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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Happiness: A How-to Guide

What is happiness? That is the question asked in this issue of *Spiritual Link*. It's a simple question, but there are as many possible answers as people in the world. Everyone seems in search of their own idea of happiness in their own way.

From a worldly viewpoint, happiness is generally seen as comprising a measure of health and wealth, social status and professional or creative satisfaction, as well as a loving family and friends. But all these are transitory and fragile.

Lasting happiness, it is often said, can be achieved only when we finally leave this physical plane and return to our spiritual home. This is ultimately true – but does it mean we should give up on the idea of being happy until then, and just be miserable instead? No.

The saints advise us that even in the midst of this troubled world, we should strive to be happy – to take a positive attitude, smile rather than frown at whatever life brings, and not worry. This requires that we understand and focus on our real purpose, and have faith. Even scientific studies show that what produces contentment is not the active pursuit of happiness for its own sake but rather our attitude to life as a whole. Psychologist Viktor Frankl said:

It is the very pursuit ... of happiness that thwarts happiness, because happiness occurs as a by-product, as a side-effect of finding and fulfilling a meaning – or of loving another being.

What brings happiness then is not only a clear understanding of what life truly means but also, and above all else, love – ultimately our love of the Father, and his love for us. It is that love which enables us to trust him to show us the way, and to hold our hand as we go.



The Mind Is Its Own Place

How many times do we unwittingly find ourselves with a knotted brow and a mind in turmoil over some unwelcome trouble? For many this state of mind comes as naturally as the sun slipping beneath the horizon every day.

A friend of mine once caught himself worrying about the fact that he was not worrying. He was so used to feeling worried that an anxiety-free moment caught him off guard. So what was he to do? Well, naturally he slipped into worrying about having nothing to worry about. Yet today he is still here and doing far better than he was back then. So what was he worrying about all the time?

Another friend, who had been going through an incredibly difficult time, suddenly one day found herself walking down the street singing loudly with happiness. She had turned the corner at last, and found faith that whatever the outcome of her travails, ultimately everything would be all right. She had faith in God.

As satsangis and seekers, we betray ourselves when we worry. The Master has made us a wonderful, golden promise – to take us out of this world of turbulent strife and troubling pain and to return us to our ancient, eternal home. Our part is just to be faithful to our vows and sit in meditation every day.

Yet, when troubles do visit us in this world and we have what may seem like a real reason to worry, the promise of liberation may seem no more real than the fading shadow of a barely remembered dream.

When this happens, it can help to remind ourselves what it is like to be in the company of the Master. When we are in his majestic and powerful presence, touched by his humility and awed by his love, in a

deep quiet place within ourselves, we know that our ultimate destiny is beyond this world.

As we are often reminded, this physical world is no more than a shadowland where the constant interplay of dark and light creates the environment in which we live. One day we may be high up in the world, sitting on a velvet throne and admired by many; the next we could be among the lowest, sitting destitute on the roadside, slandered and despised.

This is the way of the world. So why should we worry? It won't change anything; it won't alter the course of destiny. It is not going to make any difference. But it might leave us with a face furrowed by deep lines – enough to scare any child – and a state of mind like a stormy night.

It was the seventeenth-century English poet, John Milton, who said: “The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.” In the same vein, Shakespeare's Hamlet spoke the words: “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so”.

In short, we can make of any situation what we will. Of course, it's less than pleasant to have to face troubles that can cause a great deal of worry – such as calumny, slander and bankruptcy. But when the winds of adversity are strong, we can take steps to protect ourselves.

Simran can be a refuge in such times if we do it with intensity and love. And action is always a positive thing: we can take practical steps to address the problems that are causing us anxiety – in fact, we have a duty to ourselves to do so. But once we've done that, we should figuratively present our worries to the inner Master and leave everything to him.

Henry Ford, the great American entrepreneur, once said: “I believe God is managing affairs and that he doesn't need any advice from me.

With God in charge, I believe everything will work out for the best in the end. So what is there to worry about?"

Look at what Henry Ford went on to achieve – the world's first mass-produced car and an industry that today helps sustain millions of people the world over. Did he reach his goals by fretful worrying? Not likely.

The Buddha said: "The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, or not to anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly."

Let's not forget: this path is one of sublime brilliance. It is the royal road to our dimly remembered, ancient and glorious home; the gateway to our true being. The Master is the graceful guide who has revealed the way; the true friend, the selflessly loving Father who is guiding us to our true home. So why worry?



It is mankind's misuse or abuse and our own attitude towards things that make us miserable. Try to develop contentment and indifference. Be happy in what the Lord sends, do your duty with love and devotion, and take life as it comes.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

The disciple should also adopt the attitude of contentment which too is essential for moral conduct and spiritual progress.... As contentment enters the heart, desire leaves. Along with desire, worry also disappears.

Message Divine

A Recipe for Contentment

Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.

Desiderata, by Max Ehrmann

Laugh Your Way to Heaven

She stood captive in the little bookshop and it felt as though her laughter would never stop. The tears of hilarity poured down as she turned the pages. What was so funny?

The book was a catalogue of errors – a not uncommon source of humour. We often smile at verbal blunders or at newsprint mistakes. In this case a series of catering mishaps had been captured on camera, and the gap between the cook's grand aspirations and woeful reality somehow touched a chord. Was it sympathy that made her laugh, or relief at not being alone – at recognizing that we're all part of an all-too-susceptible human family? And in a flash she saw: *you can either laugh your way through life or cry.*

Looking up in a sudden moment of self-consciousness, she caught a few odd looks shooting her way from the other bookshop customers. She coughed a little as cover, embarrassed to be caught in a private world. Anyone seen laughing uncontrollably is likely to be hit with: “What’s so funny?” But then, she realized – really, what is there to be shy of? It’s good to laugh. She remembered her Master:

His laughter was spontaneous, vibrant, joyful and infectious. He would catch his lower lip in his teeth as though this were the only way he could stop himself laughing too much. Were he not himself to limit it, one felt his merriment might shake the whole world.

Maharaj Charan Singh as described in *Legacy of Love*

She closed the book and then, with an unconscious slight shake of her head, she put it back. No, she thought. It’s not just the book. You can laugh about anything. (There are even teachers, she’d heard, who

will train you how to laugh about nothing at all.) The laughter comes from within. It's a gift, she thought. Maharaj Charan Singh once said:

You see, except for humans, nobody laughs. I don't think you have seen any bird laughing or any animal laughing. They may smile, but the privilege of laughter is given only to humans. So if we want to remain human, laughter has to be there, just to help us relax. But we have so much association with past species that we find it very hard to laugh. In spite of being human, we're hardly human.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol III

Good for the body, good for the mind – good for the soul – laughter is an unbeatable gift, and yet, as so often with gifts, we forget to bring it out and actually use it. She remembered suddenly why she'd come to the bookshop: to choose a present. Something to convey her gratitude for everything her father had done for her, and still did. She was aware that she didn't always show it – just as, she realized, we so often fail to show appreciation to our heavenly father.

Happiness, her grandmother used to say, is a form of gratitude. If we really understood what the Lord has done for us, is doing for us every day, then we would be joyful. And he does not like to see us unhappy – that's reason enough to cultivate a more light-hearted attitude to life. She'd even heard her own Master say that we shouldn't cry; we should laugh our way to heaven.

Ah, this would do: *Light Vegetarian Meals for Late-in-Life Beginners*. She headed for the cash desk, thinking how apt the title was – her father, although not exactly light in body, was certainly someone who took life lightly. She too would make an effort to cultivate such an attitude. After all, the reality of life as a satsangi is that we are going

through our karmas and the Master is looking after us – so what reason is there to be unhappy? It is only our lack of understanding that makes us cry rather than laugh. Maharaj Jagat Singh advised:

Form the habit of clear thinking always and laugh away your troubles and sorrows. Even the devil himself can do nothing to a man so long as he can laugh. Does a laugh cost anything? It is as easy to laugh as to worry and fret. Only a little effort is required in the beginning. It becomes a habit after a time.

The Science of the Soul

As with everything in life, it was just about forming good habits. She might not be as jovial as some she knew, but surely anyone could foster a more light-hearted approach with the right effort. We don't need much to get us giggling: we can laugh for no good reason at all and still feel the benefits. Even a few minutes pretending to laugh can actually result in genuine laughter, and a resultant uplift in spirits. Of course, when we feel happy we are more inclined to see the funny side of things, but we don't need first to be cheery in order to laugh – laughter can itself create happiness.

Handing the book to the fellow behind the desk, she smiled, and only realized she was smiling when she noticed the cashier smiling back, puzzling her for a moment. Her bemusement drew a little laugh from her. "What's funny?" he inquired, curiously. "Oh, just – life!" she replied. More smiles.

It felt good to have made someone smile. And to have done so without even trying, she reflected in wonderment, as she swung through the door on to the rainy street. What else could she do to get everyone laughing? Ah, of course, jokes! But you had to be careful – there's no guarantee that your sense of humour will be shared by

the recipient, and it's important always to joke in a loving way, never making fun of others unkindly.

Safest to make fun of oneself, of course – and that can bring extra spiritual benefits by undermining our old enemy, the ego. It can also help us see how unimportant are our personal concerns, which can lighten the mood if things are not going well. Like right now – that was her bus shooting past; she'd have to run for it to reach the bus stop in time! Here is another quote from Maharaj Jagat Singh:

Life is not worth worrying over too much. It begins in folly and ends in smoke. It has to come to an end one day whether you like it or not. And its middle portion also passes away. The best policy is to laugh its worries away.

The Science of the Soul

When it comes down to it, she thought breathlessly as she raced along the pavement, most of our misery is of our own creation, generated by lack of understanding. If she was truly to have faith in her Master, then she should be glad to receive whatever comes her way. Maybe she wasn't meant to catch this bus! Not that she was going to stop running – you have to put in the effort.

After all, she thought, whether I laugh or cry, what is happening is still happening – it's my destiny. Crying when things aren't going how I'd like will only make me feel I'm being dragged through life by a bulldozer. Better to just accept the reality of whatever situation I'm in, make the necessary adjustments – and be happy. If I end up walking all the way home in the rain, so what? It's just another way to have a beautiful day.



Late Ripeness

*Not soon, as late as the approach of my ninetieth year,
I felt a door opening in me and I entered
the clarity of early morning.*

*One after another my former lives were departing,
like ships, together with their sorrow.*

*And the countries, cities, gardens, the bays of seas
assigned to my brush came closer,
ready now to be described better than they were before.*

*I was not separated from people,
grief and pity joined us.
We forget – I kept saying – that we are all children of the King.*

*For where we come from there is no division
into Yes and No, into is, was, and will be*

Czeslaw Milosz, *New and Collected Poems*, translated by Robert Hass





Maharaj Jagat Singh

Lighten Up

We need to “lighten up”, so the present Master has said. What does this mean? First of all, of course, it is a suggestion not to take life too seriously. And from the context, it was clear that we were also being told to find time to enjoy ourselves and participate in the lighter things of life, such as singing, sport or baking, even if we are not very good at them. But there are other ways, too, in which we can lighten up our lives.

Smile at life

One way is to cultivate a lighter attitude to life. Being lighter can mean not only less weighty but also brighter. We should be positive on the path, even when things are not going well in our lives. Smiling can be an important part of this. When we smile, we actually feel lighter. It takes about forty-three muscles to frown, but only seventeen to smile, so smiling is physically easier.

Maharaj Charan Singh supported this idea when he said:

Give up the habit of worrying and losing your temper. It is easy to be happy and laughing; in fact, easier than it is to fret and frown. God does not want us to be unhappy. It is a sin to worry. Have faith in His goodness and grace and try to keep simran on your lips at all times.

Divine Light

This isn't just telling us to try not to worry – it goes much further, actually calling worry a sin. That is because when we indulge in worry, it means we are forgetting to put our trust in God or the Master. The message here is that God does not want us to be unhappy. Saints

often demonstrate this light-hearted attitude to life through their own actions. They like to laugh, and to make us laugh – even when we come crying to them.

In *Heaven on Earth* we are told how Maharaj Jagat Singh was asked by a satsangi, “Maharaj Ji, when I sit for meditation, my soul withdraws to my knees, yet I do not see anything inside.” His Master replied, “Brother, the Lord, it seems, has erred a little. He put the eyes too far away, high up in the face. If he had put them in the knees, you would surely have seen something.” By responding to his disciple with affectionate humour, the Master would have helped him feel less anxious.

Hazur Maharaj Ji said that no other person should be so happy in this world as an initiate who is on the path. The initiate should always keep his final goal in sight: the treasures, the joys and the bliss that await him in his true home. Hazur said that we should give up feelings of depression and live a joyous life, fully relaxed, thanking the Lord for the great gift conferred on us.

If we just keep our thoughts in simran and bhajan, then we can find happiness within ourselves. We should not worry about anything in this life, which the saints say is nothing but an unpleasant dream. The real life lies beyond the physical, and that is where our Master awaits us.

Don't be weighed down by attachments

But while we remain in this physical world, we should live our lives with an attitude of joy and gratitude while also focusing on meditation. We should enjoy life – even love it – but without feeling attached to it. This is one of the ways in which we can lighten up and not take ourselves so seriously.

This approach to life is described in the quotation written above the Victory Gate near Agra in India. It says: “The world is a bridge. Cross

it but don't build a house on it." It goes on: "The world endures for an hour. Spend it in devotion." This means that in the grand scheme of this creation, we exist at the physical level only for a fleeting moment.

The mystics remind us that since we are here for only a short time, we need very little in this life and should control our desires. Moreover, we cannot get rid of our desires by satisfying them. That would be adding fuel to the fire, which only makes it blaze more. The mind can never be satisfied. The more you give it, the more it desires. Instead, we should use simran and bhajan, coupled with love for the Master, to balance our attachments.

Meditation further develops our love for the Master, and automatically moves us towards detachment from the physical. It provides perspective on life, and makes us prioritize our needs more clearly: thus through meditation we develop contentment. Changing circumstances is not necessarily a bad thing. But when efforts don't pan out, contentment allows us to accept our situation. Contentment allows us to travel more lightly.

Follow the Master's guiding light

Quoting the Bible, Maharaj Charan Singh used to say, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." These words are usually cited to explain that only a living Master, someone with whom we can talk and ask questions, can help us to return to the Lord. The Master is thus our light in the sense that he is our guide, showing us the way.

But there is also another important implication in these words. "I am the light of the world" means that the Master is literally radiant light. When we meditate, when we withdraw our attention from the world to the eye centre, what we will eventually perceive is the Radiant Form, the divine light of the Master.

Hazur Maharaj Ji also used to quote the following passage from the Bible:

The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

Matthew 6:22-23

He explained that if we want to be one with the light, we can find that light in the body. And if we want to see that light in this body, which is the temple of the living God, we need to be at the eye centre. He also said that in our bodies there is only light. So “lighten up” can also mean to merge ourselves in that light within.

Sometimes, though, it can seem as if we have a long way to go before we can reach that stage. Hazur Maharaj Ji was once asked why the Lord doesn't just take us sooner rather than later, since this is something that is going to happen eventually. He replied that in time we would learn to see that there is value in the struggle.

Accept the struggle and trust in him

Seeing value in the struggle means learning to see our daily effort as an investment towards returning home. A professional athlete creates his winning ability by continual practice, by struggle, with no guarantee of success. Every great achievement has been accomplished by those who have accepted and embraced their struggle. Today we are struggling with meditation, perhaps precisely because we have not accepted it as a struggle.

The reason that the Master does not simply take us inside right now is because we are not yet ready. Once we have accepted the struggle as his gift, we can come to understand that every effort we make is one step closer to our home. Today we are resisting the struggle, and it's

said that what we resist will persist. When we accept the struggle, it becomes easier, lighter.

With the right approach, and by his grace, we do progress. The Masters have often emphasized that there are only two things for which we are responsible: our sincere effort and our attitude. This attitude entails putting our faith in the Creator, seeing every event in life as an opportunity to trust in his plan. This is the essence of a positive attitude.

There are many books available on the path to which we can turn to help us understand the spiritual process and foster a positive attitude, and we are fortunate in also having the opportunity to put questions directly to the present Master. But ultimately, as he has said, we need to move on from analyzing the teachings and instead just live them.

Doing this requires us to live in the present moment. Because, as the saints have told us, even in this present moment we are already at our destination, it is just that we have not yet realized it. In meditation, we are simply being asked to be ourselves, to commune with our Master within, beyond thought, beyond intellect. This is an act of trust. Slowly, detachment will come in its own time.

The Master knows what he is doing. If only we knew what he knows, we would laugh at ourselves for wasting time worrying and questioning our destiny. Baba Ji once said that when we truly believe the Master is helping us, we will never feel overburdened by our problems or overwhelmed by our responsibilities.

So let's accept the struggle, live lightly, and trust in the Master. Sultan Bahu says that in the dark, fathomless night of ignorance, love is a torch that brings light. If we truly love someone, how can we not pay attention to him and follow him to the destination he has chosen for us? We want to go where he is going. And that is towards the light.



Feeling Funny



A String of Coloured Beads

The Infinite Joy of the Infinitesimal

In a village on the verge of sleep one evening, I was walking with my daughters when a sense of simple peace appeared. Just being with them in the golden light of the setting sun, in the quiet air between the trees, brought to me an immense yet weightless happiness. And it came to me that happiness, and its inherent, eternal renewal of hope, comes to us most dependably in little things, and in outwardly unremarkable moments.

The big things in life, even wonderful events to which we have long looked forward, carry within them the seeds of disappointment bound to be germinated by incompletely fulfilled expectations. And even when untainted by anticipation, life's big prizes still eventually let us down, because there is always a downside: they are just too big, too complex, to be straightforwardly and simply good.

But the little things in our lives that bring us sudden, fleeting, unexpected joy, those tiny moments of absolute happiness, of total connection or immersion, of complete realization – of love – are small enough to be purely perfect. These tiny specks of unalloyed gold can, in a flash, cast a new light over life, perhaps just when the darkness might seem at its heaviest.

And these infinitesimal joys come endlessly to us, if only we reach out our hands – without asking, but rather in an attitude of readiness without expectation. If we allow them, they will carry us through life from moment to moment, like a string of brightly coloured beads that we pass slowly through our fingers. The big things (good or bad) we need not much concern ourselves with, for their reality exists only in the little moments of which they consist.

But the flow of these moments can bring us happiness only if we are truly there to catch them as they happen. The tiny joys of life exist not in the past or the future, to which we so often look for happiness, but in the present. This is where we need to be: to be fully here, absolutely conscious and aware, in the present moment.

Crossing the rushing river of life, one can easily be thrown off balance by the immensity of the distance to the other side, doubting one's capacity to navigate across. But we will not be daunted by the obstacles and difficulties that stand between us and the far side if we simply focus on each stepping stone, each present moment, one at a time. All we need do is to look only at the very next rock, and take the next small step.



If one does not gain his object in spite of effort, or succeeds to a very small extent only, and yet remains calm and collected and does not feel troubled in his mind, he is said to have contentment.... Contentment is had from Nam.... On getting contentment mind gets all and asks for no other boon. All desires vanish on getting wealth of contentment. Owing to his being desireless, worry disappears and mind becomes restful. Those who desire nothing are real kings.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol.III

Call No Man Truly Happy Till He's Dead

When our very survival is threatened, we have no time or inclination to think of such concepts as happiness. Managing to remain alive occupies our full attention, not wondering about our state of mind. Imagine asking someone in a famine area to name their favourite foods – it would mystify them, as they would be grateful for anything.

People with scant control over their lives are bound to place tremendous importance on the idea of fate. In virtually every modern day Indo-European language, the word for happiness is linked with luck, fortune or fate. One of the most deeply rooted philosophical ideas is that ‘things just happen’. The word ‘happen’ is echoed in words such as ‘happenstance’, ‘haphazard’, ‘hapless’, ‘perhaps’ and ‘happiness’. This view of happiness sees life as consisting of the things that happen to us: if more good things than bad happen, then we are happy.

“Call no man truly happy till he’s dead” was the rather stark way the ancient Athenian dramatists Aeschylus and Sophocles expressed this view. Only when someone had passed beyond this realm of chance and ‘happenings’ could the measure of his happiness be judged.

But the challenge to this idea also came from classical Athens, a culture that emphasized self-reliance and self-control. Socrates himself wrote critically about the condition of happiness, and in doing so he probably changed the way people thought about it. Socrates made happiness a matter of full accord between an individual and the good: to be happy was to lead a good life, one in keeping with higher patterns of being. And he discussed at length the question of what a good life might comprise.

Sant Mat also lays great emphasis on how life should be lived. Baba Ji says we often tend simply to react to events without considering whether or not our actions take us closer to our goals. He wants us to be what he describes as “objective”: having a target that we keep in mind and always strive towards. In our day-to-day thinking, we assess worldly success in terms of achieving targets. We feel we need to be successful in our working lives and find lasting love in order to have a fulfilled life. These measures are fine, and can apply to satsangis too, but what our Masters emphasize is that we must look beyond this world for higher goals.

Looking beyond

Why? Because it is absolutely certain that we shall leave this life one day, even though our mind cannot conceive of this fact and tends to rebel against it. That avoidance of reality is based on fear – of the experience of dying, and of the unknown that lies beyond. Yet Maharaj Sawan Singh said in *Spiritual Gems* that, for the followers of Sant Mat, “the time of death ... is the happiest time of all”. And Guru Nanak said, “The whole world is miserable. Only he is happy who has taken to Nam.”

Our Masters encourage us to focus not on this life but on what comes after. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say (for example, in *Divine Light*) that we are in this world because our karmas are a mixture of good and bad – if they were all good we would be in some kind of heaven, all bad and we would be in some kind of hell. Since we have to go through our allotted karmas anyway, he would explain, then we may as well do so smilingly. He would conclude by saying, “Above the eye centre all is peace and bliss.”

Whilst the classical Greek idea was that life here is not pleasant and so we should simply look forward to a future life of delight in the Elysian Fields, the saints take a more positive view. Hazur Maharaj Ji

liked to emphasize that this human life is a rare opportunity of which we should make best use. By this he did not mean furthering our worldly goals. He wished instead that, through our unique possession of wise discrimination (*vivek*), we would come to recognize that our life here is not eternal and consists of what is destined for us – rather than trying to make it a non-stop succession of our chosen pleasures.

Our destiny includes the fact that we shall one day die and leave this world. We cannot consider it our real home, so why should we feel such an involvement with this life? The saints say that it is actually our involvements here that lead to unhappiness – and that includes the pleasures that we seek, since we mistake pleasure for happiness. As Sardar Bahadur said, “Happy is he whose wants are few. The fewer the wants, the happier the person.” Hazur Maharaj Ji referred to these sensations that we seek as “the insipid pleasures of the senses”, and contrasted them with the far greater joy that can be experienced once our attention is turned towards spirituality.

For the saints, happiness is not something that happens to us but a state achieved through taking another approach to life – namely, “dying while living”, meaning that we become detached from this world and awake to the higher worlds through devotion to the Satguru and focusing at the eye centre. As Hazur Maharaj Ji says in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol I*:

*Whatever you may get in this world you can never be happy.
The inclination of the soul will always be towards its own
source, and unless the soul merges into that source it can never
be happy in this world.*

Nonetheless, we are here in this world, and making best use of this opportunity does not mean the Master expects us to spend every

minute in meditation. To support our meditation we are encouraged to attend satsang and do seva, but also to live our worldly life in a way that is harmonious with the atmosphere of meditation. Although our life is destined, the Masters say we have limited free will and thus the ability to make choices. In making these choices, we are encouraged to be sensitive to the needs of our fellow creatures, subduing our ego by lessening our tendency towards self-centredness.

Wanting more than our destiny

Hazur Maharaj Ji often reminded us that there is more happiness in giving than receiving, and that the Great Master told him his hand should always be extended towards others palm down (in the gesture of giving) rather than palm up (in expectation of receiving). Baba Ji says we humans tend to be the most ungrateful of all species, complaining about what we lack rather than being glad for what we have. He says that our problem is that we tend to want more than is in our destiny, and this leads to discontent.

The Great Master wrote in *Spiritual Gems* that as recipients of the gift of Nam from the Satguru we have a richer inheritance than if we had been given many millions of dollars. That should be for us the fountainhead of great and undying happiness.

For, as Hazur Maharaj Ji explains in *Quest for Light*:

You have been given the passport to go back to your own home where your Supreme Father is waiting to receive you. What greater joy, blessing or bliss can one have in this world of misery and suffering? In fact, no other person should be so happy in this world as an initiate who is on the path. We should always keep his final goal in sight – the treasures, the joys and the bliss that await him in his true home.

Acopia

The other nurses and I exchanged looks of bafflement. What was this poor patient suffering from? The medical notes stated the diagnosis as acopia, something we'd never even heard of. Was it a mysterious lung or liver condition? We searched through our medical dictionaries and textbooks, but it wasn't there.

Eventually, a bemused colleague noticed our perplexity. Chuckling with delight, he explained that acopia was a made-up word used by doctors to refer to a person who just cannot cope with their situation for whatever reason – for instance, a frail elderly person living alone at home. This was the loose term ascribed until any necessary medical diagnostic tests could be run.

Looking at the lives of even the most enthusiastic satsangis, many have probably at some time, in some way or another, suffered from acopia. This world of illusion can easily pull us off track and affect our balance, leaving us temporarily in a state of not coping too well with life. Sometimes the world seems to drain our fuel tank, leaving us feeling emotionally and mentally weak.

Luckily for us, there is an effective treatment for acopia – one with no harmful side-effects and on which it is impossible to overdose. But it's not a medication; it's that same meditation that draws us godwards and which automatically makes us feel stronger by providing us with stillness and silence. Above and beyond that, it provides a special connection with our Master and the divine energy, which uplifts our entire being.

As a beneficial side-effect, meditation sharpens the mind, facilitating clarity of thought. Decisions can then be made with deeper wisdom, based on the faith that everything is happening as part of a

divine plan. We are able to exercise a higher level of discrimination (*vivek*), the faculty that gives us feedback as to whether events, actions and thoughts are taking us closer to or further away from the divine. This aids us in our spiritual navigation towards the light.

By cultivating clear thinking through meditation in this way, we become able to rise above the duality of the world. We tend to perceive what happens in our lives as either 'good' or 'bad', but in reality it is just a matter of perception. If we view life through a positive lens we get a brighter picture, while a negative lens gives us a gloomier image.

Meditation clearly lights up the path we need to take – participating in and enjoying the play of life while not allowing ourselves to be too caught up in it. It helps us to remain composed and centred, so that neither turbulent times nor joyful times distract us from our spiritual goal. The detachment that we gain frees the mind so that we are able to focus at the eye centre.

One of the ways in which daily meditation benefits us is that it provides us with the inner balance that enables us to cope effectively with life. When we feel unable to cope, this is in a sense a symptom of our separation from the Lord, and a manifestation of our need to strengthen our connection with him. So let us leave behind acopia and attend with zeal and valour to our daily meditation, for it will not only take us ultimately to our true home – thus curing all ills – but also, in the meantime, as a highly positive side-effect, help us to remain balanced while we travel along our chosen path.



Live a clean, moral life, according to the Sant Mat teachings and give regular time, every day, to your meditation. This will result in peace and contentment.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



Great Master initiating children, Kalabagh

Be True to Yourself

A couple of years back, I'd just started at university. Surrounded by cool, sophisticated, well-spoken individuals in the design department, I couldn't help but wonder what had led me to this place. Although I didn't yet know it, I was about to experience for the first time, at a personal level, the clash between the spiritual values I hold dear and the dominating materialism of the world.

I considered myself quite a strong-willed character, rarely influenced much by others. But my strength was tested by the giddy youth culture of university. My commitment to the principles of Sant Mat was just getting into full swing, and at times this made university life extremely challenging. Surrounded by people whose behaviour was based on very different standards, I felt keenly the gap between my values and those of many students. And they noticed it too: I found myself often subject to teasing or questioning.

A common query was: "Why don't you drink alcohol?" I found this hard to answer because I was unsure whether to explain that this was based on the teachings I believe in. I was worried that people might judge me, perhaps even see me as a religious extremist. On the other hand, if I didn't state my beliefs clearly, I felt weak in not standing up for them. Things panned out so that eventually I followed my heart rather than my head, and I did tell people it was to do with my beliefs.

Although I felt more comfortable this way, I knew that my openness would come with a price. And it did. Revealing that I didn't drink because it contradicted my beliefs did often seem to cause people to treat me as 'different'. Some would even try to pressure me to join in with their behaviour.

The second big issue was the fact that I didn't eat anything containing egg, fish, poultry or meat. Again, certain acquaintances would question this. And although the teasing was less than with the drinking, people still seemed to get in a few wisecracks: "Animals are here to be eaten, so why not enjoy life?" or "Have a taste, you'll like it!"

Overall, I was increasingly aware of a lack of commonality and a growing sense of conflict. Outwardly, I laughed things off and ignored the digs, but inside me the opposite was happening. I suffered a profound feeling of not belonging and a diminishing sense of my own identity. I had become so focused on others' behaviour towards me that my own life seemed somehow frozen.

If only I had followed the words of Maharaj Charan Singh in *Quest for Light*:

You should not mind what that person says to you.... When we know that we are on the right path we should not worry at all what others say... We should silently ignore what they say and not answer back, to avoid unpleasant controversy.... Do not allow these things to disturb your mind.

I should have simply not cared what the world thought. I should not have taken everything to heart, or bothered to debate with others about my beliefs. On one level I did know this, but I failed miserably to put it into practice. I found myself repeatedly crying down the phone to my mother about what people had said: every single remark would stay with me. But although she gave me good advice, I felt the difference in age and experience made it hard for her to understand fully. Finally she prompted me to write the issues down and maybe send a letter to Dera. This I did, and received the following reply:

We have to use our sense of discrimination and determine what is worthwhile for us. We should ask ourselves: what is the goal of our life? Once we remind ourselves what this is, we can then ask ourselves: are we taking all possible practical steps to achieve our goal? Are we making sure that our daily life fully reflects this purpose? When there is no correlation between our actions and our desires in life, we cannot attain our cherished goal.... If one is convinced about the path, one should be prepared to make sacrifices. One should not worry about the opinion of others but should be true to oneself.

Extract from personal letter

This letter was like a beacon of light. For me, the most striking word was “goal”. Without a goal in life we don’t know where we are heading, and we cannot make the appropriate choices. Once we recognize that the aim of our life is to keep closely to this spiritual path, nothing should be able to touch us. But if we focus, as I did, on other people’s reactions, then we ourselves are giving them control over us.

I decided I needed to run a priority check. I asked myself: what is really more important to me – what am I focusing more of my energy on – other people and their opinions of me, or my chosen spiritual path? What I realized was that I only *thought* that spirituality was more important to me: in practice I was acting as if the world were more important. Contrary to what I had thought, my focus was not in fact the spiritual path. It was other people, and therefore the world. I had begun to lose my way. Recognizing this in the light of the letter, I redirected my focus with determination – and I never looked back.

In letting other people’s comments upset me, I had obviously been heading in the wrong direction. Although I didn’t argue with people, I had assumed that everyone ought to understand and respect my

beliefs. Big mistake! Everyone is not the same, nor should we expect them to be. As Maharaj Charan Singh said in *Divine Light*:

The fact is that this world is full of all sorts of people.... It is very difficult to find everybody around us to accord to our liking. Nor can we reform everyone and shape all according to our choice, or make them act in accordance with our wishes and desires. The best policy is to adjust ourselves according to the circumstances and pass our time most happily.

It isn't just young seekers at university that come up against such challenges. We can all sometimes face similarly awkward situations in which we don't quite fit in with the rest of the world. But rather than let such moments shake us, we should recognize that it is simply illogical to expect to be a snug fit in this materialistic world. This is for the simple reason that spirituality and materialism are at opposite poles, like positive and negative. Moreover, situations in which our own values come up against those of the wider world can help strengthen us in character and commitment, making us more courageous and yet tolerant individuals.

Rather than dwelling on how other people think and behave towards us, our energy is better directed towards something positive and much more precious to us: our spiritual path. There will always be those in our lives who act and speak in ways we don't like or perhaps find hard to understand, but does this mean that we are going to get upset and annoyed every time? No. As Maharaj Charan Singh said in *Quest for Light*:

Do not take too much to heart the behaviour of other people towards you.... Cease from men and look above thee.

Staying on Course

The sea turtle embarks on epic journeys across the ocean covering thousands of miles at a time, navigating all the while using a special ability it possesses to keep on course for its destination. When these turtles set off on their migration to the beach of their birth, there is no doubt that they have within them what is needed to reach home, no matter how high the tide or fast the current.

Scientists were long puzzled by this but recently discovered that what enables sea turtles to find their way back to their own particular egg-laying site is a special ability to sense longitude, using almost imperceptible gradients in Earth's magnetic field. This provides the turtles with a basic navigation system to enable them to keep their bearings, stay on course, and return home.

This ability of the sea turtle to travel unerringly across vast oceans to its original place of birth seems incredible. However, don't we perhaps possess a similar ability? There are certainly some clear parallels to be drawn between the migration of the sea turtle and our own epic spiritual journey back home.

Just as the sea turtles can find their way across the oceans, we have a capacity to navigate through the astral and spiritual planes towards our own ultimate destination. In time, and with some effort, we should be able to focus in on that target, slowly learning to master the ability to tune into the force that is drawing the soul ever closer to its origin.

This wonderful capacity to connect to the pull that draws the soul home is inherent in all of us. It is in light of this that the Master gives us the gift of Nam, to enable us to put that latent ability into practice. As we begin and then progress along that spiritual journey, the Master also offers us personal guidance to help us stay on course

so that we are able to reach our goal. He is part of that force that keeps us on course, and he helps us to navigate along the direction of that pull towards our destination. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh describes in one of his letters how the soul and Master interact through the spiritual journey:

The soul leaves the physical, astral, and causal bodies in succession as it progresses towards Daswan Dwar. During devotional practice, as the concentration improves, mind and soul vacate the body and pass through the eye centre, then cross the starry sky, the sun, and the moon, and meet the Radiant Form of the Master. From there onwards the Master's Form acts as guide, and the journey is made in the company of the Master.

Once the soul has started on the right path in this way, navigation from one level to another becomes almost automatic. Tapping into that innate ability to journey home gives us a heightened sense of awareness and enables us to realize our true identity, bringing true happiness. All we need to do is put in the effort, and our internal compass will steer us in the right direction.

As with the turtles, the mechanism to steer us home is already within us, so there is no question of whether or not we will be successful on our journey. Indeed, the saints have said that there are no failures in Sant Mat. Once we have made the decision to commit ourselves to this spiritual journey, we too, just like the sea turtles, will be guided through the vast oceans we must cross to reach our goal. Our guide, the Master, will help us to take the steps required to bring us closer to him and to our home.



Something to Think About

A soldier named Nobushige came to Hakuin, and asked: “Is there really a paradise and a hell?”

“Who are you?” inquired Hakuin.

“I am a samurai,” the warrior replied.

“You, a soldier!” exclaimed Hakuin. “What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar.”

Nobushige became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued: “So you have a sword! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head.”

As Nobushige drew his sword, Hakuin remarked: “Here open the gates of hell!”

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master’s discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

“Here open the gates of paradise,” said Hakuin.

Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*

This whole world is a heaven and hell. You can make this world a heaven, you can make this world a hell. They exist within you. If you make yourself hell, you are in hell here. If you make yourself heaven, you are in heaven here.... Make this world a place of heaven. Have that peace within yourself and this whole world will be at peace with you. If we are able to build that heaven within ourselves, then the whole world becomes heaven here. And if we make ourselves miserable, the whole world is miserable to us.

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

Swing, Fall, Balance

The incipient rumble of autumn was there in in the city, as my friend DW and I went out to the park to meet for one of our weekly chats. Something about the shifting season and an article I had to write had us talking on the topic of happiness ...

ME: It's a state of mind.

DW: What is?

ME: Happiness, it's a state of mind.

DW: Everything is a state of mind.

ME: Except the things that aren't.

DW: Okay... What's your angle on it, anyway? What are you writing?

ME: Well, I think I'm trying to write about happiness, but it's impossible.

DW: Nothing is impossible.

ME: Okay, not impossible, but it feels crazy.

DW: Crazy?! Crazy is two grown men sitting on the kids' swings at the park, talking about happiness.

ME: Yeah, maybe, but I'm starting to think that happiness might be the craziest response to life.

DW: Do you think? I mean, what's the alternative? What could be better than a happy reaction to it all?

ME: See, it's that idea of happiness that I can't get alongside. I don't think it should be a reaction at all. I want to find a universal happiness.

DW: There isn't one.

ME: But there must be ... we're all humans; there must be a way of thinking about happiness that allows for a common approach.

DW: Yet where I find joy is different from where you might find it.

ME: But we're talking about two different things. What I'm talking about isn't just simply being happy as a reaction to something. I'm trying to pin down something more stable and lasting.

DW: Well, if that's what you mean by happiness, then I would say true happiness can't be found in this world – the limited world of the physical. Maybe beyond that, but not within it.

ME: But we're talking about the physical here, because that's what we know. Let's talk about what we know.

DW: Oh, you know about that, huh? So enlighten me: what do you know?

ME: I'm not sure, but I know that whatever it is, it's more than you.

DW: Ha! I see you know a lot about the ego, anyway. Look, let me tell you what I know about happiness: we're sad because things don't work out how we'd wish. In fact, they often work out the opposite way, and we struggle, and it can feel like hell. Then time passes, and what we had thought was impossible happens: the pain eases off, good things come our way and we're happy for a while.

ME: See, that's my point –

DW: I think you'll find that that was *my* point.

ME: No, the part about it being “for a while”. Why only a while?

DW: Because nothing lasts forever.

ME: I know it doesn't, but that doesn't mean aim for the short term. Why not aim for something more substantial?

DW: How so?

ME: Think of it like this: if we're simply reacting to everything in turns of overwhelming joy and sadness, then we're always at the mercy of our senses and emotions.

DW: Because that's what we are: senses and emotions!

ME: But we can determine to what extent those things control us, right?

DW: Maybe.

ME: Not maybe, surely! Nothing is impossible ...

DW: Touché. But how do you figure?

ME: Well, I figure, if we don't simply react to all the things outside our control then we allow for a more balanced approach.

DW: What do you mean by not reacting?

ME: I mean not plunging into actions without reflection. As more balanced individuals we can be more understanding of others – by not having excessive expectations, for instance. Think about times when you expect something from someone – you invest all this emotion on the assumption that they'll act as you wish, but you leave no room for empathy. It happens all the time in relationships, whether husband/wife, brother/sister, friends. And that lack of balance in understanding leads to distress.

DW: I'm hoping that wasn't a dig at me at the end there ...

ME: Nah, you're not really even a friend.

DW: Yeah, funny. But wait, you're throwing me off the point ... So you think you shouldn't expect anything from anyone?

ME: Well, that's an extreme proposition and kind of unlikely – although I like the sound of it. No, I'm not saying that; I'm talking about the extent to which we have expectations, and about not being at the mercy of someone else's actions.

DW: So where do you find that balance? How do you stop yourself from swinging about all over the place, at the mercy of your emotional reactions to other people?

ME: What do you mean?

DW: I mean: don't you need something solid to hold on to, to give you that kind of steadiness you're talking about?

ME: Well, I suppose that would make sense.

DW: So what is that something solid? Is it something outside you, or something you find inside?

ME: I suppose it can be something different for each individual. For one person it could be faith, for another willpower, for someone else love ...

DW: I guess. But, this thing about not being over-sad or over-happy: do you think we should all be void of emotion or something?

ME: You know I don't mean that: you always take the extreme point.

DW: I like to watch you having to explain yourself.

ME: Well, I didn't mean we should be emotionless. I was talking about being careful not to tip the balance in any given situation, so as not to completely lose control. It's like: taking on all your important responsibilities, with all your heart, but remaining removed enough to remember that the outcome isn't always in your hands. Being serious about life, but not being a serious person.

DW: Well, don't worry: I don't take you seriously.

ME: Nothing but compliments from this guy!

DW: I'm just kidding, man. But you make it sound like it's so easy.

ME: I know it's not easy – believe me, I've tried – but I guess that's often the way with a worthwhile cause.

DW: I mean: it's not like you can decide to be this happy and not that happy ...

ME: Sure, it's not a switch; it's a way of life, something to work towards.

DW: Chipping away at it day-by-day, huh?

ME: That's what I'm saying.

DW: It's ... it's a daily vigil.

ME: Exactly.

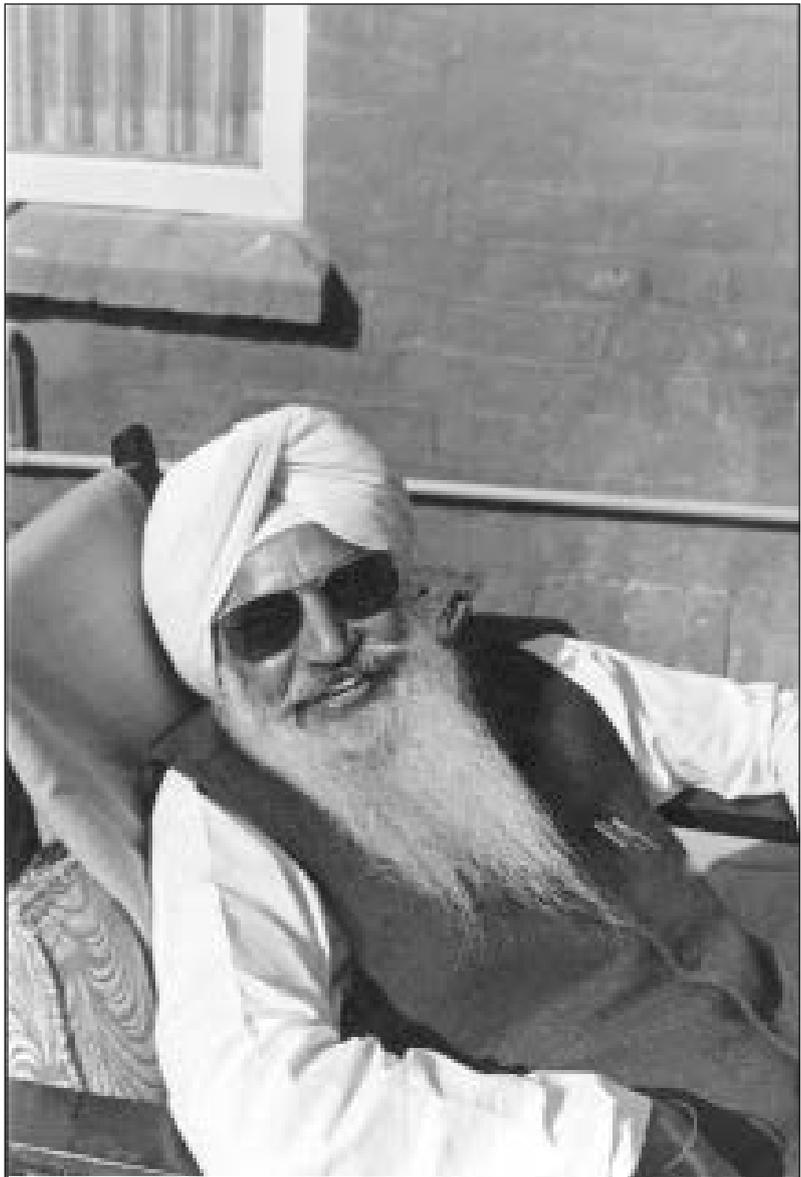
DW: And you know what?

ME: What?

DW: It's like I was saying from the start: it's a state of mind.

ME: ...





The Realization of Happiness

If we try to pick up all the splinters of the world, we cannot succeed. But if we have strong shoes on our feet, they do not bother us at all.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol III*

There seems to be a continuing debate in newspapers and books, on TV and on the radio, about the pursuit of happiness, and how one can acquire it. Regarding happiness as something to be pursued or acquired makes it sound like a cabbage or a football – an object that can be held, passed around or owned. Implicit in this way of thinking is a sense of entitlement, that society (or even the universe) is supposed to supply us with happiness. In the more developed nations there often arises an ‘entitlement expectation’, whereby people come to believe they are entitled to receive benefits from the state, free healthcare and schooling, and so forth. Some of us may even think we are entitled to spiritual progress, as well as to happiness.

It may be helpful for us to examine our expectations about entitlement, and about happiness. We must wash out of our minds certain long-held stale thoughts and emotions and develop a more reflective consciousness about such things. If we do so, we may see that happiness is not like a cabbage or a football, it is not an object: but what is it? Is it an emotion, a state of mind, a personality trait, an abstraction? There are differing views. As the late Rabbi Hyman Schachtel said in his book *The Real Enjoyment of Living*, “Happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have”. The author George Orwell wrote, “Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness.” These thoughts suggest that

happiness is perhaps best defined as an attitude, a way of being in the world, or a way of relating to people, things and events. Margaret Lee Runbeck, the author of *Answer Without Ceasing*, observed, “Happiness is not a station to arrive at, but a manner of travelling ...”

In *The Master Answers* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Even if you live in a palace, you may have a thousand dishes before you, you may have many happy people around you, but you are not happy; nothing appeals to you. But when you are happy within yourself, then you find love and joy even from anything you pick up, every step you take, you just dance with happiness.

What determines whether you are “happy within yourself”? It starts with perception: how we look at, understand, and reflect on our situation and the world around us. In *The Master Answers* we read the story of the child at the fair who loses hold of his father’s hand and is lost, then begins to cry. Maharaj Charan Singh explains how the child then feels:

The same things are still going on in the fair, but nothing appeals to him. Then he realizes that he could get peace and joy from this fair only as long as he was holding the hand of his father.... As long as we remain in his Will, we are holding his hand, we love him ... we will be happy and we will also find peace while in this world.

The child comes to see that his happiness depends on his father’s presence, and that he is miserable when separated from him. Through his perception of what has happened, the child becomes aware of what

is important to him. The awareness he gains gives the boy the ability to choose to continue to relate to life “holding the hand of his father”. Having established that crucial relationship, it becomes easier to relate to everything around us in the world.

Happiness is thus found not through pursuit but through understanding in the wake of reflection. The experience of the boy shows that if our understanding helps us to relate to things more comfortably – be it life, people, things of the world or God – then we are likely to be happier.

Relating to anything is not an entirely logical process, nor is it entirely illogical. Rather, ‘relating to’ is a mixture of contradictions and, illogically, it brings together opposing forces. For instance, ‘to relate’ demands that if we give, we also learn to take; if we are being firm, we also need to be flexible; if independent, there are times when we need to accept dependence; if self-sufficient, we find ourselves learning how to accept help. There are as many opposites in ways of relating as there are grains of sand, all of which make up the actions that enable us to be related to life. If we can adapt to this flow between opposites, all manner of things become easier.

But this requires us to accept that ‘relating to’ is both rational and irrational – we accept that its nature is paradoxical. If we reject paradox we reject nature, which puts us in a very uncomfortable attitude to life because we are resisting so much of it, and then many issues become unnecessarily complicated and difficult.

Our inability to accept the paradoxes of life affects both our happiness and our ability to be comfortable in ourselves. Self-realization is a natural result of spiritual discipline, which embraces the nature of paradox and is concerned with the natural balance of matter, spirit, and soul. This is shown in the teachings of the mystics, who are both self-realized and God-realized souls. Their teachings

inform and answer questions of how to relate to the paradoxes of living and how to achieve self- and God-realization. Through mystics we learn that God-realization is the goal of existence, and reaching towards this resolves the paradoxes of life and gives us a sense of what we may call happiness.

Part of this may be that spiritual development also develops our humanity, allowing us to be more natural. Maharaj Charan Singh said:

These days our problem is that we are living in so-called civilized society, where we can't even weep.... We have forgotten how to laugh, we have forgotten how to weep.... If you are in agony or misery, just weep and cry and you will become light. If you're happy, you just laugh.... These are the natural safety valves the Lord has kept within everybody.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

In a somewhat similar vein, Desiderius Erasmus suggested in the sixteenth century that recognizing and accepting one's true nature was the key to happiness: "It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is."

In the book *Buddhism: Path to Nirvana*, the author explains that through the Buddhist concept of right view, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration, we can bring an end to suffering. In other words, we can become happy (end suffering) by looking at life with natural and healthy perceptions, beginning with how we view things and working up to how we interact with the world, understand ourselves, and relate to God. In basic terms, this means moving from negative to positive attitudes.

Maharaj Charan Singh, in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol III*, explains how changing our attitude to life will bring us closer to happiness, by

making us better able to deal with the paradoxes of life, those difficult ups and downs we encounter:

If we try to pick up all the splinters of the world, we cannot succeed. But if we have strong shoes on our feet, they do not bother us at all. The saints arm us with that meditation (the strong shoes), so that the ups and downs of the world do not bother us.... We come to that stage, that level, where the worldly situation makes us neither happy nor unhappy.... Whatever our store of karma is, good or bad, we have to go through it. But I can assure you that by meditation our will becomes so strong that these good and bad karmas do not affect us at all.

The mystics tell us that rather than being entitled to happiness, self-knowledge, self-realization, or spiritual fulfilment, we are totally dependent on meditation and on God's grace. If we focus on meditation and wear its *strong shoes on our feet*, it changes our perceptions and the way we relate to life itself, which means we change our attitude to life and to the Creator. If we keep putting in our daily effort, then we come to realize that we are not what we once believed we were. And, as we begin to glimpse our spiritual self, we open to that happiness we feel when we see we belong to God.

In the words of Father Yelchaninov, a Russian priest:

The more a man gives up his heart to God, to his vocation and to men, forgetful of himself and of that which belongs to him – the greater poise he will acquire, until he reaches peace, quiet, joy: the apanage of simple and humble souls.



A Complete Cure for Every Kind of Trouble

A place where there is love becomes sanctified by it. In that environment there is a powerful current of exaltation, but it can be felt only by a heart that is filled with love. If we perform our domestic and other worldly duties with love, we shall enjoy our life in comfort and without any worries, because in the presence of love, the mind and intellect are powerless to disturb one's inner calmness.

Love is a complete cure for every kind of trouble. Maulana Rum says:

O! the intoxication of my love, be happy, well and strong; for you are the only physician and cure for all my ailments.

If we could experience true love, we would be our own physicians and could bring peace and happiness to ourselves. Then all our pain and sadness because of our separation from the Lord, which are caused by our not understanding the principles of love, would vanish and the radiant currents of joy would fill and invigorate our minds.

It is love alone that can give peace and happiness. Without it life is dry and worthless, and even the joys of heaven are of no value. A palace will appear as dreadful as a graveyard to a person who is bereft of love. But even the ill-furnished and dilapidated huts are beautiful if they are brightened with the spark of love. Through love, even jungles become filled with happy life and without love, populated cities may appear bleak....

Love is the richest of all treasures.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol II*

The Wakened Lover Speaks

*The wakened lover speaks directly to the beloved,
'You are the sky my spirit circles in,
the love inside love, the resurrection-place.*

*Let this window be your ear.
I have lost consciousness many times
with longing for your listening silence,
and your life-quickenning smile.*

*You give attention to the smallest matters,
my suspicious doubts, and to the greatest.*

*You know my coins are counterfeit,
but you accept them anyway,
my impudence and my pretending!*

*When I was apart from you,
this world did not exist,
nor any other.*

*Whatever I was looking for
was always you.'*

*Rumi: Whoever Brought Me Here Will Have to
Take Me Home, rendered by Barks & Moyné*

Book Review



The Spiritual Guide

BY MIGUEL DE MOLINOS. EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY ROBERT P. BAIRD
PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: PAULIST PRESS, 2010. CLASSICS OF WESTERN
SPIRITUALITY SERIES. ISBN 0-8091-0583-0

The Spanish mystic Miguel de Molinos (1628-1697) is one of the most controversial figures in Roman Catholic history. Teaching a mystical practice of attentive inner silence, he served as a spiritual guide to a large following, including some of the highest ranking officials in the Church. His book *The Spiritual Guide* came out in 1675 and within six years it went through more than twenty editions, with translations into Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch and Latin. However, in 1685 Molinos was tried for heresy and condemned to prison, where he died in 1697. After his book was banned by the Catholic Church, it continued to be highly influential in Protestant circles. His teachings were labelled Quietism, and over the next two centuries many Christian mystics were called Quietists.

The recent Paulist Press edition offers an excellent new translation of *The Spiritual Guide*. The introduction describes Molinos's life and times and explains the theological and political controversies that culminated in his arrest and imprisonment. The text of *The Spiritual Guide* itself is in three sections or books.

Molinos begins Book One by assuring the reader: "Know that your soul is the centre, the residence, and the kingdom of God." One must only "look within your own heart by means of interior recollection" and remain steadfast in a state of utter resignation, knowing nothing, desiring nothing. He says that this simple contemplative practice is superior to both "meditation" (by which he means the practice of thinking deeply on a particular spiritual topic) and "discursive prayer" (expressing oneself to God in words). According to Molinos, "The perfection of the soul does not consist in speaking or in thinking much

on God, but in loving him much. You reach this love by means of perfect resignation and interior silence.”

When God says that he wants to speak to the soul alone, he calls it and leads it to interior solitude and mystical silence in the most secret and intimate depths of the heart. You must enter this mystical silence if you want to hear the gentle, interior, and divine voice.... Repose in this mystical silence, and you will open the door so that God may communicate himself, unite you with him, and transform you.

Book One focuses mostly on the challenges of darkness, dryness and temptations that, he says, face every mystical practitioner. Molinos claims that God actually allows these challenges “for the good of your soul and your spiritual benefit”. Persevering in prayer through periods of dryness and darkness “is a manifest sign that God in his mercy wants to introduce you to the interior road, the happy path of paradise”.

Know that there are two kinds of prayer: one is tender, easy, loving and full of feeling; the other is obscure, dry, desolate, tempted, and dark. The first is for beginners; the second, for the diligent and those on the path to perfection. God gives the first kind to win souls; the second, to purify them. With the first he treats them like children and wretches; with the second he begins to treat them as though they were strong.

Molinos counsels, “Know that the Lord esteems this veil of drynesses so that we will not know what works within us. By this ignorance we are humbled.” In fact, one should “embrace these darknesses. When in the midst of them you should believe that you are in front of the Lord and in his presence.”

During this practice, one will be assailed by temptations. Ironically, Molinos says:

Know, then, that temptation is your greatest happiness.... Be grateful to God for the benefit it does you. In all these temptations

and abominable thoughts the remedy you should adopt is to scorn them ... for there is nothing that injures the devil in his pride more than seeing himself scorned, with no notice given to him or the thoughts he conjures.... Keep yourself in your peace without becoming disquieted and without multiplying reasons and responses. There is nothing so dangerous as to engage in debate with one who can deceive us so quickly.

Book Two focuses on the need for a spiritual guide for anyone attempting to travel the interior path. Molinos advises: “In every sense it is advisable to choose a master experienced in the interior way... Were we to submit our actions to our own judgement and natural impulses, we would immediately stumble and fall in a thousand abysses.” Spiritual books can mislead the seeker:

These books confuse the souls instead of illuminating them. They fill souls with discursive knowledge that greatly impedes them. While it is true that they give knowledge about the light, this knowledge enters from the outside and dulls the soul's powers, instead of emptying those powers so that God can fill them with himself.

Book Three focuses on the experiences of “those who are agreeable to God”. These mystic practitioners continue “to enter quietly and silently within themselves in God, for here is their centre, their dwelling, and their delight”.

The soul sometimes hears the interior voice of its Beloved, a very delicate whistle that calls it and makes it hurry, going out from the most intimate part of the soul where he dwells and strongly penetrating the soul until it melts and undoes it. The soul sees how near the Beloved is to itself and how far, since it cannot completely possess him. This intoxicates, dismays, weakens, and fills the soul with insatiability.

Molinos says that the soul must pass through a “spiritual martyrdom” that is much harder than the external martyrdom of those who are

persecuted. “You should know that you must suffer to arrive at the sweet, gentle, and abundant richness of high contemplation and loving union. No holy soul has ever arrived at this state that has not passed through his spiritual martyrdom and painful torment.”

Here you will see yourself abandoned and subject to the passions of impatience, anger, rage, blasphemy, and disordered appetites. You will appear to yourself as the most miserable creature, the worst sinner, the most abhorred of God, stripped of all virtue, nearly suffering the pain of hell.... But truly, if you see yourself so oppressed, and seem to yourself on good evidence to be proud, impatient, and angry, then these temptations will not have any force or place in your soul, thanks to the hidden virtue and interior gift of fortitude that reigns in the intimate part of your soul....

Be constant, O blessed soul, be constant, for you will never love more nor be closer to God than in such abandonments!.... The Lord allows this painful abandonment in your soul to purge you, clean you, deny you, and strip you from yourself. By these means you will be all his ... and to whatever extent you surrender yourself to him will his infinite goodness be given to you so that you may be his delight.

On the interior way, one must die to oneself. Molinos says the state of the soul that is “stripped of the self” is impossible to describe. “Only those who experience this contemplation know it.”

If you give God your detached soul with this liberty, free and alone, you will be happier than any creature on earth, because in this holy solitude the Most High has his secret dwelling. In this desert and paradise God allows himself to converse; only in this interior retreat is that marvellous, efficacious, interior, and divine voice heard. If you want to enter this heaven on earth, forget all cares and thoughts and strip yourself so that the love of God may live in your soul.



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