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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 2 Surrender to the Master
- 4 Spiritual Building
- 9 Is There Someone to Love?
- 10 A Chinese Story
- 15 What Will I Be Thinking?
- 17 An Experiment
- 21 Why Me?
- 26 A Father's Advice
- 27 The Purpose of Life
- 29 Regularity and Punctuality
- 32 The Mystery of God
- 36 Something to Think About
- 37 You Tell Me Nothing New
- 38 The Cloud of Unknowing
- 39 Meditation
- 41 A Mother's Advice
- 44 The Day Is Short
- 48 Book Review

Spiritual Link

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Surrender to the Master

The Master's love for the disciple who surrenders himself completely is immense. He overlooks all his faults, provided the surrender is genuine.

*Many may be the tales about me that people carry,
The Master turns a deaf ear to them all.
He has turned a deaf ear to such tales,
Ever since I have surrendered myself to him.
Ignoring all my faults and sins,
He has made me his own.
I commit acts of injustice and am
Carried away by lust and anger.
Howsoever wicked the son may be,
He is, nevertheless, dear to his father.
Lustful, greedy and depraved.
Also dishonest and low-bred am I.
And yet, considering my surrender,
He has exalted me to eminence.
Such indeed, O Paltu, is his gracious
Treatment towards me.
Many may be the tales about me that people carry;
My Master turns a deaf ear to them all.*

Saint Paltu



Spiritual Building

The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Bible, *Matthew 13:31-32*

We are like this man. We have taken the path, which in the beginning does not appear to be very significant and is not recognized as valuable in the eyes of men. Indeed, we ourselves are unable to comprehend its true worth. But it is the potential that we do not see. It is the potential that we do not comprehend, just like the tiny mustard seed which is as insignificant as dust. But the man in the parable took this minute seed and planted it in his field. He knew what to do to make it grow. He prepared the soil, he planted the seed, he watered it, he protected it from foraging animals until it was strong enough on its own, and then it grew into a magnificent tree. Now we have to do the same. We must take our initiation and provide a suitable field to grow the potential of this gift, and the potential is that we can all become as our Master. The present Master has said that we can each achieve this. We have all the necessary potential.

This gift is subtle, though it may appear inconsequential and may even be easy to forget its importance. But we must provide the circumstances whereby this gift can grow.

It is only through that understanding and acceptance, only through our continual efforts to comply with the four principles, that our foundation will be strong enough to stand up to the forces that will

try to prevail against us and hinder our progress. We all know what happens to a structure if the foundations are inadequate.

So once we have a foundation that is adequate for our structure, what next?

We start to lay the bricks, one after the other. We must lay at least seven bricks every week of our lives because we undertook to do this at initiation – one brick each day. One brick is our two and a half hours of meditation. These are the building blocks of our journey on the path. We have to place the first layer of bricks on a good mortar bed on top of the concrete foundations. The bricks are the substance of the building and they will now form the superstructure. Each brick on its own is relatively insignificant in size, but all are equally essential within the structure. Seven meditation periods of two and a half hours should be properly attended to each week. Any meditation done with all the love, devotion and attention that one can muster, no matter how dry and boring the result, is acceptable to the Master. The Great Master used to say, if you cannot bring me your successes then bring me your failures. The clear message here is to bring the Master something.

The Master guides us as to how we should do this meditation. The first part is repeating the five holy names whilst holding the attention at the eye centre and the second part is listening to or for the Shabd. He answers our questions about it in the utmost detail so that we may keep straight and true in our endeavours. This is the stringline for laying our bricks. Before a bricklayer places any bricks, he sets up a stringline to line and level so that his courses run straight and true. Then each brick is individually laid on a bed of fresh mortar, seated home with a tap of the trowel, and then the joints are cleaned up.

The mortar forms the matrix within which the essential structure and tone of the building is created. The structure will fail if the mortar

is defective. If we look upon the mortar bed and surround for each of our meditation periods as the other three vows and our worldly duties, then we can use this imagery to see how the four vows crystallize together to form the structure. So we must continue to keep to the vows in our everyday life and attend to our worldly duties. In this way, we ensure that each day's meditation fits properly into the overall structure of our life. Consolidated, balanced progress is what we are after.

The mortar is also the actions we take to try to ensure that our meditation can receive our best efforts and is of the best quality. For example, the Masters suggest that we get to bed at a regular time which allows us to have adequate sleep. They advise us not to eat too much, not to take part in stimulating activities before going to bed, to read some of the Sant Mat books each day, to give time to simran whenever our mind is free. These important practical tips have a significant effect on the following meditation period. If we are careless about these things, then we undermine our ability to make maximum progress. It is a waste of time for bricks to be laid that are crooked or laid on a weak mortar bed. They will have to be removed and placed again.

Equally, we need to be constant and regular in our practice. If the bricklayer lays the mortar bed and then is distracted or goes to do something else, the mortar will go off and the bricks will not bed. The old mortar has to be removed and is wasted, and he then has to start again with fresh mortar. Steady routine is what is required.

The first few courses of bricks above the foundation are placed to bring the walls above ground level. When the bricks are above ground level they are all laid 'fair faced', with the joints fully finished. The appearance must be first class. When we start on the path the first few years are spent adjusting our lives, trying to get the quantity of

meditation embedded into our lives. At first, the quality may not be so good. We must start as soon as possible to improve the quality of our meditation so that we are working 'fair faced' to provide a quality job for our Master. He supervises and inspects our work continually and it will be this work that determines when and how we are paid – in grace. This we easily forget!

Each meditation each day is important, no matter what we think. It is like a bricklayer who needs and orders 15,000 bricks to build his house. The last brick is the same as the first. It is of equal size and weight and it is laid in the same way to the same stringline in the same mortar surround. It just happens to be in a different place. Equally, the building is not complete if but one of the 15,000 bricks is missing. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that in a building, one needs bricks at the top and bricks at the bottom. Which brick is the most important? They are all equally important and the building will not be complete without all of them. We must be clear about this so that we value properly each and every meditation period.

Equally, making our best efforts must include all the daily supporting routines and actions which go to improve our meditation when we actually sit down to do it. The meditation will never improve if each day we are undoing what we have achieved in the previous meditation. If a bricklayer just places bricks one on top of the other without the mortar matrix then he ends up with a neat stack of bricks, but he does not end up with a load-bearing structure.

Maharaj Charan Singh advises in *Die to Live*:

You have to give it [meditation] practical shape in your daily routine, in your daily dealings with people.

And again in *Quest for Light*:

*Please remember that great things are not accomplished quickly.
They require time and effort to achieve them.*

So the process that we are undertaking is initially to fit our meditation firmly into our lives, then develop this until our meditation, the atmosphere that it brings and the attitude that it creates, all merge into our everyday life so that it is seamless, and our spiritual duty is as much a part of our daily life as our worldly duties. Satsangis should avoid the *de minimus* attitude of doing the minimum to comply. In that way, meditation time and attendance at satsangs will not be fresh but will become a stale ritual that is remote and separate from our everyday life. We are not going to satsang on Sunday just to forget the path for the rest of the week. It is up to us to keep the path and our efforts fresh and vibrant.

Maharaj Charan Singh reassures us in *Die to Live*:

Just change your way of life according to the teachings and attend to meditation. That is all that is required. From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come.



Is There Someone to Love?

In this extract from a discourse, Maharaj Charan Singh directs the seeker after truth to follow a Master.

We grow to love the faces and objects of the world because we see them and interact with them. We love our parents because they gave birth to us, our children because we gave them birth, our wife because she is the mother of our children, and our friends because we have associated with them since childhood. We love our wealth because we have acquired it with our sweat and blood, and our properties because we have inherited them. We love our community and religion because we have been part of them since birth.

How can we engender love for the Lord when we have only heard stories about him, when we have never even seen him and know nothing of his face or features? Is there someone whom we can love who will instil this love in us, who will create in us love and devotion for the Lord?... We must seek a devotee and lover of the Lord, a true Master, who is connected by an all-consuming love to the Supreme Being. We must keep his company and associate with him so that through him our thoughts and love may also be attuned to love and devotion for the Lord

Waves rise from the surface of the ocean for a matter of minutes and then merge back into it. The Masters, the lovers of the Lord, are related to the Supreme Being in a similar way. Waves never become separate from the ocean; however high they rise, they also remain part of the ocean. In the same way, the Masters are waves of the ocean of the true Name.

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

A Chinese Story

A story from the Chinese says that at one time in his life the sage Lieh Tzu learned archery. When eventually he was able to hit the target, he asked Kuan Yin Tzu to comment on his shooting. Kuan Yin Tzu was a renowned teacher and he gave the question his careful attention.

At length he asked: “Do you know why you hit the target?”

“No, I do not,” was the reply.

“Then you are not good enough yet,” answered Kuan Yin Tzu.

So Lieh Tzu went away and practised for three more years after which time he again presented himself. Kuan Yin Tzu asked the same question as before:

“Do you know why you hit the target?”

Lieh Tzu reflected a moment. “Yes”, he said.

“In that case,” said Kuan Yin Tzu, “all is well. Hold fast to that knowledge and do not let it slip.”

In Sant Mat terms, once we are initiated, the first target is the eye centre. How do we ensure that we hit the target? It took Lieh Tzu three years to work out what his formula for success was. After all, if you don't know how it's done, it's not within your control and you can't repeat the process at will. We're more fortunate than Lieh Tzu. We're given our formula, the exact method of our spiritual practice. All we have to do is to persuade our mind to take to it! That is the knowledge to hold fast to. It is to implicitly follow the Master's instructions.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

You ask for the method I worked out for myself during my own early experiences. In regard to that, I may say that I never

worked out any method for myself. I took instructions from my own Guru and he gave me the exact method. That method is the same as all saints use, which is simply the concentrated attention held firmly at the given centre. What else can we say?

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

At the time of initiation we are told to practise meditation daily, gradually building up the time to a two and a half hour period. That is the main instruction. The other vows – vegetarianism, teetotalism and moral living – of course we must adopt before being initiated.

Then the Master advises us that to support our way of life we should try to control our mind's attention during the day. Attending satsang and, if we get the opportunity, carrying out seva, is part of this. The other part is occupying the mind in simran whenever it is free. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

If simran had not been so important, Saints wouldn't have impressed upon us the necessity for it. It is important.

Die to Live

When an archer places his arrow against the bow string, draws it taut and takes aim, very steady hands are needed, concentrated focus and a history of practice and more practice to make the arrow fly to its mark.

Baba Ji sometimes tells us that we should aim for this amount of focus in our daily lives. If we let our attention run out for seventeen hours of the twenty-four and then expect to collect it in a mere two hours of meditation, we won't succeed. That's where simran in the day comes in.

Sometimes we feel in the mood for meditation; sometimes we don't. If, like Lieh Tzu, we ask ourselves why some days are positive and some negative, the answer may lie in how far we were able to control the focus of the mind in the last twenty-four hours. Were we carried away on waves of reaction to things others did and said? And, if so, why were we carried away? Why did we react so quickly? Was it that the simran wasn't there to protect us?

When Baba Ji advises in Question and Answer sessions that we should "not react" in adverse situations, it may appear to be a minor piece of advice aimed at smoothing our path through life. But it is by no means minor. "Not reacting" is the spiritual equivalent of the steadiness of the archer's arm. If his arm is trembling, the arrow won't fly straight. If our mind has tremors, it will start off a whole chain of unwanted effects that will spoil our desire to meditate. Who knows how the archer trains his body to keep steady? It's a secret known only to him. But how we do it in Sant Mat is through the process of simran as we go about our daily activities. That's what will make it possible for us to resist the inclination to react and it will keep us ready for meditation.

Everyone is subject to an individual 'weather system' (our karmic path) as we pass through life. It's made up of chilly winds that make us shiver but also sunny hours when we stand firm, able to raise the bow and look at the target.

It's sometimes worth noting exactly what these cold winds are and, conversely, the things that help us to stand firm. Simran will always be our best ally but there can be other factors. For instance, when we really do our duty by others in a loving spirit, we may find the simran flowing more easily. On the downside, we will find out through experience which situations leave us distracted. If there are certain things that do bring us down and which cannot be changed, we can

also find out whether it is possible to remedy that with simran and an attitude shift.

If we constantly remember the Master's instructions and are able to adjust to the weather of life rather as an archer might note the wind direction and fix his aim, then in the words of Kuan Yin Tzu, "All is well." We can "hold fast to that knowledge and ... not let it slip."



All these trials that come to us in life, if taken in the proper spirit, as a satsangi should take them, will develop strength of character and make one throw himself absolutely at the feet of the Satguru within. On the other hand, they may also discourage us and make us unhappy, which reveals to us our own weakness.

I am sorry I do not appreciate your attitude of being fed up with life and having no interest in it. Life was given to us for a definite purpose and that, as a satsangi, you know well. It was given to us in order that, by complete surrender to the Satguru and daily spiritual exercises, we might be joined to Shabd and rise above this valley of tears. That is a privilege which nobody can take from you unless you yourself, in a fit of petulance or despondency, give it up or cease to make use of it. Even then, no satsangi's life is hopeless. But the road is much easier for us if we do our bit.

You have to take care of your worldly duties and give as much time to bhajan and simran as you possibly can, and then leave the other matters to the Satguru. When one has thus surrendered himself to the Satguru, why should he worry? For by heeding his advice, the adverse karmas which stand in the way will also be mitigated to a great extent, and their force will be lessened.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



Maharaj Charan Singh

What Will I Be Thinking?

Saints tell us that we were sent into this creation a very long time ago. As our own memories of the event are absent, and this ancient moment might give us cause to wonder, it is perhaps more useful to ask the question, “Why am I here at this very moment? What is the reason for the lifetime that I am currently undergoing?”

Saints teach us that it is only our desires and attachments that bring us back into this world of forms. If they didn't exist, then we couldn't exist in this world. They are the raw material of the workings of karma, and the very mechanisms that bring people into this world and take them out again. It was also the condition of our consciousness at the moment of death in our last life that was the principal factor in forming our current destiny. So we might ask the question of ourselves, “When I departed my last life, what was I thinking?”

We might look at the karmic web of our current existence, and all the desires and attachments that have driven us down various pathways of grief or happiness. We might observe how much disorder there is in our own consciousness at this very moment, and certainly wonder, “What was I thinking?” It is an idle fantasy for which we have no answer. But this bit of speculation does lead to the more pertinent question, “When I depart the world this time, what will I be thinking?”

Our thinking at the time of our final departure from this body is being shaped by our thinking today. If the mind is spending most of its time pursuing material objectives and forming attachments to them, then it stands to reason that the mind will be swamped by thoughts of these things at the time of death. Perhaps we may think that there could be an instant change at the time of death? The saints say that

unfortunately it doesn't work that way. The transformation of the mind needs to be gradual and incremental. And meditation is the primary activity that will bring about any lasting change. A change that replaces material desire with spiritual desire.

So the answer to the question "What will I be thinking when I depart this world" is a straightforward one. What I think and do today, next week, and next year will determine what I will be thinking, and whether or not it will be necessary for me to be reborn into this world again to finish off what I have neglected to do now. However, it is not an easy question to have to ask of oneself, but it is essential to ask it. Are we mindful of time passing, and how we are spending that time? How are we using this finite consciousness available to us? Whether it is invested wisely or foolishly? Mind is simply the perennial procrastinator, and needs reminding of the short and transient nature of life. It needs reminding that at the end of life, the soul and mind will go to what the heart desires.

So the question is indeed pertinent, "When I breathe my last breath, what will I be thinking?"



Until we join ourselves to the Shabd, we are subject to egotism – and as long as we are in ego, there will be bondage and pain. As long as we say, "I am doing it," there will be bondage. If we do good, the bonds that tie us are pleasant; if we do bad, the bonds that tie us are unpleasant. It's up to us whether we go on sitting here within the nine doors, or we get instruction from someone, go beyond the nine doors, and attach ourselves to Nam.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*

An Experiment

Introduction

The mind is as sly as a fox. It deceives us in the most unimaginable ways. It has only five weapons, any of which it uses most effectively in a given situation. These are: lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego. The ego is really the driving force for the others. Just as all planets revolve around the sun in our solar system, lust, anger, greed and attachment revolve around ego. Left to its ways, the mind will continue to torment the soul with the treacherous use of all its powerful weapons.

The soul, on the other hand, is a particle of the greatest positive power that can ever exist. As a result of the biggest misfortune that can befall anyone, this soul has become a prisoner of the negative power, the mind. It yearns to be free and reunite with its own source.

Something needs to be done to save the soul and to facilitate its deliverance by opposing every attack of the mind on the soul, by countering and striking out against every blow that it tries to give to the soul.

The following experiment aims to achieve this end. It is an effort to save the soul, to empower it to break away from the chains of slavery that bind it to the mind and return it to its true home in all its glory.

Aim

To counter and overcome the deception of the mind, and thus reunite the soul with its origin.

Principle

There are two main principles that will be active throughout the experiment. These are:

1. It is the prime duty of the mind to keep the soul away from its true home. The mind will give a tough fight and leave no stone unturned to accomplish its duty. It will always make use of at least one of its five weapons to achieve this task. Recognition of the mind's trick and its weapon will contribute immensely toward the successful completion of this experiment.

2. The Satguru's grace coupled with our most sincere efforts at our meditation is the only and the most effective antidote that will be able to defy the mind and overcome it. There is no other way.

Apparatus

1. Satguru's grace: it is always assured and available in ample amounts to every initiate.

2. Deep love, complete faith and total surrender to the Satguru: the outpourings of the soul must be painstakingly collected and preserved in the heart and left to react with the Satguru's grace. After a while these outpourings transform into love, faith and surrender.

3. Sincere desire to rescue the soul and a firm resolve to crush the mind and all its horrible intentions. We get this resolve when we realize the amount of suffering we as souls have undergone while at the beck and call of our own minds.

An Important Consideration

Whenever any undesirable situation arises, we react to it in some way. Most often the result is that we lose our peace of mind over it, and find it difficult to concentrate on our meditation, at least for that particular day. It is interesting to observe that it was not the situation itself, nor the people in it that took us away from our meditation. It was really the mind that succeeded in its duty to keep us away from Shabd by offering us apparently free use of lust, anger, greed or attachment to satisfy our ego. As soon as we pick up any of these weapons to fight the

situation, we already lose the real battle – the battle with the mind. The mind's trick on us has worked – out go all thoughts of our Satguru and meditating on his Nam. And we are repeatedly told – anything that takes us away from our meditation is wrong.

Procedure

The following steps may be taken when dealing with our daily struggles, disappointments and difficulties:

1. When a troublesome situation arises we close our eyes (if possible, not necessary though) and do our simran for a while and completely dissociate from the trouble at hand.
2. We go on to realize how unimportant it is compared to our deep love for the Lord.
3. We then tell ourselves that whatever happens, the situation or its outcome is not going to interfere with that day's meditation scheduled at a particular time.
4. Then we pray to our Satguru to help us face the situation with a clear and calm mind. He will give us courage to change whatever we can, the serenity to accept with gratitude whatever we can't change and also the wisdom to know the difference.

Observation

Help will come. It always comes. The mind has to lose. And we, with the grace of the Master, will win.

Inference

Very often the trouble or undesirable situation is never as big as our mind likes us to believe. Therein lies its trick. We get carried away with what our mind tricks us to believe, and have recourse to using its ever ready weapons of deception. We must always choose to use the Satguru's weapon – simran – over the five weapons of the mind, or we are sure to be led astray.

Conclusion

As we practise and master this technique, a time may come when we may even look forward to a difficulty, and thank even our enemies for giving us an opportunity to defeat our mind and taste the joy of victory over it again and again!



Saints' foremost argument is, "Come with us and see". Few are ready for it. So the Saints come down to the intellectual plane of men and talk to them in their terms. By their superior intellect they give people's belief a little shake-up and make them think afresh. Slowly and slowly they bring them up to the point of experimentation. They give initiation, and the experiment begins.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Most of us seek the Truth, but it is not possible to find Truth outside. You must seek it within yourself and, when you have realized it within yourself, you will see it everywhere. You have been instructed in this Science and explained the technique of "going in" and, after you practise the technique diligently, you will make spiritual progress and become indifferent to the squabbles of the world.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

Why Me?

How many times in our life have we asked the question: “Master, why me? Why is this happening to me?” This could be anything from a death in the family to failing an exam. We start to feel sorry for ourselves and then lose our balance. This in turn makes us restless, and in some instances may even make us question the spiritual path we are on. We know there is a purpose for everything that happens to us in this world. However, from our limited viewpoint, life’s events may sometimes appear ‘unfair’.

So why are we here, going through the ups and downs of life? The answer is our karma. Whatever we are going through in this birth is a result of our past actions in previous lives. We are merely reaping now what we have sown in the past. It can be difficult at times. When we yearn for our beloved and need his help to deal with our worldly problems and it seems that he isn’t there. Yet, this is the time when he is nearest to us. He is so close. Due to our karmas we are unable to be receptive to him. He hears our cries and helps us in more ways than we know.

How do I know that my Beloved is here with me? Why is he so quiet when I need him? The silence is where it all happens. He is the helmsman of our lives and nothing can happen without his will. We need to remember this fact constantly.

The Lord is everywhere and is fully aware of our predicament. He is all merciful by nature and will do what he thinks is best. Maharaj Sawan Singh, in *The Dawn of Light*, reiterates the fact that the Master is in charge of the events of our life:

Take for granted that all that has happened is happening or will happen, is with his will. So whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we should remain contented. If he sends us misery, we should accept it with pleasure, and if he keeps us happy we should take it as his children. So do not consider that your life is not a bed of roses. Take it as his gift and be happy in it.

We are at our spiritual peak when things are going against us in this world. This is when the yearning for the beloved becomes unbearable, when our heart is filled with the pang of separation, the pang of loneliness. This is all his grace, as it is at these times that we seek him within us and start slowly to detach ourselves from this world.

We are going through the karma we have to go through. We need to remember that he knows our tolerance level. We are in no position to analyze how he is handling our karmic account. Our main duty is to cultivate and strengthen our love for the Beloved through meditation.

Let's look at a simple example. When a mother gives her child some medicine, doesn't she feel the pain of her child crying out because the child doesn't want to take it? Yet, ultimately she knows that the child has to take the medicine so that she can get better. Similarly, the Master makes us go through our karma but at the same time is fully aware of our pain, and is ever present to give us the strength to carry us through our karma.

Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

The Lord is within us. He wants to wash away our karma, to make us pure and fit to get into his presence. Our only course amidst sufferings of any kind is first to bear them patiently with courage and fortitude and, secondly, to pray to the Lord for

forgiveness. The Lord hears our prayers and showers concessions which we cannot see unless we go in.

The Master is humility personified. Even though he does so much for us, both on physical and spiritual planes, he never admits he is doing anything. Recently, Baba Ji said that if we really knew what the Lord did for us and what he protects us from, we would all bow our heads in shame. We underestimate the supreme power of the Master. Just because the physical form of the Master is not with us does not mean that he is not there. Without doubt when we are with him physically it makes us happy and changes our mood. However, we should not limit the Master to the physical. He is everywhere. We should not limit the limitless. He is constantly guiding us in everything we do.

We spend the majority of our time thinking about past events and pondering what might have happened if we had done this or that. Then we go on to analyze our mistakes and start to worry and regret the past. However, if we look at our actions, can worrying about the past or even the future change anything? No! He is in charge of our karma and can do what he pleases. The Master is all love and is ever merciful when he sees our efforts. We need to trust him and turn into “silent observers” of our destiny.

What is in our hands? Can we really change what marks we are going to get in our exam or who we will marry or even how much money we will make while in this human body? No. We need to leave all these transient things to a higher, all-knowing power and do the work we were given this human life to do – meditation.

If we take the saints’ teachings to heart we should stop worrying. However, as most of us know, we worry about things even though we ‘know’ that our Master is in charge. It’s as though it’s part and parcel

of our nature as human beings. The solution to this is simran, the repetition of the five holy names, given to us by our beloved at the time of initiation. We need to channel our thoughts into these names rather than on things which are beyond our control.

The present Master has continually emphasized the need for us to let go of our problems. But we find that sometimes we lack the faith in our beloved, so we don't. We need to understand that the Master always has our best interests at heart. By worrying, nothing will change. We will just get frustrated and be unable to do our meditation.

Recently at a meeting, Baba Ji emphatically said that meditation acts as our life support system. He stressed the importance of meditation in everything we do. The more we do our duty to him the more we will realize that he is doing everything for us and that we are in effect just going through the motions of life.

We are all going to our eternal home – each and every one of us. It is just a matter of time before we merge back into our source. So why don't we live in his will and let our Master take care of our destiny for us?

Who is really happy in life? We tend to get so easily bogged down with problems that we forget that this is all an act. We are acting a part in a play where the director is our Master. We are all puppets, with the Master pulling the strings. We need to remember that nothing is in our hands. The Lord is the doer. Let us do our real work in this world – practising our devotion to our beloved through meditation, and let our beloved look after our worldly affairs. This will give us peace of mind and help us to bear life's ups and downs without losing our balance. If we follow his guidance, instead of saying "Why me, Lord?" we may one day come to say, "Why not me!"

Satsangis should cheerfully and patiently go through the results of their karmas, following the Satguru's instructions and relying on

his mercy. He minimizes most of our troubles. We see only what we have to pass through but not what we have been spared.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Master is always with you and watching you and helping you in every action. Go on increasing your love and faith in him by regularly attending to the spiritual exercises. He himself will look after our worldly affairs.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



If we work at the Nam practice, we will experience happiness from it. Let go of words and idle talk; catch hold of Nam and do the practice! It's a fact that listening to the saints gives us momentary faith, but the moment there's a little suffering or pain, we waver in our resolve. If we apply ourselves, however, we will experience the sweetness. What we need is to experience the bliss of Nam.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*

A Father's Advice

The following story is told by Idries Shah in *Tales of the Dervishes* about a farmer who left his lazy sons some land, telling them that it contained his treasure. After he died, they started to dig over the fields looking for treasure.

But they found no gold at all. Realizing that in his generosity their father must have given his gold away during his lifetime, they abandoned the search. Finally, it occurred to them that, since the land had been prepared, they might as well now sow a crop. They planted wheat, which produced an abundant yield. They sold this crop and prospered that year.

After the harvest was in, the sons thought again about the bare possibility that they might have missed the buried gold, so they again dug up their fields, with the same result.

After several years they became accustomed to labour, and to the cycle of the seasons, something which they had not understood before. Now they understood the reason for their father's method of training them, and they became honest and contented farmers. Ultimately they found themselves possessed of sufficient wealth no longer to wonder about the hidden hoard.

Thus it is with the teaching of the understanding of human destiny and the meaning of life. The teacher, faced with impatience, confusion and covetousness on the part of the students, must direct them to an activity which is known by him to be constructive and beneficial to them, but whose true function and aim is often hidden from them by their own rawness.



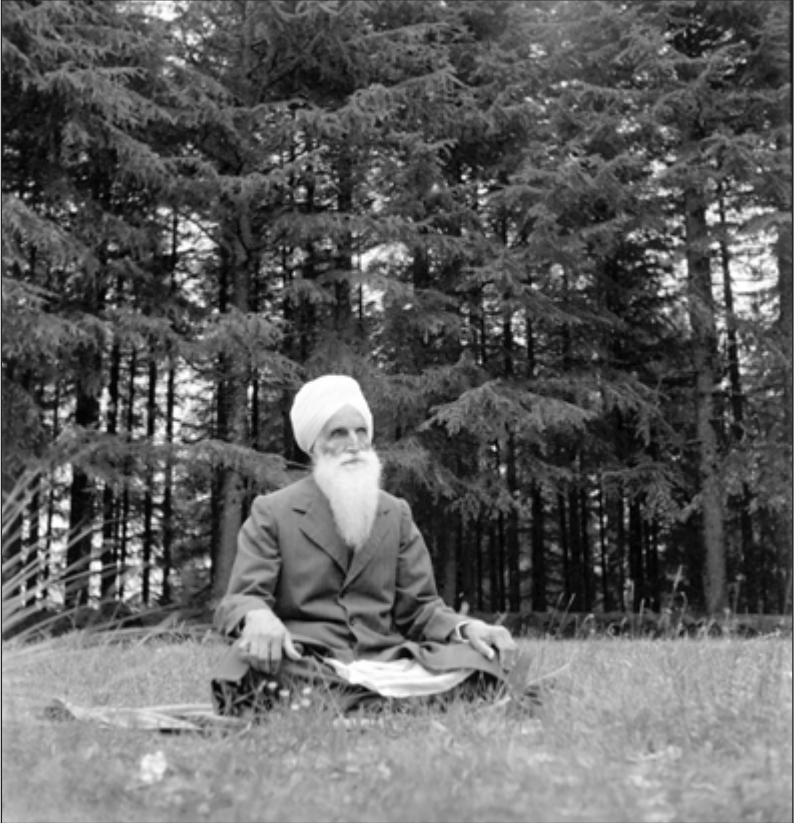
The Purpose of Life

In Light on St Matthew, Maharaj Charan Singh explains the parable of the talents that Christ told his disciples (Bible, Matthew 25: 14-30). Maharaj Ji points out that it is essential that we use the number of breaths allocated to us in this life precisely in the way the Saints recommend.

Christ says that the Lord gives every human being in this world a capital amount, the number of breaths which we are allotted, and expects us to make proper use of this in our life. He expects us not only to make use of these breaths merely to live in this world but to add to this capital by doing something else. And that is to attempt to achieve the goal of God-realization, which is the purpose of human life.

After our death the Lord enquires what we have done with the capital amount with which he sent us into the world. Those who made a 'profit' please the Lord and he takes them unto himself. Others who did not make the right use of the breaths he gave them, did not make any profit. They just ate, drank and enjoyed life in this world and died. Such people do not please the Lord and as a punishment he not only takes away from them the privilege of the human birth he gave them, but throws them into the darkness of transmigration.

Christ means that we should be like the wise servants of the Lord and make right use of the capital with which he sent us into this world. That is, to gather the spiritual wealth, clear all our burdens, live the teachings of the saints, follow them in obedience, and by so doing, attach ourselves to the divine melody within. Then we will be accepted by the Master and the Lord at the time of our death and go back to our real home.



Maharaj Sawan Singh

Regularity and Punctuality

Q. In the books, it is often said that we should adjust our life to attend to our meditation regularly and punctually. Could you please speak about the benefits of regularity and punctuality?

A. Well brother, there is hardly anything to say. You know the advantage of regularity and punctuality. Now when lunch time comes, whether we are hungry or not we quietly go to the dining table, because we have formed the habit of eating at that particular time.

Similarly, we have formed a habit of meditation. If you say, “When I feel the urge I will meditate,” you will perhaps never meditate. If you think, “When I feel the right atmosphere, then I will meditate. I will sit in the morning, I will sit at noon, I will sit in the evening,” you will always go on giving excuses to yourself; you will never attend to meditation.

Just as you have made a habit of going to the office at a particular time, of going for a walk at a particular time, of going to the dining table at a particular time, similarly you should make a habit of going at a particular time for meditation. Then your mind slowly and slowly is disciplined to attend to meditation. That is why so much emphasis is laid on regularity and punctuality.

If you say, “All right, today I don’t feel like meditating; I’ll sit tomorrow,” then tomorrow again you’ll have some other excuse, and the day after tomorrow again you’ll have another excuse. Then there will be gaps and gaps and gaps of time, and you’ll think, “Oh, I have absolutely forgotten for months and months to sit in meditation.” But if you force your mind to meditate and say, “Even if I can’t give the proper time to meditation, let me give at least half the time, even if I’m busy,” then you’ll get regularity.

And punctuality is also important because we have associations with timing. If you have selected a particular time for meditation – for example, 3.30 or 4.30 a.m. – you know that you have to get up punctually in the morning, and you will also be punctual in going to sleep at night. You will adjust your time in such a way that you get six or seven hours of sleep so that you can get up in the morning. Otherwise you know that you will miss your morning meditation. To this extent punctuality is essential. It should become a habit with us.

Unless we discipline our mind this much, our mind will always find excuses not to sit in meditation. We are regular in our other daily activities – “I have a time to go to the office; I have a time to go to lunch; I have a time to have a cup of coffee; I have a time to walk in the evening, I have a time to go to sleep” – then why not also have a time for meditation? It should become part of our life, a part of our daily routine.

If you discipline your mind every day by attending to meditation punctually, then you won't miss meditation, and if you do miss it, then you'll feel miserable that day. You'll feel that something is lacking, and you will try to find some other time for meditation to make up for the lost morning time. Thus regularity and punctuality are both essential, if we can manage it.

Even having a particular place to sit makes a lot of difference in our meditation. Now, a bed is associated with sleep. If you want to read in bed, the moment you are in bed you will fall asleep, because you have an association of the bed with sleep. If you sit at a writing table, you automatically feel like writing a letter to somebody, because you associate that table with writing letters. If you sit on a comfortable chair, you will feel like relaxing; you associate relaxation with that chair. So also, if you find a particular place for meditation, then you

will have an association with that place for meditation, and that place will remind you to attend to meditation.

These things are just to induce us to attend to meditation – nothing else. Otherwise, even if you keep to meditation without regularity, it is all right. If you can keep to meditation without having a particular place for meditation, it is all right. These are just inducements to the mind not to run away from meditation.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*



When a person escapes from the path of the mind, what is his condition? Like a child in his mother's lap – she's the one who has all the cares: loving him, bathing him, playing with him. In the same way, when we come to the path of Nam, then Nam takes over all our cares and we are left carefree.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*

The Mystery of God

Sant Mat writings include many different topics – the soul, the Shabd, the Master, the vows, meditation, and the disciple's way of life. The most difficult topic to write about is God, for good reasons. Saints explain that God is too vast, esoteric and mysterious to understand and know. People have lost their ability to perceive God.

In order to perceive God or to understand him, our task is to become as subtle as he is. Our denseness is a veil that renders us blind to the divine as our inner, spiritual eye is closed. Unfortunately, we believe that reality is that which is seen with our physical eyes.

The Great Master writes in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV*:

We can see subtle things only when we ourselves become subtle. The Lord is extremely subtle. Unless we become as subtle as he is, we do not get connected with the Lord. It is a basic principle that the instrument with which we see must be appropriate to the thing to be seen.... It is necessary that our inner eyes become subtle. The Lord is the subtlest of the subtle. To realize him we have to be equally subtle.

Saints explain that in the spiritual realms too, reasoning is useless, as God is too vast for mere human minds to comprehend. Why then even explore the idea of the mystery of God? Perhaps Maharaj Charan Singh's letter to a seeker in *Quest for Light* explains why:

I quite appreciate and understand your difficulty in loving and understanding God whom you cannot see, feel or communicate with. This feeling of dissatisfaction is in itself a sign that the

Supreme Power desires you to investigate this matter further; otherwise, the whole world is drifting away without ever devoting a moment's thought to its Creator.

Masters say that human birth is for a twofold purpose: to recover our spiritual identity and to find our way out of the creation and back to the Creator. This means that we should aspire to know and to be with God, before our physical death. Many fail to realize that when one dies one does not automatically ascend to God's mansions. Masters say that there is a cycle of reincarnation that keeps each person coming back to this level of existence, lifetime after lifetime. Each individual's spiritual goal could be to get out of that cycle in order to reunite with God.

Through his own will, God brought the creation into being. Through his will, God originated divine law, the Shabd – the Shabd that is the creative energy which sustains the entire universe and all the spiritual regions. This Shabd is the link between God's will and God's creative action.

The Great Master writes in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV*:

All the universe was created by divine Law (or Shabd) and he, as the Creator, is running the universe according to his Law (or the Shabd)... Everything takes place according to this Law, and according to it the administration of this universe has been placed under the control of the negative power or Kal. It is only by knowing the divine Law (or the Shabd) that one can travel beyond the sphere of Kal.

Saints tell us Shabd is that energy of sound and light which has the power to cleanse souls, end karmic indebtedness, and pull the soul

up through the various spiritual regions back to the Father. It is the energy which emanates from God and which is God, and it is only by connecting to the Shabd that the soul is able to travel beyond Kal's jurisdiction and back to the Father.

The few to whom God reveals the mysteries of the Shabd are his saints, the perfect living Masters, and through them he reveals the Shabd to their disciples, those souls marked by God for the Master to bring back to their spiritual home.

These Masters are manifestations of the Word incarnated in flesh, the manifested Shabd. Through them flow the loving, all-powerful, all-knowing energies which are Shabd, which are God. It is through the Masters that God reveals himself to us on a level at which we can relate to him. Humankind cannot worship and develop love and devotion for an abstract idea of God. In his mercy God reveals himself to us in the form of a man, the Master. Throughout aeons of creation God has given us the Masters.

Through initiation the Master instructs us on how to become God-realized. He cautions us to keep the four vows and to meditate, which is the key to spiritual understanding and development. He instructs us to practise simran – the repetition of five holy names. This sharpens and strengthens our powers of concentration and love and our devotion for the Master. In the practice of bhajan, we listen to the melodious sounds of the Shabd within, and begin the journey that will take us back to God, the Supreme Lord. Only a perfect living Master can take a soul on this journey. And as the saints frequently remind us, to be put on the road back to God the Father is the rarest and the greatest gift given to a human being.

In conclusion, the saints tell us that while we might be able to see manifestations of God here in the physical world, his true form lies

within. They tell us God is the embodiment of love and his love for humankind causes him to call us back to our spiritual home.

In *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV*, the Great Master describes the mystery of God:

The Lord is beyond time and timelessness, high and separate. All the creation is under his orders ... he is beyond form and formlessness. He is omnipresent and the sustainer of all; creator, immovable, all-powerful, imperishable, redeemer, eternal and pure consciousness. He is everlasting, invulnerable, a storehouse of knowledge and nectar, without attributes, kind to devotees, self-existent, apart from all, an ocean of sweetness and is omnipresent. He is the embodiment of Shabd and his Name sustains all.



If you take instruction from the Master and do your work, light will appear inside you; your attention will gradually go inwards and become attached to Nam. You'll be fully absorbed in it – to your benefit. This is the path of the Guru, and the Guru's will. You cannot pursue this subject without the Guru's wisdom.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*

Something to Think About

Insincere Prayers

The Baal Shem Tov once refused to enter a certain synagogue because he said it was too full of prayer. Noting his followers' astonishment at his attitude, he explained that so many routine insincere prayers were uttered there that they could not rise to the heavenly throne and stayed on earth, cramming the synagogue full.

Baal Shem Tov, as quoted by Lionel Blue in *Here & Hereafter*

* * *

It is a common experience that all things which one asks for in prayer are not received. The reason for this is that we do not know the mercy of the Lord, and ask for things that are not for our real good. The Power wants our evolution and progress. When that Power finds that what is asked for would involve the devotee further in the world, he does not grant it. If the Lord does not grant us the things we ask for, in order to save us from sinning, this is for our good. In the Christian scriptures, it is said:

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

Bible, James 4:3

We are entangled in bodily and sensual pleasures. Our vision does not rise above them. If we were to receive all we ask for, we would certainly be involved in more sensual pleasures and our sins would increase.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. III*

You Tell Me Nothing New

You tell me nothing new: you are not the only one that is troubled by wandering thoughts

I believe one remedy for this is to confess our faults, and to humble ourselves before God. I do not advise you to use multiplicity of words in prayer; many words and long discourses being often the occasions of wandering; hold yourself in prayer before God like a dumb or paralytic beggar at a rich man's gate; let it be your business to keep your mind in the presence of the Lord; if it sometimes wander and withdraw itself from him, do not much disquiet yourself for that; trouble and disquiet serve rather to distract the mind than to re-collect it; the will must bring it back in tranquillity; if you persevere in this manner God will have pity on you.

One way to re-connect the mind easily in the time of prayer, and to preserve it more in tranquillity, is not to let it wander too far at other times; you should keep it strictly in the presence of God; and being accustomed to think of him often you will find it easy to keep your mind calm in the time of prayer, or at least to recall it from its wanderings.

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*



Regarding the wandering mind, it has been out for thousands of lives and it has become its nature to flit from one subject to another. Simran and Shabd are the only remedies. One should not despair, but apply these remedies steadily and it will yield in due course. You are not alone in this respect. Most beginners complain of the mind wandering.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

The Cloud of Unknowing

How the work of contemplation (meditation) shall be done; of its excellence over all other works.

This is what you are to do: lift your heart up to the Lord, with a gentle stirring of love desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts. Centre all your attention and desire on him and let this be the sole concern of your mind and heart. Do all in your power to forget everything else, keeping your thoughts and desires free from involvement with God's creatures or their affairs whether in general or in particular. Perhaps this will seem like an irresponsible attitude, but I tell you, let them all be; pay no attention to them.

What I am describing here is the contemplative work of the spirit. It is this which gives God the greatest delight ... and so diligently persevere until you feel joy in it. For in the beginning it is usual to feel nothing but a kind of darkness about your mind; or as it were, a *cloud of unknowing*. You will seem to know nothing except a naked intent toward God in the depth of your being.

The Cloud of Unknowing, edited by William Johnstone



You can make up for a deficiency in devotion only by devotion... Look in this direction – the solution is meditation; look the other way – it's still meditation.

And the root of all devotion is Guru Bhakti, devotion for the Master.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II

Meditation

The extract that follows is from a discourse by Maharaj Jagat Singh on a shabd by Soami Ji Maharaj.

*From weak to strong – one day you will do it.
Stop deceiving yourself and do your meditation.*

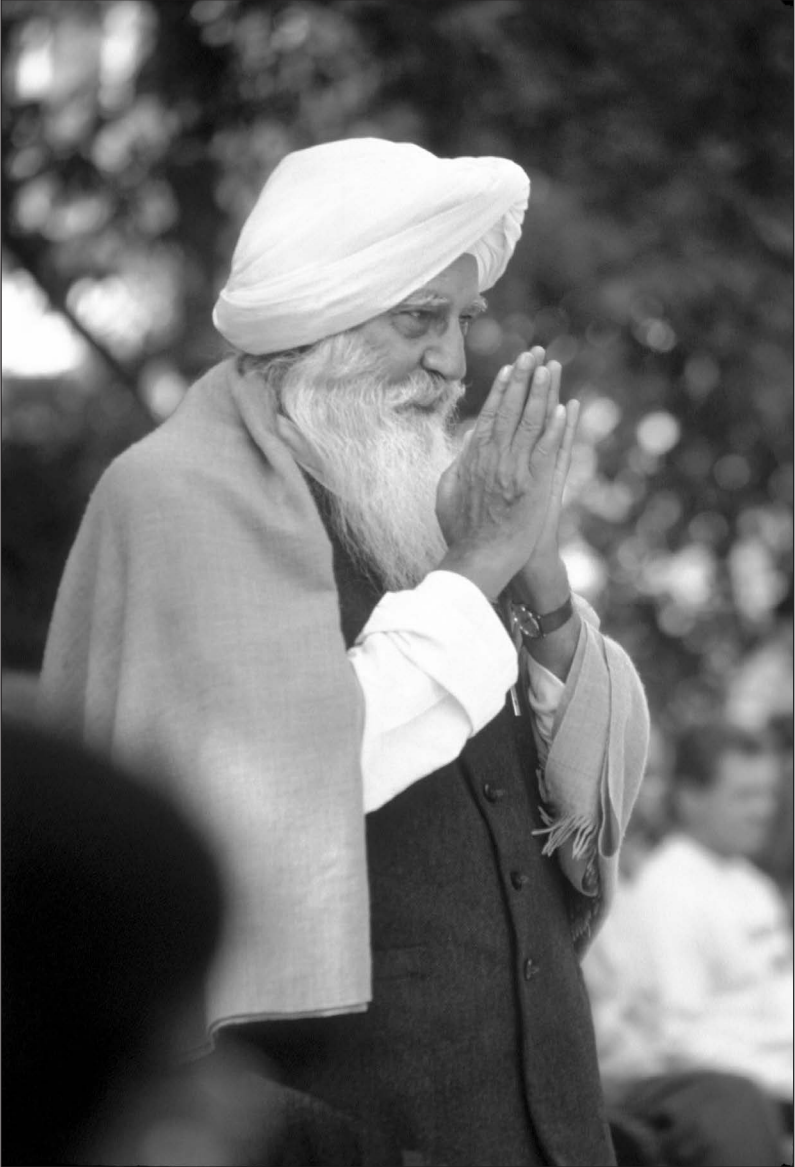
Soami Ji says: Whatever weaknesses are to come in the way of your devotion will gradually disappear as you continue with your meditation, and the entanglements in your heart will be taken care of.

*Insincere devotion is useless:
But good or bad, do your meditation!*

On the one hand Soami Ji says weak devotion has no value; on the other he says that even if you are insincere at heart, don't worry, just continue! ... If the mind takes no pleasure in it and it remains tasteless, don't give up – keep doing it! If you don't succeed today, you will tomorrow – and if not tomorrow, then the next day. Gradually, gradually, devotion will bring its own sweetness.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*





Maharaj Charan Singh

A Mother's Advice

Dearest Daughter,

When I left you last month you were “walking on air” (your own words) after little Lally's birth, and feeling that you were now a real family.

But I have just now read your email of today and am really sorry to find you so depressed. You have written, “I had such high ideals when I was initiated, all I cared about was meditation and seva – now I can't do either.” And later you say, “I have the awful feeling that I've messed up, made the wrong choices, and lost out on the chance to be a good satsangi.”

What rubbish this is! The fact that you are missing meditation and seva so much shows what a firm hold the teachings have taken with you. Perhaps the problem is that your concept of meditation and seva is too limited.

I wonder how we all look from where the Lord is sitting? From our viewpoint, we expect almost instant results in everything. From where he is, I guess he can see all our past, present and future. We are constantly anxious because we don't have the benefit of his overall viewpoint, we don't see the slow, inevitable unfolding of things in exactly the way that they are meant to be. Perhaps, in his eyes, things with you are just as they should be. Once you were an eager new initiate, burning with enthusiasm, having lots of fun in company with others your age when you went for seva at the property. Now you're a wife and mother of two tiny children. It's not surprising that you don't get to the property much, nor is it surprising that you're finding it a struggle to get time for meditation. But do you think that your Master would have wanted you to remain frozen in one particular time? You

wouldn't want Lally to remain a baby forever, so wouldn't he also want to see you grow?

See how I've written, "you don't get to the property any more" – not "you don't get to seva any more". Is seva really confined to a property? Is being close to the Master confined to one place on earth? How could that possibly be true?

So you should understand that your seva is now to be the best possible companion to your husband. It's also in looking after two of the Lord's souls who have come to join you, dependent on you right now for everything, most of all for their well-being and happiness. That's quite a privileged seva – as long as you treat it as that, as a loving service to the Lord. Never see your family either as "forever yours" or as something that keeps you away from him. It may sound corny to say it, but looking after our family and putting those we are responsible for before ourselves in all that we do is a wonderful training in losing the ego. And isn't that what seva is about?

As for meditation, I agree that it is important, but remember what Maharaj Ji (Maharaj Charan Singh) had to say about it – that it's not just closing ourselves in a room for a couple of hours, it's a "way of life".

Meditation is about remembering him and finding a spiritual heart in the physical world so, yes, it helps to have a concentrated session every day. I remember how you used to get up at 4 a.m. and come knocking on my door to get me up some days. But if the children make it impossible to sit for long, do whatever time you can manage. Even ten minutes makes that vital connection if you put your heart into it. Then, if the children have a sleep in the day, read a Sant Mat book or do another half an hour; keep making the connection again and again in a loving way because I'm sure that just as you long for him, he is lovingly looking at you and longing for your devotion. Once upon a time, he had to keep you physically close (through seva

at the property). But now he knows that you can stand on your own feet and build your own atmosphere around you at home. I believe you can do it.

Sant Mat is slow. It's meant for a lifetime and we go through many different stages in our development. So take heart, take courage, and keep going.

Affectionately,

Mum



What is higher than everything else? Nam. That is what is holding everything together. Nam is present in every mote and every leaf. What is this precious thing that cannot be bought at any price? It is Nam. Nam is unique, without a peer. It upholds the entire universe and looks after all of us.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*

The Day Is Short

This article is based around Mira's devotional poem entitled 'The Day is Short'. Mira was a royal princess who, when she was eighteen, married a handsome prince. She seemed to have it all – jewels, land, palaces – all the trappings of full royal life. One might imagine that she wanted for nothing!

But then it all fell to pieces. This can happen to anyone of any position: no one's security is guaranteed in this vale of tears. Her husband and father both died in battle and her father-in-law was murdered; most commentators suggest he was poisoned. Mira must have been full of confusion; her life as she knew it was falling apart. But just when the despair was deepest and life had probably lost all meaning, Saint Ravidas appeared on the scene. It is an old saying that when the disciple is ready the guru appears. His divine being and his simple teachings penetrated deep into Mira's heart. However, she experienced a barrage of criticism and slander because Ravidas was a cobbler and Mira a royal princess. But for Mira these harsh words were nothing when compared to the wealth her Master had bestowed upon her. This tension between her worldly responsibilities and position, and her love for the cobbler saint became rich and fertile ground for spiritual growth. Thankfully Mira shared her unfolding spiritual nature in the form of devotional poetry.

This is Mira's poem 'The Day is Short':

*Foolish wayfarer, why do you delay?
Take heed, the day is short and long is your way.*

*The sun in the East has lit the torch;
Now is the time for your homeward march.
Move swiftly, reach home before the sun turns pale.*

*The hours are fleeting and long is your trail.
Treasure the chance, don't falter or lose heart;
Be free of all cares and make a start.*

*Reach home, and from fear and doubt be free;
Loitering midway, you will come to misery.
Foolish wayfarer, why do you delay?
Long is the way and soon will end the day.
Foolish wayfarer why do you delay?
Long is your way and soon will end the day.*

*O kind Lord of Mira, Thou in Thy grace
Gave her a path, short and easy to pace.*

Mira, The Divine Lover

So why are we foolish? Why do we delay? Is it that we don't want peace of mind? Don't we want a resting place beyond the madness and troubles of the world? Imagine if you can find a place that knows no death, pain or sickness: a place where beauty is beyond description.

The saints try their best to give us an impression of this place but they always concede that words are useless.

Saints and mystics from every country and culture have spoken only to encourage us. They want to share the wonder. They want us to join them in that ocean of peace, bliss and absolute love.

So knowing all this and being encouraged at every opportunity by the Master, why is it that we delay? Why do we continue to be fools? The answer is simple and stark.

Because we are slaves, we are not free. If we were free we would go and see for ourselves right this moment. When we see a lovely place in a holiday brochure we can make arrangements and be there the next day. But the place we really want to go and see somehow eludes us.

After only a little study of our condition we are forced to admit that the senses have us over a barrel. They have us running this way and that. And the senses themselves have made the mind a slave to them. The mind desperately seeks peace, contentment and fulfilment but unfortunately the mind's search for peace outside is doomed to failure.

Each reincarnation of the soul is given a measure of energy. When that is used, a new cycle is necessary for the soul. When the soul gets weary of its rounds of pleasures and pains, then it seeks an answer to this riddle of life and its merry-go-round. And like the prodigal son of the Bible, it finally remembers the Father's house and its high calling as his son.

Realizing its true identity, it turns all its energies to the homeward journey instead of towards outward sensual pleasures and achievements. Then ways and means are opened to the soul by the gracious Father, by which the soul can find its way to the distant home it left long, long ago.

The soul's earnest longing is rewarded by the Father's helping hand of guidance and by his love. He calls his children home at the end of the cosmic journey, and there is great rejoicing and bliss in daily growth of consciousness until the soul becomes one with him, as it was in the beginning. Only now it is richer in experience of humility and love for him.

A sincere seeker will find the true teacher and the way. The return process is slow and steady. Love guides the way when the soul sets the way toward home. Inner progress will blend into outer changes until all is one in his love.

Mira advises us to “take heed” but the reality is that the Master has chosen us and we are compelled to take heed. The feeling is such that we just can’t miss. Something in us recognizes this supreme opportunity.

It is only in the present moment, in the now, that we can begin to channel our time and energy to the eye centre. We begin slowly, gradually to re-direct our energies toward that focal point in the forehead, and the growing force of this increasing energy will one day be enough to pierce the veil of the inner worlds where our Master awaits.

There is a great adventure ahead of us. When we repeat the holy names, we find that the great adventure is life itself. It is not some far away goal to be reached; it is right now! The great adventure is living right now. Simran makes all of this an adventure. Simran enables us to find pure light and understanding in every moment of living.

Mira urges us on at some pace and with some eagerness: value this human birth, time marches on relentlessly. The mind is the faithful servant of its master, Kal. It will do its best to keep our attention out, moment after moment, day after day. We are old before we realize it. Our sun turns pale; our energy allowance may soon be used up.

Mira warns us the hours are slipping away. We know that turning the mind’s currents around is the most difficult task and will require our constant vigilance.

So we must not delay – we must do what the Master asks of us.



Book Review



Cave in the Snow: A Western Woman's Quest for Enlightenment

BY VICKY MACKENZIE

PUBLISHER: BLOOMSBURY, NEW YORK, 1998.

ISBN 1-58234-045-5

Living in a cave is not a necessary condition for spiritual development. Still, it is inspiring to read about the quest for spiritual growth that led Tenzin Palmo, a British woman, to spend twelve years in a Himalayan cave. Written by Vicky Mackenzie, a journalist familiar with Tibetan Buddhist tradition, this book presents Tenzin Palmo's life in a lively and detailed way, so the reader can understand the choices made throughout her life – even when these choices seem to be quite extreme. The story of her quest for enlightenment reveals profound spiritual insights.

Cave in the Snow starts in 1943, the year that Diane Perry, who later took the name of Tenzin Palmo, was born in the East End of London. It ends in 1997, when she was busy raising funds for Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, which has since become a flourishing institution for nuns specializing in higher Tibetan Buddhist education. The author traces Tenzin Palmo's sincere search for the spiritual path that would best meet her needs. In her early years this quest started as a search for her identity, driven by her penetrating mind and a highly questioning nature, inspired by the spiritualist seances in her mother's house, meandering along different religious and philosophical traditions and finally, at the age of eighteen, bringing her to the realization that she was a Buddhist. Once she had realized this, the real work could begin.

Questioning Tenzin Palmo critically but empathetically, the author helps the reader understand the exotic choice Tenzin Palmo made to

live and meditate in a snow-bound cave. Asked what had led her to the cave, she replied:

My life has been like a river, it has flowed steadily in one direction ... The purpose of life is to realize our spiritual nature. And to do that one has to go away and practise, to reap the fruits of the path, otherwise you have nothing to give anyone else.

Going into a long retreat is an accepted and important method of spiritual practice in Tibetan Buddhism. Yet, Tenzin Palmo's answer on the question of whether an extended retreat from ordinary life is necessary reflects her non-dogmatic view on the subject:

Even for short periods, [a retreat] can be helpful. You don't have to do it all your life. I think it would be very helpful for many people to have some period of silence and isolation to look within and find out who they really are, when they're not so busy playing roles – being the mother, wife, husband, career person, everybody's best friend, or whatever facade we put up to the world as our identity. It's very good to have an opportunity to be alone with oneself and see who one really is behind the masks.

Although there are many ways to go into a retreat, Tenzin Palmo herself preferred to do it the traditional way. For three full years out of the twelve she remained in complete solitude, without talking to or otherwise contacting another human being. Reading about the details of daily life during the retreat, one is amazed at the logistics required to organize even a severely simple life, just to provide the proverbial 'two square meals a day and a roof over one's head' while keeping time for meditation.

But the real focus of the book is not on the rigours of her retreat, but on Tenzin Palmo's firm resolve towards her spiritual practice in general and the mind in particular, which, she said, "like a wild horse, needs to be reined in and trained." The difficulties she faced are similar to those of anyone sincerely struggling in meditation practice. Asked what kind of obstacles she had encountered in her lonely retreat, she said:

When you get into the practice you begin to see how it should be done, and when it is not you begin to ask yourself "why?" In my case it came down to laziness, a fundamental inertia. That's my main problem. It's tricky. It's not like facing the tigers and the wolves of anger and desire. Those sorts of problems you can grapple with. My failings are much more insidious – they hide in the undergrowth so that they are more difficult to see.

Ultimately she lays the greatest stress on the central importance of effort:

One knows how to practise, and of that one is perfectly capable. But one settles for second or third best. It is like getting the progress prize at school – one is not really doing one's best. It's a very low grade of effort and it is much more serious than having a bad temper. The times when I have genuinely put my whole self into something, the results have surprised even me.

Besides telling the story of Tenzin Palmo's spiritual quest, her struggles and her insights, *Cave in the Snow* also provides an interesting glimpse into the recent history of Tibetan Buddhism. The author's thorough knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, combined with her journalistic style of writing, offers the reader an informative and often entertaining picture

of critical events in the spreading of Tibetan Buddhism to the West during the last four decades of the twentieth century. For example, the author tells how Tenzin Palmo, in 1962, first met Chogyam Trungpa, who became a well known and influential Tibetan lama (spiritual teacher) in the United States in the seventies and eighties.

Like the other lamas of that time he was wandering around lost and ignored, no one having any idea of the calibre of the teachers who come among them. Tenzin Palmo happened to be at this cross-over point, ready. "Shortly after I met him he turned to me and said: 'You may find this difficult to believe, but actually back in Tibet I was quite a high lama and I never thought it would come to this but please, can I teach you meditation? I must have a disciple!'"

Tenzin Palmo's life story reflects an exceptionally firm determination leading to choices that may seem extreme from the outside, but turn out to be quite logical in the context of her search. Apart from the inspiration that reading about such a remarkable life may evoke, this book also invites us to reflect on our own lives. What is our objective in life? To what extent do the choices we make actually reflect that objective? For the reader who is sincerely aiming for spiritual growth, Tenzin Palmo's extraordinary life story may serve as an inspiring mirror.



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