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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

# contents

- 2 A Perfect Devotee
- 4 Seva
- 7 Real Happiness
- 9 Our Divine Purpose
- 16 Camels on the Roof
- 18 His Gift
- 21 Day by Day
- 26 Small Beginnings
- 27 Straight Down the Middle
- 30 The Beauty of Love
- 35 Living in the Presence of the Lord
- 38 Something to Think About
- 39 Forgetfulness
- 42 Feeling Funny
- 43 Grace
- 45 Live and Learn
- 48 Book Review

## **Spiritual Link**

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# A Perfect Devotee

*One who has purged himself of ego  
Is like a wish granting gem.  
He slanders nobody, hurts nobody,  
Thinks ill of nobody –  
His mind is clear as crystal.  
He need not go to holy places  
For he is the holiest place of all.  
The world comes to him,  
And the sight of him gives deliverance.  
Does one whose mind is pure  
Need beads or any outward adornments?  
He sings forever in praise of the Lord  
So that his mind is full of happiness.  
He has given his body, mind and wealth  
To the Lord and has no more desires left.  
Such a one is more precious  
Than the philosopher's stone, says Tuka.  
How can his greatness be described?*

Tukaram, *The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*



# Seva

Much has been said and written about the need for and the benefits of seva and how it can best be done. Like a farmer, the gracious Master tills the soil of spirituality, sowing the seed of Nam. The soil is suitably prepared, protected with the fence of satsang, then watered and harvested through daily meditation. Seva is meant to check the tendencies of the lower mind which would otherwise be like weeds in the field where the seed of Nam is sown. This is why the saints have laid stress on seva as an integral part of discipleship.

Looking at the disciple's overall development, the Masters explain that seva is of four types: with wealth, with the body, with mind and with the soul. The first three sevas are the means to the real seva, which is the seva of the soul, or connecting the soul with the sound within. Seva means that service which pleases the Master, and the most pleasing seva to him is our meditation. Seva of wealth is useful because accumulating wealth usually leads us towards self-indulgence, and attachment to wealth creates an inflated ego or sense of superiority within us. Wealth used for the benefit of the whole community helps to eliminate the element of greed and sense of possession. Wealth used for the common good in rendering service to our fellow beings invokes the love and compassion of the Lord.

Seva with the body is also done in order to eliminate ego from within ourselves. Since ego is the biggest barrier between us and the Lord, any service that helps to reduce or eliminate it is acceptable to the Master. The mind is highly impressionable, and by giving us an opportunity to come together and serve, the Master deliberately puts his disciples in a safe and secure environment where they can grow. It is a sure sign of his grace and he wants his disciples to learn to work

in harmony and love. The best seva is done when the mind is kept in check and no free rein is given to it. Whatever the assigned seva role may be is immaterial. If the seva is carried out in harmony and in a spirit of love, it has a powerful cleansing effect on the mind. It is a great mistake to think that one seva role is more important than another. Seva is meant to produce the necessary mental discipline and humility to be able to succeed in meditation. Hazur Maharaj Ji spoke about any outward form of seva as “adornment of meditation”.

To stay the seva course, just like a long distance runner, certain disciplines – some do’s and don’ts – form an integral part of training and ultimate success. If physical seva is done merely with the body, without the accompanying discipline and love, then its benefits are naturally limited.

Obedience and discipline are often tested during the Master’s wonderful official or surprise visits to a Centre. Our physical discipline is lacking if we deny Baba Ji the space to come and go freely by rushing and following him from one location to another. When we exercise restraint, the Master praises our discipline to encourage us, but we should remember that there is always room for improvement. Since we are the direct beneficiaries of this discipline, any transgression simply works against our interests and risks the displeasure of the Master.

There have also been instances when we become frustrated and upset if seva is not available on demand. Seva at Centres is meant to facilitate the provision of satsang. In reality we appear to be saying that we can do without satsang but not seva. This is putting the cart before the horse. There may be times when seva is not available in the short term, and accepting the situation cheerfully is also a form of seva. John Milton, the English poet, wrote: “They also serve who only stand and wait.” We are then in the arena of the ‘seva of self-restraint’. Seva of this type is often more difficult than carrying out physical tasks, since we

have to check the urgent impulses of the mind. This takes us from the physical to the mental, which links to the spiritual. Seva with the mind means to adopt a positive attitude.

Different types of sevas serve like links in a chain in the development of a disciple. According to the saints, service with the body and wealth is comparatively easy to do. Service with mind is more challenging, and to serve the Lord in spirit by carrying out meditation is the most difficult.

The Master reminds us not to mistake any outward form of seva as a substitute for meditation. To keep the soul attuned to the divine Shabd resounding within us forms the core practice of the science of spirituality. After connecting the soul to the sound current, the Master aims to keep us usefully engaged in seva, alongside meditation, so that our spiritual practice rests safely on a sound foundation of selfless service.



*The first and most important thing for an initiate is to realize the great value of human life and the true purpose for which the Lord has conferred this rare gift on us. A soul comes into human life after sometimes passing millions of ages in the lower, sub-human species in which God-realization is not possible. This privilege and capacity to return to our eternal home has been given to human beings only.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

# Real Happiness

*Q. Master, how can we be happy in this world and keep our balance when meditation is dry sometimes, and also our mind is not getting what it wants in the world anymore?*

**A.** Sister, actually we can only be happy when our soul is in love or in devotion with the Father, because the inclination of the soul is always towards its own origin, towards its own source. The more we keep the soul away from its source, from its destination, from the Lord, the more unhappy it remains. The more we are nearer on the path, towards our home, the more joy and bliss we feel within.

There is no pleasure or happiness in the outside worldly objects or worldly achievements. They are all short-lived, temporary, transitory, because there is always danger of losing those things. If you have money which gives you pleasure, there is always a danger in your mind of losing that money. If you have a lovely wife or a lovely husband, there's always the fear of losing him or her. When that fear is in our mind there is always pain and misery, even at the base of these so-called pleasures. So that is no pleasure at all.

Real happiness and pleasure is only to be in love and devotion for the Father, to develop that. The more you build that within yourself, the more happy you will become. Meditation no doubt is dry to begin with, because for ages our mind has been in the habit of running outside towards the senses, towards the worldly objects, towards the worldly achievements. And we are so interlinked with each other, so much attached to each other, that naturally it is not so easy to withdraw the mind from all that and attach it to the Shabd and Nam

within. Naturally it requires a great effort to do it, and meditation to begin with is definitely dry – but it is worth achieving.

*Q. Maharaj Ji, when I give in to feelings of emptiness and hopelessness, does the Master still help me at those times?*

**A.** Well, brother, in the morning when the sun rises, it is there for the whole day. But sometimes thick clouds come and we cannot make use of the light of that sun. It does not mean that the sun is not there – it is just behind the clouds.

So we should not despair. The Lord's grace is within every one of us, but due to our karmas, sometimes thick clouds come within us and we feel that emptiness, that void within ourselves. Not finding anything within and not being attached to anything outside, we feel that void, but that should not cause us to despair at all. That is for our own good, our own advantage. We know the reality of this world, we know our real self, so we try to find the reality. This should help us to attend more to meditation, to overcome that void and emptiness.

The sun is always there. His grace is always there – there is no question of emptiness. Our cup is upside down. His grace is always flowing, so we should try to turn our cup into a position to receive his grace. Our mind is scattered outside. It runs to the senses, it runs to the whole universe through the nine apertures. We should try to withdraw the mind and hold it at the eye centre and make our cup receptive to his grace, to receive that nectar within and to overcome that void and emptiness.

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



# Our Divine Purpose

The following article is based upon an English language satsang given by the present Master in Delhi in March 2013.

Many of us live our lives in confusion because we don't understand how creation works. We see someone leading a life of virtue yet who suffers terribly. We see someone else leading a selfish and immoral life yet who seems to enjoy only comforts and happiness. Life is clearly a mix of ups and downs but we don't see what makes it so, and it doesn't appear to make sense. This is where understanding the principle of karma can help. Karma is the law of cause and effect, of action and reaction – what we sow is what we reap – *jesi karni vesi bharni* as the Punjabi proverb says, or “what goes round comes around”. Karma is the principle of creation that makes us accountable for every single thing we do.

According to the law of karma, the consequences of every action have to be undergone at some point in time, and there are no exceptions. Wellbeing and happiness are the consequence of good deeds; pain and suffering are the consequence of bad deeds. It is very simple. But because the causes and effects of karma may be separated by many lifetimes, we don't see the connections. Either we don't believe in karma, or if we do, our belief remains at the conceptual level and we live as though the principle is not true.

In the world, people have credits and debits in their bank accounts and the credits and debits offset each other to give a net balance. In the karmic bank, good actions – the ‘credits’ in the karmic account – do not offset ‘debit’ entries. All living creatures have to face the consequences of both good and bad actions to keep on balancing their

account – impact for impact, positive and negative. In this way the law of karma keeps souls trapped in the creation, like in a prison, as souls go from suffering to happiness again and again, perpetually, since there are always accounts of give and take outstanding at the end of each life.

Some people think that to improve their destiny, a person can turn to the practices of religion – to prayers, rituals, self-denial, or giving in charity (*pooja, path, jap, tap, daan*). But by the law of karma, such actions cannot bring liberation. At best they may lead to a happier life in a future birth since all actions are part of the cycle of karma. Our actions may lead us to a better environment, more comforts, more wealth and luxuries – but then that lifestyle itself may lead to pride, arrogance, self-importance and greed. Recall the Indian proverb: *Tapo raj, rajo nark* – “Austerities bring royal abundance; royal indulgence brings hell.” We are bound to the cycle of birth and death and the cycle continues on and on. Human nature – we know this from our own experience – lives blind even to the very next moment.

### **The trap of karma**

When we observe people who are noble and righteous in their conduct but they are suffering, it is because the consequences of negative actions performed at some earlier time – maybe many lifetimes ago – are now causing them pain. While noble conduct certainly makes the world a better place, in the karmic bank of life good deeds cannot offset the debts incurred from bad deeds – no matter how long ago they happened, who we are now, or how or where we live. And while we are undergoing the consequences of actions already done, we go on creating fresh consequences that will affect us in some future time or future life.

Another way to help us understand creation is to see it as a ladder – a journey of thousands of steps from the simplest life forms at the base to the most complex at the top. A soul takes on different coverings as it passes from one rung to another, undergoing a particular karmic lot or destiny for each life. Life subsists on life. In some lives the being may hurt or kill others and cause suffering. Or sometimes that being suffers or is killed. Some lives are very brief and some last for hundreds of years. For each life, the breaths are numbered; pleasure and pain are experienced according to dues for that life; in each life, we are programmed to act within particular parameters. Were a soul to live even just one year in every life form, it would need to be in the creation for millions of years to climb the ladder of life even just once. Karma is the operative law for all; karma keeps life going; karma ensures that the creation will never run out of fuel.

### **Our unique potential**

How then does the pure and entirely positive consciousness or energy that is our essence ever escape from the workings of this law? At the top of the ladder, where the coverings over the soul are most complex, life is endowed with a particular intelligence or power of discrimination (*vivek*). For the human form alone, consciousness is invested with a unique potential that can be used to step off the karmic ladder. The extraordinary and distinctive quality of human consciousness is its ability to discriminate, to reflect and to choose its own way of being. By using this power of discrimination wisely, a human being can free itself from the prison of action and reaction. By using their unique power of discrimination, human beings can first of all choose to minimize the effects of karma in their lives. The true human *dharma* is not religion – it does not depend on whether whether one is Hindu, Sikh or Muslim or a member of another

religion – it asks that we recognize our intrinsic and extraordinary shared potential as human beings, and then reflect this understanding in how we choose to live.

With an understanding of karma we see that there is no one to blame for the pain one suffers – it is for each person to cultivate a truer perspective. It is an understanding of the workings of karma that makes us choose to live on a vegetarian diet and separate ourselves from the violence inherent in eating the flesh of animals – higher forms of being – simply to sustain ourselves. It is an understanding of the law of karma that makes us choose not to take recreational drugs and such substances that affect our clarity of mind and our decisions and actions. An understanding of karma gives us the commitment to lead an honest life of high moral principles, knowing that what we give is what we get and whatever we do will rebound back to us. With clear thinking on the workings of karma we can take tough decisions relatively effortlessly to gain control of our wants and desires – our body, mind and feelings – rather than be driven by them, with all their instabilities, predilections, addictions, and negative potential.

### **True dharma**

The practices of religion may orient a person towards spirituality, but just as in school we grow in capability and progress from class to class, so to realize life's spiritual nature we need to go beyond the material world with its physical and mental activities. We need to go beyond defining God as something outside of us, shaped by different cultures and languages. We need to experience God for ourselves as the one timeless divine power or creative energy, as what we have come out of and what we will merge back into, a spiritual oneness beyond all definition. Understanding and acting on this awareness is the ultimate human calling or vocation, the true *dharma*. In pursuing this calling

we fulfil the highest potential of human being: only a human being can use his distinctive consciousness to learn how creation works and rise beyond the play of karma.

To understand this better, we focus on Shabd, on Nam, or any other names given in the Gurbani to describe the divine creative power. In Christian teachings this ocean of creative energy is called the Word. “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In the Vedas it is called Anahad Nad. No matter by what words it is called, it is the primal energy responsible for the existence of everything.

### **The power of Shabd**

To free oneself from the field of action and reaction, the ‘me’ or ego-centred reality needs to merge in a power so great that it can absorb all the actions we have ever done. It is these actions that stand between our extraordinary potential and us as we are now. This power is Shabd. Like a process of ‘mergers and acquisitions’ in the business world where one company acquires both the assets and liabilities of another company, we need to merge with and be acquired by Shabd. Our assets are our good actions; our liabilities our bad ones. When a merger takes place with Shabd, because that power is unlimited and so packed with positive energy, it automatically dilutes, absorbs and cleanses us of all our karmic balances. When a tiny drop of dirty water joins with a vast, limitless ocean it is automatically diluted and purified. No longer is it an individual particle or drop; it has merged and become part of the ocean.

We cannot imagine the power that will be ours when we are in touch with the Shabd within us. Right now, and at all times, we have all the riches of the world within this human body, yet we behave as

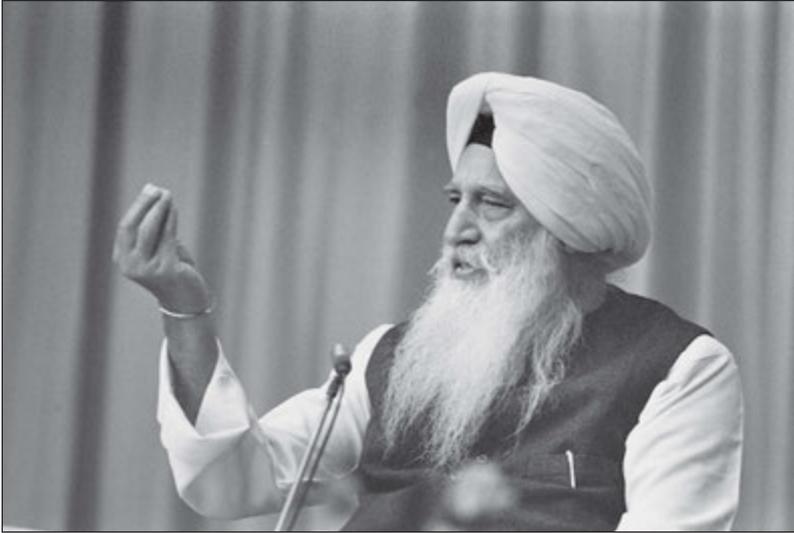
beggars, chasing happiness wherever it presents itself to us, moment to ever-changing, unpredictable moment.

Humans are blessed with the power of discrimination to enable them to take stock and then to seek and find that eternal treasure of spirituality within themselves. To find the Shabd we do not have to go anywhere – not on any pilgrimage, not to any place of worship, not to any other town, culture or country. We have only to seek this power within us by sitting in silence and becoming aware of it.

The one purpose of the perfect living master is to tell us of the need to get in touch with Shabd, to make us aware of it, to show us how to contact it within ourselves. Who knows for how many aeons our soul has suffered from the deadly disease of karma, imprisoned by the karmic law? When a person starts recovering from a disease, doctors prescribe booster vitamins to help him regain his strength. Like taking booster vitamins, associating with a spiritual master strengthens us so we can walk the path of spirituality and experience what we are.

Saints share their vision of life with anyone who seeks to know life's purpose. They assure us that we **do** have a purpose and that nothing happens by accident. Everything happens within the limitless compassion of Shabd and the logical boundaries of karma. We can understand this – we can know it for ourselves – by coming in touch with Shabd.

In the Bible (James 1:22) it says, “Be ye the doers of the Word”. The responsibility to fulfil our divine nature is described in the Gurbani as *Nam (Shabd) ki kamai* – earning the wealth of Nam, of Shabd. Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh spent forty years sharing this same message with us. The true human *dharma*, the human responsibility, the greatest work we can do – is to take right action, engage with spirit, with Shabd, and be liberated (*mukti*). This is the purpose of human life. No other life form has this option or possibility.



*Maharaj Charan Singh*

*Shabd karm ki reh kataave, shabd shabd se jaye milaave:* Shabd alone erases the karmic record. Shabd within us merges with Shabd that is all and everything. Shabd is the one way to communicate with the divine, whether we call this infinite power God, Truth, Nam, Bliss, Love or anything else. Shabd brings salvation. Spiritual practice, sitting in meditation to become aware of Shabd within, is the real human duty. In this way, karma is overcome.



# Camels on the Roof

In the following story, King Ebrahim-e Adham, in spite of following the prescribed traditional religious practices and avoiding the indulgences to which royalty is sometimes prone, fails to reach spiritual fulfilment. The reason for his failure is explained in the quotation which follows the story. The words of Maharaj Charan Singh clearly indicate the breadth and depth of the attachment that blunts our efforts towards God-realization.

Before leaving Balkh, Ebrahim-e Adham spent much of his wealth in spiritual pursuits. Whenever he saw a dervish, he sacrificed everything for him. He withstood much physical austerity. He wore a torn rag under his kingly raiment and secretly fasted and meditated during the day. All this he did in order to fulfil his desire for God-realization, but without success. He thought to himself, “What should I do? Why is no door opening?”

One night when he was half-asleep, the palace guards started blowing their whistles, striking their wooden nightsticks, shouting and drumming. The king said to himself, “O guards, which enemy are you dissuading? The enemy sleeps with me. When we are in need of God’s merciful glance, what protection can you provide? There is no safety, save under His protective grace.” While the king was caught in this train of thought, love stole his heart. He tossed and turned, lifting his head off his pillow and putting it back again. He could not sleep. So strange! How can a lover sleep?

Suddenly, he heard quick steps and a commotion on the palace roof. It sounded like a group of people coming and going and the king thought, “What happened to the guards? Can they not see these people running around on the roof?” He listened with astonishment

at the footsteps, unable to call the armed guards. Suddenly someone's head popped through the window and asked, "Who are you in this bed?" He said, "I am the king. Who are you on this rooftop?" The answer came, "We have lost two or three strings of camels and are searching for them on the roof of this palace." "Are you crazy?" asked the king.

"You are crazy!" the man replied.

"You say you have lost your camels on the palace roof. Is someone searching *here* for camels?" the king demanded.

"Does one search for God on the throne of kingship? Do they search for Him here?" the man asked, and that was it. Upon hearing those words, the king left and was never seen again.

Shams-e Tabrizi, *Rumi's Perfect Teacher*

To achieve God-realization one has to make many sacrifices, face many hardships, break away from worldly attachments of countless lives, turn away from many comforts and pleasures of the world. The attraction of wealth, worldly possessions, power and position, love for the family, society and country – all such desires and ambitions have to be curbed, and only the urge to go back to the Lord takes precedence over all else. What difference does it make even if you become the ruler of this whole world, so that everything is under your command, that whatever comes out of your mouth becomes law? Ultimately, you will lose the body and will go into the cycle of birth and death. What type of bargain are you making? You are losing your soul and winning the world – which is perishable, which is only for sixty, seventy or eighty years.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Saint Matthew*



# His Gift

Your mother is coming to visit on Sunday. She gave you a coffee set last Christmas and, knowing how observant she is, you will be at pains to ensure that she sees you use it when she arrives, demonstrating to her that you appreciate her gift.

The Masters love their disciples inestimably more than our mothers love us (although our mothers would certainly dispute that), so do we equally concern ourselves to show the Master how much we appreciate the precious gift of salvation that he has given us?

His gift is the rarest, most worthwhile and priceless gift we will ever be given because it is not of this world but is bestowed on us by the grace of a higher supreme power.

The gift takes many forms and all these are part of the simple overall blessing of intimate contact with the Shabd, the sound current, through our meditation. This brings about the release of the soul from its perpetual and forced association with mind and the physical body. We come to understand that the Master is working for us unceasingly and that through meditation we can realize his presence within us. His gift directly addresses the pain of the soul which has realized that it is living in a temporary, illusory world. It wants to escape to somewhere better but it is lost in the darkness. The gift of the Master releases the soul, gives it light and salvation and allows it to return to its source, which we are told, is a state of eternal bliss and peace and will be the permanent solution to its discomfort and pain.

When your mother comes you are going to dust off the coffee set and get it out for her to see. You want her to know that she has given you a very useful and beautiful gift. She would not be happy to think that, in fact, it has been sitting on a shelf, unnoticed and unused,

since the last time she came. Do we also put the Master's gift away in a dusty corner of our minds, unnoticed, when we are not in his physical presence?

When he comes into our midst, we all turn out in the thousands to be in his presence, wanting to give him the impression that we really appreciate and use the precious gift he has given us; thanking him for it with all our hearts. But are we so thankful when he is not here? Do we remember his gift every day and follow his instructions for meditation faithfully, or is it then forgotten and put on a shelf until his next physical visit? We wouldn't tell our mother that we didn't ever use her gift, it would hurt her feelings. Yet many of us don't mind telling our Satguru that we find it impossible to use what he has given us; that we cannot do meditation and that we don't even try to appreciate its worth. How can we say this in the same breath as telling him that we are so thankful and that we love him?

He wants us to use our simran and bhajan every day; not to let them get dusty and forgotten, and he wants us to be honest with him, and with ourselves, by doing our meditation and growing nearer to him every single day. Like our mother, it would make him so happy to see us enjoying the gift he has given.



*Keeping some Sant Mat book in one's daily study is a very good habit.  
This practice maintains one's earnestness and zeal for meditation and  
increases one's love.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



*Maharaj Sawan Singh*

# Day by Day

Seven hundred years ago a Christian bishop in England wrote a short prayer which is still remembered by Christians today:

*Day by day, Lord, for three things I pray:*

*To see Thee more clearly*

*To follow Thee more nearly*

*To love Thee more dearly.*

Richard of Chichester

This prayer was addressed to Jesus Christ, whom Christians take as their model and their Master or Lord. Christ in fact lived 2,000 years ago but Christians pray to see him, to follow him and to love him because in doing so they are seeing, following and loving God, whom Christ mirrored in his earthly life.

The followers of other religions similarly pray to be able to model themselves on the founder of those religions, so Buddhists try to live according to Buddha's teachings and to be like the Buddha, Muslims respect and love the prophet Mohammed and Hindus tell stories about and listen to and love the teachings of Lord Krishna.

We are fortunate to have a living, contemporary saint amongst us. There is someone living for us to see, to follow and to love. This is one of the important messages of Sant Mat: that God is indeed a power, and that power is within us and can be contacted within. Yet because we're human we need to take the help of another human, the help of that "mirror" which is the living Master.

The purpose of seeing, following and loving the physical form of the Master, is to lead us, through meditation, to his inner form, which

waits for us at the eye centre. If we try our very best to reach that inner form through simran and bhajan, we are making the best use both of our own human body and of the opportunity we have been given to see the Master's outer form.

If we want to create the right atmosphere around us for concentrating the mind, then we can't do better than to cultivate the attitude which "sees" God or our Master in everything in life. Carrying that attitude with us in daily life puts us in the mood for meditation and practising meditation will then lead us to seeing the real Master within us. Then we will understand that everything that takes place is God's will. So why fret and frown and worry?

If we get into the habit of seeing the hand of the Master in everything, whether good or bad, then we save ourselves a lot of heartache. There's no longer the possibility of blaming other people for what happens – for example, "He has hurt me, now I'm going to pay him back." Instead we know that this is karma which our Master would like us to go through and finish and our mind remains calm.

When, with the help of this attitude, we are able to develop that inner seeing, by closing these physical eyes and concentrating inside, we perceive this world quite differently from the way we saw it before we came to the spiritual path.

However, to be able to carry this out and control our mind, we do need help. We need the help of the very person we're trying to reach – the help of the living Master who has himself achieved everything that we aspire to. A perfect Master is more than just a good contemporary teacher.

An important difference between the Master and an ordinary proponent of religion or philosophy is that the Master has inner experience and inner wealth – the wealth of Shabd, Holy Spirit or Word, given him by God. That is why he has the authority to initiate

us, which means not only giving us outer instructions on how to meditate and control our attention, but actually connecting us, internally, with the Shabd.

Only Shabd, that divine, magnetic, audible power, can ever satisfy and quieten the mind. Only listening to Shabd can burn away – eradicate – the store of karmas which would otherwise cause us to be reborn here again and again. It's not just a question of obtaining peace of mind and learning to see God's hand in the creation; it's a question of being forgiven for our karmas, of getting out of this cycle of life and death in the physical creation altogether, so that we need not return. By teaching us how to control our mind and so become 'tuned in' to Shabd, the Masters offer us a unique opportunity to obtain liberation.

Once we have gained an intellectual understanding of Sant Mat, theoretically at least, it should be easy for us to follow the Master. But is it? You would think that if we dimly began to see someone in front of us, holding out his hand, encouraging us forward, that we would follow. But the same mind that creates the fog around us in the first place also makes it hard for us to surrender our will to someone else, even when the question of our salvation is at stake. Baba Ji has pointed out how hard it is for us to let go and simply follow the Master's guidance. He has given the example of following a guide down a steep mountain. The guide may tell us to relax, hold on to him and tread in his footsteps. But do we have the faith? This is where meditation comes in, by gradually building the confidence in our mentor.

We will only gain the faith to really follow him by doing meditation. That is, we will only gain the faith to meditate, by meditating! However, even when we meditate with little faith and experience, we are showing a kind of faith, a very valuable faith, in just being obedient. We are invoking our Master's grace and also giving ourselves the chance to develop a taste for meditation.

So “following” means keeping going, sticking with it, not giving up. Following “more nearly” means taking a lot of trouble to follow properly: taking trouble to really keep the vows, not just ‘sort-of’ keep them; taking trouble to really understand what the Master is saying in satsang and to take his advice as completely as possible; taking trouble to notice what the Master is like because, after all, he comes to set us an example.

We begin by following the Master out of determined obedience, because we’ve decided it’s the right thing to do. And if we do our best, we will end up by following because our obedience and duty has turned into love. Love always wants to give, and Baba Ji, when asked what gift the Master would most like to receive, has sometimes made the surprising reply that we should give him our ego. Obviously this isn’t because ego is something desirable but because when it has gone from us, the barrier between lover and beloved disappears. By being obedient and hardworking, we are shedding ego. When we shed ego, more love comes.

We are told that God worships himself through us. He creates us, sends us away from himself, and then a love story is enacted through us as we are found and return to him. It is his game, his play. This strange and wonderful thing called love is the purpose of our whole existence. It’s the reason we want to see the Master and the reason we follow the Master. He has come to find us because he loves us, and through his love we also learn to love.

Going back to the prayer quoted in the beginning – to see, to follow and to love – the writer says that he prays for these things “day by day”, and this is how we are taught by our Master to help ourselves and to take his help towards this new undivided life: Day by day, in daily practice, in daily meditation, because every day is a new beginning. Every hour, every minute is a new beginning.

The time for simran is now, the time for remembrance is now and the time to meditate is now – day by day! Whatever is past is past. We should not worry about it or feel guilty about it. And we don't have to concern ourselves with big plans for the future because it will all happen as it is meant to. It will be built day by day from our efforts to do the right thing in the present, today.

Seeing, following and loving, with the resultant joy as we draw closer and closer to our beloved Master, are entirely bound up in our practising “day by day”.



*When we put our spiritual goal first, we find that our happiness and contentment increase. When our lives are clear, harmonious and balanced, we sleep well at night because we are at peace with ourselves. We discover for ourselves, through our own experience, that it is through the natural order of the Lord's creation and not through our efforts that we receive whatever we have.*

*Honest Living*

# Small Beginnings

To Almighty God, it's not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving. And so, I would like you, if you are truly a co-worker, to do that.

Maybe just a little flower you bring to your old father or mother, maybe you just arrange the bed a little better, maybe you are just present to receive your husband with a big smile when he comes home from work – just small things. Maybe when your child comes home from school, you are there to receive her, to encourage her: How have you done? What have you done? Have you been good?

We don't try to connect with each other anymore. We are so busy, we have no time to smile even. We have no time to give love and to receive love. Love is not measured by how much we do; love is measured by how much we give.

Obedience is love in action through the spirit of sacrifice. Even in family life, the most natural thing that keeps the family together, that nourishes family life is surrender to each other. If there is not that obedience and surrender of the father and mother to each other, then how can they ask their children to be obedient?

*Based on Where There Is Love There Is God, Mother Teresa of Calcutta*



# Straight Down the Middle

Some years ago, there was a terrace of houses on a hillside at the edge of town. It may still be there today. To approach by car, you drove steeply uphill and then made a sharp turn between two stone gate pillars set on the slope. This led into the lane behind the houses. The gateway had been constructed before the days of motor traffic and was only just wide enough to allow a vehicle to pass through. You had to approach at some speed to avoid stalling, spin the wheel at the right moment, and then steer accurately between the pillars – any misjudgement and the bodywork would have hit the stone.

I lived in that terrace so I know that the knack to the manoeuvre was never to actually look at the pillars – not *really* look. You had to be aware of them in the corner of your eye but then focus intently on a point somewhere between them, and just go for it. They say that a cat can pass through small gaps, jumping and climbing with ease, because it uses its whiskers to assess the space around it; once it has that information, it propels itself fearlessly forward.

Following the path of Sant Mat in daily life bears similarities to both those examples. Our ‘whiskers’ are our experience and consequent judgement – but these alone won’t help us. Sant Mat also gives us an excellent point of focus which will pull us through many a tight squeeze. This focus is both the principles we stand on and the Master by whose grace we are able to put those principles into practice. We have every reason to be confident.

When faced with a whole gamut of tight squeezes – temptations of the senses, tricky social moments, awkward work or family situations, we will sail through – albeit sometimes by only a whisker – by focusing intently on the Master rather than on the situation itself. The

situation, if you like, is the surrounding material that we crash into if we look at it too hard. The Master is that pure central space that we must aim for.

If you want an example, just imagine this: you wake up early in the morning, very comfortable in your warm bed. It's cold outside – but you know you must get up to do your meditation. Faced with the temptation to stay under the quilt, what will actually get you up? Is it thinking about that temptation (“I shouldn't but I want to ... I want to but I mustn't”) or simply starting up your simran? The point is that we have to avoid looking around us and just focus straight down the middle. The 'middle' is our Master's instructions. Suddenly we're out of bed and reaching for our shawl.

This spiritual path is about learning to control the mind. It simply cannot be done by analysis or even will power. This is why we need a Master and why we must follow his instructions to do our simran and bhajan and keep our attention at the eye centre. In a letter in *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh, quoting a proverb, says: “If you are going fox hunting, go with the preparation of a lion hunter.’ The same applies to mind hunting. Every day one should be on the job with renewed determination.” The place where we work on the task is at the point between the two eyes.

Love is a great motivator, the love generated by our relationship with our Master and his great love for us. Because we learn to love and trust in him, we are motivated to please him by doing the work he sets us. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*, letter 154:

*You ... ask for the method I worked out for myself during my own early experiences. In regard to that, I may say that I never worked out any method for myself. I took instructions from my own Guru and he gave me the exact method. That method*

*is the same as all saints use, which is simply the concentrated attention held firmly at the given centre. What else can we say?*

Again and again, in further letters in *Spiritual Gems*, he explains that ever since we took birth in this creation, our mind has been running wild, mistakenly seeking for peace through satisfaction of sensual desires. In this way, it involves us in an unending chain of actions and their resulting reactions. What we now have to do is to go through our present life without creating further karma – hence a need to keep a firm hold on the mind throughout our daily transactions – as well as, most importantly, giving the prescribed time to our spiritual practice every day. The key to this, says Maharaj Sawan Singh, is training ourselves to bring our attention to the eye centre because, as he writes in *Spiritual Gems*, letter 157, “Here is where Divinity comes down to meet the struggling man.”

We humans have such a propensity to forget our good intentions that we cannot rely on our mental powers to fulfil them. We must turn at every opportunity to that place – the eye focus – where we can take the help of divinity – in other words, our Master. He is a power far beyond mind, and the five holy names he gives us to repeat are charged with his power, the power to lift and transform us, the power to take us through very narrow spaces.



# The Beauty of Love

Love, in all the forms that we know it, is always beautiful. We have all experienced love's many aspects at different times of life.

We have loved our mothers ever since we were born; the love of a baby for the mother is totally one-pointed. The infant looks upon the mother as the ultimate being who will take care of all its needs, who will comfort and protect it. The baby couldn't be happier than in its mother's arms. The complete dependence of the baby on its mother is the foundation for this form of love.

As we grew older, we developed a new love, that for our close friends. We knew we could count on them to understand us as we shared the same childhood emotions and experiences. We shared with them our toys and games, fun times and all those great moments at school and in the neighbourhood. It is a time that we remember with nostalgia. True comradeship lies behind this love.

Our studies in school and college brought us another form of love, the love we had for our favourite teachers. Many of us probably looked upon them as our role models, marvelled at their knowledge and were impressed by their personalities. Indeed, we are thankful to them for their guidance and for the vital role they played in our lives. This sort of a love is based on a genuine sense of respect for our teachers and humble gratitude for their contribution towards our development.

Then came perhaps the sweetest love of our whole lives. The mere thought of that love even today kindles memories from a long time ago, and our hearts are filled with the sweet fragrance of that time. It was the love of a sweetheart. It was the only love that we felt really mattered to us at that time, and to what lengths did we not go to achieve that love? How deeply involved we were, and how happy it

made us feel. We just threw all our cares and worries away and revelled in it. We didn't care if we did silly things, like being lost in thought about the special one even if someone else was talking to us – or blushing when they figured in a conversation. It was a special love and a special time in our lives, when even the pain of separation was sweet as it brought with it the hope that we would meet again.

More maturity brought with it a deeper kind of love. This one we shared with our spouse and it taught us new lessons. We learnt the real meaning of some simple words like sharing, giving, depending, supporting, understanding, repenting, forgiving, consoling, and many, many others. We now realized the importance of that one person who would always be there for us to come back to with our failures, or to rejoice with in our achievements. And we also learnt to return that support in all sincerity. This sort of love made us feel that we were on firmer ground, and in a reasonably good position to face life with its many hardships. It made us responsible, brave and courageous.

Then came parenting, which was a new and amazingly satisfying experience. One of the greatest realizations that it brought with it was of our sense of responsibility. It was our prime duty to care and provide for our children. We would often put our own comforts and desires on the back burner, and concentrate on the little ones' needs. In other words we learnt to sacrifice. We learnt to sacrifice our sleep to care for our babies at odd hours; we cut down our partying in order to be able to read that favourite bedtime story, and any time that was earlier spent in unnecessary indulgence of any sort was now saved to be spent in the company of those dear ones. We also learnt, sometimes the hard way, that our little darlings were watching us closely, and imitating all our qualities. So we hastily reformed ourselves, overcame some of our shortcomings and tried to set a good example for them to

follow. Thus, along with the birth of our babies was born a new love, one that taught us self-discipline, patience and perseverance.

As we grow older, our love also grows with us and so does our knowledge. A couple in the later years of their life share an unparalleled form of love. This love comes from a thorough understanding of all the ups and downs of life that they have faced together, of how they have travelled on the long and arduous journey in each other's company and with each other's support. When they watch the next generation and its achievements and happiness, they are content that they have been successful in their endeavours and all their effort has borne fruit. It was a long and difficult path, but they have made it together.

We experience these different forms of love at different times in our lives. With every new love we may have to let go of an earlier one. Each one is beautiful in its own way and cannot be compared with the other, and each individually gives us that special feeling which makes us want to hold on to it for all time. And yet, none of them can last forever.

We may feel sad that eventually we have to let all these loves go. But we all know that the Almighty Lord is never unfair. In fact, in his mercy, he has arranged for us to enjoy his own love which encompasses and transcends all these varied forms. If each of these loves in its own turn could make us so happy, though only for a short while, how much bliss we would feel if all these loves were present within a much greater, eternal love ?

It is indeed possible to taste that bliss by making the object of our love none other than the true Lord himself. Indeed, the Lord has, by giving us the opportunity to experience the beauty of love in so many different forms, shown us that we are capable of loving him in many different ways! We can love our Master like a newborn loves and depends on its mother. We can look upon him as a true friend

or teacher who guides us and shows us the right path. He can be our sweetheart with whom we are completely in love, or we may seek the same companionship from him in inner planes that we seek from our spouse on the physical plane. We could make all those sacrifices for him that we make for our children. And just as a couple who love each other reach the final stages of their lives with a sense of satisfaction at having accomplished all that they had set out to do, we too can share with our Master the happiness of having followed the path of God-realization through our regular meditation.

Thus, if we love our dear Satguru even just in the same way as we love all our dear ones in this world, and develop the same qualities for him that we develop for all our loved ones, we will be able to offer him a love of the highest order and experience ultimate bliss in that love.



### **Hidden Pearls**

*Love may cut you deeply –  
but like an oyster's shell  
it contains  
hidden pearls.*

*Love's burden is great,  
but always be willing  
to carry this weight.*

*Like a heavy, laden branch,  
it will offer  
many fruits.*

Radi Ghaznawi, in *Love's Alchemy*



*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# Living in the Presence of the Lord

We mortals are living on top of a time bomb – can you hear it ticking? It will explode, it's just a question of when. Death can come at any moment. So let's be prepared by keeping in mind our true purpose in being here: God-realization. Let's use our time consciously – that means meditation and remembrance.

Ultimately everything on the path comes back to meditation, but that is only two or three hours a day. What about the other twenty-one hours? Deduct about seven for sleep and you are left with fourteen waking hours each day. But are they 'waking' hours and are we really 'awake' during that time, awake to God's presence? Or are we asleep as far as the inner world is concerned and awake only to outer illusion or *maya*?

Neither people nor things belong to us. We do not possess them but are only possessed and obsessed by them. To keep our distance from this world, how should we spend our days? The simple answer is "in remembrance of the Lord". Although Sant Mat is a householder's path (we do not retreat physically from the world), we should aim for some of the discipline of a monastic life while still carrying out our worldly responsibilities.

A monastery is a retreat from the world. The eye centre is *our* retreat and we should consciously practise living there. For that is where the Lord is, that is where the Master is, that is where the Shabd is. The more time we can spend during the day living in this spiritual dimension, the more detached we will become and the more blissful we will feel. Think of a deep sea diver, operating in his underwater world from the protective bubble of his suit and helmet – the noises of the world sound a long way away. Are we not all divers, diving deep

within ourselves for the pearls of spiritual experience? To remain in the atmosphere created by meditation and satsang we must cultivate a life of solitude, even though we may be surrounded by people.

Thomas à Kempis, a Christian monk living in the fifteenth century, wrote in *The Imitation of Christ*: “If you avoid unnecessary talk and aimless visits, listening to news and gossip, you will find plenty of suitable time to spend in meditation.” So you see, they had the same problem that we have today, namely filling up their days with time-wasting trivia at the expense of their meditation. He continues, “Whoever is resolved to live an inward and spiritual life must ... withdraw from the crowd.”

Trapped in the human body, the soul is not free. Our top priority must be to escape from the trap, not perpetuate it. The only way to escape is by meditation which is supported by round-the-clock remembrance. In *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh says, “If the Lord is always in your heart, then every breath is meditation.” To help us in this remembrance, we are given the simran of the five holy names, which can be repeated not only during our daily meditation session but whilst we go about our routine activities. One day this simran will awaken us from the deep sleep of ignorance and we will see the world through the eyes of love. Love will vibrate through our being and everything will be right with the world.

Just like Brother Lawrence, another Christian monk, who advises us in *The Practice of the Presence of God* that “One way to recollect the mind easily in the time of prayer and preserve it in tranquillity is to not to let it wander too far at other times”, Maharaj Charan Singh points out that simran or remembrance during the day will enrich our meditation practice. He says, “The practical use is that when we sit in meditation after having done simran during the day, we are able to concentrate much better sooner.”

It is ourselves we have to work on and change for the better. The real battle is not with anyone or anything outside but with our own mind and its many weaknesses. We need not concern ourselves with the increasingly strange and perverse ways of the world. The Lord is overseeing development in his creation and until we accept that everything is happening as he wills it, we will not find inner contentment. We waste so much mental energy and concentration on the past and the future. If we remain in the present – “in the presence” – we will feel energized. Brother Lawrence says, “You would think it rude to leave a friend alone who came to visit you; why then must God be neglected? Do not forget him, but think on him often, adore him continually, live and die with him.”

Our well-being begins and ends with regular, quality meditation, or at least the right quantity of meditation, as the results are in his hands. But meditation is more than sitting for a couple of hours in a room. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that “its effect should be there with you in all the activities of the day.” The Master has given us a full set of tools and detailed instructions for their use. Are we going to use them or leave them gathering dust in a cupboard? We must bridge the gap between words and deeds. “Offer him your heart from time to time in the midst of your business, even every moment if you can”, says Brother Lawrence.



# Something to Think About

## Genuine and Counterfeit

Just as genuine and counterfeit currency can circulate simultaneously, so truth and falsehood can co-exist. Those who are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood are living in darkness. They are like travellers in the night, not knowing in which direction they are going. The task of religious teachers is to enable people to see what is true and what is false. A jeweller needs to learn the true ruby from a worthless stone; a merchant must learn to tell genuine currency from forgeries. To become holy a seeker must learn to tell divine truth from worldly falsehood. And as a person grows in holiness, night turns into day.

Jalaluddin Rumi, quoted in *Rumi in a Nutshell*

Not knowing our own soul and being separated from our source cause the constant strife that goes on within individuals. This then results in social unrest as people forget the ideal of the oneness of God and kinship among all their fellow beings. Discord among individuals, families, communities and nations then follows, throwing the whole world into turmoil....

In such times saints draw our attention to reality and point to the natural path that God has himself placed within every person since the beginning of time. They remind us that there is a Creator of this universe and that all religions encourage realization of the Creator alone.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *My Submission*



# Forgetfulness

We are all suffering from the same curse. We are all under a heavy spell of forgetfulness. We live in this world without any real idea of our origin, our true home. Like sleepers, we wander from one dream experience to another. We carry within ourselves a great restlessness and dissatisfaction, yet the nature of our illness escapes us. Things only begin to change when we are lucky enough to come in contact with a perfect living Master. It is only then that we begin to get a notion of what it is to be awake, a glimpse of what it would be like to experience life fully.

The Master is many things to us – a teacher, a helper, a guide. His brightness and joy attract us, yet do we really know who he is? What does the dreamer know of the awakened one? When a little baby is fast asleep, look how tenderly the mother caresses him in order to wake him up. The Master's great gift to us is that of personal spiritual awakening. Who knows by what great good fortune we made contact with our Master! At some point in our lives we just knew that the message was clear to us, we realized it was the Lord's desire that we should become spiritually conscious. It was all a gift.

We have all known those moments of exaltation in the Master's presence when love became not a dream, but a living, loving experience. The Master is our focal point. Our love for him enables us to experience a spark of that divine awareness. During those moments we are awake, alive. The truth of the mystics is real and true to us. The desire to go home is reborn in our hearts. We make all kinds of promises at those times (which the Lord, no doubt, knows we will never be able to completely fulfil). Like a baby, we open our tiny

eyes and look lovingly upon the face of our mother, and know great happiness at the sight of her.

But look how quickly we fall asleep again. One moment we are wide awake – and the truth pervades our consciousness, our hearts are full of devotion – and a short while later we are dreaming again. How quickly we make dream-stuff of the Master's message. The truth becomes reduced to the little rituals we develop around Sant Mat; the half-remembered moments of joy become the basis of a folklore about darshan and the Master's grace. We venerate the box in which the jewel is kept, and forget to wear the jewel itself. Worst of all, we forget to meditate; we sink back into a way of life based on our old selfish impulses and lose contact with our inner source of happiness.

The state of spiritual awareness is a living thing. We are obliged to constantly struggle to keep ourselves afloat spiritually. If we let ourselves slide, in no time at all we are back asleep. The only way we can keep ourselves awake is to make that daily contact with our Master through meditation. *To remember the Lord with our full attention is the secret.* Meditation is nothing but remembering him. The five holy words the Master gave us at the time of initiation are the spell-breakers. Curiously, at different times, these words have different significance to us. When we are not meditating frequently, we find them hard to repeat and they remind us of our ingratitude. But when we are able to focus on them properly, we find them sweet with his forgiveness. There is a brightness in those moments of remembering the Lord. The words become delicious, enlightening points of contact with the Master, each word like a spiritual embrace. There is a thrill in the sense that we are in contact with such a being, and we feel deep fulfilment when we experience a response to our devotion. The Master once said to a disciple who was obviously

deeply in love with him, that these words of simran can be the deepest expression of our love for him.

From time to time, most of us feel that the Lord made a mistake in initiating us. We notice that we do not seem to have any of the characteristics of a true devotee; our spiritual fire has been all too quickly extinguished. At such times, it is hard for us to raise our eyes towards the Lord. But we should not forget the depths of the mother's love for her child, or forget that we were fast asleep when the Master first touched us with the kiss of spiritual awakening. The Master's love for us cannot be extinguished – it is just for us to struggle to end this state of suffering and work towards the time we will be with him forever.



*All our questions and prayers are answered inside only if we have learned the technique of turning our attention inward at the eye centre. We have to delve deeply into our own selves and once this habit is formed we become immune to whatever befalls us or comes in our way in this world. We become resigned to the will of the Lord and give up entertaining any desires of changing our fate karmas. What we call frustrations, are then no longer capable of upsetting our balance of mind. On the contrary, they drive us more intensely towards our Master inside. The eye centre becomes our haven, where we can retire for rest and quiet whenever we like. Simran and bhajan with faith and devotion is the method by which this attitude can be attained.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

# Feeling Funny

## Evolution – The Monkey’s Viewpoint



*Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree discussing things as they're said to be,  
Said one to the others, "Now listen you two, there's a certain rumour  
(that can't be true)*

*That man descended from our noble race. The very idea – 'tis a dire  
disgrace!*

*No monkey ever deserted his wife, starved her baby and ruined her life.  
And you've never known a mother monk to leave her baby with others  
to bunk,*

*Or pass them on from one to another, till they hardly know who is  
their mother.*

*And another thing you will never see is a monk build a fence round a  
coconut tree*

*And let the coconuts go to waste, forbidding all other monks a taste.*

*Why, if I put a fence around this tree, starvation would force you to steal  
from me.*

*Here's another thing a monkey won't do: go out at night and get in a stew,  
Or use a gun or a club or a knife to take some other monkey's life.*

*Yes! Man descended, the ornery cuss, but, brothers, he didn't descend  
from us!"*

Anon, published in *With the Three Masters*, Vol. III

# Grace

What do we understand by the simple word 'grace'? Does it simply mean mercy – or, more precisely, the Lord's mercy? A dictionary definition of grace is the unmerited and free favour or blessing of God.

Let us put it this way: we have probably all, at some point in life, felt that we were being given more than we merited or deserved. We feel that a lucky star is shining on us, that God is smiling down on us. We generally feel this way when things are going as we want them to, according to our plans and wishes.

But what happens when things don't go as planned? Has God forgotten to shower his grace on us? Is he punishing us? Is he testing our faith in him? Many negative thoughts come to mind when things don't go our way. Although we don't really know what's best for us, we still expect things to instantly work in our favour. When that's not the case, we become disappointed and lose heart and the thought that we are being made to pay the price for our karmas depresses us. Little do we realize that this period in which we may be feeling low and unloved is, in fact, the time when we are truly being looked after.

For example, when a child is hale and hearty, he is busy with his games and enjoys himself and may not have the chance to notice how much his mother cares for him. The mother has no reason to keep running after the child or to show her concern. But when he falls ill, when he is in pain and is suffering, the mother is constantly by his side. She makes sure that he is well fed, that he takes his medicine on time and gets sufficient rest. Now the child might be too ill to actually notice that the mother is doing everything she can to lessen his pain and suffering. All the child may notice is that he is being made to take

bitter medicine. Nevertheless that very bitter dose of medicine is going to help him recover.

In the same way, when we are going through rough phases in our life, alongside the pain we may come to feel that God is in fact taking more care of us than ever. We may not be able to see it, but his care is undoubtedly there – the Lord is by our side looking after the smallest of things for us and working for our long-term, spiritual well-being. If this is not grace, what is? We have come into this creation where nothing is permanent and nothing is perfect. So how do we expect our life to be perfect, how do we expect to always be happy? The sun cannot shine day and night. It has to set. Night has to fall, a new day will come and the sun will shine again.

We as humans cannot see the big picture, but the Lord can. He knows exactly what we need.

Why do we find it so hard to trust the Lord? We say that he is all knowing and if that really is the case then doesn't he know what's truly beneficial for us? Or do we think we know better? If so, would we still be here, in this creation, stuck in the cycle of transmigration? Let's trust the Lord and show some gratitude by accepting his decisions and his will happily. His grace is always with us – more so in our difficult times, even though we may fail to see it. Now it's our turn to behave gracefully and place our trust in him.

Can we do it? We can at least sincerely try. Isn't it always said that effort and grace go hand in hand? Let us put in some more effort and invoke his further outpouring of grace. Eventually grace is the only thing, the one thing, that will get us through this life, taking us beyond the cycle of birth and death, and back to our true home.



# Live and Learn

Many of us will have used the short proverb, “live and learn”, at some time. These three words reveal a vital activity common to us all. From the time of birth right up to old age our lives are a continuous learning process. At birth our senses become programmed to absorb information from the people and the environment around us. We then go through different stages of life in which we continue to develop and learn – first from our parents and elders, then from our teachers at school and university. After qualifying, we may enter the corporate world where again we have to undergo rigorous training before we can start earning our living. And all the while, alongside the formal education, our experiences in life teach us to mature both socially and personally.

This outward learning is essential to enable us to function and succeed in the world but it does not provide everything we need and, in the end, when we leave this plane it will be discarded. However, mystics tell us that there is something of great value which, if learnt, would go with us when we die. This is the understanding of truth.

In the seventeenth century an English clergyman wrote a poem called “Reason” in which he said, “We live and learn, but not the wiser grow.” This may seem a contradiction but he explains what he means in another line when he says that we “must first disrobe the mind, and all unlearn,” because this “will smooth the way to truth.”

The “truth” is the wisdom hidden inside of us which the world is seeking outside. Inside us is the way back to the Creator who has placed within us his own spirit, the Shabd. When we have the good fortune to come in contact with a perfect Master, he tells us that to reach the understanding of truth, we must leave our mind behind

because no amount of intellect will make us any wiser in the way that will benefit us at the end. Maharaj Charan Singh explains this in *Spiritual Perspectives Vol.1*:

*If you're full of ego or intellect, this will keep you from the real wisdom, from the spiritual experience and spiritual truth, which the Lord has put within every one of us.*

When we embark on our spiritual journey, we are doing nothing but learning this truth. We come to understand the saints' teachings and follow their instructions for daily meditation, taking the mind inward instead of outward.

If we think we learned patience and focus in our worldly education, we soon realize that we have learned nothing at all when we start attempting to meditate. Remembering that it took us many years before we could start earning our living, how can we think we can get immediate fruit from our meditation? If we have to unlearn everything we know and retrain the mind to go in a different direction from that of many millions of previous lives, it is hardly surprising that the saints say that it can take more than one lifetime to see any results.

But as in the world, where unpaid college studies are the necessary preliminary to having a job, so with each day of meditation when we think we are making no progress, we are actually in that steady preliminary stage. When the time comes, we will start gaining the benefits – they will come as a result of the patient training we've been undergoing with our Master.

When we were in school there were times when each of us questioned the point of learning certain subjects which we judged as possibly useless in 'real life'. We didn't realize that all the time we were developing our basic skills, making us ready, when the time came,

to take on the world. Similarly, when we are meditating, although we may not see any light or hear any sound, we are most certainly developing our spiritual skills in readiness for the Lord's grace, whenever he chooses to give it. One fine day, when the time is right, it may seem that we experience this bliss 'out of the blue' – 'just like that'! But, as we know, nothing really happens 'out of the blue'. It will be the result of that patient, steadfast training in meditation. That is why the Masters tell us just to sit. As never missing a class or lecture was of utmost importance when at school, so we must never miss a day of meditation – because every little bit counts.

When we were children we didn't have a clue why we were told to focus on our studies so much or how it was going to help us in the future. We simply listened to our parents and teachers. This is because, deep down, we truly believed that they knew what they were talking about. They'd seen more of life than we had and so they knew what was going to be best for us.

Similarly, our Master is like the best parent and teacher. He has come from the highest spiritual region to this inferior plane for our sake. He would not waste his time asking us to do something which is not important. He is more eager to see us through to the end than we are to get there.

Many of us are like infants on this spiritual journey. We don't realize that we have so much essential learning to do and we lack appreciation for the importance of meditation. But all we need is faith in our Master. Let's take a firm grip of his hand and while living and learning his wisdom, walk through life with him.



# Book Review

## **Everything Starts from Prayer: Mother Teresa's Meditations on Spiritual Life for People of All Faiths**

SELECTED AND ARRANGED BY ANTHONY STERN, M.D.

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Mother Teresa is best known for her charitable work with the destitute, the sick, and the dying. But, as the title of this collection of her writings implies, everything she did and everything she was derived from her life of prayer. She often said, "Everything starts from prayer."

Prayer, for Mother Teresa, did not mean repeating a set of words. Prayer meant walking in God's presence, turning to him, lifting the heart to him. As she wrote, "You can pray while you work. Work doesn't stop prayer and prayer doesn't stop work. It requires only that small raising of the mind to him." She further advised, "Offer to God every word you say, every movement you make. We must more and more fall in love with God." This life of prayer, she said, requires an effort, but can infuse every moment of one's life with God's presence. She wrote, "We should make every effort to walk in the presence of God, to see God in all the persons we meet, to live our prayer throughout the day."

Stern writes in the introduction that he hopes that the sayings and writings he chose for this collection will speak to persons of all backgrounds. In fact, he made his selections in order "to give the widest possible access to people with no clear path as well as to those with various inner paths", and "to glean pearls of inspiration that provide an ecumenical entry into a life of prayer". Although Mother Teresa herself was a devout Christian, she herself reached across the boundaries of religion. Stern relates an incident at one of her projects, The Home for the Dying, when Mother Teresa whispered to a terminally ill man, "You say a prayer in your religion, and I will say a prayer as I know it. Together we will say this prayer and it will be something beautiful for God." She would say about the

people she served, “castes and creeds mean nothing. It does not matter that they are not of my faith”, and “we should help the Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Muslim to become a better Muslim, a Catholic a better Catholic”.

The selections in this volume are all short and simple, often only one or two sentences. Stern invites the reader to take time to ponder each gem of spiritual wisdom. He writes, “My one suggestion for reading this book is an echo of hers: Make it a prayer. The more seriously and openly you approach it, the more the words will penetrate.”

Many of Mother Teresa’s sayings deal with the need for silence. Prayer “is born in the silence of our hearts”. She wrote, “We cannot place ourselves directly in God’s presence without imposing upon ourselves interior and exterior silence.” And, “We must learn not only the silence of the mouth but also the silence of the heart, of the eyes, of the ears and of the mind, which I call the five silences.”

It is in inner silence that we can be alone with God.

*Listen in silence, because if your heart is full of other things you cannot hear the voice of God. But when you have listened to the voice of God in the stillness of your heart, then your heart is filled with God. This will need much sacrifice, but if we really mean to pray and want to pray we must be ready to do it now.*

With inner silence “you can hear God everywhere: in the closing of the door, in the person who needs you, in the birds that sing, in the flowers, the animals – that silence which is wonder and praise.” And inner silence transforms our outward lives as well: “Silence gives us a new outlook on life. In it we are filled with the grace of God himself, which makes us do all things with joy.”

Mother Teresa stresses the need for a firm and unwavering intention to develop a life of prayer. “Often, under the pretext of humility, of trust, of abandonment, we can forget to use the strength of our will. Everything depends on these words: ‘I will’ or ‘I will not.’ And into the expression ‘I will’ I must put all my energy.” She says we must “love to pray – feel the need to pray often during the day and take the trouble to pray. If you want to pray better, you must pray more.”

Prayer, she says, has a seemingly miraculous power to transform us. “Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God’s gift of himself. Ask and seek and your heart will grow big enough to receive him and keep him as your own.” The secret lies in emptying ourselves. “The more we empty ourselves, the more room we give God to fill us.” Thus Mother Teresa, who gave so much to help suffering humanity, could write: “It is not how much we really have to give but how empty we are – so that we can receive fully in our life. Take away your eyes from yourself and rejoice that you have nothing – that you are nothing – that you can do nothing.”

She explained this point with a metaphor of a bunch of wires. Whether the wires are old or new, expensive or cheap, “alone they are useless, and until the current passes through them there will be no light. The wire is you and me. The current is God.” Letting that current pass through us entails total surrender. As she puts it, “Total surrender to God must come in small details, just as it comes in big details. It is nothing but that single word, ‘Yes. I accept whatever you give, and I give whatever you take.’”

*To be holy doesn't mean to do extraordinary things, to understand big things, but it is a simple acceptance, because I have given myself to God, because I belong to him – my total surrender. He could put me here. He could put me there. He can use me. He cannot use me. It doesn't matter because I belong so totally to him that he can do just what he wants to do with me.*

She encourages us, “When we have nothing to give, let us give him that nothingness.”

Mother Teresa writes, “Our prayers should be burning words coming forth from the furnace of hearts filled with love. In your prayers, speak to God with great reverence and confidence.” This intense and burning love, she says, is not a talent of the rare few; it is available to everyone. “Love is a fruit in season at all times and within the reach of every hand. Anyone may gather it and no limit is set. Everyone can reach this love through meditation, the spirit of prayer and sacrifice, by an intense inner life.” She says that, while one must pray with fervent love, prayer itself is the source

of that love. “Love, to be true, has to begin with God in prayer. If we pray, we will be able to love, and if we love, we will be able to serve.”

For Mother Teresa, the natural fruit of the love which God “pours into our hearts” is service. “Our works of charity are nothing but the overflow of our love for God from within.... You may be exhausted with work, you may even kill yourself, but unless your work is interwoven with love, it is useless. To work without love is slavery.” True selfless service is, she says, nothing but love. “It is not what we do or how much we do, but how much love we put into the action because that action is our love for God in action.”

As Mother Teresa sees it, the love that flows into us through prayer naturally overflows to those around us. She writes: “Loving must be as normal to us as living and breathing day after day until our death. To understand this and to practice it we need much prayer, the kind that unites us with God and overflows continually upon others.” So she advises us,

*Open your hearts  
to the love of God  
which he will give you.  
He loves you with tenderness.  
And he will give you not to keep  
but to share.*



