

July / August 2021

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Word Made Flesh
- 5 Light and Faith
- 8 The Value of Satsang
- 12 Truth in a Nutshell
- 13 No Frills
- 15 The Elephants' Captivity
- 18 The Qualities of a Master
- 22 The Treasure of a Moment in Time
- 23 Julian of Norwich
- 27 The Gift of Love
- 29 Stillness
- 32 His Guiding Hand
- 35 Only Connect
- 37 Food for Thought
- 38 Mountaineers
- 39 Book Review

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
Copyright © 2021 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

Articles and poems that appear without sources have been written by the contributors to this magazine.

VOLUME 17 • ISSUE 4 • JULY / AUGUST 2021

Word Made Flesh

*The Name of the Lord wells up in the saints,
and the saints are steeped in his Name.
The saints are steeped in his Name
and they alone can bestow the gift of the Name.
Adepts in the practice of the Name,
they impart the way to unite with it.
Austerities, penances, fasts and pilgrimages,
one may endlessly perform,
But without the help of the saint
one can never find entrance to the Name.
Try as one may in a million ways,
one will still wander endlessly.
The chamber of the Name will not open
until one comes to the door of the saint.
The Name lies, O Paltu, beyond the reach of pranas –
It is at the beginning; it is at the end.
The Name of the Lord wells up in the saints,
and the saints are steeped in his Name.*

Saint Paltu



Light and Faith

There was once a man who wanted to make an urgent journey during the night. He had been to visit a friend but now his family needed him and it was time he returned home. It was very dark and he knew the road would be rough and that the entire ten miles was unlit. All he had to guide him on his way was a tiny lantern. He stood hesitating on the doorstep of the house, wondering how he would reach his destination when the little lantern's beam only shone ten feet ahead.

"Is something wrong my friend? Can I help?" asked a passer by. The man explained his dilemma.

"But don't you see?" said his well-wisher. "Because you are holding the lantern, the light will travel with you. Never fear – it will always be ten feet ahead of you and that is all you need, however far you travel."

There is a parallel for all of us here. Where have we come from? We are actually drops of the divine ocean of love. We are all children of God – children who are a long way from home. The path of Sant Mat has been given to us by a loving Creator to take us back home. Recognizing that we have a long way to go may present a terrifying challenge, but having acknowledged our situation we should then focus on what is asked of us on a day-to-day basis. Sant Mat is a path best walked one step at a time; we don't need to see all the way, provided we have courage and faith. The step ahead is already lit up by the light we carry with us – the light we were given at initiation, which is the Shabd form of the Guru. By using our simran and bhajan we can help ourselves to live in the moment, stepping forward happily and confidently.

Living in the moment is possible for all of us. When we do this, we invite the Creator to accompany us and can see his guiding hand in everything around us. In *Living Meditation* we read: "Our life is made up of a string of moments. Being true to each will improve the quality of our life."

Actually the Masters discourage us from spending time speculating on the stages of our inner journey and analyzing our progress. Speculation is akin to the man with his lantern worrying about the darkness beyond it. Such speculation reduces spirituality to an intellectual concept which,

as the story of the lantern illustrates, is unnecessary. It is far more important to ‘just do it’ by putting what we have been taught into practice, one day at a time, one step at a time.

Having faith in our own light, our “lantern” of the divine within us, is rather like being the little child that Jesus Christ held up as a model for discipleship. Saint Matthew’s gospel in the Bible tells us:

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to explain that a child is simple and innocent. He does not calculate – if you give him diamonds or pebbles it makes no difference to him. When his hand is in his father’s, he is happy to take whatever comes. Above all, he is trusting, and this is the childlike quality which will help us best on the spiritual path. It is faith in the teachings and faith in our Satguru that will make it possible for us to step forward.

Baba Afdal Kashani, an early thirteenth-century saint from Persia, advised us not to speculate, worry or analyze:

*Don't regret the past;
release your worries
about the future.
Don't think about yourself –
and stop trying not to!*

*Now's the time
to leave the shore –
the ocean of Unity
is calling ...*

*don't listen ...
don't see ...*

don't say ...

don't think ...

don't be ...

JUST STOP

Baba Afdal Kashani in

Love's Alchemy, tr. D & S Fideler

If we can stop worrying and start trusting, that small lantern will light the road before us every step of the way.



The Value of Satsang

Following the several months when many of us had to do without satsang because of the coronavirus pandemic, it might be helpful to revisit why satsang is so valuable. Perhaps its absence has reminded us of how precious it is and rekindled our longing for it.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh is quoted as saying:

If your boat is caught in a storm and you reach the shore, you feel so relieved. We are all in the storm of our mind, and when we go to the satsang of the mystics, we find we can land on a shore. How relieved we feel. Satsang is a great anchor.

Although satsang can never be a substitute for our own spiritual practice, it is nevertheless an essential part of our spiritual development. *Sat* means truth and *sang* means association or company. Truth is the true Master and in his company we grow spiritually.

Satsang is a school of spirituality, a school with a difference because it is run by a realized soul who is one with the One. At satsang we receive an education of the heart (the spiritual heart or the soul). We learn about our true nature and our true position in the world and we learn about our relationship with our Creator and how to get back to him. We discover where we come from, who we are and where we are heading. Jesus Christ explained the essence of satsang when he said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

The Master is present at every satsang whether he is delivering the discourse or giving darshan, or whether it is a group meeting held without his physical presence. But are *we* there? Baba Ji counsels that we should rise above the limits of mind and body. In our group meetings we intellectually say he is here, but do we really know it? Do we act as if we believe it? Actually, if it was more than a mere concept for us, our approach and behaviour would be very different. The paradox is that it is by listening to satsang and acting upon what we hear that we get the precious insight that attending satsang is very important – whether the

Master is physically present or not. Paltu Sahib, a true Master who lived in eighteenth century India, explains:

*Without satsang,
The Name of the Lord remains unknown, and without his Name,
Attachment to the world does not vanish. Until attachment goes,
There can be no release from bondage. Without release,
Longing for the Lord does not awaken. If longing is absent,
Devotion will not blossom. Without devotion,
Love will not be kindled in the heart. Without love, there is no Name.
And without the Name, no saint.
Seek the gift of satsang therefore, O Paltu.*

Saint Paltu, His Life and Teachings

Paltu explains that satsang is the means whereby the whole process of going back to the Lord is set in motion. Satsang is given as a grace of the Lord and it is that grace which gives us enough faith to start regularly keeping company with the Master. It is the beginning of a soul's transformation from being trapped by ego to realizing its own divine nature. Paltu's beautiful words remind us that we are seeking the Shabd (the Lord's Name), without which we can't get rid of the attachments that tie us to the physical. It is only as satsang works on us and these attachments start to dissolve that the gift of divine longing unfolds.

Longing establishes the soul's natural devotion for the Lord. Devotion turns to love and we realize that Shabd (the Name) and the giver of the Name (the Master) are ever present.

In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II, Hazur Maharaj Ji explains that in the company of the worldly, man loses his inborn spiritual qualities, whereas in the company of holy men or saints, he develops spiritual wisdom and love for God:

Our minds, as you know, are easily influenced by the company we keep. When we spend time with drinkers, we take on the habit of drinking; with smokers we get into the habit of smoking; with thieves, we begin to steal. When we keep the company of saints, devotees and lovers of God,

we automatically develop the habit of devotion, whether we want to or not. That is why the Masters tell us to associate with saints.

In the quotation above, the Master gives very clear advice. He is not saying, “Well, you can attend satsang if you get time in your busy life.” He is rather implying that we must cling to those enlightened souls, the mystics, because only clinging to the enlightened ones will give us the chance to end the tyranny of the ego’s habitual worldliness. In associating with the saints, we will see holiness in action before our very eyes.

Maharaj Charan Singh gives further advice on what we can expect to hear at satsang, telling us, “There is never any pettiness or criticism of others in the satsangs of the saints ... they simply pay homage to the Word and praise the Name ... Guru Nanak Sahib says: “Know that as true satsang where the principle of the one Name is explained.”

There are many types of institutions in the world that call their meetings ‘satsangs.’ They sometimes also perform the function of social clubs engaging in communal activities and even matchmaking. This all has its place in society, but true Masters consider the real satsang to be the place where only Nam or Shabd is discussed. Hazur Maharaj Ji reinforces this point when in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II, he says:

My friends, that alone can be called satsang where the desire and longing to find the Lord is awakened and the method for uniting with him is described.... Saints clear up our misconceptions and remove our doubts and illusions through their company, through their satsang. They arouse within us the desire and longing to meditate on the Name.... What illusion are they referring to? Since everything we see is unreal, it is all an illusion. The real is what we cannot see, and the saints awaken within us the desire to experience it. They detach us from our love for the creation and engender within us a longing to find the real.

Soami Ji of Agra recognizes that though the effect of satsang may not be immediately apparent, it will ultimately bear fruit. He says in *Sar Bachan* that for those who are in love with the “unreal” – the creation – it will take time, but that by attending satsang we will at least be protected from the worst effects of the world:

Satsang comes first. Those who remain in satsang receive many benefits. A stone which remains in water keeps cool although the water does not penetrate it; still it is better than the stones outside the water. Likewise, the worldly people come to the satsang and are not affected by it, but this does not matter. Anyway they are better than the out-and-out worldly people. In course of time they will begin to accept the influence.

The Master's powerful presence is actively at work in satsang. The following short poem by Kabir Sahib, a true Master who lived at the same time as Guru Nanak and Guru Ravidas, hints at the unseen process that takes place:

*Master is the magic stone,
Approach him
With humility and care;
He is the burning candle
To which neighbours come
To light their candles
From its flame*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Kabir Sahib explains that the true Master is an alchemist who owns the mythical philosopher's stone that turns base metal into gold. The philosopher's stone here is a metaphor for Shabd. If we are honest with ourselves, thinking back to our first encounter with satsang, were we not just like lumps of rusty metal, hypothetically speaking? But through the Master's loving words and encouragement we take to the purifying four principles and gradually sort our lives out. His grace and our meditation (which we can only perform by his grace) effect the transformation.

Satsang is the most wonderful opportunity for us all. Let us remember that the alchemy is active whether he is physically present or not.



Truth in a Nutshell

Genuine and Counterfeit

Just as genuine and counterfeit currency can circulate simultaneously, so truth and falsehood can co-exist. Those who are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood are living in darkness. They are like travellers in the night, not knowing in which direction they are going. The task of religious teachers is to enable people to see what is true and what is false. A jeweller needs to learn the true ruby from a worthless stone; a merchant must learn to tell genuine currency from forgeries. To become holy a seeker must learn to tell divine truth from worldly falsehood. And as a person grows in holiness, night turns into day.

Robert Van de Wever, *Rumi in a Nutshell*

* * *

Not knowing our own soul and being separated from our source causes the constant strife that goes on with individuals. This then results in social unrest as people forget the ideal of the oneness of God and kinship amongst all their fellow beings. Discord among the individuals, families, communities and nations then follows, throwing the whole world into turmoil....

At such times saints draw our attention to reality and point to the natural path that God has himself placed within every person since the beginning of time. They remind us that there is a Creator of this universe and that all religions encourage realization of the Creator alone.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *My Submission*



No Frills

Sant Mat or *Gur Mat* (the teaching of true Masters) presents its followers with absolute essentials; it has no need for any sort of decoration or elaboration, any form of ritual or ceremony, or any outward show.

Sant Mat asks us to focus on the essential purpose of our human birth, which is for the soul to journey back to its original source, the Supreme Lord. In order for this to happen, the Masters teach us four basic principles. These are explained in detail and are repeated at almost every satsang. The first is that we follow a strict lacto-vegetarian diet; the second that we avoid alcohol, mind-altering drugs and tobacco; the third requires us to lead a good moral life; and the fourth is that, once initiated, we practise meditation for at least two and a half hours daily as explained by the Master at the time of initiation. We are instructed to adhere to these four principles for the rest of our lives.

Even the Supreme Lord does not require elaborate adjectives to describe him or to praise him. He is what he is – let us reach him and know him rather than spend our breath on describing one whom we do not yet know. Saints and mystics use a wide variety of adjectives in an attempt to tell us about the Lord – they do this in the irrepressible flow of their love.

Actually, it is said in the *Adi Granth* that even if one used the whole surface of the earth as paper and used all the trees in the world as pens and then used all the water in all the oceans as ink to describe or praise the Lord, even then one would not succeed. Soami Ji Maharaj in *Sar Bachan* used one word, '*Anami*' meaning 'no name', to describe the Lord.

Let us look at some additional, everyday aspects of Sant Mat to see how it exemplifies simplicity. Firstly, dress: Masters are a perfect example to us. They dress simply but smartly and in accordance with the place where they reside. On becoming satsangis we are not advised to dress in any particular manner since the wearing of a specific type of clothing has no bearing on our ability to follow this path. We dress respectfully in response to convention and cultural norms – after all, we are following a spiritual way of life so that we can forget about our bodies, not draw attention to them. But at the same time, in a spirit of love, we should

accept those who are different from ourselves. It would be a dull world if we all looked the same.

Another aspect we might consider is the environment in which people gather to listen to the teachings of the saints. We will notice that our satsang centres around the world are often constructed to blend with the local surroundings. They are also built with functionality in mind, without elaborate decorations on the outside or inside of the buildings – they are there to serve a purpose and they do it well, without fuss.

The satsang stages from which the teachings are relayed are simple and functional, though attractive in their simplicity. Yes, CCTV cameras, monitors and speakers are there to ensure that people even far from the stage can see and hear those giving satsang. Hardly anything else is required. In fact, if there were complicated, lavish fixtures and fittings, it could distract our attention.

The simplicity in outward things reflects Sant Mat's fundamental response towards life in the physical creation: a resolve to use God's material gifts responsibly and well but always as a stepping stone towards life beyond this world.



The Elephants' Captivity

The saints tell us we are held to this creation by the mind and our ego. Our ego, backed up by the rest of mind, is running our life and we are imprisoned by our attachment to worldly pleasures and possessions – rather like the elephants in the following story:

Along a dusty highway in India a man caught up with a line of elephants and their trainer. He observed the docility of the elephants and thought that it must be a poor life in captivity for such wonderful beasts. Suddenly he paused, confused by the fact that each of these huge creatures was held only by a slender rope tied to one leg. It was obvious that the elephants could, at any time, break away from the fragile restraint, but for some reason they did not. When he reached the trainer, the man asked why they made no attempt to get away.

“Well,” the trainer said, “when they are very young and much smaller, we use the same-sized rope to tie them, and at that age it’s enough. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, and they never test it.” The man was amazed. A powerful and enormous creature was denied its freedom because of the limitations of its conditioning.

Just like the elephants, because of our mind’s conditioning, we come to believe that this physical world and its temptations – the world we live in and our physical body – are all that there is. The tragedy is that we are not even aware of this conditioning. We just let it happen.

Again and again we get bound to the people, places, and things we encounter. Each of these attachments holds us. Our past actions have brought us into this life, into this body, and have given us a destiny. Our destiny puts us in circumstances in which we are blind to where we have come from and where we are going. As we get more and more entangled in the web of action and reaction, we collect and sustain a huge karmic debt, and as a result we keep coming and going in the cycle of birth and death.

The story of the elephants reveals the power of conditioning and how it limits our perception of reality. The good news for us is that the story also shows that our conditioning doesn’t alter the reality. (The rope remains insignificant whatever the elephants think!) All we need is someone

to convince us that there is something else out there for us and we can reach it. If one of those elephants had pulled away, the others would have understood that they too could regain their freedom.

There is a parallel here with what the Masters do for us. The Masters present the true story of the Creator, Spirit and individual soul, a story that is surprisingly simple. Even a child can understand it – it is just our stubborn mind that does not like to accept simple truths. We tend to look for complicated and complex explanations which we can tear apart intellectually and make even more complex.

Masters tell us that we are in a body but we are not the body; that we are spiritual beings going through the experience of being human. As spiritual beings we are the same essence as the formless conscious energy which we have yet to experience. The soul is potentially very powerful. Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

The soul is just being dominated by the mind. We do not know what soul is, in fact, because we are so much a slave of the mind. We begin to think probably that our mind is the soul. Actually the soul is something far superior to the mind.

At present our soul is in a dormant state, completely unaware of its source and where it belongs. Underneath this fleshly incarnation of body and the machinations of mind, we are a drop of the divine Shabd. Our soul has come from regions far beyond mind and matter. But in the everyday consciousness of our life, we live in ignorance. Our soul is buried under layers of desires, passions and karmas: we fail to see what we really are. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

Soul is misguided by mind, and mind by senses, and senses by objects of sense. Objects control the senses, senses control the mind, and mind controls the soul. The whole order is thus reversed. With proper guidance, mind should control the senses and the soul should control the mind. What a shame that soul, the child of Sat Nam in Sach Khand, is subservient to senses, and senses are hopelessly attached to material objects. Let us now reverse the order. With Master's help and guidance, let us commence the journey back.

Saints come to wake us up from our deep slumber, and show us how to become free from the shackles of the body and mind, so that we can reach our source – the Shabd. We have to move beyond our thoughts, beyond even time and space to experience Shabd, as it cannot be channelled through any human words or theories. Shabd is the essential fabric of our existence. We are attracted to the Shabd because it is bliss, light and love and is associated with the higher consciousness in all of us. There is nothing outside of it. Shabd is everywhere and is the conscious energy that connects everyone and everything.

Masters explain that this world will never become a happier place, because it is designed to be a training ground for the soul. We have attained this human form after going through different species of plant, insect, bird and animal life. We cannot even imagine for how many lives we have been coming and going in this world, in various forms. But at last, and with the grace of God, the higher mind develops a longing for self- and God- realization.

Now it simply remains for the soul to finish its store of karmas, before it can merge into the Lord. In other words, by attending to meditation, we have to clear our karmic accounts before we can finally leave and go back to our home. Remembering the message brought to us by the Masters will help us overcome wrong concepts that keep us here – such as the belief that we are powerless captives, like the docile elephants in the story. We are not!

The living Masters who have experienced the truth and lived by its principles give us their teachings and the method to help us practise Shabd meditation and show us the way to liberate our souls. Saints are the manifestation of the Shabd, and are the essential link between the disciple and ultimate spiritual release. Saints diffuse the perfume of truth and bring awareness of a higher consciousness through their teachings. Guru Angad Sahib writes in the Adi Granth: “Were a hundred moons to rise together with a thousand suns, it would be, with all that light, utter darkness without the Guru.”



The Qualities of a Master

We use the word ‘master’ to mean someone who has mastered his subject – for instance we can have a Master of Arts, a Master of Science, or be a master craftsman. A further meaning is someone with authority, who guides and instructs others. When the subject is spirituality, both these meanings are relevant. Some saints, who have achieved all that is achievable in the field of spirituality, come into the world to show others how to do the same. These rare beings are known as Masters and they are possessed of wonderful qualities. Here are some of them:

Generosity

In this world, almost everything comes with a price. But like the air we breathe, Shabd, the creative life force, is entirely free, and Masters come to give us the secret of how to attach our consciousness with Shabd so that, with its help, we may return to our eternal home.

A true Master doesn’t charge money for the teachings he imparts. They are given freely to those who ask for them and are willing to commit themselves to a spiritual way of life. If anyone is charging money for spiritual teachings, then he is not a true Master. If money were charged, then only those who could afford it would be able to develop spiritually. But the Masters are quite clear that everyone is equal before God. It is not wealth, position, or material goods that recommend us to him. Paltu Sahib says, “In the court of the Lord there is only love and devotion.” So everyone has an equal opportunity.

Furthermore, the Master has no personal desire for material benefits for himself. He has no interest in wealth or any of the things that money can buy. The story is told of Guru Ravidas that his disciple Mirabai, a princess, tried to give him a precious jewel. When he refused, she stuck it in the thatch of his cottage roof, thinking that he could then use it when the need arose. But Ravidas ignored it, and she found it there months later. The Master uses the things of this world only for our sake. He lives modestly, and he encourages us to live that way, too.

Self-sacrifice

The Master has controlled his mind and senses and is detached. The pleasures of the senses have no hold on him, and because of this, and his love for the Lord and for the duty that the Lord has placed upon him, he is able to live a life of great self-sacrifice. Everything he does is done for the sake of God and for the good of the souls whom God has ordained that he should rescue.

Sometimes strong swimmers take a life-saving course and become qualified life-savers. The Master is an extraordinary life-saver. It's not our physical lives that he saves, but our souls. We are drowning in deep water, the water of the sea of *chaurasi* – birth and re-birth. He jumps in and saves us. It's as if he is saying, "Hold onto me and do what I tell you to do." If we cling to him and follow his instructions, his strength will carry us to safety.

Humility

In spite of the fact that the Master does everything for us, he has no pride. Masters don't want to be worshipped or fawned over. The Master praises God, his own Master, and the teachings. He asks us not to put him on a pedestal or to make extravagant claims about him. A famous passage from the Bible describing love says, "Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." In other words, love is humble. The Masters are all love, and they are examples of true humility.

Wisdom

The Master is a good teacher. He knows exactly what each one of his disciples needs. Sometimes he is stern and will stand for no nonsense. Sometimes he shows that he is love itself. He is extremely tender-hearted. He is fully aware of our feelings. Every disciple receives the right help and encouragement at the right time.

However kind he is when listening to our supplications, his true purpose is not to indulge our craving for worldly blessings but to take us out of this world and lead us to spiritual emancipation. In *The Path*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes: "We can recognize a true and perfect Master by his power to join our consciousness with the Shabd.

One who finds such a Master begins to hear the transcendent sweet melody within himself.”

Availability

He doesn't clothe himself in mystery and hide away in a remote place. He makes himself absolutely available by holding satsang in a multitude of places across the world and by allowing us, his disciples, to travel to visit him at almost any time we please. He takes every opportunity he can to get in touch with us at our level. During the limitations brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic, Baba Ji immediately responded by holding videotaped question-and-answer sessions which have supported followers all over the world.

It is our duty to do whatever we can to invoke his grace. We don't do this by asking him for help with our personal matters. We must try to work out our own family problems and the like, but of course we can always ask for his help in our spiritual life. We can do this by attending to meditation, practising simran and dhyān throughout the day, sticking firmly to our other vows, attending satsang, helping each other, and doing seva.

When we do this, it's as if we are setting up our shop. We set everything out, we make our wares look nice, we sweep the doorstep, we put an “Open” sign on the door, and we wait, alert, with all our attention, for the customer to come. The customer is our Master, who will come only when we make ourselves ready. To the Master, we are like little children playing at shop-keeping. Our wonderful sweets are probably just pebbles to him, our gorgeous cloth for sale just scraps of cotton. But when he sees that we are earnest in our efforts, like a loving mother or father he kindly comes and plays the game of love with us.

It's as if, like a mother, he is saying, “Oh, what have you got here? Sweets? Yes, I'll have some.” In this way he brings us up. He plays with us, he teaches us.

The perfect exemplar

The Master is our perfect example. The way he is, so should we try to be – focussed, in control of the mind, loving, selfless – thinking of others not ourselves.

The Master is brave. He is the warrior who has conquered the mind. All the inner kingdoms from the physical plane to Sach Khand and beyond lie at his feet. On our behalf, he will see that our karmas are settled, and he will stand by us when we die. For our part, we have to be brave enough to fight the daily small battles against temptations and be strong for his sake. He has become the Master for our sake; we must be real disciples for his sake. We are very lucky to be pulled by a true Master. God realizes our condition. He knows that we can relate only to another human being. So when he wants to awaken us to him, he makes his knowledge available to us through the person of the Master.

The True Lord

Although appearing as a human, sharing our human experiences and emotions, Masters remain, at the same time, above and beyond physical limitation. At all times their consciousness is within that great ocean which is the Lord. We read in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

Q: I have heard it said in the books, and it is stated repeatedly, that all Masters are one. Would you comment on that?

A: You have seen the waves in the ocean. They all arise from the ocean. They merge back into the ocean. Every wave is different from one another, and yet they are part of the same ocean, so they are all one.... We submit ourselves to the Masters, and they carry us to that ocean.

From our perspective, we could think of the Master as being like the lord of a castle, to whom the household of servants owe allegiance. It is to our benefit if we see him in this light, dedicating everything that we do to him. By being our lord and master in this sense, the Master makes it possible for us to practise losing our ego. When the ego is overcome, the soul is able to travel home.



The Treasure of a Moment in Time

*There is a vast wealth of waiting in this world.
Don't let me waste it, impatient and bored
or lost in trivial thought.*

*If you give me the treasure
of a moment in time,
while I wait for water to boil,
wait in a car for a friend
or wait in line at a store –
let me spend that moment
alone with you again.*

*Let me close my eyes and soar
into the sunrise of your smile.
Let me lose myself in the love songs
of your presence within.
Let me feel your dazzling light
dancing inside my cells.*

*Let this be the pleasure I find –
if you give me the treasure
of a moment in time
from my vast wealth
of waiting in this world.*



Julian of Norwich

In *Mysticism, The Spiritual Path*, Vol. I, the writer explains:

Mystic knowledge is not knowledge in the ordinary sense; it is a spiritual, transcendent experience which is different from our ordinary experience not only in degree but in kind ... it is an unanalysable, transcendent, ecstatic intuition which reveals reality to the naked soul.

Within many religious traditions there have been mystics who have either consciously sought to gain experience of the truth behind the dogma or who, because of the intensity of their devotion, have spontaneously risen above everyday consciousness to come into the state of communion described above. This is as true in the West as it is in the East.

Julian of Norwich, a devoted Christian woman, lived in England between 1342 and 1416. On 8 May 1373, when seriously ill and apparently dying, Julian underwent an extraordinary series of spiritual experiences. Sometime over the next thirty years, she wrote two accounts of the experiences: an earlier shorter version and a later, longer one. Her work, like those of many medieval writers, remained untitled but modern editors and translators have called it *Revelations of Divine Love*.

She is now recognized by the Christian church to have been a visionary whose most remarkable achievement was to broaden orthodox Christians' view of God, so that beyond divine justice, they also understood something of His mercy and compassion. In later life she lived as an anchoress at Saint Julian's Church, Norwich, from which she adopted her name.

An anchoress was someone who had taken vows to remain in prayer and isolation for the rest of her life. Anchorites' quarters in medieval England would not necessarily have been just a small cell but could have been a couple of rooms attached to a church, and she might also have the assistance of servants. She would be visited regularly by the parish priest and would be adviser to people needing spiritual help. Julian became well known as a spiritual adviser – a fact that can be gleaned from *The Book*

of *Margery Kempe*, published at the same time and place in England. Here the writer says that she was told by her priest to approach Julian for spiritual advice. This was exceptional in medieval England, since there was considerable discrimination against women. They frequently remained uneducated and were not usually allowed to hold any lay or clerical position of authority.

Very little is known about Julian's life except what can be inferred from her *Revelations of Divine Love*. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were a time of plague, war, and religious executions – very difficult times that parallel the difficult times in the world today. There were religious executions in Norwich, so Julian must have been very aware of the suffering of mankind as well as the corrupt nature of humanity. She refers to “vile sin” and we mortals’ “foul, deadly flesh.” Despite this, her experiences reveal an understanding of the power of the soul and God's all-encompassing love.

Her writing does not mention whether she had a spiritual teacher; we cannot tell if she followed a particular practice of meditation, and although she writes about “the Holy Ghost” no mention is made of internal sound and light. Julian describes what we would term ‘going inside’ to the inner regions, but we have no idea what level she attained. However, what we do realize from her writings is that she was granted a deep understanding and appreciation of God's love, which is what followers of Sant Mat long for.

As disciples of a living Master we are extremely fortunate. We have a specific practice: a discipline imparted to us by our Master at the time of initiation. Moreover, when disciples make spiritual progress and go within, the Master is always with them and accompanies them through the labyrinth of the inner worlds. Without the Master's presence, the soul could get hopelessly lost in these vast inner realms. Any spiritual experience that comes to the disciple of a true Master is beyond doubt and comes with the blessing of the Master, who knows when the disciple is spiritually mature enough to digest such experiences. So clearly, there are differences between our lives and experiences as satsangis and the life of a fourteenth- century Christian mystic.

Satsangis are encouraged to earn their own living or be financially independent, so the Masters would not encourage us to be an anchorite or recluse, but they do extol a simple life. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

Solitude is good for spiritual progress.... Social functions, besides wasting one's time, distract one's mind which, therefore, becomes difficult to concentrate. Without concentration, spiritual progress is impossible.

In *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian in all humility pleads with her reader to focus on her experiences and not on her person, a “poor, worldly, sinful creature”, saying that she is of no importance and that her experience of God's love is all that we should know of her. The Master also emphasizes the importance of humility for making progress on the spiritual path. The Great Master explains in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

If you want to be admitted to the court of saints, go with the cup of humility without any pride, as it is only when the cup is empty that the flagon bends towards it.

Julian writes about the experience of sin and the hope for salvation despite sin, and she expresses a sense of such cosmic optimism that others have used it in their writings, most notably the poet T. S. Eliot: “All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” Here is an excerpt from her *Revelations of Divine Love*:

Our Lord showed me a spiritual vision of his familiar love. I saw that for us he is everything that is good and comforting and helpful. He is our clothing, wrapping and enveloping us for love, embracing us and guiding us in all things, hanging about us in tender love, so that he can never leave us.

And so in this vision, as I understand it, I saw truly that he is everything that is good for us. And in this vision he showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut, lying in the palm of my hand, and to my mind's eye it was round as any ball. I looked at it and thought, “What can this be?” And the answer came to me, “It is all that is made.” I wondered how it would last, for it was so small I thought it might suddenly disappear.

And the answer in my mind was, “It lasts and will last forever because God loves it; and in the same way everything exists through the love of God.”

In this little thing I saw three attributes: the first is that God made it, the second is that he loves it, the third is that God cares for it. But what does that mean to me? Truly, the maker, the lover, the carer; for until I become one substance with him, I can never have love, rest or true bliss; that it is to say, until I am so bound to him that there may be no created thing between my God and me.

And who shall do this deed? Truly, himself, by his mercy and his grace, for he has made me and blessedly restored me to that end.



The Gift of Love

Maharaj Charan Singh Explains

Q. *Love can be a gift, but it also comes from meditation?*

A. You see, I have discussed many times, the inclination of the soul is always towards its own origin. The needle is always attracted by the magnet. The needle is always in love with the magnet. But if you put weight on the needle, the magnet cannot attract it. It cannot go back to the magnet. That doesn't mean that if the weight is there, the love has become less. Love is always there. The inclination of the soul is always towards its own origin. That is love. But if we have a weight on the soul – the weight of the mind, of karma, of our sins, of our actions – the more we remove that weight from the soul, the more that love for our origin shines.

When the Lord marks a particular soul to become whole or to become part of him, the weight starts being removed from that soul. That love starts shining. Then we become whole and then we merge into the whole one. So love is always there.

Potentially every soul is God. But we have to become God, we have to go to that level of consciousness. Potentially every drop is the ocean, but it has to evaporate and become the cloud and the rain before it can be one with the ocean.

So love is always there in every soul. But for that love, nobody would worship the Father. You find all religious places full of devotees. All the holy places are full of devotees because the pull is there from within to the Lord. And that is love. Whether rightly guided or wrongly guided, that is a different thing. But the inclination of the soul is always towards its own origin. When he marks it, then the weight starts being removed from the soul, so it starts shining.

That is why I say that meditation not only creates love, it strengthens love. It helps you to grow and grow to become one with the Father. That is the love which helps us to become one with the Father; which helps us to lose our own identity, our own individuality; which helps us to become another being.

That is love. And that is why we say that love is God and God is love, because love has the characteristic of becoming another being. To lose your identity, lose your own individuality, that is the characteristic of love. Love never wants that the other one becomes like you. Love makes us want to become like another one. In love there is submission, there is merging. So that is why they say that love is God and God is love.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. 1



Stillness

Baba Ji has advised that we practise sitting as still as possible during meditation. If we still the body, it will help the mind and emotions to be calm and settled, creating a firm base for concentrated meditation.

The formation of a good base is directly linked to the four principles he advises us to live by in order to progress from chaos to peaceful stillness, allowing our connection to God. Being vegetarian, eschewing alcohol and drugs and living a moral life calm us and instil tranquility. When we achieve this calm and relaxed base, our meditation practice is more likely to flow.

But we can go a step further. If we are following the four principles but are spending our free time chatting too much, rushing around and mindlessly doing unnecessary activities because we are afraid of boredom, or if we get caught up with unnecessary social trends, then it is much more difficult to bring the mind into focus. It will become over-active, filled with worldly thoughts, and the body will become restless which can cause us to fidget during satsang and also during meditation. Even when we do seva, many of us forget to keep in mind who we are doing it for – our Master. We forget our simran and get too involved with each other on a personal, social, and emotional level. We often do need to support one another when we are at seva, but we should avoid getting carried away, losing the opportunity to practise seva with stillness and tranquility.

Stillness does not just mean practising silence, not moving or thinking. It means avoiding any unnecessary action that takes away our attention from the Lord.

The Sufi mystic, Bu Ali Qalandar said, “When you have emptied yourself by constant remembrance, you will find the path which leads to the presence of the Lord.”

In *Psalms* 46 in the Bible we read, “Be still and know that I am God.”

Rumi said, “Although I may try to describe love, when I experience it I am speechless.”

To Mother Teresa are attributed the words, “God speaks in the silence of the heart.”

These are the words of enlightened souls who spoke from their own experience, so it is worth experimenting with their valuable advice. Once we try it out for ourselves we will soon feel the benefits and then gain confidence to continue, knowing that it will help improve our spiritual life and create a calm atmosphere.

Lasting stillness cannot be maintained by just working on a physical, emotional and mental level. The mind and senses need a more positive force to keep them stable and still. There are many techniques and therapies used to try to achieve stillness because people now realize that excess activity has a detrimental effect on our wellbeing, in particular the overuse of cell phones, electronic devices, digital entertainment, and frequent travel. Some try special exercises to calm themselves; others try breathing, medication, diet, excursions to lonely places, and so on. These all do give some temporary relief from the wayward mind and senses but don't give the everlasting peace that can come from love and devotion to a true Master and the practice of simran he gives to us.

Why is this? Simply because our mind and emotions have such negative habits and tendencies that we cannot, by ourselves, manage to change them. For permanent spiritual benefit we need the grace and help of a Master who is above all negative influences. Weakened by our desires, it is as if we are buried in a dark ditch, unable to see the way out. The Master has been sent by the Lord to help us. That is his mission and duty, and he never neglects it for a second. He not only gives us the tools – the four principles – so we can pull ourselves out, but he constantly refreshes our willpower and motivation to continue this demanding task. That is why he gives us articles and books to read, and the seva and the satsangs which implore us never to give up.

Stillness does not mean doing nothing – not putting in effort and expecting the Master to do it all. It does not tell us to be passive and just accept our situation. It means using the tools of simran and bhajan calmly and quietly with faithful balance. Stillness does not mean we undertake extreme actions; it asks that we ignore the unnecessary suggestions of the mind that steal our opportunities to commune with the divine. On a practical level Baba Ji suggests we should do our simran whenever

possible during the day so that the mind has no opportunity to take us away from the path of devotion to the Master.

Maharaj Sawan Singh explains, “To remove from the mind all desires for the things of the world and to turn the mind towards the Lord alone is devotion.”

Only the living Master can teach us the technique to achieve devotion and give us the energy and willpower to maintain the practice. But it is our responsibility to be ready in our stillness and prepare ourselves to receive his divine help with love and gratitude.



His Guiding Hand

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

Whenever a disciple sits in meditation, he's never alone. He's never alone, and he's never allowed to go astray within. There is always a guiding hand, a guiding force to lead the disciple within. The one for whom we are meditating is always there with us to guide us.

Hazur is referring to the guidance that, as initiates of a true Master, we receive inside in meditation. But isn't it equally true that the hand of the Master can be felt in our worldly lives too? Spirituality is a strange kind of 'knowing' that all of our life is connected with the inner Master. Where would we be without his guiding hand? The chains with which we are bound to this creation are incredibly strong and the eye centre is initially so hard to reach. Nevertheless, his silent inner call draws us there – to the place where, above all, we feel at home.

We've all come to this path in our own unique way. All of us are being guided to an awareness of our lost spiritual inheritance. The Masters point out that we have a unique relationship with the Father, and that reminder spurs us on to look deeper with fresh dedication. Working with the Master – inside and out – is an adventure with no lack of excitement. We find in it the enjoyment of an inner mystery of the greatest subtlety. As we fail, fall, and then get up again we sometimes quite unexpectedly experience that helping hand, and gradually the realization dawns upon us that there is an inner presence which enfolds the whole of our life. Slowly we are becoming attuned to that.

This lifetime is the turning point of our long journey downwards into the creation. We have evolved through so many lives and stages until, miraculously, we find ourselves at the point at which we start the long journey inwards and upwards. The pattern of our life is dictated by our destiny – karma created in previous lives. According to those past actions we will face both good and bad times. But we can lighten our karmic load with every round of simran, with any thought of the Master – in fact by doing the spiritual work we've come here to do.

Leading a life of the spirit will slowly but irrevocably wean us away from outer entanglements and interests. All day long we're being exposed to worldly influences and they affect us more or less deeply depending on how much we've developed our inner strength. It is no mean feat to keep a balance in this world. We definitely have to put up a fight, but we won't win it only by fighting. On this path everything will come from the time and effort we put into our meditation and from devotion to the Master, who is our guide and mentor. Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Die to Live* that it is actually the Lord who does everything, so attaching ourselves to his emissary, the living Master, is of great importance:

He's the One who is pulling us from within. He's the One who is creating that desire in us to meditate. He's the One who is giving us that atmosphere and those circumstances and environment in which we can build our meditation. He worships himself in us.

Through meditation our consciousness develops and comes to linger at the eye centre and slowly starts to stay there. The life of tranquility, of a deeper awareness of who we really are, will slowly unfold as we progress on the path. To 'fall in love' with the teachings might sound odd at first but, once we discover their depth, we can't help but love them. The building blocks for leading a truly spiritual life are being handed to us by the inner Master, bringing about a radical shift in behaviour. We will become practitioners of the art of 'doing nothing', cherishing the opportunities to dedicate and devote ourselves to our main task in life. Lifelong passions may dissipate and we begin to see the deeper meaning of what it means to lead a simple life – that is, a life in which we seek the company of our true self.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Hazur tells us:

We must get into the habit of living with ourselves, enjoying our own company, loving our own selves. The minute we are left alone, we say, "I am bored, I have nothing to do." Because we are not in the habit of living with ourselves, we always want to be with others, to enjoy other people's company; we always need something to keep us occupied. So try to build that atmosphere in which you can always be happy.

This radical shift from seeking other people's company to seeking our own company is something precious. We are reminded of those beautiful satsangs by Hazur in which, discussing Saint John's gospel in the Bible, he referred to 'the Comforter'. This is none other than the Shabd, a constant friend and comforter to all initiates. We are never alone when we turn to such a friend. As Master's children, we're being led by the hand, consoled and encouraged to seek him within.

Leading an inner life is an intimate and most private affair. You can't explain it, but the richness and joy and the sense of fulfilment is such that you become more and more inclined to turn within. We're on a spiritual journey with our Master.

Rising above mind and matter is not something we could ever achieve on our own. It is his guiding hand that encourages us to look for and find that place within, towards which all our spiritual endeavours lead us. Our meditation becomes our main interest in life. Everything starts revolving around it. And from the spiritual service he makes us do comes contentment, gratitude and joy. Withdrawing our attention from the world and focusing it at the eye centre: that's what our whole life is about. In *Die to Live* Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us:

What is meant by being at the eye centre? It means you don't let the mind scatter into the world. You don't lose your balance. Your mind is absolutely still, and you're always contented and feel happiness, and radiate happiness. That will be the effect of stilling the mind: you're always happy, nothing bothers you.



Only Connect

We human beings are a wonderful creation. This physical body is a covering over the much finer astral and causal bodies. The three bodies, together with mind, cover the soul, the true self. When we are born as a human being our individual mind and soul must adjust to the physical plane. From the day of our birth we begin to learn the skills we will need to survive here. Whether it is looking, listening, or learning to walk or talk, we become familiar with the physical world.

A common term in scientific circles, used to describe the learning process is ‘wiring’.

When we learn something new, the parts of the brain involved become ‘wired’. They connect with one another and certain neurological pathways are established. It is necessary for this wiring or conditioning to take place for the learning to become embedded in our brains. Take for example the process of learning to play a musical instrument. It may take a considerable period of time, involving hours of practice, but this results in the brain being ‘wired’ so that playing becomes second nature.

Suppose a particularly gifted musician learns to play an instrument and becomes a virtuoso: the musician will still require constant practice to maintain complete competence with the instrument. If he gives up playing and some years later starts again, he will obviously not be so competent as his practice has lapsed. The same is true of athletes and other professionals when they no longer continue in their chosen profession. This is because the pathways in the brain are no longer wired or connected as efficiently as before.

This wiring process applies equally to meditation. The technique for meditation leading to self- and God- realization can be learned from a true living Master. When we first apply the technique it appears to be very difficult. Unless we engage in the meditation practice regularly, it will continue to be difficult.

On the other hand, if we sincerely engage in meditation and we put in hours of daily practice then, just like the musician, we will begin to master the practice. Through repetition of the five holy Names given to us at initiation, and through bhajan, the practice of listening to the

sound current that is reverberating through each one of us, we will tune in to the Shabd.

Maharaj Sawan Singh gave the example of tuning an analogue radio set to a particular frequency in order to hear the radio broadcast. We are currently unable to hear the sound current that is ringing within us because we have not tuned into it. Our brainwaves at present take us on an outward trajectory – but we are perfectly capable of breaking these patterns of behaviour to become focused within.

Meditation is nothing but a silent prayer to the Lord to ask for help in changing these patterns. Nothing should come between us and the Lord during this time. The more we devote ourselves to the practice, improving our concentration through simran and bhajan, the more we are developing those inward qualities, and the pathways in the brain which will enable us to hear the Shabd .

Our outlook changes as a result. We become more positive and contented. Our faith in the Master deepens. We no longer react negatively to our destiny. Instead we accept all that comes to us as coming from him, the one true Lord. This is a form of submission to his will.

The Master who has initiated us has made it his mission not just to take us out of the physical but also out of the astral and causal bodies in which the soul is enveloped. He can only fulfil his mission if we play our part and put in the required practice in our meditation. His grace is then all that we need to escape from continual death and rebirth in the physical creation.

This will give us absolute faith not just in the Master but also in ourselves. It will prove to us that God resides within us and that we can find him there and become one with him.



Food for Thought

A Cushion Too Many



Mountaineers

Mountaineers don't do it for the view at the top. They do it for the process. You might say it's for love of the way. The view from the top is wonderful, but how could they sustain that long effort if they didn't relish the putting on of their boots and the feel of the backpack? If they didn't enjoy the stones, the rocks beneath their feet, the mountain streams?

When the weather gets bad – mountain mists come down, it's cold, it's wet, why don't they turn back (“Oh, I've had enough, I'm going home.”)?

They can't do it. They're even in love with these difficulties. This is the time when they pit their wits against the elements; they have to use every strategy there is to keep warm, to keep moving up, not to fall when the ground becomes treacherous. The secret lies in the focus from moment to moment, the joy and energy of it.

Then the clouds pass, they look around and there's a clarity that you only get high up.

Satsangis don't do it for results. They do it for love of the one who has given them this process. God-realization must be indescribably great, but how could we sustain this long effort if we didn't relish sitting down on our meditation mat, concentrating at the eye centre and turning those five familiar words over – because they link us to him.

When the going gets tough...well, you get the picture...we don't stop; we rely on our Master from moment to moment, keeping him in mind.

At last the clouds pass and suddenly there's a clarity that you only get right here, focused in the present.

Satsangis don't do it for results, yet amongst the rocky efforts, unlooked for joy does come, like a breeze from the summit.

BOOK REVIEW

The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul

TRANSLATED BY JOHN BEEVERS

PUBLISHER: NEW YORK, N.Y: CROWN PUBLISHING GROUP, 2001.

ISBN: 978-0-385-02903-2

Saint Therese of Lisieux (1873–1897), who referred to herself as “the little flower gathered by Jesus,” chose to return to God by the shortest, simplest way possible, that of love. Her twenty-four years of life were imbued with love for her beloved Jesus and with gratitude for all that he had given to her. She wrote, “I believe that if a little flower could speak, it would tell very simply and fully all that God had done for it.”

The mystery of the special grace that she received was resolved for her when she realized that Jesus “does not call those who are worthy, but those He chooses.” This revelation sustained her in her desire to become a saint even though she was like “a humble grain of sand.” Greatness was not required of her, since “He that is mighty hath done great things to me.” This opened the way to her doctrine of “the little way of spiritual childhood” and gave hope to all those with whom she came in contact. As John Beevers writes in the Introduction to the book,

She knows that nothing she can ever do can be adequate, but this leaves her quite untroubled. The depth of her love for God means that all the small, trivial acts of which she is capable take on great value because of the motive behind them. And God, with His overwhelming love and understanding, accepts them joyfully. So “the little way” means salvation is made not easy, but obviously possible.

Therese regarded herself as “a very little soul who can only offer very little things to God.” She believed that there is hope for the weakest and the “smallest” of us when we rely on the greatness of His grace and mercy. She lived her life accordingly.

Her autobiography was written at the request of her prioress at the Carmelite convent where she lived; it was completed only a few weeks

before her death. Though much of this book was written while she was fatally ill, it is lit with the joys of love of family, the beauty of God's creation, and the perfection that "consists in doing His will, in being that which He wants us to be."

She says, "I am not going to write 'my life,' but put down 'my thoughts' about the graces God has given me." She begins with her gratitude that the least of God's children are loved as much as the loftiest of souls. She tells us that in the garden of Jesus:

The splendour of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not rob the little violet of its scent nor the daisy of its simple charm.... They are His wildflowers whose homeliness delights Him. By stooping down to them, He manifests His infinite grandeur. The sun shines equally both on cedars and on every tiny flower. In just the same way God looks after every soul as if it had no equal. All is planned for the good of every soul.

Therese lived a simple, gentle life in the French countryside, in a loving and deeply religious family, yet she knew great suffering, "for my soul has matured in a crucible of inner and external trials." During her brief life she lost her mother, her "second" mother when her sister Pauline entered the convent, and then her beloved father. She wrote of Pauline's departure, "How can I express the agony I suffered. In a flash I understood what life was. Until then I had not seen it as too sad a business, but now I saw it as it really was – a thing of suffering and continual partings. I cried bitterly."

She suffered two bouts of long, painful, and debilitating illnesses. The first was during the time of Pauline's departure, when she wrote that her illness "took such a serious turn that, humanly speaking, it seemed I should never recover." The second was during the year before her death. "But now I am ill and I shall not get better. Yet I am at peace. For a long time, I have not belonged to myself, but have completely abandoned myself to Jesus.... So He is free to do whatever He wants with me."

Throughout the course of her life the reader witnesses the significant inner changes that are wrought by her sustaining faith, self-abnegation, and increasing love for Jesus. Yet, quietly she also endured the pain of inner darkness and spiritual aridity.

Don't imagine that I'm overwhelmed with consolations. I'm not. My consolation is not to have any in this life. Jesus never manifests Himself nor lets me hear His voice. He teaches me in secret.... This evening, after a barren period of meditation, I read this: "Here is the Master I give you. He will teach you all you need to do. I want to make you read of the science of love in the book of life." The science of love! The words echo sweetly through my soul. It is the only thing I want to know.

Towards the end of her life this suffering intensified and she experienced the dark night of the soul described by St. John of the Cross, whose writings she embraced. She says:

Dear Mother, this story of my suffering is as inadequate as an artist's sketch compared with his model.... My sufferings increased and I tried to find peace and strength by thinking of eternal life. For the voice of unbelievers came to mock me out of the darkness: "You dream of light, of a fragrant land, you dream that their Creator will be yours forever, and you think you will one day leave behind this fog in which you languish. Hope on! Hope on! And look forward to death! But it will give you, not what you hope for, but a still darker night, the night of annihilation!"

But the strength of this self-proclaimed little flower proved as great as that of the mighty cedars she admired.

Although I had not the consolation of faith, I forced myself to act as if I had.... I ran towards Jesus and told Him... that I was well content during my stay on earth never to see with the eyes of the spirit the heaven which awaited me.... And so, in spite of this trial which robs me of all sense of pleasure, I can still say: "Thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in Thy doings."

Her faith in the face of darkness, her acceptance and love, gave her this final grace:

I have never before felt so strongly how gentle and merciful God is. He sent me this heavy cross just at the time when I was strong enough to bear it.... Now it has only one result: it removes all natural satisfaction from my

longing for heaven.... I no longer want anything except to love until I die of love. I am free and fear nothing.

Her experience of the darkness and God's absence only inflamed her love and diminished the self that was separate from him. "But today my only guide is self-abandonment. I have no other compass. I no longer know how to ask passionately for anything except that the will of God shall be perfectly accomplished in my soul." She mirrors the realization of St. John of the Cross who says, "descending into the depths of my own nothingness, I was raised so high that I reached my goal."

What she experienced, endured, and received was the fulfilment of the way she chose at the beginning: her "littleness" was now absorbed into God's greatness. She no longer looked to herself for anything but only to Him.

In spite of my littleness I dare gaze at the Sun of love and long to fly towards It.... With cheerful confidence I shall stay gazing at the Sun until I die. Nothing will frighten me, neither wind nor rain. If thick clouds hide the Sun and if it seems that nothing exists beyond the night of this life – well, then, that will be a moment of perfect joy, a moment to feel complete trust and stay very still, secure in the knowledge that my adorable Sun still shines behind the clouds.

She makes her promise to her Beloved: "For as long as You wish, I will stay with my eyes on You. I want to be fascinated by Your gaze. I want to be the prey of Your love."

Therese died in the infirmary of the Carmel of Lisieux on the evening of September 30, 1897. She was canonized by Pope Pius XI twenty-eight years later. Her little book and the story of her life have been read by millions of people throughout the world. Just before her death she said, "What I have written will do a lot of good. It will make the kindness of God better known."



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