the temporary loves and concerns of this world and 'go within.' And this, in a nutshell, is what a true teacher enables us to do. As the present master puts it, "The only thing that matters is going within. All the rest is a story."

All of this helps to explain why Sant Mat is an individual spiritual path, not a community religion. No one else can develop

our spirituality, our love, on our behalf, any more than someone can play the violin or become an athlete on our behalf. We may need guidance, encouragement, and support to seek truth, but in the end we have to experience truth for ourselves. Practice – meditation – is what makes us receptive to that truth, and the true master is the one who guides and supports us in that practice. Sant Mat, the teachings of the true masters, therefore begins and ends with the inner, private relationship between a living master and a disciple. Whatever organisation there is exists only to enable the master to teach and the disciple to learn.

A path to be chosen, not imposed

Sant Mat is a path for those who sense that life does not begin and end with the material world and who are prepared to make a considered and mature choice to commit to spiritual practice. For this reason the master will only allow adults to apply for initiation. Any adult who wishes to follow the path may ask the master for initiation, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, language, and so on. The path of Sant Mat is not for children, who are impressionable and vulnerable to undue influence. Children are seldom in a position to make an informed choice. The master advises disciples who are parents to guide their children in the values of universal love and compassion that inform the path. His advice is that parents should set a good example by following the teachings themselves (“It is infinitely better to practise than to preach,” said Maharaj Jagat Singh)⁴ and should inculcate in children the basic principles of honest living. However, the child should be left to make up his or her own mind in adulthood about committing to a spiritual path. When

asked on one occasion why there is a minimum age for initiation, Maharaj Charan Singh said:

You see, you should be mature enough to understand what you are going to follow. Generally, children are influenced by their parents, by their elders, to follow the path. It is not their own decision. They make a quick decision under the influence of their parents; and when they grow and become mature they may think they have taken a wrong step. So I like children to grow to understand, and to make their own decision and not be influenced by anybody at all. They must satisfy their intellect.

First you must grow to build your intellect, and then, with that intellect, try to decide what is right for you...⁵

In fact there should be no attempt to persuade anyone, including relatives, to follow the path. Sant Mat is not a religion whose followers believe that everyone in the world should be following their way of thinking. The inner spiritual path is suited only to those who feel drawn to it and who cannot do without it. As Maharaj Charan Singh Ji often said, “The pull [to follow the path] has to come from within.” It follows that there is no need even to mention the path to others in our ordinary daily life or work environment, and it is entirely misguided to try to ‘convert’ other people to a true master’s way of thinking. As the master often says, we should not expect others to convert to our way of thinking unless we are prepared to convert to theirs. If people are genuinely curious and persistent we may, of course, answer their questions, but there is no need to launch

into a long explanation. The desire to follow the path has to come from within.

Disciples flock to their master

Maharaj Ji often likened the master's role to that of a shepherd who has responsibility for a flock of sheep. Evoking an image found in the New Testament, he said:

A shepherd calls his sheep; the sheep know his voice and will go to no other shepherd but their own. So it is with the Master and his disciples. Jesus explains that each Master recognizes the seekers who are marked to be his sheep, and every sheep marked for him automatically comes to him and has faith in him. The Master then leads us out of the prison of this world to everlasting freedom and peace – our heavenly home. He never calls us from behind, but is always in front of us. He remains ahead, always guiding and protecting us on the way.⁶

Those who are genuinely drawn towards a true teacher, whether conscious of it or not, will eventually find their way to their master, with or without anyone else's help. Numerous disciples can tell the story of how, despite living sometimes thousands of miles away and with no apparent connection to the path of Sant Mat, they somehow came in contact with the living master. If someone is not genuinely pulled towards the path, then talking about it in detail or trying to convince that person of its worth can bring no benefit.

What the path involves

The path of Sant Mat is in essence a commitment to regular meditation of at least two and a half hours each day under the guidance of a true teacher. This commitment is built on a way of life which combines all normal social, occupational, and family responsibilities with that period of regular, private, daily meditation. Sant Mat is not an escape from life's duties and responsibilities. On the contrary, someone following the spiritual path should aspire to be a better human being in every respect – as a family member, at work, and in the wider community.

The path does not offer disciples any material benefits or so-called 'blessings' such as money, children, social status, exam success, career advantages – or parking spaces. A real blessing, according to true teachers, is anything which turns our attention away from the world of the senses and towards the experience of the divine reality within. So 'blessings' on the spiritual path might well take the form of poverty, sickness or humiliation – even all three at once. Similarly, the master does not offer miracles, which would simply attract the curious; he offers spiritual teachings – practical spiritual guidance as to how to live and how to meditate – to those who genuinely want to learn.

Four essentials

The path of Sant Mat involves four essential principles or requirements. At the time of initiation, a disciple undertakes to follow these four principles for the rest of his or her life. The first three concern our 'outward' way of life, and they benefit us enormously. The basic idea is that while living a normal life we should minimise the harm we do to ourselves and others and at the same time

build the necessary strong foundation for the fourth principle, which is daily meditation. These first three are:

- to follow a vegetarian diet, excluding all meat, fish, or eggs. This removes us from the chain of exploitation, pain, and killing of other sentient beings, which creates a heavy karmic burden. Every action has consequences and what we choose to eat is no exception. Eating these substances also agitates the mind, when we are seeking to do the very opposite, namely to calm and focus our attention in meditation.
- to avoid all alcohol and mind-altering or addictive drugs, including tobacco. Under the influence of drugs or alcohol we lose our common sense and carry out mindless actions which may be disastrous for us and for others. Again, these substances can significantly impair our ability to still and focus the mind.
- to live a clean, honest and moral life, in all areas of personal and sexual relations and in business. A true master sets very high standards here, well beyond what is required by society at large.

In order to meditate, we have to be able to free our mind of our worldly concerns. One description for meditation used by the masters is ‘dying while living.’ We cannot hope to withdraw our attention completely from the concerns of the physical world during meditation if we are engaged in loose moral behaviour, deception and cheating, fuelled by lust and greed, or if we are preoccupied with personal interests.

Meditation

The fourth undertaking is to practise meditation for at least two and a half hours every day. Without the practice of meditation, Sant Mat is just words. Initiation is only a beginning. The path is a path of inward meditation, of transforming our consciousness. ‘Going within’ requires persistent practice and firm resolve. In sports, music, and other disciplines, dedicated students practise for several hours a day. Why? Because progress comes through constant daily practice. As the saying goes, “Champions train, losers complain.”

The masters entreat us never to neglect for a single day the practice of meditation. In fact meditation has to become a regular and punctual habit so that we attend to it regardless of circumstances. Maharaj Charan Singh was asked, “By regular and punctual, do you mean the same time every day?” He replied:

Habits are easily formed and soon become a part of our daily routine, and then if we neglect them, we start missing those things. Similarly, by giving the same time every day, this meditation should become a part of our daily routine. For instance, whether we are hungry or not, at one o’clock we are at the dining table; or the moment it is eleven o’clock, you rush for your coffee break. It becomes a habit and a routine of life. So, meditation should also become a habit and a daily routine. And if you give it secondary importance – I’ll attend to it whenever I feel like it, I’ll do it whenever I get time – then you’ll never attend to it at all. So one should make it compulsory.⁷

Live your own life

So long as these four principles – the vegetarian diet, avoiding alcohol and drugs, living a clean moral life and practising daily meditation – are adhered to, disciples around the world live, dress, and do as they wish. The master has nothing against singing, dancing, family life, fashion, sports, work and business, charity, holidays, rock music, study and research, going to the movies or belonging to a religion. He only asks that we bear in mind the primary goal of human life so that we never compromise our principles and never neglect our daily meditation.

The Sant Mat teachings summed up in the four principles are straightforward and easy to understand. Consequently, any disciple knows very well what is required to make progress in meditation. He or she appreciates also that if these principles are not followed then progress towards the goal will pause, unless and until the practice is resumed. Again the parallel with learning a language is helpful. If we keep learning and practising every day we will make steady progress. If we miss a day or two it takes more than that time to catch up. If we miss a week or a month we must not only re-learn what we have forgotten but also re-establish the habit of daily practice. Things are broadly the same with meditation. Regular, punctual, daily practice, to the extent that it becomes an unbreakable habit, is the key.

It takes time

Trying to mould one's life according to the teachings of a true master takes time and determination and involves a struggle against our weaknesses – entrenched habits of acting and thinking which may retain a very strong grip on our minds. Meditation helps us first to recognise our weaknesses and then to turn those

weaknesses into strengths, but this is not the work of a day. “Slow and steady wins the race.” When first initiated we may think we are going to conquer the mind in no time. Such expectations spring from youthful naivety, ignorance, or vanity, and not from a realistic assessment of our strengths and weaknesses. Meditation may be a simple process – it has been well described as ‘doing nothing’ or ‘just letting go’ – but it is a rare disciple who finds the path of Sant Mat meditation easy.

As indicated above, if after initiation a follower strays from these principles, there is never any exclusion or excommunication from Sant Mat. Moreover there is no time limit set on the effort to realise who we truly are. A true teacher knows a disciple’s weaknesses but will never draw attention to them. The relationship is always a deeply personal, generous and loving bond between the master and the disciple.

What happens when we die?

There are so many theories and teachings about what happens to a person after death. Many people think, “That’s it – the end.” Many others think our spirit goes to heaven or hell, either for eternity or for a length of time before birth in a new body. Some believe that those who have earned or received God’s approval will be physically resurrected on the day of judgement. Others say that dead ancestors and ghosts remain attached to places and people still living. For many people the honest answer is “I don’t know.”

The masters do not regard physical death as particularly significant. It is the natural consequence of being born into a body that will not last forever. True masters view the present human life as one in a series of lives, governed by cause and

effect. The choices we make and the actions we perform create our future – a future that may be played out across many lives. The masters emphasise that a human birth is a rare privilege. It offers a unique opportunity to become aware of the true nature of life and to free oneself from the otherwise endless cycle of birth-death-birth-death.

Each one of us has existed in many different forms – as animals, birds, insects, plants – in other lives. If we do not fulfil the potential of this current human birth, if we live and therefore die with our thoughts and desires still directed towards the temporary things and attractions of the physical world, then we will naturally be drawn back by our worldly inclinations and attachments and be reborn. As Maharaj Charan Singh puts it:

Our karma [actions] can take us down to a lower species and our karma can also bring us back to the human form. It depends upon our attachments, our desires and cravings which we have not been able to fulfil or sublimate during the life span, the seeds which we have sown and have to come back to reap the fruit thereof. All this determines where we have to go. . . . It hardly makes any difference whether we die young or old. Our karma, our desires and our attachments determine where we have to go as well as the span of that life and whether to a lower species or whether to come back to the human form.⁸

From the point of view of a true teacher, this world is a world of suffering. Sometimes things go well for us for a time. If so, a glance at the stories of conflict, oppression, and misfortune in any newspaper will tell us that we are the lucky ones, for now.

In this world nothing and no one lasts forever. Whatever we acquire, we fear its loss. No one, rich or poor, is exempt from illness or death. All of us would like to be happy and at peace with ourselves and no doubt wish this for others as well. The truth is that no one can find lasting happiness through the people and things of this constantly changing world. The masters explain that true and permanent peace and happiness can only be found by turning our attention within ourselves to a more permanent plane of existence, where true and lasting love and contentment reside. Otherwise, our undiminished attachments and desires will keep bringing us back into this world.

If we are the kind of person who enjoys life in this world and can't get enough of it, the idea of returning for another life in a different form might seem an attractive option. However, if we understand that this world is a prison-house keeping us away from a state of complete freedom, and we regard a life as a *life sentence*, why would we want to incur more life sentences, when we are already serving one? The aim of the path of Sant Mat is to end the cycle of rebirth, to achieve liberation, to merge in the infinite love which is our real being and be eternally free from all limitations.

Attachment and detachment

The masters teach that our destiny is governed principally by our attachments, whether of love or hate, like or dislike. Unless we learn to become detached from objects of desire or aversion we will once again come into the world. Attachments to things of the world, which are all temporary, can only be dissolved by a stronger and permanent attachment, and that possibility lies within us. As Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

When it [the mind] becomes attached to the inner sound and light, it starts detaching from the senses. The senses don't pull it anymore because it's getting a better pleasure than the sensual pleasures.⁹

This is why nothing can substitute for daily meditation. Meditation – learning to transform our consciousness so that we can see and experience what lies within us – can alone purify the mind and prepare it for contact with the shabd. Contact with the shabd is transformative. Shabd is described by the masters as the real 'philosopher's stone' which was believed to turn base metal into gold. Contact with shabd transforms the darkness of ignorance into the light of understanding. Awareness of the shabd makes worldly pleasures seem insipid. Attachments and egotism are dissolved in the sweetness of inner divine love.

All the pleasures of the world, the attachment to body and senses, the I-ness and duality have to be discarded before the soul can become fit to partake of the sweetness of Nam. Only attachment to shabd will detach us from the world and its objects.¹⁰

Preparing for initiation

For anyone planning to apply for initiation, there is a self-assessment period of a year or so during which time the intending applicant voluntarily follows the vegetarian diet, avoids drugs, alcohol, and tobacco and adheres strictly to the moral principles. This is to make sure that he or she can commit to the Sant Mat way of life for good. The master expects that anyone thinking about applying for initiation should read a number of key books explaining the

teachings and way of life, should attend satsangs regularly, and should study and question every aspect of the path.

This period of study and questioning should continue for as long as it takes until the individual's particular questions are fully answered and he or she has a good grasp of the main teachings. In Sant Mat, as in most projects we undertake, the initial preparation stage is crucial. This period of questioning and trying out the Sant Mat way of life is, as the masters often say, not time wasted but time gained. Only once our intellect is satisfied should we apply for initiation.

Initiation: a starting point

Once a disciple has been accepted by the master, the method of meditation is explained. This is initiation. The master continually emphasises that initiation is only a starting point. Receiving initiation from a true teacher reflects our desire and commitment to follow the inner path. The path itself can be travelled by meditation and by no other means.

Attending satsangs (talks given by disciples who have been assigned the task) to remind oneself of the teachings can be helpful for maintaining motivation to meditate. Hearing a true master speak in person is a privilege. Maharaj Charan Singh once said:

When you go to the company of the mystics, the teachings become so simple to understand. You think: Why do I remain in delusion at all? Why didn't I realize the simple truth before?¹¹

There are other activities which can be an encouragement to meditation. One is offering *seva* or voluntary service in various

capacities, usually at satsang centres. Since centres belonging to the organisation are used only for satsang and not for any kinds of rituals or social gatherings such as anniversaries, weddings or funerals, the seva carried out there is devoted solely to making the teachings available. Another support is studying books or articles about the teachings or listening to recordings of the master answering his disciples' questions. Much of this material is now available on the www.rssb.org website, as well as at the bookstalls at satsang venues.

AFTER INITIATION

following the path

The points made so far are, we might say, the basics or essentials of Sant Mat. When, after initiation, we begin in earnest on the inner path of meditation, we discover that we have embarked on what seems a lifelong struggle with our mind. In meditation we may be trying to still and focus our attention and turn it within, but the human mind has the long-established habit of ‘running out’ in scattered thoughts, feelings, perceptions and sensations.

We soon discover that, although meditation practice has the purpose of turning the attention inwards, a seemingly inexhaustible stock of thoughts, images, memories and feelings distracts us from this aim. We start to appreciate the hitherto unnoticed power of the so-called ‘five passions’ of lust, anger, attachment, greed and ego, which seem to have free rein over our thoughts, emotions, and actions. The human mind has a natural tendency to repeat the same thoughts and emotions, over and over. For example, if someone hurts my feelings I find myself dwelling on the memory by re-playing the event again and again in my mind, becoming agitated by the same emotion each time. Moment by moment, our experiences in life generate further thoughts and feelings, some of which become engraved in our mind through

repetition. Our thoughts thus become mental habits which, over time, build our entire character and personality.

When through meditation we begin to see ourselves a little more objectively, we start to realise that the person I think of as 'I' is more or less the sum total of these mental habits. In meditation, we become intensely aware of the power of these ideas, emotions, and traits of character. This awareness is the beginning of wisdom. We start to withdraw our attention from this illusory 'I' and gradually disentangle ourselves from the delusions and entanglements that distract the real 'I' from realising its true identity with that divine love and energy mystics refer to as the word, the shabd, and by other names.

The power of repetition

The master explains that we can withdraw our attention from our powerfully distracting thoughts and emotions by replacing the constant replaying of these thoughts and emotions with a more powerful, inner-directed, form of repetition. This is called *simran* (repetition of words given by the master at initiation). With the body remaining motionless in meditation, *simran* stills and focuses the mind at the eye centre, an inner focus between and above the two eyes. In this stillness we can come to understand the reality of our mind, beyond the distracting play of thoughts and emotions. Through *simran* and then *bhajan* (listening within, directing our attention to the divine melody, the shabd) we can then withdraw further and further inwards until that divine love which is 'beyond' the mind becomes our reality.

If we sit in meditation for two and a half hours every day but spend the rest of the day completely absorbed in worldly

thoughts and emotions, we will find it difficult if not impossible to dismiss the day's events from our mind when the time comes for meditation. Hence, the masters recommend that in any spare moment during the day we engage in silent simran (repetition). This way, the mind will be conditioned to turn inwards when we sit for daily meditation. The present master has put it this way: "with 24/7 simran, everything flows."

Slipping and sliding

Those who start out on the path of meditation often feel that they are becoming worse as individuals, not growing more 'spiritual' in the way that they imagined. The master explains that this is an outcome of growing self-awareness. Before we begin on the path of meditation most of us grossly underestimate the hold that the attachment-laden mind has over us. We dance helplessly to the tune of our constantly changing emotions and desires while telling ourselves that our choices are governed by 'free will,' that we are free agents in charge of our own life. In reality, we are bound by our attachments and mental and emotional habits, not free to make wise or objective choices. As we try to control the mind through meditation we begin to see the process more clearly, and we can acquire some self-knowledge. Maharaj Ji explains:

When you're on the Path and meditating, you don't become worse than before; you become more aware of your weaknesses. I often give an example also: you are in a closed room and it's absolutely dark; a little ray of light comes from the ventilator and suddenly you can see so much in

the room. You see dust particles and so many things that are moving about. But until that ray of light came, you were not conscious of all that was in that room. So with meditation, that ray of light comes in us, and those very things of which we used to feel proud, which we blindly thought were achievements, now we feel ashamed of them.

It doesn't mean that we have fallen or we have become worse by meditation. We have just become conscious of those weaknesses. And when you become conscious of them, naturally you are ashamed of them, and that makes you want to get rid of them.¹²

Our own mind naturally knows us inside out. It has so many tricks up its sleeve that the part of us which is trying to still and focus the mind often despairs and becomes discouraged. At first we cannot even keep the body still, what to say of the mind! At times the path of meditation seems an unequal battle. Perhaps it is – after all, meditation is learning how to control the mind, and mystics say that cannot be achieved completely without help from some higher power.

That 'higher' power is in reality the inner power, the magnetic shabd or divine love residing within us, our essence. That divine love exerts the same 'pull from within' that brought us to the true master in the first place. There is more to a true teacher than meets the eye. A true master radiates spiritual beauty, humility, and love. The physical form and actions of a true teacher are, as much as any words, a means of imparting the teachings to the disciple. The true teacher is an embodiment of divine love, and that love is also the inner power which attracts and draws us within.

The outlook is unsettled

When we persevere in meditation, over days, weeks, months, and years, we learn gradually how to calm and focus our attention. Not that every day is better than the last. Our circumstances and our actions – our karmas – are rather like the weather. Not all days are sunny and warm, and few days bring us the sort of karma that is easy to deal with and simple to forget about during the hours of meditation. To the extent that we are attached to people, possessions, and events, the ups and downs of life will affect our ability to concentrate on the task of meditation. But, as the master often says, what is easy in life? If we give up at the first sign of difficulty in any project, how can we expect to make progress? Progress builds on repeated failure and repeated effort, as we can see if we watch a baby trying and failing, trying and failing to clutch some object until at last she succeeds. Through regular daily hours of practice, our wilful mind gradually begins to accept that it is going to lose the struggle one day, because with the encouragement of the master we will never give up.

Measuring progress: from here to eternity

Very often a disciple on the spiritual path wants to know whether he or she has made progress and, if so, how much. This is entirely understandable. After all, someone starting out to play a musical instrument or speak a new language can have his or her progress examined and recognised by certificates – first grade, second grade, and so on. Why can't the same be done for meditation?

To some extent it can, at least for the most basic elements of the practice. We can ask ourselves, “Have I succeeded in keeping my body quite still for ten minutes, for twenty minutes, for

an hour, for the whole period of meditation?” The answer may vary day by day, but hopefully we can discern improvement with habitual practice over time. This should encourage us to forget about the body. Eventually our body will remain still during meditation out of habit, not because we are watching the clock.

However, as soon as we try to analyse and measure what is happening with our own mind, things become far less simple. We may ask, “Am I keeping my mind in simran (repetition) or are my thoughts straying?” But time spent thinking about how much of our time is being spent in simran is time not doing simran, so the very act of measuring our progress hinders our progress. It is like planting a seedling and then digging it up every hour to see if the roots are growing, when we know that disturbing the soil prevents proper root growth.

To take another example, a true master possesses extraordinary humility and we may think, “A sign of progress would be that I too am becoming more humble and less judgemental of others.” So we ask ourselves, “Am I becoming more humble?” But if the answer we give is, “Yes, I have indeed become a more humble person,” this is only a sign of pride, not of humility.

In fact, this seeming paradox is true of the higher reaches of ‘outer’ disciplines as well. A renowned musician still practises for hours every day and may never be satisfied with his performance, however much the audience applauds. The scholar who passes with honours every examination up to PhD level finds that the more she studies the less she feels she knows and the more there is left to understand. Since progress towards infinity cannot be measured, mystics often resort to paradoxical statements about ‘progress,’ ranging from, “It is impossible for us to reach the goal ourselves; we can only try to become receptive to grace,”

to “We are already there but don’t realise it.” The truth of such apparently contradictory statements can only be understood through practice.

This is why the masters say again and again, “Don’t analyse, just practise.” Applying oneself to meditation is its own sign of progress. In religious terms we could say that the grace of the Lord, or the spiritual master, is shown in the effort we make in meditation. More effort, more grace; more grace, more effort. Or if we want to put it in non-religious terms: practice makes perfect.

The world isn’t what it was

An encouraging sign, as we persist in meditation practice, may be that our attachment to things and people of this world starts to fade; we find the world less alluring. What once seemed exciting, attractive, and worthwhile starts to appear superficial and unrewarding. Increasingly we realise that if we are going to find permanent peace and happiness it can only be found deep within ourselves, not out here in the constantly changing world. This does not mean that we cease to love or care, nor that we give up on our responsibilities. To the extent that we become less scattered, less obsessed and less possessive about people and things, we will become more helpful to others and more focused in whatever we do.

We all need encouragement

Anyone who has persisted on the path over time will admit that there are ups and downs in his or her relationship with the path. Doubts and discouragement assail everyone from time to time. This is quite natural; an amateur runner hoping at least to complete a city marathon will start the race full of optimism

and energy. Halfway through, when the initial enthusiasm has worn off and it is nothing but hard work and pain, he may well think, “Why am I doing this?” and contemplate giving up. That is when a word of encouragement and a reminder of the goal makes all the difference. The serious professional runner, by contrast, has trained and trained and trained again and thus understands what is happening to her body and mind at every stage of a race. She expects mental and physical highs and lows and knows from experience how to overcome them. In the same way, someone who has devoted time to regular daily meditation over many years comes to recognise the real ups and downs that accompany the practice and with faith and trust in the spiritual teacher keeps going regardless.

Many of us may think from time to time that we are just not much good at meditation and perhaps never will be. Maybe our master has made a mistake in initiating us? Maybe the whole thing is a fairy story? Maybe we would be happier downing a few glasses of wine, taking a long holiday from meditation, or going fishing? Maybe not, when we stop and think it through. ‘Practice,’ after all, is built on ‘failure’ after ‘failure.’ We tend to think failure is something negative, something to be avoided. But this is a misunderstanding. If we watch a child trying for the first time to stand, then to stay upright, then to walk, then to run, we see how repeated failure is not a by-product of effort but, on the contrary, absolutely essential to success. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Before we start learning to run, we have to pass through so many stages. You know that when a child takes birth, it is difficult for the child even to lie down properly. Then he has to learn how to sit, and he has to pass through so many

processes, so many failures, before he learns to stand on his own legs. After that, he learns to walk, and so many times he falls. Then, slowly and slowly, he picks himself up and learns to run, and does not fall. *This whole process is essential* before he can run.

Similarly, all these failures [in trying to still and focus the mind] are part of our ultimate success. They should be a source of strength to us, provided we continue with our ‘failures,’ we continue giving our time to meditation, and do not become disgusted and leave meditation. We should go on making attempt after attempt – that is what it means.

Great Master [Maharaj Sawan Singh] used to say, “If you can’t bring your success to me, bring your failures.” It means, assure me that you have at least been giving your time to meditation. Whether you have achieved any results or not is a different question, but you bring me at least your failures, because that means you have been attempting to meditate, you have been doing your best. And if you haven’t noticed any results, that is entirely for Him to see about. We should do our best. Whether we succeed or fail in meditation is a different thing.¹³

The master is always positive, always encouraging, always supportive, and he leads from the front, by his example. His remedy for any tendency to neglect our meditation is “more meditation.” He says, “We are stronger than we think” and “We can do it.”

Over to you?

Nevertheless, at some point we are probably going to ask: “If the master wants me to still and focus the mind, why doesn’t *he*

make it happen? Supposedly the master is in touch with Truth, is in control of events and not a slave to circumstances in the way that I am. Then let him take me within when he sees fit and let him connect me with that divine melody, with the shabd. I don't really need to do anything myself – and anyway I can't do it!"

It's a thought, but let us think a bit more carefully and clearly about it. The master has initiated me to teach *me* something; to benefit *me*; to *make a real change in me*. He is there to make sure I succeed. And the master will not give up on a disciple. We can be certain that if the master wants to teach me something then, one way or the other, I am going to learn it.

Let's use an example. A child goes to school and starts to learn how to read. The teacher introduces the letters of the alphabet, shows how words are formed from letters. But the child doesn't 'get it'; she knows the individual letters a,b,c, etc. but cannot actually read anything yet. So for homework the teacher gives the child a piece of paper with a few simple sentences and says, "I want you to take this home and read it." The child gets home, looks at the paper and can't make sense of it. She thinks, "I can't do it, I'm probably no good at reading, I'll play instead." But then she thinks, "The teacher is expecting me to read this so it must be important, I need to find out what it says." So she begs her mother, "You can read, you are my mother, just do it for me; tell me what it says, then I can just repeat the words to the teacher. I'll even do something for you to make up for it – I'll tidy my room." What a brilliant idea!

But her mother is wiser than this. She knows that the point of the exercise is not that someone who already knows how to read should understand the words. The purpose is for that particular child, who *cannot* yet read, to learn how to do so, to become able to read for herself.

So the mother, instead of telling the child what the words say, encourages her, gives her small hints, keeps her on task, praises her sincere failures, tells her she can do it if she perseveres, keeps her going in the right direction, and slowly and slowly the child makes out the words and then the sentences until – hurrah! – She ‘gets it’ and understands for herself what the words are saying. And it turns out that it’s not important at all what the words say. What’s important is that by means of these particular words she learns to *read*, and once we can read, well, as we know, a whole new world opens up for us; everything changes.

This example might help us to understand why the same inner spiritual path can be taught by a true teacher using different words and different concepts according to time, place, and audience. It also explains why there’s no short cut, no substitute for meditation. Meditation is a learning process for *me*, for the *disciple*. It is meant to benefit *me*, to transform *my* way of knowing. Therefore, I have to engage with the process myself. However arduous it is, however inadequate I feel, however long it may take, I cannot delegate that learning process to the master or to anyone else – and nothing can take the place of meditation.

The essential truths

When we study the teachings through words on a page, we are learning the “a,b,c” of Sant Mat. We may understand that the path is a path of meditation, even if we don’t fully appreciate what meditation means. When we encounter a true teacher we may come to know from that master’s demeanour, words and character that the master really does have something to give us that is more valuable than the most precious diamond – and we may sense that this is what we really want. Initiation then

gives us our spiritual homework – at least two and a half hours meditation every day, according to the instructions given at the time of initiation.

However, it is only through experience, through the practice of meditation, that we will learn to cope with the inevitable ups and downs in our relationship with the path. It is only by following the vegetarian diet, avoiding drugs and alcohol and living a clean moral life that we gradually come to understand how this way of life benefits us and makes meditation possible. It is only when we are engaging in regular daily meditation practice despite our busy lives or challenging circumstances that we appreciate the practical value of reading spiritual literature and listening to satsangs. And at the same time we come to understand that these outer activities, helpful as they may be, can never be a substitute for meditation.

A true teacher can guide and support a disciple on the inner path, but we have to do our part. If we wish to follow the guidance of a true teacher we should think carefully about the commitment involved and ask ourselves whether we are prepared to put in the effort required.

Clear thinking about the path

A true master encourages us to think clearly about our situation, identify the action needed and then take that action. At the start of this brief outline of Sant Mat it was said firstly that a true teacher leads us to the understanding of the truth – of how things really are, secondly that this is a truth which cannot be expressed in words but only realised through experience, and finally that this inner experience is gained through meditation, which requires sustained effort and determination.

These statements embody the underlying logic of the inner path. Logical arguments are built on axioms or self-evident truths. It is self-evident, for example, that as human beings we desire happiness rather than suffering. It is equally self-evident that we cannot secure permanent happiness for ourselves or for anyone else if that happiness relies on the fulfilment of worldly desires, needs and ambitions. This is because the physical world is an arena of instability and change. Moment by moment everything alters. We can do our best to plan for the future but the truth is we never know what it holds. And we know, whether or not we admit it to ourselves, that everything we hold dear in life – our relatives, possessions, friends, our own body – will be left behind at death.

What goes around comes around

An axiom of the masters is that our existence is governed by the law of karma, of action and reaction: the principle of “As you sow, so shall you reap.” We can see that the physical world runs on cause and effect. If I plant a flower seed and the conditions are right, it will grow and blossom. If I don’t plant it or the conditions are wrong, it will not. But in the sphere of human life things are more complicated. Because we cannot see clearly why things happen as they do, events can seem to be random or unjust. An old ditty runs:

The rain it falleth every day
Upon the just and unjust fellow,
But more upon the just, because
The unjust has the just’s umbrella!

The karmic consequences of good and bad deeds are seldom seen within the span of a human lifetime. Moreover a human being can cause far more suffering – or indeed good – in one lifetime than can be paid back in a single future life. The masters say that every action, good or bad, has its consequence; good and bad deeds don't cancel each other out.

We can prolong our involvement in the chain of karmic cause and effect by reacting unthinkingly to events and thus making poor choices. Or we can think and reflect, make wise choices and resolve to turn our attention within, to the still point at the centre of the turning wheel of existence, to become eternally free of uncertainty and suffering.

What is the proof that happiness lies within?

For most people, it is not self-evident that the happiness we seek can be found within, through meditation. This is where the encounter with a living master is decisive. Before we meet a true living master, we cannot imagine such a being, however many books we may read. The qualities and presence of a true master are unique. No ordinary human actor, however gifted, could play the part of a true teacher who, while fully human, combines utter majesty with genuine humility, kindness and good humour and whose every word and action is an expression of the deepest love. When we meet a true master, we see with our own eyes the radiant human embodiment of inner peace and divine love. It is by encountering a living master that it becomes evident to us that true and lasting love, peace and contentment really can be found within.

A LOGICAL CONCLUSION

Since the goal we seek can only be found within, it follows that we should conduct our search in that direction. To go within, we need the guidance of a true teacher. As stated at the outset, a true master shows us the practical steps needed to overcome our deep-rooted delusions and experience truth for ourselves. That truth lies hidden within every human being. We have received the rare privilege of a human birth. With the help of a true teacher we can seek for that truth and find it within. The great medieval saint Kabir said:

Like oil in the sesame seed,
Fire in the flint,
Within you is your Beloved;
Wake up and realize him
If you can.
As the pupil is in the eye,
So is the Creator in the body;
The foolish know it not
And go searching for him outside.
He for whom you have searched
The four corners of the earth,
He is within; you fail to see him
Because he lives behind the veil
Of illusion.¹⁴

ENDNOTES

1. For more on the qualities of a true master, see Julian Johnson *The Path of the Masters* Ch. 3 “The Masters and their Duties.”
2. *Bible* Matthew 6:22
3. *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol. III, Q.490
4. *The Science of the Soul* Part IV. “A Spiritual Bouquet” no.4
5. *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol. II, Q.36
6. *Light on St. John* Discourse on John 10, p.156
7. *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol. II, Q.383
8. *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol I, Q.68
9. *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol. III, Q.225
10. *The Science of the Soul* p.23
11. *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol III, Q.225
12. *Die to Live* Q.348
13. *Die to Live* Q.332
14. Translated in Maharaj Charan Singh *The Path* p.26

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