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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Yours Affectionately
- 6 What's Real?
- 9 Something to Think About
- 10 Why Me?
- 14 The Disciple's Attitude
- 16 With Love
- 19 Repartee of the Wise
- 20 The Shelter of Satsang
- 22 The Extra Mile
- 26 Silent Spectators
- 28 The Master Answers
- 31 Finding Peace Within
- 33 Did You Know?
- 34 Are You There?
- 36 Spiritualisticks
- 37 How Much for a Pair of Shoes?
- 39 Posture
- 42 Memories of My Last Darshan
- 43 Superficial Love
- 46 Giving Our Best Time
- 49 Heart to Heart
- 50 Book Review

Spiritual Link

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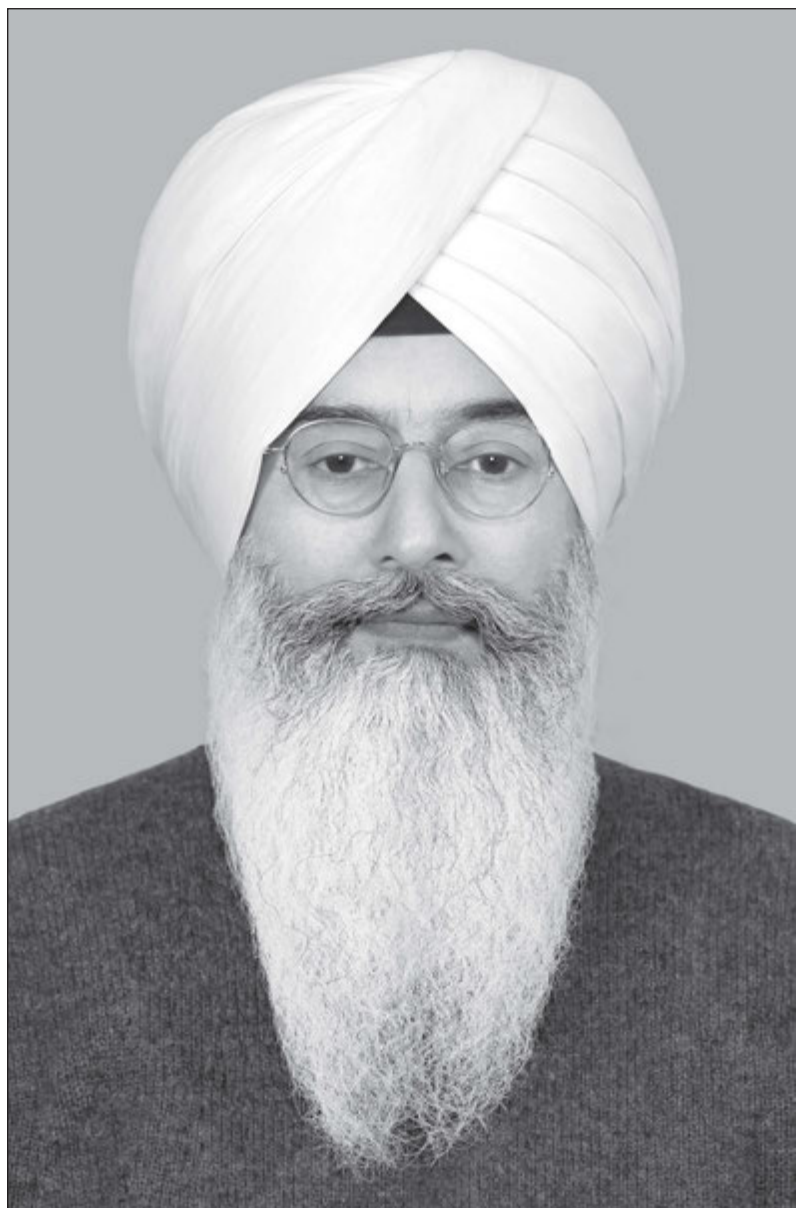
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Yours Affectionately

I am very glad to learn of your keenness in pursuing practical spiritual lessons, and note your acknowledgment as your willingness to obey instructions. Obedience to the Master's instruction makes the student's path easier and facilitates progress. And the world has nothing higher to offer than the truth of Sant Mat. I am particularly pleased to learn that you are doing your simran and bhajan regularly, and are able to hear the sound current and the internal melodies. In fact, it is the sound current that holds the world together, and the higher harmonies will, by and by, take the soul up to the highest region. With faith and constant practice, you will contact the finer harmonies some day. Obstacles are bound to come, but as you have rightly remarked, they are only stepping stones if properly tackled. Our own mind is, in fact, our greatest enemy, and this has to be conquered. This is done by Shabd or sound current practice, which is an absolutely foolproof method.

There is no reason to be afraid; think of the Master and repeat the five Names, and if you again feel any difficulty or fear, help will come. It was a very good experience you had. As the student progresses, he sees, hears and experiences so many things. With faith and confidence, move on and on.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



What's Real?

You are not imagining things, and in course of time you will yourself feel and know that what you see inside is more real than that which you see outside.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

There was a famous politician who was quite conscious of the way that he appeared in the media. Indeed, he realized that his skin looked more radiant under yellow light and that his profile shots were most appealing when taken from the left side. Whenever he had dinner outings or public appearances, his assistant was assigned the task of going to the restaurant or venue beforehand to choose a table with the best possible lighting and seating that featured his left profile.

In today's world, artists, celebrities and people in the public-eye are not the only ones who are conscious of their image – we, ordinary people, too have started to play a very active part in how we present ourselves to the world. We want the world to see us in a certain light – we want to be viewed as beautiful, powerful, interesting and happy. So we stream on to the internet images of ourselves in which we look our best and appear our happiest. Social media has become a part of our daily routine, with constant status updates, instagrams, tweets and so forth. But are we telling the world the truth? Or just like the politician, are we selectively portraying ourselves in a certain favourable light? More importantly, are we telling *ourselves* the truth? In fact, what *is* the truth?

The fact is that most of us adorn ourselves with multiple layers because we are somewhat uncomfortable with who we really are. By hiding behind our social status, our designer clothes, our jewellery, our coloured hair and perfectly manicured nails, we evade facing

ourselves. The end product, the image we present to the world is many layers of illusion. But stripped to our core, what remains? And more importantly, how comfortable are we with the person underneath all those layers.

Unfortunately, we have been born into a world of illusion. Everything we believe to be real is in fact perishable, unreal and subject to decay. We blindly pursue the illusion, attempting only to enhance the facade, because quite frankly, we don't know any better. We have been born and brought up in this world, and have naturally started to define ourselves by its parameters. And the irony of it all is that in doing so, we are actually concealing our true beauty. In the movie *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Sayuri Nitta beautifully unveils the illusion behind a geisha's perfection and flawless elegance. In Japan, geishas were considered to be living pieces of art, beautifully adorned with silk robes and immaculate white makeup. But Sayuri Nitta explains in the movie: "She (the geisha) paints her face to hide her face."

There is an ancient proverb that states, "There is none so blind as those who will not see." We have chosen to turn a blind eye towards who we really are, embracing the illusion instead. But the illusion cannot sustain us forever – there is only so much that it can provide – because at our core we are much more. So a sense of emptiness eventually sets in for us all.

There is a story of the 1930s actor Charlie Chaplin that sheds light on this point. In those days, Chaplin was considered as one of the most famous men on earth. He was once travelling privately by train and did not expect anyone to greet him at his destination. However, news of his arrival somehow leaked to the press, and to his surprise he found a mob of fans waiting to greet him as he disembarked from the train. Being a showman, he put on a smile for his fans, made them happy, and then retired to his hotel room. That night, however, he wrote a letter to a dear one in which he confessed that as he

disembarked from the train, into the sea of adoring fans, he actually never felt so alone in his entire life. Similarly, Albert Einstein once said: “It is strange to be known so universally, and yet to be so lonely.”

The magic of the illusion eventually fades for us all, and we are left with a sense of loneliness, emptiness, searching for a glimpse of the truth. Is anything real in this play called life? Is the love that we feel in this world even real? Maharaj Charan Singh advises us that even the love we feel is an illusion:

There's no real love in this world at all; it's just a self-deception. Nobody belongs to us; we don't belong to anybody. We deceive ourselves; people deceive themselves. They're living in an illusion that we belong to each other, that we are meant for each other. We belong only to the Father; the rest is just karmic relationships with each other.

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

If love isn't even real, then what is? Only one thing: the relationship between a disciple and his Master. Those precious moments spent in silent remembrance of our Master are the only few glimpses of reality that we have during our short stay in this world. Yet, both silence and darkness tend to make many of us uncomfortable. We cling to our outer layers, because it takes a lot of patience and courage to take a peek at what lies within. So we spend our entire lives hiding from our true beauty. We avoid facing, embracing who we really are. Perhaps it is time to focus less on portraying ourselves in a certain light and turn towards finding our inner light, which shines ever so brightly.



Something to Think About

Sant Mat does not encourage running away from one's duties, but simply taking the mind out of the glamour of the world. By living in the world and performing our duties and obligations, we can still be above these things, and that is the effect of simran and bhajan. When the mind is at peace and you are no longer troubled by attractions and attachments, you are in a place of peace. Peace comes from within.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



As far as possible, no requests for physical needs should be made, for whatever you are destined to get you will get without fail. From the Master, ask for the Master, for when he grants you that, you will get everything with him. Why ask charity from a giver instead of the giver himself?

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



We should never lose our temper nor use abusive language towards anybody. It shows want of clear thinking. Besides obstructing one's spiritual progress it also impairs one's health to a great extent.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Why Me?

In the course of our lives, we come across situations which lead us to despair, and when this happens we often call out to the Lord and cry, “Why am I suffering? What did I do to deserve this? When I constantly try to do what’s right, why is it that I suffer while others have all the luck?” To this the saints reply:

Do not blame anybody; our own deeds are responsible for whatever happens. As I did, so do I fare; why then blame others for it?

Guru Nanak, as quoted in The Path

“How are our own deeds responsible?” we may ask. “How am I to blame for this situation in my life? I haven’t done anything wrong. How is it my fault?”

Analyzed from a simple and practical perspective, we know the entire universe is governed by strict laws. For instance, we are aware of the laws of science, laws of justice and laws of business. In the seventeenth century when an apple from a tree fell on Sir Isaac Newton’s head, he proved scientifically that what goes up must come down and called it the law of gravity. He also discovered one of the laws of motion: that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. In every civilized country, there are laws of justice to reward good citizens and punish criminals. We are applying laws of business when we employ workers and pay them fair wages. These laws are merely the tip of the iceberg. Scientists and others have discovered innumerable laws in the physical creation and have applied them to all aspects of life.

Studied in greater depth, we find that all laws are based on a single fundamental relationship – the relationship of cause and effect. One action triggers a reaction, whether positive or negative, rewarding or punishing. This cause and effect relationship existed since the beginning of the creation with the divine law of karma.

The law of karma ensures that every action shall have an equal reaction. Jesus Christ said “As ye sow, so shall ye reap”; even Moses preached “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” It simply means that every thought, spoken word or physical action will generate a reaction. If we perform good actions, we will receive rewards for them; and if we partake in hurtful or evil actions, we will be punished for them.

We can never calculate or fathom our karmic accounts. They have been accumulating for millions of lifetimes – which we do not remember. The reactions of our past actions (from previous lifetimes) can bear fruit in a current lifetime or even in future lifetimes. Maharaj Charan Singh explains this more clearly:

Our stay in this transient world, our experiencing of its joys and sorrows, its pleasure and pain, its weal and woe, its hopes and fears, is all due to our own karmas. Like a peasant who harvests one crop, brings it home and then sows another, we are also reaping the fruits of our actions in past lives, and in this life we are sowing new ones to reap in the next.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. I

Hence, Guru Nanak wrote, “Our own deeds are responsible for whatever happens.” So when we ask God, “Why me?” we must understand that according to the law of karma, our fate or our destiny is determined by our own actions.

It also means that by going through painful situations, we are actually paying off and clearing our own karmic accounts. Thus our pains are actually blessings in disguise.

Nevertheless, sometimes when we are upset, we either refute or simply are incapable of absorbing the wisdom of the saint's words. But, even just the attempt to understand and accept can provide immense relief from our mental torment. Maharaj Charan Singh has often said:

If we try to remove the thorns of the world, we can never succeed; but if we put on strong shoes, the thorns are completely ineffective.

The Path

The thorns are the reactions of pleasure and pain we must endure according to the law of karma; and the strong shoes represent the strength we get from our meditation practice. From the moment we are initiated, the Master connects our soul to the Shabd, and every time we practise our meditation, we are strengthening our ties and relationship to that all-merciful and all-powerful God.

The book *Living Meditation* highlights many benefits of spiritual practice. For instance, as our meditation practice becomes stable, we begin to see life more objectively. That helps us reach a state where we can more easily detach ourselves from our emotions and obsessions. It helps us to gain increasing clarity as to who we really are. And eventually, our meditation enables us to develop clear thinking, through which we can help ourselves by reasoning and thinking things through from a spiritual perspective. Ultimately, every benefit comes down to the same thing: meditation helps us develop strong shoes as we walk through this world of thorns.

So the next time we feel like crying out, “Why me?” we should try to focus our energy instead on our meditation, because as the Masters proclaim, this is the only way to gain liberation from our karmas and the pains of the world.



When good days do not last, why expect bad days to persist? Much of our bad times have passed away. Only a little is left; bear it with fortitude. Satguru is within you and is every moment looking after you. Have faith in his grace and compassion, and do not feel dejected. Do not let patience desert you. Contemplate on the Satguru's form and continue to attend to your meditation regularly.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *In the Footsteps of the Master*

The Disciple's Attitude

Based on an extract from *Buddhism, Path to Nirvana*

The work of the enlightened Teacher inspires inexpressible gratitude in his disciples. From his blissful abode, the Teacher comes down in a human form and lives on earth amidst all kinds of difficulties for his disciples' benefit. He has no selfish purpose of his own. He leaves no stone unturned to awaken, teach, guide and accompany his disciples, constantly protecting and showering his grace upon all, through the inner regions up to the Teacher's ultimate blissful abode. This is all out of his sheer love and compassion. Can anyone be a greater benefactor than the Master?

Disciples might ask themselves this question: Should we not do everything possible to facilitate the Master's work, which he is doing precisely for our sake? Does it not behoove us to do our part, to the best of our ability, however little we may be capable of contributing? Practising the spiritual discipline our Master teaches us should be paramount. Our attitude towards our Teacher and his teachings is crucial.

The Master imparts his teachings to his disciples all his life, exhorting them to put these teachings into practice for the sole purpose of enabling them to attain their salvation. It is the disciple's sacred duty to carry on the spiritual practice as prescribed by the Master with utmost sincerity. This is the real worship of a revered Master. In the Buddha's last words to his close disciple Ananda, when the Buddha was being honoured with flowers and sandalwood powder at the time of his passing away, this is precisely what the Buddha said:

Although, Ananda, all these offerings are made in honour of the Tathagata, it is not thus that the Tathagata is rightly honoured, venerated, revered and worshipped. If monks, nuns and lay

disciples were to live in accordance with my teachings and strictly follow my teachings, they would be honouring me and venerating me rightly, and paying me true respect and true reverence. Therefore, Ananda, you should act accordingly to my teaching, following all the instructions, and it should be so taught to others. This would be the highest worship, which would please me most.

For the spiritual practice to be fruitful, it is essential to develop proper devotion for the guide. This is why Pabongka Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist Master, says:

The best means of pleasing your spiritual guide is to offer him your practice of his instructions. First you should devote yourself properly to a spiritual guide and put into practice the instructions he gives you.

Since the disciple is ignorant and the Teacher is wise, since the disciple is weak and the Teacher is all-powerful, since the disciple is lost and the Teacher can guide him, it is essential to approach the guide with utmost humility and follow his instructions with faith and devotion, without which the disciple can make no progress. Gampopa, a Tibetan monk, points out:

It is useless to have lived, even for a very long time, with a spiritual preceptor if one be lacking in humility and devotion and thus be unable to develop spiritually.

For him whose humility and faith with respect to his Guru are unshakeable, it is the same whether he dwells with his Guru or not.



With Love

We are all in the same boat. Every human being we come across is sailing along with us on this ocean of life. Some are going through good times; others are ploughing through the bad, with everyone having their own individual natures. Some people are kind, loving and easy to get along with, while others are difficult and complicated. But whatever the character, whatever the circumstance, one thing is certain – everyone carries their fair share of strengths and weaknesses, and no one is perfect.

This is perhaps why, since the beginning of time, the scriptures have cautioned us not to be harsh and judgmental of others. For if we ourselves are neither perfect nor free from making mistakes, then how can it be right to point a finger at someone else?

Sant Mat teaches us that however an individual has turned out, every person is a product of the choices he has made over the millions of incarnations he has lived. Therefore, one's personality, nature, quirks and habits – every peculiarity from an anxious nature to the shape of one's toes – is based on the blueprint of one's own karma. So, from a practical perspective, there is no way one can ever know the true condition of someone who might say or do something we find reason to criticize.

Living the spiritual life, at some point we come to realize that people are the way they are for reasons that are beyond the understanding of an ordinary mind. The only way to maintain an atmosphere of peace and understanding amongst such a wide variety of human specimens is to simply accept everyone as they are.

The fact is, it is futile to try and change another person. Nature has ordained we have absolutely no control over how others think and

behave, but we have been given full jurisdiction over our own conduct and attitude. The irony is that the only way we can change others is by being good examples ourselves.

But it is difficult to overcome the age-old conundrum that when it comes to the weaknesses of others, we have 20/20 vision but when it comes to our own selves, we are blind as a bat. An inspiring piece of counsel in the Bible (Matthew 7:3) advises us not to focus on the speck in our neighbour's eye before removing the log from our own eye. Meaning, in a situation of conflict, rather than justifying ourselves and blaming others, perhaps it would be wiser to reflect upon why we are having such feelings of resentment; to consider where we may have been at fault, and from that starting point strive to resolve the situation.

The mystics often remind us that, as spiritual beings struggling through this human experience, nobody wants to be bad. Everybody we come across is fighting some kind of battle, and under the circumstances, people do the best they can. The point worth considering is this: if we have our own crosses to bear, then can we find room in our hearts for tolerance and forgiveness?

From a logical perspective, the mystics urge us to think and ask ourselves: why are we so sensitive? Does it really make a difference what people say? Just because someone says something, does it make it true? Today someone will praise us, tomorrow someone will insult us – who is right and who is wrong? Is it really worth ruining our peace of mind over something which, from a larger perspective, is actually so insignificant that we probably will not even remember it ten years from now?

Nothing is more inspiring than the example of our own perfect living Master – the epitome of lovingkindness and compassion. If we truly believe that he is raising us to walk shoulder to shoulder with

him, then wouldn't it be a giant leap towards our spiritual goal and a great tribute to our beloved mentor to be able to respond to such situations the same way he would?

We often hear in satsangs that in the final analysis, it is not between us and the people of this world; it is between us and our supreme Father. The Masters always remind us that in the same way we judge others, we too will be judged with the same measure. So when the time comes for our soul to stand before our benevolent Redeemer and all our transgressions are laid out before him, if we want love and forgiveness, then the measure must be set here and now – in this life.

That means that no matter what anyone says or does, there is only one option available to us, one way to respond to every situation – with love.



The Lord loves the humble and the low. Beware of injuring the heart of any man. God lives there. To those who break another's heart the gates of heaven shall ever remain closed. Always speak gently, lovingly and selflessly. The higher the position you hold, the humbler your mind should be. A sweet word never costs anything, but wins the world.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

Repartee of the Wise

After recounting the story of one of his disciples who had reached an inner state by praying for forty days, the Prophet said, “If anyone worships God, purely for God, for forty days, rich quarries of the heart’s knowledge will reveal themselves through his tongue.”

Subsequently, one of his followers engaged himself in prayer and supplication to God for forty days, but noticed no advancement within. So he went to the Prophet and said, “O Messenger of God, I tried my best for forty days, but nothing happened to me that resembles the state of the one whose story you told us – and I know there is no error in your words.” The Prophet answered, “I said ‘purely for God.’ Purity and sincerity of desire for God, with no other desire or intention, is the condition necessary for success. Hearing about the rare words and talk of the other man, you became greedy with desire for that state, but not for God.”

Shams-e-Tabrizi



A disciple complained to Maharaj Jagat Singh: “Sir, my mind does not allow me to sit in meditation.”

The Master smiled and said: “Well, what else should it do? It is doing its duty most faithfully. Should you not do yours? Attack it with full force. At this stage, it is a fierce battle between mind and soul. Never give any quarter to the mind. The best way is to open the attack first and to go on repeating it, so that it may never find any time to return the attack.”

The Science of the Soul

The Shelter of Satsang

If your boat is caught in a storm and you reach the shore, you feel so relieved. We are all in the storm of our mind, and when we go to the satsang of the mystics, we find we can land on a shore. How relieved we feel. Satsang is a great anchor. We are always influenced by the company we keep.

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

Throughout the ages, the one common battle that people have faced is that of controlling the mind. Today, with our increased dependence on material possessions, it is perhaps more difficult than ever before. Everyone is striving for more, and somehow whatever we have is never enough. The purpose of satsang is to help settle the storm of endless desires that our minds create.

Financial troubles, problems in our relationships, difficulty in sitting for meditation – our mind is constantly dwelling on something or another. Just as a sailor desperately needs a point to anchor his boat, similarly we need a place to anchor our mind. Satsang is that anchor.

Years go by, and we tend to forget the reason and the purpose of attending satsang. We wonder whether we are gaining anything in the process. Hazur used to give a beautiful explanation:

Crops can grow without a fence, but there is always a danger of somebody ruining your crop if it has no protection. So we need to protect whatever meditation we do by keeping up that atmosphere of love and devotion.

Die to Live

Satsang helps us build an atmosphere of spirituality in our lives. In addition, it teaches us humility and is a source of strength that helps us rise above our weaknesses.

Even if we do not recall every single satsang we may have attended over the years, we know that they have helped nourish our soul, making us stronger to overcome the hurdles in our lives.

Life can be very difficult, but perhaps more difficult than life itself is the constant struggle of fulfilling our promise to our Master. Doing our two and a half hours meditation daily and being a good, loving human being is what he expects of us. Satsang is a constant reminder of that. If we were not reminded, how easy would it be to forget that in this world of illusion.

Ultimately, everything on this path leads to one thing – meditation. Satsang helps us build an atmosphere in which we are able to channelize our lives towards this goal. It gives us encouragement, and is a positive influence towards God-realization.

*For where two or three are gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.*

Bible, Matthew 18:20

Every time we attend satsang, the Master is present. What more positivity can we surround ourselves with? What better fence can we think of, that will protect our meditation? What better anchor can there be for our mind?



The main purpose of satsang meetings is to keep awake in our hearts a keen desire and earnestness for simran and bhajan, and to create and sustain love and devotion for the Lord.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*

The Extra Mile

“Going the extra mile” is a phrase that originates in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and is included in the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew states that:

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

A huge component of success, in every aspect of life, is the willingness to venture into the extra territory. The idea of going the extra mile is to do beyond what is expected of you, with a positive attitude, without any expectation of honour, praise or reimbursement.

The rewards of doing so in our worldly commitments are close to immediate; even if it is in the smallest form, such as praise from our employer or a show of gratitude from our families. But what about on the spiritual level, where we see few signs of progress and where simply abiding by the four principles sometimes seems impossible? Why should we do more than two and a half hours of meditation each day? Why should we do more than abstain from meat and alcohol? After all, we are committed to the four vows – what does it mean to go the extra mile?

If we live by this philosophy as a matter of daily habit, the first thing we accomplish is a great friendship with our conscience. For example, when we are at a restaurant with colleagues or friends and we voice our hesitancy to pay for the meat portion of the meal, even if it is a little socially awkward to do so, where does that put us? We may not be on that party’s guest list in the future, but we would have gone the extra mile to clear our conscience of an unwanted guest: guilt.

In response to a question about a similar issue, Maharaj Charan Singh said to a disciple:

You should not do anything that makes you carry a sense of guilt with you, for that will not let you sit in meditation, it will not let you live with yourself, and it will not let you be happy.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

On the other hand, is going the extra mile even expected of us? Our gracious Master, our best friend, our Father, melts at any miniscule effort that we make. He rewards even the smallest positive action on our part. In that sense, it is so easy to please our Beloved, just by doing what we signed up for. So, no, we are not expected to do more. But then again, why shouldn't we? We go out of our way for our family, friends and often for strangers. Why not for him?

It may seem cumbersome at first, but keep in mind that we don't need to change a long list of things. Just living in this world, there are a number of karmas we cannot avoid. But there are some we can choose to cross out. Hazur Maharaj Ji used to say that we are sinning at every step. For example, thousands of insects are killed before food comes to our tables. He referred to these karmas as 'innocent weight'. But we have to decide for ourselves: how heavy do we want this burden to be? The heavier the burden on our backs, the harder it is for us to walk that extra mile. It is for us to decide and make a choice as to where we want to draw the line. But Hazur Maharaj Ji adds:

We have to take a practical view in life and try to collect the least possible load, which should be cleared by meditation and devotion to the Lord.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

So if we choose to quit smoking, for example, that is a great step. Gambling also incurs extra karmas, for the reason that we are pocketing what does not belong to us. Abstaining from telling lies is something any disciple can do. Making a conscious effort to avoid gossiping will also prevent additional karmas. We may also wish to avoid animal-derived ingredients in the cosmetics we use on our skin. Our Master does not impose these decisions on us. These are principles we can decide to impose on ourselves.

And when it comes to the most important task – meditation – we are more than welcome to go the extra mile. Our Master has instructed us to sit for at least two and a half hours in silence every single day, for the rest of our lives. Going the extra mile in meditation is probably not expected of us, but highly encouraged. Maharaj Charan Singh once answered a disciple's question regarding "too much effort" this way:

Nothing is too much on the path. There is nothing too much in love and devotion. A lover never thinks that he has been able to give too much love. A lover never calculates. He's always absorbed in his love, happy in his love. He would utilize every minute in love and devotion; so it is never too much for him. The more he gives, the more it grows. People become rich by getting something from somebody. In Sant Mat, you become rich by giving. The more you give, the more it grows, the richer you are in love and devotion.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

In any facet of life, we go the first mile out of the fear of failure. But when we continue the second mile, it is solely out of love. In essence,

when Jesus asked his disciples for the “second mile,” he was discreetly asking for a sacrifice. He was asking for love. Jesus did not make an exception for the less skilled, or the less resourceful when he asked for the second mile. Nobody is an exception. But when a heart full of love drives a disciple to do more, that disciple becomes exceptional.



*You should develop a little more faith in God and remember
that anything given in God's name returns severalfold.*

Fariduddin Attar, as quoted in *Essential Sufism*

Silent Spectators

Life is so simple and beautiful to live, provided one can rise above these human failings. They always keep one entangled in the net of worry and misery. Whatever has to happen, has already happened and we human mortals are just helpless spectators. If we can just withdraw this 'self', then only can we enjoy this drama of life.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Treasure Beyond Measure*

The idea of viewing life from the spectator's chair does seem a lot more enjoyable than what we are used to. Rather than being tossed back and forth between the emotions of passion and hatred, the laughter and wailing, the fear and courage or the meeting and parting that take place on stage under the heat of the spotlight, just sitting back and detachedly enjoying the drama while having some popcorn does seem like a much better option.

Unfortunately, life does require us to get on stage and do some acting. There are duties that we need to carry out and responsibilities that we must fulfil, but this does not mean that we cannot take a step back and enjoy our own performance.

We are so caught up in the struggle to make an impression, to survive the competition and secure a permanent presence on stage that we forget that the script has already been written, the roles have already been chalked out and our exit from this stage has already been scheduled.

Intellectually, we know that life will unfold the way it has to in spite of our constant kicking and pushing. We know that the drama has to end in spite of our much desired long-lasting stardom, but we unfortunately cannot seem to extract ourselves from the scenario.

At a very opportune moment, though, our Master has entered the sets and keeping our welfare in mind, he calls for a “Cut!” We are forced to take a break from the commotion on stage and sit back and relax, in our meditation.

It is in meditation that we are given a chance to press the ‘refresh’ button and get a new dose of courage to face the grind of the stage. It is in meditation that we are granted a sigh of relief from the heat of the spotlight, and it is in meditation that we come to understand that ours is just a role to be played and not the reality.

While sitting in meditation, we learn to detach ourselves from the daily grind; we learn to zoom out of our troubles and focus on the bigger picture, and thus we learn to act and not react to our given script. When we take that step back, through meditation, we learn to relax in the Director’s will, rising above the heartache of loss, the disillusionment of failure and the great burden of decision making.

The Master’s call to ‘Cut!’ and his tender ushering to the comfort of the eye centre is an opportunity that we just cannot afford to turn down. In fact, if we only valued this break that we are constantly offered, we would eagerly jump at his call and rush to sit for meditation without any further ado.

Meditation helps us become silent spectators in this world of passing shadows. It helps us become silent observers of the unfolding of our own destiny; that destiny which is now in our Master’s gracious hands and which cannot but have a happy ending.

*This is my delight thus to wait and watch at the wayside where
shadow chases light and the rain comes in the wake of the summer
... from dawn till dusk I sit here before my door and I know that all
of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.*

Rabindranath Tagore, as quoted in *Bengali Flower*



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *I suppose, Maharaj Ji, that any satsangi who does his meditation daily, diligently and devotedly for two and a half hours or more in the morning hours can reasonably expect to reach his spiritual destination?*

A: Definitely. You see, you not only make spiritual progress within, but with regularity in meditation and living the Sant Mat way of life, your whole attitude and approach to the world and worldly problems changes. The time comes when you feel you're not attached to anybody at all. And that is the main factor in our not coming back to this creation at all, no matter how little progress we have made within. Our whole attitude and approach to life changes by meditation, by living this way of life, and automatically we get detached from everything. And that detachment pulls us out of this creation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

* * *

Q: *Master the word 'happiness' is sometimes defined as inner peace or calm or contentment. Is that what the Masters mean when they say we should be happy?*

A: Happiness means perpetual happiness, perpetual bliss and peace within, not short-lived happiness or so-called sensual pleasures – those have terrible reactions. Happiness means that happiness which has no reverse reaction afterwards. That is perpetual peace and happiness.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *With our simran are we really calling to the Master all the time?*

A: Yes. In meditation, there's nothing else. In meditation we're calling the Master at every stage, all the time, even to the last moment. For a disciple, meditation is nothing but the Master, at every level.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

* * *

Q: *Master, how can we help our fellow satsangis when they are having a hard time?*

A: Everyone has a problem at every step in life, and there are a hundred and one types of problems. We are all full of problems. One has to struggle in life at every step and deal with these worldly problems. We should do our best, then leave the results to the Father. This world is full of problems – there's no dearth of human problems. Mostly they are our own creation – I don't say individually, but collectively. We have created these problems.

The Lord has given us enough earth to grow our food, enough material to live, enough places to live, but we do not know how to distribute these things, so we have created our own problems. We have exaggerated our needs in life so much that we cannot fulfil them, so we are always confronted with one problem or another. What do we need? How much can one eat? How many clothes do you need to cover yourself? How much shelter do you need? Calculate individually. Some have nothing, some have too much. So who created these problems? Our demands, our desires in the world – there's no end to them, so there's always a problem at every step.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



Finding Peace Within

Have you ever observed what punctuates a typical day in your life? If you have, you will have noticed how your mind and hands buzz with a lot of unnecessary movement – words and actions that clutter your thoughts and decisions.

The five senses of human perception toss us around like feathers in a whirlwind. We receive multiple stimuli from our senses every minute of our lives. Inevitably, and perhaps unknowingly, our mind ends up accumulating a lot of clutter, negative thoughts and attitudes.

As we rub shoulders with the world, we create new mental blocks; we keep grudges towards people through old family quarrels, political issues, and misunderstandings that challenge our relationships and circumstances, creating a long list of issues to overcome. We are constantly bombarded by turbulent desires, particularly those that give pleasure to our body. Family and friends bog us down with their demands. Duties and responsibilities threaten to overwhelm us day in and day out, and the more we try to extract ourselves from this rigmarole, the further we are entangled in it.

Finding ourselves derailed from our course, we seek our centre – and try to focus on whatever will raise us above the din and clatter of the world, and open our eyes to the conspiracy which the world shares with our mind. The Masters in their infinite compassion for our dilemma teach us: “The human body is the temple of the living God.” We merely have to turn within to find peace and happiness. This is a simple and unfailing remedy given by the Master to help us alleviate the tensions of this world; yet we are so unwilling to make the effort.

We forget that the world will go on and on, and leave us behind, for our stay is only temporary. We urgently need the Master’s help as we

try to tame our chaotic mind. The Master says we have to discipline ourselves.

*If the mountain guide accepts you as his charge,
he will insist upon your travelling light.*

The Mystic Philosophy of Sant Mat

Similarly, we must lighten our emotional baggage – what is required on this path is simplicity of mind, faith and love.

One of the Master's toughest tasks is to convince us that nothing should deter us from the daily practice of meditation, and that we should try desperately hard to go within. He extends his hand to us in so many unmistakable ways. What matters is that despite everything we face in life, we must never give up; we must continue to carry out the spiritual discipline with regularity and punctuality. After all, the Master happily accepts both our triumphs and failures.



Meditation is nothing but knocking at his door for mercy, to seek forgiveness from him. Meditation is nothing else – it is just our expression of gratitude towards the Father, just to tell him how anxious we are to become one with you, how restless we are to be with you, reach you.

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

Did You Know?

Negative feelings and emotions first of all harm those who entertain them. Love, contentment and admiring the good in others are positive and constructive virtues that make us happy.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



The mind and the soul are two distinct and separate entities. The mind itself is material – of course, of a very highly refined order. But the mind has no independent self-consciousness. It cannot function alone, being wholly dependent upon spirit to activate it.

With a Great Master in India



Gambling is not approved of by the saints. This effort to obtain others' money increases one's greed and adds to our load of karmas. One cannot and does not get a whit more nor a penny less than what is in his destiny. Who has ever solved his problems by resorting to such risky and uncertain methods like gambling? He might even lose what he already has. Many lives are ruined by gambling. Such money seldom brings happiness. Money that is earned by the sweat of one's brow brings a sense of peace, achievement and satisfaction.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Are You There?

This is a question so many of us have asked at some stage in our spiritual lives when we have gone through an unexplainable dark and empty period. Is the Master truly there? And if so, why does he not fill our being with his love? Our spiritual practice feels dry and we start to think that we are incapable of meditating. Deep in our heart, we long for that zeal we once had. What happened? And how do we make our way through such times?

The saints tell us to persevere and to simply keep trying. The spiritual practice may feel mechanical but this is a normal phase that every disciple goes through. As a Christian mystic once wrote: “There is no such thing as a prayer in which nothing is done or nothing happens.”

He dwells in every heart. He sees everything and knows our secret feelings. The Lord hears even the footfall of an ant.

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

The Masters have often told us that all we have to do is to “show up” in our meditation. As much as we might feel alone, we have to remind ourselves that we are not – he is watching us, he is aware of what we are going through and is helping us at every step. Ultimately, it is only he who can turn our struggles into successes.

A mystic once put it beautifully: “In the game of love I cannot lose. If I win I get you, and if I lose, you get me.”

There is a story about an ardent devotee of the Lord. Whenever he attended to his worldly duties, his thoughts were constantly on the Lord. When he retired at night, he would sit in meditation, yearning for the Lord. For many years, night after night, he continued with this practice.

One day, his mind began taunting him with questions like: “After all these years, has the Lord ever answered your prayers? You’ve been giving so much of your time to him, but where is he? Have you even experienced a glimpse of his magnificence?”

There were no answers. He became so disheartened that he stopped praying. Then one night, he heard a voice: “Why have you stopped calling on God?”

The man answered, “Because I feel unloved; where is the Lord? In all the years that I called out to him, not once did he reply, ‘Here I am.’”

The voice then told him: “God has commanded me to tell you the following words: ‘Am I not the One who engaged you to do my service? Am I not the one who asked you to call upon me? Each time you called ‘God, O God’ was because I replied, ‘Here I Am’. That pain, that longing and that one-pointed devotion was my message to you. Your struggles and perseverance for my help were the reasons grace was showered upon you. That grace was the reason for your prayers. Your love and devotion are the magnet for my mercy: and each ‘O God’ of yours contains many ‘Here I am.’”

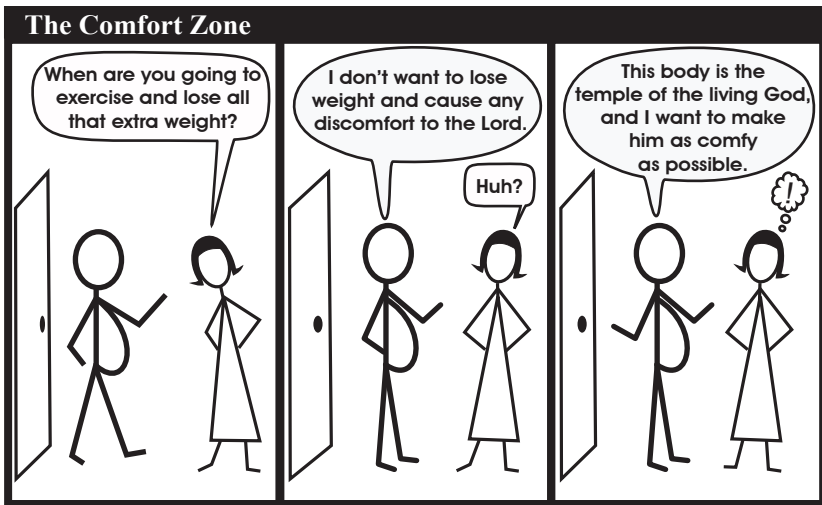
The Masters have told us that it is only because of the Lord’s grace that we even sit in meditation. He is the One who pulls us from within and gives us the opportunities to make the effort to move closer to him. By our own effort we would never be able to even think about him. Grace is never withheld from us – in fact, we are told that

it flows in abundance. We only need to be receptive to his grace by turning our attention towards him.

The struggles that each of us go through in our spiritual practice are actually filled with blessings. It is how we learn that we cannot rely on our efforts alone in our spiritual practice. We come to understand that everything, even an inch forward towards the Lord, is possible only because of him. It is through our struggles and perseverance that the focus is shifted from I, me, myself to “only you”. It is then that we realize that he has always been there and always will be.



SPIRITUALISTICKS[®]



How Much for a Pair of Shoes?

Nizamuddin was a great saint, and it is said that no one who ever approached him came away empty-handed.

A poor man who had a daughter to marry, once came to him and begged for his help. The saint told him: “My son, whatever offerings come to me during the next three days, I will gladly give them to you.”

Filled with hopeful anticipation, the poor man stayed for three days with the saint. But during that time not a single soul brought an offering to him.

On the evening of the third day, when the poor man – his high hopes dashed – was weeping miserably, Nizamuddin gave him his own shoes, saying: “Take these, my good man, for what they may be worth. They are the only possessions I have, and at the least, you can sell them for enough to buy a day’s supply of food.”

Greatly disappointed, the poor man nevertheless thanked the saint, and left him to return to his own village. As he trudged wearily along the dusty road, he saw approaching him a large caravan of richly appointed and heavily laden camels. It was the caravan of Amir Khusro, who was returning from Kabul with all of his luxurious possessions, after retiring from the king’s service.

Amir Khusro himself was riding at the head of the caravan and, as he approached the poor man, he began to smell the fragrance of his beloved Satguru. After he had ridden past the poor man, he noticed that the fragrance came from behind him. Both puzzled and intensely curious, Amir Khusro at once got down from his camel, ran after the poor man, and asked him: “Who are you, friend, and where are you coming from?”

The poor man still feeling very miserable and wretched, told the whole story of his three days’ stay with the great saint, and held

up the pair of shoes to show how old and of what little value they were.

Amir Khusro asked with some impatience: “Would you sell the shoes to me, my good man?”

“Why, by all means, noble sir, I was hoping to sell them in the next village, so I could get a little food; for otherwise I would go hungry,” the wretched fellow replied.

“I will pay you well for them,” said Amir Khusro. “Give me the shoes, and in return you may have all my caravan, including all the camels and their loads, except for the two beasts that are carrying my personal belongings.”

Overjoyed at this totally unexpected good fortune, the poor man thanked Amir Khusro profusely, and went away rejoicing at the head of the caravan.

Within a very short time, Amir Khusro reached his Satguru, and placed the pair of shoes at his feet. Nizamuddin, smiling asked:

“And how much, my son, did you pay for such an old pair of shoes?”

“Sir, I gave my entire caravan and all my worldly possessions for them, except for the two camels that are standing here,” Amir Khusro told him humbly.

Again Nizamuddin smiled. “Brother,” he said, “you paid a very low price indeed. They were truly a tremendous bargain; and actually, you got them for practically nothing.”

“To find a saint of the beloved Lord is the highest good fortune that can come to any man; for the saints are the rarest jewels in all the world. And the gift of Nam, the divine melody of the Word of God that takes one to God, which the saints bestow on their disciples, is a treasure beyond any price.”

Glimpses of the Great Master

Posture

They are the cries of moms all over the world: “Sit up straight”, “Stop slouching”. Even when I was a child, I remember my mother constantly reminding me to “Keep your head up”, “Walk tall”. Research studies have revealed that people with strong and erect posture develop several physical and psychological benefits such as improved organ function, less body pain, increased overall confidence and better ability to concentrate and focus. If we believe in the importance of good posture and the benefit it brings to our daily lives, then the next logical question to ask is: does posture have any effect on spirituality? What advantage does posture give us in our meditation?

At a very basic level, meditation is the process by which we try to obtain peace of mind. And we get this once we are able to still our mind and withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre. The fundamental idea is to try and keep our attention upward and inward rather than let our thoughts scatter downward and outward. At the time of initiation, we are instructed to give two and a half hours to meditation daily. This process requires us to still the body and to sit in one position for a considerably long period of time. That suggests that our posture does play an important role in meditation.

Learning to sit still during meditation is essential in Sant Mat. And to be able to achieve that, good posture is critical. The important principles that one should bear in mind while adopting a suitable posture are first, we have to be relaxed and comfortable, and second, our posture has to allow us to remain alert and aware. Both are equally important.

An uncomfortable sitting position can be distracting and affect one's concentration. We should sit in a natural and comfortable position, but not one that lures us to sleep. Some may feel that they are most comfortable lying down and that is their most relaxed position. However, lying down is associated with sleep, and therefore, even if you are not asleep, your mind will be foggy and lazy. If you have ever been to a yoga class that ends with everyone having to adopt the *shavasana* position – this is when people lie flat on their mats to relax – you would have noticed that many fall asleep within minutes. This is the reason why it is not recommended to meditate while lying down.

Sitting on a chair or sitting cross-legged on the floor is generally prescribed, as that helps us stay alert. However, the main factor here is to ensure that our spine is kept straight.

Even in our daily work, we are advised to keep the spine straight. At our desk and table where we work, the chairs are always straight. If they were very comfortable or you sat on a sofa to work, you would just go to sleep because you would become too lazy.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

The mind is a creature of habit that easily forms associations. With practice and discipline, we sustain a fixed sitting posture. Over time that posture will create a groove on our mind and it will start associating that particular position with meditation. Eventually, we will be able to develop better concentration and our minds will be alert and sharp.

Having said that, it is important to highlight that there is no one particular position which is correct or necessary for meditation. For example, we are taught during initiation that sitting cross-legged on a chair or cushion is an ideal posture for simran, and the bhajan

position is recommended for listening to the divine melody. These are only suggested from a health point of view – one is encouraged to sit in any position that one finds comfortable. Spiritual advancement comes from concentration and not from the position you sit in.

Hazur Maharaj Ji advised us that although the posture itself may not be important, it is essential to stick to the posture we choose and remain motionless in that posture during simran. Any movement will interfere with the withdrawal of the life-consciousness from the body. One should try to remain motionless in the same position and let numbness set in, which in turn is a sign of withdrawal. We should try to bear the initial aches, pains and pinpricks in the body. This happens only when the consciousness first begins to leave the body on its way up to the eye centre. This feeling will not last forever. Ultimately, we will forget the posture we are sitting in or whether or not we are even in the body. Then withdrawal itself will be a joyful process without any pain whatsoever.



The posture should not be such as will induce sleep, because one should remain alert. We should not have to wrestle with the body during meditation; it is the mind that we have to control. We have to forget the body. If we are wrestling with it, our mind will always be concerned with the body. Then how can we concentrate? But these postures which are explained to us at the time of initiation are very good from the point of view of health and for keeping alert so that sleep does not overtake one during meditation.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

Memories of My Last Darshan

I went in to have my last 'darshan' as is customary, to receive parshad and to be given a striking portrait of the Master. Maharaj Ji greeted me by saying, "So, you are going home!" with a twinkle in his eye. So I said, "I am going, but I don't know about 'home!'" (Mentally I remember thinking: Where is 'home'?)

Our Satguru then gave me his blessing and it was during this that I realized the truth of the saying that to serve a Guru (through seva) is in truth to gain spiritual wealth for oneself. One can give nothing in return to him – he can cause sticks and stones to serve him as efficiently as any human being, and to their great benefit. I felt no sadness this time at parting, only a great desire to go and serve.

What can I say of my experiences? Whatever I write will be an understatement of my true impressions, but to those who may be pondering whether or not they should go to the Dera, I would so like to urge them not to hesitate one instant, but go, and go for as long as possible. Though I had visited Beas many times before, over a period of years, this last occasion was so rich in spiritual experience; so many ends were tied up, so many knots resolved, through personal association with the Master and his disciples over a reasonably long stay – roughly three months – and in the most propitious circumstances. I learnt so much from others that it has taught me the necessity for associating with fellow satsangis, for as often and as long as possible. Truly, by such association, longing and love for the Master is deeply engendered and one's meditation is benefitted – the final criterion in deciding all action.

In Search of the Way

Superficial Love

Years pass and we slip into a comfort zone. The initial enthusiasm gives way to complacency and a false sense of security. We are content with our regular routine. We feel that we are fulfilling our side of the bargain by attending satsang regularly, doing some seva and having darshan of the Master. While we may attend to our spiritual practice, our efforts are mundane and mechanical.

With lip service, we hum to the same tune – how blessed are we to be on the path! How wonderful the Master is! How much we ‘love’ him! That was a great discourse!

Yet at numerous question-and-answer sessions with the Master, almost always, the questions are the same – of not being successful in meditation and of not living up to the ideals of the path.

Why is that? If we are truly honest with ourselves, we would pose the following questions: Do we realize the load of karmas we are carrying from countless lives? Do we realize how formidable our adversary, the mind, is? Are we approaching the path with a positive attitude? Do we tend to quit when we see no immediate results in our meditation? Are we lacking in faith, love and effort?

The saints warn us not to be complacent in our efforts and not to take initiation, the path and the Master for granted. Referring to our shortcomings, Soami Ji cautions us and at the same time affectionately reprimands us about our “superficial love”. If we take to heart his candid and straightforward advice, we may understand the reasons for the inadequacies in our spiritual practice. Soami Ji Maharaj explains:

*Superficially you sing the praises of the Guru
but you never bring the Guru into your heart.*

*You have his darshan outside,
 yet you never hold his form within.
 With so casual a relationship with the Guru,
 how can you hope to attain anything, friend?
 Your heart pines for wealth and honour,
 while outwardly you display humility and meekness.
 Deep down in your heart you harbour lust and anger,
 while on the outside you feign purity and forgiveness.
 Inwardly you have not cultivated love for the Guru,
 but what can outward love achieve, O foolish one?
 How can the Master come to your help
 when you have no love for the Shabd within?
 I have tried to explain this to you in many ways,
 but perhaps your destiny stands in your way.
 You are overcome by the darkness of tamogun within,
 while the harmony of satogun has not touched your heart.
 You never meditate with sincerity
 and your surrender to the Guru is only halfhearted.
 You will not bear with even a mild rebuke,
 yet you severely reprimand others.
 When threatened by misery you apply yourself to meditation.
 But when the misery ends,
 you go straight back to your old ways.
 You have not received
 the elixir of the imperishable Name,
 nor have you ever detached yourself from the world.
 Now you are at a loss to know what to do –
 without the Master's grace
 how can you possibly attain anything?*

Sar Bachan Poetry

This is really the old puzzle of grace and effort. Everything comes through the Lord's grace. We cannot achieve anything on our own. It is simply his gift freely given, to those who deserve it. But in order to become receptive to that grace, we must make a sincere and earnest effort. For it is in the trying, even the trying and the failing, that equips us and enables us to be receptive. How many times have we heard that he will accept even our failures? The Master knows us only too well. He does not expect us to be perfect but he does ask one thing of us: that we make meditation the priority of our lives and that we offer him our very best, leaving perfection and the results of our efforts entirely in his hands.

Eventually, when the mind has no interest in worldly desires, passions and attachments, and it is fully focused and concentrated at the eye centre, the Radiant Form of the Master will then look upon the disciple with loving compassion; and when that time comes, the soul will be immersed in divine love.



Sant Mat is not an emotional excitement or lip service and devotion. It is a way of life to be lived. We have to make very great effort and big sacrifices in order to achieve our goal. It is a path of practice and not of words. Love which is only expressed in words is just momentary emotion and excitement and it does not last. It should take a practical shape, and that is by understanding and following the Sant Mat way of life.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Giving Our Best Time

We always try to give that time to the Father which is no use to us at all. When we are rejected by society, by our children, by our friends, then we want to devote our time to the Father. But we have to give the best time of our life to the Father.

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

Why is it so hard to give the best time of our life to the Master? When we are at the prime of our life and in the peak of good health, why is it such a struggle to carve out a solid, consistent segment of the day to devote to our meditation? Everything else seems more important – our families, careers and other worldly interests. We tend to prioritize them over our meditation, many times cutting sessions in half, and completing the rest of our time later in the day. Sometimes we even forget to complete our ‘shortage’ because at the end of the day we are too tired or too distracted to sit still. The world pulls at us so strongly and so urgently that we give in to the mind repeatedly. Before long, we will find ourselves at the tail end of our lives, and in a situation where our bodies are not in the best form for meditation.

At some point in our lives as satsangis, we realize that in order to fully appreciate the gift of initiation and the great blessing of Nam, we have to make a sincere effort to change. Indeed, we have to find it in ourselves to shift from responding to the world to responding to our spiritual potential and developing true devotion. We do this by taking our meditation seriously.

Unless we discipline our mind, it will always find excuses not to sit in meditation. We have been regular in our other daily

activities: “I have a time to go to the office, I have a time to go to lunch, I have a time to have a cup of coffee, I have a time to walk in the evening, I have a time to sleep” – then why not also have a time for meditation? That should become part of our life, part of our daily routine. If we discipline our mind, then every day we won’t miss meditation.

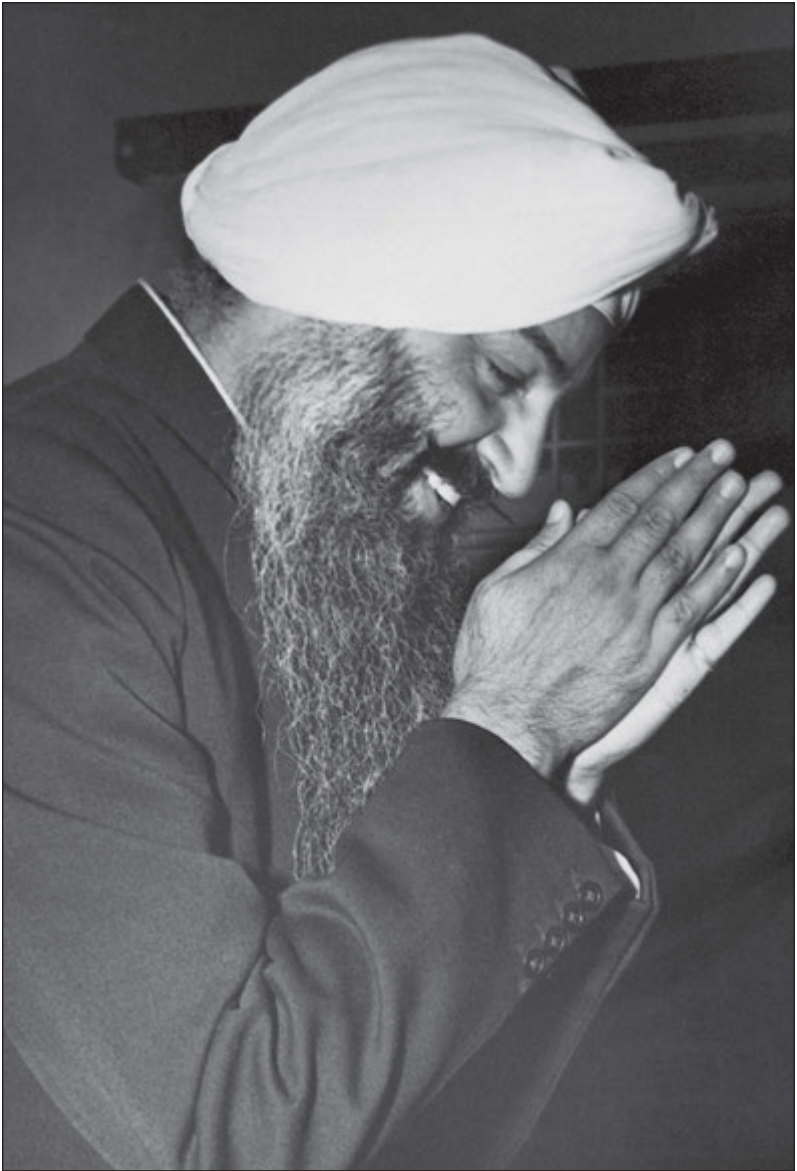
Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II

Meditation is an activity that is antagonistic to the mind’s pleasure-loving tendency. In meditation, we aspire to keep the mind still. The mind is always moving and seeking pleasure – that is its nature. This is the primary reason for our difficulty in meditation. And this is why it is so easy to rationalize to ourselves why we procrastinate and delay fulfilling this vow in favour of the million other seemingly important but actually mundane things we have to do.

Earnest dedication, sincerity and love for the Master motivate us to attend to our spiritual practice. Through meditation we connect with the Shabd, even if for long periods we feel nothing but difficulty and darkness. We must persevere and reach the eye centre – the place where all the action begins. For when we are able to taste the sweetness of Nam, even for a brief period, we will realize and experience the truth in all the teachings.

We must do our meditation honestly and with genuine commitment. Giving the best time of our day in the prime of our life to this vow, and to other spiritual activities such as satsang and seva, is essential to our spiritual life. Each activity supports and reinforces the other, keeping us in an environment steeped in remembrance of our Master.





Maharaj Charan Singh

Heart to Heart

The programme for the day was a reception to welcome the overseas guests from U.S.A., South Africa and other countries, and to get together with the satsangis and seekers from all parts of the U.K. Maharaj Ji was not expected to attend. But somehow, Maharaj Ji asked us to get ready to go to the West Centre Hotel. It was a surprise visit. But I believe he wanted to have darshan of his sangat as much as the sangat wanted to have his darshan. Nay, even more. In truth he is the lover. But when he kindles and inspires love in us, we become lovers and think and call him the Beloved. God loves us and therefore comes down in the garb of a human being to take us back to our original home. A Muslim mystic has said, “God is love, God is the lover and God is the Beloved.” It is all his play – beyond human understanding. So he entered the hall, joy written on his face, and when the sangat had his darshan they too were immensely happy. It was a bonus for them.

Legacy of Love



The sangat was sad; the wonderful days that had brought the Master among them had passed away like an unbelievably exhilarating dream. The Master was now preparing to go through customs for boarding the plane. His face was glowing, more radiant than ever, and his smile was full of ineffable love and mercy. A new initiate, with tears in his eyes, suddenly spoke out the thoughts of all those present: “Master, I am very sad that you are leaving us.” The Master turned to him and gently replied, “Am I leaving you?”

Heaven on Earth



Voice of the Heart: Songs of Devotion from the Mystics

PUBLISHER: BEAS, INDIA: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, 2013.

ISBN: 978-81-8466-236-8

Voice of the Heart presents devotional hymns, known as shabds, by 28 mystics from the Indian subcontinent. Dating from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries, these mystics come from different religious traditions – Hindu, Muslim and Sikh – and from different cultural and socio-economic conditions. However, as the publisher’s preface states, “Their voice is one because it is a universal voice of longing for the Lord.”

For a century these shabds have been sung at the Dera Baba Jaimal Singh as the sangat awaits the beginning of the satsang. They invoke an atmosphere of devotion and receptivity. The preface likens these shabds to prayers, invoking the view of the Great Master, Baba Sawan Singh, that true prayer “comes from the heart. Our heart, head and tongue should agree. Pray in such a manner that your inner feelings are aroused, every pore begins to weep, and all your veins become like the strings of a violin. The feeling of love should pour forth, and you should become absorbed in your prayer.”

This selection of shabds were published earlier in Indian languages. For those English-speakers who have listened to the shabds sung before RSSB satsangs, sensing the devotional atmosphere they invoke but not knowing the meaning of the words, this book will be a treasure. In *Voice of the Heart* each shabd is represented three ways: in the original script, in phonetic transliteration (for those who understand the original language but cannot read its script) and in English translation.

The book presents the 28 mystics in approximately chronological order. It begins with a shabd from Sant Namdev (1270–1350 CE) who pleads to the Lord for a helping hand:

*In constantly resounding waves of greed
I am drowning, O Lord!
Ferry me across this ocean of existence,
O Father, please ferry me across.
Unable to steer my boat against this windstorm,
O Beloved, I cannot reach your shore.
Be merciful, O Lord,
and bless me with the company of the Satguru,
who will ferry me across.
Says Namdev: I do not even know how to swim –
give me your hand, O Lord, give me your hand.*

Many of the mystics whose shabds are translated for this book will be familiar to English-speakers who have read other books published by RSSB. Among them are Tukaram, Mira Bai, Kabir and Soami Ji. But others may be new to English-language readers. For example, readers may delight in Surdas' colourful imagery as he sings of the Lord's compassion:

*O Lord, protect me now!
Like a helpless bird, I am sitting on the branch of a tree
and a hunter has his arrow aimed at me.
Terrified of him, I am anxious to escape,
but a deathly hawk hovers above me.
O treasure of mercy, I fear them both –
who can save my life?
No sooner than I remembered you,
a snake bit the hunter and his arrow hit the hawk.
Says Surdas, how can I describe your virtues –
praise to you, O fountainhead of compassion!*

Other mystics who may be relatively unknown to English-speaking readers include Dhani Dharamdas, Jagjivan Sahib, Dharnidas, Garibdas and Sahjo Bai. Sahjo Bai expresses her utter need for the refuge of her Master Sant Charandas, having no place else to go. She longs for the darshan of her Master, meaning to gain a glimpse of him.

*Think of your own nature now, O Lord;
 pay no heed to my vices
 and be true to your intrinsic disposition.
 Age after age your greatness has prevailed;
 the Vedas and the Puranas have sung your glory,
 calling you the redeemer of the fallen –
 hearing this, my mind has become steadfast.
 I am ignorant and you are all-knowing;
 you know the innermost secrets of all hearts.
 I have taken refuge at your lotus feet;
 bestow your grace, O merciful Master!
 With folded hands, I plead before you –
 hold my hand and accept me as your own.
 I have fallen at your door;
 without virtue and bereft of devotion am I.
 Your devotee Sahjia intensely longs, O Master Charandas,
 for the immeasurable treasure of your darshan.
 I have fallen in love
 and am hanging between life and death –
 tell me, without you where would I go?*

This book has been organized in a thoughtful way. Two indexes of first lines, one in English, one in transliteration, will help the reader find a particular shabd. The glossary includes not only definitions of terms, but also a brief note about each of the mystics. A subject index makes it easy for the reader to find shabds by different mystics on a particular subject. For example, one can read Dhani Dharamdas on the longing for darshan:

*Without your darshan I am distraught, O Master;
 grant me your vision. I stand here in anticipation –
 come, O Lord!*

And Mira Bai expresses her longing with evocative images:

*O Beloved, come and grant me your darshan –
I cannot live without you.
Without a glimpse of you, your dear one is like
a lotus without water, or a night without the moon.*

Guru Ramdas says that even the fiercest storm cannot stop him from going for darshan:

*O Lord, poor Nanak has gone mad in his longing
for a glimpse of your darshan.
Even in a fierce storm and torrential downpour
the disciple goes for the Guru's darshan.*

The publisher hopes that this anthology of shabds “will serve to remind us of the mystic teachings and renew the spirit of the teachings in ourselves, inspiring us to live in the Lord’s will through the life of devotion praised so highly by the saints in these shabds.”



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

