
Sahaj Marg Study Group

The Two Ends of a Stick

Set 3, Handout 3 (From Principles of Sahaj Marg, Set 1, Pages 107-115)

There is an ancient Chinese saying which says, "Every stick has two ends." I first came across this saying many years ago, long before I came to my Master. I could not understand it then. To me it seemed to be too simple, a mere statement of a visible fact which all can see. Who can, after all, deny that a stick has two ends? I wondered why an ancient Chinese philosopher had felt it necessary to make this statement at all. It appeared too superficial a truth to have merited any philosopher's attention. Many years later, after I came to my Master, I began to understand something of its meaning. And that was only after I had become somewhat familiar with my Master's thoughts and teaching. Even then, I think only the superficial layers of meaning were revealed to me. I perhaps understand it a bit more deeply today, and I realize what a profundity of meaning is hidden within those five words of that long forgotten philosopher.

The most basic truth that my Master has revealed is that our existence has two aspects, two areas, to it. They are the material and the spiritual realms of existence. When I first read this somewhere in our Sahaj Marg literature, I immediately remembered the matter of the stick and its two ends. "Here it is at last," I thought. But all that I had found was a correspondence. The deeper significance did not strike me. As I pursued this method of spiritual practice which my Master trains us in, and which he is offering to you all, I learnt a second lesson. There are not merely two sides to existence. The two sides have to be 'balanced' if one is to lead a full and productive existence. All of us live, but few lives have real content, real worth in them. The bulk of humanity leads an animal existence motivated by lusts, inspired by fear and driven by lower urges and appetites unworthy of being called even remotely human. So balance has to be brought into our lives. As Master says, a bird flies on two wings. Cut off one, and the bird will crash to the earth. It is immaterial how strong the wings are. No bird can fly on one wing alone!

What my Master offers in the form of a simple analogy is one of his most profound thoughts. When we, in our ignorance or in our one-sided approach to life, neglect either half of it, we are surely headed for disaster. It is immaterial whether we neglect the spiritual half, or whether we neglect the material half of life. Both are equally necessary, in fact vital, to our full existence. Without either of them, our lives are incomplete and such a life can end in nothing but the frustration and despair of an incomplete situation. Our ancient forefathers neglected the material existence, negating it almost totally. We modern ones today tend to ignore the spiritual life almost as completely. The pendulum seems to have swung from one extreme to the other with a vengeance. Our forefathers and we ourselves have both suffered in the bargain by leading incomplete, truncated lives, while all the while thinking we are following the correct way of life. All that we are doing is to do the exact opposite of what our progenitors did. And

that is certainly not a wise way of finding a solution to the ills besetting humanity! It is therefore necessary to understand that it is not important which side of life we neglect. Neglect of either is wrong and will give us incomplete and unproductive lives. Such a life will be one of dissatisfaction, misery, insecurity and frustration, giving one a feeling that one has lost the way somewhere when walking on the road of life. This is true of all human beings, whether male or female, rich or poor, sick or healthy, and whether conventionally a success or not.

Let us examine this analogy of the stick, for it is no more than an analogy, a little more deeply. While a stick has two ends, it also has a mid-point. If the stick is symmetrical then one can balance it at its mid-point. Then the two halves will be identical.

A	X	B
<p>Let us call the two ends A and B, and the mid-point X. If we now look upon life as a long, very long stick, then we can think of AX as the material half and BX as the spiritual half of that life.</p>		

I would like to remind you that it is not only a long stick which has two ends. Even a very short one still has two ends. In fact those of you who would like to try an experiment can try to cut a stick as short as you can by slicing off cuts from one end. You will find that even when you have come to a mere paper-thin slice, it still has two ends, or two sides. If we try to cut the slice any finer, we will probably end up by cutting off our thumbs or forefingers, perhaps even both!

While this appears humorous when we speak about it, it is unfortunately no laughing matter. It is precisely what numerous persons have done to themselves all over the world, in trying to cut the stick of their lives shorter and shorter. The thumb is supposed to indicate will power, and the forefinger is one which we use to indicate direction. Is it then any wonder that persons devoid of thumb and forefinger lack direction in their lives, and have no will to act responsibly? The enormous number of mental patients, suicides, society drop-outs and the like will testify to the fact that where this chopping of the stick of life has been carried too far, one ends up by seriously maiming oneself in body, or mind, tragically often both.

I would like to share with you a few further thoughts this analogy of the stick has given me. Suppose a person decides to be a great success in material life, and therefore devotes all his time and energy only to the perfection of his material life. It leads him to neglect his spiritual life, probably a little in the beginning, but increasingly so as he goes on. As he becomes more and more engrossed in the material life, material success, wealth, the neglect of the spiritual life increases. So, in terms of the stick, we now have a new one, A^1B^1 , where A^1X is longer than B^1X . The material content A^1X of his life has increased while B^1X the spiritual content has been depleted.

$$A^1 \quad \quad \quad X^1 \quad \quad \quad X \quad \quad \quad B^1$$

Now we meet an interesting, and an unconquerable, problem here. The mid-point of the stick is no longer at X as it originally was, but has naturally shifted to X^1 the new and natural center of the stick! When this analytical reasoning first came into my mind one evening during meditation, it came as a revelation to me. What is it that has happened in this situation? In trying to cut off the spiritual part of his life so as to be able to extend his material existence, all that the person has achieved is to corrupt his spiritual life. The stick must have a center, and the two sides, too, cannot be denied. What has really happened is that an automatic adjustment has taken place. Nature does not tolerate or permit imbalances. So X^1B^1 is still the spiritual half of life, but X^1X represents the corruption that has crept into it from the material half, solidifying it, making it gross, so that it has become tainted, impure.

As this process goes on and on, B^1X becomes shorter and shorter while A^1X becomes correspondingly longer and longer. In an extremely materialistic life, B^1X may be almost zero while almost the whole stick represents the material life. I must emphasize that the spiritual half of life has not dropped off. The center-point X^1 still exists. But alas! B^1X^1 , the spiritual half, has become so gross and solid, and corrupted by materialistic tendencies, that the spiritual life has become petrified.

If, fortunately, X has not merged with B¹, a tiny tip of spiritual aspiration may yet remain, but this manifests itself in nothing more than an occasional twinge of the conscience, and in gross and perverted approaches to Reality. In such an extreme situation the bird is indeed attempting to fly on one wing. Such a life is one of gross imbalance. Therefore, it is one fraught with fears of failure, feelings of insecurity and terrors of disaster. If these fears and feelings persist, they may very well lead to despair and consequent illness of body and mind which he can no longer cope with. Is it any wonder, then, that in the modern materialistic world of today, with all its glamour and glitter of material opulence and luxury, of which your city of Singapore has quite a share, there is so much mental and physical misery, so many suicides, and such high crime rates? I don't think that anyone who gives these matters proper thought can ever wonder at the situation. Such things, such ghastly and inhuman things, must positively and necessarily exist, given this gross materialistic orientation to life.

What is it that we must do to find happiness, contentment, fulfillment? My Master says that we must change our ways of life. We must balance our efforts in both directions. We must pay equal attention to our material and our spiritual welfare, neglecting neither of them for the other. If our forefathers neglected the material life, they paid the penalty of living in poverty, and in sickness that Nature vengefully poured upon them. But at least that is all that they had to put up with. When we, in our knowledge-saturated ignorance, ignored the spiritual life, we

seem to have let loose upon ourselves all the horrors of man-made disease and viciousness for which Nature can no longer be blamed. Our sufferings are our own creation. By our allegiance to vice, corruption, and violence we have let loose upon this world horrors and possibilities of devastation which our grandfathers could not have dreamt of, even in their weirdest nightmares. So, to correct this sorry state of affairs we have to bring back balance into our lives.

Now, material life has very definite limits to it. One can, after all, only eat so much, and drink so much. Much of what we painstakingly accumulate is never used by us. It is only avarice that makes us do it. A normal, level-headed, self-confident person would never indulge in such frenzied laying-up of worldly treasures. It is not necessary. Therefore, given proper and sustained effort, our material needs are easily satisfied. Then it is time to think of the spiritual life. In this dimension, the possibility of extension is truly infinite. At the same time, my Master says, "Extension or growth in the spiritual life needs less time and effort—merely an hour or so per day!"

Now let us take another look at our normal stick AXB. As we extend the spiritual existence XB, without in any way neglecting our material life AX, we find that XB can be extended to XB¹.

A X X¹ B B¹ B² B³

The mid-point will now naturally have shifted to X¹. And here we have another revelation. By extending the spiritual life, we have, **automatically and effortlessly**, extended the material life too! For now AX is the material life, and B¹X¹ the spiritual life. The life-content, or total substance of our life, has also become enhanced.

As I said earlier, Nature tolerates no imbalance, and so the new balance has been effortlessly and harmoniously established, often without our even being aware of it! Not only that. The area XX¹ which belongs to the material life in the new configuration, is really an intrusion from the spiritual life—the original XB! What we have here is a wonderful phenomenon. The material life is becoming spiritualized too! If we consider the mid-point as the base of existence, then X¹B¹ is wholly spiritual, from base to top, while the material life X¹A is having its base spiritualized. So spirituality has been introduced into the very base, the very foundation, of both aspects of our existence.

As we extend the spiritual life more and more towards infinity, all the time taking diligent care not to neglect the necessary and vital material existence, a time comes when the stick AB has extended to infinite length, say AB³. Now the material life AX with which we started our spiritual pursuit and which we have diligently preserved as a vehicle for our existence, will be but the merest tip of the

stick, though the total material life extends halfway along the stick. But the truly material part, the skin of our total existence as it were, is only the original AX. The rest has been spiritualized. We have achieved a life where it is almost totally spiritualized, leaving a tiny tip of materiality anchoring us to this world till our time to depart from here into the higher spiritual existence should come.

Great spiritual saints are the visible evidence, the proof, that such an existence is possible and practicable. In them we see the finest tip of spiritualized-materiality, a merest fraction of an immensely, infinitely large whole! The normal human sees only the visible physical person, the exposed tip. Developed persons see beyond it. Only those who have learnt to 'see' beyond the physical realms of existence can see this reality.

In the case of persons who have devoted themselves entirely to the material life, we found that their spiritual lives became tainted with materiality. This tendency increased until the spiritual life became totally petrified. Yet, the spiritual half of life remains, as remain it must. In what forms does such a petrified spiritual state manifest itself? Perhaps it is hidden in the innermost recesses of the heart as faint glimmerings of higher aspirations; perhaps as the feeble stirrings of a long subdued conscience; perhaps as vague longing for higher values of life. But all this is covered over by the rock-like hardness of gross material coverings the person has encased himself in. All this notwithstanding, they are given expression to in gross approaches to higher realities.

We all know that most millionaires tend to give away their millions in later life. They establish charitable foundations, build hospitals, erect homes for the poor, build temples, churches or mosques and so on. I used to wonder why people who have worked so feverishly all their lives to accumulate wealth should, as feverishly, try to throw it all away later on in their lives. I think part of the answer is in the feelings of guilt—but it is only a part of the answer. I think the repressed finer feelings and nobler aspirations—the hallmarks of a truly human being—hidden deep in the heart, one day build up so much pressure that, in a moment of weakness, they explode. The result of any explosion is the same. All overburden is blasted off! The result of such an explosion in the human heart is to throw away precisely all the overburden of material life that one had accumulated during his lifetime. But since his spiritual feelings are petrified, and lack refinement, all that the release of the long locked-up finer feelings and nobler sentiments is able to achieve is to build in stone, concrete, or steel monuments to his personal failure. At this stage a person's spiritual inclination can find no higher expression. Only this rather negative expression is available. To be able to give proper expression to it, cleaning of all past impressions is essential. Such past impressions are the mental footpaths and highways on which we proceed. Until they are erased, we remain their slaves. This is an important, perhaps the most important, duty of the Master.

We therefore see the imperative need of giving a due share of our time and effort to our spiritual life. There is no need for me to emphasize that the material life should not be neglected. It should get its due share, but no more than that.

Now, when our spiritual aspirations open up, we have seen that they can go into gross channels of approach to Reality. The cleaning of impressions, which I referred to a moment ago, can alone guarantee that newly awakened spiritual impulses go in the right channel or approach. So here we meet with the second imperative, the imperative need of a Master. Who can be a Master? My Master says, "Look for one who can guide you to the highest. Don't be satisfied with anything less than that." Such a guide alone knows the way, having traveled the whole way himself. You may call him Master, Yogi, Saint, or anything else, but he remains a guide, whatever else he may be to us, and for himself. After cleaning our system of past impressions and thus, in a very real sense, lightening us, he takes us on the road which leads us to our goal. The more we trust him and the more we obey him in following his principles and practice, the quicker will be our success. If, fortunately, we can achieve that acme of faith-cum-discipline which goes by the name of surrender, then our goal is capable of being achieved here and now!

I now come to one final, but at the same time unique, feature of this system of Sahaj Marg. The Master, by virtue of his own spiritual attainments, is able to transmit the spiritual essence of himself into the heart of his students. We call this, rather prosaically, transmission. It is so simple to speak about that its very simplicity hides the infinitude of blessings that it can confer upon us. Imagine being left a million dollars by a rich relative, so that you become a millionaire overnight without lifting your little finger to achieve it. Multiply that by billions of times, and that is the benefit that this spiritual transmission of the Master confers upon us. This is a unique feature of this system. After my talk is over, my Master will transmit to all of us, and give you an opportunity of receiving it into your hearts.

Now, some of you will probably ask me the question which I was asked again and again during such lectures in Malaysia. What happens when the Master goes back to India? What do we do then? Well, it is a vital question. The answer is that in this system there is yet another unique feature. That is the system of training and permitting persons, like you and me, to do the work of the Master here. Such persons can do the cleaning and the transmission in exactly the same way that the Master himself does. They are called preceptors. So, when Master leaves for India, those of you who take up this system will not be left high and dry without guidance. Mr. Tan Kee Leng of this city is one such person selected by Master. There will be another preceptor, too. Both of them are at your service in all matters spiritual. My brother Mr. Reddy, Secretary General of the Asian Youth Council, seated to my left, resides in Kuala Lumpur but will visit you all as often as possible for further guidance.

I think I have explained, in some detail, the salient features of Sahaj Marg. I request brother Reddy to now explain the process of meditation to you, after which we shall all sit in meditation for about twenty minutes and receive my Master's transmission.