

Spiritual Link



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Yours Affectionately

All pleasure, pain, poverty and disease are parts of our life due to our past actions. Disease, poverty and pain are for our own good. They turn our face to the Lord and create humility, meekness and devotion in us. They are essential parts of the economy of creation and are as necessary as health, wealth and pleasure.

Even though disease and pain come as a result of our past karmas, we should try to get rid of them. For one thing, the coming of the doctor gives some solace and satisfaction to the patient's mind as well as to the near and dear ones who feel concerned about the patient. For another, sometimes the pain and suffering may be due to a mistake on our part, which can be easily remedied.

As to recovering from disease through prayer, this occurs only rarely, and when it does, one's faith plays a great part in it. The illness disappears only when that particular karma is finished. A satsangi should look upon pain as pleasure. This may at first seem a little difficult, but with a little effort this attitude can be acquired.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*



Remember that all of us have to undergo our destiny, which is the result of our own karmas of the past life. Let us cheerfully face life with indifference to pleasure and pain, and with utmost faith in the Master.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

One Moment

The problems lie in our mind, in the way we think, not in the things themselves. Jesus used to tell his disciples to stop asking: What will we wear? What will we eat? He advised them to observe how the flowers and the birds live in the moment and how all their needs are taken care of. He would say: Ask yourselves how anxious thought can add even the slightest measure to your life! All experts on spirituality have said the same: All we have is this moment.

Living Meditation

One day when the Buddha sat to give his discourse, he raised a flower, held it there for a moment and then left. He did not utter a single word. This became one of his most famous speeches. Only one among the thousands gathered there that day understood the real meaning of his gesture and became enlightened.

The Buddha's silent speech was to teach us that all we have is the present moment. We are all alive at this moment, but the question we have to ask ourselves is, are we also awake? Are we fully present?

Living in the present moment is one of the greatest disciplines. It is an awareness, a habit, that needs to be developed if we want to live life with joy and ease. For a spiritual practitioner, it is one of the most powerful practices.

The truth about time

Our biggest challenge on this spiritual journey is to disassociate ourselves from our own mind. To maintain its own identity the mind needs to function, and it does so by feeding on time. The mind is inseparable from time. What is time?

Time is an illusion which we dwell upon day in and day out. It is the constant change that keeps the entire creation busy under the spell of illusion. Time is meant to serve a specific purpose in our lives: the past is meant to be learned from, and the present helps us create a better future.

But we misuse time. When we think too much about the past we face emotions of guilt, regret and sorrow, while anticipation of the future creates fear, anxiety and worry. When change and impermanence is the law of this land, why are we trying so hard to obtain security? John Lennon of the Beatles once said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." A basic financial or educational plan is necessary; we cannot live in chaos. But obsessive planning tends to make our lives miserable. Our past mistakes are life experiences; they are meant to instruct us. They are part of our evolution, meant to push us forward in our journey towards self-realization. They contribute to our wisdom.

When we let our mind feed off the past and future, we are clearly encouraging the habit of compulsive thinking. This habit strengthens our ego. Worrying, judging, analyzing, building mental projections and expectations are forms of mental chatter which have no reality. The ego always finds something missing in our lives. It finds the need to rectify, amplify and complicate our lives. It is never satisfied. The ravenous hunger of the ego presents itself to us in the form of desires.

These very desires force us to act and thus we write our own destiny and inevitably create karma.

The importance of this moment

Rinzai, a Zen master, would often raise his finger and ask his disciples, “What at this moment is lacking?” It was to root their attention deeply in the ‘now’. In the ‘now’, the ego has nothing to feed upon. If at this moment there is no thought about the past or the future and we are completely absorbed in what is happening at this moment, then we are deflating the importance of the ego.

Indulging our ego has left us with deep grooves and impressions on our minds. We have carried these imprints for endless lifetimes. These impressions have shaped our present mindset and will continue to influence our future unless we consciously change the pattern. It is not easy, but definitely not impossible either.

The good news though is what writer James Allen shares with us in his book *As a Man Thinketh*:

It matters not that by the unfailing law there are past thoughts and acts to work out and to atone for. By the same law, we are setting in motion, during every moment of our life, fresh thoughts and acts, and we have the power to make them good or ill.

Now, at this moment, we have the power to choose. We create our own present and future by what we give attention to today.

Meditation and simran are great tools to help awaken our awareness of the present moment. Our entire life has been given to us as an opportunity to meditate. It is a chance to change our future.

So the choice is ours. Should we allow the mind to get fixated on our problems, or do simran and remember the Master instead?

When our attention is focused on simran, we are creating neither bad thoughts nor good ones. Consequently, we neither add to our good or bad karma. If we are with our simran it is hard to fall into the trap of the mind. We can start with a forceful round of simran every time our mind drags us into a thought of the past or future. Let's not think about the thought, rather just bring the mind back to simran every time it meanders. This exercise has immense benefits: we become more focused – when we are concentrated at every task, we are more productive and with every round of simran we are adding to our spiritual treasure.

When you are fully engaged in what you are doing, your mind doesn't wander. You enjoy life. And you are happier and more effective. You are intent only on what is happening at that moment. And that focus and concentration leads to your success.

Spencer Johnson, *The Present*

Maharaj Charan Singh also explains to us:

Our mind is never still and is always thinking about something. It is always thinking about worldly faces, worldly objects, and it is never still. So if we want to forget those things, we have to direct the mind into a different channel. In order to do that, we should repeat the name of the Lord while moving about or doing our work. There are two things that we are usually thinking about. Mostly we are unhappy thinking about what has been our past. We generally think

about that and have a sense of guilt about it, and then we are sorry for what we have done and are always worrying and repenting, or feeling sorry for ourselves and trying to justify our actions. Secondly, we are always bothered about our future and that is always making us frustrated and unhappy. If you keep your mind constantly in simran, you will not have this sense of guilt or frustration or unhappiness; and, when you sit for your meditation period, because you have not allowed your thoughts to be scattered out into the world, you will easily be able to withdraw your attention back up to the eye centre and will be in touch with the sound.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

To live in the moment can be beautifully summarized as: “hands to work and mind in God”. This is a recipe for success.

The present moment is a gift. We owe it to ourselves to be present for it. Why waste our precious moments being negative, sad, emotional or confused? By living in the present moment we are renouncing all our worry and concern. It is a gesture of faith and trust in the goodness of the Lord – even if it is only for a moment.



Something to Think About

The company and friendship of worldly people is transitory and evanescent. Some leave us when we face difficulties, while others desert us in the end. But the Master is the true protector and helper of the disciple. He is always with him at the time of need or difficulty. He does not leave him alone at the time of death or even later.

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



Shah Farindu was asked how he supervised his servants. He replied, “By politeness and forbearance.” He was then asked how he solved his difficulties. He replied, “By leniency and kindness.”

However serious the difficulty, use politeness, sweetness and melody. It can succeed better than use of the sword or violence. The wound inflicted by a sword heals in course of time, but that caused by a sharp word becomes fresh every time you remember the words. It is, therefore, necessary to watch the speech so that no harsh words are used. Think before you speak. Even if there is no occasion, ask to be excused, as a matter of courtesy. It tastes sweet to take bitter pills from a cheerful person. It, however, becomes difficult to take even a sweet thing from the hands of a rude man.

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

Discrimination

In today's world, the word discrimination has negative connotations of prejudice and injustice. But the origin of the word is from the Latin *discriminat*, which means to be able to distinguish between two points of view.

From a young age, we teach our children the fundamental qualities of being a good human being – to love, to share, to be compassionate. We teach them to understand the difference between right and wrong, good and evil.

In much the same way, the saints explain to us a philosophy that helps condition our actions in this world. They tell us that the path back to God requires us to be good not just in word, but in thought and deed. As Christ said on the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

By giving us the principles by which to live our life – being vegetarian, abstaining from alcohol and mind-intoxicating substances, leading a moral life – the saints are in fact giving us the ability to discriminate between what is good and bad for our spiritual life so that we too might one day have a pure heart.

The ability to identify what is good for our soul allows us to see the bigger picture and comprehend the significance of our actions. It enables us to stay on the path our Master has outlined for us.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains the process to us clearly:

The very realization that we are committing a sin and are the victims of this weakness, that very realization is a great step toward getting rid of that weakness. If we don't realize we are committing

sins, we will never be able to get rid of those sins at all. But when you know you're committing a sin and try to help yourself, the Lord's grace will also be there to help you.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

Before coming to the path, many of us led lives which had a different compass and direction. We did not necessarily put others' feelings ahead of ours; we did not worry if we hurt others; we were perhaps comfortable in our semi-permanent state of benign agitation.

And so, in the beginning, we may feel that we are in fact regressing on the path. The realization of how much more we need to do to achieve the ideal creeps up on us. But we must not become despondent and give in to over-analysis. We are simply becoming more aware. Our ability to discriminate and reflect on our actions is increasing. Maharaj Charan Singh once explained:

If this room is filled with darkness, you do not know how much that darkness covers up; but if a little ray of light comes in, you know instantly that this whole room is filled with small particles. Similarly, when we do not know about or are not on the path, we are not aware of our bad points. Rather, we take pride in our habits. But when we are on the path, that ray of light comes within us. Then we analyze ourselves and find that we have many very bad habits. In fact, the bad habits were there before, but now we are in a position to analyze them, to realize them. So we feel a little guilty about them.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

As the rays of light continue to shine on our actions, we begin to mould our lives in accordance to the Master's teachings. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the balance of the scales in our lives starts to shift towards the good and away from the bad. The change is gradual, but over time we realize that we are more balanced, and we approach the vicissitudes of life with a new-found equanimity.

Why does this happen? The saints explain to us that there is a logical conclusion to everything we do in life. Once we are able to discriminate what is good for us as opposed to what is bad, we are better able to distinguish between the permanent and the illusory. We finally understand what the saints have been telling us for aeons – that the pleasures of this world are fleeting, and our attachments to our family, our wealth, our beauty are only temporary. In contrast, what remains real is the Master – his love for us and his teachings. With our ability to discriminate, we start to follow our Master's one and only command – to attend regularly and faithfully to our meditation.

Over time, through our Master's love and grace, we are propelled towards the quiet and peaceful solitude of our meditation. Hazur Maharaj Ji used to say, "From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come." This becomes possible when we take those first tentative steps on the path of discrimination – the path of being able to distinguish between right and wrong.



Following in His Footsteps

It is said that as Guru Nanak was getting older, there was increasing talk of successorship. Some of his followers even thought that maybe the guru in his old age was not in full possession of his senses.

One day Guru Nanak took three people who were all close to him to the edge of the forest. The sun was setting fast, and in the cold, twilight hour, they got lost. Guru Sahib asked the companions who were with him how to proceed.

His son, thinking the father has lost his mind, left the group to find his own way home.

Bhai Buddha used his intelligence to figure out which way was the quickest and safest to return home.

But Bhai Lehna, the third disciple, simply said, “Guru Sahib, whatever way you lead me must be the right way. I will just follow in your footsteps.”

So today, the son is known only as the son and nothing else. Bhai Buddha is known for his intelligence. And Bhai Lehna became Guru Angad, the successor of Guru Nanak, and is known as the true disciple.



*Surrender the end of the string of your will
into the hand of the Friend –
gain release from endless pain and sorrow.*

*This dear life, so filled with cravings,
now spend with the Friend,
rather than in negligence.*

Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine

Tomorrow

You won the lottery. A cheque for one million dollars was sent to you, but unfortunately you misplaced it. Every night before you go to bed, you tell yourself that tomorrow you will contact the lottery office, explain the situation and resolve it. A year has passed but that tomorrow has never come. So, every day you go to work, struggle to make ends meet while somewhere you have a million dollars lying around unclaimed. Does that sound like something you would do?

Probably not. And yet, when it comes to meditation, so many of us suffer from this disease called the tomorrow syndrome. We say, “Today, I have a meeting, I have emails to reply to, travel plans to make, so I’ll meditate later when I’m relaxed.” Before we know it, it is dinner time, it has gotten late and the body is too tired to even try. So, we go to bed promising to make good – tomorrow. But it never happens. We have the best intention, but the fact is, when that procrastination demon rears its ugly head, we are powerless. And the worst part? Give in often enough and it turns into a way of life.

Procrastination is defined as the act of wilfully delaying or not doing something that requires immediate attention. Practically speaking, one might understand delaying something which has no deadline. It might even be considered reasonable to put off trivial tasks that are of no consequence. But how does one explain postponing the primary purpose of human life for which we know there is limited time? Why would anyone deliberately delay something that the delay could lead to tragedy? Would a fireman delay going into a burning building to save a life?

Human beings are very clever about worldly affairs. People put so much time into planning every little thing to perfection. But when it comes to death, which can come at any time, what is our plan? As initiates on the path of Sant Mat, we often expect our Master to fulfil his part of the promise to liberate us from the painful cycle of physical life. But we have to ask ourselves, are we fulfilling our part of the promise to prepare for the journey that lies ahead?

Saints and mystics urge us to think and reflect. We say we will attend to our spiritual duties once we are settled in our lives, after we have children, when we have a nice home, when we have discharged our worldly responsibilities, when we have no more challenges to face.

Mystics assure us that there is no such thing as an ideal time – our circumstances are never going to be perfect. If this world is not perfect and we know that we are not perfect, then how can the environment and situation around us ever be perfect?

We always try to give the time we have no use for to the Father. Once we are rejected by society, by our children or friends, then we want to devote our time to the Father. When we become old and our senses don't go with us, our eyes refuse to cooperate, ears and limbs refuse to cooperate – then we want to worship the Father. We have to give the best time of our life to the Father.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Legacy of Love*

Unfavourable conditions come and go. It is the nature of human life. But even if right now is not the perfect time, it is all we have. And if we do not use it, we will lose it. Once we accept this basic

precept, we will realize that the perfect time, the ideal time, the best time of our life that we can give to the Father, is now.

Tomorrow is a dangerous word. It has been said that it is the devil's favourite word because if he can get someone to put off thinking about the Lord for one more day, he has them where he wants them. We use 'tomorrow' like the owner of a gas station that has a sign that says 'free gas tomorrow.' Every time we drive by, the sign puts us off for one more day, until one day we are stranded in the middle of the road with no gas. Do we really want to be in this kind of a predicament at the time of death?



*Today you say, 'I'll meditate tomorrow';
When tomorrow comes you say, 'Not now, next day.
Saying 'tomorrow, tomorrow',
This golden chance will pass away.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

The Real Prayer

An Explanation by Maharaj Charan Singh

Prayer is real love and devotion within us – the desire to go and merge back into the Father. That is prayer – yearning of the heart to go back to its own source, yearning of the soul to merge back into its own source. For that we don't need any mechanical words. No words are required. It is a prayer of the heart to the source. That is your prayer. What we think of as prayer is asking the Lord to fulfil our worldly desires. But that is not prayer. That is creating desires and asking the Lord to fulfil those desires, and then we have to come back to fulfil those desires.

I am not against prayer. Prayer gives you strength to face a situation, to go through that situation. It may not be able to change your destiny, but definitely you get strength to face that destiny. But real prayer is whatever time we give in his love, in his devotion, in his meditation. That's our prayer. We are knocking at his door so that it may be opened – that is, praying day and night to go back to him.

But we generally take prayer as asking the Lord to give us this and give us that. And if he does not, we become frustrated that our prayer has not been heard. You see, if a child is ill and he asks his mother to give him sweets, which are not good for his illness, the mother will not give that child something that will irritate his fever. Not because the mother doesn't love the child, but because she loves him so much that she cannot stand to see him suffer more. So she will give only a little so that the fever may leave him.

The mind creates desires, and then we want the Lord to fulfil them. We are the slave of the mind. We are not trying to explain to

our mind to remain in the will of the Lord; we are trying to explain to the Lord to remain in the will of the mind.

We are not devotees of the Lord; we are becoming devotees of the mind. And then if he doesn't come up to our expectations, we become frustrated with him. It is good to pray for worldly things if we know just what is best for us, but actually we don't know what is best for us. Sometimes we pray to him for four, five years to get something out of him, and then we may have to pray another twenty years to get rid of those things. Because we don't know what is best for us.

So the real prayer is submission to him. He knows what is best for us. That is what Christ has tried to explain in the chapter on prayer in Saint Matthew. He says: When he looks after even the fowl, even the birds who don't work, he gives them what they need – you think he is unmindful of your desires, your demands? He will give you what you require only if you have faith, if you can submit to him.

I'll give you a little example. If the maid in our house does her duty dutifully, lovingly, smilingly, we always want excuses to give her more and more. We are so happy with her devotion, her work and duty. If on the other hand, she doesn't work at all and she is always grumbling for more pay, we always find excuses to get rid of her.

Our real prayer is to do our duty, dutifully, lovingly to the Lord, whatever he expects us to do. That is our daily prayer. The teaching in which we live, the time which we give to meditation, the life we are trying to live – that is all prayer. And this prayer will lead us – not the prayer by the mind of creating desires and asking him to fulfil them day and night, then feeling frustrated if he doesn't do it and then forgetting about him. That is no prayer at all. The real prayer is submission to his will, facing our destiny cheerfully, and that we can only do if we live in meditation.

Meditation is nothing but a prayer. Meditation is nothing but knocking at the door of the Giver. Meditation is begging the Father for his grace, for his forgiveness for what stands between us and the Father.

You see, meditation alone can never clear all our karmic accounts. The attitude of the mind which we develop by meditation, that helps us a lot. That fills us with devotion and with love and makes us feel the separation from the Father, and we become restless without him. Our whole attitude towards the world is then changed. If you think that by mere meditation we can ever account for all the karmas we have been committing in previous lives, it is impossible. Nobody can do it. What to say of doing it in four lives, even in twenty lives we could not do it – that's how much dross we have collected. But when the Father sees our attitude, when he sees the devotion and love within us – which we can only develop by meditation, by living the Sant Mat way of life – that invokes his grace to forgive all that stands between us and the Father.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II



The real prayer is to take us back to him, that he should merge us back into him. That is real prayer.

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

The Time of Your Life

Time is probably one of the greatest assets everyone has. We all strive to be efficient and productive – to accomplish as much as possible in the least amount of time. And while we are exhausting ourselves doing everything our mind dictates, the saints remind us to stop and reflect upon what is truly worthy of our time.

Saints and mystics have an extensive scope of vision, which the ordinary man cannot fathom. They know the true value of human life, and the consequences of wasting our limited time on this earth. Tirelessly, they remind us that if we do not make the best use of this human form, we can be sent back into this creation.

But unless we make our way up, we cannot escape from births and deaths. We can be sent back. That is why we have got to make the best use of this form at this time.

After a fruit drops from a tree, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to put it back on the branch again. Similarly, if we lose this opportunity now, we may find it very difficult to get such an opportunity again.

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

It is for this reason that mystics caution us against wasting our time in futile pursuits. They remind us that accumulating wealth, running after fame and fortune, and spending lavishly on frivolous pleasures are a foolish way to live this precious life.

In every discourse, the present Master pleads with us to reflect and think deeply about how we spend our time in this world. Saints tell us to ask ourselves relevant and meaningful questions, such as: are we going to take anything with us – our money, possessions, family and friends? If not, then does it make sense to devote all our time to these things and hardly any to what is actually going to help us on the day of reckoning?

They explain to us that true happiness lies within. It is not in sensual pleasures or anywhere outside ourselves. No matter how happy our family life may be, how much social work we might do or how successful we are at our careers, we will never find lasting happiness in these things because what the soul constantly yearns for is its own source. And until that desire of the soul is satisfied, true happiness will never be ours.

Thus the saints challenge us to go within, and they explain that it is crucial to do this now, while we still have time, because once we have taken our last breath, it will be too late.

That is why Christ said, I can work in the day. When the night falls, nobody can work. ... Human birth, the human opportunity, is a day. After death we can't work; we can't find the way leading back to the Father.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol I

We can learn from the Masters how to make the most of our time. By their shining example, we can learn how to conduct our own lives. They know what is worthy of their time. While maintaining a balance between their personal lives and their spiritual duties, they teach their disciples to do the same.

Do not waste any time when you are free from official work. Not a minute of this time will be had again. There is ample time to do our spiritual work, and it has to be done. Nothing worldly will serve us at the final hour.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

The Masters are the perfect embodiment of how a human being should live his life. They are able to capitalize on their greatest asset of time, and use it to their advantage.

Whenever anyone pleads with the Master that he should take rest, he declines to do so saying: "The body will ultimately perish. Let us, therefore, do with it the utmost good that we can to others." Never does he care for food nor other physical needs. He never complains about his discomforts, sleeplessness and extensive touring.

With the Three Masters

It is vital for us to draw inspiration from this and think deeply about the direction of our life. Have we established our priorities? Are we making the most of this human life? Are we spending our precious time wisely?



The real devotees and lovers of the Father, when their mystic or Master is with them, do not waste their precious time in useless pursuits. They are always busy in attaching themselves to the Shabd and Nam within themselves.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Saint Matthew*

Paradox

We have become comfortable calling this earth our home, simply because the narrow century or so of our present human life will unravel itself here. Few of us have taken the pains to understand what our role is in the first place, and even less to realize our full potential.

It is popularly said, “Home is where the heart is.” Where is our heart then? Would we carelessly leave something as dear as our heart in a place that truly does not belong to us?

In the beginning there was only One, then there were two, and then three, then many, then thousands and lakhs, and finally there were countless beings. Now he who finds a perfect Satguru, who is one with the One, and is the form of that One, will succeed through his grace in extricating himself from the illusion of the many and reach his real home.

Soami Ji Maharaj, *Sar Bachan Prose*

The saints and mystics urge us to spend this vital human birth in search of our permanent home, the abode where our heart truly lies. A place where there is no duality, no pain or suffering, no falseness or deception, no lies or pretence. Where there is only Truth Unshakable. Irrefutable. Never changing. We may consider this place as distant as the most far-flung star orbiting in some dark recess of the universe, or closer to us than our very own breath. It all depends how deep and earnest our search is.

The mystics show us the method to tap into our hearts, to hear the music of the spheres, and lovingly woo us back. As human beings we are given the key to enter the majestic realm of our Father, the Creator, from whom we have been separated since the beginning of time. Birth after birth, we have allowed ourselves to be lost in this hall of mirrors, in this paradox of existence, taking this life simply at face value and fooling ourselves into believing that this is the end-all and be-all.

The saints come to this level of existence to make a connection with us so secure that it would never again be broken.

*Your Creator, the Lord of all creation,
has given you two gifts, sought after by all the creatures;
your heart, the capacity to love,
the light on your face,
the potential to be loved.*

Sheikh Abu-Said, *Nobody, Son of Nobody*, as rendered by Vraje Abramian

As expressed in the above lines, we are honoured to have a boon that is desperately sought after by those who roam this existence: the capacity to love and the potential to be loved. But how have we used this capacity? How have we taken advantage of the potential within us? Do we simply waste it in pursuits that will be of no permanent use to us? Why do we regard our spiritual practice as an encumbrance, a duty that has to be dealt with only to be pushed aside to tend to matters less important?

Maybe we have simply lost patience; reached the end of our tether because we have not made room for the glory and joy in our daily sitting. Our constant barrage of thoughts and mental assaults leave us short of spiritual space. Regrettably, we are unable to see how Master is preparing us.

It does not dawn upon us that each time we sit, each time we turn to him in the dark hours of the early morning, we are awash with the light of his love on our faces. If we were only aware of it! If we could only see his gentle guiding hand and trust him!

Wait constantly at this door, for the King may unexpectedly distinguish thee with His presence. The main thing is for thee to be present and nothing else; thou must be present – nothing else matters. If thou standest ready at the door, thou wilt be favoured by the King's presence.

Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Ilahi-Nama*, translated by John A Boyle

There is no end to his bounty. The King is waiting patiently to serve his banquet. The feast is being prepared, the organization is being expertly taken care of, and we, the guests, are nowhere to be found. Curled up cosy and warm in our sleep, we mortgage our precious present and lose one opportunity after another. We justify our absence with our hopeless complaints, our litany of excuses, and our habit-formed procrastination.

It could be a matter of months or just weeks before he distinguishes us with his presence! He will arrive. We have forced him to signal his arrival bearing thunder and lightning, as all along, our minds have refused to believe his words of reassurance. But his thunder and lightning do not make an announcement. They are to be heard by those that are ever ready, that expect nothing but yearn in the solitude and quiet of their hearts.

For those that doubt, that insist on tangible proof, the glory and bliss of the heavenly spheres will remain just as far away, just as paradoxical as some distant heaven shining in another universe.



Remembrance

Repeat the Name of God and forget Him not.

*Fulfil the purpose of your birth
by practising concentration.*

*Be steadfast in the remembrance of God,
Practise meditation with love
and sing the glory of God.*

The human body is the door to salvation.

Repeat the Name of God, the Creator of the universe.

*So long as a dreadful disease has not come,
So long as death has not consumed your body,
So long as the Sound has not been withdrawn,
Render service to the Lord.*

People remember not God while the opportunity exists.

When life is gone, none can remember.

So long as one lives, he sleeps; but later on, he repents.

The servant is engaged in the service of the Lord.

He alone succeeds who is wakeful.

For the devoted disciple of the Guru,

Darkness and delusion are dispelled.

He reverts not and is well set on the path.

Look thoughtfully and understand, O mind;

You shall not find such an opportunity again.

*Having come to the world,
it is up to you to win or lose.*

*I have explained this to you in so many ways,
again and again, says Dadu.*

Dadu, The Compassionate Mystic

Did You Know?

The purpose of reading these books is to learn about God and create love for Him in us. But God Himself is beyond the reach of books. He is the unwritten law of the universe; He is the unspoken language – the language of silence.

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



Your attention may remain focused for no more than a minute or two, or five or ten, or it may barely hear the Sound, but even then the news of your effort will reach right into Sach Khand, that you are offering a prayer.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*



While one is awake, the headquarters of the soul and mind is in the centre behind the eyes. Even a blind man, when addressed, feels a slight pressure on his eyes and says 'I am here'. While a person sleeps, the soul or consciousness functions in the throat, and while in deep sleep, it functions in the navel. We wish to enter a higher and better state and not a lower one. The path of the saints, therefore, starts from above the eyes (upward). The eye centre is the summit of the physical region.

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

The Master Answers

A selection of question and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Every day we find ourselves faced with different situations. Should we just accept them as part of our karmic debt from past lives? And should we pay that debt now?*

A: Well, sister, if you can know whether you have sown a seed, then you will be prepared to bear its fruit. But you do not know whether you are sowing a seed or whether you are going through what you have done in the past. You don't know at all. So do your best, thinking of every action as a sowing of a seed. Because at this stage you do not know – you cannot say whether you are sowing a seed or whether you have sown the seed in the past and are reaping the harvest now. So you do your best.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *When a body is dead, if we say some prayers so that the soul may hear it, and to help the soul, does the soul hear us?*

A: No, the soul does not hear our prayer. These prayers are said for the benefit of the bereaved ones. All that we do is to console those people whose relatives or friends have left them. Practically, we can do nothing for the departed soul. It has to answer for its own karma. All the ceremonies, prayers and things that we do after anybody dies are, in fact, to console the survivors and ourselves, and not that departed soul. We do not help the dead at all. His or her karma will take care of that. Generally when we pray for the dead, I think we are really praying for ourselves to be able to bear our loss and separation. We do not help the departed at all.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

Q: *Master, when we get to Par Brahm, are we alone with you or are there lots of other souls around?*

A: You have no association with anybody there. If you are conscious of karmas with others, you will not be there – you will not be able to go to that level of consciousness at all. You're concerned only with your Master, not with any other soul. And you are not attached to anybody. Concern is just here; attachment is just here. That is why we are not there. When we are there, we are not here. These attachments do not exist when we are there.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

Q: *Would you advise satsangis to continue family religious practices?*

A: We are part of society, we are part of a certain chain, and we don't want to look abnormal. If our family traditions demand our presence, say in a church or some family gathering, then what is the harm? Don't we go to the movies and to the theatre? We shouldn't be narrow-minded. If our duties and our family obligations demand it, there is no harm in doing it. As long as we are firm in our meditation, firm in the principles of Sant Mat on which we have to base our meditation, there's no harm in going anywhere. We must be very open-minded. We may even get something good from going to a church or temple. If it pleases other family members, what is the harm in accompanying them? We shouldn't be fanatical about these things. We must be open-minded and face the reality of life.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

Potential

There is a humorous cartoon of a unicorn sitting in a therapist's office where the therapist tells the unicorn, "You need to believe in yourself." It is funny because the unicorn – being a unicorn – cannot see its own magic. But from the therapist's point of view, it was clear how truly wonderful the creature was.

This cartoon is reminiscent of a question that someone once asked the Master. The questioner, standing at the microphone, voice shaky, hands trembling from nerves, mustered up the courage to ask: "Master, what do you see when you look at us?" The Master paused for a moment and said: "Potential."

What does potential mean? According to the English dictionary, potential is defined as: 'latent; excellence or ability that may or may not be developed'. This definition aptly describes us as satsangis. The first part of the definition specifies 'latent' meaning 'present but not visible, apparent, or actualized'. What, in each of us, is present but not visible, apparent or actualized? The Bible says: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" In the Upanishads it is written, "He is the one God hidden in all beings ... dwelling in all beings."

Can God truly be the potential that is latent within each one of us? On most days, between our endless chores and responsibilities, we feel satisfied if we can get an episode of Netflix in at the end of the night! Discovering that I am God is not something on our to-do list for the day. We do not believe that is who we truly are, or can become. And even if we do meditate, it is generally out of force of habit or duty – not because we are aiming to unleash the 'unicorn'

within. However, the second part of the definition does specify that the dormant quality within us is one of excellence.

What is meant by excellence? The Oxford dictionary defines excellence as ‘the quality of being outstanding or extremely good’. When the Master looks at us, and says that he sees dormant excellence in us – what does he see? Does he believe we can reach new heights in our meditation? It is unlikely, given that he knows all our shortcomings and how difficult it is to conquer the mind. But we can definitely excel at one thing – and it is the only thing he asks of us – our effort. In *Concepts & Illusions*, the author aptly states: “In the language of realization, the most valuable word is effort.” No matter what walk of life we come from, we share this one core strength: we can all become extremely good at putting in our daily effort. In fact, the Master even believes that we can become outstanding at it! But ultimately, the decision to put in our effort rests in our hands.

Indeed, the third element in the definition of potential specifies that it ‘may or may not be developed’. As satsangis, many of us falsely believe that being initiated guarantees us salvation. In the same book, the author clarifies:

Just being initiated does not guarantee God-realization and spiritual liberation within four lives. We have to steep ourselves in meditation. If just the act of being initiated would guarantee liberation, then why do the Masters persistently remind us to meditate?

The Master, like the therapist in the cartoon, sits across from us patiently reminding us to meditate so that we can take the necessary steps to unmask our own potential. For it is only when we take that initial step that the journey towards self-realization can begin.

When he believes in us, why is it so hard for us to believe in ourselves? When we have no trouble believing that we can fail, why is it so hard for us to believe that we can succeed?

It is human nature to doubt the positive and believe in the negative because our mind naturally tilts towards negativity. They say that a zebra's stripes never change and that a cheetah's spots never move. Do we believe that we are inherently doomed in the same way? In fact, someone once asked the Master: "Can we ever really change?" to which the Master humorously replied: "I'd be in the wrong business if I didn't believe people could change."

Concepts & Illusions

Just like the unicorn, we are inclined to sit on the couch doubting our own potential, when what we really need is to believe in ourselves. There is a story of a disciple who once asked his Master: "Isn't the end point of man's journey his union with God?" The Master replied: "The end point of man's journey is not union with God, because there has never been a separation. All that is needed is the flash of insight that makes one see it." That flash of insight can come only from our efforts.

You cannot afford to live in potential for the rest of your life; at some point, you have to unleash the potential and make your move.

Eric Thomas, The Secrets to Success

May today be the day we get off the couch, turn off Netflix, and make our move.



What Is He Like?

An extract from Heaven on Earth about Hazur Maharaj Ji's visit to USA

On the morning of May 9, 1964, Hazur Maharaj Ji began the most significant part of the trip – his first visit to the mainland of the United States of America. The end of the flight from Honolulu “would be the beginning of a mission of love, the fulfilment of a promise,” wrote A.V.M. Sondhi. “He would meet in the flesh hundreds of disciples and seekers after Truth, most of whom knew of him only as others had described him or from photographic representations, the best of which fail to convey the true image and grandeur of the real Master in human form.”

For years, even decades, the disciples had been looking forward to the Master's visit to America. His visit was a great event in the life of the American satsangis, particularly for the large number of disciples who had not yet seen the Master in his physical form. A satsangi described the first arrival of the Master thus:

“What will he be like? Will he be as wonderful as they say?” We have accepted, in a typical western, very rational fashion, a philosophy, because it answers all our questions. But the living person behind this philosophy – how will our analytical faculties respond to him? And when the jet airplane bringing their divine guest was coming in for landing, the satsangis felt a great surge of joy well up within them. When the Master entered the waiting hall, not one of us could take our eyes off the one man who was standing at the door. ... And this is Maharaj Ji. How can we describe him? He looks like his photographs, of course, but there is something more, something infinitely more. All our hopes are fulfilled – even hopes we never before realized we had, are fulfilled.

One thing is certain, the well-memorized list of criteria of a perfect Master has been forgotten. Not because it is overlooked, but because we have passed into some new kind of experience where analysis and comparison are meaningless.

‘What is he like?’ they ask us later. How can there be an answer to that? We can only say to those who ask: You must see for yourselves. We will talk about his visit for days, months and years; we will use millions of words; but only when you see that happiness that we have, only when you feel the feeling of love that we feel, only when you know the blessings we have received, will you begin to understand.”



The Master is like a looking glass. In whatever way, with whatever feelings or thoughts we look at him, the same thoughts are reflected back to us. Try to manifest your Master within. Then he will always remain with you and you will be able to see him and talk to him whenever you like.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Loyalty – Not the Scheme We Think

Many of us fly frequently. We have often enrolled in airline loyalty schemes so that we earn frequent flyer points for every mile we fly. It does not matter whether the passenger enjoys flying or hates every minute of it, each passenger earns the same points. Master is also operating a loyalty scheme. Each disciple earns frequent meditator points for every minute of meditation. Like the airline scheme, it does not matter whether the disciple is grumpy or keen; as long as the disciple shows up and makes the effort, the points are earned. Whether you experience bliss or a struggle makes no difference to the Master; every single minute of effort counts.

So whatever time you devote to meditation, that is always to your credit, whether it is repetition of the five holy names or whether it is listening to the sound. Every minute that we devote in his love, in his devotion, that is always credited to our account and we definitely get the advantage of that in one way or another.

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

Just as frequent flyer points allow you to fly for free, frequent meditator points will allow your soul to fly into the inner heavens. There, no plane or helicopter or other contraption is required. The soul can soar free as a bird. The reason we cannot fly there now is that we are burdened with the karmas collected over countless lives – the vast store of sinchit karmas. For everyone, the only way to pay off this particular karmic account is by going through endless lives of suffering in this world.

However, the true guru offers a second way – for the first time in all the ages, we can pay off karma without going through it – this second way is by meditation. Our meditation is actually not about sound or light. Maharaj Charan Singh has said:

All this meditation – 99.9 percent of it – is meant for the store of karmas, our sinchit karmas.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

So just as a criminal pays his debt to society by serving time, we too can pay off our sinchit karma by meditation. This is why every bit of struggle actually counts. How much better is this? In the comfort of our own bedroom, we can discharge the debts of ages. What a great deal – we should be so keen to bank such valuable points to our ‘karmic offset account’.

Disciples face a mind which whispers to them: “This meditation of yours is so pathetic, your concentration is so useless, you should give this up.” Taking advice from the mind about meditation is like asking a criminal what sentence he deserves. We should tell the mind that since it did the crime, now it must serve the time. Every bit of effort is worthwhile; Master never complains about quality – he just begs us to put in the quantity. Great Master also says: “This body is a shop where we have to purchase Nam.”

There is shopping in the mall and shopping online, but for the saints the most valuable shop has always been inside the human body. If we can achieve ‘gold’ status as a frequent meditator, then ultimately we will get access to the premium lounge located in the human body at Gate 10 – also called the Eye Centre lounge. In that

lounge, they are serving nectar which will satisfy our thirst forever and they are playing the enrapturing melodies of Shabd endlessly which will thoroughly soothe our bodies and our minds. It is worth dying while living to experience the rewards of the Master's loyalty scheme.



You are quite right when you say that the Master rewards disciples according to the amount of effort they put in with the proper attitude. The more we strive on the path, the more help we receive from the Master. Those who do not make an effort of their own have no idea of the blessings that are being showered on us every day of our life. The rewards that are received by a disciple are far greater than one could ever expect or even dream of, and this realization comes only when we are doing our part of the duty. Then our heart is full of gratitude to the Master. Those who do not do their best in the spiritual practice and in living the life according to the high principles of Sant Mat belong to a class of sluggards who keep on expecting everything from the other party. Sloth has never achieved anything in any field of life.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Thank You

The teachings of Sant Mat clearly state that at the time of initiation, the Master takes over the administration of the disciple's karmic account, and from that moment onwards it is the Master who allocates the disciple's karma in the best way that he deems fit. The goal, of course, is to clear the disciples' karma in the quickest possible way so that the soul can return home. The disciple still has to face his destiny and receive the merits and demerits of his own actions. The difference lies in the way the karma is administered – with the loving compassion of the Guru instead of the cold, hard justice of the law.

About your fall from the window, my daughter, as you truly say, there is nothing accidental here. Every misery or trouble that comes to us is the result of our own past actions (karmas). The sooner our debts to Kal are paid off, the better for us. Whatever befalls us is regulated by the direct orders of our Satguru and we should take it as such, as a blessing in disguise.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

Thus it would be safe to say that every initiate is walking along a path his Master has chosen for him. The moment we expressed the desire to go back to our true home, the Master carved out a path for us to walk on, and this is it. No matter how harsh or brutal it might seem at times, it is the most merciful option. Most likely, it was supposed to be much, much worse.

Whatever good or bad happens to you, through whatever person or object, directly proceeds from our loving Father. All persons and objects are but tools in His hand. If an evil befalls you, think it as His greatest mercy. We have to suffer for our past actions sooner or later. Our Master, by taking us through these sufferings speedily, intends to relieve us of our burden earlier. And by this early payment of debt – because debt it is – the amount of the suffering is very much lessened. If we had to pay one ton at first, now we are released by paying one pound only.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

The question is, do we trust the Master? When it feels like things are out of control and nothing is working out to our satisfaction; when we are shaken out of our comfortable routines, do we trust that he is in charge and he knows best? Or do we grapple and wrestle with our minds, trying to understand something that is beyond the realm of the intellect and end up in a state of analysis paralysis?

The Sufi teachings give the example of two children quarrelling over their toys, with each one having their own valid reasoning. One thinks ‘it was given to me so why can’t I play with it?’ While the other one thinks, ‘it’s a nice toy – why can’t he share?’ Both children are right from their own viewpoint. But the father knows the nature of each child and what he wants to bring out in that nature. Perhaps he wants them to go through the bickering so that they can learn how to share. At their level, however, the children do not understand their father’s reasoning; they have to grow up to his level to understand.

Similarly, the Master is the spiritual father of the disciple. He has a strategy, a plan of how to clear the disciple’s karma in the most efficient way. He also knows the disciple’s strengths and weaknesses

and what circumstances will fortify his faith and enable him to reach his maximum potential.

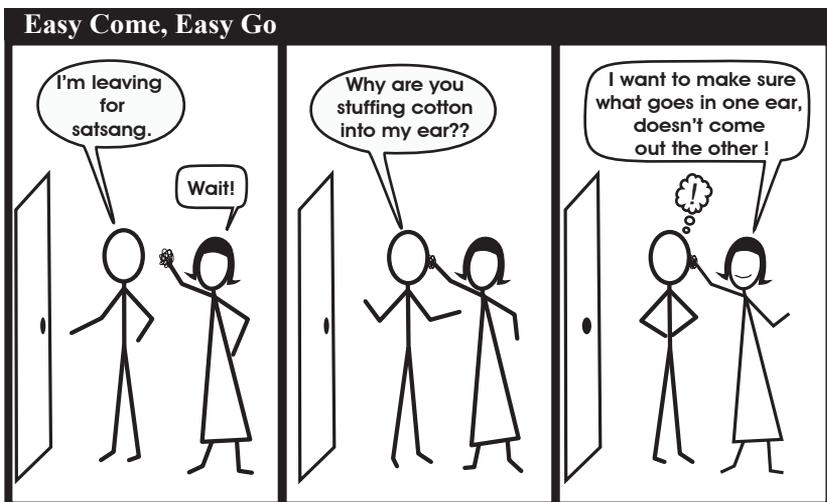
The Master is training his disciples to be attuned to the Shabd at all times, to remember the Lord in every situation, to believe, to have courage, and to be patient. The disciple's job is to collaborate with him in this training process and, like good children, be grateful there are toys to play with in the first place, let alone food to eat, a family to love and a comfortable place to live.

Eventually, as the disciple goes through the course of his karma, it is those very virtues that will come to his rescue. Faith, patience and courage will help him face his destiny whatever it may be.

So really, as disciples, the only thing left to do is to express our gratitude to our beloved Father for his loving kindness and compassion, for believing in us and giving us the opportunity to become deserving of his grace.



SPIRITUALISTICKS®



Time Out

Too often emotions, rather than clear thinking, cause us to do things we would not normally do, or to react impulsively with no reflection on the consequences. Yet, we are constantly reminded to keep our reactions in check.

Parents who have to deal with children during a tantrum or a sibling fight tend to call for a ‘time out’ where everyone is supposed to disperse and remain silent for a fixed period of time until they are able to come together to discuss things calmly.

A time out is also used by athletes when an opponent starts to become too dominant or overwhelming. They use this time to take a breather, gather their thoughts, and strategize on new tactics to win the game.

For all purposes, a time out is a welcome break that has amazing potential for productivity and success.

Our Master has given us a wonderful chance to call for a ‘time out’ at any point in our daily lives. Meditation gives us the opportunity to retreat to the backstage of this worldly play, take a break from the drama of life, gather our strength, and readjust our focus.

While living in this fast-paced world, we find ourselves constantly being swept away by the tide of our aspirations, our responsibilities and our attachments, to the extent that we forget that this is simply a transition period in our existence – our true happiness lies far beyond these things.

Our meditation allows us to switch from being performers to spectators; it helps us get our bearings and re-orient ourselves in

the right direction. That sense of detachment that we are able to experience in our meditation allows us to put things into perspective and consciously choose our next move in life – to act instead of react.

There is, however, an important difference between taking time out in meditation versus taking time out during a fight or a tournament. People generally take time out to think things over, but a meditative time out enables us to *stop* thinking.

We already know the answers to most of our questions and the strategies to adopt for most of our endeavours, but the answers are buried under the clutter of obsessive thought, worry and fear.

Dr Sherri Wilcox, in her book *Gift of Freewill*, says:

If you wish to know the specifics of how you will do this or that or how this or that will be accomplished, then that is for you to ask these questions to yourself in that silent space within you. And you shall be given the answers.

When we sit for meditation first thing in the morning, we tend to use the time to plan for chores that need to be done during the rest of the day; we worry about what will or will not happen; we strategize about how we will deal with all the possible outcomes. And if we meditate after running around all day, then we use this precious time to assess what we have achieved and how far we have come, how we feel and why we feel that way. But is this really a time out? If our mind is in constant motion, how then can we clear the mental clutter and confusion that assails us? How then can we learn to see the bigger picture?

So when we sit down to meditate, let us remember what a fantastic opportunity we have been given to take a time out from

our mind – to stop thought and enjoy mental silence. As Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us, “Simran of the Master cuts the simran of the world.” Every round of simran will delete a thought, will clear the pathways within. Every round of simran will make us more receptive to the wisdom and guidance of our Master, who actually called for the time out in the first place and is waiting for us to listen to his Word and unravel all the answers.



Life is precious and it is only after thousands of years that you got your turn to be born as a human being. This opportunity should not be lost, and every minute that you can spare from your duties should be devoted to simran and bhajan so that you may soon go in and thus finish your round of births and deaths.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Umwelt

Umwelt is a term invented by a German biologist, Jakob von Uexkull, in 1909 to connote the sum total of the experience which informs the reality of a particular biological organism. For example, a bee sees only ultraviolet light. The bee also flies and so its reality is affected by seeing things from the air. When we see a garden with colourful flowers, we think the bees will be attracted to the coloured flowers. In fact, the bee sees most colours as dull black or grey except for the colour white which is fabulously sharp – just as we experience white clothing by ultraviolet light in a night club. So a bee flying into the garden is fascinated by the boring bush with white flowers and is not impressed by the roses. The tree with white flowers dresses itself for the bee's eyes, not for human eyes. Likewise, a rattlesnake sees only infrared light and slithers on the ground so its world is based on heat emissions; a bloodhound has 200 million olfactory cells and a long nose and big nostrils, and floppy ears which drag on the ground and throw up additional scents. When you take him to a park, even though the park looks deserted and boring, he smells the scents of everyone who visited that park in the last 24 hours! He smells so intensely he can track someone who left the park the day before! His life is enriched by a world of scent and his reality is quite different from ours.

Human beings have very limited senses. Their sense of smell, sight and hearing is just enough to avoid predators, eat, socialize and mate. In fact, a human being can see only one billionth of the electromagnetic spectrum. The human *umwelt* is really nothing to boast about and yet human arrogance is such that, based on one

billionth of the evidence, we declare that God does not exist. Our ego is such that we think that “what I see is all there is.” If we could face the fact that our *umwelt* is very limited, we might not be so quick to reject the unseen truths that mystics reveal.

One of the reasons that worldly wealth disappoints is because our *umwelt* remains the same – no matter how rich we become, we can experience only the same limited palate of tastes, see only the same sights and hear only the same sounds as any poor person. The Masters advise that meditation is the way to change our *umwelt*. This is the miracle the true Masters offer – the ability to see the unseen and hear the unheard.

Great Master discusses how rising in consciousness can change one’s vision, effectively change one’s *umwelt*, so that hidden things become revealed.

1. *The individual, clothed in coarse material form, sees only the external material forms. His sight does not go deeper than that.*
2. *If he were to rise up to Sahansdal Kanwal, the same individual would see the mind actuating all forms. The form would be only secondary; mind would be the prime mover in all.*
3. *The same individual, from Daswan Dwar, will see the spirit current working everywhere, and will see how the mind gets power from the spirit.*
4. *From Sach Khand, the whole creation looks like bubbles forming and disappearing in the spiritual ocean.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Hazur Maharaj Ji refers to this limitation in the human *umwelt* in the answer to the following question:

Q. What is the citation from Guru Nanak which you regularly use?

A. It is very difficult for me to know because I use so many, not just one. But there is one that I generally repeat, 'Akhi bajhon vekhana, vin kanna sunana.' It means: 'You see it without eyes and hear it without ears.' You cannot see it with these eyes, nor hear it with these ears. Neither can you touch it, nor reach it walking with these feet. You can only get it when you die while living, when you withdraw your consciousness to the eye centre. And only through Shabd or Nam can you go back to the Father. So that is a very convincing citation which I generally give in my satsang. As Christ said: 'Having eyes ye see not, having ears ye hear not'.

Spiritual Heritage

To develop higher faculties of sight and hearing which enable us to access subtle experiences – this is the mission which saints place before us. In short, they invite us to expand our *umwelt*!

Proof that Sant Mat is the path to expanding human *umwelt* can be found in the following statement by Great Master:

He pervades all and is ever with us. But because we are always engrossed in objects of the world, we cannot see Him. The sun is not to be blamed if the bats cannot see it. The sun is shining equally for all. The Lord is all-pervading. Then why do we not see him? The reason for this is that the eyes that can see him are as yet unawakened. Those eyes that can see him everywhere are different

from the physical eyes. We can see subtle things only when we ourselves become subtle. The Lord is extremely subtle. Unless we become as subtle as he is, we do not get connected with the Lord. It is a basic principle that the instrument with which we see must be appropriate to the thing to be seen. Our eyes cannot see light that is extremely bright or extremely dim. Similarly, we cannot hear a sound which is either above or below the range of our hearing.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV

We need to cleanse the instrument of the human mind and raise our awareness through meditation so that our *umwelt* is adequate to include the sight and sound of God.



*Turn to the Lord with all your heart,
forsake this sorry world,
and your soul shall find rest.
Learn to turn from worldly things,
and give yourself to spiritual things,
and you will see the kingdom of God come within you.*

Thomas A Kempis, The Inner Life

Heart to Heart

Bhai Manna Singh, who served Baba Ji for several years, once told us, “One day I saw Baba Ji reading a letter over and over again, but I did not know what it contained or who it was from. When I asked about it, Baba Ji told me it was a letter from Babu Sawan Singh, overflowing with love for the Master and longing to be at his feet. He wanted to resign from his job and yearned to come to Dera to devote all his time to the Master’s service. Then I said to Baba Ji, “If he is languishing there without you and yearns to spend his time at your holy feet, why not call him here?”

Baba Ji replied, “He still has to fulfill his worldly obligations. But a day will come, my child, when you will see for yourself how much spiritual work Soami Ji takes from him.”

Heaven on Earth



In one of the foreign tours, Maharaj Ji accepted a request to attend a tea at a satsangi’s house outside London. When Maharaj Ji arrived, the organizer of the party said, “Maharaj Ji, four seekers who could not reach London in time for the initiation are here today and are very anxious to be initiated.”

Maharaj Ji smiled and said, “Brother, I can do only one thing or the other – we can have the tea party or the initiation, but there is no time for both.” The satsangi replied, “Just seeing you here is enough for us. If it is proper, perhaps you could give initiation to these seekers.” Thus instead of a tea party, the satsangis who were present, after a quick cup of tea with the Master, enjoyed the quiet and serenity of the initiation.

Heaven on Earth

Spiritual Link

Book Review



Being Vegetarian

BY REBECCA HAMMONS

PUBLISHER: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, 2017.

ISBN: 978-93-86866-00-4

Written in a lively, engaging style, *Being Vegetarian* addresses the many concerns and considerations people face when deciding whether to become vegetarian. Hammons begins the book by addressing the most fundamental privilege of being human:

Understanding that we are capable of shaping our own lives – our personal responses to the beauty, complexity, bewilderment, and cruelty of the world we inhabit – leads us to inevitable questions: What really matters? What kind of person do we choose to be?

Since, as humans, we have the unique privilege of being able to make choices, the author challenges us to think deeply and to make conscious choices, rather than being drawn along by habit and tradition:

We want fulfilment and joy; we want both to have a good life and to be a good person. We know inherently that those things are connected, the results of focused, conscious choices. What are those choices, and how do we make them? What direction leads to the joy, compassion, peace of mind, and wisdom we want to cultivate?

Compassion is often the driving force behind the decision to become vegetarian. Hammons provides some details of the miserable lives and brutal deaths of the animals raised for our plate, particularly in the “factory farms.” Simply knowing the facts may ignite fervent feelings of compassion for the animals.

She explains that taking actions that support the well-being of others and contributing to “non-violence in the world at large” are the pathway that leads to our own happiness:

Compassion is important to us. If we sow fields of bitter suffering, can we expect harvests of sweet happiness? Can our wellbeing be built on the misery of other sentient beings? Cause and effect, action and reaction. By acting with kindness, we receive kindness – even if we sometimes receive it eventually rather than immediately. What we give and what we get are inseparable. Understanding this principle, we realize that eating animals involves us in violence that is harmful to both ourselves and those animals. The meat on our plates rarely comes from creatures that have led natural, tranquil lives but has instead been carved from animals that have suffered in life and died in pain. Knowing this, how can we continue to choose palate over compassion?

Hammons offers five personal benefits that come from choosing to be vegetarian, and backs each one up with in-depth discussions and detailed information. First, we avoid participating in the devastating environmental and climate impacts of the meat-industry; second, a vegetarian or vegan diet is healthier and helps us avoid many chronic diseases; third, we stop causing suffering to animals. The fourth is subtle, but points to a profound impact of aligning our actions with our

own values: “When we decide to live our ethics with every food choice we make, we experience deep satisfaction.” The fifth reason is the law of karma: we will, indeed, suffer eventually if we cause suffering to others.

The book explores the environmental impacts of a meat-based diet. Many meat-eaters may not be aware of how significantly the meat industry contributes to the global climate change crisis. Therefore, the author opens the chapter called “Raising Livestock = Razing Rainforests” with the statement: “Prepare to be surprised, and not in a happy way.” She summarizes the shocking facts about how much of the earth’s limited resources of water and productive land are consumed in the meat industry, as well as explaining how the methane produced by livestock impacts climate change. Quoting Thich Nhat Hanh: “By eating meat, we share responsibility for causing climate change, the destruction of our forests, and the poisoning of our water. The simple act of being a vegetarian can make a difference in the health of our planet.”

Once the life-changing decision to be vegetarian has been made, there are many details to consider and obstacles to overcome. We have to read labels and be careful about hidden ingredients one would never guess were there:

As committed vegetarians, we sweat the small stuff because we do not want to be connected to the suffering of other conscious, feeling creatures. In other words, we pay attention to details such as whether or not Thai curry has fish sauce (almost always!), yogurt has gelatin (made from animal by-products such as hooves, skin, and bones), or a formerly favourite salad dressing is made with mayonnaise (which contains eggs).

The author provides practical information about ingredients which many people do not realize are meat-based. For example:

- *Albumen* – This protein component – most commonly derived from egg whites but also from animal blood, cow’s milk, plants or seeds – is used extensively in processed foods, especially pastries and baked goods.
- *Carmine/Cochineal extract (red dye)* – Used in candies, pastries, and some brands of yogurt, this red or purplish-red pigment is made from dried female scale insects. Females are used because their abdomens, which house fertilized eggs, are the most carmine-rich part of the insects. They are separated from the rest of the body to be mined for that carmine, a red colour often labelled “natural red 4” or simply “natural colour”. Suddenly, that pink yogurt doesn’t look so pretty . . .

This book is very practical, addressing a wide range of concerns people often have, from the issues that may come up when raising children vegetarian, to dealing with arguments about whether our human bodies were designed to be carnivore, omnivore or vegetarian. A wealth of information is provided about many nutrients we need. For example, many people worry about being vegetarian, believing they will not get enough protein, or enough vitamin B12. The book provides advice for how to make sure you are getting enough of these and other important nutrients on a vegetarian diet.

Many people think about becoming vegetarian, but can’t quite make the commitment for fear of offending – or being judged by – family, friends and co-workers who eat meat. After all, sharing meals around a table is one of the most important way that families and friends stay connected. Hammons poses the question:

Practically, how do vegetarians remain involved in the social experience of sharing food when it seems to our meat-eating friends and family that we've left their table entirely? How do we keep from alienating those we want to hold close? Isn't it terribly hurtful to tell Grandma that we can no longer eat the cake we grew up begging for or to tell Auntie that the chicken pakoras we once loved are no longer wanted? Where's the kindness and compassion in hurting another's feelings?

She suggests that when we are thoughtful, considerate and graceful in the situation, most of these problems disappear. “Gracefully being vegetarian in the midst of people who aren't requires some of the same internal qualities that we wish to cultivate in the world around us – gentleness, tolerance, commitment, and respect for others' opinions.”

Throughout the book, in the space before each chapter, a profound quote from wise or saintly persons begs the reader to stop and think. These quotes come from a wide range of historical and cultural sources, ranging from Leonardo da Vinci (“Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else”) to Goethe (“Kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together”) to Sir Paul McCartney: (“If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everybody would be vegetarian”).



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