



Chapter Seven

Santmat





Santmat: An Introduction

Santmat, the Way of Sages, is also referred to as the path of saints, the teachings of saints, and as the conviction of saints and sages. It is neither a new religion nor a new sect of an existing religion. Santmat is not a new philosophical conviction, or even a new interpretation of a religious tradition. Santmat was not founded by any particular sage or saint, although it respects all equally. Further, Santmat represents the eternal and eternal wisdom and method and is in accordance with the ancient *Vedas*.¹

Santmat is a pure spiritual tradition. The teachings of Santmat integrate devotion of God with inner subtle knowledge and *yoga* disciplines. It has been spoken about by many of the saints.

Sant Tulsidas Ji sings in praise of Santmat:

I don't mean any preference here as I praise Santmat as it is spoken about in the Vedas and the Puranas.

Sant Tulsi Sahab of Hatharas states:

I don't know any other saint, guru or path. Only the path of saints I consider gratifying.

He further says:

Santmat is the quintessence. The rest is the net of illusion (maya).



Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj praises the path of the saints:

Without the teachings of saints there is no liberation. I ask that you listen to this carefully. If you desire ultimate freedom then become the children of saints. By this is meant that freedom and liberation can only be attained by one who follows the path of saints with great devotion.

People who are ignorant of the knowledge of saints say that the teachings of saints are contrary to the *Vedas*. Also, those who are not fully conversant with the mystical teachings of the *Vedas* say the *Vedas* are devoid of the teachings of saints. However, Santmat refutes these erroneous claims, which are simply rooted in ignorance, and then brings understanding and harmony to these two incorrect perspectives. Santmat proclaims that the teachings of saints and the essential knowledge expounded by the *Vedas* are identical. As well, the sages and great saints of ancient times taught the same message about the Divine as the saints of today. These teachings of the saints are the same as the knowledge found in the *Vedas*. The present need is to examine these statements closely and to experience the Truth within.

As Kabir Sahab says:

The only people who find this [wisdom or Truth] are those who delve deep into the waters [of knowledge]. Those who are afraid of drowning in the water [of knowledge] only sit by its banks [and simply talk about the waters of knowledge].



If one studies deeply the words of the *rishis* (the Seers of the *Vedas*) and sages, then one will recognize the supreme harmony and corresponding agreement in the ideas.

Sant Dadu says:

*Those who have reached the supreme destiny
[understanding of Truth] all speak a single language.
The wise are of one thought and they all belong to one
caste [one mind set].*

The Importance of Santmat

People everywhere in the world desire happiness, and none want suffering or pain. Of all living beings, human life is the most advanced. Humans not only desire happiness, they also make many kinds of efforts to achieve peace and happiness on the basis of their knowledge. But the result is apparent: in the effort to find satisfaction people only find unhappiness; in an effort to find peace, even more anxiety often results. It is difficult to find a person in this world who does not have concerns and worries. It is equally difficult to find one who has found peace and happiness and is free of suffering. Each human being is in the grip of physical, mental, or natural suffering. Even those who are wealthy, strong, gifted, beautiful, and bountiful, seem to be unhappy, and have to experience some form of suffering in their lives.



What is the cause of this unhappiness? Unless we are able to know the cause of a sickness, it will be impossible to find a cure for it.

Sant Kabir Sahab asks:

You have lost an object in one place and you are looking for it in an entirely different place. How could you possibly find it?

Let us consider this dilemma in view of the way people usually attempt to find peace, joy and contentment. People wander ceaselessly through life, always seeking to acquire material resources, thinking they will thus achieve their goal of happiness. However, as the saints tell us, even if we acquire all these physical possessions—status, fame, or wealth—we are still unable to attain true peace, joy and happiness. The peace we seek is not found in the outer material world but only in the inner world of the soul. The outer manifest world is merely sensory. It is transitory and ever fleeting. But within us lives the Supreme Being whose true form is peace and bliss. The Divine is unmanifest (without physical form), eternal, and beyond the senses. Only by turning inward and ceasing the outward wandering, will we be able to attain lasting joy and eternal peace.



We can understand this through an analogy: If we throw a rock towards the sky, we find that the rock must return to the earth. And, even though the rock is flying and tumbling through the air as though it is part of the air, it will, nevertheless, soon return to the earth, since it is part of the earth. It is as though the rock, which is a part of the earth, strains to come back to earth, and finds stillness in reuniting with the earth. In the same way, we can think of the human soul, as it wanders through multiple life forms: the Hindu scriptures speak of 84 hundred thousand life forms.¹ The soul will experience suffering in the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*)—reincarnation after reincarnation—until it merges into the Supreme Soul (Divine), which is inseparable from the soul. The Divine exists in the soundless state, but the living soul has descended into this realm of darkness.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans advises to begin the journey:

You have descended into this darkness from the soundless state. You are now far from your home in the soundless Divine. You are caught here in this dark realm. Therefore, at this very moment, begin your journey homeward toward that soundless state.

Through inner meditation the *jivatman* (individual soul) begins its ascent toward the soundless state where it will eventually merge with the Divine. When the soul thus experiences oneness with the Divine, it will attain ultimate peace and supreme joy.



Santmat teaches a path to the attainment of this joy and peace. This is the significance of the way of saints and the importance of Santmat.

The Principles of Santmat

Maharshi Mehi elaborates on the essential principles of Santmat in his book, *Mahrshi Mehi Padavali*:

1. Ultimate Reality is beyond any beginning or end, infinite, beyond birth, beyond the senses, all-pervading yet even beyond pervasiveness. It must, therefore, be understood as the Supreme Being. This Essential Element is known in Santmat as the Lord of All and is the foundation of all things. This Being is beyond both the inanimate and animate aspects of nature. It is without qualities and beyond qualities. Its nature is infinite, imperishable, all-powerful. It is beyond time and space, beyond sound and beyond form. It is the One without a second. The Supreme Being is beyond the scope of the mind, the intellect and the senses. This entire universe is powered by the energy of this Being. This Being is not human. It is not manifested in physical form. It has existence beyond the illusion of *maya*, and there is



nothing that exists outside of it. It is the Being which is eternal and is in existence from the beginning. Santmat considers this Being to be the Divine Reality, and this [knowing or merging with] Being is the goal of all spirituality.

2. The individual soul is an inseparable part of the Supreme Being.
3. The physical world of nature was created. It has an origin and an end.
4. The individual soul (*jīva*), bound by illusion (*māya*), remains in the cycle of death and birth. This is the cause of one's suffering. In order to escape from this cycle of death and birth we must experience realization of this Supreme Being.
5. By practicing devotion through these four techniques—*Mānas Japa* (recitation of the divine name), *Manas Dhyāna* (focus on the divine form), *Driṣṭi Sadhana* (focus on the infinitesimal point), and *Nadanusandhana Yoga* (concentration on the inner divine sounds)—the practitioner consecutively transcends the realms of darkness, light, and sound which cloak the Supreme Truth—the Divine Reality. Only in a human body an individual soul is able to achieve unity with the Divine.



[In other forms of existence, animal etc., it is not possible to tread the spiritual journey.]

6. Lying, stealing, intake of intoxicating substances, adultery, and violence (including harming other beings) are the five sins to be avoided. Eating meat or fish is also considered to be a form of violence and should be avoided. The aspirants of Santmat must abstain from these vices.²
7. The following are considered to be the requirements for the attainment liberation: Trust and belief in the Divine; commitment to seek the Divine within; devotion and service to a *sadguru*, spiritual master; *satsang*, listening to the teaching and spiritual discourse including study of the teaching of the saints and the scriptures; and *dhyana*, diligent meditation practice.

The Explanation of Santmat

1. Stillness or steadiness is the essence of *Shanti*.³
2. He who has attained *Shanti* is a saint.⁴
3. Santmat encompasses the thoughts and teachings of the saints and sages.
4. It is natural for human beings to desire *Shanti*. Inspired by this inherent desire, seers of ancient times searched for the inner



peace and found the path to attain this inner peace, and expounded this way in the ancient teachings of the *Upanishads*.⁵ Similar views have been expressed by saints in more recent times such as Guru Nanak and Kabir Sahib. They expressed their teaching in the Punjabi and Hindi vernaculars, respectively,⁶ for the inspiration and edification for the common masses. The teachings of these latter saints are referred to as Santmat.

However, the *Upanishads* are considered to be the foundation of Santmat, because they uniquely and abundantly describe the means for attaining *Shanti*, and contain a comprehensive explanation of the Divine Word-Sound which leads to the Highest Wisdom. The *Upanishads* explain the yogic techniques and present a systematic path for transcending thought in order to attain the Absolute through the use of sound (the Yoga of *Surat-Shabda*).⁷ Santmat follows the *yogic* path prescribed in the *Upanishads* and specifically, employs *Surat-Shabad Yoga* in its practices. [Therefore, it is to be understood that the teaching of the saints is a later expression and development of the teaching within the *Upanishads*.]

When viewed on the surface, the teachings of various saints sometimes seem to contradict one another [or even to contradict the principles of the *Upanishads*]. But upon deeper analysis, it



becomes apparent that there is an unbreakable unity in the spiritual views of all saints. Saints have appeared in different times and in different places, and their followers name their tradition in respect to the particular saint [for example, Kabir Panth and Dadu Panth]. The apparent differences can be attributed to variations in time, place, language, and labels given to the views, but in reality, they are the same. It also happens that excessively zealous followers tend to accentuate these seeming differences. When sectarianism and the forms of the particular time or place of the teachings of a saint are removed, the basic principles of Santmat are in unity.

Satsang

The word *satsang* is comprised of two words: *sat* and *sang*. What is *sat*? *Sat*⁸ is that which can never be destroyed and is ever-existent. It is the essential element, indestructible and beyond the limitations of time. And it is Truth or Being. *Sang* means association or contact. Thus, the word *satsang* refers to association or coming into contact with *Sat* (Truth).

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna states:

Whatever is Truth always exists and is never non-existent. That which is non Truth has no existence whatsoever. (2:16)



Satsang can be stratified in to following categories:

- *The First Kind of Satsang* (Association with the Divine):
What then is this element which is indestructible, has always been constant and will forever remain as such? This principle is the Supreme Being of the universe. Association with this Being, in reality, is association with Truth (*satsang*). But, what is it that could associate with this Supreme Being? Is it the body or the senses? The answer is that it is neither of these two. It is only apart from the body and senses that we will be able to associate with the Supreme Being. This is because it is only our soul that is an inseparable part of the Divine. It is only we (our soul) that are capable of merging with the Divine. Our individual soul is truth, and also, the Supreme Being is Truth. True *satsang* is the unity of the soul with the Supreme Truth. This is the highest kind of *satsang*. However, this highest kind of *satsang*, unity with the Divine, does not occur suddenly. This category of *satsang* requires many lifetimes of good actions *samskaras* (spiritual imprints and tendencies).
- *The Second Kind of Satsang* (Association with the Saints): Sant Tulsidas Ji emphasizes the association with the saints for the realization of the Divine:

“The association of the saints brings association with the Divine, and alliance with people who are



engrossed in the world leads the way back to this world again and again.”

To attain Ultimate Liberation it is essential to have association with the saints. Saints, those who have realized the true form of God, become that True Form. The accomplished great beings who have attained unity with the Divine, and who have experienced the Supreme Being even while living in this body, have become the Supreme Being [meaning they have become one with their true Divine Form]. Association with these saints is this second category of *satsang*. However, finding such a saint is not an easy task. A true saint is rare and difficult to find.

Sant Tulsidas explains in the *Ramacharitmanas*:

Without accumulation of many good deeds one will be unable to gain the association of a great saint.

When our good *karmas* permit, we are able to come to experience the association of these sentient beings. A more important point is that even if we have a direct encounter with such a saint, we often do not have the wisdom to be able to recognize a genuine sage. A great Sant Tulsi Sahab states the difficulty in recognizing a saint:

If someone says ‘I have recognized a saint,’ then I put my hands on my ears in astonishment. [It is not an easy task.]



If it were possible for ordinary people to recognize saints, then why, since antiquity, have so many great saints, sages, and prophets have been tortured, maimed and killed? Many saints throughout the ages have had to face horrible atrocities. This simply would not have happened if people were able to recognize the genuine great saints.

- *The Third Kind of Satsang* (Association with the Words and Writings of Ancient Sages and Saints): In daily life we need the guidance of a great sage or saint. Even though we might hear about or encounter many so called *mahatmas* or *sadhus*, the task of finding and identifying an accomplished guide is difficult. A truly great sage is a rarity. So, in consideration of this, how would *satsang* (association with a true saint) be possible? The answer is that we can study the teachings of the great saints of the past, because in their teaching, we will find the elaboration of the Truth. This then is the third category of *satsang*. Generally, when we speak of *satsang*, it is this third category that is meant. This kind of *satsang* includes the study of scriptures and the words and writings of the saints and prophets of the past.

As we continue diligently in this third type of *satsang*, we accumulate the meritorious *karmas* which will lead to the



meeting with a true saint. Then we will be able to do the second category of *satsang* and will have a good fortune of listening to the words of realized beings who presently reside among us. As we continue in association with a great saint, and with the saint's blessings, we will gradually begin to meditate and undertake the prescribed spiritual disciplines. By diligently practicing these disciplines, we will one day, experience the first category of *satsang*—the association with the Supreme. When we have thus accomplished the highest category of *satsang*, our life's ultimate purpose will be fulfilled. We will now examine some of the scriptures and the sayings of saints in this regard:

In the *Yajur Veda*, *satsang* is known as the *Buddhi yoga* (*dhiyam*). This is the yoga of intellectually discerning the truth. The *Yajur Veda* elaborates on the significance of the *Buddhi yoga*:

O Dear Aspirants! In order to realize the essential form of the Supreme Being, first practice the Buddhi yoga (satsang), then Mānas yoga (practice mantra and focus on the Divine form), and the Yoga of Light (Driṣṭi yoga). By these practices you will establish the ground for the realization of Divine Union.

In the *Maha Upanishad*, *satsang* is considered essential for Liberation:

On the gate of liberation are found four gate keepers endowed with wisdom. These four are: discipline,



thoughtfulness (reflection), contentment and association with saints.

Sant Tulsidas Ji sings in the praise of *satsang*:

Without the association of great saints, there is neither discourse of the Divine nor the understanding of the scriptures. Without these two, selfish attachment does not loosen its grip. And without dispelling attachment to the world one cannot attain the realm of the Divine and the true devotion that is essential to realize the Divine.

Further, he says:

Wisdom, fame, supreme salvation, attainment of all powers and kindness are all realized by the power of satsang. No other means are prescribed in the Vedas to attain these.

Sant Kabir Sahab elaborates on the purpose of *satsang*:

Discord and delusion can be removed by the power of the association of saints. For those who associate with saints, suffering dissolves and they will remain immersed in joy.

Joy arises from noble company and pain arises from association with the wicked, says Kabir, go to a place where saints dwell and their association is possible.

A great woman saint, Sahjo Bai, has also said:

Whoever comes to satsang is released from the confinements of individual caste, status and color. Even the flow of dirty water, upon reaching the holy River Ganga, becomes Ganga (loses its impurity and comes to be known as the holy river).



Sant Sundar Das Ji says:

All people have a mother and father as well as relatives and friends. It is easy to obtain sons and wives, but it is very difficult to find true satsang (association of true saints).

Sant Tulsi Sahab says:

O Aspirant! Perform satsang by subduing the mind and taking refuge in saints. Keep in your heart a ceaseless burning desire to be at the feet (tutelage) of saints.

Maharishi Mehi Paramahans Ji asks his aspirants to perform both kinds of *satsang*:

Dear Aspirants! Each day strive to do both kinds of satsang: inner and outer. Outer satsang is listening to the teachings of great saints and studying the sacred texts. Inner satsang is the practice of one-pointed meditation.

Yogi Panchanan Bhattacharya Ji says:

By association with a pure soul the mind becomes pure and the darkness of attachment is dispelled. In attending to these quotes from different saints it becomes clear that satsang is vital and very necessary for any serious spiritual seeker.



Guru: The Qualified Teacher

A *guru* is the one who gives Knowledge. In this world there are many types of knowledge. There are also many types of teachers, each proficient in their own field. For our purposes we are discussing spiritual knowledge, and our concern is with the relation to a spiritual teacher. The worldly teachers possess knowledge concerning the physical and material world. The spiritual teacher, however, is proficient in spiritual knowledge. The spiritual teacher gives knowledge of the Self, reveals the true form of the Divine, and thus brings blessing into our lives. Therefore, the seeker of spiritual knowledge must get associated with *satsang* and seek a true spiritual *guru*.

Maharishi Mehi emphasizes the importance of teacher on the path of spiritual knowledge:

Do satsang, search for a teacher, and choose an accomplished spiritual teacher. Without finding a true teacher one can not tread the path of knowledge.

The teacher is not merely a human body. He/she is knowledge incarnate. Therefore, it is only the one who is able to give the knowledge of God should be qualified as a spiritual teacher. Sant Kabir Sahab sees the *guru* as the manifestation of divine wisdom:

The Guru is a manifestation of wisdom, and an aspirant should acquire this knowledge. Without the



*understanding of true knowledge and moral principles,
there is neither a guru nor the true seeker.*

Sant Tulsidas says:

*The true teacher is the one who gives knowledge
without ignorance, who speaks about light without
darkness, and about the formless God without the God
with forms. That teacher I deem as being true.*

Who is worthy to be called a true or accomplished teacher? The true teacher is the one who has transcended the realm of ignorance and darkness and is established in the realm of knowledge and Light. The true teacher having gone beyond the material realm of forms is established in the formless state of the Infinite (the Divine). The accomplished spiritual teacher, who shows the path to experiencing the Reality, does so, only after testing this knowledge on the touchstone of his/her own personal experience. The knowledge of a true spiritual teacher is not simply based on intellectual knowledge, but also in personal experience.

Sant Kabir Sahab emphatically asserts:

*You speak what is written down [intellectual
knowledge], and I speak from what I have seen [inner
experience].*

Therefore, we need a spiritual *guru* who will not only be a knowledgeable teacher, but will also be morally sound and



actively practicing what he/she teaches. Sant Tulsidas warns against those gurus who only serve their own selfish purposes:

The teacher who takes the wealth of a student and not the suffering of the student will go to a deep hell.

The praise of the teacher is based on the fact that one can not attain knowledge without the grace of the teacher. We now present some references from the scriptures and from the writings of various saints who have elaborated on the importance and qualifications of a true spiritual teacher:

Gosvami Tulsidas Ji says:

Without the grace of a true Guru one cannot attain knowledge, and without knowledge it is not possible to practice detachment. All the Vedas proclaim that we cannot attain true contentment without deep devotion to God.

He further says,

No one can go beyond this ocean of the world without the help of Guru.

Sant Kabir Sahab considers the help of *sadguru* as an essential requisite for the spiritual journey:

Without the Guru people are lost. They wander here and there in the world and cannot find the path.

Without the help of the Guru you cannot attain knowledge in this human birth, which will be wasted.



My spiritual preceptor and God both stand before me. Whose feet shall I touch first? I am indebted to my Guru and will touch his feet first, since he has taught me the way to God.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji also praises *sadguru*:

Without meeting a true teacher, man is filled with ego. Without the guru, we miss the purpose of this life, which is to realize the Divine. Guru is my mother, guru is my father, guru is my Lord.”

He further says:

Without finding a true teacher, one cannot attain liberation.

Tulsi Das Sahab echoes:

Without the blessings of an accomplished murshid (Guru) it is impossible to see beyond this world, and the path to our destination is unreachable.

And also:

I am suffering in the absence of my Beloved, and life in this world is empty without a Satguru.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

The Guru is greater than God’ is a famous saying. One can not attain the Divine without the help of the teacher, even though the Divine lives within our very heart.

Further:

Without having the grace of a Guru, one cannot attain liberation.



Sant Dadu Dayal Ji sees *sadguru* as the one who brings spiritual transformation in his disciple:

A true Guru by his grace transforms an animal-like being into a real human being. Then the person is transformed from human to siddha (perfected being), and from siddha to God, and from God to the Formless Infinite Reality.

Sant Charan Das places *Guru* in a much superior status when he says:

A mother is a hundred times greater than a father. A mother always keeps her son in her loving care. Even when she chides the child, in her heart she is only concerned with the well-being of her child. God is a hundred times greater than a mother and the spiritual teacher is a hundred times greater than God. The Guru loves his disciple and also takes away his weaknesses.

A great mystic and devoted woman, Sahjo Bai, presents similar idea:

I may abandon Ram (God) but I can not leave my Guru. I do not see the Lord and Guru as equals. [In other words, she deems Guru higher than God since Guru holds the key to liberation.]

Whatever happens by the grace of God, or whatever does not happen, I am not concerned. But without the grace and mercy of Guru, the insight and wisdom wash away.



Saint Sundar Das sees *guru* as the purifier of worldly entanglements:

By the grace of the Guru our intelligence is refined and purified, and by the grace of the Guru the sorrows of this world are removed.

By the creation of God the soul descends [into the web of this world]; however, by the teachings of the Guru the same soul is liberated from the net of illusion and death (Yama).

Lord Mahavira, the great *tirthankara* of Jainism says:

Service to the true Guru and serving the experienced elders, and avoidance of association with ignorant people, is the path to the Spiritual Bliss.

When we look at the life of the Buddha we see that he was devoted to finding the maker of this house (body). To that end he studied at the feet of many great sages and scholars. The Buddha stated clearly our duty is to our teacher who gives us Knowledge.

The Buddha states:

The person from whom you learn the path [as taught by the Buddha] must be served [and worshipped] in the same way that a Brahmin worships the sacrificial fire.

Now we will consider some references from various texts within the Hindu tradition. It is stated in the *Maha Upanishad*:

It is difficult to abandon the sensory pleasures; it is difficult to see the true reality; and it is even more difficult to attain the state of equanimity [and tranquility] without the grace of a true preceptor.



The *Yogshikhopanishad* declares:

The Guru is [equal to] the Creator (Brahma), the Sustainer (Vishnu) and the Destroyer (Siva). No one is greater than the preceptor in all the three worlds.

Gynasankalani Tantra says:

In this body all Knowledge resides; in this body all the gods dwell; and in this body are located all pilgrimages. Only by the teaching of the Guru can all this be found.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Lord Krishna does not use the word *guru*, but he alludes to the giver of knowledge, when he says:

Learn this through humble submission, through inquiry, and through service, then the knowing ones, the perceivers of truth will teach you the true knowledge.

From this review of these accounts, we see that emphasis for the need of a teacher for the spiritual journey as well as praise for the *sadguru* is quite pervasive through out the teachings of the saints as well as the sacred literature.

Moral Integrity

Whether we call it our true nature [form], or the nature of God, or the nature of the soul, all are pointing to the same thing. In order to realize one's true form [nature], it is essential to practice the path of Ultimate Reality. For this purpose, it is necessary to



practice a righteous lifestyle. And further in order to realize the sacred form of the Supreme Being, it is imperative to live a moral and pure life.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj stresses the need for purification:

*It is only in a pure, clean vessel that truth can stay.
Those who lead a pure (moral) life are rare. I seek
refuge in God: Lord, merge my essence into your
Supreme Essence!*

If we put cow dung, dirt or waste on our fingers, and then place a sweet fragrance on those fingers, we will not be able to smell the sweet fragrance. In the same way, if our hearts (and actions) are impure, then we cannot realize the sweet form of the Supreme Lord.

In the *Katha Upanishad* it is said:

The one who has not abstained from sinful acts, whose senses are not in control, and whose mind is not serene cannot attain the Supreme Reality by the practice of self-realization.

With these views in mind, the saints have given instructions to abstain from the five sins. Abstention from lying, stealing, intoxication, violence and adultery will help the seeker to effortlessly avoid unrighteous acts.



Maharishi Mehi announces:

If we are able to rid ourselves of these five sins, then how could other sins trouble us? And if we are united with truthful and pure conduct, then how could any curse harm us?

The saints have addressed the sin of violence with particular attention to the foods which are eaten. Foods produced by killing living beings, as well as foods which are not pure and fresh, are considered *tamasic*. Consumption of these types of foods is prohibited by the teachings of the saints. This includes animal products such as meat, fish, and eggs. These foods inhibit the clarity of the mind and the health of the body. There is an old saying: “Whatever kind of food we take in, its properties will also fill our mind.” There is also a parallel saying, “Whatever we eat, and just so will our breath smell [indicating the visible effect of food].”

Further, Kabir Sahab describes the relationship between thought and food:

The kind of food and drink which we consume directly influences how our mind will become. Even the quality of water which we drink will influence our speech.

These words of Kabir Sahib are not merely rhetorical conjecture, but represent direct experience. Drink one glass of milk and observe how your mind is affected. Next, drink a glass of wine and observe how the mind is affected. Or, observe the effect of



eating a sweet in comparison to the effect of taking a very small dose of opium. In this way, you can see for yourself how the mind is affected by what the person ingests. These are extreme examples, with noticeable effects. But even when the effect is subtle and barely noticeable, we are nevertheless affected by the food we consume.

A great *yogi*, Bhupendranath Ji Sanyal's thoughts on pure diet:

It is preferable to always avoid the consumption of flesh and fish. This is because in the very cells of these animals there might be bad diseases. But even more significantly, the natural vibration of these creatures is absorbed into the blood. This can create agitation and even sickness, and will destroy the natural calmness of the mind. Also, one must not take intoxicants, as this is a great breach of the spiritual path and natural duty (dharma). [Under the influence of intoxicants people are unable to discern the right path of action.]

Therefore, we must be disciplined in what we eat and drink, and by being disciplined, our wealth and spiritual path are protected. This world becomes agreeable, and so does the next world, since we are not incurring the *karmas* from killing other living beings. When a person leaves an immoral lifestyle to practice a moral life, he will not only better his own life, but also, his family and community will be favorably influenced.



Lord Buddha speaks about the benefits of a moral life:

A person who practices a moral life will benefit in five ways:

- 1. Enhanced social standing*
- 2. Increased wealth*
- 3. Greater influence in the community;*
- 4. A peaceful death*
- 5. After death the person will go to a blissful realm.*

In addition to practicing a life of moral rectitude, there are three important elements to be practiced by a person who pursues *bhakti* (devotion) to the Divine and seeks to attain liberation. The first is *stuti* (invocation); the second is *prarthana* (prayer or supplication); and the third is *upasana* (meditation).

Invocation and Supplication

We know that when we are indebted to someone, we should express our gratitude and appreciation. We also know that God has blessed us bountifully. Although we are unable to repay God for many generous blessings, we can acknowledge this goodness by chanting praises about the Divine Being. When we exalt God through song, we declare the glories of the Divine. In doing this, we remember the splendor of the Supreme Being. As a natural result, our faith in God increases. Unless we acknowledge someone's qualities, it is impossible to be faithful to that person.



Sant Tulsidas Ji says:

Without the knowledge of the nature of God it is impossible to know him. And without understanding his qualities we can not have love for God. Without love we cannot have devotion and true faith. This is as unattainable as the mixing of water and oil [which is impossible].

Therefore, in order to have devotion and faith in God it is necessary to know the majesty of God. Once the glory of God is known, our heart is attracted to God. This is a great way to keep the heart in devotion to God. Thus, it is through invocation that we extol the divine powers of God and draw the mind toward God.

After singing praises to God, we pray. Prayer is supplication with deep humility. In general, people have desires and make demands. Only the great sages do not have wants.

Kabir Sahab describes his state of desire-less-ness:

*My desires are gone, as are my worries. My mind is filled with detachment.
One who does not want anything is the king of kings.*

Sant Tulsidas says:

*People desire sons, wealth, and fame in this world.
Why do people desire that which taints the mind?*

Why do we desire these things? Sant Tulsidas ponders over this in his *Vinay Patrika*:



[Fleeting] pleasures come to us without asking, whether we are in heaven, hell, house, or forest. Why then do people work so hard to get these pleasures while they ignore the advice of the sages [to seek permanent joy]?

Why do we invest so much effort in acquiring these worldly pleasures which already come to us naturally? Let us consider as well that there is always pain involved in acquiring worldly objects, and that an even greater exertion is required to sustain them. Further, when these very same insidious sensory pleasures leave us, the distress is even more intense. This is why, the wise do not ask for things which are transitory.

The truth is that our desires should only be for something which would eliminate the desire [for worldly pleasures] itself. In reality, the only thing we should be asking God for is to achieve union with the divine. After realizing the Divine, there is nothing left to be achieved. This is the end of all wants.

Invocation and supplication are not merely concerned with the mindless muttering of requests, but rather, prayer should be the voice of our heart. God always listens to the one who calls out with a pure heart.



The *Yajur Veda* (chapter 20) presents an example of such a prayer:

Oh God, even as we unknowingly commit various sins, day and night, please forgive these offenses and ill desires. You are omnipresent, like the pervasive wind.

We have previously spoken about these practices of praising God and prayer in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Christians refer to this practice as prayer, and Muslims call it *ibadat*. We see that in all theistic religions there is this great emphasis on prayer.

Communion or Meditation Practice

In the Santmat tradition, the practices of invocation and prayer—glorification and supplication—are followed by communion through the practices of *upasana*, contemplation and meditation. The Sanskrit word *upasana* literally means ‘sitting near God.’ The saints present *upasana* in four sub-categories. The four basic practices are *Mānas japa*, *Mānas dhyāna*, *Driṣṭi sadhana* and *Nadanusandhana*.

Mānas Japa

The first of these practices *Mānas japa*, is the repetition of a Divine name, preferably the *mantra* given to the aspirant by the



teacher. This *mantra* is considered to be both sacred, and vibrant with divine energy. It purifies the heart of the practitioner.

Lord Krishna describes this practice of *japa* as the greatest of all sacrifices:

In the sacrifices I am the japa yajna (sacrifice in form of reciting the sacred name). In the immoveable things I am the Himalaya

The *Yoga Shastras* declare that by the practice of *japa* the practitioner attains supernatural powers:

By japa one attains sidhi (divine powers).

Sant Tulsidas also says that those People who recite the name of God find that their suffering vanishes. If a person practices *mānas japa* with diligence he will acquire eight kinds of supernatural powers. The *Brahmanda Purana* says that *japa* is equal to millions of prayers. The *Jabaldarshnopanishad* includes *japa* as one of the essential vows. Saint Maharishi Mehi says that *guru japa* is the best of all *japas*. It is incomparable. He says that the practice of *japa* is peace-giving by its nature, and that it bestows wealth, right action (*dharma*), desires and liberation, all the four ends of life. The aspirant can think of the teacher as a wish-fulfilling tree, and recitation of the *guru mantra* as a great austerity. Through the practice of *japa* all desires are easily fulfilled.



The *Vishnu Purana*, the *Shiva Purana*, and the *Agni Purana* speak of three types of *japa*: *Vachika japa*, *Upanshu japa*, and *Mānas japa*. According to all these scriptures *Mānas japa* is the highest form. *Vachika japa* is performed by speaking or reciting the holy name so that others can hear, and it includes chanting and reading of scripture. In *Upanshu japa* the holy name is uttered in such a way that the lips move, but the sound can only be heard by the one who is reciting. In *Mānas japa* the *mantra* or holy name is recited only internally by the mind, not with the mouth, and not by using any external expressions. Each method is beneficial, but the effects bestowed are of different orders: *Vachika japa* is ten times more spiritually powerful than ritual practices such as sacrifices; *Upanshu japa* is a hundred times more powerful than *Vachika japa*; and *Mānas japa* is a thousand times more powerful even than *Upanshu japa*.

For recitation purposes a short *mantra* is preferable. The smaller *mantra* serves as a device or a prod to help the practitioner control the mind which is as restless as an elephant in rut. Not only this, but, in addition, the *mantra* puts all the great deities (including Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) within the control of the practitioner. Thus the practitioner obtains spiritual powers through the practice of *mantra*.



Gosvami Tulsidas Ji emphasizes the potency of *japa* practice:

The mantra that is small has such a great power that even Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and other gods come under the control of the practitioner. The short mantra is a device to control the mind which is like a mad elephant.

It is necessary to have a focused mind at the time of reciting the *mantra*. If the mind is not focused then *japa* does not yield benefit. The practitioner must pay a close attention and not let the mind wander off to various thoughts during *japa*. The constant arising of thoughts obstructs the mind from achieving the powers of the *mantra*. However, it is important to not become discouraged or impatient while trying to focus. Be diligent in this practice, success in concentration is bound to come.

Mānas Dhyāna

It is necessary to restrain the activities of the mind for the purpose of uniting the soul with the Divine. In the *Yoga Sutra* Patanjali defines *yoga* as “cessation of the mental fluctuations.” Ordinarily, the mind is continually attending to input from the five senses as they perceive this world of name and form. In order to withdraw the attention of our mind from these sensations, we have to utilize an additional means that also seems concrete. This is done in the practice of *japa* by invoking



a form of the deity through repetition of a holy name. We have already explained the details of *japa* in the previous section. It is also accomplished in *Mānas dhyāna* through mental visualization of the sacred form associated with the name of the *Guru* or deity.

In *Mānas dhyāna* the practitioner invokes a holy name and at the same time also visualizes the sacred form of the being represented by the *mantra* that is being recited. In the saint tradition, the physical form of the *Guru* is the most revered form. Kabir Sahab, Guru Nanak, and other saints have given instructions to recite the holy word ‘*Guru*’ (the one who dispels darkness of ignorance) and to visualize the sacred form of the *Guru*.

Kabir Sahab sings the praise of *Guru*:

The essential meditation is meditation on the form of the Guru; the indispensable prayer is the worship of the holy feet of the Guru; the cardinal truth is given in the words spoken by the Guru; and the fundamental truth is the pure intention of the devotee.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

Meditate on the Guru within; with your tongue recite the Guru’s holy name; behold the Guru with your eyes; and listen to his words with your ears.



Sant Charan Das asks the aspirants to surrender themselves to the *Guru*:

O Aspirant! Meditate on the Guru and recite his/her name; surrender yourself [your ego] as an offering; and worship only the Guru.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji says:

The mantra that the guru gives is most pure and holy. Recite that mantra in your heart. Meditate on the auspicious form of the guru who is the most benevolent.

By this practice of reciting the *mantra* and focusing on the form of the spiritual teacher, the mind begins to be concentrated. Progress in meditation is gradual but steady. The significant effects of this practice occur when the aspirant becomes established in the focus on the form. This is when the aspirant will have all desires fulfilled.

Thus, Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

Establish the form of the Guru in your heart, and all your wishes will be fulfilled.

A wonderful example of the effect of *Mānas dhyāna* is illustrated in a story of the *Mahabharata*. Ekalavya, a young tribal boy (from a lower caste), desired to learn the art of archery. He approached the great Guru Drona, the master of archery. However, Drona would not accept Ekalavya as his disciple because he belonged to a lower caste. But Eklavya was



determined, and he already considered Drona to be his *guru* in his heart. The boy installed a clay statue of Guru Drona near his house and began to meditate on the form of the *Guru*. He practiced archery daily with only the desire to become fully proficient in the art of archery. As a result of Ekalavya's focus and his faith in the auspices of his *Guru*, he became skilled in the art of archery, exceeding even Arjuna in his ability. This example illustrates the significance of the practice of *Mānas Dhyāna*.

These same concepts are found in Islam tradition. *Zikar* (Sufi chanting) and *fikar* (constant remembrance and focus) can be compared to *Mānas japa* and *Mānas dhyāna*. In Sufism, meditation on the form of the *Guru* is known as *Fanahfil murshid*.

Driṣṭi Yoga

Through the practice of *Mānas japa* and *Mānas dhyāna* the mind begins to become focused, but complete control of the mental fluctuations is not yet accomplished. For this purpose, the method of *Driṣṭi yoga* (yoga of focused visualization) is utilized.



Lord Rama instructed Hanuman Ji on this method when he said:

There are two seeds of the tree of the mind. The first is *prana spandana* (breathing; movement of energy) and the second is *vasana* (desire; subconscious inclinations; tendencies and impulses). Indeed with the destruction (restraining) of one of these two, the other is also destroyed (subdued).

Some spiritual aspirants try to destroy these seeds through exercises that control the movement of the breath. These breathing exercises are called *pranayama*, and they are part of *Hatha Yoga*. Other aspirants seek to eliminate the desires (*vasanas*) using the techniques and practices of *Raja Yoga* (the path of meditation), which is also known as *Driṣṭi yoga*, the *Yoga* of the Focus of the Vision. *Driṣṭi yoga* is deemed superior to *Hatha Yoga* because it can be easily practiced by householders as well as by ascetics. For this reason Lord Ram instructed Hanuman to practice *Driṣṭi yoga*:

Oh Hanuman, until the mind is controlled, one must meditate on a single element.

And what is this one element? The one element is not found in the practice of *Japa*, because the *mantra* by itself is not simply one element because there can be more than one syllable in a *mantra*. Neither is this one element found in *Mānas Dhyāna* because the physical form of the deity or *Guru* is comprised of many elements. This one element is that which is indivisible



and uni-dimensional. It is *bindu*, a singular infinitesimal point. When an aspirant undertakes the practice of the *Yoga* of Vision (*Driṣṭi yoga*) and gazes within on a point then he/she will behold the singular *bindu* of light within. This is the “one element” that Lord Rama was referring to.

The *Yoga* of Vision is known by different names in different scriptures. Some of these names are *Bindu dhyāna*, *Shushumna dhyāna*, *Shunya* (emptiness) *dhyāna*, *Nasagra* (front of the nose) *dhyāna*, *Preksha* (seeing) *dhyāna*, and *Vipashyana* (insight) *dhyāna*. The followers of the Sufi tradition call this *Sagle Naseerah*.

Driṣṭi yoga can be explained through translation of the words: *Driṣṭi* is the faculty of vision, and *Yoga* means union. Thus *Driṣṭi yoga* refers to the concentration of the dispersed vision into a focus on a single point which is beheld with the mind’s eye. The aspirant of *Driṣṭi yoga* is instructed by the preceptor to bring both beams of vision to a unity by focusing and intense gazing on a single point.

Through this practice the aspirant pierces the realm of darkness within and enters the realm of divine light. The aspirant thus moves from the microcosm (body, the material realm) to the



macrocosm (divine realm), and from the gross material world to the subtle spiritual realm where the aspirant is able to perceive the subtle divine sounds. With this connection to the subtle sounds the practitioner of *Driṣṭi yoga* is enabled to proceed further on the path. The various realms which are then experienced have been described in many sacred texts as well as in the teachings of saints. These are some of the references to *Driṣṭi Yoga* that can be found in the sacred literature:

In the *Shivasamhita* it is said:

When the aspirant brings his attention from all directions and concentrates it at the ajna chakra (in the middle of the two eyebrows) then all the karmas from the past life are destroyed with no difficulty.

The *Yogashikhopahnishad* says:

The ida nadi is on the left and the pingala is on the right. In the middle is shushumna.⁹ The one who knows this (realizes it) is the true knower of the [essence of] the Vedas.

Shri Krishna in the *Gita* teaches how to focus with your vision:

While holding the body, head and neck in a straight line, motionless and steady, one should gaze in front of his nose and not look in any other direction [meditate]..

Sant Dharni Das instructs:

Focus right in front of your nose and gaze with your inner vision. Behold! Hundreds of moons will emerge and then your whole body will fill with light.



Sant Sundar Das says:

In front of the eyes and nose [at the ajna chakra, in between the eyebrows] there lives Brahman (the Divine Being) whose nature is imperishable. At this juncture [with concentrated vision] the light emerges naturally.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Keep your mind focused while invoking the Divine name without even opening your mouth. Close the gate of your eyes and open the gate within.

Swami Shiv Narayana describes the technique this way:

Sit in Padma asana (crosslegged) and restrain your consciousness current (your attention) from going outward, while focusing your eyes in front of the nose, then you will ascend to Trikuti (the Three worlds of mind and matter).

Saint Gulal says:

Turn inward. See in your heart that the light pervades within.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

Unite the vision of both eyes by focusing on one point. Looking within, hear the divine sound. Search within in this way.

The *Yoga of Vision* and the experience of the divine light which follows from this practice are not only found in the Vedic scriptures. The transition from darkness to the light is described in both the *Koran* and the *Bible*.



In the *Koran* it is written:

The people who keep faith in Allah find God to be their helper. Allah takes them out from the darkness and brings them to the light.

In the *Bible* it is said:

The light of the body is the eye. If your eye becomes one then your whole body will be filled with light.

The Yoga of Sound (*Nadanusandhana*)

The *Yoga* of Sound is the highest and final practice of Santmat. In Sufism this is known as *sultanulajakar*. Through the practice of this form of meditation the aspirant realizes the Supreme Lord and becomes united with the Divine. With the practice the *Yoga* of Light the adherent leaving the realm of darkness enters the realm of light, and begins to hear the numerous divine sounds.

There are five inner realms: Gross, Subtle, Causal, Supra-causal and *Kaivalya* (a state of oneness and unity). There is a specific sound at the center of each realm. These constitute the five central sounds. With reference to these sounds Kabir Sahab says:

The five different kinds of sounds reverberate within, and thirty six kinds of divine melodies are also found within.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji also describes five kinds of sounds:

There resound five kinds of sound.



Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji says:

Five celestial melodies resound within. Listen to each one of these.

In fact, the sound possesses a quality that attracts the attention of the listener. Every central sound flows from the highest realm downward to the lower realm and then directly connects to the center of that realm. The aspirant enters the process by attending to the sound of the gross realm, centering, and then following that sound as it leads to the realm above, which is the subtle realm. Upon reaching the subtle realm, the sound of the causal realm is experienced. This sound will eventually draw the practitioner from the Subtle to the Causal realm. And so the aspirant proceeds until reaching the Highest realm. Thus, the practitioner progressively grasps increasingly subtler and more powerful inner sounds and thereby progresses to the realm immediately higher.

In the final stages of this practice, the aspirant goes beyond the veil of material creation and reaches the realm of *Kaivalya* (a state of absolute freedom from conditioned existence). This is where the soul comes to experience the Divine. But even in this realm there is a thin veil, and complete union with the Divine is not yet possible. Upon acquiring the final essential sound in *Kaivalya*, the soul ascends upward to the *Nihshabad* (Absolute



Soundless State, a state of Absolute Unity). There the soul becomes one with the Divine.

Gosvami Tulsidas describes this state as follows:

Just as the flowing water of a river enters the ocean and becomes one with it, in the same way the individual soul merges with the Divine and becomes one with it. This is the end of the cycle of death and birth.

The sacred texts of the Indian traditions refer to the eternal sound by various names, including, *Anahat nad*, *Adi Shabad*, *Adi Nad* (sound of the beginning), *RamNam* (pervasive sound), *Sat Nam* (true name), *Pranwadhvani* (primal sound), *Omkar* (sound before the beginning), and *Udgitha*.

Other world traditions have names for this eternal sound as well. The ancient Greeks referred to this eternal sound as the *logos*. The Stoics spoke of *logos* as the Universal Reason, through which all things came be. It is also the principle governing and permeating the world. The Greek term *logos* was also used by Philo of Alexandria, a first century philosopher of Judaism, who understood it to mean the mind of God revealed as creation. Early Christians used the term *logos* to speak about Jesus. They identified him as the incarnation of the *Logos* (the Word of God).



In the Jewish Targum literature the term *memra* (Armaic/Hebrew for “word”) is used to indicate the Word (or mind) of God by which the universe is created. In Christian tradition, the eternal sound (the Word) is known as the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost. Maulana Rumi, a Sufi, called it *ism-e-azam* (word of words; the Highest Name). Sant Shums Tabarejz, an illustrious mystic of Persia calls it *Saut*. He says:

*World came into being through Saut (Shabad or Sound Principle). And from Saut spread all light.*¹⁰

Muhammad Dara Shikoh also speaks about the divine sound:

This whole world is permeated with the sound and the light of God. Even so, people are blind and they ask, ‘Where is God?’ You must take the cotton of deceit and egoism out of your ears. Then you can hear the sound of God.

In Chinese Taoism, the sound is known as *Tao*.¹¹ The Theosophical Society calls this the *voice of the silence*. There are references to the divine sounds in Tibetan Buddhism as well. For example, the Tibetan Buddhist Yogi Milarepa speaks about the experience of the stillness of sound.¹²

Thus we see that various saints and sacred texts known throughout the world celebrate the glory of this Divine sound. Ancient Scriptures of India permeate with the songs in admiration of the Divine sound:



Without the divine sound there is no knowledge, and without the divine sound there is no well being. Sound is the highest form of light, and sound is the highest form of the Divine.

This is a foundational teaching of the *Vedas*:

From sound (the Sound Current or Vibration) the world came into existence. Sound is the nectar, and it is birth and death; it is the beginning and the end.

Sant Kabir Sahib elaborates on the transforming power of the Divine Sound through an analogy based on a classical Indian myth about a magical stone (or philosopher's stone), the *Paras*, which transforms anything made of iron into gold upon touching. Sant Kabir Sahab uses this image to show that those who grasp this essential, eternal sound are liberated from the cycle of birth and death:

The sound of the beginning is like the Paras, and the mind is impure, like an iron tablet. When the mind comes into contact with the celestial sound, it is purified [transformed into its Pure Essential Nature, just as the iron tablet in the myth] and is freed from the bondage of attachment.



The Primordial Sound—*Adi Shabda*—and the Creation of the Universe

The primordial sound is self-existent and all manifestation is from this essential Sound. It is life-principle of the entire creation.

In the *Rig Veda* it is said: *Ekoham bahusyami.*

[In God the will (vibration) arose.] I am one, let me be many.

From the divine will (vibration) the primordial sound manifested and the cosmos was created, unfolding from subtle to gross. The *Bible* speaks about this as well, in both the Hebrew and Christian testaments. This *Genesis* account of creation, fundamental to both Judaism and Christianity, begins with the voice of God speaking (vibrating):

God said (sound vibrated), 'Let there be light.'

And in the following days, various forms of creation unfolded.

The Gospel of John refers to this primeval sound:

In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and the word was God.

In a parallel telling, the *Koran Sharif* says:

God said Kun (be) and so it [the creation] happened.



Sant Kabir Sahab says:

O Seekers! Practice the Sound Yoga. From this Sound everything has become manifest. Pursue that Sound and grasp it.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

*The earth and sky were made by Shabd,
Shabd has been the source of all light.
The whole creation sprang from Shabd,
O Nanak! Shabd is the very life of life.*

We find that many of the saints and various sacred texts of India praise the *Yoga* of Divine Sound. The following are a few additional passages from the sacred texts and from the saint literature that elaborate on the Divine Sound and the *Yoga* of Sound:

Adi Shankaracharya praises the essential practice of the *Yoga* of Divine Sound when he says:

Oh Yoga of Sound I bow to you. You establish us in the Supreme Abode. Due to your blessings and grace my prana (breath) and mind merge in the highest abode of God (Vishnu).

It is said in the *Nadavindu Upanishad*:

Mind, like an elephant in rut, runs after the pleasures of the world. Nada (Sound) Yoga serves as the sharp prod to curb that wandering mind.

Dhyanvindu Upanishad describes the Supreme Soundless state:

Beyond the anahat sound (the unstruck mystical sound), the realm of soundlessness (the State of



Supreme Silence also known as Brahman) exists. Yogis consider this realm to be the highest. In this realm, all doubts perish.

Brahmavindupanishad:

There are two kinds of Knowledge (Awareness). One is Shabad Brahman (the Primordial Sound), [Saguna Brahman], and the other is Para Brahman (Supreme Being) [Nirguna Brahman]. The practitioner who becomes proficient in Shabad Brahman reaches Para Brahman.

Shivanarayana Swami says:

O mind, keep focusing! The mystical sounds are reverberating within.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Search for that essential sound and control the mind. This is a very effortless path (Yoga). The primordial sound is our true essence; this body is transitory.

Guru Nanak Dev says:

The one who shows you your home (eternal abode, God) within your home (your body, in which this soul resides), is the truly benevolent sat guru (true teacher). The melodious sound of the five divine instruments and the essential sound are reverberating in the depth of your being.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

Focus your consciousness current in the sushumna [in the middle of two eyebrows]. By doing so you will know the original sound and your cycle of birth and death will end.



Conclusion

When we study the different religions of the world, we find that at the root and dissemination of each, there was some true saint, prophet or sage who undertook intense meditation and profound spiritual effort. The great beings—saints, prophets, sages—first realize within themselves the true nature of the Divine through meditation in solitude. Then they bring forth this knowledge and teach other people the path of peace and well being. When their followers increase, these teachings often take the form of a new religion or sect. Due to geographical, cultural and temporal variations it is predictable that these religions will appear to differ considerably. These contextual differences are the reason that each religion has its distinct deities, rituals and practices.

People encounter the outward symbols and convictions of a religion, at first, and are attracted to a religion according to their own personal preferences. This is a natural human response. However, a true seeker of Truth will pursue truth to the deepest core of these religions, and there, the seeker will find that the center of all religious paths is essentially the same. Every one of these religions is erected upon the foundation of the Infinite Supreme Being (Reality) whose nature is Truth and Peace. [Even in the traditions where the founder of the system does not



directly speak of “God” as was the case with the Buddha, the path that he taught reflects the human search for eternal Wisdom, Truth (*Satya*), inner peace, and a state of transcendence (*nirvana*).

Generally speaking, all religions contain prayers, invocations, meditations, and moral injunctions. They each elaborate on the nature of the Divine, the soul, liberation from suffering, heaven and hell, and other basics. Each religion presents the core truth in local language and familiar symbols.

The *Rig Veda*, the ancient text of Hindu *dharma*, says:
The Truth is one, but the Wise [sages] speak of it in various ways.

The Divine Reality is One, but God is known by many names. Vedic people call God *Brahman* or *Ishvara*; Christians call the Divine, Christ or Lord; Muslims, *Allah*; Buddhists, Buddha; the Jewish people call God *Yahweh*. The Chinese call the Divine Reality *Tao*. The Parsees call It *Ahurmazd*. The unity of the divine is also proclaimed in these various religions. One of the central pillars of the Islamic faith is the call to faith, which states that there is none other worthy of worship except *Allah*. Christians also proclaim that God is One. The prayer at the heart of Judaism states: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is One.”



In each of the religious traditions, the key ideas are expressed in words derived from the language of its cultural origins. For example, the Vedic tradition, based in the Sanskrit language, uses the word *prarthana* to refer to prayer. Muslims, using Arabic language call their prayer *ibadat*. Each of these religions speaks of the basic concepts of like heaven and hell in their root languages. For example, Hindus refer to heaven as *svarga*, hell is called *narak*, and liberation is called *moksha*. Muslims call these *bahisht*, *dozak*, and *nazat* in their language.

Many foundational religious stories are common to the various religions, and are expressed in words that derive from the root languages of the traditions. An example of this can be seen in the stories about the origin of human beings. In the Vedic tradition, the first human ancestors are Shatrupa and Manu and since humans are children of Manu we are called man. In the monotheistic religions—Judaism, Islam and Christianity—all human beings are considered to be descended from Adam and Eve. In the Arabic language, the word ‘man’ is derived from *admi*. In ancient Hebrew the word for ‘man’ was *adam*.

Another example of this type of corresponding ideas found within various traditions is the motif of holy water. For example, in the Vedic tradition the water from the River Ganga is



considered to be holy. In the Islamic tradition, *Abe Zumzum's* water is considered holy. And in Christianity, the River Jordan, where John the Baptist conducted much of his ministry and where Jesus Christ was baptized still retains the mystique of a holy river.

In each of the religions we have been considering, including the Vedic, Islamic and Christian paths, a basic requirement is a life of moral rectitude. Each system emphasizes that the adherents must abstain from vices such as lying, stealing, intoxicants, killing and adultery.

Thus, it can be seen that a careful study of the essential elements of these various religious traditions reveals an underlying unity. The outward differences in the practices reflect cultural differences related to origins, languages, and time. As each religion comes to expression through different groups of people using different languages in different countries, diversity is bound to emerge in the outer structure of the religious systems. It is natural that different languages give rise to different terminology. Nevertheless, it remains evident that the underlying essence (Truth) of each religion is the same, which is experienced within. Even though the particular saints and sages of each religion experience and teach wisdom within their



respective cultures and religions, all of their essential teachings express the same essential truths. As a concluding summary we once again offer these words of Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj:

In different times and different places saints appear and their followers name their religion according to the sage or saint who propounded that tradition. These differences can be attributed to time, place, and language. This gives rise to various labels for the common views held by all religions. Likewise, due to excessively zealous followers, these seeming differences are often amplified. When all sectarianism and the temporal and linguistic aspects are removed, the basic principles of all the saints are in accord and the voices of the saints are in harmony.

¹ The various religions of India shed light on the cycle of death and rebirth.

² In Buddhism these five abstinences are known as the *Panch Shila* (the Five Precepts).

³ *Shanti* is a Sanskrit word which can be understood in English as peace, tranquility, and bliss. It is the peace which results from participation in some degree of Divine communion.

⁴ The term “Sant” is derived from the Sanskrit *Sat* (truth, reality). Thus the “one who knows the Truth,” and who has experienced Ultimate Reality. Even though the word *sant* does not cognate with “Saint” it is often translated in English “Saint.” In this book, for the sake of convenience, we use the words ‘sant’ and ‘saint’ interchangeably. A saint in the Santmat tradition is one who experiences the mystical state; it is a title conferred because of yogic achievements. This is different from the way this word is commonly understood in Western traditions, where a saint is considered to be morally correct and is only canonized as a saint after death on the basis of some form of miracle that he/she had performed during their life times. In the Santmat tradition, saint is a living person who leads a moral life and has achieved realization of the Divine. Clearly, many of those who are considered to be saints in the Western view would also be included in the Santmat definition of saint.



⁵ The *Upanishads* are ancient Vedic texts that define and categorize the mystical teachings and the philosophy of Yoga. In the chapter on the Vedanta, we have dealt with these teaching in great detail.

⁶ The seers of the *Upanishads* composed in the Sanskrit language. This was not a language of the common people. Guru Nanak and Kabir Sahab describe the same *Upanishadic* views in languages understood by the common man.

⁷ *Surat Shabad Yoga* is the practice of transcending the mind in order to enter the level beyond the mind. This is the level of ultimate unity. The vehicle for this inward journey is sound.

⁸ The Sanskrit word *sat* has several meanings: Truth, Being, and Reality.

⁹ The *Ida*, *Pinagla*, and *Sushumna* are the subtle channels or energies.

¹⁰ “Man is not only formed by vibrations, but he lives and moves in them. They surround him as the fish is surrounded by water, and he contains them within him as the fish tank contains water.” (Hazrat Inayat Khan)

¹¹ In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu says:

The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao;

The name that can be defined is not the real name.

¹² There is a well-known image of the Tibetan poet and mystic Milarepa, sitting in his familiar listening posture, with his right hand cupped over his right ear. In this passage the mystic beckons:

Enter the garden of sacred sounds with a concentrated mind.

Sit still in a comfortable position.

Let the sounds float around and into the body, effortlessly.

Join in and chant the sound OM or HUM, whichever is more pleasing.

Listen to the resonance of the sound.

Close the ears with index fingers, chant hum and experience the resonance within.

In moments of silence stretch the ears to hear the farthest star.

Experience the stillness of sound.

When leaving the space retain the inner resonance to experience the world anew.