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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# The Jewel of Love

*The Lord has made me his own  
And I am drenched in his love.*

*Even were my body put to flames,  
I would not flinch for a moment;  
Even were I to lose my life,  
I would not break the bond of his love.*

*How can the jewel of love  
Be obtained for nothing?  
In exchange for my very being  
I bought Him, the Priceless One.*

*The Lord for whom Brahma searched in vain  
I have found within my own body.  
Says Kabir: I have become free  
From the ties of hopes and desires;  
I have met the Lord and am blessed  
With unshakable faith in Him.*

*The Lord has made me his own  
And I am drenched in his love.*

*Kabir, Weaver of God's Name*



# Slaves of Love

Who are we and what is it that drives us to seek? What are we in our very essence? In truth we are all simply slaves of love. We are here in this body because our beloved Lord asked us to experience this creation, and as slaves of love we had no option but to obey. And now we have existed with a covering of mind for so long that we have completely forgotten our original home and our Beloved. We find ourselves in a state of complete ignorance and forgetfulness.

But the Beloved has not forgotten us. He too is a slave of his love for us and has done something incredible. He, the perfectly intelligent and conscious One, has come down to this level and incarnated in human form to work with us.

But why would the truly enlightened One willingly surround himself with the ignorant and arrogant creatures that we are? It is his love that has driven him to come and live among us as our Master, and to work tirelessly to pull us to his level of pristine consciousness and bliss. In fact, it is his love that leaves our Master powerless to resist the yearning of those souls marked for him by the Creator. He too is a slave of his love for us.

In spite of our ignorance there is a searching in us, a yearning to discover who we really are. Shakespeare famously said that “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” Maharaj Charan Singh also used to say that we are merely playing a role on this stage. But we have become so absorbed in that role that we have come to think we really are a husband or a wife, we really are rich or poor. And so the sad moments in our lives make us weep and the pain really hurts us.

The mystics have taught us that although we are inherently spiritual, our true nature has been smothered by mind and by its close associate, the ego. We have lost all awareness of who we are. And only a Master, through his great love for us, can help us to rediscover our true identity – and in the process make our way back to the divine home from which we originally came.

Inside each of us is a spiritual being – a being who has been bullied and gagged by the ego, and has quietly submitted and completely faded into the background. And it is an awareness of this spiritual self that we crave

to awaken. It is our soul, our true spiritual self alone, that has the ability to see this world for what it is, to experience true bliss, and fathom and experience God. And yet, it remains imprisoned in this world of pain. Soami Ji asks this question:

*O soul, what foolishness are you caught in?  
You wander about with the mind,  
    mised, confused,  
    not listening to the Master's word....  
Kal has spread this web of attachments  
    and baited it to entice souls like you.  
Through ignorance and greed you stray into his trap  
    and pay heavily for it.  
I am here to explain to you now  
    that only the Master can save you*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*

Baba Ji has told us we are like a man who is sinking in quicksand. We cannot get out by ourselves; we need someone who is standing on solid ground to pull us out. We need an enlightened one to show us the way, to tell us that at our core we are pristine, beautiful and blissful beings. And we need a Master to teach us a method of meditation that will guarantee our freedom from ignorance and deliver us to essential consciousness.

This is the greatest love story of all. Out of love and compassion the Saint, the living Master, has come from his abode of pure consciousness and bliss to this material world that is filled with ignorant, suffering beings. It is the Master who draws us to him and teaches us the secret of meditation.

We're told by the Masters that initiation, and learning how to meditate, are the greatest gifts that could be conferred on us. They are the very turning point in the ages-long existence of the soul. It is only through meditation that we can eventually end our imprisonment in the creation and learn to know ourselves as spiritual beings – as the Master himself is a spiritual being. It is through meditation that we can start our inner journey that will take our unhappy souls back to the lap of the Father.

This is what we must learn to do – simply turn in and up within ourselves. But for a person who has been walking bent over facing the

ground for countless eons, looking up to the sun seems a forgotten art. In truth, though, at our very core is an intense desire to turn our gaze inward and upward, to start coming into harmony with that divine music, that inner Shabd that is pulling at our very essence.

However, it takes time to start becoming aware of that stream of love and light which is flowing within and draws us upward. Seekers and initiates often complained bitterly to Maharaj Charan Singh about being held captive by our own weaknesses. In one of his responses, he said:

*Well, brother, your protest is justified. Nobody can doubt it. Because if this creation is to continue, then those weaknesses have to be there. Otherwise nobody can remain attached to this imperfect creation. Everybody would go back to the father. We are only here because we are imperfect.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

This world has to be imperfect for it to continue – it has to be filled with sinful, ignorant individuals. And because we all have no choice but the act, we inevitably incur karma – countless karmas in every life that we have lived – and these karmas keep us locked in the creation to keep enduring the consequences of those many actions. This is the Lord's plan to keep the creation rolling on. In fact, behind the scenes he is the puppeteer. The people whom we may judge for their apparent evil, or dislike for the pain they have caused us, *must* act this way. It is the Lord who pulls the strings for them to behave as they do.

Fortunately, the Lord has kept an exit for a number of souls. If we are feeling lonely, or carry pain in our hearts, if we feel disillusioned and want to get out of this world, then maybe we are among those who can escape from this vast prison house. The pain and suffering we have experienced that has brought us to this point, may turn out to be our greatest blessing – for the Master responds to that pain and comes down to our level out of his love and compassion for us, and pulls us to himself.

We have all suffered more than enough. The question now is, will we allow ourselves to escape from all this? Will we allow ourselves to start sensing that flowing inner stream of light, love and bliss? For it is only then that an all-consuming love for the Beloved will flower, and we will begin to do as the Master asks. It is love for him that will help us to

meditate and do our simran with love. Baba Ji recently explained in a question and answer session that the trick to focusing in meditation is just a *little* love for the Master. It is essential that we generate love for him.

But what is behind this love? What is it that our Master wants to give us? He wants to give us his greatest gift: himself – in his real essence as the Shabd. But to receive this glorious gift, we have to make ourselves receptive to his love. And further, it is in our best interest to heed his advice very carefully, for then we are assured of deliverance soon.

Is it difficult to please our Master? No! All he wants is our sincere effort. Great Master said: “If you cannot bring me your successes, then bring me your failures.”

Why don't we just try it? Try to take Master's hand and walk by his side, and we will surely see how he supports us in every way. We will find that at his table our failures and failings are insignificant in comparison with his love, compassion and generosity.

Let us meditate earnestly every day, remembering that this is a great gift and privilege. And just simply let go, for the barrier that separates us from our Master within is thinner than the wing of a butterfly. Let us just give ourselves to the Sound Current, and Master will embrace us and drown us in love – until there is nothing left of us but pure divine love. Then all will be accomplished.



# Satguru is Pleased with Humility

Some thirty years ago, when the spacecraft Voyager was travelling into deep space, it turned its cameras backwards and took a photo of Earth. The image of our planet appeared as a tiny, pale blue dot in the Milky Lane galaxy. And the American astronomer Carl Sagan remarked:

*The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light.*

What does this tell us? In the vastness of the creation we are – each one of us – less than a tiny speck. And yet, we can have some very grand ideas about ourselves. We imagine that because the Creator has ordained that it is only when one reaches the human form that one can start the journey back to him, and that this somehow gives us special worth. If we take a close look at ourselves, though, we find that we have little to be proud of. If we've reached this privileged human form, it was all the Creator's doing. In ourselves we're helpless. Without his grace we can do nothing.

Since finding out about the spiritual path we've been told that in the beginning we were all part of the great ocean of power that is God. Then for some reason we were sent away to travel down into his creation. In order to function in the lower reaches of the creation the soul was equipped with mind and a covering of ego. And as a result of this, under the influence of mind and ego the soul began to see itself as a separate entity, forgetting that it was once part of the blissful oneness of the Creator; forgetting that its mission is to return to that state of oneness.

The mystics tell us that the very essence of the Creator is love. We ourselves have a spark of that same love in us, but it has been suppressed by our ego. And therefore we're no longer capable of reaching and merging back into the divine ocean of love. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

*Ego is a block between us and God. It is a definite block and a very solid block. Without elimination of the ego the question of meeting the Lord*



*doesn't arise at all, because God is love... Love means that that the other one exists – you don't exist at all.*

Does the idea of ceasing to exist as a separate identity frighten us? Yes, perhaps. The mind and ego, must be quite scared of this – because it means their complete obliteration. But let's take a deeper look at ourselves. Deep down haven't we become tired and disillusioned by our long and weary existence here in the creation? Don't we yearn for the peace and bliss that we knew before we separated from the Creator?

This might not be a conscious thing, but we do know that we're no longer happy here. We want something better. And if we want to find that something, the ego which keeps us separate has to give way to humility – a deep humility which tells the Creator that we're tired of our separation. We want to consciously become part of him again.

But it's all very well talking of merging back into the Creator – he's completely beyond our reach. Yet, we do have access to someone who is both one with the Lord and available to us here at our level. We have access to our Master. And he can tell us how to strive to suppress the ego, which is blocking us from becoming reunited with God.

Baba Jaimal Singh was the Master of Baba Sawan Singh, who would in time succeed him and be affectionately known as the Great Master. This is what he told him:

*The stream of divine knowledge is flowing ... but a single veil still remains:  
Surrender your self, my son.*

*Spiritual Letters*

Surrender your self – this might be a difficult concept for us. Somebody once asked Maharaj Charan Singh what was the idea behind this. He gave a lovely, simple answer:

*You will get the feeling that you are nothing when you merge in the love of the Master.... You will just forget what you are.... Then you know you are nothing.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

We may have already had some small experience of this. We may have sat in front of our Master and felt such love for him that we lost all sense

of self. Hazur Maharaj Ji emphasised that it's love, and particularly love for the Master, that makes the ego simply disappear.

It's impossible not to feel humble when one comes into the presence of a true Master. You just recognise that here is someone so immeasurably great, that you can't help feeling humble. When we're in the presence of the Master we instinctively know that he is someone so full of love and divine power that our minds become stilled. With awe and worship, our souls respond to what he is.

We have to come into the orbit of a Master, the very personification of love. He has to fill us with that love, because only through that love can the ego be eradicated. It's not in our power to rid ourselves of ego. But the love between Master and disciple can achieve anything. Submission to a Master through our love for him is the key to our eventual merging back into the Lord himself, as Shabd.

We may find it quite hard to fathom how someone who was born into a physical body, as we were, and who went through childhood into adulthood as a human being, can be transformed into a being of such greatness that he can be appointed the successor to his own Master. But it happens. It's a mystery we'll never be able to understand.

But when you come before your own Master and your soul recognizes him for what he is, how is it possible not to feel humble before him? And how is it possible not to feel love for him? He *gives* us love for him, because love is the primary characteristic of the relationship between Guru and disciple on this Bhakti path. And this love will demolish the ego.

Love brings submission; love brings humility; and it makes us want to please the other person. And when it comes to loving our Master, by now we know very well what pleases him: our regular, daily meditation. Sitting to meditate every day, regardless of whether we think our meditation is successful or not.

Experience has shown us over our years on the path that we can't expect visible results in our meditation. Most of the time it's a struggle to achieve even a little concentration. But our struggle is what pleases him. And it is not going to waste. We just don't know what our Master is doing with it, but he values our obedience and our effort.

It's also possible that the results we would like to see in our meditation are being deliberately withheld from us. Perhaps this, too, is to teach us humility. Perhaps its purpose might be to keep our egos in check. Can you imagine how self-satisfied we might become if all our meditations were crowned with success? We might even start to believe ourselves to be amazingly spiritual, very advanced souls – which we most certainly are not! In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Hazur Maharaj Ji speaks about this:

*Spiritual ego, that's the worst... We should attend to meditation without thinking that I am doing it, I am achieving it. Then there is always a danger of building ego. That ego, even spiritual ego, will be in our way. If you have the idea that I am doing it, I am doing seva, I am doing meditation, you are inflating your ego.*

Strictly speaking, we can't even say, "I am following the path." It's only by his grace that we follow the path. And most probably it's also his grace that we often feel ourselves to be failures in our spiritual practice. It is our failure that makes us aware that we're incapable of controlling the mind. So in the end we're forced to admit, in deep humility, that we can't do this and that only he can make this happen. We have to submit ourselves completely to him so that *he* can pull us up. Hazur tells us in fact that we are just puppets, doing only what he makes us do.

Still, because we don't *know* that we are just puppets, we tend to judge ourselves by whether we manage any concentration during the hours that we sit for meditation. And the chances are we judge ourselves quite harshly. But our Master doesn't judge us. All he wants is our effort and some of our time, and our remembrance of him throughout the day.

And if our egos are steadily being ground down as we acknowledge our helplessness, then what else can we do but submit ourselves to him? Then he himself *will* do it all. In *Sar Bachan* there's this encouraging little passage:

*Sat Guru is pleased with humility. If humility is genuine, then one need not worry either about the restlessness of the mind or about the provisions for the journey. Such a one should firmly take refuge in the Sat Guru and rely on his protection. Then his boat will cross over to the other side.*



# The Bird that Sings Within

We all come into this world the same way and more or less in the same condition. We are immediately plunged into the dark forest of the senses, where we may well live in constant fear, driven by our desires and our perceived needs. This environment works according to a set of rules never revealed to us, so we remain ignorant of the consequences of our actions.

Life after life we have continued like this, pursuing our desires and running from our fears, the darkest being imminent death. People are dying all around us. We've all known friends and family who have passed on, and yet we behave as though this fate will not be ours. If we remained mindful of our inevitable death, would we not behave more responsibly? In our ignorance we have sown seeds that must in time sprout and yield the bitter fruit that is the outcome of our actions, and which have collectively created the momentum that drives us, like so many cattle, to the ruthless fulfilment of our destinies.

The Master teaches that our future is determined by the sum total of our past actions. Inevitably after so many lifetimes, we have continued to sow the seeds of our own undoing and perpetuated the cycle of misery and suffering, life after life. At the same time we have left no stone unturned in our quest for happiness. Sadly, we have never achieved it. If asked what it was that we were seeking, it is doubtful we could have provided an adequate answer. There was just this deep-seated longing.

At some point we had to admit to ourselves that our search for answers was not successful, and we simply had to give up. This was the signal that the divine power was awaiting. We had to come to the point of surrender. Our ego had to be sufficiently suppressed for us to actually listen to the voice within. Thus, we came into the orbit of the true Master of our time; the living, breathing being who, while being at our level, is also at the level of the Lord himself.

This encounter was what our soul had been waiting for. Many of us, when recalling the moment at which something inside us had just said YES to the Master's teachings, could not begin to explain what had happened. It is as though someone had flipped a switch and a light suddenly came on inside.

The great mystic Kabir describes the situation in very clear terms in the poem “The Bird that Sings Within” in the book *Kabir the Weaver of God’s Name*:

*No one tells me about the bird  
That sings within the body.  
Its colour is a colourless hue,  
Its form a formless form,  
it lives under the shade of Nam.  
No one tells me about the bird  
That sings within the body.*

One of the first things that the Master attempts to teach us is the true nature of reality. The Master makes it plain that this world of the senses is not real and is constantly changing. Reality, he says, is unchanging and eternal. He tells us that there is a place called the true region where we will find the unchanging reality, the Creator himself. He says we are something beyond both mind and body, something immortal. This true self is what we commonly refer to as soul – all the rest is merely a covering that obscures the soul’s true nature.

This is the “bird that sings within the body,” of which we have been totally ignorant. It has no physical form or attributes. This bird is trapped by all the attachments and karmas we have created.

*In the vast tree dwells a bird,  
It hops, it pecks, it eats,  
And from branch to branch it flies.  
No one knows where it comes from,  
No one knows what makes it sing.  
No one tells me about the bird  
That sings within the body.*

Kabir says this bird, this soul, lives in “the vast tree” of the creation. Under the influence of the mind it is trapped by its fascination with the world’s glam and glitter. It goes from one thing to another pursuing happiness, never settling on any one thing. It wanders through the creation,

convinced that this is its home, further reinforcing the shackles and chains that bind it here.

*Numerous vines entwine the tree,  
Throwing shadows dark and dense;  
Numerous birds huddle together  
In the tree's sunless gloom.  
But they fly away in the evening.  
Morning they return for the day;  
No one understands their strange ways.  
No one tells me about the bird  
That sings within the body.*

The dense material creation, symbolized by the tree and vines, provides an environment designed to lead souls astray. Many souls gather together here as though they belong together, trapped by the bonds of friendship and family. When nightfall comes the birds fly away to roost, to return again the next day. Just so, we see others leaving the stage of life, and then we too must leave. Our mistake is to think that these roles we play are real and forever. We behave as if we're going to live forever.

*Only to taste two fruits comes the bird,  
Not for ten, not for twenty,  
Not for countless, nor for many.  
But vast and inaccessible  
Boundless and eternal  
Is the bird's true home;  
If the bird will only return  
To its original home,  
It will not be forced  
To come and go again.  
But no one tells me about this bird  
That sings within the body.*

The mystics tell us that two things, karmas and attachments, bring us back to incarnate here. If we rise above these we have the potential to escape

this bondage. Kabir tells us our true being is beyond the physical and the mind. How do we grasp a reality that lies beyond mind? The mystics explain how we can rise above the limitations of both mind and body – this being our only true purpose in life. We did not come here to be intoxicated by the allurements of the world.

The Masters advise that our purpose is threefold: to meet a Master, to get initiation from him, and by the practice enjoined by him, rise up and grab hold of Nam and journey back to our true home in Sach Khand. No other action is required of us. Only a true Master can show us the way. He has sent the Master for us and given us a sense of discrimination.

*Says Kabir: Yes, my friends,  
The story I tell you  
Is hard to comprehend;  
But where, O Pundits,  
Where, O learned ones,  
Is the Home of that bird  
That no one is able to see,  
That sings within each body?*

Kabir states that the true home of the soul cannot be seen nor found in the dimensions of mind or body. It lies in the land of pure spirit. The task before us is clear. The Master has taught us to adopt a lifestyle that enables us to engage in spiritual practice in order to return to our true Father. The way ahead is to engage in meditation.

Our main aim is to get to the eye centre, through the practice of simran, the repetition of the five names imparted at initiation. Simran gradually weakens our attachments to the world by redirecting the attention to the eye centre. As concentration improves, attachments decrease and consciousness rises. Our perspective and sense of values expand and we start to take on the characteristics of a devotee – one who practises love and devotion.

This process continues until we reach the eye centre and the Radiant Form of the Master. This is the true start of the path. Here the power of the Shabd raises the soul up through the levels of mind to escape the cycle of coming and going forever.

Only when Shabd eliminates our residual karma are we able to leave the domain of illusion. Once done, the soul rises to the realm of pure spirit, all remaining impressions created by the soul's long stay in the creation are washed away.

The soul then emerges, purified of all worldly stains and radiating the light of many suns, as the Masters describe it. The journey terminates in the soul's reunion with the Lord, its true father. It has accomplished its mission and has returned to the home it left so long ago, there to dwell eternally in peace and bliss at the feet of the Lord.





# Waiting for the Perfect Moment

Maharaj Jaimal Singh gave this advice:

*Do not waste time uselessly. Be concerned about time spent in vain, and regret why so many breaths were wasted, since they were utilized neither in worldly affairs nor in spiritual pursuit.*

*Spiritual Letters*

We can spend our whole lives chasing certainty, waiting for the time to be just right, for the perfect moment to attend to spirituality. We believe that at some point we will have the courage, motivation and right conditions to accomplish our spiritual goals. But such an attitude leads to a state of limbo and procrastination. Waiting for the perfect moment is a bit like trying to peg down a tent in high winds. We need clarity not certainty in life.

We spend so much time dealing with things that are insignificant that we leave meditation till last. Our duties and obligations consume all our time. At the end of every day we may realize that we have not found the time to meditate at all. Worse still, what if we reach old age and find that our life has whizzed by without our having done any meditation at all? We should get serious about the path.

We are all getting older. Time may be an illusion, but it's an illusion that's running out for us. When we were young we thought we would have plenty of time to get around to doing what's right for our soul. The mind is so subtle it convinces us that we are clearing our plates in order to keep the best for last. But death can remove our plates before we are ready.

One of our problems is that we insist on clinging to our identities. In *Concepts and Illusions – A Perspective* we read:

*A river moves on, and by its own nature it is moving. But if you were to sit on a rock and paddle your feet in its water, it is for the sheer joy of it. But to feel and then to assert that your paddling is the cause for the entire river movement, is the play of your ego.*

That's the same attitude we have towards life. We stress about questions like "What will happen without me?" But we're not indispensable. Let's look

around us. A country doesn't stop functioning because its president passes on. Life goes on. Nothing, absolutely nothing, stops life from moving on. It's like the waves in the ocean – they keep rolling.

We too are constantly changing, from infants to old age. The days are ticking by and our time will soon be up. It's time to turn our attention inwards. What is impermanent is not worth delighting in and not worth clinging to.-

The fact that death is inevitable should motivate our most important decisions. Everything – external expectations, pride, fear of embarrassment or failure – falls away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. No one wants to die, and yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. Are we making the best use of our lives? In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*We have to form a habit of meditation. If you say, "When I feel the urge I will meditate," you would perhaps never meditate. If you think, "When I feel the right atmosphere, then I will meditate. I will sit in the morning. I will sit at noon, I will sit in the evening," you will always go on giving excuses to yourself; you will never attend to meditation.*

Every letter to an initiate from a Master contains an urgent request to attend to bhajan and simran. Maharaj Charan Singh Ji told a questioner:

*Whether the answer to your question is in six pages or in a book or in one line, the answer is the same: meditation! It depends upon how much time you want to take to understand that answer – whether by reading the whole book or by understanding only one or two words.*

*Die to Live*

And that pretty much sums up Sant Mat. We are not willing to accept something so simple. We like complicating matters.

When it comes to meditation, we need to be as determined as if we are boring through a tunnel in utter darkness, not knowing when we will break through into the light. It could be today, it could be tomorrow or it could be some years away. Two things are certain: first, we will not reach the light unless we keep drilling, and second, once we break through into the light there will be no return to darkness.

Our time is limited. We do not have the luxury of waiting around for the perfect moment or for ideal conditions to manifest. We have to act now or we will miss the opportunity of our human birth. Our lives should reflect our priorities. The time we get up, what we eat, what we think, what we do and don't do, all stem from these priorities. Our actions demonstrate our top priority and this automatically becomes the most important thing we do.

It is imperative that we choose to live the life of a true disciple. Meditation has to be at the top of our priorities. If something interferes with our meditation, we should discard it. Things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least. Every time we sit for meditation we are doing the most important thing a human being can do.

A satsangi is one who is in contact with truth (sat means truth and sang meaning with). We are either there or we are not. If we are not doing our meditation, then we are not on our way to becoming satsangis. By putting more emphasis on the physical Master than on his teachings, we lose the entire point. The Master's finger is pointing to the eye centre but we are busy worshipping his finger, not trying to reach where his finger is pointing. Through action we must now do our part for the welfare of our soul.

Given the urgency of our goal, why do we find meditation so difficult, and why do we get so disheartened on the path? One reason is that we want to measure our spiritual progress. As we do in our worldly activities, we look for some kind of scorecard. We are accustomed to seeing results from our worldly efforts. So we approach meditation thinking that the more effort we put in, the more results we should see.

Soami Ji says:

*The fruit of worldly actions is quite manifest to the living being and hence he is easily entangled in the world. But the fruit of spiritual work is hidden, and belief in its value is therefore slow to develop.*

Sar Bachan

We not only expect results, but we want those results instantly.  
Initiation today, enlightenment tomorrow!

What we are ultimately trying to accomplish is not easy. Controlling the mind and senses is the most difficult thing on earth to achieve. It is less complicated if we adapt the rest of our activities to meet this challenge – make it our life's work. But if we try to squeeze Sant Mat into an incompatible lifestyle, we run into trouble. If we want true freedom, we have to choose between wanting the world or wanting to return to our spiritual home.

Meditation doesn't work like our worldly activities. We are not able to measure our progress. We have been told simply to meditate – just that. No expectations, no rewards and no scores. Just sit every single day. It is never too late to start trying. At the end of it all, it is his love and grace that will pull us through. Let us do our best; without a doubt, our efforts will please him.

The sole purpose of every satsang, of every Sant Mat book and of our Master working so hard for us every single day is to give us one simple message: we can do our meditation. Otherwise he would not have initiated us. So let's forget about waiting for the perfect moment and just do it.



# Our Life's Job Card

In the days of the Sikh gurus there was a disciple who was not happy with the state of affairs in the world. He kept complaining to his guru about the problems in the world – the diseases, strife, poverty, wars and unhappiness. He asked why, if God was so loving and compassionate, didn't he just take away all the troubles in the world and make everything perfect?

Eventually the Satguru asked him to sit in front of him in bhajan. The satguru then, with his own divine power, took his soul up through the inner regions. The guru allowed the disciple to see with his own inner perception the entire workings of the creation as well as all the individual karmas unfolding. The guru then asked him to say what he thought needed changing.

After examining everything the disciple turned to his guru and said that there was nothing that needed any change. He said, "I can now see that everything is absolutely perfect just as it is." He apologized and said that from now on he would live happily in the will of his guru and God, totally satisfied that everything that was happening in the world was exactly as it should be.

I'm sure that we can relate to this disciple, as these same thoughts may have crossed our minds many times. Just like this disciple, we sometimes struggle to understand why the world is in such a mess and why our lives are sometimes in such turmoil. Our Master has told us many times that our lives are unfolding as they should, and that everything is happening exactly as the Lord has willed it. Yet we can't seem to help wondering if things could possibly be different.

During a question and answer session back in the 1980's a lady came to the microphone and sobbed through her tale of woe, telling Maharaj Ji that life had become almost unbearable because of the heavy burdens that had been placed on her shoulders. Maharaj Ji said gently, "Sister, please don't take life so seriously. It's all just a gigantic puppet show."

We've been told so many times by the Master that we are just actors playing the roles assigned to us according to all our actions in previous lives. As the playwright William Shakespeare wrote:

*All the world's a stage  
And all the men and women merely players  
They have their exits and their entrances  
And one man in his time plays many parts.*

*As You Like It*

And in his *Rubaiyat*, the Persian mystic poet Omar Khayyam wrote:

*For in and out, above, about and below,  
'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show,  
Played in a Box whose Candle is the Sun,  
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.*

All true Masters have said that when we are born we come with a scroll imprinted on our forehead, listing all the events and actions that we will have to undergo during this life. Let's call this our job card for this life. When our Master initiates us, he tears up this job card and rewrites our destiny as he sees fit. We can be sure that this modified choreography of events has been made a lot easier for us to bear. Knowing how loving and compassionate our Master is, we can also be certain that this special list includes a huge discount. After all, haven't we been told that he turns a serious stab into a pinprick?

Nothing is happening haphazardly. We are reaping the comeback from actions that we ourselves have performed previously. In order to clear this mountain of karmas, our Master has choreographed our entire life so that, through his grace and mercy, our job card will be cleared when we get to the end of it. And yet our minds still wonder if things could not have been different.

We have to understand that the mind is not actually a part of us. It is a separate entity living inside us. On our way down into this creation, as we passed through Trikuti, this entity hitched a ride and has been inside us ever since. It is this entity that is generating many different thoughts in order to lead us astray. And because of our close association with the mind, we think that *we* are doing the thinking and we follow these thoughts, one after another. And another.

Our Satguru has told us many times that the mind is our biggest enemy, but this doesn't sink in. Instead of our endless thinking, shouldn't we be

much more dedicated to simran and meditation in order to hasten our journey back to our true home with our Master? Shouldn't we be eager to do what he asks us to do?

Our Master has told us that being blessed with a human birth is a rare privilege. He has also said that to be pulled to the feet of a living Master is the most precious gift that God can bestow on a soul. And all he has asked us to do is to meditate every day and adhere strictly to the vows we made when initiated. As well as during regular meditation, he has also asked us to do our simran whenever our mind is not fully occupied. This simran is crucial as it helps to stop the mind continuously thinking about worldly matters.

However, when we do simran more often, we may crave distractions and worldly nonsense. So as each new thought enters our mind, let's examine this thought and observe what it's about. Does it lead us towards our Master or does it try to lure us into indulging our fancy? If it's a thought about our Satguru, meditation, simran or the path, we can be sure that this has been generated by our Master's grace. Also, if we're not occupied with any worldly duties and we suddenly feel the urge to sit for some extra meditation, we can be absolutely sure that this motivation has also come through his grace.

Our Master is taking us back with him to Sach Khand and the only thought that should occupy our minds is how best to please him. He has sacrificed his entire life in order to rescue us. What can we sacrifice as a token of gratitude for his priceless gift of initiation? Surely, as a token of our appreciation, we should be willing to devote a little more time to meditation than the required minimum. Our Master has said that the path and meditation should be given the highest priority in our lives. Everything else in life should be secondary. Do we behave this way, or does the mind make us feel that we're too busy looking after other things in life that we consider more important?

Great Master answered a letter from a satsangi who seemed concerned about his business, as well as the problems in his life, and the lack of sufficient time for his meditation. The Great Master told him:

*Other things in life are of minor importance.... Every satsangi in the world who has been so fortunate as to get Nam from a perfect living Master*

*should consider it his primary aim, purpose, and business in life to go inside and take up the journey to higher regions. To that everything else must be subordinated, even the making of a living. And if you make this your main objective in life, you need have no worries about business or other affairs. Do not forget that your Master is one with the Supreme Lord and he will take care of you.*

As quoted in *With a Great Master in India*

This makes it clear what we should be focusing on in this precious life. Simran is the only thing that will eventually control our wayward mind. Shouldn't we be working hard to perfect our simran?

Of course, we know that it takes a great effort to keep our simran going while not getting any results. However, that is what our Master wants us to do. So we should do our simran with love and devotion, knowing that it pleases him. Simran is knocking at his door, as much as possible with focused attention. He has said that we should do our repetition while concentrating between and slightly above our eyes. With a thankful heart let us do some dedicated knocking. This knocking should be constant, unceasing, incessant.





# Being Who You Really Are

Living in this world is no picnic. In fact, if we were to conduct an informal survey on what people think of the world as a place to live in during these times, we might be surprised at how few positive responses there would be. We are constantly being bombarded with bad news in every area of endeavour on our planet. Everything that sustains our society seems to be eroding – kindness, compassion, morality, respect for one another and even respect for ourselves.

Hazur tells us that this world has always been an unhappy place. However, what concerns the Masters is how our sojourn in this gloomy, illusionary world, affects our innocent, pristine souls. Soami Ji has this to say:

*Heavy, intense darkness prevails in the world  
and the body is a storehouse of shadows.  
Whether they are awake or asleep, I see people  
helplessly caught in the maze of the creation.  
Through ignorance of its own real home  
the soul is living here like a homeless wanderer,  
stumbling through different life forms,  
tossed about in the cycle of birth and death.  
Moment by moment she lives her days in utter misery,  
defeated, demoralized and crying in pain,  
but who is there to listen to her cries?*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*

The sole purpose of the teachings of the saints, as guardian of our souls, is to galvanize us to obey the vows that we made to our Master so we can realize our true essence. The tragic truth is that *we* are those souls living in “utter misery, defeated, demoralized and crying in pain.” We are not objective bystanders looking on and shaking our heads in sympathy. We are the souls that Soami Ji is talking about.

We need to act now. We are morally obliged to move from our narrow-minded, false and misleading view of who we are to a spiritually accurate view of our true reality as spiritual beings. The Master is here for each of us and only with his love can we begin to recognize that we

are not body and mind. Only he can lead us to this understanding.  
As Soami Ji says:

*I am here to explain to you now  
that only the Master can save you.  
Burn your attachments to the world  
in the fire of your love for the Master –  
the kind of love that should make you forget  
your body and mind.  
Obtain the alchemy of Nam from the Master  
and be free of all your confusion.*

Only the Master is able to save us from Kal's web of attachments and from returning lifetime after lifetime to this realm. Receiving initiation from him is the key to this huge privilege. In the book, *From Self to Shabd*, the writer says: "Ignorance of who we are is the 'disease' at the root of all our problems."

We are not yet clear about who we really are. Can we become aware of who we are if we live in the illusion that we are separate from all other beings? As we read in *self to Shabd*:

*The misconception that we exist as a separate individual is a big hurdle on the path of spirituality. Soami Ji Maharaj says, "Man does not know who he is, whose essence he is, nor where He (the Source) is."  
Not knowing that in reality we are the formless, deathless Shabd, we remain stuck in the identity we have created as we go through our human experience.*

What we already know – and accept – is that, as we read in *The Path of the Masters*, "All men are born to an inheritance far beyond and above their wildest flights of fancy." Our egos make this concept very easy to accept. Man has always aspired to being more deserving of better circumstances. And the Masters promise us that the process of learning the true value of self will be most illuminating. As the author confirms: "When a man gets but a glimpse of what he really is now, and especially of what he may yet become by a little effort, that knowledge will give him the greatest possible inspiration."

We must examine our soul to see if we are in a fortunate or poor spiritual state. How do we do this? The Masters tell us that the soul is Shabd, and Shabd is the essence of every being – every creature, every entity, everything that comprises the world we live in. However, this still doesn't enable us to examine our own soul.

There is a truth about the soul that true mystics and even some quantum physicists agree upon – and that is that Shabd is love and therefore the soul is love. Understanding this, we have some idea of how to examine our soul. We know that true mystics are supreme living examples of love – embodiments of love. By studying how the Masters conduct themselves we have some idea of what we have to do to clean up our own act. This ongoing introspection and re-evaluation of our spiritual state, holding the impeccable model of our Master before us, should enable us to shape ourselves with the objective of realizing our spiritual essence.

Baba Ji has told us so often that we ought to constantly ask ourselves: why are we on the path? Why do we meditate? Where are we trying to go with our spiritual practice? We know our goal: to eventually become one with God. We need to keep this goal in mind. We must keep in mind the magnitude of our divine objective.

We have been instructed in the techniques involved to discover who we are, and the practice has been thoroughly demonstrated. Maintaining this focus on our objective is exactly what our Master requires of us – and what better motivation is there than that of pleasing him? We really can't go wrong if we focus everything we do on pleasing him. That is true gratitude.

But our lives as disciples on the path are unfortunately not without obstacles. Every obstacle which hinders our progress on the path stems from the mind. American author Will Durant sums up an extract from the philosopher Aristotle's writing as follows:

*We are what we repeatedly do.  
Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.*

Our actions can become habits. If we repeat positive actions often enough, they become what we are. Through prioritizing our simran and bhajan, our spiritual practice will become a natural part of us. With this approach,

the divine love we have yearned for will present itself and we will realize our true identity.

This complex creation with which we have become so besotted has not presented us with a single permanent benefit – other than that it has enabled us to meet our Master and enjoy his dedicated friendship and unconditional love. Rumi says:

*Do not strive so much to achieve your worldly ambitions;  
Strive only in your religious affairs.  
Otherwise at the end, your life will be unfulfilled,  
your bread unbaked.*

Juliet Mabey, ed., *Rumi: A Spiritual Treasury*.

Rumi is saying that if we put all our effort into our spiritual practice, his grace will ensure that our lives are fulfilled and joyous – and will secure our passage out of this creation.

Pleasing our Master should become our habit and pave the way to our objective. With this as our objective we soon realize that there is no spiritual gain from indulging in material objects and pursuits. The only permanent treasure is attained by our spiritual practice as instructed by our Master.



# The Nature of Illusion

*Beings come to the world  
in a sad state, knowing nothing,  
and they leave in the same condition.  
They keep their grip on the world,  
and still they leave with nothing.*

*Many Voices, One Song*

This is an observation of a sad truth by the mystic Samarth Ramdas. It highlights a problem that pervades the entire world. We arrive here in a state of ignorance. We grow up learning the ways of the world and believing in them. And, following the example set by our parents and our peers, we engage with this world and become enmeshed in all its comings and goings.

We strive for name and fame, we work hard to accumulate wealth and property, and we search desperately for happiness. But lasting happiness eludes us. Even when we seem to succeed in our endeavours, nagging dissatisfaction gnaws at us. We find that, in proportion to the measure of worldly success we achieve, there is a price to pay, and that price always involves suffering. There seems to be no end to suffering.

When we finally realize our utter helplessness and inability to find happiness, we come into the aura of the spiritual Master of our time. Initially we have no idea of his lofty status, but are drawn intuitively by his personal magnetism. It is then that we discover a path that *can* lead us out of the hall of mirrors that is this material world. Let us consider what this path is, in the light of what Soami Ji has to say:

*Why not submit to the Master?  
You have spent this human life in delusion.  
Your spouse, your children,  
indeed your entire family are cheats,  
so why waste time and energy on them?  
Why don't you seriously consider the fact  
that this world is just an illusion?*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*

In what way is this world an illusion? We generally relate to the world as it appears to us via our senses. But actually, our senses are unreliable. In truth, all that exists is a sea of light – a great ocean of superconscious energy from which the universe has manifested as a devolved form of that energy.

Modern-day physicists are only now coming to terms with this astounding fact. They do not relate to the ‘superconscious’ part – the idea of conscious energy eludes them completely – but they have discovered that when you get down to the very smallest fragments of matter, at one moment they manifest all the properties and behaviour of matter and the next moment they demonstrate the properties and behaviour of pure energy.

Quantum physicists are starting to say that all matter is oscillating at a very high frequency, between form and that state of pure energy. So, if we bear in mind that the world that we see, and think we know, is not what it appears to be, we can re-evaluate our relationship with it. If it is all so evanescent, how can we form binding and lasting relationships with anyone? How can we call anything or anyone our own? Perversely though, it would seem that we can become possessed by virtue of our investment in these things and our attachment to them. As Soami Ji says:

*The mind is so utterly foolish,  
so in love with its own attachments -  
how can it free itself from this web of deception?*

Because we see the material world as real and true, and because we have become slaves to the desires of our mind, we become involved with and attached to all these things. As long as we believe all of this to be real, it is not possible for us to find our way out of this hall of mirrors alone. Our consciousness shapes our reality, so when we direct our attention into the material world, we are identifying with the degraded forms of energy that manifest there and establish that as our reality. The mystics say that to escape this domain of illusion we are going to need help.

It is when we realize this – that on our own we have no hope of escaping the trap of karmas which drives the endless wheel of transmigration – that we become restless. When we reach the point in our spiritual evolution where the burden of worldliness becomes unbearable, the soul within us cries for help.

That cry does not go unheard. The Supreme Father hears and responds. In his love and mercy he sends his “light bearer” to seek us out and rescue us. And this, says Soami Ji, is his message:

*Attach yourself to Nam, dear friend,  
and patiently hold still within yourself.  
Understand the will of the Beloved -  
whatever he does is entirely for your good.*

The mystics tell us that our perception of the world and our place in it is all wrong. We think that this is all there is, and that this is where we belong. So, we believe that if we want happiness and peace, then we think that this is where we’ll find it. However, we now learn there are worlds beyond worlds and universes beyond imagination. The mystics tell us that there are regions of light above this shadowed domain of pain and sorrow. They assure us that these regions exist, and the pathway to them can be revealed by the Satguru.

In this vein the Master explains to us that the key to the whole thing is consciousness. To this end he teaches us how we can extract our attention from the gross elements of the material world and collect it at the eye centre. The Master explains that we need to become still within ourselves. For aeons we’ve been rushing around in the world, generating more and more karmas, which in turn tie us to the wheel of coming and going.

Now the Satguru has taken over the administration of our karmas, and whatever needs to be done, he will make sure that it gets done. He asks us only to direct our attention inwards and perform the simple meditation techniques that he has taught us: simran and bhajan. This alone will prevent us from getting further ensnared by the pitfalls of worldly life. When this is accomplished, we will have completed the first major step towards our spiritual liberation. And so Soami Ji tells us:

*Have faith that no one other than the Guru belongs to you.  
Go to the Master’s harbour  
and tie your soul to the primal Shabd.  
Only the Shabd, and nothing else,  
can liberate you from this web.*

What Soami Ji is saying here is that all our worldly associations are temporary and are a function of our karmas and our past associations. Repeatedly we are born and grow up in the environment of a family and friends with whom we naturally form strong bonds. However, not one of these relationships will last. Every single one of them will come to an end. Only our Master is our permanent friend.

The bond between Master and disciple is forever. There is no relationship in this world or the next to compare with this. He is the one who is the key to our future. And he tells us there is only one way out of our situation and that is to devote ourselves to our spiritual practice: simran, which extracts our consciousness from the mire of the material world, and bhajan or Shabd practice, which has the effect of merging our consciousness in the divine sound. The Shabd alone can raise our soul from the worlds of shadow to the domain of light.

By attending the satsang of a true Master, and putting what he says into practice to the best of our ability, we will progress spiritually. Our consciousness will rise up, and the shackles and chains that bind us here will be steadily loosened and eventually broken. Every step in the right direction is taking us towards our goal.

We have had endless numbers of lives in the great cycles of incarnation, in all the eight million four hundred thousand species into which a soul may incarnate. We have surely had enough of that! Now we have been blessed by the initiation of a true Master of our time, together with the incredible gift of a human birth. Now at last we have the road beneath our feet that leads to the court of the Supreme Lord.





# Face to Face with Death

Imagine that you are being swept away from the beach by a strong current in the sea. The irony is that you are close enough for people to see you, but you are too far away for them to hear your cry for help. Every minute a wave crashes over your head. You swim frantically, but you're tiring, and unless you get help soon, you will drown.

This happened to me. Minutes went by with the waves relentlessly crashing over me. I never stopped shouting for help, but my voice could not be heard over the sound of the sea and no one even suspected that I was in distress. I have never felt so helpless and alone.

In my heart I knew that my Master was there for me. But how was I to know my destiny? How was I to know if I would live or die that day? My instinct to stay alive was strong, but as time passed I was getting exhausted. I never lost faith in my Master. But was I at peace with the Lord's will? I don't know, but I knew I was running out of time.

Then salvation came. In a nearby car park a young body boarder was about to leave the beach when suddenly he heard distant cries for help coming from over the sand dune. He happened to be a trained life saver and his instinct to help took charge. He ran to the beach, swam towards me, and soon delivered me, utterly exhausted, to safety.

A life-threatening situation makes one see life as a precious gift not to be squandered. One suddenly realizes what an advantage and privilege it is to be a disciple of a true living Master. The spiritual link between Master and disciple feels very real.

From my perspective there were two possible outcomes to this potentially fatal situation: being rescued or drowning. From a higher perspective, my destiny was already carved in stone – or as Baba Jaimal Singh so aptly put it in *Spiritual Letters*: “Whatever is to be done has already been done.”

At the time of initiation we make a commitment to daily meditation. We know little of the importance of this commitment at the time, but as time goes by our meditation gradually prepares us for our unavoidable death.

However, when I was face to face with death, was I prepared to die? My honest answer is NO! I was very scared. And I felt a strong pull towards my loved ones. I was not at all ready to leave them. I could not help thinking how distressed my husband would be if I drowned. I thought of my daughter, my elderly father who was dying from heart disease, and my mother who needed my support caring for him.

When we are put to the test like this we are faced with our strengths and weaknesses, and it dawns on us that we are not quite the person we thought we were. So a life-threatening situation can humble us and make us realize our insignificance and fragility. And the prospect of dying can make us truly appreciate the precious gift of a human birth.

At the same time, though, through our daily meditation we are preparing to die. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Die to Live* that meditation is a daily rehearsal to face death.

*That is the real purpose of meditation. Before you play your part on a stage, you rehearse your part so many times, just to be perfect....  
Meditation is nothing but a preparation to die.*



# The Glance of Love

Most of us very happily refer to our Master as “Master,” but it is a word with many interesting connotations. It implies power, control, accomplishment, great skill or ability – someone who has gained mastery over other people. Someone who has gained mastery over a skill or activity can also be said to have complete control over his or her instrument. Having the upper hand in a situation might mean one has mastered that situation.

How truly fortunate that our Master has all of the skill, the knowledge, power and control he needs to get his job done, as well as infinite love.

So, what is the Master’s role in our lives? First, he is our redeemer and saviour. He is the only person who can free us from this jail of creation and take us back home to God. Second, he is our guide and teacher who has travelled the route home, knows all of its complexities and has mastered them all. And third, he is the Master washerman – cleansing us as we undertake this return journey.-

The redeemer part of Master’s job is to initiate us on to the path of Sant Mat to reunite us with God so that we can leave this cycle of birth, death and rebirth forever. At the time of initiation our Master places his Radiant Form in the eye centre of each disciple, and from that moment on is constantly with them, guiding their every step, physically and spiritually. Sultan Bahu says: “A lover, with but one glance of love, can carry millions to their deliverance.” All initiates have received that glance of love.

The first thing that Master explains is that we have been in this creation for aeons of time. And during that time our soul has incarnated into millions of different life forms. All of this we would continue to do were it not for Master’s glance of love.

Masters tell us that originally we came from Sach Khand, at God’s behest, and only a true Master can reveal the route home, place the disciple on it and guide him all the way. The Master explains that God has decreed that the route home is the path of love. Perhaps we were sent away in order to learn to consciously love the Lord.-

Our Master ensures our eventual release by reconnecting our souls with the Shabd, the Word or Nam – God’s power through which creation was

brought into existence. This power is present in all living things, and in humans it takes the form of sound and light that our inner consciousness can experience.

The Master must teach us to look at this world of phenomena differently. We have been here for so long that we think we belong here. We need to view it as a room in an inn where we will stay for a few nights only. Soami Ji tells us in *Sar Bachan*:

*All this play is a night's dream,  
and I have now woken up.  
False is the body, false is the world,  
and false is the mind that allures.*

As quoted in *Sultan Bahu*

Having told us that we belong to God, having put us on the pathway back to him, the Master explains that we must detach ourselves from the world and attach ourselves to him. He explains this extraordinary concept that God's true home is within the human body. He is the very essence of our being. He is not just close by – he is *us*, we are him. But we need to follow our Master's teachings before we can experience this for ourselves.

Now we are very happy with all that our Master has done and explained. Yes, he has initiated us; and yes, he will guard and guide us all the way home. But we must participate actively. If he *is* our Master, then we must bow down and submit to his will completely. We call him Master – but do we treat him as a Master?

Sant Mat is a path of love and effort. First comes the Lord's love and grace in the form of the Master and initiation, but then comes our response in the form of our effort – principally: meditation, simran and attitude. Maulana Rum says:

*My pull it was that caused you  
to make your efforts.  
It freed your feet.*

As quoted in *Sultan Bahu*

Are we obeying, trusting and accepting in all things? Nowhere does this question become more valid than when it comes to our Master's other role in our lives – that of master washerman. Happily, we accept him as the great redeemer, freeing us from this world. But it is just possible that we're less comfortable with his role as the master cleaner.

Why does he need to cleanse us and how does he go about this? Masters explain that before the soul can merge back into the Lord it must be pure and clean, as it was originally. As long as we still need to reap the consequences of past actions and are still bound by our karmas and attachments to things of this world, we will not be free to escape from this domain of Kal.

One of Kal's best devices to keep us here is our forgetfulness of previous lives and ignorance of the law of karma. In each lifetime we sow more than we can reap, and each lifetime's overflow gets added to the stockpile, which, left to our own devices, we can never, pay off fully. Which means we are trapped.

So how is this debt to be paid? If we can't do it ourselves, how will we ever be free? The answer lies with the Master and his glance of love. He has taken charge. He now judges how best the load can be lifted and how the purification process should be undergone. The negative power must accept his mastery in this instance.

First of all, he asks us to become actively involved in this process by meditating. Masters explain that meditation is the only way to empower us with enough strength to undergo our karmas gracefully. So, meditation is our principal contribution. But also as cleanser he can take a different approach. A satisfied, totally content and happy soul might not see a need to leave and re-join God. What therefore is Master's method of disillusioning us, of making us long for God's love?

Some of it seems to be through suffering and struggle. Suffering is one of his most successful tools. Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *The Dawn of Light*:

*The Master tries to get as much of the debt as possible paid off by suffering here, so that by suffering a longing for the Master may be created and the upward journey made easier.*

Feeling disenchanted, lonely and sad is – for some of us, par for the course – but the true thread running through all is the love of the Master pulling us home. He does what he needs to do to turn us towards him. Master is like the potter, slapping the wet clay on the outside and supporting the pot on the inside. Kabir says in *Kabir, the Great Mystic*:

*The Master is the potter and his devotees the clay.  
He kneads the clay, removing its impurities,  
then shapes the pot,  
supporting it within  
with his own hands – unfailing, strong –  
while slapping the clay from the outside alone.*

No doubt we have all staggered under the impact of the potter's slaps. No doubt there have been times when many of us have thought: "This isn't fair. This is too much. Where is he?" These are natural responses to calamities. If we are happy to call him redeemer, then we must be equally happy to call him cleanser. He will take care of our whole karmic story, one way or another, out of his extraordinary love for us.

Meditation is his gift of love to us, to help us cope on a daily basis; to help us pay off our own debts; to help us move towards him, where he is waiting for us at the eye focus with nothing but love. Great Master wrote:

*My home is within you and I am also within you. The outward homes are of clay and are perishable. The real permanent home is within. I wish you could come up and see me there.*

*The Dawn of Light*



# BOOK REVIEW

## God Is Closer Than You Think

BY JOHN ORTBERG

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Ortberg begins this book by recalling his visit to the Sistine Chapel to see the mural painted by Michelangelo on its ceiling. The mural portrays, he says, “God’s great desire to be with the human beings he has made in his own image.”

*The figure of God is extended toward the man with great vigour.... His head is turned toward the man, and his gaze is fixed on him. God’s arm is stretched out, his index finger extended straight forward, every muscle is taut.... It is as if even in the midst of all creation God’s entire being is wrapped up in his impatient desire to close the gap between himself and this man. He can’t wait. His hand comes within a hairbreadth of the man’s hand.... But having come that close, he allows just a little space, so that Adam can choose. He waits for Adam to make his move.*

Ortberg is a Christian minister, so he refers often to the Christian scriptures and the example of Jesus. He tells us that in the Bible the most frequent promise God makes is not “I will forgive you” or “I will protect you,” but simply “I will be with you.” Relating various Bible stories where this simple promise of God’s presence is reiterated, Ortberg concludes that here and now, in the midst of the most ordinary moments of our lives, God is always present, waiting for us to turn to him. With the image from the Sistine Chapel ceiling as a metaphor for the human condition, he writes:

*Adam is more difficult to interpret. His arm is partially extended toward God but his body reclines in a lazy pose, leaning backwards as if he has no interest at all in making a connection. Maybe he assumes that God, having come this far, will close the gap. Maybe he is indifferent to the possibility of touching his creator. Maybe he lacks the strength. All he would have to do is lift a finger.*

Metaphorically, the effort a human being needs to make to touch God, to be fully aware of his closeness, is tiny: just lifting a finger. Yet most of us go through our days unaware of him. Why does God choose to make his presence so subtle? Ortberg says,

*It allows creatures as small and frail as human beings the capacity for choice that we would never have in the obvious presence of infinite power.... God wants to be known, but not in a way that overwhelms us, that takes away the possibility of love freely chosen.*

How do we choose that love? What do we need to do if we want to “receive each moment” of the day as “a God-charged sliver of grace”?

*This is what we need to remember at the outset: Spending the day with God does not usually involve doing different things from what we already do. Mostly it involves learning to do what we already do in a new way – with God.*

Ortberg offers some practical, concrete advice about various aspects of the daily routine. For example, how do we begin the day? As he puts it, how can we “wake up with God?” He suggests taking just a few moments to “acknowledge your dependence on God,” saying something like “I won’t live through this day banking on my own strength and power.” Ask for his help and “renew your invitation for God to spend the day with you.” Although God is present with us, regardless of whether we are aware or not, we still have an active role in inviting him to be with us. Ortberg continues with practical advice for a variety of situations we go through every day – such as eating, working, dealing with interruptions.

Ortberg lays out what he calls “foundational truths” for the lifelong struggle to become more aware of God’s closeness and suggests that we review and remind ourselves of these. Some are:

- *Coming to recognize and experience God’s presence is learned behaviour; I can cultivate it.*
- *My task is to meet God in this moment.*
- *Whenever I fail I can always start again right away. My desire for God ebbs and flows, but his desire for me is constant.*
- *Every thought carries a “spiritual charge” that moves me a little closer to or a little farther from God.*

He notes that some thoughts “move us toward love and joy and peace and patience.” He suggests that thoughts that move us in this direction might be considered as “God-breathed,” as if they come from God. He cites psychological studies showing that the natural tendency of the mind is negative, veering automatically toward fear, anger, unhappy memories, and other forms of self-centred imprisonment. Our work is to recognize thoughts that lead into spiritual darkness, choosing to follow instead the impulses that lead us toward God’s presence. “For instance, nowhere in the Bible does



it say, 'And then God worried.' So I can be quite confident that thoughts that move me toward paralyzed anxiety are not from God."

He writes, "The mind is an instrument of staggering potential... For it is in our minds that we live in conscious awareness of and interaction with God." In other words, "being with God is something that takes place primarily in our thoughts, our mind." This requires what he calls "interactive awareness."

*If you have ever had a relationship with someone who worships at the cult of the Remote Control, you know the difference between "being in the same room as" and "being with." Being with another person requires what might be called interactive awareness. I am aware that you are with me, and the things that you do and say are influencing the stream of thoughts and feelings going on inside me. We interact.*

He stresses that God is closer to us than we think, only a hairbreadth away as depicted in the painting on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. He is never more than a thought away. Some people feel they would have to become very good, or very accomplished in spiritual discipline, for God to want to be close to them. Ortberg disagrees:

*The story of the Bible isn't primarily about the desire of people to be with God; it is the desire of God to be with people. One day I was sitting on a plane next to a businessman. The screen saver on his computer was the picture of a little boy taking what looked like his first shaky steps. "Is that your son?" I asked. Big mistake.... He had a whole string of pictures of Adam doing things that pretty much all children do, and he displayed them one at a time. With commentary.... "I can't wait to get home to him," the man said. "In the meantime, I could look at these pictures a hundred times a day. They never get old to me." (They were already getting pretty tiresome to everybody else in our section of the plane.)*

Ortberg found himself getting annoyed with the man. He suppressed the urge to say that his own children had done all the same things, earlier and better. The only reason this very ordinary child fascinated the man was that he looked at him through the eyes of a father.

*And then it hit me.... I am the child on God's screen saver. And so are you. The tiniest details of our lives never grow old to him.... God shows our pictures to the angels until even the angels get a little tired of looking.*



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