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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Knowledge, Wisdom and Love

The Creator is existence, knowledge and bliss, or power, wisdom and love. An atom or a spark of this essence of existence is the soul which, encased in its coverings of mind and matter, forms the individual man. If the coverings were removed from the individual, the soul would be naked and would be qualified to know its Creator. The individual will know itself – attain ‘self-realization’ – and will in turn, be able to know its Creator. Wrapped in its coverings, the soul merely hears of its source from others or reads about the Creator in books, makes guesses and draws imaginary pictures to satisfy its intellectual curiosity. It also manufactures creeds.

If a lantern were wrapped in a thin muslin cloth, its light would be dimmed. If there is another envelope of thick, coarse cloth over the muslin, the light would be cut off entirely and the lantern would cease to serve its purpose. Man is much like the covered lantern. There is light in him. There is the spark of pure existence, knowledge and bliss in him; but the envelopes of mind and matter dim his light and he gropes in darkness. Real existence has degenerated and appears in him as reason, intellect and instinct. Bliss has degenerated into fleeting experiences of pleasure and pain....

Anybody who goes inside of his focus is independent of time and space, and he can, from his own experience, give guidance to another who has not reached so far. He who rises still higher, and has access to other and higher worlds, is capable of guiding others to those higher worlds.

As in all other branches of study, a student who occasionally meets his teacher and converses freely with him, has a distinct advantage over one who takes only a correspondence course. The same is the case here in Sant Mat and the development on this path. But the beauty of it is that, when you gain access to the inner light and the words of light within, the elements of time and distance so completely disappear that you stand face to face with your teacher and Master, and he will always remain right there to instruct and to lead you as well as to strengthen you.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



The Bridge of Smiles

The Bridge of Sighs is a famous viaduct located in Venice, in northern Italy. Passing over the Rio di Palazzo, the enclosed bridge connects the interrogation rooms in the old government palace at one end with prison cells at the other. The bridge's name, given by Lord Byron, comes from the suggestion that prisoners would sigh as they took in their final view of beautiful Venice before being imprisoned.

Within us is a bridge functioning in quite the opposite way. Let's call it the Bridge of Smiles. You can guess, I hope, that this is our simran. These five holy names, repeated patiently, one after the other, take us from imprisonment within the dark confines of ego and the domination of the mind to the other side where freedom awaits – the shining light of the Master's love.

Even more than us, the Master longs for our soul to reach the other side of the bridge. Moreover, he likes us to be brave soldiers, to smile and remain positive. Our only guarantee of making it across is to tread that bridge, one step at a time, and repeat the process over and over again. It's true that we don't move very quickly and, without any glimpse of the other side, our already long and arduous journey seems impossible to complete. But at least we're *on* the bridge; so many aren't.

As you walk along the bridge, if you look through the gaps in the floor, you'll notice the gremlins trying to catch your feet. Some come dressed as worries, others as remorse and still others as pain. If you ever make the mistake of stopping, they'll soon take that smile off your face. The same is true at the windows. The most alluring winged creatures are trying to get in, but don't let them! These lovely fairies are the thoughts that charm you – plans, schemes and fond memories built from a multi-coloured tissue of desire. They'll entwine themselves around you so tightly and intricately that you'll be rooted to the spot.

So just enjoy the experience of being on the bridge. Enjoy the fact that you are enclosed within; enjoy the lack of view. Just *be there*. Forget where you came from. Don't think about what may lie ahead. Give your complete attention to one name at a time and, without calculating where it has brought you, move to the next. When you reach the last one, start again.

As you emerge from the bridge after your daily walk, you'll smile, ready to face the ups and downs of the day. Before long, your entire being – body, mind and soul – will smile from the peace you feel within; all down to your slow but consistent walks along the bridge.

Unlike the Bridge of Sighs, which is built of solid limestone, our bridge is made of something subtle; we might call it 'mind over matter' or 'mind control'. This astounding substance, once activated, has the power to deliver us to a destination beyond all imagination.

The poor prisoners in Venice sighed when leaving behind their loved ones. One day we will smile as the door at the end of our bridge opens and we glimpse our beloved Master waiting for us.



The Prodigal Son

American folklore includes a story of a young man who left home shortly before the economic depression of the 1930s. Angry with his parents and frustrated by life on a farm, the young man wanted excitement and adventure. So, seeking fame and fortune in the city, he left home. Unfortunately, the stock market crashed, employment became scarce, and instead of wealth and fine living, the young man found himself living as a pauper. Nostalgic, he thought of his home and family and how they loved and took care of him. Yet, in all the years he'd been away, not once had he contacted his parents. Now, whilst wishing for their forgiveness, he was too ashamed and proud to admit that he had been wrong and to ask to be taken back into the family home.

Times were hard and the young man had no place to live and little food to eat. Facing destitution, he finally found the courage to write to his parents. He acknowledged his mistake, apologized for causing them distress, and admitted he was too scared to ask for their forgiveness in person lest they should reject him. Despite his dire straits, the young man had saved enough money to pay for a train journey home. So he asked his parents, if they could forgive him, to tie a white handkerchief to the old apple tree near the railway track on the day he would be on the train passing that spot. If he saw the handkerchief from the train, he would know his parents welcomed him back but if he didn't, he would return to the city.

The young man boarded the train on the allotted day, and the closer it drew to his village, the more anxious he became. Eventually, he managed to bring himself to look out the window. To his utter amazement, he saw not just one handkerchief, but the whole tree festooned with white handkerchiefs.

Our imperfections

There is something of this young man in everyone. Most of us have harboured feelings of regret that we were not better human beings at some point in our lives. And when it comes to the quest for eternity within ourselves, no doubt we have been struck, from time to time, by the

magnitude of our imperfections. “Be therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect,” Jesus advised and we wonder, “How?”

The mystics are aware of our feelings of guilt and remorse and whilst they do not wish us to become complacent, neither do they wish us to indulge in self-reproach. They know that if we forgive ourselves, we will feel happier and, therefore, better able to turn our faces to the light. God’s forgiveness of, and love for, errant human beings is thus a common theme within mystic literature. Like a loving parent, the divine welcomes us with open arms, irrespective of our mistakes. In the Christian faith, the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son are perhaps the best-known stories exemplifying God’s love and readiness to forgive. The former conveys the divine’s concern for *each* soul. Representing the Master, the shepherd does not rest until, from his flock of many, he has found the one that has gone astray. The latter recounts the primeval story of the soul: its departure from God, its spiritual sleepiness in the creation, its awakening, and eventual return to its origin – the divine home.

God’s forgiveness

In the parable of the prodigal son related by Jesus, the younger of two brothers leaves home after asking for – and receiving – his inheritance. Squandering this and becoming so pitiful as to be willing to eat the food he is feeding pigs, he eventually decides to return home. The young man is humbled and repentant and, fully intent on begging his father for forgiveness, is even willing to be his father’s servant. Expecting to be scorned by his father, the young man is amazed to be welcomed back with celebration and fanfare.

‘Prodigal’ means ‘wasteful’ and ‘extravagant’. Whilst these are apt adjectives for describing the behaviour of the young son who, upon prematurely obtaining his inheritance, fritters it away, the word ‘prodigal’ is intended to symbolize humanity squandering its greatest potential – human birth – on the sensory panorama of the world. The aim of the parable, however, is not to dwell on our weaknesses but to emphasize the possibility of changing direction. We can make a commitment to reversing our outward-oriented attention and, like the young man, set about returning to our Father.

In the parable's concluding section, we learn that, even before the young man has reached home and had the chance to ask for forgiveness, it is the father who, upon spotting his son in the far distance, is overjoyed and rushes to embrace him, totally oblivious to the son's outrageous behaviour. This suggests that, irrespective of the child's misdeeds and without judgement or admonishment, the Father is always ready to welcome the wayward child. We never need to feel unworthy of God because He is all love. We can forget our past, look ahead to him and our spiritual goal. Feelings of guilt and unworthiness are forms of self-absorption, distractions of the mind, which prevent us from devoting our attention to the spiritual quest. Though it is natural from time to time to entertain such feelings, they are not in themselves a positive step. In fact, our search for God's forgiveness originates from the wellspring of the divine spirit deep within us. We are merely responding to his call, heard faintly at first but undeniably urging us home. Therefore, as one gnostic writer counsels:

*Release yourselves,
and that which has bound you will be dissolved.
Save yourselves, so that your soul may be saved.
The kind father has sent you to the Saviour,
and given you strength.*

*Why are you hesitating?
Seek when you are sought;
When you are invited, listen, for time is short.*

Abridged from *The Prodigal Soul:
The Wisdom of Ancient Parables*



The Contradiction of Silence

Covering an area of one square inch, a small red pebble lies atop a moss-covered log in the wilderness of the Olympic National Park. Though easy to miss, the pebble marks the quietest place in the United States. It is the result of the efforts of the award-winning acoustic ecologist (one who records natural sounds), Gordon Hempton. Keen to counteract the damaging effects of noise pollution on the environment, Hempton hoped that by dedicating a single square inch to silence, this might give rise to other areas devoid of human noise. The detrimental effect of noise pollution is a phenomenon that scientists have only recently begun to explore, but the mystics have long been teaching the importance of silence. In so doing, they highlight the composite layers of silence, each one of which – as explained in the three excerpts at the end of this article – will be penetrated as we attain the ultimate spiritual goal of realizing the Shabd.

The morality of silence

Morality forms the basis of all religious and spiritual traditions. For instance, right conduct is expressed in the notion of *dharma* in Hindu philosophy whilst Buddhism incorporates the principles of a virtuous life in its 'eightfold path' to liberation. In these and other faiths, 'right speech' is an integral aspect of morality that all spiritual aspirants are expected to practise.

Right speech encompasses three dimensions. At its most basic, it means one should refrain from criticizing or speaking ill of others. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, Maharaj Sawan Singh advises, "Keep watch on your tongue so that it may not utter any improper ... or abusive words." Harsh words are an obstacle to spiritual progress because they injure the feelings of others, but also because they emit anger, undermine self-discipline and fuel the very passions we seek to overcome. The Bhagavad Gita puts it like this: "From anger comes delusion, from delusion the loss of mindfulness, from the loss of mindfulness the destruction of discrimination, and from the destruction of discrimination he perishes [utterly fails to attain his spiritual goal]."

Right speech also entails speaking the truth, which Maharaj Sawan Singh defines as “to describe a thing exactly as seen or heard.” Untruthfulness, on the other hand, not only fosters disquiet within oneself, but renders void the good results that come from devotional practice. Indeed, cautioning us that, “Without truth there can be no remembrance of the Lord,” Maharaj Sawan Singh explains, “There is no austerity like the truth, and no sin like the untruth. He who has Truth in his mind, the Lord himself dwells in him.” Truthful speech, therefore, is an essential precondition for realizing the Shabd.

The third aspect of right speech – the topic of the Hasidic poem reproduced at the end of this article – is to talk sparingly. Expressing the same sentiment, Maharaj Jagat Singh advised, “Much physical and spiritual energy is dissipated by talking. Silence is golden. Speak as little as possible.” And Mirdad instructed: “Refrain from speaking much. Out of a thousand words uttered, there may be one and only one that need in truth be uttered. The rest but cloud the mind, and stuff the ear, and irk the tongue, and blind the heart as well.” Talking scatters our attention. It prevents us from using that time to repeat simran. By controlling our speech, we begin to discipline the mind. This is why the mystics place such importance on talking sparingly.

The nobility of silence

Thomas Merton, the influential American Trappist (a branch of Roman Catholicism) who was ordained in 1949, often described the highest degree of union with God as occurring in absolute silence; to be able to hear the Word of God, it must be received in silence. Thus, in one text he wrote, “the Word emerges first of all from silence. When there is no silence, then the One Word which God speaks is not truly heard as Love.” There is a further reason why Merton believed that “silence is better than speech.” As he explains in his book *The Ascent to Truth*, words are utterly inadequate when attempting to describe God. Therefore, it is better to say nothing than to try to describe that which is beyond language and human comprehension.

The idea that the inadequacy of words compels silence is also found in Buddhism. The Buddha, for instance, is thought to have practised

‘noble silence’; that is, he would remain silent whenever questions were put to him about the nature of reality. Like Merton, the Buddha believed that is better to remain silent than to respond with answers that mislead or are limiting. This approach is particularly popular in the Zen school of Buddhism where silence is the means by which teachings are taught and learned. As summarized in *The Flower Sermon* sutra below, the spiritual teacher does not speak because this silence imparts spiritual wisdom that words are incapable of explaining.

The infinity of silence

The one-square inch in the wilderness of the Olympic National Park is, in reality, far from silent; previously suppressed by human noise, the wilderness is now loud with the sound of nature. This is the contradiction inherent within silence. When noise is quietened, what was once imperceptible becomes perceptible. This is why silent meditation is the cornerstone of spiritual practice advocated by mystics. The Buddha achieved enlightenment through silent meditation; Soami Ji Maharaj meditated silently and virtually non-stop for seventeen years; “Be still and know that I am God” advises the Bible. As the author of *From Self to Shabd* explains, silent meditation means making the mind completely motionless; that is, rendering it devoid of any thoughts. It is not enough to merely not speak. Outward silence must be accompanied by inner silence. This is because if the mind continues to think, one’s attention remains at the surface of our being. However, the only way to make real spiritual progress and reach a higher level of consciousness is to transcend surface level thinking and, to do this, one must make the mind motionless. The eleventh-century Indian mystic Nāropa calls this ‘the emptying of consciousness’: “Outwardly this is a process of dying, while inwardly it is an increase and gathering of light.... The attainment of this goal is an access to a sphere of life larger and more powerful and divinely inspired than the normal conscious life.” This is also the experience of Kabir, given in the final one of the three excerpts. It was only after he had become completely silent that the voice of God became audible.

Inner silence, then, leads to an emptiness and it is in this state that the consciousness comes to apprehend that it is a drop of the Infinite

Source. So, when Mr. Hempton describes his square- inch of silence deep in the piney wilderness as “not the absence of something” but “the presence of everything,” he is expressing a thought that the mystics have been teaching us for centuries.

The following poem is advice given by a famous Hasidic rabbi to his disciples.

*Do not speak at all of everyday matters,
not even of important concerns,
from the time you get out of bed in the morning,
until one hour after prayer
not even with your spouse or children, unless it is urgent.*

Even then, be as brief as possible.

*Avoid idle chatter all day long.
Restrict your conversation, say only what is needed
for your livelihood or other essential matters.
As the sages said
“Speak words of Torah
but do not indulge in worthless conversation.”
Idle talk is obviously forbidden at a time when you
could be studying Torah.
But even when you cannot study,
cleave to the blessed Creator;
do not let your attention wander from him.*

Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, Likkutei Amarim,
included in God in All Moments by Rose & Leader



The Flower Sermon

As expressed in the following sutra, the Zen school of Buddhism stresses the importance of wordless insight and discovering the truth within oneself through silence.

One morning, the Buddha took his disciples to a quiet pond and, as was their custom, the Buddha's disciples formed a small semi-circle around their Master and sat waiting for the Buddha to teach them something about spirituality. On this particular morning, however, the Buddha said nothing. Instead, reaching into the pond, he pulled up a lotus flower. With its roots dripping with mud and water, the Buddha continued to hold the lotus flower in front of his disciples, remaining silent as he did so.

After a while, the Buddha got up and, walking to each disciple in turn, quietly held the lotus flower in front of them. The disciples were greatly confused and did their best to fathom the meaning of the flower and how it might fit within the Buddha's philosophy. When at last the Buddha stood before the last of his disciples, Mahā Kāshyapa, the disciple smiled and began to laugh. Buddha handed the lotus to Mahā Kāshyapa and said, "What can be said, I have said to you and what cannot be said, I have given to Mahā Kāshyapa." From that day forward, Mahā Kāshyapa became Buddha's successor.

The last quote shows us how important it is to listen rather than verbalize.

*As long as I talked unceasingly about the Lord,
The Lord stayed away, kept at a distance.
But when I silenced my mouth, sat very still
And fixed my mind at the doorway of the Lord,
I soon was linked to the music of the Word
And all my talking came to an end.*

Kabir, The Great Mystic



Truth in a Nutshell

Self-discipline

A widow came to the Mulla's court and said: "I am very poor. My young son eats a great deal of sugar: in fact he is addicted to it. This means that I cannot make ends meet. Would the Court forbid him to eat sugar, because I cannot myself enforce this request?"

"Madam," said the Mulla, "this problem is not as easy as it seems. Return in a week and the decision will be given, after I have examined the case more thoroughly."

After a week the woman's name was again on the list of supplicants. "I am sorry," Nasrudin said to her when her turn came, "there will be another adjournment of this very tricky case until next week."

The same thing happened for the following fortnight. At length Nasrudin announced: "The Court will now give its injunction. Call the lad."

The young man was brought before the Mulla. "Boy!" thundered the magistrate. "You are forbidden to eat sugar, except for half an ounce a day."

The woman now expressed her thanks to the Mulla, and begged leave to ask one question. "Say on," said Nasrudin.

"Your Worship, I am mystified as to why you did not forbid the boy to eat sugar at any of the earlier hearings."

"Well," said Nasrudin, "I had to get myself out of the habit first, didn't I? How could I know that it would take so long?"

Idries Shah, *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin*

The best way [to discipline children] is to be a good example.... Supposing one smokes and does not want the child to smoke. How is it possible to impress the child that it is wrong?... If we give advice but are not living up to all the good advice that we give, the child knows; so that advice does not have any effect at all.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*



Romancing the Infinite

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893 – 1952) has introduced millions of readers to the perennial wisdom of the East through his acclaimed life story, Autobiography of a Yogi, and his numerous other books. Today his work is carried on by Self Realization Fellowship, the international society he founded in 1920. The following are extracts from his anthology Man's Eternal Quest.

The greatest romance is with the Infinite. You have no idea how beautiful life can be. ... When you suddenly find God everywhere, when He comes and talks to you and guides you, the romance of divine love has begun.

Dive deep in the ocean of meditation. If you don't find the pearls of His presence, don't blame the ocean, blame your diving. Dive again and again until you find Him.

Success is not a simple matter; it cannot be determined merely by the amount of money and material possessions you have. The meaning of success goes far deeper. It can only be measured by the extent to which your inner peace and mental control enable you to be happy under all circumstances. That is real success. When you can look within and your conscience is clear, your reason unprejudiced, your will firm yet flexible, and your discrimination strong; and when you are able to obtain at will the things you need and the things you consider worthwhile, you are a success.

Let no devotee miss his daily appointment with God. The mind may suggest the movies or some other distraction; but when the time comes for God each day, keep that sacred engagement. Otherwise you will be a long time finding Him.

There is no way back Home if you weave around you a snare of worldly desires. You came to play your part on the stage of time, to fill the role that

you were designed for in the divine drama; but the essential part of your role is to think of Him and to do His will, naught else. Every thought, every act, is deluded that does not place Him first....

Each soul must find its way back alone. No one but you is responsible for your mistakes and habits. Once you have found your Self in your soul, you are free. But so long as you are not free, so long there is danger; you will have to come back to earth and work out all the desires that remain unfinished.

Until your devotion for God and awareness of Him become complete, don't rest; don't give in to sleep when you should be meditating. Never give anything preference before God! His love is the greatest love there is. So long as you let other things come first, He will wait. But your delay may be too long, and your suffering may be great. Don't procrastinate. Be certain in the sincerity of your conscience that you have made the effort to commune with Him. Don't rest, don't give up until you can see Him with your own eyes, or feel Him in your heart. Birth, play, marriage, children, old age – life is finished. That is not living! Life is much deeper and more wonderful than that.... When you know God, there is no more sorrow. All those you loved and lost in death are with you again in the Eternal Life. You don't know whom to consider your "own" anymore, because everyone is yours.

It is impossible to deceive the Lord because He is sitting right behind your thoughts, and knows what you are thinking and desiring. If in your heart you truly renounce the world and seek inner communion with Him, He will come to you. But you must know that you want Him and nothing else. Once that desire for Him is established in your heart, He must come.

Rouse the eternal flames of divine memory until they burn away your forgetfulness, and remember that you always have been, and are even now, one with the Lord.

Excerpts are taken from Yogananda's anthology *Man's Eternal Quest*. © 1982, Self-Realization Fellowship. All rights reserved. Used by permission.



There Is No Alternative

A tree planted in rich soil and lovingly nurtured will grow tall, provide shade on hot summer days and produce bountiful fruit. It will also grow – maybe not quite so sturdily – when planted in poor soil. However, if the gardener devotes all his energies to nurturing the soil, ensuring that it is enriched with all the right nutrients, but he subsequently fails to plant the sapling, there is absolutely no chance of the tree growing at all.

Spiritual life without regular meditation is like spending weeks weeding, draining, and fertilizing the soil but, like the gardener, failing to plant the sapling. Meditation is the foundational principle of Sant Mat. In fact, the present Master distils the entire philosophy to one simple tenet: one's effort to meditate must be sincere and regular. All other practices typically associated with religion and spirituality – pilgrimages, penances, weekly satsang attendance, extensive seva – are irrelevant when it comes to liberating the soul. As Maharaj Charan Singh wrote in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II:

Try whatever method you want, try any technique that you can think of – give what you want in charity, go on endless pilgrimages, bathe in all the holy waters, read all the scriptures, pierce your ears, wear your hair matted, smear ash on your body, go on bowing at the tombs of past saints, renounce your family, hide away in some forest or mountain retreat – without the practice of the Word, you will not escape from the prison of the body under any circumstances whatsoever.

Sooner or later then, meditation just has to be done; there is no alternative. No other practice is able to expand our consciousness so that we can realize our true identity. Yet no one, least of all the mystics, claim that this is easy. In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes, “I don't think there is anything more difficult than meditation.”

Faith without practice

Hindu philosophy states that if a soul carries impressions of meritorious acts from previous births and sincerely yearns for spirituality, the

possibility of meeting a Master is greatly enhanced. In the *Skanda Purana* section of the Guru Gita, for instance, one reads, “One obtains a great guru as the result of merits acquired in many births.” This would explain why we are so receptive to the ideas we imbibe on first attending satsang. In fact, our faith transcends intellectual reasoning. Listening to the spiritual discourses or reading words on the page, our very core instinctively senses that this is the truth. Why then do we experience such difficulty translating into practice what we instinctively believe to be true?

Maybe it’s because, despite believing that meditation is the only means of liberating the soul, we find it impossible to imagine that one day we will die. By imagining our death as a far-off event, we allow ourselves to become diverted by worldly activities, promising ourselves to practise tomorrow or next week. As a Tibetan teacher, Geshe Acharya Thubten Loden, observed, when putting off our meditation we console ourselves with the thought:

“I can always practice later.” [Yet] Without allowing time for the mind to relax and become tranquil by meditating, you busily rush through life fulfilling each moment with things that “really must be done!” Each New Year you resolve to begin dharma practice seriously, but end up putting it off until next month, next year, then the next year until ‘next’ becomes next life!

The uncertainty associated with human mortality is precisely why mystics impress upon us the urgency of meditating now. In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh states, “Every breath that we take without thinking of the Lord is time wasted. Every day is a step nearer to the end of this life.” Kabir puts it like this:

*With every breath that passes
In forgetting the Name of the Lord
You are losing the chance to ... reach the spiritual heights.*

*What guarantee have you of life?
Your body may be destroyed in a single moment.*

*With every breath, therefore,
Fearlessly continue repeating the Lord's Name.
When the oil of life is exhausted
And the wick of the lamp extinguished,
Then there will be quite enough time
To sleep both day and night.*

Kabir, the Great Mystic

Beyond meeting our basic needs for existence, no other activity is worthy of our whole-hearted effort except meditation. Yet, for many of us, the reverse is true. With our attention overwhelmingly directed at addressing material priorities, we dissipate the drive and determination required to conquer the mind and, ultimately, risk becoming the person who returns empty-handed from a land rich in precious gems. In the poem from which Kabir's verses are taken, the weaver-mystic expresses his bafflement about our behaviour. Every moment not spent repeating simran is, according to him, time wasted. Similarly, Buddhist philosophy considers it a grievous failure on our part if, after being given the rare privilege of a human birth, one does not give proper attention to meditation.

Love and hope

Meditation practice is non-negotiable, irrespective of our circumstances. Without this becoming the activity around which everything else revolves, our spiritual aspirations will remain just that, aspirations. The mystics tell us that the Master's love for his disciples knows no bounds. We believe them because of the love we feel as our soul responds to the rays of love emanating from the Master whenever we are in his physical presence. However, the Master's love does not dissolve our duty to practise meditation with diligence and dedication. We must dispel any notion of the Master intervening to liberate the soul without sustained effort on our part. In a book of spiritual essays, Swami Sivananda states, "Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to develop dispassion and practice. He did not say to him, 'I will give you liberation now.' Therefore, abandon the wrong notion that your guru will give you ... liberation."

Of course, it's impossible for us to attain liberation without the Master's help. Our consciousness is so scattered that, even if we meditated non-stop for a hundred years, it would be impossible to take even a single step towards our destination. The Master's help is essential but so is our duty, which in practice constitutes very little. Nothing more is required of us than making the effort. With this in mind we can, paraphrasing Maharaj Charan Singh, draw comfort from the knowledge that we are no longer roaming in darkness but are closer to our destination each day we meditate.



Death Is Life

According to a story, when the mystic al-Ghazālī felt his death approaching, he dismissed those who were with him, with instructions that no one should come to see him until the following morning. The next day, when they entered his chamber, they found him clad in his shroud, facing the *qiblah*, (the direction of the Kaaba to which Muslims turn at prayer) dead. At his head, they found a sheet of paper with these lines:

*Say to my friends, when they look upon me, dead,
weeping for me and mourning me in sorrow:
“Do not believe that this corpse you see is myself.”
In the name of God, I tell you, it is not I.*

*I am a spirit, and this is naught but flesh:
it was my abode and my garment for a time.
I am a treasure, by a talisman kept hid,
fashioned of dust, which served me as a shrine;
I am a pearl, which has left its shed deserted:
it was my prison, where I spent my time in grief,
whence I have now flown forth, and it is left as a token.*

*Praise be to God, who has now set me free,
and prepared for me my place in the highest of the heavens.
Until today I was dead, though alive in your midst:
now I live in truth, with the grave clothes discarded.
Today I hold converse with the saints above:
now, with no veil between, I see God face to face.
I look upon the Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*), and therein I read,
whatever was and is, and all that is to be.*

*Let my house fall in ruins, lay my cage in the ground,
cast away the talisman, 'tis a token, no more;
Lay aside my cloak, it was but my outer garment:
place them all in the grave, let them be forgotten.*

*I have passed on my way, and you are left behind:
your place of abode was no dwelling place for me.*

*Think not that death is death, nay, it is life:
a life that surpasses all that we could dream of here,
while in this world.*

*Here we are granted sleep:
death is but sleep, sleep that shall be prolonged.
Be not frightened when death draws nigh:
it is but the departure for this blessed home.
Think of the mercy and love of your Lord:
give thanks for his grace, and come without fear.*

*What I am now, even so shall you be,
for I know that you are even as I am.
The souls of all men came forth from God;
The bodies of all are compounded alike
good and evil, alike it was ours.
I give you now a message of good cheer:
May God's peace and joy be yours for evermore.*

al-Ghazālī, in Margaret Smith, *al-Ghazali the Mystic*



The Parable of the Ballroom

In *With a Great Master in India*, Dr Julian Johnson creates an extended metaphor to illustrate the fleeting nature of life, and how easily we fall prey to its allure before waking to grim reality. There is an alternative, he tells us. This descriptive piece of writing was first published more than eighty years ago and in some places uses a style of language which may seem a little outmoded to the modern mind, but the point is that the truth it conveys never changes. We can all appreciate the deep meaning given within a simple tale. In the book, the whole story stretches over several pages but, for the purposes of this magazine, here it is compressed to convey the essence only:

“The dance is in full swing,” says Dr Johnson. “Costly gowns and sparkling jewels, bare skin, powder and rouge, light and music and wine, beauty and laughter and love, all mingle in one gorgeous night. During a pause in the music, a couple slip away into the garden. They hold each other in close embrace and murmur endearing words. In a whirl of blissful frenzy, intoxication of passion, and throwing all caution to the wind, they float away in the ecstasy of sweet delirium. ...

“Time passes. The sleeper stirs and mutters some words of endearment. He is now an old man, full of disease and pain. What could have happened to him? Only a few hours ago, he was young, full of joy and the sweet intoxication of love. And where is his beloved? Why isn’t she at his side? He struggles to his feet and looks at the garden, which had once been so exquisite, but now the chill autumn winds whistle through the dead limbs of the bare trees. And then, as the old man reaches for a cup, his hand drops and his body thuds to the floor. Another soul has passed under the Wheel.”

Master enters the dance hall

Dr Johnson follows this picture of life’s illusion and sorrow, by rewinding the story and inviting us to imagine how the couple’s life might have taken a different course:

“Going back to the dance hall, let us follow another scene. In the midst of the whirl, an elderly man enters. He wears a tall white turban

and has a long white beard. His bearing is noble, his countenance is like the rays of the morning sun, and his voice is full of tenderness. He spreads about him an atmosphere of holy peace. Even the dance hall seems sacred in his presence.”

We can guess that this loving portrait is that of Julian Johnson’s own Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh. Dr Johnson tells us that most of the people in the ballroom seem to be unaware of the Master, but that one couple (that same couple that in the previous version were in love with illusion) eagerly come forward to meet him.

To suggest the inward and upward nature of the relationship with the Master, Dr Johnson paints a picture in which the Master, “greeted them with a smile and leads them away from the crowd to a flight of stairs.”

At the top of the stairs they become more than ever aware of the power and light emanating from the Master, together with “a stream of divine melody that was itself the very essence of life, truth and wisdom and love.” The Master is there to draw them into this new world but also to make them realize what they must overcome in order to remain in it: “He took their hands and bade them to look behind them. Much to the couple’s amazement, they saw that five others, with extremely uninviting aspects, had also entered the room. They were humanity’s five deadly enemies: passion, anger, greed, attachment, and egotism. These five cowered with fear at the sight of the Master and would have fled but, tied by many tightly woven invisible threads, they could not detach themselves from the couple.”

The sword of Nam

“The Master now presented to each of the couple a most beautiful sword, a sword of the finest steel, finer than the finest blade of Damascus. And the sword was so constructed that if one listened carefully, he could hear, emanating from it, the sweetest strains of music. On the golden hilt of each sword was engraved in a shining white, the letters: Nam. The Master bade them take this sword to fight the five deadly enemies.”

In contrast to the fading joys of the previous storyline, the couple now embark on their lives as young disciples of a true Master. They wield the sword of Nam (that is, meditation, which leads to conscious contact with

Shabd) so as to overcome the temptations which otherwise assail us as humans and confine us to repeated births in the physical realm:

“With the radiant form of the Master always at their side, the couple grew stronger while their enemies grew weaker. At last the battle was over, the victory won. When at last their victory was complete, they stood upon the heights of dazzling splendour upon the plains of Daswan Dar. The Master’s approval was their greatest joy. But their journey was not yet finished. They followed the Master until at long last they entered the realm of immortal life and immeasurable happiness.”



You Tell Me Nothing New

You tell me nothing new: you are not the only one that is troubled with wandering thoughts... When the mind ... has contracted certain bad habits of wandering and dissipation, they are difficult to overcome and commonly draw us, even against our wills, to the things of the earth. 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 wanders and withdraws itself from Him, do not much disquiet yourself for that; trouble and disquiet serve rather to distract the mind than to re-connect 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*



Are You Worried?

Are you worried? What worries you the most? Family, school, work, health? Leaving these thoughts aside, think back to some difficulty during which you felt the protective hand of the inner Master, the Shabd, steering you away from danger, reducing the impact of some troublesome event, or providing reassurance you were not alone.

Initiated or not, we regularly thank the Master for looking after us, not only during crises but in the micro and mundane aspects of existence too. And whilst we would be hard-pressed to describe the nature of that support, we *know* of it because we have sensed it. So, returning to the question first posed, isn't it odd that we are worried? If, deep within, we've sensed the Master's care, why would he not respond to our call for help again?

Why do we worry?

Human birth, finding a true Master, and receiving the gift of Nam are three extremely rare gifts bestowed by the divine. In a letter to a disciple living overseas, Maharaj Sawan Singh, the Great Master, wrote in *Spiritual Gems*:

The mere fact that God, in his mercy, has selected us to be put on the path should make us very happy. If it does not, it is due to the fact that we do not realize the great blessing and privilege involved in it.... Are not you one of the luckiest persons living in your country to be chosen by him for the path? How many millions is the population of your country, and how difficult it is for any person living there to come to know of the path and, even on knowing, to get initiated on it! Do you think you have searched for and found the path by your own efforts?

Whilst the mystics remind us of our great blessings and exhort us to be happy, going by the questions relating to worry in the Sant Mat literature, it is evident that we do not eradicate our anxieties simply by making a commitment to follow a spiritual way of life. However, allowed to persist, worrying will impede our spiritual development. To avoid

this, let us try to identify the root cause of our angst. Maharaj Charan Singh points to “our wishes, our demands, our ambitions, our desires” as one reason. We agonize over fulfilling our aspirations, and the stronger our desire to achieve these, the more we fret. On this basis, it would seem logical for us to become desire-less but flitting from one desire to another is so deeply ingrained in our psyche that, no matter how much we instruct ourselves not to wish for anything, it’s impossible to achieve this by reason alone.

In *The Dawn of Light*, the Great Master identifies karma as an additional reason why we are unable to become desireless:

Although in our heart we may persuade ourselves that we have eliminated desire, yet it is not correct, because as long as the karma is not washed away, which happens at the second stage only ... it cannot be said that the practitioner has abandoned desire.

So, to stop worrying, we must become desireless and for this to occur, we must eliminate karma. We are apparently caught in an impossible situation but Maharaj Charan Singh offers advice on how to stop worrying. Before turning to this, it’s useful to explore how worrying impedes our progress.

Worry impedes our spiritual development

From a spiritual perspective, worrying binds us to the material plane. Just because we might not be praying for X or Y to occur, we mistakenly believe that we are complying with the mystics’ advice not to ask anything from the Lord but the Lord himself. However, our worrying is an expression of dissatisfaction through which we are implicitly entreating him to change things in accordance with our desires. Since, in accordance with divine law, the mind records every thought, word, and action, our worrying also creates an imprint, and if etched deeply, this will become the reason that we return to the material plane after death.

To understand how this might happen, we can turn to another divine law. As explained by Guru Arjun Dev in the fourth stanza of the *Jap Ji*, when the Lord sent souls into the creation, he decreed that every desire

of the soul must be fulfilled: “The kind Father has ordered that the child should have whatever he asks for.” Perhaps this was to compensate the souls for their separation? Whatever the reason, as long as the soul keeps yearning for worldly things, its desires continue to be fulfilled. Indeed, the Lord will continue satisfying our hopes and wishes until such time as we become exhausted with asking.

To be clear then, our worries become imprinted in the mind and, if etched deeply, signal a desire. In accordance with divine laws, each desire must be fulfilled, if not in this life, a subsequent one. We are therefore mistaken if we believe that our worries are harmless or, at worst, cause us temporary mental anguish. Until we expand our consciousness, we are incapable of understanding the subtle and intricate ways in which karmic law operates. Our worries are not harmless but keep us imprisoned on the material plane.

How do we stop worrying?

To stop worrying, Maharaj Charan Singh advises us to give everything our best shot but, ultimately, to let the Lord decide what is best. Virtually, all aspects of our life are predetermined and cannot be changed, irrespective of how much we worry. By focusing our energy on our effort and not the outcome, we not only minimize regrets for not trying harder but also our unhappiness when events unfold differently from our hopes or expectations. Indeed, this is exactly why Maharaj Charan Singh puts considerable emphasis on learning to accept life as it is because when we don't, meditation becomes much more difficult. Indeed, meditation is the only tool at our disposal to truly learn how to accept our destiny. Acceptance, if not always a sign of contentment, means we are less preoccupied with desiring change. With fewer desires, we reduce our worry.

Conclusion

The human mind is incapable of understanding how severely worry damages our spiritual development. We risk setting off a chain of events that will bring us back to the material plane. Our only defence is meditation and the grace of the Master, as Maharaj Charan Singh lovingly explains in the following quotation from *Die to Live*:

You can't change the course of events dictated by your destiny. But by ... attending to meditation you remain happy and relaxed as you go through it. You accept whatever comes your way as the grace of the Master. He is the helmsman of your life now, and he has only your happiness and best interest at heart. By his mercy he is bringing you to him as swiftly as possible to give you all he has. So worry has no place in a disciple's heart.



Energy Efficient

It sounds easy doesn't it? Sit down and repeat five words. Yet, our simplest task is undoubtedly our greatest challenge and, unlike many of the scientific paradoxes or conundrums, the reason is obvious – we are addicted to thinking. So when we come to meditate, we might start off focused on the words, but before we've realized it, our thoughts have led us completely astray. It's because we spend virtually every moment allowing our attention to scatter through the nine doors of the human body that we remain preoccupied by the minutiae of the physical plane when we meditate.

We do, however, have the power to reverse this outward fixation. By focusing every iota of our attention at the eye centre, we are assured of channelling our consciousness upwards, contacting the astral form of the Master and entering the higher spiritual planes. Yet raising one's consciousness requires tremendous energy.

To attain this goal, we must conserve as much energy as possible, using no more than is necessary to meet our obligations on the physical plane. In the same way that a car cannot be driven if instead of pouring petrol into the petrol tank we pour it on the roadside, we cannot withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre if our attention is scattered. But if our attention is directed towards simran throughout the day, this will minimize the downward flow of the soul currents. Maharaj Sawan Singh put it like this:

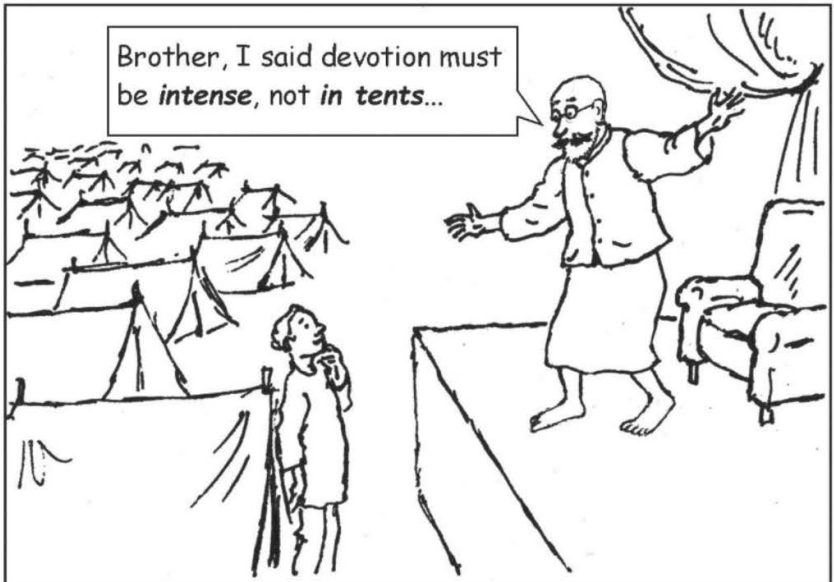
When the water of a reservoir that has been leaking through a large number of holes and pipes is made to pass through one pipe by shutting all other apertures, what great force and velocity it acquires. In the same manner, our soul current passing out through the eyes, ears, nose and other apertures has become attached to ... objects of the material world – animate and inanimate. When all this love is concentrated singly on the Master, you can hardly imagine what power and energy it generates and what wonders it performs.

Call of the Great Master



Food for Thought

Words can be so confusing!



Experiencing God

Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon, commonly known as Madame Guyon, was a Christian mystic who died in France in 1717 after spending nearly ten years in prison for advocating inner prayer as a means of attaining union between the soul and God.

Forced to marry a man much older than her, Madame Guyon was a widow by the age of twenty-eight. Whilst looking after her three children, she dedicated her life to inner prayer – meditation – under the guidance of a Barnabite monk. Despite the many hardships she faced, she placed her faith in God not only for spiritual salvation but for all material necessities and surrendered herself to him entirely. Indeed, such was her faith that she viewed her difficulties as gifts from God with the purpose of eliminating the ego so that she might become one with her inspiration, Jesus Christ. As she explains in her book, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, inner prayer is not the same as idleness; on the contrary, the soul becomes active when the self is still:

When some people hear about the prayer of silence, they falsely imagine that the soul remains dull, dead, and inactive. But [just the opposite is true]. Without question the soul acts more nobly and more extensively than it has ever done before. God Himself is its mover, and He now energizes and directs its activities by His Spirit.

Harold Chadwick, *Madame Jeanne Guyon, Experiencing Union with God through Prayer*

Sant Mat is also a path of action and similarly emphasizes meditation as a means of rendering the mind motionless so that the soul, moved by God, may rise upwards. Put differently, the consciousness does not expand *due to our meditation*, but our effort is essential for God to do the rest.

Sant Mat advises that our effort should encompass two actions: to perform all we do in the name of God, as this negates self-interest and the ego; and the other is to be attentive to God in every moment by repeating simran. Maharaj Sawan Singh describes inner prayer as “the most natural, direct and easy means of connecting individuals with the Creator, and connecting the soul with the Lord.” Such inner prayer subdues the mind,

liberating it from turmoil and anguish. The calmer the mind, the more at peace we feel and, as Madame Guyon explains, the more inclined we are to keep our attention directed in prayer: “The soul that rests in God has an activity [that is] exceedingly noble and elevated, yet altogether peaceful. And the more peaceful it is, the swifter it moves, because it is given up to that Spirit by whom it is moved and directed.”

When satsangis dedicate their life to inner prayer – that is, repeat simran throughout the day and practise meditation sincerely and regularly – it may or may not result in the vision of the inner form of the Master. However, the more we practise meditation, the closer we feel to him in heart and spirit, and, determined not to lose these feelings of love and yearning, we strengthen our desire and resolve to keep our attention focused on meditation. The love that we experience as a result is really an example of divine grace, a gift from the Lord in recognition of our effort to practise. As Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

Of course, it starts with the Father; but then we try to search for him, and our love grows and grows. The more he gives, the more it grows. The more effort we make, the more love we feel; the more grace is there, the more effort we make. These will always go side by side.

To conclude, union between soul and God is attained by a life dedicated to inner prayer.



The Good Samaritan

Throughout the ages, seekers of the truth have sought the help of living spiritual guides, often viewing them as their saviours. Upon the death of such mystics, later followers have often claimed that ‘their’ spiritual guide was humanity’s only saviour even though this did not reflect the teachings of the mystic himself. For example, in Christian tradition, the saviour is always Jesus, although there is considerable evidence that Jesus taught the importance of a living guide. There is also evidence that the common interpretation of Jesus’ parables is not always the way in which many early Christians understood them. One such parable is that of the good Samaritan.

Who is my neighbour?

Found exclusively in the Gospel of Luke, the parable of the Good Samaritan is narrated by Jesus in response to a question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ In the parable, a Jewish traveller is stripped of his clothing, beaten, and left for dead on the roadside. After a while, a Jewish priest comes by and then a Levite (an educated man of Israel’s priestly class) but neither offer the man any assistance. Finally, along comes a Samaritan who, tending to the man’s injuries with oil and wine, carries him to an inn and leaves money as payment for all the man’s expenses. Thus, Jesus concludes that the good neighbour is the Samaritan who, despite the hostility between the Samaritans and Jews, took care of the beaten man.

References in early Christian texts suggest that this parable, though commonly taken to be a story exemplifying human kindness and compassion, may have been intended as a mystic allegory. The wounded man, symbolizing the soul, is stripped of his light and glory by ‘thieves’ – the passions and negative tendencies inherent in us all. He is ‘half dead’ because, although in a desperate condition in the physical universe, the soul never loses its natural pristine purity and immortality.

Choosing a priest and a Levite as observers who offer no help to the wounded man, is significant. It is the priestly class which is looked upon to provide guidance on spiritual matters. Like everyone else, however, priests can be consumed by human passions and victim to the illusion of life on

the material plane. Whilst well-versed in mystic teachings, they may not know how to apply these in practice. Therefore, powerless to help, the priest and the scholar of holy scriptures simply pass on by.

It is left to a passing Samaritan, an outsider, to heal the wounded man. The Samaritan represents the Master. It is he alone who, understanding the depth of the wounds incurred by souls, is truly compassionate and able to start the healing process. Thus, tending to the man with oil and wine is symbolic of the Master imparting the technique of spiritual practice. The inn where the wounded man is taken represents the inner heavenly realms where the saviour pays off the soul's debts; debts which would otherwise have prevented the soul from recovery. Left destitute by the thieves of the mind, the soul has no other means of payment. The soul, therefore, is entirely reliant upon the compassion of its friend – one whom it has never previously met and yet who has taken so much care of him.

And there the parable ends, rather abruptly from the allegorical point of view, with the Samaritan paying for the man's stay at the inn for as long as necessary. Perhaps, when the man is well enough to travel further, the Samaritan takes him to his own home and allows him to stay there forever. But that, of course, is purely speculation!

Abridged from The Prodigal Soul: The Wisdom of Ancient Parables



Spirituality Tweets

Maharaj Charan Singh gave his disciples a wealth of wonderful advice. The following 'tweets' are taken from Words Eternal, a compilation of some of his sayings contained in discourses and in letters to satsangis and seekers.

Without divine grace Satguru cannot be contacted. Without Satguru Nam cannot be obtained. Without Nam there can be no salvation. Such is the essence of the path of the Masters.

The doctrine of karma is not against making any effort, but teaches us to be content when our efforts fail.

Satguru is within you and is always ready to help you. Nothing gives the Master more pleasure than a disciple coming up to Him and contacting Him within.

The mere fact that God in his mercy has selected us to be put on the path should make us very happy. If it does not, it is due to the fact that we do not realize the great blessing and privilege involved in it.

Pray to God to grant you courage and strength to overcome the weakness that you find in yourself. His mercy and grace are unlimited and we should never be disappointed in this respect. God is your Father and you are his child. Try to approach him in that light.

In this world we accept a reflection for real, a counterfeit for genuine, a piece of glass for a diamond.

Nam is the greatest of gifts with which the Supreme Lord has endowed us. It is the one gate He has provided for us to get out of the wheel of births and deaths.

Do not worry unnecessarily about your failings. Forget the past, live and meditate in the present, and do not worry about the future.

As to intellect, God gave it to us simply to carry on our worldly work. Beyond that our wisdom does not help. God wants us to rise above cold reason on the wings of love for him and see him with the eye of the soul.

Love lies within you and is the outcome of meditation. The more effort you make on the path, the more the inner love is developed.

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

The Lord loves to meet us even more than we can possibly long to meet him. It is he who creates the desire in our hearts to meet Him.

Love, like fire, needs regular fuel. Your love for the Master must be sustained by regular meditation and devotion.

Shabd is the only real, everlasting and unfailing friend and this we should try to cultivate. Shabd never deserts, nor does the Master.



The Final Word

Wisdom from Maharaj Sawan Singh in Philosophy of the Masters Vol. II.

Wherever there is love there is life. Where there is no love, life is worthless. Actually, a man is not a true man unless he has within him the divine spark of love. God, in the form of love, is within everybody. Those whose eyes are open see all human beings as manifestations of God, like rays of the sun or waves of the ocean. They know that the same spark of love has created them all. Therefore, who can be low or who can be high? Men in different positions of life and in different countries are all one in His eyes; and differences in caste, creed or country can never be of any importance to those who possess the quality of love. There is one God in heaven and one family on earth. Maulana Rumi says:

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

Love is the richest of all treasures. Without it there is nothing and with it there is everything. Love never perishes, even if the bones of a lover are ground fine like powder. Just as the perfume of sandalwood does not leave it, even if it is completely ground up, similarly the basis of love is the soul, and it is indestructible and therefore eternal. Beauty can be destroyed, but not love.

When St. John became so old that he was not able to walk and was able to speak only with great difficulty, another follower of Christ took him to a great gathering of children to deliver a sermon. He raised his head and said: "Little children love one another." Once again he said this and then repeated it a third time, after which he was silent. At that the people closest to him said, "Good man, haven't you anything more important to say to these children?" To this he replied: "I give this advice over and over again, because of all of the qualities, that of love is the greatest need of mankind. If you would love each other and the current of love would

fill your minds, you would possess all other good qualities. Love, and all things shall be added unto you.”

Saints are an ocean of Love, because they are already merged into Lord, and the Lord is love. The currents of Love emanating from the saints spread out and influence every nook and corner of the world. By receiving such currents, one's heart is inclined to meet the Lord.

To demand worldly conveniences from God is to separate oneself from the aims of love. Not to remain in His Mauj (Will), not to be contented in happiness or even in pain is to fall down from the heights of love. A lover loves only the Beloved, and the Beloved is the be-all and end-all for him. He sees only the light of his Beloved in this world and in the sky above. The Beloved is his real world. Nearness to the Beloved is his heaven, and being away from the beloved is his hell.

Love is not dependent upon anything else. It is an ocean of faith and fortitude. It is an ocean of strength and faith. It imparts peace and serenity to the mind and to life. It is of real and lasting value. All the things of this world appear beautiful when there is love. By the currents of love the entire atmosphere is charged with joy, and the spark of God's light is visible in love.



BOOK REVIEW

With the Three Masters: Translated from Ruhani Diary (A Spiritual Diary)

BY RAI SAHIB MUNSHI RAM, SECRETARY TO THE THREE MASTERS

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Rai Sahib Munshi Ram served as the personal secretary to three masters: Maharaj Sawan Singh, Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh and Maharaj Charan Singh. For most of that time he kept a personal diary recording in intimate detail the daily lives of these masters from his unique standpoint as personal secretary. Spanning fourteen years, 1942 to 1956, the diary covers the expansion of Dera, the Partition of India, the death of the Great Master, the three-year mastership of Sardar Bahadur Ji, and the succession and early years of Maharaj Charan Singh Ji's term as master. First published in Hindi as the three-volume *Ruhani Diary*, the English-speaking audience knew of this work through selections translated and published as *With the Three Masters*. With this new fifth edition, of *With the Three Masters* RSSB offers for the first time a complete translation of *Ruhani Diary*.

This diary affords a rare glimpse into the way the masters fulfill their worldly as well as spiritual responsibilities, setting the example of a balanced human life. Many entries in the diary describe Maharaj Sawan Singh (affectionately known as the Great Master) spending long hours in the heat and dust attending to the work of the family farm in Sirsa. In this way, he fulfilled his duties to his family as a householder, ensuring a source of income by which he and his descendants could not only sustain themselves but give generously to the sangat:

We hear that some ignorant people, including a few satsangis, complain about a great saint like Hazur being involved with his children's worldly affairs like an ordinary householder... He said: I do not want my children to become a burden on society or the sangat. I do not want them to lose spiritual grace and depend on satsang funds. That is why I have encouraged them to take up farming.

The balanced life is essential to following the spiritual path. The author summarizes Maharaj Charan Singh's response to the many letters from disciples saying they wanted to leave their jobs and homes and settle at Dera:

Hazur always tells them that this is the path of sahaj yoga, on which progress is slow. This slow and steady method of separating the soul from the body by meditation is the only one that bears fruit. We should not rush in this or give up in despair. Those who leave their homes for this path run the risk of becoming disillusioned faster and quitting.... In renunciation, you feel failures much more and become easily frustrated.

Each of these masters devoted time almost daily to attending to correspondence from their disciples around the globe. Sometimes, when a disciple's letter was found to be particularly interesting – especially if the disciple describes some inner experience – the author copied the full text of it into the diary. Often he writes a paraphrase of the master's response or a synopsis of discussion he had with the master about the letter. For example, he writes about Maharaj Sawan Singh:

After I had read the letter to him, Hazur said that only those who work hard get results. We are unaware that we carry the burden of millions of lifetimes of karmas on our heads. The inner Master will become manifest only after these karmas are washed away. When you sit in meditation, the inner Master sees that there is a soul anxiously waiting for him.

In addition to attending to correspondence, many days were spent receiving visits from satsangis and seekers who brought him their questions and troubles. Reading the diary, we are privileged to hear the master's answers. Thus, again from the time of Maharaj Sawan Singh:

Regarding a European lady that Hazur initiated: The lady told Hazur that she wakes up depressed in the mornings. I suggested that it could be due to weakness or illness. But Hazur said that the moment people wake up, they get absorbed in thoughts of persons and things they love. Since she had no such worldly attachments, she felt a void that made her feel low and unhappy. When she begins to develop love for the Shabd and the Master through her meditation, this feeling will disappear.

When a visitor complained, “Why is it that good, God-fearing people suffer in life and often die a painful death, whereas wicked, sinful people meet a quick death and do not suffer much?” Great Master replied, “This is how it should be.” He went on:

God is especially merciful to good people and cleans their karmas through sickness and so on, so that they do not have to undergo punishment in hell or in future lives. Maulana Rum says: “You who complain to God about your suffering should look instead at his kindness. Either you should cease asking for his grace or quit complaining about your suffering.”

The masters also frequently traveled to visit sangats large and small to give satsang. The diary records the grueling schedule of travel on dusty roads, stopping to give darshan to groups of satsangis who gathered at various spots along the road, or to give an impromptu satsang, or to visit a sick or dying satsangi in some village – and not infrequently to deal with a broken-down car. Reading the diary, one cannot escape the overwhelming fact of how hard the masters work on behalf of their disciples. As the author points out many times, the masters seemed to have an otherworldly capacity for hard work, often with no break and very little food or rest.

Whenever we ask Hazur [Maharaj Sawan Singh] to rest, he says that this body will perish one day, let it be put to good use. He is not at all bothered about his walks, meals or personal needs. Quietly, he keeps serving others and never complains or talks about the discomfort, lack of sleep and constant travel he has to undergo. No ordinary man can undertake such work.

Holding satsang is the masters’ seva, and no inconvenience would stop them from performing it. Whether at Dera or in some remote village or even by the side of the road, the masters gave satsang. In the diary, the author often gives a short paraphrase of the main points that the master stressed in a satsang. For example, his brief synopsis of a satsang by Sardar Bahadur was:

First, work hard. When the mind gets tired of working hard without achieving any results, intense longing for the Lord is awakened. Without intense longing, love for the Lord does not arise. Love is essential if we are to meet the Lord; love is born out of intense longing, which in turn is a result of hard work.

Throughout the three volumes, one is struck again and again by the humility of the masters. They did not want praise through devotional songs or poetry, nor did they want people to bow before them or make a show of their devotion. The author describes an incident with the Great Master:

He told them that he had been a government servant all his life and was not a mahatma, faqir or saint; he was just like them – a sinful soul of God. “The same God is within me that is within you,” he said. “There is no difference between us.”

The humility of the masters is nowhere more evident than in the challenging times of transition from one master to his successor. The diary details the last days and death of Great Master and the beginning of Sardar Bahadur’s mastership. Three years later Sardar Bahadur’s death and the transfer of the mastership to Maharaj Charan Singh is rendered similarly in detail. The author includes the words of Maharaj Charan Singh’s speech at the time of accepting the duty Sardar Bahadur had laid upon him:

We must not lose courage at this trying time. Instead, calmly and with determination, we should follow the path of joining the soul with the Sound Current taught to us by Hazur Maharaj Ji and Sardar Bahadur Ji. Hazur Maharaj Ji used to say that he was always with everyone. This assurance was for all of us and not for me alone.

All in all, Rai Sahib Munshi Ram’s work is rightly titled *Ruhani Diary* – that is, “spiritual diary.” A personal diary, clearly not written with publication in mind, it tells us many mundane details of his daily life as secretary serving three great masters. But woven in among these seemingly meaningless details – and often taking one by surprise – one finds innumerable brilliant gems of spiritual wisdom.



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

