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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# Ancient Coin

*Business has been good,  
I got the position I wanted –  
All of me is placed at your feet,  
Now I can rest –  
the signs were right,  
all my exhaustion is gone.  
Having seen You face to face,  
I'll come and go no more.  
It's good I reached this place,  
where my past actions have brought me.  
My sense of the body is transformed  
since God's shadow touched it.  
A treasure, indestructible and filled with joy,  
has come and won't go away –  
the form of the formless Lord I have seen.  
It's an ancient coin, a hidden treasure,  
waiting for one still enough to find it.  
I embrace this treasure with my life,  
never will I let it go, says Tuka.  
Oh Lord, so hard have I worked for this –  
please let no jealous eyes look my way.*

Sant Tukaram, in *Many Voices, One Song*





# Imperfect

*How long should I worry about my dark record  
and ponder my actions in sadness?*

*I will rest in his grace and mercy  
and be released from past, present and future.*

*Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine*

Many of us feel that we cannot make progress because we have not yet reached a sufficient degree of perfection – whether in our meditation, in the moral standard adhered to in our daily life, or in our actions and thoughts. Actually, the word ‘perfection’, or even ‘imperfection’, does not capture our real feeling; ‘failure’, ‘moral disaster’ or ‘making a mess out of my life’ come much closer. But the saints’ teachings about this feeling of ours are extraordinary and, taken seriously, give us great encouragement to continue our struggle.

The mystics offer us advice regarding this problem from many, many different points of view. First, we find that the saints, speaking of themselves, often express a feeling similar to ours in their poems and writings. For example, Sarmad says in *Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine*:

*O Lord, innumerable sins have I committed –  
What am I to do?*

*Pray save the worn out boat of my heart from this whirlpool,  
I am drowning in a sea of shame and remorse.*

*Only thy mercy can bring me to shore.*

Saints are letting us know that even great disciples will feel this way on their path within. Probably this is because as dedicated disciples

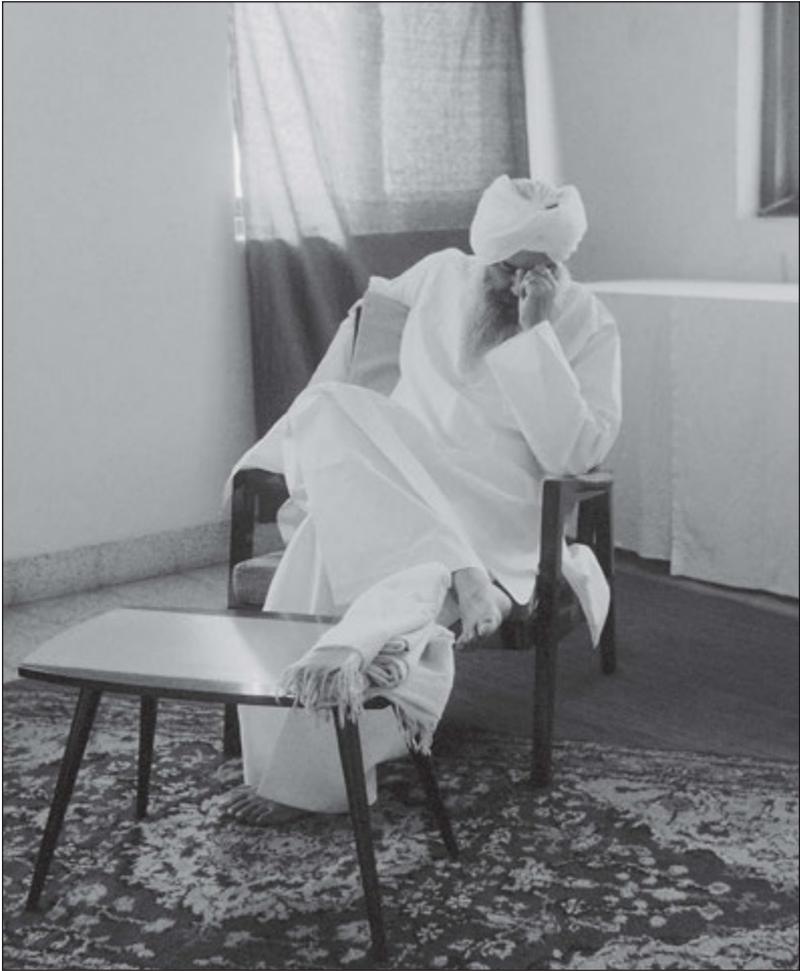
they reach a station where they perceive that all that exists reflects the Lord and is perfect, while their own ego is the only source of evil and imperfection. Kabir is quoted in *The Path*:

*I went out in search of an evil man,  
But could not find one;  
When I searched within my own self,  
I found I was the worst of all.  
I am, O Kabir, the worst of all;  
Except for me, all are good.  
He who understands this is indeed my friend.*

We may respond that, no, our distress arises not from this sublime realization but from the simple fact that we are really bad, repeatedly committing unforgivable sins. Well, at least we know that the saints, for whatever reason, felt the same way and yet attained success, and that we too will one day correctly realize that within us, in our minds and egos, is the source of negativity.

A second point of view on this problem takes us into the very heart of Sant Mat teachings. All saints point out that this world is not the place for perfection, and all who dwell here are imperfect. If we were perfect we would not be here. Yet human perfection is possible – at higher planes of consciousness. How do we gain this perfection? It is not, the saints emphasize, by trying to improve ourselves and our life here until we reach perfection. This is impossible because it means seeking perfection according to the dictates of our own mind, which is itself the source of imperfection.

Saints offer another avenue altogether to achieve perfection. First, astonishingly, they tell us that our true self, our soul, is now and always has been perfect. Second, they tell us that we will realize this



perfection. Sant Mat gives tidings of an astounding miracle: that even on this plane it is possible for the imperfect to meet the perfect, the sinful and false to contemplate the pure and the true, and the mortal and transitory to begin to dissolve into the eternal and unchanging. The secret, the link, the bridge, is the living perfect Master. How do we meet him?

We have the opportunity to meet him through the grace of initiation as he connects us to his inner form – the Nam or Shabd.

Now, if these are the teachings of Sant Mat, we can easily realize how dwelling on our own imperfections is beside the point. What we are to dwell on is not our false selves at all – imperfect by definition – but rather on perfection, the perfection of the living Master. Through persistent contact with perfection, as continuous and concentrated as we can muster in our meditation, we gradually awaken to our own perfection, the soul within, and increasingly realize our identity with the divine.

A third point concerning imperfection is that, however sinful we are and have been, our sins are as nothing when compared to the Lord's mercy. Our karmas, our sins, have no significance before his grace. But we have to do our duty – then leave everything to him. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

*When a person is under the sway of lust, anger and attachment, when he is assailed by miserliness and avarice, when he is in the grip of the four vices, namely stealing, drinking, adultery and the persecution of saintly people, when demon-like desires to annihilate others have taken hold of him, when he will not listen to the recitation of the scriptures, even then, if he thinks of the Lord, he shall gain freedom in the twinkling of an eye.*

Such is the grace of the Lord.

As a fourth and final point, saints simply point out that by harping on our imperfections, and considering them a bar to progress, we indulge in a defeatist attitude, which is never good. In other words, it is not really our imperfections but our attitude about them that stands in the way of our progress. Defeatist and negative thoughts are only

a trick of the mind. Saints say it is not so important whether or not we fall, provided we always get up again and start walking. We must simply persevere in doing our duty and not consider whether we succeed, putting our trust in the Master and the Lord. Maharaj Charan Singh often addressed this point, as can be seen in the following two letters to disciples in *Quest for Light*:

*Please do not feel so depressed and dejected. It is good to know one's faults and weaknesses, but then instead of lamenting about them it is better to find a remedy and get rid of them. If you have not done your duty towards the Lord so far, honestly, then start doing it now. After all, what we are required to do, we have to do. Nothing can be gained without effort. A price has to be paid for everything. Be brave and courageous. Do not shirk the responsibility that the Lord wants you to shoulder. Do your duty towards him with your best efforts and then leave the rest to him.*

*Please remember that all are struggling souls on the path. We all have to strive and do our best and then leave the rest to him. There is no need to feel so disheartened. This is a path of hope and courage. Live within the will of the Lord, do your duty every day and leave the rest to him. He is always with you.*



# The Seva of Meditation

Every satsangi is blessed with the gift of seva because the most important seva of all is meditation and we all have the ability to do this. Meditation is the seva that the Master cares about the most.

The real seva is practising our meditation day in and day out, going through the dry periods, the times when we are so tired that we feel it is impossible to carve out the time, but do anyway; the times when we would like to be doing almost anything else, but manage somehow to give time to meditation anyway. When we do all this, even if we get nothing tangible in return – no feeling of spiritual development, no rise within – we are doing a seva that the Master appreciates. Soami Ji says in *Sar Bachan Prose*:

*After initiation by the grace of the Satguru into the mystery of holy Nam, one should do his best to practise it, and continue to develop love for the Satguru and faith in him.*

The Lord has ordained that we must seek a perfect Master and be initiated by him while both are living in the body. Then, through meditation, we must please the Master and develop love for him. Soami Ji continues:

*So long as there is life (so long as you breathe) you should go on with Guru bhakti. Devotion to Guru is devotion to God. This should be done without asking anything in return. He is all-powerful and will bestow on us anything he likes, when he sees fit.*

When a disciple asked Maharaj Charan Singh how to develop love for the Lord, Hazur explained:

*Brother, practically it comes when it comes. You do not have the power to develop it. When his grace is there, it just comes; but the practical step that we can take to develop our devotion to the Lord is to meditate, to build that atmosphere around us of devotion for the Lord by reading books, by satsang, by discussion and by having harmonious meetings. By helping each other, we build that atmosphere around us in which, then, we start giving; and we find that the more we give our devotion to the Lord, the more it grows every day. The more love we have, the more it grows. But the only practical step that we can take is to be honest in our meditation, for then devotion and love come automatically.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

No meditation is wasted. Everything we do in Sant Mat has to do with meditation. Every other type of seva we do is done to encourage that meditation, to give the inspiration to meditate and thus, create that bond of love between the Master and the disciple. You might say that meditation is the seva that really matters.



*Absorbed in his love, they dedicate  
every breath of their lives  
to remembrance and contemplation of him.*

*Sultan Bahu*

# Acceptance versus Expectation

An attitude of accepting the Lord's will instead of an attitude of expectation goes hand-in-hand with a life of meditation. Maharaj Charan Singh goes so far as to say that the purpose of meditation is to develop this attitude of acceptance rather than expectation.

*The purpose of meditation is to prepare us to accept what the Lord gives, to prepare us not to expect. In prayer we always expect, but in meditation we always accept. That is the difference between meditation and prayer. We pray because we are expecting something; we do meditation because we are preparing to accept what he wants to give us. In prayer we speak to the Lord; in meditation we hear him.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

When we first come to the path we are drawn by a desire to understand reality. We want more than this world of pain and pleasure can offer. Masters tell us that the reality can be found within us and they teach us that through meditation we can gain conscious contact with this power of God – the Shabd.

The Masters tell us to conduct this experiment within our bodies and realize the truth for ourselves. In *Path of the Masters* it says:

*Go ahead and conduct the experiment. That is all the Masters ask. They ask no blind beliefs. They ask no more than is required of any man who proposes to build a bridge or make a chemical analysis. In every scientific experiment, one must accept something as a working hypothesis. He is then ready to*

*proceed with his practical demonstration. In the process of the demonstration, he gains definite knowledge.*

We may initially think that the purpose of meditation is only to experience the truth of sound and light within us. But, the Masters tell us that the purpose of meditation is much more than that. Meditation is to align ourselves with the will of God and to become aware of that oneness. It's a complete transformation in our level of awareness.

Learning to accept is at the core of a disciple's life. When we expect, we think we know what's best and we tell the Lord what he should give us. The truth is that we don't know what is best or what God has planned for us.

Maharaj Charan Singh says in a very striking way in *Legacy of Love*, "The best plan you can make in life is to live in his will and accept his commands and be receptive to his grace – that's the best plan we can make." Hazur was always very clear that we can only live in the will of the Lord when we go beyond the realm of mind and matter. Masters also tell us that we ourselves have created our destiny by our actions of past lives and we come back to reap the rewards or punishments of those past actions. If the events of our life are not to our liking, it's our own doing.

Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*The Father doesn't write anything in your destiny which you have to go through. You have created your own destiny; you have sown your own seeds; your own seeds have created your destiny, what you have to go through. They're our own actions – we can't hold the Father responsible. He has written only what we have sown. But to go through that cheerfully is contentment.*

Both of these – meditation and developing an attitude of leaving everything to the Father – independently require our attention. If we only work on our attitude of accepting his will, or being positive, or contented, but we don't meditate, the results will be shallow. And perhaps we will be shallow – because without meditation, these attitudes won't be grounded in something deeper and more real. They won't be based on any inner awareness.

On the other hand, if we put our required time into meditation, but don't work on our attitude, eventually the meditation will automatically change us. But in the meantime we could go around for a very long time, maybe most of our lives, with very negative attitudes and grumble at all the negative things of life. And that attitude will make meditation difficult.

When we adopt an attitude of acceptance – rather than expectation – we become the most fortunate people and our hearts become filled with gratitude. Hazur explains this very beautifully when he says:

*What more could we want, if we can trust ourselves to the Lord? What more do we want? We think we know more than the Lord? What else could we want – that he will take care of us, he will absolve us from all our planning, all our thinking, that he takes our destiny in his own hands – what more could we want in life? These are the most fortunate people.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*



# Where Our Happiness Lies

Master's presence, physical or otherwise, always seems to bring the truth back into focus. He helps us see where we are and where we would like to be. It seems that in his presence the seeds of change are planted in our hearts. The pressures of life fall away. We feel our spiritual desires are within our reach, and we want to make the effort to try and improve ourselves.

Most of us yearn deeply for a sense of peace in our lives, a sense of purpose – we want to love and be loved – because otherwise the suffering is endless and senseless. In Master's company we find that peace, that love which satisfies us, but unfortunately we cannot always be physically with him. So in a way we are always seeking, consciously or otherwise, for the spiritual love he radiates. And although we might prefer it otherwise, we can only find what we are looking for inside.

Meditation brings clarity and peace into our lives. But often our preoccupation with all that is going on in our lives keeps us away from it. So it seems we have to consciously cultivate our relationship with him, by doing all the things that make us feel close to him. Experience shows us that keeping a positive attitude and being loving and kind to everyone around us helps us to tune in to him – helps us create the kind of atmosphere that makes it easier to meditate.

At times in meditation we have painful realizations about ourselves: we see our weaker side for what it is. We have all done things we regret. What better way to ask for forgiveness than to turn to the spirit within without trying to hide from our shortcomings? What better way to remove our negative habits than to present them to the source of all that is positive? Sometimes we can feel we are being washed clean, that the tension and guilt are being lifted.

Whenever we direct our thoughts and love towards him, don't all our troubles fall into perspective and begin to fade away? And positive qualities gradually replace the ones that are troubling us?

Master is extremely loving. He is more eager for us to succeed than we can imagine. He wishes us the greatest possible happiness from this practice and is always offering his help. Our bond with the Master underlies our entire lives. Even in the most difficult circumstances, in the most troubled times, the underlying bond is not broken. The desire for spirituality was his gift, and he will never remove it. At times it may seem to be forgotten due to circumstances of our life, but it is not gone.

Surely this is not a path of rules and recrimination; it is a way of ever-increasing love. Baba Ji encourages us to do the best for ourselves, to do what will make us really happy. He wants us to feel positive about ourselves, rather than feeling guilty and depressed, and worrying about our failed obligations. So why not go where our happiness lies. As Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, "Real happiness is only in meditation, nowhere else."



*Leaving everything else aside, one must implicitly obey the Satguru of his own time, and faithfully follow his instructions. This will lead him to success. This is the long and short of everything.*

Soami Ji, *Sar Bachan Prose*

# Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a complex human quality. The saints have preached its necessity, especially for those who are seeking spiritual liberation. In the book *Mirdad* it says:

*Life is a fever of varying intensity and kinds, depending on each man's obsession; and men are ever in delirium. Blessed are they who are delirious of Holy Freedom which is the fruit of Holy Understanding [forgiveness].*

Why do the saints put such importance on the trait of forgiveness? Because, our inability to forgive gives rise to intolerance, discord, resentment, criticism of others – all manifestations of anger and pride. These are all traits that we want to shed; we know they are not conducive to our meditation.

There will always be those who want to hurt us or whom we dislike, but the Master advises us to counter these feelings and mental habits with patience, understanding, kindness and forgiveness.

Often when we think of forgiveness, we are focused only on one aspect of it. We want to be forgiven. We want forgiveness for our karmas so that the coverings on our soul can be removed. Intuitively we understand that we have a great weight on our shoulders that prevents us from experiencing the Lord. So we ask him for forgiveness, perhaps even beg for it. Maharaj Charan Singh in a letter in *Divine Light* says:

*I am glad that you have realized your mistake and have decided never to commit such a blunder again in the future.*

*Genuine repentance and the sincere determination never to repeat the mistake is real forgiveness. Please forget totally what has happened.*

So in asking the Lord for forgiveness, Hazur is suggesting that we not commit the “blunder” again, but that we also release the memory of that blunder, to “forget” it. Genuine repentance and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin. Not repeating the mistake is a basis for obtaining the forgiveness we seek. The replay of the “blunder” in our mind creates another mental attachment, which in turn keeps our mind from focusing on our bhajan and simran – the real road to repentance and forgiveness.

Not only should we beg the Lord for forgiveness of our sins, but we should also beg forgiveness from others whom we have harmed. And we should never hesitate to forgive those who have harmed us, even without their asking us for forgiveness. Why? Because ill will toward others can close our heart. If our heart is closed, our mental baggage keeps getting heavier. Instead of being able to sit for our spiritual practice with a peaceful mind, we may be assailed with the disturbances and upsets caused by our anger towards those who have harmed us; or we may fill our minds with justifications for why we hurt others.

*The Gospel of Jesus* acknowledges the contradiction, perhaps the impossibility, of becoming spiritually attuned while holding grudges against anyone:

*First be reconciled to thy brother,  
And then come and offer thy gift [meditation].*

This verse doesn't imply that we shouldn't meditate if we haven't sought forgiveness but rather, if we notice that the grudges we are holding against another come up when we meditate, it is a clue that we need to mend that grudge. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Hazur says, "As long as you have malice in your heart, or hatred against anybody, or ill-feelings, your prayer will never be accepted by the Lord."

Forgiveness should be so complete that we forget that we have forgiven or that we were hurt in the first place.

*We should even forget that we have forgiven.... Forget the incident, absolutely. We do forgive people, but we don't forget that we have forgiven them. So a scar is always there. The wound is gone, but the scar is always there. We shouldn't be conscious of even the scar.*

Another suggestion of Hazur's is to not react to other people in the first place. If we cannot forgive others, we may have to come back to forgive them. It is an attachment. We should just forgive those who have hurt us and call it quits, so to speak. Forgiveness is a process of letting go.

Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Light on St. Matthew*:

*So in order to be receptive to his grace, if anybody asks for forgiveness, we should always readily forgive. And if somebody expects us to ask for forgiveness, we should never hesitate.*

The saints have all described God as merciful, compassionate and forgiving. As we attempt to live a spiritual life dedicated to our meditation, we can seek forgiveness from those whom we have harmed, practise forgiveness for those who have harmed us, and ask forgiveness

for what stands between the Master and us. True love of the Lord can then begin to emerge in us and we can become receptive to his grace and compassion. As Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

*The highest embellishment of forgiveness is the divine glory of the saints and they preach its practice.... The spirit of non-forgiveness is the chief cause of unrest in the world. Forgiveness is most sacred. By practising it, unrest disappears and man is saved from being burnt in the fire of anger. A man should, therefore, always practise forgiveness.*

Great Master understands our condition here, that we may not automatically be able to forgive. That is why he says we should “practise” forgiveness. We must forgive over and over and over again.

If we cannot forgive, how can we expect to be forgiven? Without forgiveness we cannot escape from this world and its distractions. We are on a journey to our true home, and we must do what we can to drop our vice-like grip on those things that hold our attention here in the world. As Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, “So we seek his forgiveness, we seek his grace, that he should give us admission into his court and save us from all this misery.” Meditation will help us attain this.

Hazur has emphasized that real forgiveness is only attained by meditation. This is a basic “bottom line” of the path. Meditation is nothing but seeking his forgiveness.

*Real forgiveness can only come from the Father by meditation. Clearing our karmic account is forgiveness. Eliminating the karmas that stand between us and the Father is all his*

*forgiveness. When he wants to forgive us, he puts us on the path. He brings us into the company of the mystics. He gives us that environment where we can meditate. That is how he forgives us.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

So ultimately, it is to our advantage to seek forgiveness, forgive others and to meditate. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, “The happiness you get by forgiving, you don’t get otherwise at all.” We are not only repenting for our own sins but we are opening our hearts and minds to the attributes of compassion and forgiveness that we can extend to others. We are letting go. Forgiveness is always best.



*The soul cannot help but love its own origin. So we have to lift the weight of the senses, of the mind, of karmas or sins, before we can experience that love. And we feel real love when we go beyond the realm of mind and maya, when there are no coverings on the soul, when the soul shines, when it knows itself.*

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

# A Darkness Full of Light

In the beginning  
you need absolute darkness,  
to see the subtle light.

Listen, dear friend!  
What you on earth, call pain,  
can prosper the soul.  
The rough bark,  
the piercing thorns,  
the tangling roots  
of the tree of consequence  
yield a healing tonic –

Remember!  
Suffering is a cure  
to cool your fever,  
to end your running blind.  
Secret grace glows  
in the dark bottle  
of your despair.  
Your lucky name  
is on the label.

Your doctor is a specialist  
in this dread disease.

He has an ancient remedy  
to cure your illness,  
to end the loneliness  
of exile.

Follow his orders implicitly!  
Escape the riot and spin,  
the shout and whisper,  
the grope and clutch  
of the world  
for a time  
each day.

Be quiet space  
and deep relief  
long enough to recover  
the hidden secret of perfect health –  
You, dear friend, are a darkness full of light  
that has gone too long, unseen.  
Unheard.

Original Poem by a Satsangi



# Without Expectations

Faith forms the basis for a life devoted to walking the spiritual path. Without faith we cannot continue. We start walking the path based initially on belief or trust, but later it is faith that makes it possible for us to keep going. Faith arises in us when our initial belief is reinforced and becomes firm.

You can picture this process in a down-to-earth way by comparing it with starting to use a pressure cooker to cook potatoes because a friend recommends it. Based on her own experience she advises you to use this tool instead of a regular pan since it is much more efficient. She has no reason to mislead you as she is an experienced cook, so you trust her advice; you believe her. It is not that you have faith in using the pressure cooker yet. You just believe and trust your friend. Besides, her explanation is so clear that you believe that you can learn to use the pressure cooker by yourself.

So you buy a pressure cooker and take it home. You put in the water, add the salt and the potatoes, and close the lid and follow the instructions. During the process you do not look inside the pressure cooker. You trust all is fine. Then, after about seven minutes of boiling, you open the lid and see that the potatoes are done. The next time you use the same tool, the same method and the same instructions, you will have faith in them and in your own capacity to use them.

This mechanism of acting upon initial trust and having faith – or not – based on the outcome is a common and useful process in life. However, on the spiritual path, it can also create obstacles.

Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in the book *My Submission*:

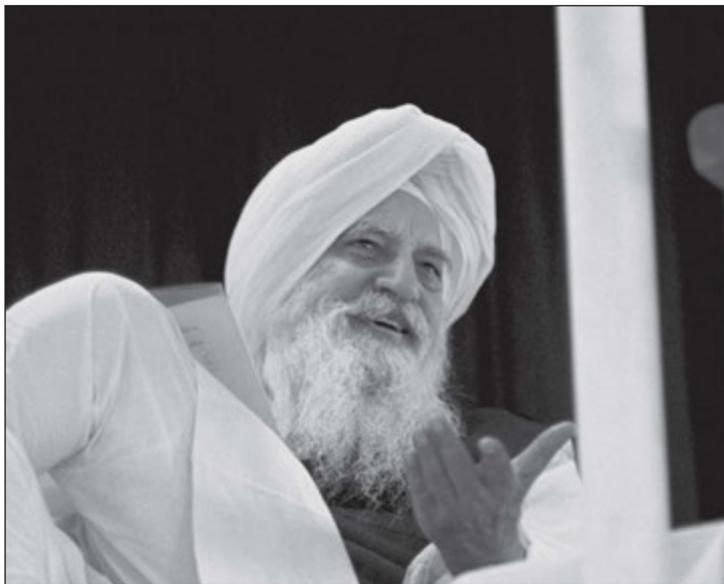
*When a person realizes that despite his best efforts all his plans and endeavours have failed, he gets disheartened and gives up trying.*

We cannot blame ourselves for the tendency to give up in the face of failure. From a practical point of view this world functions through desire and expectation. That's how we sustain ourselves. If we experience thirst, for instance, we expect that drinking water will quench our thirst. So we start looking for water. It is the expectation of removal of thirst that motivates our action to seek water. But if a desired outcome does not occur – for example, we do not find the water we need – we start to doubt that our method of finding water was correct. On the spiritual path, this feature of the mind can work against us, especially when we seek results in meditation.

Before we asked for initiation, we believed in something. We had some trust in the Master; maybe we had some true knowledge that gave us faith in the teachings. That was the foundation of approaching the path and asking for initiation. After initiation we started to meditate. We started to apply the method with ourselves. And what happened with many of us? Not much. At least that is what we thought, which was a disappointing experience for us. In such circumstances, when our expectations are not met, there is the danger that we conclude that the action of meditation makes no sense.

It is at this moment that our mind provides us with a sneaky and seemingly effective solution to the situation: we lower our expectation by meditating less or stopping altogether. If we meditate little or not at all, we do not have much expectation regarding the effects of our meditation, and as a consequence, we do not feel frustrated by the results. That seems a good way to stay comfortable, indeed.

Many of us have used this method of dealing with apparent lack of results in meditation, at least at certain points in our lives. But there is a term for dealing with expectations that way: giving up.



Sometimes there is nothing wrong with giving up – except when you give up something very precious. And that is the position we are in. We have been given an extremely precious opportunity, so it makes much more sense to at least start remoulding our expectations of meditation, instead of giving up our trust in the teacher and his teachings.

Whether we choose to walk this precious path or not, we still have the natural need for reinforcement of our belief based on the outcome of our actions to make our belief firm. Besides, are our expectations not raised after reading Sant Mat books and attending satsangs? Yes, they are. We have to keep in mind that these books and satsangs have

just one goal: to inspire us to put ourselves under the influence of the Master and to meditate.

The problem is that our mind seeks reinforcement of belief and trust in a conventional way. We use the teachings to create expectations based on what we can understand. But the path is beyond what can be understood with our intellect. Our mind does not like a state of not understanding, but that is what we have to bear.

The eighth-century Zen Master Yongjia said, “Great Enlightenment comes from great doubt.” Doubt pushes us to seek new and deeper understanding of our path. It is for this reason that the sixteenth-century Korean master Xishan said in *A Paragon of Zen House*:

*There are three essential things in the practice of the path. The first is great faith. The second great will, and the third great doubt. If any one of these is missing, practice becomes useless like a cauldron, a kettle, with a broken leg.*

What this implies is that we should have great faith in the method and the Master, and in ourselves. We have no reason not to. The only thing we have to learn is to give up clinging to our conventional understanding, to learn to expect nothing and to allow the “great doubt” master Xishan refers to. We are like a bird that arrives at the high cliff of understanding and expectation by flapping his wings. To travel further we have to let go of this cliff and jump into the unknown while just spreading our wings by meditation. The Master will carry us with his uplifting atmosphere and take us back to our true home. Until that time, the only thing we have to do is simply not give up. That is our path.



# Even the Masters

When we are feeling down in the dumps in our lives and wonder if we will ever be able to make it on the path, it is useful to remember that even a Master-in-the-making struggles with living in the world. A perfect example can be seen in the letters that Maharaj Sawan Singh wrote to his Master. How do we know what he wrote? From how his Master, Baba Jaimal Singh, responds to his letters.

For example, Baba Jaimal Singh says in reply to a letter in *Spiritual Letters* written only a year before Maharaj Sawan Singh began initiating his own disciples, “You have written that your mind feels sad, that it does not wish to do any work, that it has become tired.”

We can surely identify with this statement. How many of us go through periods of abjection, even downright depression on the path, and wonder why we feel like that when we have so much to be grateful for. Baba Jaimal Singh responds with encouragement. “Definitely the mind should remain detached from the world, my son.”

The sadness and tiredness come from being detached from the world – we can definitely feel depressed when there is nothing in our lives that interests us anymore. But it is a good thing to be detached.

Baba Jaimal Singh then adds:

*Don't worry; keep your mind in the Shabd-dhun and firmly fix your attention in simran all the time, and listen to the Shabd with love and devotion – then the physical tiredness will go away.*

Don't worry about a thing; everything is going to be all right. Just do your meditation, simran and bhajan with love and devotion; that is the cure for the sad, tired feeling.

Then Baba Jaimal Singh refers to a situation in Great Master's life that is bothering him:

*You also write that the officer who has now come is very strict. So what if he is very strict? You have to do your official duty, and it will do you good when your mind, nervous and worried, turns towards bhajan and simran. So the news is good.*

Good news, indeed! A strict officer coming to Great Master's workplace is a good thing because it will encourage him to turn within. When we are happy, it is easy to forget about the Master; when we are upset, we turn to him.

Baba Jaimal Singh continues:

*So have no fear. Remain dauntless in your heart – nothing can happen without his command. Whatever has to happen has already happened. We are going to do only that which has already been done – the true Lord, Radha Soami Ji is doing it. Continue to work fearlessly; the compassionate Guru is always your protector.*

Everything that is going to happen was decided before our birth. What we do and the consequences of these actions were all mapped out and put in our destiny karma for us to go through. Everything is in the hands of the Master; and what he is giving us – whether we recognize it to be good or not – is for our benefit because it is lightening our karmic load and taking us closer to him. He is protecting us at every step, so why worry about it?

Baba Jaimal Singh concludes:



*Since we have been granted the true wealth, why should we care about the false one? Rather, the mind is not to be attached to the unreal. Whenever you are free, listen to the Shabd-dhun by fixing the mind and soul in it.*

There is nothing to be worried about in this unreal world. We have been initiated by a perfect living Master, and he is taking care of everything in our lives. We just need to go through our karmas calmly and happily and do our meditation every day with love and devotion. This is the advice to a perfect Master-in-the-making and to every disciple on the path. Enlightenment for each of us is just around the corner.



# Is It Failure?

Ibn Khafif had two disciples, Ahmad the Older and Ahmad the Younger. He thought Ahmad the Younger was a better disciple, but everyone disagreed. So he set the two a test.

Ibn Khafif told each of his disciples to carry a camel onto the roof.

“But, Master,” said Ahmad the Older, “how can anyone carry a camel onto the roof?”

“That’s enough,” said Ibn Khafif. “Ahmad the Younger!”

“Here I am,” said Ahmad the Younger.

“Carry that camel onto the roof,” ordered Ibn Khafif.

Ahmad the Younger rolled up his sleeves and ran out of the house. Putting his two hands under the camel’s belly, he took a deep breath and heaved with all his might, but he couldn’t budge the beast. So he tried again and failed again.

“That’s enough,” said Ibn Khafif. “Now we all know who is the better of the two.”

Now what would we do if the Master told us to go back home and lift a camel onto our roof? Some of us might say, “Great! That’s got to be easier than meditating – than controlling our own mind.” And this just might be true.

But what if it wasn’t about getting a camel on the roof? What if it was about getting strong and obedient for an arduous spiritual journey? What if our failures to lift the camel were exactly what we needed to successfully move us to the next stage of our spiritual development?

What if our failures in meditation aren’t what they seem? When athletes want to strengthen their muscles, a good fitness trainer will coach them on what’s called, ‘working to failure’. This means they lift a weight that is heavy enough such that after a few repetitions

they can't lift it anymore. That's the critical time. If the athletes stop at that point – if they give up then – they will not be very effective at building muscle. But if they struggle even for a few seconds in the face of failure, this effort sends a powerful signal to their brain telling it to build more muscle.

It is this very struggle while they are failing that is the real key to rapid progress in muscle building. The repetitions before the failure just serve to prepare for those few moments of struggle that produce the most effective growth of new muscle. It's these last few moments of struggle that reveal the athletes' depth of commitment to their training. Who knows, maybe it's those moments of struggle in the face of failure during our meditation practice that are most helpful in our spiritual development.

Of course the struggle in meditation is of a different nature from the struggle of weight lifting. Weight lifting is pure force of will, whereas in meditation, force of will takes us only to the doorstep. Then we have to let go. Baba Ji says we have to sit down, say the names and let go. The first two of these take force of will at times. It often takes force of will simply to sit down – to get out of bed when we just want to sleep in. It takes force of will to go to bed early, not to overeat and not to let ourselves get pulled into the world so much that we move away from our meditation. It takes force of will to repeat the names when our mind wants to do anything but that.

But the third step, letting go, is very different. We have to let go even of our force of will at that point. It's then that our meditation becomes, as Baba Ji has described it, like walking on the beach with the wind behind us.

Robert Fritz, author of *The Path of Least Resistance*, gives us another perspective on failure. He tells of his own experience as a music student:

*When I first attended the Boston Conservatory of Music, the clarinetist Attilio Poto was one of my teachers. The first lesson he assigned me was a bit more difficult than I was technically ready for. After a week of diligent practice I still couldn't play it well. When I went for my second lesson, I expected Mr. Poto would have me spend at least another week practising the same exercise. Instead, he assigned the next exercise in the book, which was even more difficult than the one with which I had struggled for the past week.*

*I spent the week attempting to play the new exercise, and when the time came for my lesson, I could not play it very well. I suggested to Mr. Poto that it was time to perfect my technique by focusing on that exercise for another week. Mr. Poto only smiled as he turned the page to the next, and more difficult, exercise in the book.*

*For three more weeks I was assigned progressively more difficult exercises to play, each of which I was unable to play well after a week of practice.*

*At the sixth lesson Mr. Poto turned back to the very first exercise he had assigned me—my exercise for the first week—and asked me to play it. Although I had not even looked at that exercise for the past five weeks, I was able to play it well. He then turned to the second week's exercise and, again, I was able to play it well.*

*Had I spent six weeks attempting to perfect those first two exercises, I would not have been able to play them as well as I did that day.*

This story offers us a valuable perspective, both on our lives and on our meditation practice. How many times have we felt that life has

thrown us more than we can handle? We struggled and still felt like a failure. Maybe our struggles in the face of those failures were part of a larger learning pattern, helping us in the long run more than if the circumstances hadn't been so overwhelming.

And in our meditation practice, how many times have we felt that we just couldn't do it? What did we do when we felt that way? Did we struggle in the face of failure? Or did we give up? The Master has told us that if something is easy, anybody can do it, that it is a mature person who in the midst of adversity makes a success out of it.

So let's embrace our daily 'failures' with perspective and acceptance and continue to struggle valiantly. In *Spiritual Gems* Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us:

*We are not justified in saying that we cannot do it, or that it is impossible, or that it is useless. Here is a worthy pursuit for the application of our critical and other faculties.*

There is no more worthy struggle than this to dedicate our lives to.

We have no idea how much effort our spiritual journey will take. But the rewards are unimaginable. As Great Master continues, "Those of you who remain faithful and go on working to the best of your ability must one day realize how great is the work you have done and how great is the reward which awaits you." In answering a questioner who talked about how hard the path can be, Maharaj Charan Singh makes what may be one of the greatest understatements of all time. He answers very simply: "It's a constant struggle with the mind ... but it's worth it." (*Die to Live*).

It will certainly be worth the effort when we realize the ultimate rewards of everlasting peace, love and bliss that await us. But even the short-term rewards are worth the effort – the satisfaction of

completing a good spiritual workout, the knowing deep inside that we are doing the right thing, the best thing for our eternal future, the feeling, however subtle, that we are with him, our one Friend – even if it is in the silence and darkness – the satisfaction that we are doing the one thing he has asked us to do, just to show our love for him.

The Great Master says it this way:

*There is nothing equal to this way, and it gives more real joy and satisfaction than all else in the world. But to get that you have to go inside. It cannot be realized outside. All the world is seeking it in books, holy places, and association with people, but it has to be found inside. That is gained by steadfast meditation and holding your attention in the eye focus, without wavering. When you learn to do this, the treasure, which is yours already, will come into conscious possession, and you will realize more than you can dream of. Let nothing stop or hinder you. Let no earthly obstacles stand in your way of going inside. Set your mind steadfastly upon that and make all else subordinate to that, and other things will melt away and leave you free.*

*Spiritual Gems*



# One

In *The Path*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes, “While a Saint is alive, we listen to his words, but we do not heed them.” How sad and true this has proven to be for some of us. Wrapped up in the Master’s love and light, we disciples sometimes miss the glory of the Master’s teachings. Often we realize, years later, that the Master’s words apply to us and not to someone else. But when a Master speaks of our ritualistic religious tendencies, he speaks literally not metaphorically. When he points to the spiritual root of life, his words are true and not merely symbolic or moralistic. We disciples may be convinced as our Master speaks that we understand him, but looking back at our lives, we may now see that many of our working concepts, attitudes, and actions do not conform to his message, despite our many efforts.

Hazur continues:

*As soon as he leaves the world, we turn to rites and rituals and thus completely forget his real teachings. We begin once again to reduce his lofty teachings and the truth of his experience into creeds and sects, thereby sowing the seeds of discord and dissension. We do this, actually, for selfish reasons and justify it in the name of national honour or the prestige of traditional religion.*

Seemingly, Hazur is speaking to the broadest social context where politicians and priests stir up strife by promoting fear and manipulating religious ideas for personal advantage. But in subtle ways his portrait of conflict is a warning to us as well. Narrow religions start with us, the followers of a mystic saint. We begin to judge who is worthy and unworthy, what mores and rules should define our small

community, and our cultural bias dictates the creed we support in the otherwise open-ended world of mysticism. We need to reflect.

What are his real teachings? Is the Master speaking about worshipping the infinite Lord or success in life? Is he speaking about oneness or duality? Does he ever insist on a conservative or liberal posture? Does he advocate monarchy or democracy, hierarchy or brotherhood? What is his management theory and cultural ideology? Does the Master divide followers into categories of sinner and redeemed, saved and unsaved, good and bad, or create special categories of more talented and favoured followers, or divide families into converted or not converted? We listeners may have a bias on one side or another of these issues, but does the Satguru? Never. The same message of love, compassion and mercy is given to everyone.

After his cautionary note, Hazur makes his case for oneness and unity instead of duality by saying, “Our soul is of the essence of the Lord. We are a drop of that vast ocean of divinity, a ray of that mighty sun.” The Lord, he says, is our essence. Soul has emerged from the Lord and is a particle of him. This means that ultimately our self, our essential nature – our very identity – comes from the Lord, not from our body and life circumstances. Real consciousness in life comes from ascendancy of the soul, not the reverse.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

*By praying to him and merging in him one shares in his powers.  
But he who considers him to be a separate being cannot enjoy  
this wonderful pleasure and the full benefits of merging in him.*

*Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. III*

No words could better communicate the benefit of spiritual realization. Prayer, as conceived here, is seen as a form of intimate communion. The Lord is the author of all identity and consciousness. The sooner it dawns on us that we have no fundamental identity or existence or self that is separate from the Lord, the sooner we can appreciate everything the Lord is doing. We are already linked, though we may not understand or realize it. If we are conceiving the spiritual path as a journey from material to spiritual with a private benefit to us, we are doomed to failure. Expressed differently, if we think that our bodily identity is who we are and that it will somehow persist after death, we are considering ourselves as fundamentally separate and must by definition fail once again.

All dualism is a fiction in the sense that dualism is not permanent, but only with God-realization do we gain this awareness. Nearly all words and concepts have a subject and object and are based on dualism. Thus our standard notions of spirituality and who we are, do not stand up to simple analysis and are largely fictional. The only way forward is merging. Mysticism and love destroy dualism and with it every dictate of creed and cultural belief. With the Lord paramount in our hearts, delusional ideas derived from race, class, gender or personality fade away.

Frankly, achieving this perspective takes maturity because we have to be able to sense the Lord's purpose in the middle of all the contradictions, passions, and apparent suffering in life. We need human understanding that stems from seeing life from a stable perspective beyond words and thoughts. Meditation is the way to achieve this. Through a life of meditation we can gain the maturity that comes from facing our own mortality and realizing that even in the scale of outer things we are insignificant.

After the death of our identification with the limited self, we realize that everything happens as the Lord wants it to happen and according to ultimate wisdom. What he made is good, the natural order, the moral order, the spiritual order, law and compassion, all. What we do with it is only good in so far as we choose to act in support of his will and wisdom. Our only virtue comes from developing a truly intimate relationship with him. He has virtue and identity that he generously shares; we have nothing. We have to go deep into meditation to understand this.

Spiritual maturity means we habitually place our experience in a wider context, as part of something bigger. Only an all-pervasive friend can help us cross the limited boundary of identity and circumstance. He is always with us, everywhere and in every state. We are connected. From this vantage point, the sense that he knows everything about us is welcome and obvious. The Lord has a handle on things. Our worry is less. We begin to trust others to do what they must do. We all stand before the same Lord. We cease imposing religious superstition on ourselves and fear-based prescriptions on others. We understand that everyone is growing and developing.

Great Master affirms in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, “Those who think that the Lord is on high and directs the affairs of the world from there seldom receive a response to their prayers.” Dualism reinforces ego, the sense that we are a separate independent self, vulnerable and alone, and that this is my body, my car, my house, my children, my art, my clan, my class, my education, my country, and my world. With dualistic thinking, our creed must bolster our position against those seemingly different from ourselves. However, we as disciples of a loving Master can’t hide behind the notion that the Lord is remote, inaccessible or apart. The Master is here. He is in human form. He embraces us. He gives proof of our unlimited human

potential – that the Lord is not chained in heaven, and man is not confined to the earth.

Great Master writes in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, “The Lord is with you and within you and not far away from you. The Lord is inside you. He is none other than the spirit of your soul.” Nothing could be more straightforward. Meditation is the process of inner reflection and travel that destroys the subject-object delusions embedded in language and thought. From this perspective of unity, we can resolve every problem that we seem to possess. Our cultural codes too often distort our understanding of other people and circumstances. We feel responsible when we are not. We don’t even see obvious virtue in others when we think ourselves separate.

Let’s reflect on the unambiguous words left to us by the Masters. If we act on them with focus and conviction, we will look everywhere but find no fear and no enemies and nothing wrong, only fulfilment of every hope – and the Lord instrumental in everyone:

*Meditation helps us to see how there is oneness between everything and everybody in the creation – that, externally and internally, all is Shabd. We see how everything is interconnected. As we bring this realization to all aspects of our daily life, we demolish the walls we have built that separate our spiritual life from our daily life. The fracture that is experienced by so many people in the wholeness of their being is gradually healed.*

*Living Meditation*



# Come

*Come, my beloved Master, please come!  
Many days have passed in eager anticipation –  
please bring forth bliss and blessings.  
With my eyelashes I want to sweep the path you walk on;  
my eyes eagerly wait for you –  
please set your feet on the path.  
Night and day I await your arrival;  
please turn your gaze towards me.  
With heartfelt zeal I decorate my courtyard,  
trying to imagine how I would worship you –  
I sacrifice my body and mind to you –  
I want to circle around you  
and bow my head at your feet –  
I would be content to simply listen to your words.  
I am just a slave at your feet, O Master Sukdev!  
I want to be completely absorbed in your darsshan*

*Sant Charandas*



# Reveal, Release and Liberate

In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh shares with us the purpose of the saints:

*Saints come to reveal to us the way to achieve God-realization. They come to release us from the eternal bondage of birth and death. They come on a mission of mercy to cut away our chains and to grant us true liberation.*

Saints don't waste anything while in human bodies – not energy, not food, not time and definitely not words. Hazur says the saints reveal, release and liberate.

When something is revealed, there is a sense of mystery involved. Something is being made known that was either forgotten or unknown. Thus, saints reveal or make known to us something that has been hidden or forgotten. Our true home was, is and forever will be Sach Khand, but we have forgotten that home. We have become so entangled in the creation that we have forgotten our true identity and have forgotten we were ever merged into the Creator. This path of merging back into the Shabd is being unveiled for us. The clues to solve the mystery of God-realization are given to each disciple at initiation, and “true liberation” then becomes each disciple's personal revelation.

Hazur uses the words release and liberate. Elsewhere in *Spiritual Discourses*, he says that saints come to “release us from all attachments to this transitory world ... to liberate us from the cycle of birth and rebirth.” If something is already free it does not need to be released, so here he is reminding us that our souls are not free; our true selves are

in fact captives in this creation. The saints come to release us from the bonds that hold us to this creation. They come to help us untangle the karmic knots we have tied in past lives. It is not enough to release the soul temporarily. Through their loving compassion and their devotion to the Lord and the seva they are performing for the Lord, the saints devote their lives to liberating each designated soul, freeing that soul from ever having to return to this creation.

This detachment from the world is difficult. Some of us are stubbornly attached to the creation and find its beauty captivating. A questioner once asked Maharaj Charan Singh, “Why do saints and mystics always seem to emphasize the darkness and ugliness of the world rather than the beauty?” To most of us that is not the case, we see the saints as if on a balance beam juggling the darkness and the light, well aware that this world is not our real home. The saints in fact tell us to enjoy the creation but not to get attached to it. Hazur enjoyed nature and spent hours photographing roses, mountains, scenery, and clearly appreciating all of it. Nevertheless, he responded to the questioner with:

*What is the one thing which belongs to you? The Father. Why don't you try to make him your own? When you get peace within, you'll get peace outside. That is their approach. They know the reality. It's not that they don't see beauty in this world or that they only try to explain the back side of the picture. But they also have to show us the back side of the picture. These faces are so beautiful, but from the back, those pictures are nails and cardboard. The saints know both sides of the world. They know that peace within, and they know that misery within. They know the reality.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

In this letter Hazur reminds us that this world is an illusion. Until we experience this place as unreal, until we realize it is a prison for us, we will continue believing this place of constant change and transition is our home. The saints come to free us from ourselves, from our illusions, and from the prison we have created for ourselves here in this world. They have come to help us extricate ourselves from our own karmas and attachments. Maharaj Ji then says in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I:

*The world is a vast prison house. It is a tight net in which we are caught. It is a dangerous ocean. It is an impregnable fort. There is only one exit from it. The secret of this exit – the only way of escape – is, however, known to the saints alone. It is only when they apply the key that the gate opens. The mind then turns toward Nam Bhakti. Devotion to the Lord becomes practicable. The spirit ascends to the higher realms and meets her Lord face to face.*

This world, with all its varied entrapments for the soul, is very much the prison house, and Maharaj Ji makes it clear that only the saints know the way out – know the way to escape from the prison. We might well ask how do the saints know the way out? We have read and been told that a perfect saint is one with the Creator. We have also heard the Master consistently say that we cannot know if a saint is a perfect saint until we experience his Radiant Form within. It seems like a “Catch 22” – we won’t know for sure until we experience him within, and we cannot experience him within unless we do the prescribed meditation and follow the tenets of the path. Despite all our quandaries and conjectures, despite our moments of doubt and our frustration, despite our occasional rebellion, most of us find

ourselves, or will find ourselves, following the four tenets: leading a lacto-vegetarian life, abstaining from drugs, alcohol and tobacco, leading clean, moral, and healthy lives, and doing the required two and one half hours of meditation each day. As one of our dear satsangis used to say: “What if you get to the end of your life and this God-realization isn’t to be had, will you regret the life you led?” Even if God-realization is a myth, we would have led good lives, we would have worked toward something noble. If in fact the promise from the saints is true, that God-realization is to be ours, then all our effort will be rewarded with truth, with real love.

The saints tell us that God-realization is real – they share with us that they have the key to unlock our prison cell, and they come to us so full of love that we cannot resist them and their message. In the next paragraph of *Spiritual Discourses*, Hazur quotes Soami Ji:

*O soul, if you wish to meet your Beloved; if you wish to enjoy your pristine glory; if you wish to enjoy ineffable bliss and eternal happiness; if you wish to transcend the plane of sorrow and suffering give up your association with the mind and awaken from your long slumber.*

This is such a promise! This makes it sound as if it is our birthright and Baba Ji has said as much! If we want to enjoy the company of the Divine and our own pristine glory, it seems that this pristine self, which is already our true identity, is ours when we awaken from the dream. If we want to have the happily-ever-after life that seems to be waiting for us, then we have to do whatever it takes to set the alarm and wake up from this illusion. The saints come to remind us to do the spiritual work so we don’t have to die again and again. Hafiz says:

*But would not a good father  
Instruct all his heirs  
Toward that path that will someday  
Deeply satisfy?  
This world is a treacherous place  
And will surely slay and drown the lazy.  
The only life raft here is love  
And the Name.  
Say it brother.*

*The Gift: Poems by Hafiz, rendered by Daniel Ladinsky*

We cannot help but enjoy the thought that we are the heirs of a spiritual treasure. We cannot help but be awakened to the truth that if we are spiritually lazy, we will be drowned in the karmic ocean due to our lack of spiritual effort. We cannot help but see salvation in climbing into the life raft that our Master has given us in the form of meditation. In this poem, Hafiz is reminding us that we always have our simran to repeat, we always have the five holy names to remind us of our Beloved. The more simran we do, the more we turn our focus on him, the closer we get to claiming our birthright as spiritual beings.

The Master has his role in this ongoing journey – he reveals and releases, or liberates us from this world of transmigrating souls. He draws us to him like a magnet and infuses us with this love. He teaches us to meditate and to turn our attention inward.

In turn, we have our role as well. We are told that we must put in our sincere effort of meditation. We are told that if we sit down and let go, he will take care of the rest. We are reassured that he is there waiting to help us whenever we are willing to let go of the world and turn toward him. We are asked to remember him as we go through our day by doing simran when we can and by doing our meditation

without fail with as much devotion as we can muster. Baba Ji keeps infusing us with positivity, with hope and with the needed conviction that we can do our part, we have the capability and the capacity to succeed. And he reminds us that there are no losers in Sant Mat – we are all winners.

Who is the Master? He is the One who is waking us up and taking us up! He reveals, releases and liberates!



*One does not become a satsangi simply by being initiated. One must mould his life in accordance with the principles of satsang. Every thought, speech and action must conform to them. Actions speak louder than words. Thoughts are even more potent. A satsangi's daily conduct must bear the hallmark of excellence and must reveal that he is the follower of a true Master.*

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Science of the Soul*

# Positive Approach

Maharaj Charan Singh encourages us to remain strong and positive on the path.

*Begging is not for worldly boons. Begging is for the Lord's grace, and meditation itself is begging. By meditation we are begging at his door for admission. We are asking just to become one with the Father. We are begging for his forgiveness, to forgive what stands between us and the Father... Instead of just making repeated prayers, "O Lord, give me grace, help me give time to meditation," why not just sit in meditation? Why not just give time to meditation? Instead of asking for his grace, attend to meditation – that itself is grace. Instead of asking him to open your inner vision, attend to meditation, which will automatically open your inner vision. Asking doesn't change the situation. There's a positive step, which is attending to meditation. Otherwise, we are all beggars at his door.*

He continues by referring to the lines in a Paltu poem "In the game of love I cannot lose. If I win I get you, and if I lose you get me."

*If I win, naturally I'll be in your lap. If, in my struggle, I lose, you will pull me to your level. So there are no failures if I am doing my best.... So even if we lose in this battle of love, we win.*

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



## Book Review



### **All Love Flows to the Self: Eternal Stories from the Upanishads**

BY KUMUDA REDDY, THOMAS EGENES, AND LINDA EGENES

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*All Love Flows to the Self* presents twelve stories from the Upanishads, retold in simple, modern language. Each story ends with a quote from the Upanishads related to the theme of the story, shown in the original script, in transliterated script, and in English. This attractive book offers a particularly accessible introduction to some of the profound wisdom in these revered ancient texts.

Many of the stories show a seeker after truth receiving guidance from a wise teacher. In some stories it is a young boy who goes to study with a guru at his forest retreat; in others it is a deity learning from another deity; in many of the stories it is a son learning from his father.

Interestingly, while most father-son stories depict a wise father and a respectful son, the story of Nachiketa from the Katha Upanishad is quite the opposite. Although Nachiketa was only a young boy, when he saw his father selecting his weakest and sickliest cows as a gift for some holy men, he understood that his father had acted ungenerously. He asked, “To whom will you give me?” Enraged at being criticized, his father burst out, “Unto Yama [the Lord of Death] I give you!” Though the father tried to take back his curse, the words could not be unsaid, and Nachiketa travelled south to the land of Yama to honour his father’s words.

When Nachiketa reached the doorstep of Yama, the dread Lord of Death was away, and the boy waited for three days. Finally Yama arrived riding a water buffalo and looking very fierce. But when he realized the boy had been sitting on his doorstep for three days with no food or drink, he remembered the saying “Honour the guest as God.” Chagrined, he told the boy he was free to leave the land of death unharmed and even offered him three boons. The first boon Nachiketa requested was that his father’s

anger be appeased. For his second boon he asked the way to reach heaven, and for his third, to understand the nature of immortality. He inquires, “If I gain immortality, will I still be me after I die?” Yama explained that the body is like a chariot, with the senses as horses, the intellect as the charioteer, and the Self as the one who rides in the back. In this book Atma is translated as the Self, and is understood not only as the individual consciousness but also as the universal Being towards which all love flows. Yama explained:

*If a person does not know the Self, then his mind is restless, like uncontrolled reins. The horses dash this way and that, dragging the whole chariot in every direction. Such a person never reaches the goal of life. But those who know the Self have even minds. They reach their home.*

He further explained:

*When you seek life eternal, you must turn your attention inward. There you will find the Self. The innermost Self resides in the center of the heart like a flame without smoke. It is the same today and will be the same tomorrow. It grants all desires. The Self is Brahman. It is the immortal. You will know the Self when your senses are still, your mind is at peace, and your heart is pure.*

The need to know the Self is a recurring theme throughout these stories. From the Chhandogya Upanishad, for example, there is the story of Satyakama who wanted to become a knower of Brahman. He went to a guru who told him that the first step was to know his Self. The guru then surprised his student by sending him off to a distant pasture to care for a herd of weak and sickly cows. Over a period of years, Satyakama dutifully cared for the cows. He also meditated, and his mind became quiet “like a vast ocean of silence.” The cows gradually became healthy and multiplied under his tender care, and when their number reached a thousand, a ‘wise bull’ – the head of the herd – spoke to Satyakama about the nature of Brahman. The bull then sent him to learn from a swan, a bird, and the spirit of fire. Each of them revealed in one way or another the secret that

Brahman is intimately present everywhere and in all things. It is only after all of these encounters with nature that Satyakama's guru explained: "Brahman is realized by knowing the Self, your true nature. Then you realize that you are everywhere – you are endless. And you are radiant. This is the supreme knowledge, Brahma Vidya."

Of all the human virtues lauded in these stories, perhaps humility and respect for all creatures are most important. In one story, Janashruti, a great king who was famous for his unbounded generosity and kindness toward all his subjects, had to learn the lesson of humility. The king's only fault was that he prided himself on these very virtues. Everywhere he looked he saw the results of his generosity in the happy and prosperous state of his grateful subjects. He was quite sure he must be the wisest king ever. The beginning of transformative wisdom for the king came when he overheard two geese telling each other that he was a fool compared with Raikva, a poor cart driver. The king sent ministers to search for this unknown Raikva. They finally found him sitting under his bullock cart amidst the noise and bustle of a busy marketplace in ragged, dusty clothes.

*Even though he looked like a poor man, his large serene eyes and peaceful face created a feeling of silence amidst the clatter of the market. A radiant light shone all around him. He seemed to be floating in sweet, simple happiness.*

The king went to the marketplace in a palanquin followed by a parade of elephants, and grandly presented a gift of 600 cows, a gold necklace, and a chariot to the poor cart driver. "But Raikva did not even look at them. He looked straight at the proud king. 'I don't want your gifts,' he said gently. 'Please take them and leave.'"

One story seems to reflect the dual nature of human consciousness, in which one aspect is satisfied by and engrossed in material existence, while another aspect longs and searches for a higher truth. It begins: "High in the starry heavens Prajapati, the protector of life, was teaching about the nature of Atma, the Self.... Prajapati's words were overheard by both the shining devas (the positive powers of nature) and the Asuras (the negative powers)." The devas and asuras both wished to know more about the nature of Atma, so the devas sent the god Indra to study with Prajapati,

and the asuras sent Virochana. Prajapati's initial teaching to Indra and Virochana implied that Atma is the body. Virochana went back to the asuras and told them, "The body is Atma. If the body is satisfied, then we will obtain all our desires." The asuras were pleased with this teaching. Indra, on the other hand, was dissatisfied and kept pressing Prajapati for ever deeper truth about Atma. Ultimately he learned that: "When the Self knows its own nature, it shines within itself. This is the highest light. This is Atma. When the Self knows its own nature, it laughs and plays and rejoices. The Self is pure happiness. The Self is immortal."

Kumuda Reddy and Thomas and Linda Egenes, who collaborated on selecting and composing these stories, are all disciples of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and practitioners of Transcendental Meditation. In their understanding, Vedic literature expresses "the fundamental structures of Natural Law at the basis of the universe.... The Upanishads especially focus on the ultimate reality of life." They claim that a clear connection exists between the 'fundamental structures of Natural Law' expressed in Vedic literature and human consciousness and physiology.

*With this understanding, we appreciate that the full meaning of the Upanishads is not found in books. Rather, the Upanishads are structures of our own intelligence, our own consciousness, our own Self – Atma – and can be directly experienced in the simplest state of our own awareness, pure consciousness.... This discovery shows that every one of us is Veda; everyone has the total intelligence of Natural Law and its infinite organizing power within their own mind and body.*

The authors stress, however, the importance of meditation practice to experience the "beautiful, evolutionary qualities of consciousness expressed by the Upanishads." From "the highest level of human experience" towards which the Upanishads point, "one flows in universal love, nourishing everyone and everything." In that state "everyone and everything is as near and dear to us as our own Self."



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

