

January 2014

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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What is Love?

There is a Light within every one of us, but due to the darkness, we do not comprehend the Light. That is the condition of every one of us. And how do we eliminate the darkness? Christ says there was a man sent by God... He sent somebody from his level to our level to tell us how to eliminate that veil of darkness and how to see that Light which is within every one of us...

You never calculate to fall in love. After falling in love, running after the beloved becomes natural. You don't have to put forth an effort to run after the beloved, neither did you have to put forth an effort to fall in love. There's something within you which prompted you to love that person. You found yourself helplessly in love, and now there is something within you which is making you run after the person. What are *you* doing? If you want to take the credit that you are running after the beloved, you are wrong. But for that love, you would never run after the beloved.

So if we are meditating, there is something within us which is urging us to meditate. There is something within us which is giving us that atmosphere, that environment, those circumstances, and creating that yearning, that feeling of separation. As Christ said, blessed are those who mourn for the Father. The Father creates that feeling of separation in us, and when we feel that separation, we long to become one with him.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*



Dera: Love in Action

If you want to see how by living a positive life we can transform our physical landscape, take a stroll around Dera Baba Jaimal Singh in Beas, India. The Dera is a community that reflects the spiritual values of love and service – values taught by the five spiritual Masters who have lived and taught there over a period of more than one hundred years. Walk around the Dera with your eyes and heart open and you'll see the miracle that happens when the human instinct to love, and the creativity it naturally generates, is directed to selfless service, cooperation, hospitality, and compassion. You'll see what humanity looks like when they pursue one goal – to please their Master – to pursue peace, working for one another to honour the spirit of God within them. You'll see people from every walk of life working side by side to serve the highest values they know, treating one another as one family.

Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh quoted the Great Master (Maharaj Sawan Singh) as saying that “the foundation[s] of the Dera [are] love, humility, seva and meditation”. These are the qualities that have transformed what was once a barren inhospitable wilderness of sandy soil and deep ravines next to the Beas River into a thriving human settlement.

Some of the visible, physical aspects of the Dera inspire awe. The entire colony is built from the resources of its community, donated freely by all to the common good of all. In this context, nothing is wasted, nothing undervalued – frugality and optimum returns in the interests of everyone are among the uppermost considerations. Human effort, ingenuity, and skillful engineering allow the colony to design and manufacture many of their own materials: bricks, tiles, and

paint are made on site to construct new buildings; cooking equipment, storage facilities, and management systems for many functions have been specifically designed for the Dera to meet its very specific needs. Housing for permanent sevadars is provided to a high standard for everyone. Sensitivity to the environment generates organic farming and the recycling of water. Sewage is converted to fertilizer for the flowering trees and shrubs.

The Dera provides free food and shelter every weekend for as many as hundreds of thousands of visitors who come to see the master – Maharaj Gurinder Singh – and to perform seva, or service. They in turn are cared for by volunteers, some of whom live at the Dera full-time.

Care and companionship are given to elderly residents. Tutoring and recreational facilities, including cricket and soccer fields, are provided for the children who live in the colony. Resident volunteers pay for only their food and utilities. All property belongs to the community through a charitable society.

But it is not just the place and its operation that make the Dera so impressive. What is astonishing is how much good will one encounters – and the many smiles one sees! The graciousness and commitment of the community, the way that people who enter the colony are treated with respect and dignity, the belief that all human beings have equal worth as children of one loving power – this one experiences in every corner of the Dera.

The Master recently said that the Dera works because people are given a good roof over their heads and food and a purpose in life. They emanate that sense of purpose as they serve a good greater than themselves by helping others. And when people are given the opportunity to serve, it seems that there is nothing that cannot be accomplished.

BLOCK

6



Feed 400,000 guests lunch and dinner? No problem. From 9,000 to 12,000 volunteers serve the meals in the langar, or free kitchen. The chapatti preparation begins at 2:30 a.m. in order for the ladies to hand cook the roughly 1,100,000 pieces of bread that are required on any given day. Fifty thousand guests are served at one time, and they are given some twenty minutes to eat their meal. Everyone wants to attend morning satsang? No problem. The shed that currently seats 500,000 is equipped with 26 jumbo screens, and 90 high-quality speakers. And because the crowds are increasing, the shed will be expanded to accommodate an additional 170,000. (The long-term plan is to be able to seat 2.1 million.)

The statistics are doubtless impressive, but the Dera is not about statistics. It is about people working to create a community where selfless service, love, harmony, and meditation are primary. At the Dera, one has the opportunity to learn the meaning of selfless service. One can see what can be achieved when selfless love is the guiding principle. And one can see some of that love and hear some of that joy when people sing their much-loved hymns while they work. Does bread cooked with love taste better? Do bricks formed with care make more beautiful buildings? The clean bathrooms, the swept lawns and streets, the lovely trees and flowers everywhere, all appear to say “yes.”

There are many ways to take up a broom and sweep the floor. You can do it mindlessly. You can see it as just a necessary chore. You can do it with resentment, wishing someone else had to do the task. Or you can relish the task and be grateful for the opportunity to serve.

The Dera is not a perfect place – it is, after all inhabited by human beings, with all their frailties, aspirations, and shortcomings. But it is a place where everyone, no matter how poor or wealthy, skilled or

unskilled, healthy or infirm, can contribute to the common good. Everyone can offer their time and energy in service.

The spirit of the Dera is not contained inside its walls. We can carry its spirit of love with us. Wherever we live, and whatever we do, every person is being given the opportunity to serve. We just have to see it. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

The Dera is not built of mortar and bricks. It is built on seva and love and devotion and humility and meditation. And we have to build our whole life on these principles...

Wherever there is a sangat, there is a Dera. A Dera is not a place made of bricks. It is made up of devotees, of the lovers of the Lord, of the seekers of the Father... The Dera is just your love, your harmony, your affection, your understanding and your cooperation with one another. That is the Dera...

Our attitude should always be to help and to be a source of strength to people, and to be loving and kind to everybody... Is there any place where the Lord doesn't walk? ... The real Dera is within you.



The only way to strengthen love is by meditation. There's no other way, because the love which we get by experience cannot be compared to any other type of love ... and for that experience, meditation is necessary.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

We Have No Control

*I thought I had self-control,
so I regretted times I didn't.
With that considering over, the one thing I know
is I don't know who I am.*

Rumi, *Unseen Rain: Quatrains of Rumi*,
John Moyne and Coleman Barks

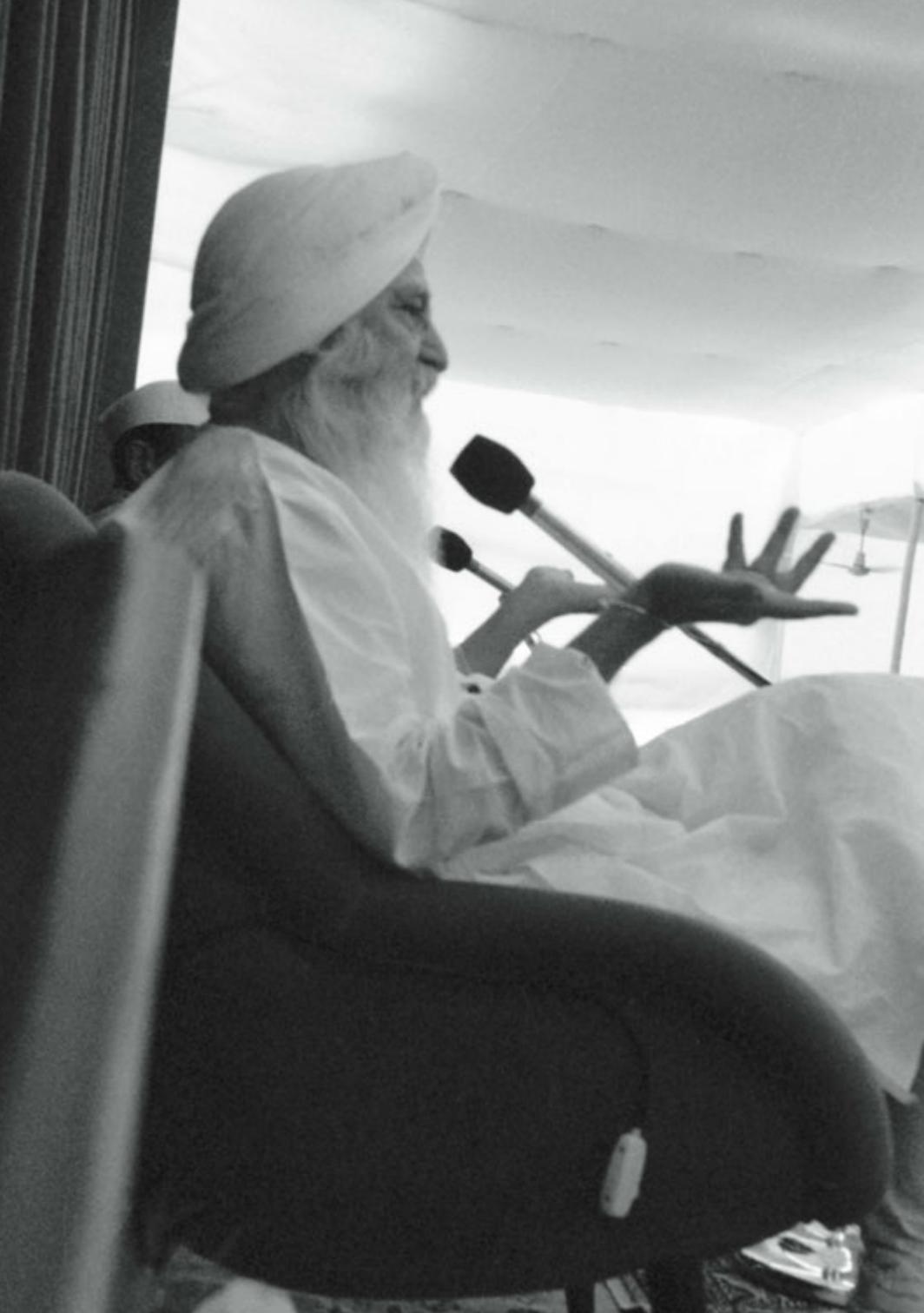
These four lines imply that we think we know who we are: we think we can control ourselves, make choices, and determine the direction of our lives. And when we continually fail at making the right choices, we may feel guilty, inadequate, and perhaps even stupid. But as Rumi tells us: the reality is we have no control at all. Rumi is saying, now that he has come to that realization, he has begun to seek the truth of who he truly is. And with these words, he invites us to do the same.

The questions we may need to answer for ourselves are: If I am not in control of my life, then, who or what is? And if someone or something else is in control, who am I, and what is my role in my life?

The who or what that may be in control of our lives is, of course, the Lord. But who is this Lord, and what is our relationship with him? Do we think of him as a separate entity from us, sitting far away, perhaps in heaven, pulling the strings of our lives and watching how we react? The Masters say we are not separate from the Lord; we are part of him.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV:

*Ignorant persons think that God lives beyond the skies or
beneath the depth of the oceans. Great souls realize him in their
hearts, and perfect saints see him everywhere, both within and*



without. Saints and holy men say that he pervades the entire universe and that the universe is in him.

So here the Great Master is differentiating among different categories of people: ignorant persons who do not realize who and where God is and great souls who experience God's love within themselves. Great Master continues:

This universe is his [God's] body in which he dwells. He pervades every atom in the same way as the soul pervades every pore of the body and is enabling it to function.

In other words, this whole creation is God's body. There is nothing that is *not* God – not filled with God, not encompassed by him. Maharaj Charan Singh supports this point in *Light on Saint John*:

This means that everything was created by him. Nothing was created except by him; none else was there to make anything. The Lord is everywhere and we live and breathe in him. God has created the universe and everything in it through his own Word, Shabd, Nam, Holy Ghost or whatever name we may give to this power, which is all love. There is nothing in existence that was not created by this Word of God and that is not sustained by it.

This makes it clear. God is everywhere. He is in the creation; he is the creation; we are part of him. Maharaj Sawan Singh continues:

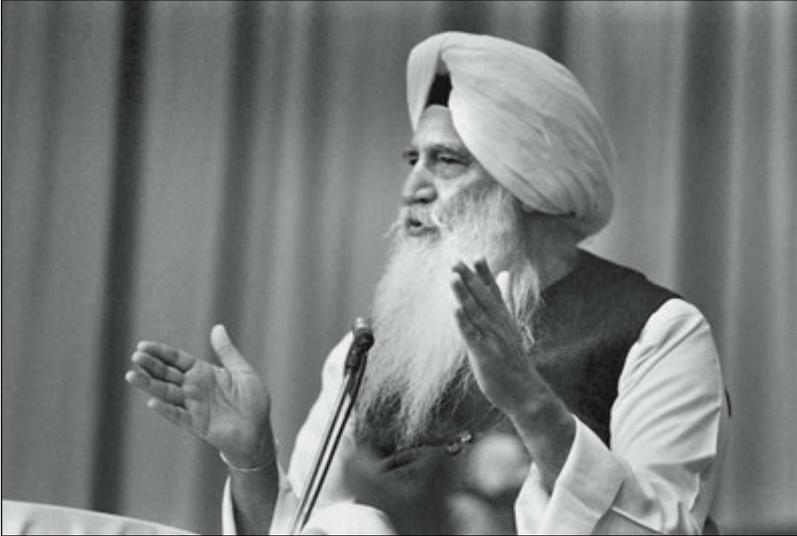
We are particles of the Lord. The relationship between us and the Lord is that of a part to the whole. There is no distinction between the ocean and its waves. There is no difference between

the sun and its rays. The Lord is never unmindful of us even for a moment. He is always looking after us. We have never been separated from him. He is always with us and always pervades our entire being.

This is no impersonal God sitting on a cloud watching his creation in a disinterested manner as humans try to get his attention through prayers, penances, and offerings. On the contrary, the Lord is in us and we are in him; we just don't realize it. The Master has said that the only difference between the Master and the disciple is the degree of realization: the Master has seen with his own inner eyes that we are truly Shabd; if we haven't had that experience yet, we don't realize that truth. The Lord is taking care of us every second of our lives. There is nothing in our lives that he is ignorant of. There is nothing in our lives that he is not intimately involved in. God is Shabd; he is the power that created and sustains the universe. He is in every particle of the universe and within us. There is no separation.

It is the veil of mind and maya or illusion that stops us from realizing the oneness of the soul and the Lord. Our mind is caught in the illusion of this creation. We think our life is real, but it is actually just a play generated by the Lord so that we can balance our karmas. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II, "This world is a vast stage, and according to our karmas, each of us is playing our role." Nothing in our lives is real. It is all an illusion generated by the Lord. The Lord is the puppeteer pulling our strings. We have no control, and yet every day it seems we are faced with choices to make. Can we choose? Can we make a mistake?

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, a questioner asked Maharaj Charan Singh:



When we have a choice of two ways to go in our life – let's say we have to live in one place and all of a sudden there's a chance we can live somewhere else – we sometimes experience a turmoil. You're not sure which way to go, whether you want to go – to move to the other place – or stay where you are. Yet you always tell us not to worry. It seems like in order not to worry about that, we should just surrender that problem, but how do we do that?

Maharaj Ji answered:

Brother, instead of worrying about the situation, one should try to do one's best. With your best available intellect or reasoning or thinking or intuition – whatever you may have – do your best, then leave it to the Lord. Still you can be wrong, but then, you see, you have no other option. What else can you do? You have done your best. Then leave it to the Lord.

Leave it to the Lord; surrender the problem to him. Make the best decision by using our best discrimination; then take action and leave the results in the Lord's hands. What else can we do? Maharaj Ji continued by saying something that makes our helplessness totally clear.

If he [the Lord] doesn't want us to do the right thing, we will never do the right thing. If he wants us to do that right thing, he will also give us that understanding to do the right thing. If he doesn't want us to do the right thing, he will not give us that understanding to do the right thing. And it doesn't mean that if you know the right thing, you will definitely be able to do the right thing. Sometimes we know the right thing, but we never are able to do the right thing because we become a victim of certain weaknesses. Even knowing what is right, we can't do the right thing. Or sometimes we don't get that understanding to do the right thing.

So our doing the right thing depends on the Lord's will. We are not in control of the kind of choices that we make – good or bad.

Maharaj Ji ended with:

Things happen in whatever way it suits him, however he wants them to happen. So if he wants us to behave in that way, he will give us the right understanding to behave in that way. If he wants to keep us in the dark, we will remain in the dark.

Here we have the facts. The Lord is in complete control of our lives. If he so wishes, he will give us the understanding to make right decisions; and if he doesn't want us to have that understanding, he

won't give it to us. So, if in our estimation we feel that we are inadequate when we keep making “mistakes”, we are not, because there are no mistakes. Everything is in the Lord's hands; everything is according to his will.

The question is: how do we make choices? We don't know what the Lord wants us to do, we don't know if our understanding of the situation is right or wrong, but we still have to make decisions. As the saints tell us, we use our knowledge of the world; we analyze the situation as best we can; we do our meditation and try to calm our minds so we can think clearly; and then we take action, leaving the results in the Lord's hands. The saints have given us the teachings, the vows, which will enhance our faculty of discrimination and guide us to do the right thing. Do it and don't worry about the result.

The events of our life are our destiny. Destiny is a path that is decided before we are born. It's like the script of a play. When the actors perform the play, the words they speak, the actions they perform were written months or even years before. Nothing 'new' happens in the performance of the play.

Now that we have acknowledged that we are not in control and that the Lord is managing every aspect of our lives, we can stop worrying and put all of our efforts into what Rumi implied was our goal in life: learning who we are through personal inner experience, through self-realization and God-realization – through our meditation.



Close to Him

When we came to the path we may have thought that it would be only a matter of months, at most a few short years, before we would get a glimpse of the inner worlds of which the Masters speak. Had we known then how many turns our lives would take, how many times our love and devotion would be put to the test, perhaps we would have been too daunted to set out on this adventure. But, of course, we had no choice. The flame of love that inspired us, which drew us to the Master, also dazzled us, and made our problems seem insignificant. Fortunately, if we underestimated the challenge, we probably also failed to fully grasp the Master's ability to affect us. It seems that even at the best of times we can only vaguely understand the importance of the Master's influence on us. Often it is only when we look back on events that we realize how he has been subtly present in our lives, influencing us in ways we could not perceive or imagine at the time.

We have been accustomed to darkness for so long that we adjust very slowly to the brightness we are beginning to experience. Clearly, the key is to always try to keep close to Master in our thoughts and our feelings. No matter what problems we are going through, how weak our faith, how poor our devotion, we just shouldn't let go of his hand. Even if we stray far from our original intentions, even if we get so confused we cannot imagine that he really is a true Master, even if a thousand contrary thoughts assail us, we should just keep on turning our hearts towards him. Thinking of him, remembering him, repeating the names brings him consciously into our lives. Then we get to that place where his influence is strongest, where we start to experience changes in ourselves, where illusion cannot penetrate.

Meditation could be such an adventure. To meditate with love is the ideal, trying in our own way to touch his heart with the simple gift of just meditating to please him. If we knew of the depth of the ocean of his love for us, perhaps we would never come out of meditation – we would be unable to breathe or think or function at all at this level. But even if we only get a faint glow of inspiration from time to time, we should try to focus on him as often as we can. Contact with him has a tremendously positive effect. It changes the way we see things, what we want and how we behave.

We cannot ask him to do everything for us and not lift a finger to advance the process. Nor can we try through our efforts to achieve it all on our own. There should be neither pride in our devotion nor over-dependence. It is as subtle as the most beautiful of dances. We listen to his voice and fall in with his step, trying to make the moves he asks of us – even if at times we feel uncomfortable. Offering even our poor efforts at devotion has the effect of preparing us for him. Only by losing ourselves entirely in the music can we become absorbed in it and begin to move in perfect harmony. Clearly, we must play our part, making the effort, and at the same time we need to submit to him entirely. But no matter how we manage, one day, no doubt, the music will overwhelm us and we will be swept off our feet!

In the book *A Hundred Letters* by Paul Jackson, a wise man is quoted:

The whole world claims to be a lover and to love, but when you examine this claim, all play the role of the beloved, not that of a lover. When a lover claims to love, the genuineness of his claim becomes clear the moment that he emerges purified from all selfish desire. As long as he seeks his own desire, he is really seeking to be the beloved of all, not the lover of all. His affairs

put lie to his claim! Hence you can understand that his claim to be a lover is false so long as he desires even the smallest particle besides the Beloved!

Are we trying to be a lover? It is a question of what we are prepared to give. How can we achieve this unselfish love? How can we break the spell that binds us here? Is it not our moments of kindness, our forbearance and our love for each other, performing seva without wanting reward or recognition, our faith when we appear to have been forgotten, our trust in him when he seems far away from us, our devotion to him in the solitude of meditation – a combination of all these things – that make the difference? No matter what happens, we should always, always try to keep close to him in our thoughts and feelings. To be an imperfect lover is better than not to love at all. And we can be sure that one day we will fall deeply, utterly in love and nothing will be able to keep us away from him. For such is his wish!



Outer darshan is when you see the Master outside; inner darshan is when you see the Master inside. But you can't have inner darshan without the outside love and faith and practice, for they lead to inner darshan.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Staying Alive

Against your will you live; against your will you die.

Ethics of the Fathers 4:22

The flame knows no rest, for it lives in perpetual conflict between two opposite tendencies. On the one hand, it is attached to its wick, drinking thirstily of the oil that fuels its existence. At the same time, it surges upward, seeking to tear free of its material tether. It knows that such disengagement would spell the end of its existence as a manifest, illuminating flame; nevertheless, such is its nature.

This is the paradox of the flame's life: its attachment to wick and fuel sustains both its continued existence and its incessant striving for oblivion.

Man, too, is torn between these two contrasting drives. On the one hand, he tends towards self, towards life and existence. At the same time, he yearns for transcendence, to tear free from the confining involvements of physical life, to reach beyond his material self. The tension created by these conflicting drives is the essence of the human experience.

The desire to escape the trappings of physical life is what separates the human from the merely animal; but the escapist nature of man is counterbalanced by the compulsion to be, a compulsion that binds him to the material reality. Back and forth, back and forth runs the cycle of life, from being to transcendence and back again.

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Spiritual Recovery

During the mastership of Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh, a travelling sadhu came to meet him. Seeing the Master bow to him first, he felt so overwhelmed by Hazur's humility that he asked:

Whenever we go to saints or to religious leaders for an interview ... they expect us to bow to them. This is the usual custom. This is the only place where I have seen a Master bowing to the disciples first. Why is this so?

Hazur replied:

I am the servant of the Lord and the Lord is in everyone.

Treasure Beyond Measure

If the Master sees the Lord in everyone, then he sees the Lord in you and me. Let's think about that: the Creator of all that is and all that was and all that will be – in us? The ocean of love, the source of life itself – in us? If the Creator lives within each one of us, and what we experience every day is also his creation, then why do we have problems? What possibly could be a problem? Love is within us, the natural expressions of love are outside, yet misery persists. Such a situation makes no sense, yet isn't it the universal human condition?

Soami Ji addresses this question by saying:

*Man suffers from three obvious and three dormant maladies....
Only a Sant Satguru diagnoses such ills....*

*The first of these diseases is the liability to birth and death;
the second is that of strife and struggle with the mind.... The*

third disease is ignorance, for man does not know who he is, whose essence he is, nor where he (the Source) is.

It is evident that no disease can be cured, nor quarrels decided by reading books. One has to go to a living physician, describe his condition and get the necessary medicine.... The Satguru is the living physician ... and can cure these ills.

Sar Bachan (Prose)

These ills affect all of us, even if we're physically healthy and mentally strong. We may consider them universal spiritual maladies, and as with any ordinary illness, we are moved to seek a remedy and recover from them.

No one would dispute that we are "liable to birth and death". The entire planet is perishable and our bodies are part of that; they will decompose one day. Nature is always in a process of creating, sustaining, and destroying. It is one thing to say death is present everywhere; it is another to accept it and not feel vulnerable to its power. Mostly, we consider this process of life and death to be a troubling state of affairs, and we are frightened. But why are we troubled? If we understood that our identity is unaffected by death, would death be so terrible?

In a movie, we may identify with a character and then see him or her die; we feel sad or even weep. A few minutes later, we leave the theatre, and we don't give that death a second thought because it was acting. It was a temporary psychological experience for us.

The remedy for the first malady – of birth, death, and rebirth – is devotion to love alone. If all of us humans were so devoted to love that we *became* love, we would not suffer this illness, this fear of death, because real love is eternal. This love is not subjective; rather, it is an inner reality called Shabd which we can experience within.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I:

Love alone is eternal and God is love ... Those who devote themselves to him alone also become eternal and deathless.

Our second malady is that of “strife and struggle with the mind”. There are powerful forces of lust, greed, anger, attachment, and ego driving all of us relentlessly to act and react. We live together, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes in conflict. Following our passions, we sometimes act in ways we later regret. Other times we are victimized by friends or strangers pursuing their own passions at our expense. No matter where we look, whether it is international affairs, community organizations or family gatherings, there is occasional strife and struggle. Even within the private recesses of our own thoughts and feelings, conflict and disturbance may arise at any moment.

As we mature in life, we may rightfully conclude that strife and struggle are the way of the world. Many people seek alternatives to their selfishness through community service, intellectual study, creative expression, or religious practices. Anyone who has been involved in these activities will notice that they also involve aspects of strife and struggle. Is there no practice that is free of the mind? Look around the world and recall everyone you have met. Who has gained freedom from the strife and struggle with the mind? If you say the Master, then how did he do it? How did he find a cure to this spiritual illness?

Baba Jaimal Singh answers this question in *Spiritual Letters*:

When day by day the mind's faculty of focused attention, which is an aspect of the soul, becomes pure through continuous practice ... the Satguru will look upon the disciple with his glance of mercy; and as the Satguru's compassionate glance

keeps falling upon the disciple, all the gross and evil tendencies of the mind will go away.

Our third malady is ignorance, “for man does not know who he is, whose essence he is, nor where he (the Source) is”. Sooner or later in life, this universal truth becomes painfully apparent. When we find ourselves acting like animals, we may declare, “I am not going to behave like that anymore. I am better than that!” But, what is it to be a human? What is special about our species? Who are we?

We search everywhere outside and never find our source. Perhaps one day we find a person or a place with special meaning to us, perhaps we can make that person our spouse or that place our home, but one day we must leave. Sometimes we may feel our source is our family and, with gratitude, we acknowledge our parents’ gift in bringing us into this life. Still, we know they did not create us. If they had created us, they would understand the mystery of life’s origin. Our source must lie somewhere else.

Maharaj Charan Singh notes in *Quest for Light*:

This constant feeling of loneliness and missing something is in reality the hidden unquenched thirst and craving of the soul for its Lord. It will always persist as long as the soul does not return to its ancient original home and meet its Lord.

The Master’s message is that only we humans have the capacity to realize our true divinity. Our body will still die but we will not identify with it. We will gain inner peace, relief from mental strife and struggle, by disciplining and purifying our mind through simran and bhajan. We will gain wisdom by attending to meditation. We will come to understand that we are a drop in the ocean of spiritual love, our

essence is the holy sound and light of Shabd, and our path home starts at the third eye.

As with all recovery, there may be relapses; we will face setbacks and disappointments. In every relapse, however, there is a chance to learn humility and seek the Master with renewed vigour. The Master's grace aids us in turning our weaknesses into spiritual strengths. Our spiritual recovery from these maladies involves a million decisions to adhere every hour to the four vows, and a lifelong commitment to give the Master constant opportunities to open our hearts to love.

Although the human condition is drenched in the negativity of the passionate mind, it is also the place for spiritual recovery. As Maharaj Ji often reminds us:

To be born as a human being is a great privilege because it is only as a human being that you can strive to work for your emancipation and thus get out of this endless chain of birth and death.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



The Little Darling You

There's a little, shy someone,
deep within your heart, somewhere,
always trying to whisper something,
and you know you need to listen,
and surely you will, someday;
it's just that right now it's impossible somehow.
But you have every hope that,
on this treadmill of hopes and fears,
there will come a break,
and you will be still, and you will hear, and listen.

Till one day,
or perhaps one night,
some rude stranger declares
that your time here has run out
and declares you on your way out.
Find some time for your Darling Self,
for far too often in this blizzard, here called life,
worn out and spent, the last image one beholds
is that darling little girl, your soul,
still holding the bunch of wild flowers,
you had gathered for the Darling Emperor,
and somehow never got a chance to look for.

Original poem by a satsangi

This Path

On this path the focus is not on what we lack but what we gain. The focus is not on us and our shortcomings, disappointments, and failures, but purely on him. This is the opposite of so many conventional teachings with their attention on ourselves and what we should be doing and what we are doing wrong and what we need to fix. Instead, this path is only about him: it's not a balance between us and him – the scales are tipped towards only him; this path is about being with him in every moment.

This path is not about petitioning God to give us things in this world or praying for resolutions to the events of our everyday lives. It's not a dialogue with him as our advisor to make business deals or fix relationships. We need to look within ourselves for solutions to these affairs of the world. When it comes to a relationship with the Divine, a true disciple seeks the Father only for the sake of the Father.

This path is not about spiritual expectation based on spiritual stories of grandeur told by others. We are not trying to repeat the experiences told by another. We are seeking to have our own personal experience by his grace, in his time.

On this path, it is so important that we reserve our judgment and not place limitations on ourselves. It is his grace that creates success in our journey. Our willingness is magnified by our surrender to the situations he puts us in. This is his play, his script; we are just acting out these roles to fulfil his wish for us. In *The Book of Mirdad* it says, "Live as if your God himself has need of you his life to live. And so in truth, he does."

This path is about expanding our perspective and looking at the bigger picture. When we look up close, we find ourselves in a constant

struggle to survive in a complex world of seemingly random events. When viewed from above, through his eyes, we may find ourselves in an intricately refined spiritual testing ground full of opportunity for maximizing our growth. When viewed through his eyes, every situation, every event, every interaction that we encounter is laid before us as a teaching moment. He speaks to us through these lessons, and we reply through our actions. We must not overlook even the smallest opportunity to act out this relationship.

This path is about our meditation. It is about quieting our mind's endless chain of trivial dialogue. It is about turning our attention away from the daily grind of worries, frustrations, and regrets while turning towards his presence. When we follow his instructions, this quieting and refocusing is a natural occurrence with a guaranteed result – as simple and assured as the cycles of the ocean with the tide rising and falling each day, pulled by the moon as she chases the sun amongst the symphony of planets dancing to the spark of creation, set in motion by one moment of intent from the divine.

Through our meditation, we mature our bond with the eternal rhythm. Through our persistent practice, we prepare for the inevitable shedding of this body and familiarize ourselves with the separation from this physical world. This is the ancient practice taught by all the saints that have come to shepherd the marked sheep from the wilderness. When we follow our shepherd, he will guide us through the undulating cavernous landscape of this creation and return us to the green pastures of his presence within. Let us abandon our carefully constructed plan, surrender to his divine intent, and fulfil the true purpose of this path.



Sandalwood Grove

Do we realize what a precious gift our human birth is? We have been given this human body in order to realize God within, but we waste our incredible reward by ignoring the Lord and living our life controlled by the mind and senses. The following excerpt from *The Science of the Soul* beautifully illustrates this condition.

Our body may be likened to a precious sandalwood forest, which we can exchange for millions of rupees (spiritual values) but we, in our ignorance, reduce it to charcoal in the fires of the five passions. The following anecdote aptly illustrates this point:

A poor man lived in a forest and eked out his living by making charcoal from scraps of wood and selling it. One time, as a reward for rescuing a king who had lost his way in the forest, the poor man was given a beautiful grove full of the most fragrant type of sandalwood trees. These trees were of a special quality from which very expensive and rare perfume was made. One of these trees, in its natural state and without any effort on the part of the old man, alone was worth more than the poor man could have earned during the rest of his life by producing and selling wood as charcoal.

Of course the poor man was very happy over this gift but did not realize what a great fortune was bestowed on him. So, in order to make a living, he resorted to making charcoal out of the sandalwood trees and selling it in the market for a pittance.

After a long time the king happened to pass that way again and noticed that the most valuable grove had been reduced to ashes, also that the old man was in the same poor condition as before. When the king inquired as to what had happened, the old man related that he

had been earning his living by making charcoal from the trees. The king then asked him if he had any of the sandalwood left. The old man replied that he had nothing except a small piece, perhaps, one or two feet long. The king told him to go to the same bazar where he had been selling the charcoal and sell this piece of wood without first turning it into charcoal. There were some wealthy people in the bazar who noticed the excellent quality and rare fragrance of this piece of sandalwood. Recognizing its value, they all wanted to buy it. The result was that the old man earned hundreds of rupees out of that one small piece of sandalwood.

He returned to the king with the money, and the king said: “You have not appreciated the value of this wood. Had you appreciated it, you would have earned millions instead of the paltry sum you did by selling it as charcoal, and that too after going through the unnecessary labour of first making charcoal out of it.” On realizing his mistake, the old man asked the king for another such gift that he might make proper use of it. The king replied that such a gift is bestowed only once in a lifetime.

Maharaj Jagat Singh

Let us not be like the old man in the story. Let us value the precious gifts of the human body and initiation that the Master has bestowed on us and make the best use of these gifts each and every day. Let us not squander Nam, only to realize, much too late, how foolish we have been. Just like the sandalwood that was reduced to ashes, the time lost in not valuing the gift of Nam cannot be recovered.



What Kind of Yoga?

She was on a cordless phone; he was on a landline some three thousand miles away. He had just moved to California to work in the movie business, and in no time at all, he had grown a ponytail, became a vegetarian, and found a guru, and now he needed some advice. So he called to talk to his old friend. She used to date a vegetarian, so he figured that she had a pretty good understanding of Eastern mysticism.

Did I mention she was on a cordless phone? She was wandering around in her backyard, way past the effective radius of good reception. Static and noise filled the spaces between their words and even ... sometimes ... broke ... up ... words.

“What?” she said. “What’s the name of your meditation?”

“Surat Shabad Yoga,” he declared, showing off the fancy Sanskrit words that he had been studying, and fully expecting her to be somewhat impressed.

“What did you say?” she said. “I’ve got the yoga part, but what is the rest?”

His answer was very serious and slow, making sure he rolled his rrr’s just right, and he spoke with an emotional confidence as if he had uttered this romantic and ancient language for a thousand years.

“Sur-at Sha-bad Yo-ga,” he echoed.

“What?” she said, chuckling, “Sit-Down Shut-Up Yoga? Oh yeah, I’ve heard of that one!” Tickled with herself, she started laughing at him. But there it was – the truth so straight and sharp, that her razor wit sliced through his holy pretense.

“Yes, in fact you’re right,” he said. “That’s it exactly!”

So, what exactly is this Sit-Down, Shut-Up Yoga? We are endowed with a great purpose – to go beyond the illusion and experience life as a self-realized human, a spiritual being, as we strive for God-realization. We have two things going on simultaneously – the unique opportunity to awaken our spiritual natures while at the same time living in a human body. In spite of this rare spiritual boon available to us, we still have to use physical matter, such as flashlights and foot-stools and telephones. And we have to walk on two legs, do sit-ups, ask for advice, and we always beg to differ because we are stuck in and dependent on our minds.

How lucky we are to have met a teacher, a Master who practices Sit-Down, Shut-Up Yoga and who freely explains to us how to do this meditation every day in order to cut through the illusion that we believe to be reality but that holds us captive here. He shows us with great patience and consistency that in this very life we *can* connect with our true purpose – go within ourselves, rise above the static and noise of this painful earth theatre and hear the sound of the soul current, and eventually discover our true divine being in this Sound. It's a lot to ask of a bunch of struggling souls. But the Master smiles on us because he has taken our part, and he will instruct us how to sit down and shut up and so much more than we can ever fathom.

Sitting down and shutting up are two parts of the same thing. Sitting down sounds easy enough: bend our legs, let gravity pull us down to a cushion on the floor or a chair and rest our body weight directly on our bottom. These are the basics, but sitting down is so much more than that. Sitting down is the opposite of standing, the opposite of walking. It is the opposite of running around in the physical world, interacting with the illusion, and believing it to be real. Sitting down involves the critically important action of putting aside the desire to run about in

the illusion and, instead, nurture the desire to be motionless, serene and still. Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Die to Live*:

The first problem is to still the body. It doesn't want to sit in one place for even twenty minutes. So first you get into the habit of stilling the body, then you get into the habit of stilling the mind.

“Shut up” is not a nice thing to say. It sounds kind of harsh. But when our mind has run wild and is telling us this and that, constantly yammering about something or other that sounds really important at the time, it may take some harsh words to jolt its attention away from its comfort zone of static and noise.

But the mind won't bend to being bullied for long. It responds better to a persuasive method, a course of gentle and steady repetition of the five beautiful names given to us by the Master at initiation – our simran. Through simran comes true stillness, stillness of body and of mind; and from stillness of mind comes serenity. When the mind catches glimpses of serenity, it savours the taste of stillness and silence.

So the transformation point – the pivot point – of all the lives we have ever lived in all the 8,400,000 forms of life, begins with us waking up and starting our day by stopping our movement. When we achieve stillness of our body we create a quiet place where we can wrestle with the mind. By sitting quietly in body and mind, we practice in the manner our Master wants us to practice and prepare ourselves to someday meet him in that quiet place where he can be found.



Bewilderment

The quotes of Rumi in this article are from the 1926 R.A. Nicholson translation of The Mathnawi of Jal'alu'ddin Rumi. The parenthetical words and phrases in the quotes from Rumi are the translator's insertions, which he added to help communicate and clarify Rumi's meaning.

Do you find yourself increasingly bewildered in your grasp of this spiritual journey? Does your understanding of the path of the saints, seem to be decreasing? Would you describe yourself as dumbfounded, occasionally distraught, or perplexed?

According to the Persian poet Rumi, in his masterpiece *The Mathnawi*, this bewilderment that so many initiates experience is a blessing. It is a sign of progress and the way forward. Rumi suggests that when you have become dumbfounded, crazed, and reduced to nothing, you have reached a point of helplessness in which you can say, "Lead me".

According to Rumi, our bewilderment and confusion is not a problem; instead it is the beginning of wisdom. He says, "The treasure must be sought, and this (bewilderment) is the ruin (where it is hidden)." Ruins are places that we rarely search for our heart's desire. Ruins, for the most part, look abandoned, dangerous, and broken. We might once have thought that our intelligence would help us to get through this wilderness. Rumi just laughs at such naïveté. He claims that bringing our intelligence to God can be compared to a rich man bringing a gift of seven camels to the Emperor; each of the camels is laden with saddlebags filled to the brim with gold. But as the man approaches the palace, he can't help but notice that the dirt under his

feet is made of gold, as are the hills and the desert as far as the eye can see. What is the value of gold to the one whose palace sits on a vast plain of gold? Similarly, what is the value of human intelligence on the journey to the one who has created all the universes, the material world, and our small brains?

Rumi warns us:

*To sharpen the intelligence and the wit is not the right way...
Sell intellect and talent and buy bewilderment in God... None
but the broken in spirit wins the favor of the Divine King.*

Does being “broken in spirit” sound painful? It frequently is. Some of what needs to break is our arrogance, our illusions, and our stubbornness. It means learning we are not in control. It means developing trust in God. Why is this process so difficult? Rumi explains:

*The gardener lops the harmful bough, in order that the date
palm may gain stature and goodness.*

*The expert digs up the weeds from the garden, in order that
his garden and fruit may look flourishing.*

*The physician extracts bad teeth, in order that the beloved
may be saved from pain and sickness... Cling to him that binds
what is broken, and ascend.*

Does this sound disorienting and confusing? Losing what you thought you needed? Being trimmed and torn and dug up and transplanted? The bewilderment increases. Rumi compares our state of mind to that of a “cat in a bag”. He says we are like

... straw in the face of the wind, and then a settlement! A Resurrection, and then the resolve to act!... In the hand of Love I am like a cat in a bag, now lifted high, and now flung low by Love.... He is whirling me round his head: I have no rest either below or aloft.... The lovers have fallen into a fierce torrent.... Sometimes 'tis spring and summer, as honey and milk; sometimes (the world is) a place of punishment by snow and piercing cold.

And to those of us who might have preferred a smooth journey, or spiritual work that looked and felt successful, to those of us who hoped that we could keep what we imagined was our strong resolve to achieve God-realization, Rumi shows his penetrating grasp of all our intentions, promises, resolutions, and covenants when he tells us:

Our covenant hath been broken hundreds and thousands of times; Thy covenant, like a mountain, stands firm and stable. Our covenant is straw and subject to every wind; Thy covenant is a mountain, and even more than a hundred mountains. ... Have some mercy upon our mutability... We have seen ourselves (as we really are) and our shame. Thou art infinite in beauty and perfection; we are infinite in wrongness and error.

Rumi doesn't describe our discipleship in very flattering terms. He says we have frozen hearts, hearts of iron and stone. He describes us as being ungrateful and proud, despite the fact that we give so little attention to God. Our realization of our blindness and failures confuses and bewilders us. Yet the news is that this bewilderment is meant to increase! He suggests that, "Bewilderment should be thy whole occupation."

With our failure to be the disciples we want to be, we turn to the Master. We learn that this is his show, not ours. We cry for help, we begin to release our own expectations, and we begin to “let go and let God”. Our spiritual failure turns out to be one of those ruined places that hides great treasure. Rumi writes, “By their failures, the lovers are made aware of their Lord. Unsuccess is the guide to Paradise.”

No matter if it seems that we have lost ground or if our hearts are like stones, or if our spiritual practice seems pitiful and dry, Rumi reminds those of us who seem to have little to offer our Master:

God accepts the exertion of one that has little (to give). God accepts a crust, and absolves, for from the eyes of a blind man two drops (of light) are enough.

The power that is all love answers those of us who appear to have so little love to give. To the one who is lost, bewildered, and enslaved by the passions, God replies, according to Rumi:

O thou art weak in thy repentance and in your covenant; But I will not regard that, I will show mercy.... I from loving kindness will bestow the gift at this moment, since thou art calling unto me.... He [God] maketh losing the way an avenue to faith; He maketh going wrong a field for the harvest of righteousness. To the end that ... no traitor may be without hope.

Our failures make us beggars. When we know we have absolutely nothing to give, we turn in the direction of the Giver. Rumi tells us to, “lift up in prayer a broken hand; the loving kindness of God flies toward the broken.”

The elegant solution to our limitations, our distractions, our failure is the Master. As Rumi says often, “Everything is perishing except his face.” In the Master’s strength, lies all of our hope, faith, and inevitable redemption.

We are all invited into the presence of the Master, into the company of the Friend, for as Rumi explains, “ From him is the sweetening of every bitterness.”

The real answer to our confusion and bewilderment is the Master; the living saint who embodies the teachings and instructs us. He tells us over and over again that the love and truth we seek can be realized only through meditation. The answer to the mystery of our existence is to be found in the teachings given to us by our “Beloved Friend”.

We don’t have to rely only on Rumi’s descriptions of the pull of the perfect saint. In the preface of *Legacy of Love*, the ultimate importance of our “Beloved Friend” is beautifully stated.

Without a living example in front of us, we can get lost in the complexities of concepts and theories, whereas a practical example of what we seek can point us straight to our goal. Such was Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh – our friend, our teacher, divine guide, and incomparable example.... The spiritual energy surrounding him touched the highest recesses of the hearts of all who came in contact with him. As he uplifted our consciousness, Maharaj Ji awakened us to the possibility of genuine knowledge of God. Seeing the harmony and perfect balance of person, we had a burning desire to become like him.

Our hunger to know all about Maharaj Ji, therefore, was insatiable. To be with him was to be with one’s best friend in a garden of tranquillity and understanding. Nothing we knew in life was sweeter – so, with our immature understanding, we

tried to learn truth. We attempted to listen carefully to every word he spoke, and digest its meaning. We watched every movement, gesture, and expression, trying to carry with us the memory of his face and his presence. There was nothing about our beloved teacher that was not important to us.

Great Master, as quoted in the same preface of *Legacy of Love* says:

The Masters become a bridge for us to cross. By loving a perfect Master, our soul eventually comes to love the formless and indescribable one and only God.

How does Rumi describe the face of the beloved?

The heart that has seen the sweetheart. How should it remain bitter? To the friend, when he is seated beside his Friend, a hundred thousand tablets of mystery are becoming known. The Friend is the guide.... Gaze incessantly on the face of the Beloved! ... His moisture is nourishment for the garden of spirits: His breath revives him that has died of anguish.... To see him is to see the Creator. To serve him is to serve God: to see this window is to see the Daylight.... I have put it to the test more than a thousand times. I do not deem my life sweet without Thee. Sing to me, O object of my desire, the melody of resurrection!

The Masters do sing to us and their song is the Shabd. And they tell us that the only place we can hear it is within, at the eye centre. The mystics all come with the same message, “The Kingdom of God is within you.”

Maharaj Ji says to us in *Legacy of Love*:

When we attend a saint's satsang, we come to know what is real. We learn that we will gain nothing from external practices, that the Lord lives within us and it is there we must search for him by turning within. By keeping the company of saints, true love for the Lord and the longing to find him will be awakened within us.



*When one finds that he's absolutely helpless, then he should really become helpless and submit himself to his meditation....
That's the only move one should make.*

* * *

You can achieve real surrender only when all the coverings are removed from the soul. Then the soul shines, it becomes perfect, and then it is capable of merging into the Perfect Being. That is real surrender. That is real love. That is real devotion.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

God-Realization and the Mechanical Duck

In the early part of the eighteenth century, a French engineer and inventor named Jacques de Vaucanson achieved great fame and fortune. We have forgotten him now. But in the late 1730s de Vaucanson was the talk of Europe. And what was his great accomplishment? He built a mechanical duck. The duck did not survive the centuries, but we have written descriptions that indicate it was quite remarkable. The duck was driven by a series of weights and had more than a thousand moving parts. It could eat fish, digest this food in an artificial stomach, and even excrete the waste in a natural way. Why was Europe agog at the mechanical duck? Automaton were the rage and the mechanical duck was among the most spectacular.

The duck was purchased by a German collector and since has disappeared. One last report on de Vaucanson's creation was made by the poet Goethe, who saw it and reported in a diary entry from 1805 that the duck was in deplorable condition.

Of course the inventor de Vaucanson is no longer with us. He died in 1782 after living what any honest observer would describe as a successful life.

His could be the short biography for many people. "He was born. He built a mechanical duck. He died." We are all in the same boat with de Vaucanson. We are intensely involved in building ducks. In many cases, as certainly must have been the case with de Vaucanson, the constructed duck is a thing of wonder, worthy of acclaim by society. In other cases, one might make a very ordinary duck. In still others, the duck might not be much to talk about. But if it's our duck and we built it, we think it is most important.

The mechanical duck can be a metaphor for our activity on this planet. Most everything we do in this life can be put into the category of de Vaucanson's duck. It may be fantastic, it may dazzle, may gain us fame or fortune. It may seem important at the time. But as a wise man once said, "If it walks like a duck, if it talks like a duck, it's a duck."

One can argue that if building mechanical ducks was the purpose of human life, one or all of the Masters would have told us so. But that isn't what they tell us at all. They do not say, "The main purpose of human life is to build ducks." In fact, what they actually say is, "God-realization is the main purpose of human life."

Hazur Maharaj Ji wrote the above in a letter to a disciple. The full quote, from *Divine Light*, is: "God-realization is the main purpose of human life and we should take full advantage of it." He doesn't say that God-realization is our only purpose. He knows that we do, in fact, have ducks to build. But he says clearly that God-realization is our main purpose. What this means to us as satsangis, as seekers, is that we have to shift our goals and objectives from what we were taught by our parents, teachers and society. To belabour the metaphor, we were taught to get out there and build ducks, to build great ducks. We were taught to build the best ducks that we could build. We had to do this because ducks are important, critical to our success, significant for our country and the future of our children. We probably still believe that our ducks are very important.

But if the Master tells us that we should use this human life for the purpose of God-realization, what do we do? How do we shift from duck builder to God-realizer? Most of us know it is not so easy. Well, it does seem easier for some than others, and Hazur explains this as well in the same letter. He says in *Divine Light*:

There are some persons who, having been on the path in their previous birth, get very good results quickly. They start from the point which they reached in their previous life. They reach their previously earned stage with very little effort at all. There are others who, with a great deal of effort on their part, seem to move up very slowly.

Many of us must be beginners. We have to work harder, put in more effort. Hazur echoes the folk wisdom that “effort is its own reward.” In the same letter in *Divine Light* he writes, “No effort on our part goes unrewarded.”

When the Master tells us our primary purpose in life is different from the one we have been pursuing, what should we do? How do we change direction? All of our lives we have been heading one way. We meet a Master and he tells us that our priorities are wrong. He tells us our focus is incorrect. He teaches us that we are concentrating on the wrong things. He tells us that building mechanical ducks is not our real work and that there is something more important than our family, friends, relationships, wealth, and possessions. Hazur says again in *Divine Light*:

When we are born as human beings, we completely forget the purpose of life. We get so absorbed in enjoying the pleasures of the senses, in devotion to our caste, creed and country, that we have no time to think of anything else.

We have no time to think of anything else. Or, we are thinking about the wrong things. This sounds like a management problem. As individuals we manage our lives haphazardly. Perhaps we should take a lesson from businesses, which very typically, run their corporate

lives using a program of “Management by Objectives”. One of the first steps an organization takes in creating objectives is to decide on a mission statement. The Master has, in fact, already given us a mission statement. But we have to attach ourselves to our Sant Mat mission and truly make it the guiding force in our lives. We have to decide what principles we wish to adopt to anchor our lives. Once we adopt a mission, every decision we make, every action we take, should be related to that mission.

It’s pretty simple really. If our mission is to build the infamous mechanical duck, then our daily activity will emphasize all that duck-building entails. However, if we decide to adopt the mission of God-realization, recognizing this as our main purpose in life, we will give it the highest priority possible.

We can laugh at Jacques de Vaucanson and his silly duck. But if we laugh at him it’s only fair that we laugh at ourselves as well. Our priorities are misplaced. We are operating from the wrong mission statement. Building ducks will not get us where we want to go.



*When the mind is consumed with
Remembrance of Him
Something divine happens to the
Heart ... Love.*

Hafiz, *The Gift*, tr. Daniel Ladinsky

Our Father's Love

If there is one thing all of us experience while visiting the Dera or being in the Master's presence, it is the love of the Master. We often arrive after a long journey, tired, and needy. We sit before him, scattered and worn by the world, and he understands. We know how unworthy we are to be in his radiant presence. He sees all of our faults and he loves us anyway. We realize how little devotion we have, how far we have drifted from the Master, and he draws us to him. Helpless, we abandon the ragged and lowly self and allow him to fill us.

And then – nothing else matters. Nothing was ever of any consequence. How could we have forgotten this love? In an instant we are transported from a sad and weary pilgrim to a joyous child, lifted and secure in his love. It is our solace, it is our strength. And it is ours, completely, unconditionally, ours. He loves us exactly as we are. Immensely.

It is not we who love. It is he who loves us. And we are helplessly attracted to that love. The wonderful awareness of this love is rightfully ours. The saints tell us it is our heritage – that his love is always within. In fact, it is what we are made of. We are particles of divine love.

As often has been said: Never forget that the feeble echoes of love you have for the Lord are but a dim reflection of the immeasurable love God has for you.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II, Maharaj Sawan Singh speaks of love:

God is love, and love was in the beginning. The entire creation is the result of love. We have been sent down into this world through love, and the cause of our return will also be love. The

path of love is the real ideal. Whosoever is following this path is following the True Path.

Great Master continues:

Love is noble and pure. It purifies us and ennobles our life. It is the very essence of simplicity and purity. It is also the sustaining power of this world. Without it the world would be desolate and our life would be aimless. Love is the sustainer of life. Without it a man would be useless. It acts like a binding or uniting force, to keep everyone attached to each other. It induces us to work and to be active. It stimulates our intellect and energy of mind. It is the essence of true purity. It is the spiritual light that brightens our soul. It is the Straight Path that takes one to the Lord. All Saints and poets sing its praises. The story of love is indescribable. Nobody can really describe it, since it can only be experienced.

So this power, this quality of love moves and sustains the human spirit. It is the fundamental quality of our essence, our soul. When we are devoid of it, life is dark and meaningless. When we are immersed in it, nothing can make us happier.

Great Master continues to explain that love is a universal attraction:

Love is born out of human emotions. The sweet fragrance of love permeates the orchard of life. Whenever there is a current of love in the mind, the heart is spontaneously attracted by it. This current or force is working throughout the entire universe.

Great Master tells us that love for another human being can lead us to love for God. He suggests that even our desire to find a partner, a special loved one, is really a reflection of our yearning to find the Beloved and can lead us toward divine love.

If you have physical love which is not subject to any selfish or ulterior motive, then such a love is welcome, because it is the means of creating in you, love for God.

Sufi saints, as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II, have also described physical or worldly love as a first step toward spiritual love. The Sufi saints say:

Love, whether it is material or spiritual, should be in every heart, because in the mirror of material love there is the reflection of spiritual love. The light of worldly love illuminates the path of love divine.

Baba Ji tells us that the Lord is lovingly waiting for us. Once, on an exceptionally cold evening in the Dera he said that, the Lord loves his children. When you know someone is waiting lovingly for you when you get home, how does that make you feel? When they greet you and give you a hug, and bring you a cup of hot coffee, doesn't that feel nice? Well, multiply that a million, billion times.

In his endearing way, Baba Ji was trying to describe what awaits us within. What words can he use to impress on our limited intellect? A million, billion times more comforting than the sweetest love we know.

This love is ours. It comes from the Father, the one who created and sustains us. And it is communicated to us through the form of

the Master. When we are irresistibly drawn to the Master, it is the love of the Father pulling us. After the long journey to the Dera or to see him anywhere, we arrive travel-weary and woefully unworthy; then our minds fall silent and our hearts fill with joy and yearning in his presence: it is our Father's love awakened in us by the Master.



Knowledge says that the world is scattered in all the six directions – north, south, east, west, above and below – and that there is no path leading beyond this. Love says, “There is a path and I have been on it many times.”

A lover may be full of troubles, but in his mind there is always a surging wave of joy for the Beloved.

The intellectuals of the world spend their lives in groping in the dark, which is full of worldly worries.

The human intellect says that there is nothing beyond this body, this physical life. It is followed by death and nothing else. The path of love is full of thorns of troubles and one should not tread that path under any circumstances.

But love says, “Thorns there may be, but there are also life-giving flowers on this path. In love, one goes beyond this body, because then only can one find the life eternal. Therefore, do not be afraid of the thorns of this apparent death.”

Shams Tabriz, as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I



Book Review

Visions of God: Four Medieval Mystics and Their Writings

BY KAREN ARMSTRONG

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In *Visions of God*, Karen Armstrong presents selected writings of four mystics from fourteenth-century England: Richard Rolle of Hampole, Walter Hilton, Dame Julian of Norwich, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Particularly for readers who come from a background other than Christianity or who find reading medieval texts challenging, this book may serve as a useful point of access to medieval Christian mysticism.

In her introduction, to place these mystics in context, Armstrong offers a sweeping view of the history of world religions. Beginning with the Axial Age (800–200 BCE), she discusses general phases of development in world religions and the place of mysticism within religious experience. She then turns to medieval Christianity, discussing political and social developments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that may have created an environment ripe for the flourishing of mysticism in fourteenth-century England. Armstrong also introduces each of the four mystics, providing useful biographical and historical information, sometimes adding comparisons with mystics from other times, places, and religions.

The first of the four mystics, Richard Rolle (d. 1349), attained ecstatic states of divine love while living the solitary life of a hermit. In his book, *The Fire of Love*, he describes his experience of divine love as a palpable warmth, literally like a fire blazing within him which flooded him with joy.

For his love is a fire that sets our hearts ablaze so that they glow and burn, purifying them from all the dross of sin. Blazing in his chosen souls, this fire compels them to gaze continually in spirit toward heaven and to cultivate a constant longing for death.

Rolle found he would lose this sense of the presence of God whenever he engaged in intellectual discussion. “I find myself growing cold on those occasions until I put all outward matters behind me and try to stand in the presence of my Saviour. Only then do I retain this inner warmth.” Therefore, he explains, he wrote this book not for wise men, philosophers, or great theologians “but for the simple, unlearned people.”

Rolle writes of a divine music experienced in moments of one-pointed yearning for God:

Nothing can satisfy the human soul but God, because it has a capacity that only God can fill. That is why the people who love this world are never satisfied. The peace enjoyed by those who love Christ is a consequence of the fact that their hearts are fixed with yearning and consideration of the love of God, and they contemplate him as they sing with ardent love. This peace experienced by the spirit is very sweet. A divine and dulcet melody comes down to fill it with joy. The mind is ravished with this sublime and effortless music and it sings the joys of everlasting love.

Walter Hilton (d.1396) was perhaps the most widely read and influential of the four mystics. According to Armstrong, his book, *The Ladder of Perfection*, was “the first systematic and comprehensive account of the spiritual life to be written in English, and its immediate popularity shows that it answered a real need.” For the modern reader it may be “the most accessible and the least esoteric of the English mystical works of the fourteenth century.”

As the title of the book implies, Hilton sets out to provide step-by-step guidance, a ladder, for the spiritual aspirant. He begins with the three types of preparation for contemplation: *lectio*, *meditatio*, and *oratio*, that is, reading scripture, pondering deeply on spiritual topics, and prayer. He sees vocal prayer as a discipline, a daily practice which should not be abandoned before one has reached the prayer “of the heart” that “comes softly, using no words, together with great peace and quiet of body and soul.” When the Lord gives this peace to his servants, Hilton says, “it is as

if he wanted to reward their efforts and give them a shadowy glimpse of the love they will enjoy in the bliss of heaven.”

To the beginner who complains that she is unable to pray as she ought to because so many useless thoughts crowd in upon her, Hilton offers this advice:

When you come to pray, direct your intention and your will to God as wholeheartedly and single-mindedly as you can in a brief mental act. Then get to work and do it as well as you can. Even if a myriad of distracting thoughts prevents you from carrying out your original intention, don't be afraid and don't be too angry with yourself or impatient with God.... Keep your prayer, however pathetic it is, firmly in your mind's eye with a humble heart and put your trust in the mercy of our Lord, who is bound to turn this to your good in ways that you cannot conceive. You have to understand that you have discharged your duty and that you will benefit as much from this prayer as from any act of charity that you perform, even if your heart is not in it. So, do what you have to do and let our Lord give you what he wants and don't give him orders.

Hilton says that there may be various methods, suitable to the different temperaments of men, leading to contemplation of the divine. However, all paths must pass through one gate, the death of the self. “If the seeker wants to enter by any other gate, he is just a thief and a gate-crasher and he will be thrown out because he is unworthy.”

Dame Julian of Norwich (1342–1416) experienced a series of visions at the age of thirty. She became an anchoress in a cell next to the church, praying in solitude but conversing with the community through a window into the church. Through her counsel and through her book *Revelations of Divine Love*, she sought to share what she understood from her visions. She wrote:

Our Lord showed me, in a spiritual manner, how intimately he loves us. I saw that he is everything that is good and which supports us. He clothes us in his love, envelops us and embraces us. He laps us round

in his tender love and he will never abandon us.... Our Lord God also showed me what pleasure it gives him when a vulnerable soul comes to him, simply, openly, and as a friend.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* kept his identity hidden, so we know nothing about his life. Like Richard Rolle, he stressed that love is the way to God.

Every single rational creature has two faculties: the power of knowledge and the power of love. God is always quite unable to be comprehended by the first faculty, that of intelligence, but he is totally and perfectly comprehensible by the second, the power of love.

The central image in this book, the “cloud of unknowing” refers to the darkness of ignorance, impenetrable by the intellect, that separates the soul from God.

When you begin you only encounter a darkness and, as it were, a cloud of unknowing.... So prepare yourself to wait in this darkness for as long as you can, yearning all the time for him whom you love.

The anonymous author advises, “Lift up your heart to God in a humble impulse of love and aim for him alone, not for any of the good things you want from him.” He warns that God is a “jealous lover”:

He will not share your heart with anybody and will only work in your heart and will if he is in sole possession.... All he wants you to do is to keep your gaze fixed on him and to let him do the rest.... You need only lean on God humbly in prayer and he will soon come to your rescue. Lean on him, then, and see how he bears your weight. He is absolutely ready and is only waiting for you.



