

September 2014

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Beloved
- 6 Sacred Romance
- 15 Are We Reactive or Objective?
- 19 One Karma Closer to God
- 20 Focus Is Everything
- 23 Grace
- 28 Peace
- 29 Detachment
- 31 Smell the Jasmine
- 36 Suffering
- 38 Ten Thousand Idiots
- 41 Savoury Simran
- 45 Chainsaw Seva
- 49 Travel Light

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
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Beloved

I have been pierced by the arrow of love –
 what shall I do? I can neither live, nor can I die.
Listen to my ceaseless outpourings:
 night and day, I have no peace;
 I cannot live without my Beloved for even a moment....
The fire of separation is unceasing –
 let someone take care of my love.
How can I be saved without my Beloved's darshan? ...
Oh, Bullah, I am in deep trouble –
 let someone come and help me....

Love cares not for caste or creed;
 it is the opposite of orthodox religion.
The land of the Beloved lies across the river,
 yet waves of avarice have engulfed me.
The Master is holding the boat –
 why do you tarry, why this delay? ...
The Beloved is right within you –
 whom do you search for outside?
Why are you deluded in bright daylight?
Come, Friend, come to my help.

Sain Bulleh Shah, in *Voice of the Heart*





Sacred Romance

It is said that spirituality is feeling the presence of the Divine. But because we have lost our personal connection with the Divine, we have lost touch with our spiritual nature. This spiritual disconnection is the root cause of all of our suffering, problems, conflicts, worries and cares.

The Masters have given us a very simple way to establish a relationship and feel the presence of the Divine. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

The problem is not complicated at all. The whole thing is just attention, and then unbroken attention, at the eye centre, allowing no other thought to intrude itself into the consciousness and lead you away from the centre.

Attention, and then unbroken attention at the eye centre, allowing no other thought to intrude itself and lead us away. Sounds so simple, but we shouldn't confuse simple with easy. Controlling the mind is the most difficult thing any of us will ever do. Maharaj Sawan Singh continues:

If there is any difficult work in the world, it is the fight with the mind....

To give up worldly pleasures, to control the senses, and bring the attention in one centre by controlling the wild runs of the mind while still alive and kicking, is not an easy task. But what is it that with love and faith man cannot accomplish.

Our spiritual journey involves an ever changing relationship with the Divine. The authors of *Sacred Romance, Drawing Closer to the Heart of God*, refer to this evolving relationship:

Indeed, if we will listen, a sacred romance calls to us through our heart every moment of our lives. It whispers to us on the wind, invites us through the laughter of good friends, reaches out to us through the touch of someone we love. We've heard it in our favourite music, sensed it at the birth of our first child, been drawn to it while watching the shimmer of a sunset on the ocean. This romance is even present in times of great personal suffering: the illness of a child, the loss of a marriage, the death of a friend. Something calls to us through experiences like these and rouses an inconsolable longing deep within our heart, wakening in us a yearning for intimacy, beauty, and adventure.

Just what is this sacred romance they are talking about? The joy for each of us as spiritual seekers is that we get to discover step-by-step, stage-by-stage, more and more of what this sacred romance really is. This divine dance becomes more enticing and more compelling until it becomes the be-all and end-all of our existence.

There are no words that can describe the depth of this sacred romance, although the poetry of mystics like Rumi, Kabir, Mira Bai and others offer inspiring hints. These mystics touch on the deep longing of the soul. They say with beautiful simplicity: "Aren't you thirsty? Listen to your heart. There is something missing."

We try to ignore or numb ourselves to these inner feelings, but the divine romance persists. The authors of *Sacred Romance* write that this romance:

Will not go away in spite of our efforts over the years to anaesthetize or ignore its song, or attach it to a single person or endeavour...

This longing is the most powerful part of any human personality. It fuels our search for meaning, for wholeness, for a sense of being truly alive. However we may describe this deep desire, it is the most important thing about us, our heart of hearts, the passion of our life. And the voice that calls to us in this place is none other than the voice of God.

The Divine, God, the Lord, Creator – whatever we call this sacred energy, starts out as merely a concept to us. In the beginning, we project all kinds of qualities on to our idea of the divine. The Master, as our connection with the Divine, is also a recipient of our varied projections. We can't yet begin to see him for who he really is. As we grow in our spiritual maturity, and we begin to experience the Divine more directly, these projections gradually fall away and we realize our romance is with nothing other than pure love itself. Only then can we begin to see the Master for who he truly is.

The Divine takes on different roles at different times in the relationship that we are developing – sometimes as teacher, sometimes as guide, or friend, or parent, or redeemer, or beloved. Let's explore some of these different roles.

God is our teacher in our spiritual evolution in both gross and subtle ways. Through the Master we are taught in satsangs and through books. But in more subtle ways, every life experience is our teacher. Every life experience is custom made to teach us exactly what we need to know at that moment. When we feel the Master behind every life experience, our interaction with every moment becomes part of the sacred romance, an interaction with

him. Each life circumstance as it arises becomes an opportunity to dance with God.

These lessons are unfailing and perfect. And we all know from experience that they are not always gentle or easy. Hafiz says:

*Pure Divine Love is no meek priest
Or tight banker.
It will smash in all your windows
And only then throw in the holy gifts.*

*I Heard God Laughing,
rendered by D. Ladinsky*

Divine love will do whatever it takes to mould us into a perfect lover. We may resist it and we may not appreciate it at the time. But when he throws his holy gifts through the smashed windows of our ego, we are grateful for what it took to create our openness and receptivity.

The Divine is also our guide. First we are given the outer teachings for guidance. We are also given intuition and conscience for inner guidance. Of course this guidance is easily overridden or blocked by the voices of our desires. But the guidance is there if we are sincere and become quiet enough to hear that “still small voice”. At some point in our spiritual evolution, our inner spiritual vision is opened and we can see that we have always been guided.

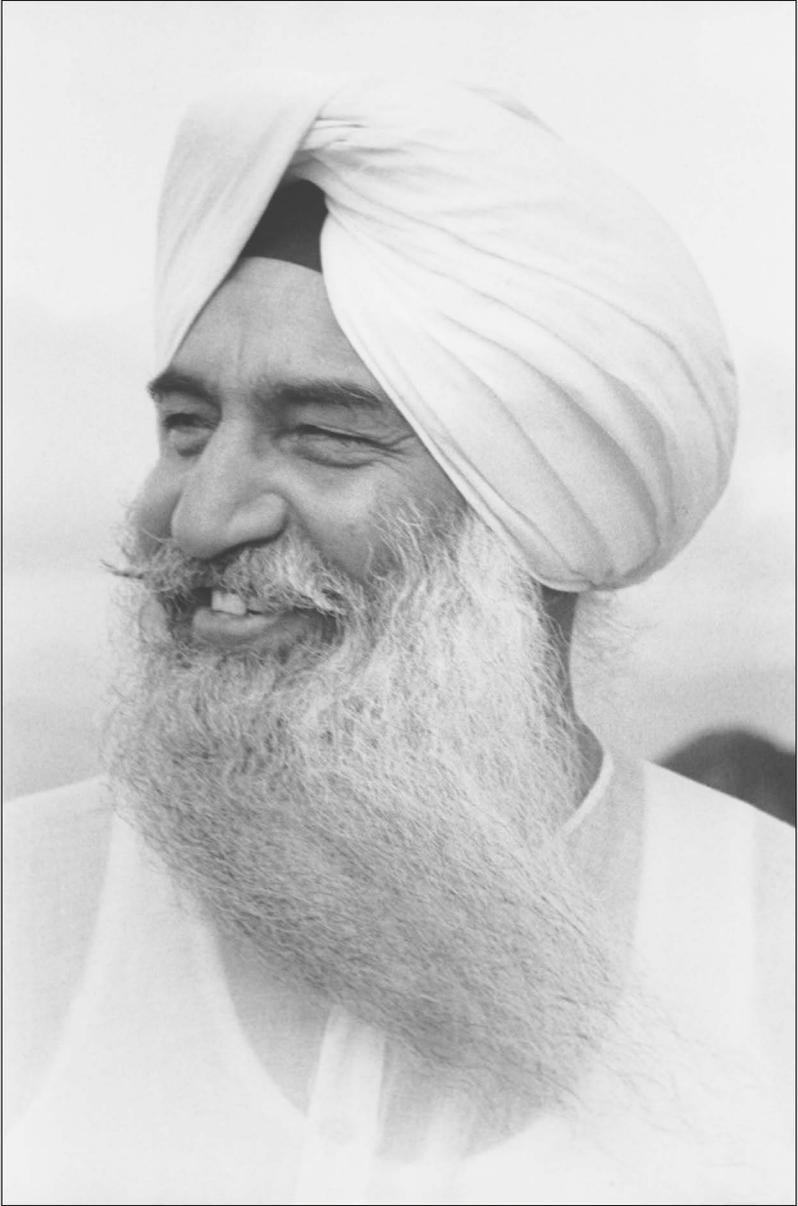
The Divine can also be a parent to us. We talk about God the father or the divine mother. At times we just need to curl up in God’s arms and be nurtured and protected.

Maharaj Sawan Singh describes this role of the Master as a mother in a beautiful passage that also addresses concerns we might have about not being in the physical presence of the Master. He says:

When we are away from the Master and the satsang, the world imperceptibly impresses itself on us so much that, in spite of our regularly giving time to simran and Nam, we often begin to feel discouraged, dry, and desolate. In such a state faith and love are our support; and if faith is firm, the Master responds. He is always with us – within us – watches as a mother watches her child. So long as we are on this side of the focus, we do not see him working. But he is doing his duty. Your worries and cares are Master's worries and cares. Leave them to him to deal with. Having become carefree, your business is to cultivate his love. He is not going to let you drift. You will go up.

Spiritual Gems

The Divine is also our redeemer. This is the one aspect of our relationship with the Master we may never fully appreciate. We have accumulated a huge store of karmas, enough to keep us coming back life after life, indefinitely. During our long process of learning and maturing spiritually in previous lives, we have probably caused tremendous pain and suffering to others, committed untold atrocities, and accrued an unfathomable load of karmas. This karmic debt must be accounted for. There are only two ways to pay off these karmic debts: to go through them, which would take forever and involve a huge amount of suffering for us, or to be forgiven for them by our redeemer. We are like inmates in a prison undergoing multiple life sentences. Unless we can have our sentence commuted or forgiven, we will never escape from the prison of transmigration. Our only hope is to contact the Shabd, which the Masters tell us will burn up all of our past karmas. The Master connects us with the Shabd, saving us untold suffering.



Maharaj Charan Singh

And when we persist in our spiritual practice, something very beautiful happens. Our motivation for meditating begins to change, in very subtle but very powerful ways. Instead of meditating because we want something from the Master or because we are told that we should meditate to be a good disciple, a desire begins to grow in us. It changes us. We now want to give to the Master. We meditate to give, no longer to get. Real love begins to grow in us, and the sacred romance deepens.

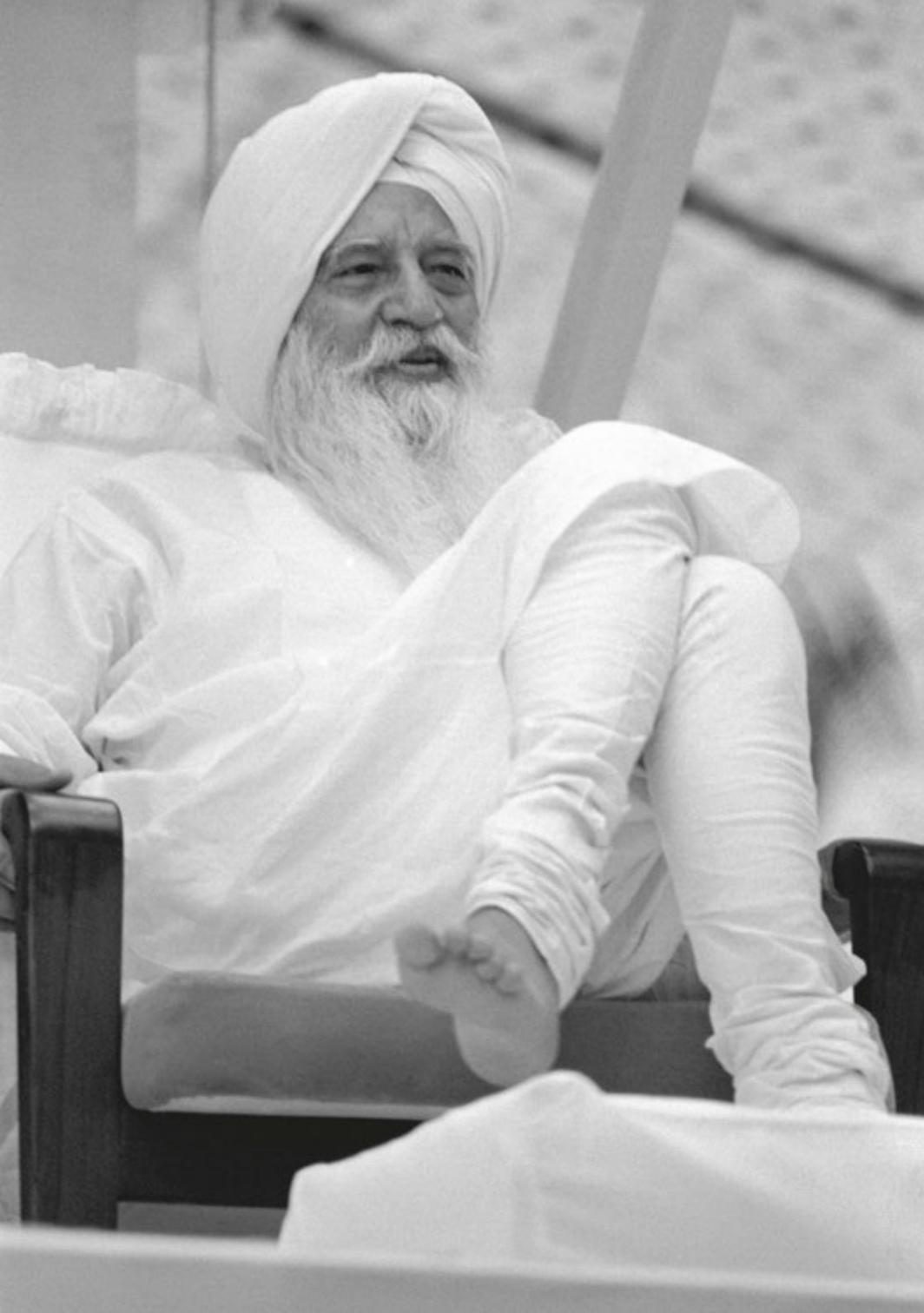
The culmination of the sacred romance is a sublime merging into the Divine. No words can describe the bliss of this merging. But the words of the Masters can give us an inkling of the depths of love that we are entering. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Die to Live*:

Love is losing your own identity and becoming another person. That is love. There's no ego left. To become another being and to just lose your own identity, ... to eliminate your ego and be in the will of another being, that is love.

This is the end game of the sacred romance, to completely lose our identity and become God, to become love itself.

The beginning of love is giving and the end is merging. For most of us, losing our own identity and becoming another being is inconceivable. We can wonder, we can speculate, we can imagine what this would be like, but why not take a step forward in this dance of sacred romance and experience it for ourselves? Why not cultivate the one relationship that will really make a difference in our lives, the one relationship we will take with us after this life is over – our relationship with the Divine.

Let's take all that we have received and put it into practice – doing our meditation with love and devotion, remembering simran throughout the day and moulding our lives around our spiritual ideals.



Love and Happiness

Everybody wants happiness. There is hardly anybody who does not want peace.... If we are to find peace, we have to seek peace within our body. Unless you seek peace within yourself, you will never find peace outside. The nearer we humans are towards the Lord, the closer we will be to each other.... So, if we really want peace , let us go back to the same goal, the same source or origin, the same destination. The closer we come to him, the closer we come to each other.

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

Love is something which you can't help; it is just there. It's not something which you are calculating to have or you are contemplating or you are trying to have....

If love is there, it is there. If it comes, it just comes. But by meditation everybody can grow that love. If the Lord has given certain grace to somebody, that's a different thing.... If somebody inherits riches, that is the grace of the donor, but everybody can become rich by hard work. Everybody can grow that feeling, that love, that intensity, by meditation.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Are We Reactive or Objective?

It is important to be objective in life – not objective as defined in academic philosophy or as a dry matter of ‘should’, but simply as a practical approach. They say that if we are just reacting in life, we are merely existing, but if we are objective, then we are truly living, then our lives have meaning.

What is reactive? It means just to react, aimlessly and without thought, to whatever comes our way. We have no objective to guide our actions – we are just acting at the mercy of our cravings, emotions and habits.

If we were to think deeply and choose what we really wanted more than anything in this life, this would be called the objective of our life. If we committed to this objective and took action toward it, then we would be in the process of becoming objective – and of becoming truly alive.

If our ultimate objective is love, then our objective is to realize the spiritual form of the Master within – the Shabd. Being objective then means the ongoing practice of choosing the Master and the Shabd. It means meditating – the practice of choosing to focus on our vast, radiant, ever-present, sweet Friend within.

Being objective can then spread like honey throughout our daily lives: we turn toward him, we lean toward him by asking at every moment: does this thought or action take me toward him or away?

What is the choice? This is it – our life is here and now and every moment until our last breath. And what does everyone truly want? It’s so simple: we all want happiness and peace that never die. We want the best, the brightest, the sweetest. But where are we looking? In this cheap-thrills world, we get little shards of peace and happiness,

but then they evaporate. We want to have it all here in this creation, we want to do it all, but then a mystic from beyond this world comes along and invites us to come to the centre of life, right within us, and experience enduring joy and majesty beyond our wildest dream. Mystics say, “Come back home to the One. Become the One.”

By great good fortune, we choose this objective, and we embark. And then of course, we soon find that it’s a long and winding road. Someone once said, “Isn’t it amazing that we live our lives ruled by our emotions rather than our commitments?” It’s not that emotions are bad – they are just reactive, they are not directed by an inner commitment. Keeping our shining objective in mind gives us the possibility to embark on the road that leads home and then to stick with it – the greatest adventure of this precious life.

We are venturing into the ‘Infinite Territory’, once known, but long forgotten. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Die to Live* how to approach the journey:

To have success in meditation, the aspirant must enter upon it with determination to explore its possibilities. He must not start with reservations, but should be willing to go where he is led but without expectations.

And so the journey slowly becomes our life: all day, every day we come to forks in the road. Every second of every day there’s a choice – the razor’s edge of the moment: to go in the direction of the objective or to wobble and spin and trip in reaction to whatever comes our way. Being objective gives us the clear opportunity to choose what we want and to take action toward that objective – to turn towards him in any way we can.

And how beautiful it is that the mystics offer a path that engages all aspects of our nature, that calls us to give all that we are. The objective of spirit will finally consume us – our emotions, our thoughts, our discrimination, our determination, our sense of adventure. Our objective is love, and we will slowly, slowly lose ourselves in that radiant immensity.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to tell us that if emotion is directed upward, it becomes devotion, and if it is directed downward it becomes passion. Isn't the ultimate game of life the choice to direct ourselves, over and over again – no matter how many times we fall and forget – to the beauty beyond words that lives within us, the truth of peace and happiness that is above all limits? What grace it is to even be given the opportunity to choose real life, real love – to choose the Beloved.



*Stay alert, think clearly
if you want to break free of the world.
Every second repeat the Name,
don't waste a moment –
your whole life is passing away,
who will help you then?
Know that the world lasts only a moment,
so with single heart give yourself to God.*

Sant Namdev, in *Many Voices, One Song*



One Karma Closer to God

Welcome, hard karma.
Walk right in.
Your arrival heralds good news!
A housecleaning.
A hauling away of consequence
for some old forgotten crime.

Yesterday
you still stood before me
blocking my view of God.
Today
you are here
like the Lord's hand
of blessing
upon my head.

Tomorrow
You'll be gone
And I will be laughing,
lighter and brighter.
Thank you for coming
and leaving me
one karma closer to God!

Original poem by a satsangi

Focus Is Everything

Why are we not happy? What can we do to change our state of mind? Maharaj Sawan Singh says, “Happiness is the fruit of a concentrated mind, and a concentrated mind is the fruit of focused meditation.” If we want to focus at the eye centre in meditation, we must practise focusing in our everyday lives. This means being mindful of what we are doing.

There is a wonderful Zen story in Anthony de Mello’s book *The Song of the Bird* about the disciple Tenno, who, after apprenticeship with his Master Nan-in, had become a teacher in his own right. One day, he went to visit his master, and because it was raining, he wore wooden clogs and carried an umbrella. The story explains:

When he walked in, Nan-in greeted him with “You left your wooden clogs and umbrella on the porch, didn’t you? Tell me, did you place your umbrella on the right side of the clogs or the left?”

Tenno was embarrassed, for he did not know the answer. He realized that he lacked awareness. So he became Nan-in’s student and laboured for another ten years to acquire constant awareness.

De Mello comments:

The person who is ceaselessly aware: the person who is totally present at each moment: behold the master!

How present are we at any given moment in our lives? How aware are we of what we are doing? Do we forget where we parked our car and waste valuable time looking for it when we want to drive home? Do we lose track of our car keys? If we consciously park our car, paying attention to exactly where it is, we will find it when we want to drive away. If we consciously put our keys into our bag, we will know exactly where they are later when we need them. But if we absent-mindedly jump out of our car and shove our keys somewhere, while running over in our minds all the errands we have to do, there is a good chance that we won't be able to find them or our car later.

Maharaj Sawan Singh echoes this in *Spiritual Gems* when he says:

When we are attending to our daily duties, our mind is usually not occupied with them but is wandering. Saints say, hold the reins of the mind tight in your hand throughout the day then, when you sit in bhajan [meditation], concentration will be quick and easy.

How does one hold the reins of the mind tightly during the day? The saints have suggested that when we are focused on a task that we fully pay attention to that task, but ultimately simran is the way to collect the wandering mind. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Die to Live*:

There is something wrong with us. We never want to be happy at the present moment. Either we are worried about what we have done or about what is going to happen to us. We don't want to make the best use of the present moment. If we make this moment happy, our past automatically becomes happy, and we have no time to worry about the future. So we must take life

as it comes and spend it happily. Every moment should be spent happily. And simran helps.

Staying in the present moment can only be accomplished with the help of simran. Eventually simran will help keep our attention at the eye centre and we will become unconscious of the effect of the world and our karmas. It will truly be like a stage. We will move like actors on the stage of our lives and yet be fully conscious and present. Ultimately, Hazur Maharaj Ji says, “That is the effect of simran, and that is ultimately what we want to achieve.” He continues:

Simran looks dry, but the concentration that you get with simran alone gives you peace and bliss and happiness. The more the mind is concentrated, the more happy you are: the more the mind is scattered, the more frustrated you are. As long as the mind is below the eye centre towards the senses, you can never be happy – there’s nothing but frustration and agony. But when you are able to withdraw your consciousness to the eye centre and still your mind, you feel bliss and contentment and happiness. And simran is the only way that you can withdraw the consciousness to the eye centre.

So ultimately our happiness lies in focusing our attention on the one thing that will bring us the ultimate and lasting happiness that we seek. The more simran we are able to do, the more effect it will have on our mind. When the concentration and focus come, love comes and Shabd comes, then we are able to see the Radiant Form of the Master within. This is our road to true happiness.



Grace

Each day as we stumble through this world, the Master blesses us. His daily blessings take many forms and some are so disguised that we fail to recognize them for the generous gifts they are. However, all of the Guru's gifts are taking us closer to his ultimate gift – our liberation from this world. With each day, the Master is tenderly unwrapping us from the illusions of the material creation that have ensnared and paralyzed us like a spider's victim in the strong gossamer threads of desire and attachment.

The story of our spiritual journey and the journey's interrelationship with the Lord's grace is an epic tale that has its beginning in our inception as a human embryo. After thousands of lives, in and out of the bodies of thousands of species up and down the evolutionary scale, we are blessed with this human life. Our human birth is our first great gift. It is in the human form that God has constructed the only route of escape from the physical world.

Because we have been blessed with a human birth, we are also blessed with a unique opportunity for liberation. According to the saints, human beings are the top of the creation; we are the only species with the faculty of discrimination. We are the one species with a natural disquietude. We are never quite satisfied. We run after one desire and then another, but nothing quite fills us or keeps us filled. There is always a gnawing hunger. We may continue for years in our confused searching for gratification until the moment comes when we realize there is something essential within us that is greater than the sum of our chaotic desires and their elusive fulfillment.

The Austrian mystical poet Rainer Maria Rilke's poem *The Panther* is an analogy of that moment of awareness in our life.

Rilke writes:

*His vision, from the constantly passing bars,
has grown so weary that it cannot hold
anything else. It seems to him there are
a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.*

*As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,
the movement of his powerful soft strides
is like a ritual dance around a centre
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.*

*Only at times, the curtain of the pupils
lifts, quietly ... An image enters in,
rushes down through the tensed arrested muscles,
plunges into the heart and is gone.*

Each of us is like Rilke's panther. We have grown so weary of the limitations of our existence that it seems to us we are caged behind a thousand bars and beyond these bars there is nothing. Our prison, this material world, has become for us the whole of the creation. We have forgotten who we are and where we came from. All of our many lives have been like the cramped pacing of the caged panther. We have gone through the same behaviours over and over again until our habits have become a ritual dance in the centre of which our soul, the mighty essence of God, stands paralyzed. We go on this way, like the panther, pacing in circles in our cage until one day the curtain over our eyes lifts and a realization enters in.

For the panther, the fleeting image is of his freedom. And for us, it is the recognition that our origin is far more glorious than the dung heap of this world.

We are here in this world, but we are not of here. We don't belong here. The saints tell us that we belong to a country of unclouded skies. And now, as humans, we have the significant potential for returning to that land. God has blessed us: he has given us a body with a doorway to freedom and then brought us to the realization that we are not free and must be liberated.

To assist us in getting free, the Lord's next gift is to send us a Satguru who, wrapped in flesh and blood, descends into this world to redeem us. Although dressed like us in a physical body, our saviour is not imprisoned like us and so he is our one true friend and helper in this lifetime.

It is through the Lord's grace that saints are sent to us, and it is also grace that draws us into their presence. We know that we can never find our way home on our own. We need a friend, we need someone who will help trim away our ego, someone to hold our hand and keep us from losing our balance. With our initiation commences the Master's gracious and painstaking peeling away of our layers of ego, our desires and attachments that we have accumulated lifetime after lifetime.

To begin our cleansing process, the Guru's grace first flows to us in the form of the vows we take. Initially we don't have a complete appreciation for the value of the three vows that require us to limit what we ingest, to not imbibe in intoxicants and drugs, and to lead a moral life. But through the years, we realize that the Master refines our practise of these vows, so that we can begin to receive the subtle benefits of these remarkable gifts and meditate unimpeded.

Often, the events in our life that bring us happiness or wealth we call grace from a loving Master. The events that leave us shocked, impoverished, diseased – these events we call bad karma. We differentiate between these extremes and label them accordingly because we can't understand that there is a Master who loves us, yet would allow us to be brought to despair. However, as we are often reminded, in reality we know neither what a true Master is, nor what his love is – these are just concepts, ungrounded in direct experience.

The Persian poet-saint Maulana Rum has suggested that we should honour the gifts of adversity that come to us as these will help us return to the Lord.

Health and sickness, riches and poverty, success and failure are all the saint's blessings. We don't know what is best for us. We don't know the extent of our karmic debts. We don't know who the Master is – what he does for us and how he loves us. We don't know who we are. But we can, through the direct perception of our liberated soul. To unravel the mystery of the Master and his love and our own identity, we must go within ourselves. All true knowledge is there. We must go through the inner door. And we can.

Our persistent efforts in meditation mixed with the Master's love have a synergistic effect that purifies us, pulls us home. Any progress we make on the spiritual journey is a gracious gift of the Guru, but we must keep our promise to tithe our time. We must let go of our expectations and relax into the dark solitude of the eye centre, through the deep comfort of simran. And we will. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

If you egotistically say, "I will not fight this battle," your resolve will be useless; your own nature will drive you into it.

*If you will not fight the battle of life,
Your own karma will drive you into it.*

This is what it is to be human – to rise valiantly and consistently to the mystical challenge of going within to find the Lord's doorway to liberation that can be found only in the human form.

All the circumstances and opportunities given to us, however we perceive them – as bitter tanning acid or showers of blessings – are the Master's infinitely mystifying grace: A grace that first draws us into his physical presence and ultimately makes us strong and pure enough to pass through the inner door and into his Shabd presence. This true form of the Master, the Shabd, is the ringing and radiant creative power of the Lord, which began all things, will dissolve all things, and holds everything within its memory.

Each of the gifts that the Lord sends us over our lifetime is designed to bring us closer to him and our own true essence.

It is then that the purpose of our humanity is fulfilled – we break loose from the world's cage. We rise up out of our obsessive desires; and guided still by our one faithful friend, our soul opens its wings and we fly unbound toward home. This then is the Satguru's most precious gift – our unwrapped soul shining in its true nature and finally free.

The journey begins within us at the eye centre. The Master guides us there and takes us home. He has called us to himself in this lifetime because in his flawless wisdom he knows when we are ready to accept him, his gifts and his grace. He knows we are ready to rise courageously to the challenge of being human.

And we are.



Peace

We live in the atmosphere which we build by meditation for the whole day. We don't forget meditation even in dreams, even in our worldly activities, and we try to deal with people in the light of that meditation. Our dealings should be straight, in fact our whole way of life should be straight. That is real meditation. Merely closing ourselves in a room for a couple of hours and then forgetting the path for the rest of the day is not real meditation. Its effect should be with us all the time. It is a very hard struggle, but we have to retain the atmosphere that we build in meditation.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

What is peace? When we have no desires. When we have no anxiety... Only when you become desireless can you be at peace... As long as the tendency of the mind is downward from here toward the senses ... we will never be at peace. But when we are able to withdraw ourselves from the senses to the eye centre and become one with the audible life stream or that Shabd, with that divine light within, then automatically your mind will be at peace.

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

Detachment

When intense love is awakened, all worldly desires are obliterated and one automatically becomes detached from the world and everything in it. No desire remains for anything in this world or the next. In this state, when the mind is free from all these desires and longs to meet the Master, the longing and the love thus created is called detachment.

In this state, all attachment for the world vanishes and the mind has an urge to be with the lovers of God and away from the world. A detached person is indifferent to every non-essential object of the world and runs only after his Beloved, who is the Almighty Father.

True detachment consists in accepting the material comforts as well as the necessities of life merely to the extent of their usefulness for life, while realizing them to be only the means and not the goal. A truly detached person lives in this world but does not become entangled in it. He does not consider it necessary to leave the world in order to rise above it. He sees the presence of God in everything.

To be detached is to make one's soul and mind free from desires and attachments for anything in this world and the next. Those who try to become detached without fully realizing its implications, cannot be happy or peaceful. Such people are restless in this world. One should, therefore, enter into the activities of this world in name only and should connect his soul with Nam, the Master and God.

Then he should continue increasing his love for them every day. His love for the world will decrease to the same extent as his love for God increases.

There is a difference between detachment and renunciation. Detachment is not dependent upon renunciation. One can be

detached even while he is leading a householder's life; whereas one who has renounced, may be devoid of the wealth of detachment.

Detachment is absolutely necessary in order to achieve spirituality. A seeker becomes eligible for true detachment by meeting a Master and by devotion to him. It is not necessary for him to leave his hearth and home. He becomes detached when he tastes the elixir of the soul's love, for then all other attachments become insipid. He lives in the world but he is not attached to it.

The Master imparts to the devotee the secrets of Surat Shabd Yoga and teaches him how to practise it in this world and how to remain detached from the world. The disciple is then able to achieve salvation even while engaged in the activities of life in this world.

The saints did not renounce domestic life. They performed their worldly duties and remained truly detached through the grace of Nam.

The disciple can accomplish all this only through his love for the Master and by remaining indifferent towards the world. If one has a strong longing to meet the Lord and is deeply engaged in this pursuit – so much so that he feels it is impossible for him to live without the fulfilment of this longing – all his connections with the world are loosened and he may be called a detached person.

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



Smell the Jasmine

*My Master has planted in my heart
the jasmine of Allah's Name...
When the buds of mystery unfolded
Into the blossoms of revelation,
My entire being was filled with God's fragrance.
May the perfect Master
Who planted this jasmine in my heart
Be ever blessed, O Bahu!*

Sultan Bahu

Sultan Bahu lovingly calls the divine energy that pervades the whole creation "the jasmine of the Name". Jasmine blossoms open their buds at night and release a sweet, intoxicating fragrance. Night is also the time when a devotee finds it easier to experience the enrapturing, exhilarating presence of the Divine, the power of love that rings within every living being.

Sultan Bahu says in another poem:

*If you practise the real Name of God,
All bliss will be yours, O Bahu,
In this world and beyond.*

Sultan Bahu clearly states that the practice of the Name will satisfy our longing for bliss and peace. Initiation into the practice of the Name is therefore a turning point in our lives, a rebirth into higher levels of awareness. Just as a caterpillar has to turn into a pupa and enter a dormant stage during which it can grow wings and change into

a butterfly, we too have to engage in a process of transformation. We have to withdraw our attention upwards and inwards while we still live in the world. That requires redirecting the time and effort we spend on worldly pursuits and engagements. It is a necessary part of the metamorphosis from a selfish, egocentric individual into a pure drop of the divine ocean of love and light. Sultan Bahu describes this period of growth as “the buds of mystery”. It is a bit mysterious as we have no idea how much our love for God is growing.

No saint ever said it would be easy. The cleansing of the mind is necessary but is hardly a walk in the park. Sultan Bahu tells us:

*You will only meet the unrivalled Beloved
If you offer your head on the altar of his love.*

There is no compromise. We have to offer our ego on the altar of his love, and that means following the Master’s instructions implicitly. Keeping the vows is essential to our progress, for they help us build the firm foundation we need to meditate. Of course, anyone who has tried to meditate will know that focusing at the eye centre feels a bit like an ant climbing up a wall. The attention slips down over and over again. The mind can seem very uncooperative, every minute coming up with anything that pulls the attention down into the body or into the feelings, hopes, and fears that keep us stuck in this world. So the mind needs to be educated about the advantages it will gain by cooperating. The mind is not happy here, as it is restricted at every step by the pettiness of this level of consciousness. We need the cooperation of the mind in planning this greatest of all endeavours.

We are in training to become lovers of the Lord and therefore requires a rigorous program that supports our efforts. So what will

convince the mind that all this hard work is worth it and that it is not missing out on the fun and games of this world? Great Master says:

Mind is an agent of Kal when on the plane of this world it gives itself up to sensual pleasures; it is a friend and helper of the soul, when, after concentration, it goes up to higher regions.

With the Three Masters, Vol. I

Therefore, it is only when we experience the inner peace and bliss through concentration that we can convince the mind. To some extent we have to put in the effort in good faith, just like an athlete who sacrifices many hours building the skills necessary for achieving excellence. Through the practice of meditation we grow spiritual muscle in that we learn to accept his divine will patiently, crave our Master's presence, and grow in our love for him.

There is no doubt – hard work is necessary. So how are we doing? We can kid ourselves that we are doing our best, but we cannot deceive the Lord. We might find that the difference between the words “try” and “triumph” is a little “umph”. Of course, success is in the hands of the Lord but effort and grace are like two wings of a bird, which we have to grow in order to fly back home. Without the wing of effort matching the wing of grace, flight will be impossible.

Sultan Bahu states:

*You will be able to renounce the world
Only when you find the treasure of devotion.
True renunciation will only occur
When you beg for the Lord's grace
in the begging bowl of your heart.*

So that is how we escape from the bondage of the mind: by developing true devotion through meditation done with love and longing from the bottom of our hearts, by begging for the Masters grace. While the grace of the Lord is ever present, we must enter the chamber of our hearts to become aware of the true depths of that grace. Sultan Bahu describes what happens when the Lord grants us his grace:

*Then, in an ecstasy of love,
You will repeat the Name of Hu [God] constantly,
Devoting every breath of your life
In contemplation of him.*

We have the saints' examples of the ecstasy of divine love to give us hope and comfort. They merged with their Beloved. In their presence our minds are soothed and the stresses of our busy lives recede. Their compassion and love encourage us to try harder. Sultan Bahu tells us that:

*When the buds of mystery unfolded
Into the blossoms of revelation,
My entire being was filled with God's fragrance.*

Sultan Bahu tells us to be patient and that eventually the buds of mystery will unfold and blossom. The saints are living proof that union with the Divine is possible and that the practice of the Name will eventually release the divine fragrance of the "jasmine of Allah's Name". He encourages us to have faith not just in the process but in the Master who is guiding and supporting us at every step on the way.

*May the perfect Master
Who planted this jasmine in my heart
Be ever blessed, O Bahu!*

The Master deserves our gratitude, for without him we would make no progress back to the Divine. The Master is the real doer who pulls us towards him and our true home. He has given us the priceless treasure of Nam, the key to eternal bliss, peace and love. We can rely on him to be there for us. The Master offers us his shoulder to lean on and walks beside us every step of our journey. All we have to do is call him using the five holy names.



*This
Sky
Where we live
Is no place to lose your wings
So love, love,
Love.*

Hafiz, *The Gift*, rendered by D. Ladinsky

Suffering

The path to God-realization, the search for God, or the search for more meaning in life, does not have to begin with suffering, but suffering is a wake-up call for many and a common human experience. Victor Frankl, a concentration camp survivor said, “Suffering is not necessary to find meaning, only that meaning is possible in spite of suffering.”

Whether we recognize it or not our experience of separateness is often a profound cause of suffering. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

It is very clear that since our separation from the source, we have not been happy in this world. Even in the human form, which is known as the top of creation, if you analyze, you will not find anybody happy in this world.... We will find peace only when the soul merges back into the Lord.... If we could be truly happy in this world nobody would ever think about the Lord....

The soul is suffering because it is separated from its origin, the Lord. The mind suffers because it is separated from the second stage, Trikuti, universal mind, and has become a slave of the senses. The body suffers because its five elements are separate from earth, water, air, fire and ether.... When the soul merges back into the divine melody within – the Lord – the suffering of the soul finishes.

War, famine and strife have existed since the beginning of time. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, that:

Some are suffering from diseases, some due to lack of children, some due to too many children, still others due to the lack of security in life; some are frustrated in their love affairs and some in their domestic life....The whole world is suffering in one way or another. ... And what more suffering can there be than when the soul is separated from its source?

The world was not meant to be perfect. It is meant to be a training ground for the soul. We come here due to our combination of good and bad karmas. When we learn the lessons we need, we begin to rise above it all. As someone said, we can't take the thorns out of the world, but perhaps we can put on gloves to handle the thorns.

Victor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning* continues:

We who lived in the concentration camps can remember those who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances.

It is important to note that the teachings do not shun happiness and prosperity. Rather we are told to enjoy these things while we have them, but not identify ourselves with them, attach ourselves to them, or derive our happiness from them. We are told that if we want to escape suffering, there is only one way, and that is to go back to the Father. We are told to stay connected to this higher source of contentment at all times. Suffering is a result of losing our balance and focus, yet it can play such an important role in spiritual development..



Ten Thousand Idiots

If you were to receive a flyer in the mail that promised to turn you into a concert pianist in six months, with no teacher, no need for you to practise and no expenses, you would be more than suspicious. Nor would you be likely to fly in an airplane with a pilot who “felt” as if he knew how to fly but hadn’t actually taken any instruction or passed any exams.

In the real world we are well aware that there is no substitute for hard work, discipline, and experience. But as modern culture embraces spirituality, a new and effortless ethos is often promoted. Can we blame people who hope that the path to truth and enlightenment will be easy, pleasurable, and quick? You see it on bumper stickers: “Smile, God Loves You.” You can even detect it in the cries of social reformers: Join our righteous ranks, support our noble causes, and you will be counted among the saved. There is nothing new about human beings taking a few answers, or a partial grasp on some piece of reality, and concluding that their work is complete. The wisdom at hand is believed to be sufficient.

The voracious, relentless ego approaches the work of the spirit, much as it does everything else. “How can I use this to my best advantage? How can I use what is spiritual to make my life more predictable, more agreeable, more consoling?” And there will always be those understandably popular authors who will tell you that your struggle is over, you need only to celebrate yourself, and all will be well.

But there are saints and prophets who come with a radically different message. The poetry of Hafiz, the fourteenth century Persian poet, sounds the perfect note of caution to all seekers who are starting out on a spiritual journey:

*It is always a danger
To the aspirant
On the
Path
When one begins
To believe and
Act
As if the ten thousand idiots
Who so long ruled
And lived
Inside
Have all packed their bags
And skipped town
Or
Died.*

*The Subject Tonight is Love,
renewed by Daniel Ladinsky*

While we may not know all of our internal idiots by name, we can be certain that complacency is not an option to someone in our spiritual condition. The human mind can be a powerful servant in the quest for truth. But it also can be a formidable opponent when it doesn't wish to give up its willfulness, its selfishness, its destructive habits.

One of the reasons we meditate and read spiritual literature is to open these small minds of ours (and the thousands of idiotic impulses they contain) to a truth that, refocuses our attention and reminds us of the immense work that has yet to be accomplished.

We can wish “Godspeed” to those who find themselves on smooth, relaxed and enchanting pathways to God. The path of the saints takes us on sterner roads, roads with plenty of rocks and

stumbling blocks, with hard lessons of sacrifice and surrender and endless years of effort. On this road there are miraculous moments of blessing and grace and gratitude and appreciation. But there is never more than a moment's rest.

Maharaj Jagat Singh poignantly describes our current situation in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II:

Whatever we do, we do it with the intellect. The intellect thinks, "I am doing everything right" – when in fact only forty percent is right, and the rest is wrong! In effect, we are functioning from madness the whole time. We have no idea why we have come here or for what purpose. That's the nature of this drug of the world we're so intoxicated by... The work that takes us to our destination is what we should be doing ...

There is only one way to get out: you have to go in, you have to do bhajan!



*There is a light that shines from the Lord onto humans,
and that is the light of Grace.*

*There is a light that seeks its way from humans to
the Lord,*

and that is the light of Purity.

Sheikh Abol-Hasan, *The Soul and A Loaf of Bread*,
renditions by V. Abramian

Savoury Simran

In answer to a question once asked about dry simran, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

You see, you have to make it tasty. First you have to fight with your mind to attend to your meditation, but the time comes when it becomes very tasty.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

In *Treasure Beyond Measure*, Maharaj Charan Singh recounts the time when, at a railway crossing, a cart accidentally dumped a huge load of iron bars through the windshield of his car. The bars stopped one inch away from his head. As Hazur says:

By Maharaj Ji's grace, I was so calm and cool that I even laughed when it was over.... At the time of the accident, I was doing simran as a matter of habit.

Simran was an essential and integral part of Maharaj Ji's nature. He had been able to make his simran tasty. Perhaps if we follow his example, it will become an essential part of our nature too. It will become our lifeline. And ultimately it will lead to the beloved's Radiant Form within.

How do we make simran tasty? First, let's put aside the fact that even the ability to think about God, much less meditate on his Shabd, is the highest grace. We know in the grander scheme of things we've won the lottery without any effort on our part. But at a personal level

how can we, men and women of action, transform our bland-as-mush simran into a gourmet experience worthy of a king?

Since Hazur uses the word “tasty”, which we associate with food, what is it about food that we find tasty? Maybe it’s the flavour, or the texture, or that it reminds us of our favourite tasty meal our mother would make after a tough day at school. It satisfies us in some way, both physically and emotionally, and we long to have more of it. As satsangis we want to relish our simran like good food, and we want to crave more of it.

Let’s start with a food. Take pizza. Most people like it. If we wanted to make a pizza that someone would enjoy, how would we do it? First we would need a recipe from a master pizza chef. The chef would have made thousands of pizzas and would know the exact method for making a masterpiece. Next we would gather good quality ingredients: flour, olive oil, spices, yeast, tomatoes. Only the best ingredients will make the best pizza.

Master has given us the recipe for reaching the divine food above the eye centre – repetition, contemplation, and listening. This is a tried and true method. He has also given us all the ingredients we need – the five holy names. These names are priceless and rare, as they come from the Master.

None of the pizza ingredients or the holy names is savoury in and of themselves. Anyone can buy flour and clever people can figure out the names that we use for repetition. But that doesn’t make for success either in pizza making or meditation. For meditation we need the expertise, the guidance and the power of a Master to make our simran effective. Most importantly, we need that love connection.

So, we start making our pizza. Perhaps we are making it for someone we love or care about. We are very careful about using each ingredient correctly, in the right order, out of love. And perhaps we’re

smiling to ourselves as we imagine his or her enjoyment of the pizza we're creating.

With meditation, when we begin our simran, we repeat those precious 'ingredients' of the five names deliberately, in the right order, out of love. At first, our repetition is not very focused or one-pointed. In fact, maybe we think it's plodding and cloddish. Maybe our first few attempts at making a great pizza aren't successful either. But we continue on. Over time we begin to realize that the tastiness of simran comes from the pleasure we get by being attentive to the Master's presence in the serene darkness of the eye centre. The savouriness comes from him. His holy ingredients are infused with a taste of his love. They awaken in us a craving for more.

In this day and age of fast food, why not just send out for a pizza? Or, for satsangis, why not just ask the Master to deliver the spiritual food without us having to go through the trouble of working for it? A wise cook knows that there is two-fold happiness in cooking. First, is the pleasure in creating a meal for a loved one, the care that it takes, and maybe a small measure of anxiety the cook feels hoping that the meal will please. Second is the happiness in coming together with the loved one and sharing the joy of the meal.

In meditation there is the joy of repeating the names attentively for the love of the beloved, hoping that he will find them acceptable; and then there is unfathomable bliss of union with him. So why would a cook ignore the pleasure of cooking, and why would a satsangi give up the pleasure of repeating the simran of his beloved Master?

Simran is the appetizer that leads to the banquet inside. The Master has given us the recipe, the appetite, and the food in the form of meditation and Shabd. All we have to do is approach the table.

*O come to the water all you who are thirsty:
though you have no money, come!*

*Buy corn (hence, bread) without money, and eat,
and, at no cost, wine and milk.*

*Why spend money on what is not bread,
your wages on what fails to satisfy?*

*Listen, listen to me,
and you will have good things to eat
and rich food to enjoy.*

*Pay attention, come to me:
listen, and your soul will live.*

Isaiah 55:1-3

So, savour repeating of the holy words at the eye centre, in the Master's presence. They will become tasty. And tasty simran leads to the spiritual feast within.



My definition of real is that it never changes. That which is true, only that is real. All else is an illusion. Only the Lord is real. The soul is real. All other things change.

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

Chainsaw Seva

The call went out: sevadars were needed at a satsang site, located on 55 acres of wooded forest. Those who could use chainsaws were being asked to clear some fallen trees, to cut large piles of brush into manageable sizes, and to remove a lot of dead wood. The skilled application of chainsaws and muscle would allow greater access to land and parking lots.

But before the sevadars and their chainsaws were sent out into the forest, there were important preparations. First, there was a brief satsang, reminding us of the higher purpose behind all of our activity in the world. Then came the required half an hour of safety training. Chainsaws are inherently very dangerous power tools. One slip, one moment of careless inattention, could result in serious injury. But the basic principles of safety were meant to cover all seva: anytime, any place, any task. And these practical rules have as their foundation the conviction that it matters where we put our time and attention. If we do our work wisely we will be safer, and the people around us will be safer. And the ultimate purpose of seva, to grow in humility and love, will be realized.

We begin by taking into account the environment, the potential hazards and the people around us. In the forests in this area, certain precautions are essential. Poison ivy grows abundantly. If anyone comes into contact inadvertently with its leaves, stems or roots, there are specific ways to wash their hands and clothes that will help them avoid the painful rash. Likewise, there are ticks in the woods where deer are roaming. Lyme disease can be carried by these insects. Precautions include covering all skin with gloves and long sleeves,

wearing light-coloured clothes, and pulling socks up over the legs of long trousers.

The sevadars who give these safety directions sometimes hear from the volunteers, “Grace will protect me – I don’t need to take all these precautions;” or “If I get injured or sick from this seva, I will clear twice as much karma.” But the Master says that such attitudes are misguided. He says that not using safety practices is foolish, much like standing in front of an oncoming truck and proclaiming that you are relying on grace to keep from getting run over.

Some of the safety directions are chainsaw-specific: always wear goggles and protective headphones or earplugs to protect your hearing from the loud motors. Wear thick gloves to protect your hands from sharp thorns on the brush. Be careful where you walk because the ground underneath the fallen leaves is uneven, and you don’t want to fall over rocks or fallen branches. Other safety directions are for every physical activity: lift objects correctly in order to protect your back by using the strong muscles of your legs. Don’t twist your back when you are carrying heavy things. The sevadars who offer us these safety lessons keep emphasizing, “Don’t overlook the small things that can harm you and others.” They are clear that prevention is a much smarter strategy than trying to treat an injury or cure a disease. Spotting a potential hazard helps us avoid future problems.

The wisest thing we are told is, “If you can’t do it, ask for help.” We human beings have our pride, our illusions of independence, and our delusions that we are self-sufficient. But when we are given the privilege of doing some seva, we are also given the blessing of the strengths and talents of others. No one does seva alone. We do seva together. At the heart of seva we are doing this service for our Master and remembering his presence. It is a wonderful spiritual training to learn to ask for help from our brothers and sisters. It prepares us for meditation.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that asking for help is at the heart of meditation.

Meditation is nothing but seeking his forgiveness ... we are asking the Father to forgive us.... By meditation we are begging at his door for admission. We are asking just to become one with the Father. We are begging for forgiveness, to forgive what stands between us and the Father.... We should ask him to give us that heart which is full of gratitude for what he has given us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

In meditation, we are asking that the Lord remove that which separates us from him. We are asking for help because we cannot clear our own heavy load of karma.

There are challenges to face when doing seva. Looking at many acres of untouched forest, one gets the impression that there is an infinite amount of dead wood that needs to be cleared. This seva could go on forever, no matter how many chainsaws are buzzing away at the fallen trees. And yet how wonderful it is to be given the privilege to begin. When we are asked to do any kind of seva, we have been given work we can do and a way to be useful. Moreover, we are not doing it alone; help is there.

Whether our seva is with heavy, dangerous chainsaws or making food for hungry sevadars, whether our seva takes us to the Dera in India or keeps us at home where we may be given the opportunity to be kind to a neighbor or to the clerk in the grocery store, it matters how we offer our time and attention. In all varieties of service, we are asked to take certain precautions, and to meet high standards of conduct and care, for our own sakes as well as for the well-being of others. As we do work in the name of the Master, for the Master,

we can do our best to emulate some of his graciousness, humility, generosity of spirit, and his ability to instil confidence.

In seva at various satsang properties, we are encouraged to wear thick boots and heavy gloves when we are travelling through rough terrain. In our daily lives, our meditation provides that protection. This material world is inherently dangerous, unpredictable and challenging to navigate. Even in the midst of faithfully and carefully performing our seva, in the midst of the storms of karma of our lives, we can get injured, distracted, lose our way, and even get discouraged by how much there is yet to accomplish. In such demanding circumstances, we can make careful preparations, adopt safe practices, take preventative actions whenever possible, and learn to ask for help.

In the opening line of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the narrator says: "Midway through the journey of our life, I found myself in a dark wood." Dante was not equipped with a chainsaw (which had not yet been invented in thirteenth century Italy). But the allegory of the "dark woods" is easily recognizable. We human beings are all lost in dark forests: we awake to find ourselves in a tangled brush of karmas, circumstances and destiny. It is our work, our privilege and our sacred duty to follow our vows, especially our meditation, and to do our seva.

No matter how dark the forest or how thick the underbrush, we have been promised that someday all obstacles will be removed, and we will make it home. And meditation helps.



Travel Light

*If you set out on a journey
with thieves as companions,
they'll deceive and betray you.
One who takes to the road of spirit
with passions as companions –
that one's a fool.
If someone ties a stone to himself
and tries to swim across the river,
the dullard will soon go under.
Unburden yourself of illusions –
this body, these possessions.
Set out towards pure meditation.
Only then, says Dnyaneshwar,
will you realize your Self.
Otherwise, halfway across
you'll find you've lost your way.*

Dnyaneshwar, in *Many Voices, One Song*





Sweet Sorrows: Selected Poems of Sheikh Farideddin Attar Neyshaboori

RENDITIONS BY VRAJE ABRAMIAN

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Sweet Sorrows presents a rich selection of poems, sayings, and brief stories by the Persian Sufi poet Attar (c.1119- c.1221 CE). Attar, literally meaning perfumer or herbalist, was the pen name of Abu Hamed Mohammad ebn Ibrahim, also known as Farideddin Attar. Although Attar is one of the most famous figures in Persian literature, little is known of his life. He expressed his deep mystical insights in poetry and allegorical tales which have been revered by subsequent generations of Sufis. As translator Vraje Abramian puts it, Attar's "word has nourished generations of people on the Path." Rumi wrote:

*The seven cities of love Attar traversed,
the corner of the first valley we have yet to turn.*

Attar, Abramian says, "never tires of pointing out to the individual that in the midst of the uncertainty and the baffling apparent chaos of material existence, the only refuge and happiness is to seek our Essence, the Ultimate Treasure in us, which is independent of time and space and never succumbs to the degeneration and degradation matter, by nature, is heir to." Attar addresses his message to all humanity. Speaking to the Ultimate Beloved, he writes:

*Every particle in creation
turns to You in adoration;
every human in prayers faces in Your direction.
Whether they know it or not,
creatures in both worlds
eternally long to return to Your fold.*

*In truth, none other than You can ever be loved,
it's only in remembrance of You that others are loved.*

The 'sorrow' referred to in the title of this book is longing for union with the Divine, the yearning that rankles in the hearts of spiritual seekers. Attar describes the "sweet sorrow of missing the Beloved" as a treasure:

*This sweet sorrow granted at love's door
is the true treasure buried in our soul—
a particle of it will bestow upon you more
than the two worlds could ever hope for.
One bereft of this pain can hope for no cure.*

It is a sorrow that is uniquely 'sweet' because it leads to 'release and true delight.' Attar hints that something like a fragrance emanates from the heart of one who experiences this 'sweet sorrow.' For the person who lacks this experience, even smelling the fragrance of another person's longing will uplift him.

*If this sorrow enters your heart for a moment
you will surrender both worlds.
If you could smell this pain, even in another heart,
you would find release and true delight
all through your days and your nights.*

Attar tells us that this pain has a secret purpose. The sufferer calls out to his Beloved,

*"Why this suffering and pain,
this burning despair?" I asked.
"I have you here believing that you exist
to thus give you a taste
of being separated from Me," said the Beloved.*

Believing we exist, we feel we are separated; through longing we erase our self and unite with the Infinite.

*The cure for this pain of longing is yet more longing.
Lovers drink a thousand oceans
and still burn with thirst.
When Attar is completely erased of himself
a tiny particle of his soul contains the nine spheres.*

Sweet Sorrows presents writings selected from several of Attar's best-known works: *Asrar-nameh* (The Book of Mysteries), *The Divan of Attar*, *Elahee-nameh* (The Book of the Beloved), *Mokhtar-nameh* (The Book of the Sovereign), *Moseebat-nameh* (The Book of Travails), and *Tazkirat al-Oliya* (Biography of the Saints). The full citation for each selection is given at the back of the book.

These writings are varied. Among them are wise sayings, such as, "Greed is—to pile up that mountain under which you'll be buried." And also brief stories, such as one about a poor gardener who brought three cucumbers to the vizier as precious gifts. The vizier ate all three gratefully and gave the man thirty gold sovereigns. Only after the gardener had left did he admit, "Those were bitter, very harshly bitter, and should anyone have mentioned a word, it would have broken the poor man's heart. Mind me not, good gentlemen, for I could not see him shamed." Attar then comments, "On the Day of Judgment, nothing carries more weight than forbearing kindness to all of God's creatures."

While the 350 verses and prose passages that form the main collection in this book follow an order that is loosely thematic, using material from all of the above sources, the author also offers as an appendix a selection of verses solely from *Moseebat-nameh*. *Moseebat-nameh* is an allegorical tale depicting the journey of the seeker as he meets challenges and experiences various encounters, turning always to the guidance of his Pir (spiritual master), until "the final merging of the individuated consciousness into Consciousness, the drop in The Ocean." Of this spiritual journey Attar warns:

*Perilous and long is the journey,
and we are like unto the blind.
Should you attempt this without a guide,
You will, if yourself be a lion, fall in a well and be left behind.*

In the Introduction Abramian provides background about Sufism, the mystical tradition within Islam, as a context for understanding Attar's writings. He explains that it has long been a practice among Sufi brotherhoods to recite mystical poetry, sometimes with musical accompaniment, in gatherings where "these words serve as portals into domains where human consciousness embarks on journeys beyond the realm of words."

*O companions come
let's speak about our secret
about this ancient heartache.
Like strings on a harp
every vein in my body sings of this love.
I would say so much more
but this pain refuses to be spoken of.*



