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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 2 The Greatest of These
- 4 The Brightest of Futures
- 7 I Believe in All That Has Never Yet Been Spoken
- 8 Through the Eyes of Animals
- 15 An Imaginary Interview
- 20 A Journey into Faith, and Out Again
- 23 Do We Really Believe We Need the Master?
- 29 Feeling Funny
- 30 Rapt in Divine Love
- 38 Hopeful House
- 41 The Question of Faith
- 47 Something to Think About
- 48 Book Review

Spiritual Link

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The Greatest of These

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Bible, Corinthians 13:13

Faith, hope and love have long been viewed as the spiritual virtues that outweigh all others, outlast all others, and so should be those to which we most aspire. While there has not always been agreement on which is the greatest of these three, the prevalent view is that it is love.

One reason for this is that faith and hope can be said to apply only in the lower worlds, unlike love, which is the very essence of the highest plane of existence. Once that highest level – our true home – is reached, faith no longer applies, as we have instead certain knowledge of God's love; similarly, hope is at that point no longer required, as it has already been fulfilled. Only love remains.

But while we remain on this earth, faith and hope are still invaluable to those following a spiritual path. Faith, that the Master is there for us and that God's plan is being carried out even though we may not understand it, can carry us cheerfully through our troubles. Hope, that at death the Master will be there for us to take us to the Father, enables us to maintain a positive approach to life.

So while it is most of all love – and its cultivation through meditation – that is at the core of our spiritual progress, faith and hope can help us to be happy in our journey through life, and keep us strong on the path.

The development of all three virtues can strongly benefit all those in search of spiritual enlightenment. For this reason, all the articles in this issue of *Spiritual Link* address in one way or another one of these three themes of faith, hope and love.



The Brightest of Futures

Even if from time to time we feel a bit lost, looking back we can see how the positive influences in our lives have affected us. It seems that from early childhood we always had a tendency to run away from the things we should be doing, and run after those we would be better off leaving alone. For most of us, that is the norm. Yet a desire for a higher, purer experience always seems to linger below the surface. For each of us, there are times when this desire emerges with full force, and a deep yearning for pure love and peace overwhelms us. We cry out instinctively for God's love. And that is when the Master actively, consciously, comes into our lives.

Our contact with the Master is like being pinpointed by a searchlight on a dark night. At first we are amazed by the conscious attention that the Lord so generously turns in our direction. With his help, our yearning for the Lord can become focused. Through him we are conscious of a power awakened within us, yet we quickly learn that it is only partially awakened – until such time as we are able to exercise it. And whether we accept it readily or not, we eventually come to understand that the process of meditation is the only way to take the spiritual currents and focus them inwards with full concentration, thereby increasing their force and intensity.

Our destination is determined

Once the process has begun, we may wander a little from time to time, but our destination is now determined, and we are slowly but surely drawn into his sphere of attraction. As our feelings for the Master increase, they begin to propel us beyond the sphere of our material

inclinations. Our soul is searching for the light. In meditation we become connected with a well of luminous energy inside ourselves.

The inner radiance we find inside has all the qualities of the Master we have come to know and love. Through it we are absorbed in powerful currents of spirituality emanating from the Lord himself. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are gradually experiencing his benign energy at higher and higher levels.

Though the spiritual call may appear to come and go, we are actually progressing all the time. Like a tree whose branches grow in the summer and become dormant in winter, there are times of great devotion and other times when we are totally apathetic. Yet every year the tree grows taller.

On occasions we get flashes of understanding: we feel that we are spirit, trapped in the body, yet separate from it. And we yearn for deliverance – though it is a slow but natural process. In the same way that electricity and magnetic and other forces exist in nature, we possess soul currents of our own. When our attention is focused on the world, they bind us to the objects of our love and affection. In this way our energy is always being dissipated and we have to continue to experience the world at this level.

A touch of the soul

But as soon as we manage to loosen our ties to the world, and turn our attention inward, a wonderful thing happens: the currents flow out and touch the ocean of love within. It has been said that the result of this inward focus is that a mighty torrent of intense love issues forth from the ocean in response, striking the earthly lover so that the two become the lover and the beloved of each other. Initiation is not the spoken word but a touch of the soul, from the soul of the Master to the soul of the initiate.

But the need to exert effort on our own part in order to achieve our objective is also very clear. From time to time, we each should look into this matter in the privacy of our own hearts. There can be no deceit here. We know what we should be doing and what we are actually doing. Perhaps we should just remember that we are now tied to a powerful current, whose force is constantly working to uplift us. We will be badly hurt if we resist too hard. Better to suffer the small hurts of self-sacrifice and detachment than to be battered by resistance. Peace is within our reach, the end of suffering in sight, if we can just keep tuning in to our dear, beloved Master.

So although we are blessed by contact with a mighty power that will inevitably draw us upwards into itself, we should not be satisfied with an entirely passive attitude towards this divine love. We cannot afford to be complacent. And we should never have a misplaced sense of superiority simply because we are satsangis. We must close our eyes and ears and focus inwards on the Master in meditation. This is the best thing that we can do with our time. Love responds to every effort we make, and love's response is the fuel for our spiritual experience.

We really must invest time in the practice of meditation. Each effort we make in this direction produces results. Master assures us that our negative tendencies diminish in proportion to the attention we give to the current. Like blowing on embers, attending to our meditation ignites the fire of spirituality. We should be in no doubt that we have the brightest of futures before us. We should embrace our good fortune wholeheartedly, and try to struggle as best we can to be worthy of it.



I Believe in All That Has Never Yet Been Spoken

I believe in all that has never yet been spoken.

*I want to free what waits within me
so that what no one has dared to wish for*

*may for once spring clear
without my contriving.*

*May what I do flow from me like a river,
no forcing and no holding back,
the way it is with children.*

*Then in these swelling and ebbing currents,
these deepening tides moving out, returning,
I will sing you as no one ever has,*

*streaming through widening channels
into the open sea.*

Rainer Maria Rilke,
translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy

Through the Eyes of Animals

We so-called humans are a species of animal distinguished by – and *burdened* with – self-awareness. But we are animals nonetheless. However much we regard ourselves as rational beings, we are driven as slaves by our instincts, habits and passions.

Unlike a lion, say, we humans have a mind and ego – the source of abstraction, thought, talk, worry, lust, greed and anger – everything that has led us uniquely as a species to nearly destroy our own habitat. But we are *distinguished* and *blessed* by self-awareness when it leads to our spirituality.

With no self-awareness, a lion is king of the jungle – he is no more and no less than a lion. You and I are at present both less than human and potentially more than animal.

Dying animals

In his 1928 poem *Sailing to Byzantium*, the Irish poet W. B. Yeats explained how we are immortal souls tied to the bodies of dying animals:

*... sick with desire,
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is ...*

From an animal point of view, we are in dire straits every day, at constant risk of death. Rumi wrote:

*Your fear of death is really fear of yourself: see what it is from
which you are fleeing!*

R. A. Nicholson, *Selected Poems of Rumi*

And Maharaj Charan Singh said in *Die to Live*:

It is very strange. Every day we sit in meditation and prepare ourselves for death, but when that particular time comes, those who have not died while living start crying and protesting and weeping, and say they don't want to die. The purpose of meditating every day is to prepare for that time, to meet that eventuality, to go back Home. It is all a preparation, nothing else. When the Lord gives the opportunity now to leave the body and to materialize the effect of meditation, then we should make use of it.

Thinking animals

In trying to clarify what is a human being, seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes expressed the bleakness of the rational view of our humanity when he deduced *cogito ergo sum* – or *I think, therefore I am*. He was saying that we are no more than thinking machines; that the language of our thinking defines who and what we seem to be.

Our heads are filled with constant chatter about family, ideas, work, country, ambitions, money, love, friends, poems, frustrations, breakfast ... the stuff and the froth of life. We are at sea in the ship of our own imagination, defined by the language of our worldly simran. We are becoming, always becoming; never arriving; always retelling the stories that make up these selves of ours.

These stories describe the self as it strives to be a hero, to invent the impossible myth of our success. We want to be noble, to know exactly what is going on, to rise above our petty human struggles. But meanwhile we go on living our animal life.

The fact is I am my attention, I am nothing else. I am not my history, nor my possessions, nor my family, nor my job, nor my qualities or defects. I am just this attention that flits about like a demented butterfly. It flits so furiously that it cannot know itself, cannot stop to see itself, dare not be calm enough to understand its nature.

Learning love

We sit here, looking through the eyes of animals, but the “we” that looks is a constant murmur trying to make sense of itself.

What to do? In order to make sense of the murmur, we must first let go of the froth. And to do that we need a guide: someone who can teach us how to be still and silent, and how to speak the language of love, since that is our essence. Right here and now, in the middle of the drama of our own personal soap operas, we can reach reality - not by pretending spirituality but by letting love unlock the cages of our mind.

Maharaj Sawan Singh wrote in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol II*:

Love is an innate quality of the heart. It is only through love that the sublimity of the Truth is known, because without it man would be in anguish.

He also wrote, in the same book:

Every person cannot be called a human being in the strict sense of the term. Only those persons are human beings who have the spark of love developed in them.

In *Light on Saint John*, Maharaj Charan Singh wrote:

The relationship of the soul and the Father is that of love ... that is why Christ refers to this relationship of the soul with the Lord as that of father and son, also as that of bride and bridegroom, because in both relationships it is the love that binds them. It is purely a bond of love. And if we love the Father, we go back to the level of the Father after death. The Father has so ordained that we can love Him only through his beloved Son who is living in this world when we are here.

Letting go

The present Master has said that we keep a “House Full” sign over our hearts. We’re too busy trying to be rational human beings. Meditation is the only answer; meditation is where we bathe on the beach of his ocean of love. To let go of the self we must, ironically, exercise self-discipline through the purposeful utterance of the language of our spirituality: simran. One word after another, building that association, brick by verbal brick.

Rather than saying “I think therefore I am,” like Descartes, the mystics would say: “I repeat the five names therefore I am.” The language of simran enables us to be what we really are: Shabd. It is the language of love.

Simran is nothing but the practice of the art of dying. Nothing else exists but the words being repeated at that moment. Literally nothing. This is death. When nothing else exists but the name of the Lord being repeated in that moment, then the self does not exist.

The *something* of our animal nature can become, in our human nature, the *nothing* of the lover, which merges with the beloved to become *everything*. The Beloved – our Master – gives us the longing, the hunger, the desperation to lift us from our animal unconsciousness to the realization of our true God nature.

Baba Jaimal Singh Ji wrote:

Always look upon this world as if it is a dream, and believe it firmly. Our relatives also are part of the dream-world and are therefore unreal. Take the ego out of yourself and remember only the Satguru and the words of the Satguru. When everything – body, mind, wealth – everything belongs to Satguru, then all the worldly goods as well as relations also belong to Satguru. I am nothing. Always remember these words.

Spiritual Letters

One of the qualities of love is the delicious way it dissolves the self. Love merges the murmur with the subject of the murmuring, the beloved. There are no limits to the soul in love – it is the ocean.

As Fakhruddin Iraqi, the thirteenth-century Persian mystic, put it:

You are nothing when you wed the One; but you are everything when you become nothing.

Animals learning to live

When you are dreaming a dream, however surreal it may later look in hindsight, at the time that you are in the dream it feels as real as does the apparent reality of our waking hours. Dreams within dreams within dreams.

The paradox is that our mystical apprenticeship can be undertaken only while we live in the world of time and space – while we work, dream, breathe, worry, fail, fail again and fail better, bearing the grief, frustration, stress and disappointment that goes with our worldly animal selves.

The Great Master wrote in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol V*:

This universe is an ocean. The Master is a ship and He Himself is its captain. No one can cross over without the Master. It is only through His grace that we can meet the Lord.

The Master will keep us safe from sharks and drowning, so that we can journey across the ocean of karma to the end of the story, to that moment when he sweeps us up in his arms.

How do we learn to live in the world as real human beings? The Great Master gave us a hint about how to do this when he said:

Love is another name for attaching the heart to the Beloved. It is not a child's play. Only those of sterling worth, who are free from the ties of the world, and who are fearless, can become lovers. It is the work of one who is free from all worldly desires, and who is able to keep his mind clear of the dirt of duality. When the leaven of love begins to act, then a lover cannot turn his attention towards any object except the Beloved.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol II



*As you live out your desolation, you can be either happy or unhappy.
Having that choice is what comprises your freedom.*

Milan Kundera



Great Master with Dr Pierre Schmidt.



*But day by day, while yet I draw my breath,
And day by day, unto my last of years,
I shall be one that has a perfect friend.
Her heart shall taste my laughter and my tears,
And her kind eyes shall lead me to the end.*

Robert Louis Stevenson

An Imaginary Interview

Here is a piece of fiction which, in the guise of reportage, is able to weave together several ideas about faith. The quotes from named writers are from genuine works.

Shortly before his death in 2009, the writer Amadeo Esperanza, affectionately known to his friends as ‘the Monk’ (due to his marathon meditation sessions and penchant for jazz music), wrote a short note to his daughter Fidelia, quoting one of her favourite writers, Franz Kafka, in response to her worries over recent events in her life:

Don't despair, not even over the fact that you don't despair. Just when it seems that all is over, new forces come to your assistance after all, and just that means that you are alive.

The note was a rare message from Amadeo’s solitary and contented life in a small villa overlooking California’s Piedmont Hills. Like all those who knew her father, Fidelia had grown accustomed to seldom seeing or hearing from him. He made no response to the countless emails and letters he received, and refused interviews. But this last note awakened in Fidelia a sudden urge to see her father and to record a lasting account of his thoughts on a subject dear to both his writing and his way of life. That subject was faith.

Fidelia: So, here we are. It’s so good to finally see you.

Amadeo: Are you sure you want to start with “finally”? You may live to regret it!

Fidelia: Okay, but I’ve started already, so I’ll just have to learn to live with the regret.

Amadeo: Ah, regret. Quevedo said: “He who spends time regretting the past loses the present and risks the future.”

Fidelia: Okay, hold on to your seats; he’s started! (Both laugh)

Amadeo: Well, you wanted to talk about faith?

Fidelia: Sure, but what’s that got to do with regret or risking the future and losing the present?

Amadeo: The word “regretting” evokes distress and worry: the very things which stifle our efforts to live in the moment because we’re preoccupied with the past. And this incapacity to live in the moment automatically affects our future.

Fidelia: So what do you suggest we do?

Amadeo: Let go. Faith is a slow process of letting go of all our worries and wants and learning to trust that He knows best what we need.

Fidelia: You make it sound like a simple thing. But I’m not sure anyone who’s tried would think it was so easy.

Amadeo: Let’s not confuse simple with easy: they are not necessarily the same. But sure, in this instance letting go is at its core a simple notion, yet one that’s not easy to follow – rather, it is a universal struggle fit for an epic story, which is why I warm to it.

Fidelia: I think the hardest part of faith is trusting in something you can’t even see.

Amadeo: You know, that reminds me of a funny story your grandfather told me, because I used to say the same thing to him and then he told me about the fish. There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish nod back and swim on for a while, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and asks, “What the hell is water?” The water so entirely makes up the world in which the fish live that they cannot register its existence. Similarly, the divine energy that

sustains our existence – the *life force*, the sound current, the source; call it what you will – resides in everything we sense, but we lack faith because we cannot trust in something we cannot see! You know, my grandfather would always tease me if I ever lamented over why God wasn't helping us through hard times. He'd say, "But young Amadeo, can't you see the water?"

Fidelia: Yeah, he was great. But I'm not the small fish!

Amadeo: Yes! That's exactly what you are. (Both laugh)

Fidelia: Okay, I think it's time to move on. We're talking about faith, and I think you're saying we should just sit back and allow things to go where they're destined to go – trying not to control our destiny?

Amadeo: I seem to have sparked a dangerous presumption.

Fidelia: How do you mean?

Amadeo: Okay, let's use the familiar backdrop of writing as an example for what we're discussing. Like any other discipline, writing has its own specific path. What is required to follow the path of the writer – just as for our shared spiritual path – can be split into three components. Firstly, there is talent, which is required of any writer. The degree of talent cannot be controlled and seems to be determined by destiny. Secondly, there's focus: the ability to concentrate your talents on whatever's critical at that moment – to sit at your desk and think of nothing else but what you're writing. And thirdly, endurance: you must set aside a regular time for your daily bout with words, thinking in a long-term capacity – you cannot write a long work if you're tired after a week. Now let's substitute those three aspects in relation to our path. The talent is the divine providence that allows us to attain initiation on to a true path – a gift that cannot be taken but is given to us if we are fortunate enough. The focus is the act of meditation and the day-to-day living within the guidelines given to aid our practice. The endurance is the long-term outlook and lifetime commitment

to the path. Now, whereas the incipient rumblings of faith can exist before one ventures on this lifelong path, a true and unwavering stance on faith can be realized only after all the aforementioned work and grace take place. So your presumption in referring to attaining faith as an idle matter was a misunderstanding. The grace of faith goes hand in hand with our efforts to attain it.

Fidelia: I think I get it: you begin to let go by focusing on the effort and not worrying about the result. Ours is the effort; the result is up to Him.

Amadeo: That's it. There's hope for you yet, kid.

Fidelia: Is there anything else you wanted to add about faith, maybe something from other writers you admire?

Amadeo: There's no end to the writers who've spoken on the matter. But not too long ago, a former hostage, Ingrid Betancourt, spoke about her time as prisoner of Colombian rebels in a way that only someone who had been through such a profound experience could do. I wrote it out here (reads from his notebook): When asked why it is that desolation can make people believe more insistently in the human spirit, rather than abandon all faith in it, she replied, "Maybe this; I was in a situation where I had to make a decision: I could follow the path of cynicism, or that of some kind of spiritual discipline and faith. The first would be easy, the second very hard. The first is about ego, and what is happening in front of you. The second is about the battle inside you, beyond these events, that one that gives life meaning. I chose the hardest path, but once I had decided to follow that path, it was like having wings."

Fidelia: It's kind of hard to follow that with a question ...

Amadeo: Then I guess it's a good time to tell you about something I wrote for you, when you first moved away, called "Vida con la Fidelia" (life with faith), which I never sent. It was after you cried over the

phone for some forgotten reason – when your mother was still around. She told me not to send it, but to read it to you in person.

Fidelia: You never told me that!

Amadeo: Well ... (retrieving his notebook): “Nothing is lost in the wake of the hardships you endure, because the meaning is in the moment, the moment is part of ‘the everyday’, and the everyday belongs to you and you to Him.”

Fidelia: Wow, I guess that really is life with faith. So what would you say is life without it?

Amadeo: My dear Fidelia, life without faith is different ways to claim sadness.



*i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear,and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)*

i fear

*no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)*

*here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart*

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

e. e. cummings

A Journey Into Faith, and Out Again

Just how important is faith? The world's many religions generally demand acceptance of a lengthy credo of belief, and even Sant Mat offers a fairly detailed account of how the world is, or should be seen (in terms of theological and ontological structure), if we peruse the literature with that in mind. But ultimately none of those details is essential, because spirituality is a matter of practice rather than theory, and faith is secondary to love. What follows is my own experience of liberation from the bonds of belief.

I was brought up as a Christian in the Church of England, which can be such a liberal environment that faith is strictly optional. Often, all that is assumed is a vague sense of the numinous and a measure of sociability and social conscience. In many sections of the Christian archipelago your typical churchgoer is not expected to demonstrate actual belief. In addition, my parents considered a lack of scepticism to be in very poor taste and religion as something not to be discussed out loud.

Easy as that sounds to live with, I couldn't get comfortable. As in many long-established religions, structure seemed stressed over content, and the actual implicit belief structure, when I examined it privately, struck me as contradictory and out of place historically. So I wandered off into the desert of atheism, which although spiritually arid at least did not challenge my credulity and did satisfactorily comply with my instinctive devotion to Occam's Razor (that whatever theory posits the fewest entities and rules is the most likely to be true – in other words, don't ask yourself to believe any more than you have to).

I assumed that I had taken up permanent residence in the unchallenging land of smug disbelief, with the occasional foray into

wondering. I stifled a vague sense of the existence of some kind of ultimate truth with the solid conviction that even if there were such a thing, it would necessarily be inaccessible.

Then by chance (or not) I came across a completely new approach to spirituality, one based on action rather than belief. And it felt right; so I climbed on board. I had, miraculously, somehow stumbled into certainty, a clear way forward, and hope: everything that I had never even dared to long for.

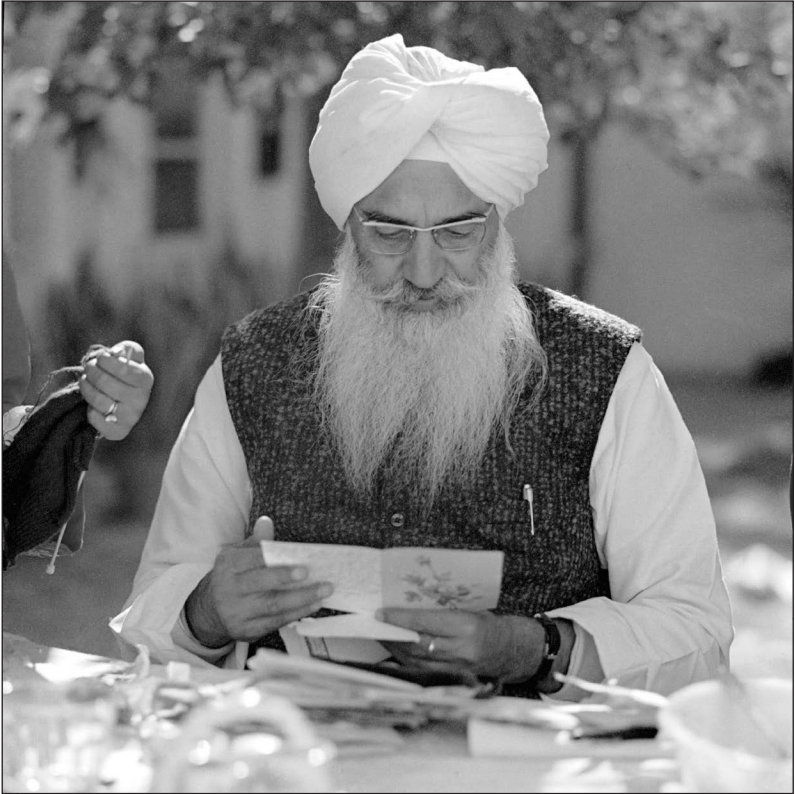
However, after several years the old discomfort started slowly to surface. Occam's Razor began to slice at my faith; and certainty began to feel a little like credulity. At first I fought against this, but that just resulted in a sense of being at odds with myself, even of failing to be true to myself.

So at last I tackled it head on, and asked the question about faith directly. And so I found the answer:

You don't need faith. All that is needed is love. And even the love doesn't have to be felt; only loving action is required. Out of that will arise actual love, and out of that love will come faith. At last understanding will come, and on that understanding we can build hope.

So now, I don't ask myself to believe anything. Neither do I reject belief. But I don't see faith as the starting point, the keystone on which everything else rests. I know that it will come, in the wake of love. And that sometimes it will go; but that no longer worries me. I can accept too that at times even the love will be beyond my awareness, although it will still be there. Because I know that all I need to do is sit down, and look inwards, towards that love. And that if I practise, it will come to me.





Maharaj Charan Singh



Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you now have was once among the things only hoped for.

Epicurus

Do We Really Believe We Need the Master?

Do we really believe that we need the Master? Think about it. If we do, then *why* do we think we need him? Or do we not consider the issue at all? This question is obviously a critical one for a seeker, but it is also valid for those who have been on the path for some time.

The proposition that the saints present is that we need a Master only if we wish to acquire that which the Master offers us. If we want to purchase vegetables, we go to a greengrocer; for petrol, we go to a garage; and so forth. We need to be clear that the Masters are continually offering us something, while always reminding us that what they are offering already belongs to us. We have but to stretch out for it, and it can be ours.

But if we do not want what is being offered, if we see no personal requirement for it, or we do not consider it worth the price or the effort to acquire it, then we do not need a Master. And unless we do feel the need of a Master, how can we follow his instructions, and become attached to him? We cannot.

Hearing without meaning

This is the position of most people. Even if they hear what the Master says about what he has to offer, they are not interested. They cannot align themselves with the objective to which the Master leads us, and so they have no need for a Master. They hear the same words that a disciple hears, but it means nothing to them.

So we have to feel the need for a Master. This feeling can come only from within ourselves, from a source of which we have no comprehension and yet which is our very being. The Masters advise

us that this feeling is the pull of the Creator on the marked soul, which is ready to be drawn back to its source. How or why this happens we do not know. But we must establish a conscious need for the Master, because it is that consciousness which will be the prime mover in influencing us to take the right actions in our worldly and spiritual duties. It is that need which holds us close to the Master through thick and thin.

Where do we find the conscious need for the Master? It is in understanding what it is that he has to give and aligning ourselves with that as our objective. It is misguided to come to the Master looking for permanent happiness in this creation: we must be clear that the Master will provide us only with those things that lead us to Sach Khand. If we want the world, we should not seek it from the Master: his shop doesn't offer such goods as worldly happiness, wealth and power.

The Master is the provider of spiritual sustenance. He will help us to turn slowly away from this world, pulling us surely towards him till we reach the point where our love is so developed and our ego so diminished that we become part of him, and in merging in him we automatically merge into the Creator.

To recognize our need for a Master, the following steps may be taken:

- identify as our objective the soul's return to its source
- understand that the Master is the only way to reach that objective
- be clear about the role of the physical form of the Master, understanding that the true Master is the Shabd within; and
- align ourselves with the will of the Master by following his instructions.

If we have done these things, then we are aware that we need the Master. And once we know we need him, we are more likely to make

the effort to work with him in a team effort. As any manager will tell you, for a project to succeed everyone must share an objective and pull together. But it does not end there: we have to keep reminding ourselves that we need the Master, otherwise we subconsciously return to acting as though we are the doers.

He never leaves us

Once we have been initiated, whether or not we are conscious of our need for the Master at any particular time, the Master is always there. We may forget him, but he does not forget us. From the moment of initiation onwards, the Master never leaves us, for he has seated his astral form at the third eye. From there he oversees our lives in this world, knowing every thought, observing every action, influencing events in any way he sees fit so that we make progress upon this path.

But it appears that we do not really believe the Master has this intimate awareness: otherwise we would not think and act as we do. If we truly understood that he is watching over us, we would always behave as we do when we are in his physical presence. But the Masters tell us we have only to go within to see that he is always there.

Our task is to keep reminding ourselves of the Master, for if our mind is not towards the Master then it is towards the world. One or the other – it cannot float in a vacuum. Characteristically, the mind has to be occupied with something, and so at initiation the Masters give us simran, an activity in which we can participate at any time. If we remember to do this simran, then we are reminding ourselves of our need for the Master, and that he is there with us.

There is a Chinese proverb which goes: “I hear, I forget. I see, I remember. I do, I understand.”

We hear and see (or read) about the many aspects of this path, but we readily forget to do what we ought to do. It is rarely intentional

disobedience that causes us to forget, but rather the habit of the mind – in turning towards the stimulation of the senses, over millions of lives. Satsang and reading Sant Mat literature can help to remind us of what we need to be doing and of our need for the Master. But it is only by actually *doing* what we have to do – our simran and our meditation – that we will truly understand and know.

Get up and get going

We need to get up and get going. The message of all the saints is that we are asleep. We do not appreciate the urgent need to put in an effort and so avoid returning here again. They tell us that there is no point putting it off, because it will only get more difficult. The same things have still to be gone through, the karma we owe still has to be lived out or else destroyed by meditation. It has been said that we as satsangis are like would-be train passengers milling about on the platform but failing to actually get on the train, which then leaves empty. And yet the Master is exhorting us to get on, to go within.

Imagine an army embarking in landing craft, driving forward to storm a beach and establish a foothold in enemy-held territory. The craft arrive at the shore, the doors go down, the soldiers stream on to the beach and come under fire. The natural tendency is to flatten oneself against the sand or hide behind any object. But it is accepted military wisdom that the forward momentum must be maintained, because once the soldiers hit the deck they will be pinned down and will struggle to get up again. It takes all the encouragement of the officers to keep the men moving forward under heavy fire, but things would be worse if the landing got bogged down on the beach.

Perhaps this is like most of us. We have been floating around on the sea of this creation for so long, but the Master has steered us towards the beach, where after initiation we land and engage in battle against

the full force of the mind, our enemy. The Master has to keep us moving forward, otherwise we will become bogged down. We must maintain pressure on the mind. Once we have landed on the beach we have identified ourselves on the field of battle to the enemy, the mind. This brings us under heavier fire, because the mind sees that we have been given weapons capable of beating it. Battle has commenced in earnest and will not stop until we have won, so we might as well get on with it.

There used to be a charge in the British Navy of “reluctance to engage the enemy”, which could result in a court martial for a ship’s captain. It would be said as general advice to any young captain unsure about naval tactics that if he always sailed towards the enemy and engaged in combat, no matter how much more powerful the enemy squadron might be, then he could not go far wrong. The Admiralty would look favourably on him. This is what the Master too wants to see us doing: engaging the enemy of the mind with simran.

Engaging the enemy

Great achievements were made by outnumbered and outgunned vessels, through the sheer bravado of the officers and crew, which translated into considerable confidence in the outcome of battle. We should try to develop the same confidence and bravery, putting our faith in the Master’s promise that we will eventually succeed. If we engage the enemy then, even if we fail in battle, the Master will – like the Lords of the Admiralty – reward our efforts.

Let us at least undertake to put in what the marines call “a maximum effort” to be worthy of the great good fortune that has befallen us: the care and protection of a Master and the gift of Nam, not just now but forever. The Masters love our efforts, and we must fight to become worthy of our birthright.

Like the sea captains, we will never go far wrong if we always engage the mind with simran and do not turn our backs or lay down our arms. We cannot overcome the mind in one-on-one combat; it is too powerful. But if we swing our effort behind the instructions of the Master and use the weapons he has given us, there is a guarantee of final victory.

Success is certain, but we have to do our bit. The general of an army cannot fire all the guns himself; he relies on the foot soldiers. It is a team effort to win the battle. We must press on courageously with what the Master wants us to do. The path is about the Master and the Shabd, but it is also, no less, about our own effort.



Those whose lives are fruitful to themselves, to their friends, or to the world are inspired by hope and sustained by joy: they see in imagination the things that might be and the way in which they are to be brought into existence. In their private relations, they are not preoccupied with anxiety lest they should lose such affection and respect as they receive: they are engaged in giving affection and respect freely, and the reward comes of itself without their seeking. In their work, they are not haunted by jealousy of competitors, but concerned with the actual matter that has to be done. In politics, they do not spend time and passion defending unjust privileges of their class or nation, but they aim at making the world as a whole happier, less cruel, less full of conflict between rival greeds, and more full of human beings whose growth has not been dwarfed and stunted by oppression.

Bertrand Russell, *Roads to Freedom*

Feeling Funny

On the Write Track



Rapt in Divine Love

Saint Francis began to speak of God so sweetly, so sublimely, and so wondrously, that the fullness of divine grace came down on them, and they were all rapt in God. And as they were thus rapt, with eyes and hands uplift to heaven, the folk of Assisi saw that the church was burning brightly. They ran thither in great haste to quench the flames – but coming close and finding no fire at all, they entered within and found Saint Francis and Saint Clara and all their company in contemplation rapt in God. Whereby of a truth they understood that this had been a heavenly flame, and no earthly one at all.

Adapted from Franciscan Chroniclers, *Little Flowers*

This story describes the feeling of being “rapt in”, and aflame with, the love of God – a state that seekers of God wish to experience. It tells of a divine vision, something not often talked about, but about which mystics have written. Through their writings we catch a glimpse of being “rapt in divine love”, and we may be inspired to do our meditation so that we too may find such blissful union with the Lord.

The story describes a moment when the people of Assisi run to the church of Saint Mary of the Angels to put out what they think is a dangerous fire. Then they realize it is the fire of love divine and, as they see this, they step out of their daily reality into an inexplicable vision of the sacred – a vision so powerful that it transfigures, elates and lifts them out of themselves.

It must have turned upside down the daily grind of their lives, thrusting them into a completely different relationship with God. They would never be the same again, because, at the church of Saint Mary of the Angels, each person was caught in something that went

beyond themselves. As they were absorbed into the fire of divine love, radiating from Saint Clara and Saint Francis, they came face to face with the divine presence and were passionately imbued with their *experience* of the divine. They then had no choice but to begin a journey into the sacred, which Dante describes as:

*... a journey that gathers light from a descent into darkness,
a pilgrimage of knowledge that penetrating deeper seemingly
turns away from the light, which yet reappears – and yet again
vanishes.*

The Inferno of Dante

After this they must no longer have simply had faith in the sacred, they would have known it to be real – in their bones.

Bulleh Shah, the seventeenth-century mystic, wrote wonderful poems (published by RSSB in the book of the same name), describing his inner experiences of the divine, such as *Ishq di navion navin bahar* (Ever fresh spring of love):

*When I grasped the hint of love,
I banished 'mine' and 'thine' from me.
I was cleansed within and without.
Now, wherever I look, the Beloved pervades.
Ever new, ever fresh, is the spring of love!*

Writings such as this show how mystics experience a truth that is beyond the grasp of the mind. The mystic speaks with God and is in the direct presence of God. This is the inner truth found by those who practise a meditative path that leads through love to the inner vision

of the Radiant Form of the Beloved. This makes the experience a very personal relationship: there is simply God and oneself.

A fourteenth-century monk, Kallistos Kataphygiotis, said: “The most important thing that happens between God and the world is learning to love and be loved.” Mystics have come into the world to remind us that God is love, and that the only way to draw close to God is to learn to love and (which is often overlooked) *to be loved*.

In Christianity, God sent his son Jesus Christ to teach us to “love one another” and to know that God is love. In the teachings of Sant Mat, Masters have come into the world to guide us towards reuniting with God through love and devotion to the invisible life force, the Shabd, manifested through sound and light.

In search of divine love

Through all the ages people have sought to unite with God. The plethora of religions, philosophies and spiritual practices that exist in the world today are evidence of this. Those initiated into Sant Mat are asked to meditate for two and a half hours every day, to lead an ethical life, to refrain from eating animals, and not to take any habit-forming abusive substances such as drugs or alcohol.

Sometimes we struggle to keep to the principles of our spiritual path. So how would it be, if each of us were able to find a little of the intensity of devotion revealed by the mystics? And what if we could identify those characteristics that connect them to the divine? Could we then hope to emulate them and become a little like Saint Francis and Saint Clara, who experienced the “fullness of divine grace” and “were all rapt in God”?

Those who have sat at the feet of a Master have glimpses of being wrapped up in divine love. When we sit below the dais at Dera or in a meeting hall, and experience his *darshan* or *drishti* (that intensity of

divine love which flows from his eyes), within these moments we too are “rapt in God”. These are the diamonds that we treasure. We savour each connection with the external Master, trying to transform it into an internal experience that helps us in our journey towards God. We use these experiences to help us to focus during our daily meditation.

Meditation is quite simple: you sit down, close your eyes, do your simran, concentrate, look into the darkness, then look for the light and listen for the sound for two and a half hours! But we find that meditation demands a lot more preparation than at first we might think. The preparation is how well we follow the principles. The weaker we are in following them, the poorer the meditation; the more we follow them exactly, the stronger the meditation. Preparation relies on living the principles with integrity.

This is because the path to God is a path of love, and the four principles are the means through which we express and practise our love for the Master, for God and for the Shabd. Love demands many things of us, and one of the most important is commitment.

Making a commitment to love

Commitment means that you have promised to do something; that you have dedicated yourself to an activity or cause; that you are willing to do something that may restrict you from doing something else you might want to do. Commitment involves choice, and sacrifice, and sometimes suffering. The mystics show us this.

We often use the word ‘commitment’ when we talk about relationships and getting married. Marriage demands a lot of attention from us, a lot of concentration, as well as a certain amount of courage and perseverance to keep it going; but most of all it involves love and commitment – with all its dedication and promises of selflessness and sacrifice made at the marriage ceremony.

The spiritual path is very similar to marriage: it calls on us to practise love daily. It is a sacred practice for which we prepare ourselves, to which we commit ourselves and which we put into action in the way we live our lives, in order to learn how to love – to love ourselves, our families, our neighbours, the creation and its creator. This living experience of love wraps us up in the divine, and guides us towards spiritual maturity. This daily practice creates a flame of love, a fire that keeps us going and keeps the world alive.

But how can we, mere human beings, aspire to this? First, we look to the mystics to see how they do it – perhaps we are drawn to a living spiritual teacher – and then, step by step, we appropriately try to apply the methods they give us, the attributes they reveal to us, and practise these in our householders' lives. We try to commit to those principles and actions that lead us towards, rather than away from, God.

But often we don't see what is right under our noses. We easily take for granted those close to us, rather than cherishing their positive attributes and showing compassion for what we perceive as their faults. If we take a leaf out of the mystics' book, we would teach ourselves to look for those qualities in others that we perceive ourselves to lack, and set about learning how to grow them for ourselves, rather than indulging in criticism.

Fostering spiritual independence

We can also fail to see clearly sometimes because of the habits of thought ingrained in us through our upbringing. It is an essential part of one's journey to God-realization to re-examine one's culture in order to make up one's mind about what is important for spiritual understanding. It is easy to believe unquestioningly what one has been taught by family, school, state or priest.

Emphasizing how important it is for disciples to stand on their own feet and think for themselves, Anthony de Mello, a Jesuit priest and author, describes in his story “Adulthood” what a master said to a disciple who was always praying to God for help:

“When will you stop leaning on God and stand on your own two feet?”

The disciple was astonished. “But you are the one who taught us to look on God as Father!”

“When will you learn that a father isn’t someone you can lean on but someone who rids you of your tendency to lean?”

As de Mello points out, God is a guide, a mentor who rids you of your tendency to throw everything into his lap saying, “You do it for me, God.” God does not create dependency! He directs us towards being independent, standing on our own two feet so that we can be mature and surrender to him through this maturity.

It is part of spiritual maturity to be able to grow from one’s experiences and to develop an awareness of what one is in life and where one is going. We need to prioritize our most important value. Do we truly seek God-realization, or do we just want a benign heavenly father/mother to look after us?

Learning to know oneself

Facing this question puts us in a better position to choose consciously to commit to and sort out what we truly believe, and to put in the effort in to make it happen. Then we are on the journey to being true to ourselves and to surrendering to the Master. In other words, as the wise and loving father Polonius said to his only son, who was leaving his family to make his way in the world:

*This above all, – to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

In this roundabout way one begins to realize that the striking aspect of mystics is their ability to be true to themselves – which, as Socrates observed, is only possible if one knows oneself!

Knowing oneself is not a new idea. Centuries earlier in India, the epitome of Vedic thought was (and it still is) that everyone should seek to know one thing, knowing which, all else is known. They say: seek to know the inner self. To be true to yourself is to seek the inner self.

Do the mystics know themselves? We can judge from their words. Kabir said:

*When I sought within my body
I realized my true self;
... By knowing my self, I became lost
In the bliss of divine love.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

To have this kind of self-knowledge is to be closely attuned to God. To be committed like a warrior, with steely determination to live the four principles, is to be in tune with the Shabd. Being in tune with the Shabd and the Shabd Master within and without is to be like Saint Francis and Saint Clara, who were so rapt in the divine. This is the purpose of all spiritual practice. As the mystics poignantly show us, attunement is brought about by complete surrender to the Beloved.





Great Master at Kalu-ki-Bar.



*Faith as the fulfilment of life is really the same thing as trust.
And trust is one of the fundamental aspects of life for every human existence....
Only trust allows the soul room to breathe.*

Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostles' Creed

Hopeful House

“You’ve heard of Heartbreak Hotel, haven’t you?”

“It’s where the broken-hearted lovers go (they cry there in the gloom). Of course, we don’t put satsangis there. There’s no call for it.

“But I’m rushing on ... forgive me. Let me introduce myself. I’m your tour operator; here’s my card and there’s my name:

Mr I. Focus, that’s me. I arrange travel to the Inward Isle and organize the accommodation along the way.

“That mention of Heartbreak Hotel just now – that was just a joke! (Don’t mistake me, I love my job, my boss and his customers, but I have to look on the funny side of things sometimes.) Actually, that particular hotel is owned by Worldly Love and it’s not on a very good side of town. My boss’s company, Spiritual Departures, is based in a much better district, in Discipleship actually, which is altogether preferable.

“One of the hotels we use a lot in Discipleship is Longing Lodge, right next to the airport. We put our most serious clients there, I would say. They generally arrive in Longing Lodge when they’re ready for the trip across the sea to The Beloved’s Arms, which is actually our destination on the Inward Isle. It’s a wonderful view as you come in on the plane. Yes, it’s our final destination and a most desirable one. My responsibility certainly ends then, as the host there personally arranges for onward travel into the high peaks. No, I can’t really describe The Beloved’s Arms on Inward Isle. You’ll have to go there, you really will, and see for yourself.

“What did you say your name was? Mr Try-Hard? Well, Mr Try-Hard, I’m putting you, as is usual with newcomers, into Hopeful

House for a while. You'll be taken from Hopeful House by helicopter to Longing Lodge when you're ready.

"Now, and this is the funny thing: I just can't say when 'ready' will be! You see, it's so much up to you. What I can tell you is that we have some rather erratic guests in Hopeful House. Just a few come in, register, go straight upstairs (with no fuss at all) to the helipad on the roof and get the next flight out. But the others ... well, all I can say is that they're a constant surprise.

"We have many people who (believe it or not) make the effort time after time to get to the roof – and it's not an easy climb – but who never stay long enough to get into the helicopter. I'm waiting there with my list (I have to check off the names, you see), I turn my back – only for a moment – and when I turn back they've gone. Yes, literally gone!

"I find them a few minutes later asleep on the stairs or calling up a friend on the phone, even playing cricket in the garden. They've completely forgotten what they set out to do – until the next day, when up they come again, only to disappear the moment I take my eye off them.

"Oh, it's a very difficult job I've got. I've known some people spend half a lifetime in these antics – yes, half a lifetime. So, Mr Try-Hard, my advice is: if you get near the rooftop, hang on to me, do!

"Mind you, not everyone even gets as far as the rooftop. There are some who book into the hotel and seem keen but then spend a lot of time sitting on the stairs. Why? Well, that's a good question. It's a comfortable staircase, I suppose. They see a reassuring bit of sky up above, and they settle down and make do with that. Perhaps they like imagining the trip rather than making that little bit of effort to actually do it. Someone even wrote a travel manual describing it all, from the stairs. Believe it or not, he'd never made the trip, just used to climb to the landing every day and head back down in the evening.

“Then there’s the luggage – stacks and stacks of it, getting stuck round the bends, and of course I have to tell them that they can’t bring it on board the helicopter. ‘Miss Preoccupied,’ I was saying only yesterday, ‘please open this bag and let me have a look. My dear, you are really not going to need all this stuff. Please leave behind your righteous indignation, your gossip, and all those worries; and there’s an awful lot of daydreams here that are not going to be allowed in the air with you.’

“But would she let go? No, she would not. In the end she couldn’t stagger with them to the top. She’ll be back, I’m sure.... The only trouble is, I’ve just seen her taking it all out of one bag and stuffing it into another – she doesn’t seem to realize that having an expensive bag and a new label on the luggage isn’t going to change anything.

“What’s that? You’re asking me what you *should* take? Well, since you ask, I would say: almost nothing. Carry nothing, Mr Try-Hard, but choose what you wear with care. Humility makes the best undergarment, worn close to the skin, whatever you put on top. Detachment for your topcoat, I would say, but fill the pockets with kindness and remember that a lightweight suit of steady application should definitely be the basis of your wardrobe. Your hat, your scarf and your gloves should be of that incomparable fabric, devotion-to-guru, and finally, ‘Love’ trainers will give a lift like nothing else can.

“Come on, Mr Try-Hard, I’m beginning to have high hopes for you. Here we are at Hopeful House. You can do it, you know; you really can. I’ll give you a little time to acclimatize, and I’ll see you presently on the roof. Don’t worry if it takes a while to get your bearings. I’m always waiting, and you’ll always find me at the top of those stairs just as soon as you’re ready.

“Au revoir!”



The Question of Faith

The Radha Soami faith is purely for the uplift of souls.... Please try to understand that when a soul is initiated – and if after that it keeps in faith and does not fall into bad habits and do foul deeds, but for certain reasons had not the opportunity of doing the spiritual exercises and progressing – it is, after death, stopped at the first or second stage, according to its karma and desires. There it takes to the spiritual practice and then in time it is taken upward. Rebirth in this world is only for those who have lost faith, do foul deeds and have very low desires. The second birth in this world is then given in such a place that they have the opportunity of meeting the Satguru of that time and doing the spiritual exercises.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

This letter from *The Dawn of Light* shows strikingly the significance of faith in Sant Mat. But what does the Great Master mean here by the word “faith”? In fact, he uses the word in two different senses: the first time it denotes a spiritual way of life; but when he talks about keeping or losing faith he means trust or confidence in the Satguru and his teachings.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to quote Jesus Christ’s saying that “to sin against the Holy Ghost can never be forgiven”. Hazur Maharaj Ji would explain that the “holy ghost” is the Shabd, an aspect of God that permeates the entire creation and with which we have lost touch during the long ages we have been incarnating down here. He would then go on to describe how saints are sent by the Supreme Lord into this creation to reach out to those souls who will be receptive to them, with the aim of reconnecting those souls to the Shabd or Holy Spirit within. This

reconnection gives the soul the nourishment, indeed the life, that it has been missing for so long, and it takes place when the Master gives the soul initiation. A soul thus blessed is urged to turn this gift to practical use, by devotion to meditation as taught at initiation.

Hazur Maharaj Ji used to emphasize that meditation should be the post-initiation cornerstone of every satsangi's life. Yet when satsangis confessed that their efforts at meditation were neither as ardent nor as successful as they would like and expressed anxiety that some awful punishment would befall them, he would reply that there could hardly be any greater punishment than missing the company of the Master through lack of effort at meditation. He said that it was not a matter of reprimand or chastisement but rather of a missed opportunity that would never come again. So that "sin" could never be "forgiven" because one could not turn the clock back and do what one had once failed to do. Our Masters frequently remind us that having a human life is a rare privilege, does not last as long as we imagine it will when we are very young, and is an opportunity not to be squandered.

Yet although we hear this advice and believe it intellectually – we know it makes sense – being able to live in accordance with that advice is not so easy. Quite simply, our attraction is still mostly for this world: we perceive it with all the senses and it is what we are used to; even if life here is hard, we cannot picture existence on any other level. We have no "evidence" for it. The Great Master understood this, for in letter 68 in *The Dawn of Light* he wrote: "Faith, unsupported by direct evidence from within, should not be put to very severe tests, for it is shaky."

A little later in the same letter, he says: "I am glad to learn that in your illness ... you had no dread or fear of going out of life and bore the disease with unshaken faith in His goodness. It is one of the signs of devotion that the mind should remain steady in pain and pleasure."

This provides an insight into how crucial faith is in the life of a satsangi – trust in the Master is core to our devotion to the Master

and to our meditation, and Masters say that meditation should be at the centre of the satsangi's life. The present Master has sharpened our awareness of this spiritual duty by explaining repeatedly that we must first establish a clear goal in life and then set our priorities, so that we shape our lives to ensure we never lose sight of that goal. The immediate target is to reach the eye centre, in order to come to the place where we may meet the inner Master and thus obtain some "direct evidence from within". This is not just a meeting; it is a reunion that will give us, at the eye centre, complete peace and bliss.

This life goal must be clearly set, because it may feel elusive and we may appear not to get the kind of direct reward for our efforts that we are used to in earthly life. The Great Master recognized this in letter 66 in *The Dawn of Light*:

The determination and faith should be so strong that even if nothing comes out of it until the last moment of life, there is no wavering of faith. There is no other way to rise up besides this. Let one seek and inquire as much as he likes – he will have to come to this conclusion. It is a natural process, and effort must bear fruit. If a labourer receives wages all right from his employer, will the Creator then keep back the reward from one who is seeking Him?

We can be encouraged that the Great Master describes our path of devotion as a natural process and that the Master will look after us. The Saints explain, for instance, that our life here is a mixture of good and bad, and that all our actions bring consequences. We shall all definitely leave here one day, by the process of death. Since people have such different destinies in this life, it is more credible to suppose that this variation is the result of the sum of all past actions than to ascribe it to divine whim.

We go where our heart is – or, as Hazur Maharaj Ji used to say, we go where our attachments are. For most beings, this means that the end of one life is followed by a return into a physical body soon after, as the attachments to Earth are still strong and a mountain of accumulated karma remains to bind us to this creation.

We are by no means totally happy here. As Hazur Maharaj Ji explained, this is the nature of life here on this plane of creation, since we “take birth along with our karmas,” and the appropriate karmic balance to earn life here is a mixture of good and bad. (If we had all bad karmas, he used to say, we would be in a hell, and if we had all good we would be in a heaven.)

The saints offer us a way out of this endless cycle of births and deaths. They offer us some rational insights: we are what we eat; as we think so we are; as we sow so shall we reap. If we live an unethical life, this damages others and ourselves, and attaches us yet more to the world’s processes. Saints advise that we live as total vegetarians, avoid alcohol and mind-affecting drugs, and live as moral a life as we can. Common sense tells us that this is the path of right living.

We need to realize, though, that these bases of good living are but the foundation of spirituality; the next step is to become active spiritually. Just as we take worldly instruction from someone more knowledgeable on a subject, so equally in spirituality it makes sense to follow someone who knows the spiritual path.

This world is not our home, and indeed cannot be since we have to leave it (by death), so it makes sense to want to find our real home. The Masters say that we are descended from the true Lord himself, and so our real home is with him. Anyone away from home desires sooner or later to return, and the saints say that our underlying dissatisfaction in this world is because deep within we want to go to our real home.

It is also true that a teacher can take us only as far as he has himself progressed. So if we want to be shown the way back to our true home,

we need to be guided by someone who knows the whole journey, and who therefore belongs to that level himself. If we search around in this world we fail to find anyone who fits the bill, unless we find a living Master. He will not say explicitly who and what he is, but it will be implicit in the steadiness of his life and behaviour and the total consistency of all his teachings.

At this point the seeker has to take a leap of faith. Although there is no outer proof of the Master's inner teachings, there is a credibility in the sheer good sense of everything he tells us. He does not require us to suspend rational judgment and rely on credulity or gullibility, but rather to satisfy ourselves by observing him and absorbing all he has to offer us. Then once we are satisfied that the balance of probabilities is in his favour, he says, we should take what he tells us on an initial or provisional trust (i.e., faith) and be willing to apply ourselves to the practical course of meditation. If we accept this, he invites us to apply for initiation and then put into practice all he teaches us and so find out the truth for ourselves.

The present Master has said that there is nothing so convincing as our own experience. Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh described this human body as the laboratory in which we should carry out the Master's experiments. Hazur Maharaj Ji often urged us to keep up our meditation practice despite the ups and downs that occur during our lives and not to try to force the pace or expect rapid, definable results. We do not do meditation for the results but because he has told us we must do it, and it is a chance to have some peace from the restless activity of our mind and be in his (inner) company.

All saints agree on the vital importance of meditation and following as closely as we can the guidance of our Master. He has no doubt about what he tells us, as he speaks from his own devotional practice and experience. The present Master also says we should have

confidence in ourselves, and realize that because the Lord has marked us for initiation, it means he has confidence in us that we can follow successfully the path of devotion and meditation. There is thus no question of any justification for a lack of faith. This is summed up in Soami Ji Maharaj's *Sar Bachan (Prose)*, aphorism 116, which is the only such paragraph to be printed entirely in capitals:

*LEAVING EVERYTHING ELSE ASIDE, ONE MUST
IMPLICITLY OBEY THE SAT GURU OF HIS OWN TIME,
AND FAITHFULLY FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS.... THIS
IS THE LONG AND SHORT OF EVERYTHING.*



*When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possest,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, – and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.*

William Shakespeare

Something to Think About

This, Too, Will Pass

A powerful king, ruler of many domains, was in a position of such magnificence that wise men were his mere employees. And yet one day he felt himself confused and called the sages to him. He said: "I do not know the cause, but something impels me to seek a certain ring, one that will enable me to stabilize my state. I must have such a ring. And this ring must be one which, when I am unhappy, will make me joyful. At the same time, if I am happy and look upon it, I must be made sad."

The wise men consulted one another and threw themselves into deep contemplation, and finally they came to a decision as to the character of this ring which would suit their king.

The ring which they devised was one upon which was inscribed the legend:

THIS, TOO, WILL PASS

Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*

Time changes and will go on changing, but Nam does not change. The current of Nam goes on as usual. It is Nam which changes the times and brings about all changes.

Till we are able to put our consciousness in Nam, we will be subject to changes, now happy and now miserable. That is why the Saints repeatedly exhort us to withdraw our conscious attention from the nine doors of the body and fix it in Shabd.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

Book Review



New Seeds of Contemplation

BY THOMAS MERTON

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New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton's collection of essays on the pursuit of the interior life, is worth reading over and over again. In these essays one encounters a traveller on the spiritual path with rare powers of observation, honesty and trust in God. He writes with breathtaking candour about the deceitfulness and trickeries of the mind. He has an unsentimental understanding of the rigours of spiritual practice. And he has an inspiring capacity to accept from God a wide range of gifts, including absolute poverty, silence and apparent lack of progress.

Thomas Merton was a Roman Catholic Trappist monk. He spent most of his life in a monastery in Kentucky. A poet and author of more than seventy books, he wrote on diverse topics ranging from contemplative prayer and monastic life to peace, non-violence and racial tolerance. Some of his books, like *The Sign of Jonah*, lyrically describe the experience of God in nature. Others, like *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* or *The Asian Journals of Thomas Merton*, offer his insights on Zen, enlightenment and the human condition. Merton recognized throughout his life that there were many paths to God, and that God calls us in many ways to return.

The essays about meditation and contemplation in *New Seeds of Contemplation* are neither linear nor systematic. Rather, they are a mix of notes from his own efforts in contemplation: confessions, observations, warnings and words of encouragement. Merton had a firm grasp on the nature of the mind and ego, and well understood that he was just a struggling soul like everyone else. His essays often read like letters from a close friend on the spiritual path.

He has no hesitation in speaking of our profound shortcomings as we attempt God-realization, especially when we experience times of discouragement.

Despair is the absolute extreme of self-love. It is reached when a man deliberately turns his back on all help from anyone else in order to taste the rotten luxury of knowing himself to be lost.... Because our own resources inevitably fail us, we are all more or less subject to discouragement and to despair. Despair is the development of a pride so great and stiff-necked that it selects the absolute misery of damnation rather than accept happiness from the hands of God.

On the other hand, he writes, “Humility contains in itself the answer to all the great problems of the soul.... Humility alone can destroy the self-centredness that makes joy impossible.” He asks, “How can you be humble, if you are always paying attention to yourself?”

Merton describes many of the unsavoury aspects of our minds with unsettling accuracy.

People who know nothing of God, and whose lives are centred on themselves, imagine that they can only find themselves by asserting their own desires and ambitions and appetites in a struggle with the rest of the world ... thus emphasizing the difference between themselves and other men, who have less than they do.... [But] the man who lives in division is living in death.

Merton’s extensive meditation practice allows him to describe the actual experience of prayer in stark and revealing language.

Prayer and love are really learned in the hour when prayer becomes impossible and your heart turns to stone.... It is useless to get upset when you cannot shake off distractions. In the first place you must realize that they are almost unavoidable in the life of prayer. The necessity of kneeling and suffering submersion under a tidal wave of wild and inane images is one of the standard trials of the contemplative life.... You would profit much ... by patiently resisting distractions, and learning something of your own helplessness and incapacity.

Merton writes that “it is the will to pray that is the essence of prayer, and desire to find God, to see Him and to love Him, is the only thing that matters”.

No matter how distracted you may be, pray by peaceful, even perhaps inarticulate efforts to centre your heart upon God, who is present to you in spite of all that is going on in your mind. His presence does not depend on your thoughts of Him. He is unfailingly there; if He were not, you could not even exist. The memory of His unfailing presence is the surest anchor for our minds and hearts in the storms of distraction and temptation by which we are purified.

Merton beautifully describes the blessings of being in the company of a saint, one who models what it means to be humble and to have fully submitted to the will of God.

His gentleness and sweetness are not pressed through his pores by the crushing restraint of a spiritual strait-jacket. They come from his direct docility to the light of truth and to the will of God. Hence a saint is capable of talking about the world, without any explicit reference to God, in such a way that his statements give greater glory to God and arouse a greater love of God, than the observations of someone less holy.

Therefore, whatever a saint says or does becomes a spiritual lesson, a sermon, in itself.

For the saint preaches sermons by the way he walks and the way he stands and the way he sits down and the way he picks things up and holds them in his hand. The perfect do not have to reflect on the details of their actions.... They finally cease to be aware of themselves doing things, and gradually God begins to do all that they do, in them and for them.

For all of our limitations and delusions, Merton knows there is only one solution, and that is the power of God. Our role is to trust and have faith in the One who brought us into being and who has promised to take us home.

Unless God utters Himself in you, speaks His own name in the centre of your soul, you will no more know him than a stone knows the ground.... He comes down from heaven and finds us. He looks at us from the depths of his own infinite actuality, which is everywhere, and His seeing us gives us a new mind in which we also discover Him. We only know Him in so far as we are known by Him.

Ultimately, Merton concludes:

What you most need ... is an unfaltering trust in the Divine guidance, as well as the courage to risk everything for Him. In many ways, the journey seems to be a foolish gamble. And you may well make many mistakes.... What matters is for you to be heroically faithful to grace and love. If God calls you to Him, then he implicitly promises you all the graces that you need to reach Him. You must be blindly faithful to that promise.

New Seeds of Contemplation will give great encouragement to anyone striving, as Merton did, to “love God with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your soul”.



