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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Yours Affectionately

Truly, Nam is the greatest gift of all, and one can only begin to have some idea of the magnitude of this wonderful blessing after going in.

Yes, to control the mind is the real problem. It is not an easy job to still and control the mind. One may do so to an extent, more or less, by study, contemplation and other means; but the mind is really controlled and becomes a friend only when it comes into contact with Shabd and begins to enjoy its bliss.

Controlling the mind by other means is like putting a poisonous snake in a basket (as snake charmers do here in India). It may seem harmless as long as it is in the basket, but as soon as it gets an opportunity it will surely bite. However, if the poison sac is taken out of the snake, there is no need of even putting it in a basket and one may handle it freely, as he likes.

One may approach the Shabd through intensive simran, that is the repetition of the five holy Names. One may hear various sounds, as you are hearing and this is good too but one will be joined to Shabd only when all the attention is concentrated above the eyes. (You are not to strain nor try to put your attention there, but simply keep it at the centre between the two eyebrows; it will go in and up of itself.)

The bliss or the enjoyment of Shabd is superior to any other pleasure which one can enjoy in this world. Once the mind begins to enjoy this bliss, it will be harnessed to it and will not turn back to worldly pleasures. It will then be like the snake whose poison sac has been removed.

Please go on working, and with faith and devotion attend to the spiritual practice regularly. By and by everything will be all right.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



A Rose in the Garden

One day, while travelling back home, a woman had to wait several hours at an airport for her flight. She was hungry so she decided to buy a bag of cookies and settle down somewhere and read a book. Engrossed in her book while enjoying the taste of the cookies, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed a man sitting beside her. She continued reading but was caught by surprise when she saw him helping himself to the bag of cookies lying between them. At first she thought, “let it go, why create a scene over a handful of cookies?”

However, that noble thought did not last long. She felt a surge of anger as she watched the man slowly consuming her stock of delicious cookies. With every cookie she took, he took one too. Finally, when it came down to the last cookie, she wondered what he would do. With a smile on his face and a nervous laugh, he broke the cookie in half and offered it to her. Throwing him a look of disgust, she snatched the cookie and headed towards the boarding gate. In her entire life, she had never come across such audacity.

When she boarded the plane, she reached for her backpack and froze when she opened it. Inside was the bag of cookies she had purchased – untouched. She groaned in despair – all this time it was she who had been eating the other man’s cookies while he was just being nice and sharing them with her! Unfortunately, it was too late to apologize. With a heavy heart and deep regret, she realized how rudely she behaved towards the kind and ‘gentle’ man.

How often have we fallen prey to a similar pattern of negative thinking? It is human tendency to see what is wrong instead of what is right – we easily jump to conclusions or pass judgment instead of focusing on the positive.

It is said that we all live in glass houses and no one has clean windows. Sadly, we seem to be more concerned with the stains and smudges on our neighbour's windows than our own. Sant Mat teaches us to adopt a loving, humble and helpful attitude with everyone, even to those who seemingly 'steal' our cookies!

But being loving to everyone is not always easy – especially during times when we have been mistreated or wronged. Our attitude towards others usually depends on how they behave towards us.

But saints and mystics advise us to love everyone who crosses our path, whether they come to us as roses or thorns.

If someone puts a thorn in your path and you put a thorn in his, there are thorns everywhere! It is like this among men, that you are straight with those who are straight with you, and crooked to those who are crooked. But among dervishes, it is like this, that you are straight with those who are straight with you, and with the crooked, you are also straight.

Sheikh Farid, The Great Sufi Mystic

It is very easy to extend our love to those who love us. This may be why our love is restricted to our family, spouses, children and friends. Because attachment is always at the root of this love, we are only able to channel it towards a select few. However it is when we learn to love everyone without judgment that we understand the true meaning of love.

What does it mean to love everybody? Maharaj Charan Singh describes a 'loving person' as follows:

They are loving toward everybody. Their love does not run in a narrow channel to one person. To love somebody is different

from being loving toward everybody. Actually, when you love everybody, you don't love the individuals, you love the Lord who is in everybody. Love is something different when there is attachment in it. In a loving and sweet nature, there is no attachment at all.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

By their own example, the saints teach us to widen our circle of compassion and love all. And as we open our hearts towards others, we become more receptive to the Master's love for us. In the Bible, when Christ gives his disciples a new commandment, to love one another, he ends by saying: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." If for no other reason than to uphold the teachings and pay tribute to our Master, it is our duty, as disciples, to strive towards achieving this ideal.

Ultimately, the saints are the perfect embodiment of the teachings. And by observing them, we see what it truly means to love everyone. A rose with its immaculate beauty and fragrance is often described as a symbol of true love. So perhaps the Master's love for his disciples is best compared to a rose. Known for its indiscriminate character, a rose offers its fragrance to everyone and withholds it from no one. It has the beautiful quality of giving all that it has, with no expectations.

The Master also does not discriminate, nor does he favour a few. He showers his boundless love to all alike – just like the sun that radiates warmth to every living being on earth. Even though he sees the blemishes and stains on our glass windows, in his generosity and kindness, he accepts us as we are.

Slowly and gradually, through the practice of meditation, we begin to acknowledge our own faults and shortcomings. And just as the Master loves us despite our imperfections, we understand that we too should love others the same way.

So we should strive to be like the rose that gives its fragrance even to the hand that crushes it. We should show love to everyone without judgment. For it is only when we have learned to love like this that we will have earned the honour and privilege of being a rose in our Master's garden.



Well, you know Hazur loved roses. You are all his roses and he gave me the seva of head gardener to look after the garden and his roses.

Baba Gurinder Singh, as quoted in *Equilibrium of Love*

Something to Think About

Sant Mat does not enslave, but teaches the disciple to be really independent by means of self-control and self-knowledge.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*



If we always feel perturbed with every little thing, then how can we concentrate, how can we meditate? If we make every little thing an issue the size of the Himalayas, then how can we concentrate? We have to forget; we have to forgive; we have to train our mind to take things easily, lightly, to laugh them away, ignore them. This is all training the mind.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*



An ounce of practice is better than a ton of knowledge. What use is it to know the principles if one does not live them? A learned person without practice is no better than a beast of burden carrying a load of books on its back. It is infinitely better to practise than to preach.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

“What Now?”

As we go through life, we notice that it is easy or even natural for us to maintain a positive and cheerful attitude when things go our way. However, for most of us, it takes only one trying circumstance to lose our equanimity. A financial loss, a sudden illness of a loved one or relationship problems are sufficient for us to go through a certain degree of emotional or mental stress. We then begin to question the Lord's ways.

It is a fact that no one is free from suffering and sorrow, and that grief and affliction are a part of life, depending on one's karmic load. As long as we exist on this physical plane, we will ceaselessly fluctuate between pleasure and pain.

Saints do not come to the physical world to alter our karmic consequences. Our karmas are ours to face. However, they often remind us that everything happens for a reason. Because of our limited understanding, we may not be able to comprehend the purpose of the difficulties we face. The Lord knows that we learn by experience. With every adversity, we develop deeper levels of patience, love and understanding, making use of the situation to grow stronger mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

When great difficulties arise, and troubles beset, regard your perplexity as a call to deeper thought and more vigorous action. Nothing will attack you that you are not capable of overcoming; no problem will vex you that you cannot solve.

The greater your trial, the greater your test of strength, and the more complete and triumphant your victory. However complicated your maze of confusion may be, there is a way out of it, and the finding of that way will exercise your powers to the utmost, and will bring out all your latent skill, energy and resource. When you have mastered that which threatens to master you, you will rejoice in a new-found strength.

James Allen, *Book of Daily Meditations*

In truth, it is during difficult times that we are able to assess where we stand on the spiritual path. Are we resistant and easily flustered? Or are we accepting and composed? The greater our trial, the greater is our test of strength. Our Master would not be a loving parent if he protected us from all our problems. He wants us to grow as spiritual beings and not remain as spiritual infants. Thus, he encourages us to face life with patience, rise above our conditions bravely and go through our destiny cheerfully.

But how does one go through pain cheerfully? How can the mind remain calm amidst difficulties and troubles?

The answer is simple – meditation.

Saints explain that through regular spiritual practice, we are able to rise above our problems. While meditation practice may not cause our difficulties to disappear, it will certainly make our attitude and mindset stronger and more positive. Turning to our meditation helps us to regain control of our lives, and with its practice, we are able to build a rock-like foundation that enables us to treat both pleasant and unpleasant situations alike. Meditation can help us weather the storms and make us stronger so that adverse circumstances lose their power

to affect us. Calming the storm is not possible; but if we learn to calm ourselves, the storm passes quickly.

Meditation is the solution to all our problems. Instead of putting up your list of demands, put up your meditation. Then you will rise above those problems and they won't affect your mind at all. You will never be able to solve the problems of the world. But we can always rise above those problems so that they do not affect us, they do not bother us, they become meaningless to us. Meditation helps; that is the real solution to those problems. The solution does not mean that those problems are going to be solved according to our liking – destiny has to play its part – but you will be happy to go through your destiny. That should be our approach to problems. Events will never change according to our wishes; we have to adjust to the events. Happiness lies in adjusting to the events, not making the events adjust to your liking. That will never happen. Destiny has to play its own part.

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

So the next time we are faced with life's intractable problems, instead of asking "why me?" perhaps a better question to ask is "what now?"

It is said that the only human freedom that man possesses is the choice of one's attitude in any given set of circumstances. So what are the choices we can exercise? We can obsessively and incessantly brood over our sorrows and delve into negativity or self-pity, or we can grow from our trials and allow adversity to make us better, instead of bitter. We can drain our body, mind and spirit of all its precious energy and

wear ourselves out to the core, or we could turn to our Master, our strength and solace, and use this time to deepen our faith and commitment to him. Life and our worldly ties may disappoint us, but his love, strength and compassion will never fail us.

The problems of the world will never end and have never ended. No man in this world can say that he has no problems in life. Our duty is to make our willpower so strong, through meditation, that we are able to rise above the difficulties of life. Our duty is to make efforts to solve the problems when they arise and, whatever the results of our efforts may be, try to live in the will of the Lord. Meditation indirectly solves all our problems by making us forget this world and its objects. Therefore attend to it with love and faith, without wondering about what life brings to you.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



*When you can have the ocean
why will you seek a drop of evening dew?
Shall he who shares the secrets of the sun
idle with a speck of dust?
Is he who has all, concerned with the part?
Is the soul concerned with members of the body?
If you would be perfect seek the whole,
choose the whole, be whole.
Attar, *The Conference of the Birds**

Balance

There was once a prince who had a reputation for indulgence. One day, with the Lord's grace, the prince came into contact with the Buddha and was accepted on to the path. After he had become a disciple, the prince became a monk and vowed to repent for his past sins.

However, in his zeal, he was rapidly moving to the other extreme. He would take only one meal on alternate days; he would meditate under the hot, unforgiving sun. He walked around naked and did exercises that were torturous to the body.

Over time, this behaviour took its toll. Earlier, the prince was a beautiful man but within six months of this regimen, he became very thin and weathered. One night, the Buddha went to the prince and asked him, "I have heard that when you were a prince you were a great musician and you used to play the sitar. So I have a question for you. If the strings of the sitar are very loose, what happens?"

The prince said, "If the strings are very loose, then no music is possible."

Then the Buddha asked, "And if the strings are too tight; then what happens?"

The prince replied, "Then too there cannot be any music. The strings must be adjusted in the middle, neither loose nor tight; only then can the divine music flow through the sitar."

The Buddha then said, "O prince, I have observed you for the last six months. I am here to convey the same message to you. Life is musical only when the strings are neither loose nor tight, but just right in the middle. Although renouncing the world is easy, only a Master knows how to be in the middle. So, be the master of your life and set the strings in the middle in whatever you do."

The Encounter

The Young Man

I was late! The traffic was horrendous. To reach my appointment on time, I jumped out of the taxi and ran to the closest subway station. My heart was pounding, my shirt was drenched in sweat. I kept hoping my client would be delayed as well, caught in the same gridlock! I really needed to close this deal. My mind was filled with frustration at the traffic and apprehension that I might lose this contract. I held firmly on to my briefcase and prepared for the morning crowd of travellers heading to work by train.

And then a few feet in front of me, there was a resounding thud. An elderly gentleman had slipped and fallen down. Instinctively, I rushed forward and reached out to help him. “Are you all right?” I asked. As I helped him onto his feet, I looked over his frame to make sure that there were no injuries. “Are you okay?” I repeated.

At first he looked a little dazed. He must have been stunned from the fall. He took a few breaths and then looked at me in bewilderment, holding on to my hand for support. He smiled ... a warm and blissful smile, “Thank you,” he said. He let go of my hand and tried to take a step, as though checking to see if his balance was restored. He smiled again as he continued onward and slowly hobbled away.

As I watched him walk away, I was enveloped in a feeling of calm, as if a gentle breeze had unexpectedly rolled out of the sky. The encounter left me suddenly composed. My feelings of rush and panic had vanished. The old man’s smile stirred something inside me. As I continued on my journey, my thoughts were on the incident. I felt as though the Lord had compelled me to be there at that very moment to

help the old man. This thought was quickly followed by another more compelling one: Did I help the old man? Or did he help me?

The Old Man

No one cares. I feel so alone and unloved. Since my wife's passing, things have not been the same. Years of working long and hard have taken a toll on my frail and worn out body. All my life, all my efforts have been towards ensuring that my children had the best education and opportunities. This has left me with hardly any time to form any meaningful relationship with them. And now they have no time for me. They are too busy with their own lives.

As I walked around aimlessly wondering where to go, I was crying inside: What is this all about, Lord? Are you really watching over me? Do I really matter to you?

Tears welled up in my eyes as a wave of self-pity washed over me. Suddenly, there was a loud thud! I could feel the noise ringing in my ears and vibrating through my body as I hit the ground. I did not see where I was going and had missed a step, causing me to fall forward.

"Are you all right?" I heard a sweet soothing voice, and then a warm hand grabbed mine and gently lifted me to my feet. "Are you okay?" I took a few breaths and looked up at the compassionate and concerned face of the young man. As I looked into his eyes, a sudden serenity enveloped me. It was as though the Lord had sent an angel to help me ... to show me that he is watching over me and that I am not alone. I smiled at that blissful thought and replied, "Thank you." I composed myself, grateful to the Lord that I was not seriously injured from the fall. He had minimized my karma to a pin-prick and sent an angel to help me! I turned and walked away, smiling at my own inner musings.

The Lord's Grace at Every Step

Every day, we are faced with challenges and disappointments. But our Master is always watching over us, sending us gentle reminders that we are never alone. Facets of human kindness and compassion are echoes of the Lord's love that he has placed inside each of us. Sometimes we lose focus and we forget how much we have to be grateful for. He then sends us these sudden encounters, to make us pause and reflect on what is truly important. In the words of Maharaj Charan Singh:

Inside of everyone there is love, because there is a soul. Whosoever has a soul, has that spark of love. As long as we are in touch with that divine melody within, we are all influenced by the love of the Father. We see his reflection in everyone. We love all his creation, because we love the Creator.

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In another passage, Hazur explains about the Master's constant grace over the disciple:

Sometimes clouds do come and we don't see the sunlight at all, but that does not mean that the sun is not there. Ultimately, the clouds fade out and the sun comes again.

We have human failings. We are all struggling souls, but we again get up and again we start walking. When you fly a kite, the string is always in the hands of the kite-flyer. When he sees the kite going right and left with the wind, he pulls that kite back. Similarly, with the winds of karmas, we go astray right

and left, but our string is in the hand of the Master, and he again pulls us back to the path.

Our concept of grace is about material things in life, but that is not the concept of grace that we have in Sant Mat. That concept of grace is about spiritual progress, about how many pitfalls we are saved from, how much we are saved at every step.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II



It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson, as quoted in *The Power of Intention**

What is the Shabd?

An Explanation by Maharaj Sawan Singh

The Shabd, Sound Current, Word or Holy Spirit is not a subject matter for speech or writing. In order to make it understood, we can only say this much, namely that it is the quintessence of the Lord and that it sustains millions of universes and regions. It is the soul-current of consciousness. It is the celestial melody. It is the life-current which originates from the Lord and pervades everything. The Lord creates and sustains the entire universe through this great current of power. It gives life to the whole of the creation and can take every living being back to his original home or the Lord. The currents of the Lord pervade everywhere, like radio waves. His divine music fills all space. Unless our radios are correctly tuned to it, we cannot hear this music. As we grow more and more subtle, we begin to hear clearly its melodies. Shabd is a string which connects everyone and everything with the Lord.

The Shabd is the basis of all true religions, for religion means 'that which connects us with the Lord'. All the forces of nature are sustained by the Shabd. The life force is also its manifestation, even though it is working in the regions of Maya. Like electricity, Shabd, whether manifest or unmanifest, pervades everywhere. It is all powerful and is the Creator of all. Guru Nanak describes it as *Hukam* (command or law) in the Jap Ji Sahib. He says that it cannot be adequately expressed or explained. However, he describes in the second stanza of Jap Ji Sahib whatever is happening is within its compass:

*According to Law, he manifests;
The Law cannot be described.*

*According to Law living beings appear;
According to Law they grow;
According to Law they are high or low;
According to Law they get pleasure or pain;
According to Law one gets salvation;
According to Law one wanders always;
All are subject to Law;
None can transgress it.
He who understands the Law,
O Nanak! is no more guilty of egotism.*

Shabd is of two kinds: manifest and inner. The manifest Shabd is called *varnatmak* and the inner Shabd is called *dhunatmak*. Knowing the *varnatmak* Shabd, it is possible to know to a certain extent the *dhunatmak* Shabd.

On hearing words of love, every pore of our being is thrilled with delight. On hearing words that speak of detachment and self-effacement, we begin to entertain feelings of detachment and surrender. On hearing harsh words, we become angry. Sweet words produce happiness, and bitter words, pain. Words of sympathy give hope and unsympathetic words depress. All these powers are inherent in Shabd:

*Shabd killed them and they died.
Kings lost their kingdoms because of Shabd.
Those who always remembered Shabd,
Succeeded in their mission.*

Kabir Sakhi Sangrah

The greatness of Shabd is unfathomable and limitless. If this is true of the manifest Shabd, it can well be imagined how powerful the inner Shabd is. On listening to the melody of a violin, one gets peace. It attracts our attention and makes us become absorbed in it. When a gross outer sound can produce such a condition, how powerful would the inner Shabd be?

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV



*One little portion of Nam or Shabd, an atom of it,
burns thousands and millions of our karmas.*

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

Be the Lotus

Most practitioners on the path of the saints begin their spiritual journey while leading normal, worldly lives. They have families, careers, obligations and duties. Just like all responsible people, they strive hard to earn a living to make ends meet. They have multiple interests such as learning new things, socializing and travelling. In short, they enjoy the world and what the creation has to offer.

At the same time, they try to assimilate their life into Sant Mat with a clear understanding that their circumstances will not change just because they are initiated.

Every disciple must get accustomed to the fact that although coming on to the path and being accepted by the Master is a life-changing event (like 'taking a new birth', a term that Hazur Maharaj Ji would often use from the New Testament); this does not mean that one is no longer accountable for his past deeds and karmas. We all have to reap the rewards of our good actions and at the same time, suffer for our transgressions.

It would be futile to think that doing seva, reading spiritual books, doing good deeds or even giving in charity can change all this. Destiny has to take its natural course. But all these elements including satsang, seva and, most importantly, meditation allow us to rise above the effects of our karmas like a lotus flower floating above the water.

Commitment towards our spiritual practice will enable us to face life's trials and tribulations with a relaxed and balanced composure with which we can gracefully accept our fate. We become stronger and retain a positive frame of mind as we continue to endure all the ups and downs of life, while keeping our spiritual goal in mind.

Sant Mat does not conceal the fact that the path leading to the Truth is a long and arduous one filled with distractions. Sardar Bahadur Ji used to say that ‘the path is not meant for cowards and weaklings as it calls for the bravery of a warrior’. This is because to meditate daily with total and unwavering focus demands not only determination but also renunciation of certain things that many consider essential.

As disciples, we have to constantly prioritize because under no circumstances are we to neglect our meditation. We have to attend to our worldly obligations, duties and interests while also treading the spiritual path. But we can only be successful if we are steadfast and resolute in adhering to the instructions imparted to us at the time of initiation.

In *Adventure of Faith*, the author recorded a question put forth to Hazur Maharaj Ji when he was asked whether there was any shortcut that we could take on this slow and tiresome way of meditation. His emphatic and piercing response was:

A great and overwhelming love of God can pull the attention inside with irresistible power. But such love is found in very few seekers of God. Ultimately, this very love would lead the disciple of a true living Master to the vision of his inner form and to the experience of the Word of God within. Therefore the time of meditation is the most precious time of the day for the disciple because, as a gift of grace, it awakens the love within us and makes it grow.

Stilling the mind and “awakening the love within” is a slow and tedious process. The Masters never tire of cautioning us not to expect instant and immediate results. Hazur Maharaj Ji often admonished

us not to calculate our efforts and worry about our progress. That would eventually lead to disappointment because we are incapable of accounting for the innumerable lives we have spent succumbing to the lure of the senses and accumulating countless karmas.

One of the great lessons we learn as we walk the path of the saints is that there are no shortcuts. This practice requires immense patience, unwavering obedience and relentless effort on our part. Eventually, it brings us to the realization that it is only his grace and mercy that can pull us to “experience the Word of God within”.

Ultimately, whatever the challenges, whatever the hardships, whatever the joys, as we pass our time in this world of illusion, we must strive to be the lotus – pure, pristine and unaffected – resting atop the murky pond of human life.



*One should live in this world
Uncontaminated by it,
As a lotus leaf lives in water
Uncontaminated by its drops.
Praise and censure must fall off his ears
As if he were absorbed within
In a state of ecstasy.
One should see the world
And yet it is to be taken as a dream.
Tukaram – The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*

The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *What happens to the mind when we die?*

A: Mind does not leave us, brother. The mind has piled up so many karmas, and according to our karmas, we are again given birth. The same mind and soul come back into another body. Another cage is ready for the mind and the soul, knotted together; another prison is ready for the unliberated soul and mind. You leave one body; another body is ready for you. Here your relatives are weeping because you have left them. In another place in this world, your new relatives are all joyful and happy and dancing because you have come. That is the only difference. Nothing else happens. We leave one house, we cut off our relationship with them and we get another set of relatives. We forget the previous ones and we are in love with the new ones. That is all. That is what the mind does to us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

* * *

Q: *If one has met you it is very easy to love you, but the ones who have not been here, is there a reason why they're not here?*

A: There's no question of a reason why they're not here. They will get the same advantage if they will carry on with the meditation. They may not be here, but their Master is with them.

Die to Live

Q: *Maharaj Ji, it is often said that we should do more meditation with punctuality, regularity, love and devotion. But love and devotion seem to be out of our hands.*

A: By love and devotion I mean that you must have faith in the path which you are following, that this is the path which goes back to our destination, and faith in the one who has put you on the path, that he's put you on the right path and he's always with you to guide you to the right destination. Unless you have that faith, you will never practise meditation. If I know that a road leads to New York from Washington, I'll go on driving at full speed. If I have no faith that the road will go to New York and I feel that it may go in some other direction, it becomes very hard for me to drive. I have to ask people for directions at every step. Sometimes I look at the map; sometimes I look at the road-signs; sometimes I ask pedestrians; then I go astray. Faith doesn't take you to the destination. Practice will take you to the destination, but faith will make you practise.

Die to Live

* * *

Q: *Master, it seems like there's more temptation and immorality in the world lately.*

A: The mind is a very faithful servant of its master, and the mind is always running to the senses, and the mind doesn't want any soul to escape from this world and go back to the Father. So the morality of the world has practically always been the same. Sometimes history reveals it; sometimes we know, sometimes we don't know. Sometimes it's a little higher, a little lower, but if we had been moral and spiritual we would not be here today. We are here as part of the creation because we have not been sufficiently spiritual in the past.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



Why Simran?

Over the years, as disciples on the path of Sant Mat, we have grown to love the five precious names the Master gave us at initiation – our simran. Imagine not being able to repeat our simran in this world of uncertainty, this rollercoaster of highs and lows that epitomize our daily lives. The repetition of these precious words is a gift of untold measure.

We use our senses to interact with the world. With our tongue, we communicate thoughts and ideas which leave impressions on our mind. Our eyes allow us to visualize objects of the world, and these forms are embossed in our mind. Our ears allow us to hear various sounds and voices and these too are also registered in our consciousness. With advances in technology, our senses are constantly bombarded with stimuli every moment of the day. And finally, on social media – with applications like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter – we develop ‘virtual personalities’ that require perpetual attention. All these create an endless flow of clutter in our already overcrowded minds.

The saints advise that by simran – repetition of the holy names – we can eliminate these impressions and clear our minds. Simran allows us to think and act with clarity, kindness and equanimity. It helps us not to just blurt out words or react to situations impulsively. We learn to respond with self-control.

The problem is, we do not use our simran enough. Whilst repeating the names during meditation, we easily get lost in other thoughts. And before we know it, our meditation period has flown by. When we are nervous, worried or upset, we are anxious to repeat our simran, and we cling to the words in desperation. Simran, as the Masters have said, is the hardest step, no doubt. There is no one who can do it for us, nor

is there another shortcut to reaching the eye centre. There is no escape from the requirement of serious effort and self-discipline.

It is because of the mind's flighty nature that it is so difficult for us to keep our attention on these five simple words. The mind is a most useful instrument provided it is kept under control. In this way, it is like a car. A car can't turn on its own engine. It has no will of its own – the driver's will controls it. If it is not controlled properly and is run at full speed, disaster is inevitable.

Similarly, in order to keep the mind in tow and functioning under our control, we need to consciously steer it in the right direction, letting go of unproductive desires and tendencies and at the same time creating new, more positive habits. In the Dhammapada, a classic Buddhist text, it is stated that whatever harm a foe may do to a foe, or a hater to a hater, an ill-directed mind can do far more. The mind's desires for all things artificial takes us away from the Lord.

What then is the remedy? The mystics say that simran is the solution, provided it is consistently practised and is supported by a lifestyle that is conducive to its practice. We must put before the mind something which can curb the lower desires. We all know that our state of mind is constantly changing. Happiness, sadness, depression, anger, kindness and indifference are some states we often find ourselves in. The mystics tell us that it is impossible to keep the mind in a state of constant equanimity without simran. But until the mind experiences the bliss of the higher regions, the pleasures of the physical world will continue to tug at it. The mystics remind us that this method of repetition has been proven and tested over thousands of years. It is not possible to turn our attention inward and tune itself to the Shabd as long as the mind is fixated upon things of the outer world. All of our attention must be withdrawn from our senses and focused inside. We simply cannot take the world in our back-packs on

our journey inside. Our inner most thoughts must be detached from worldly desires and attachments.

Concerning the balance between our spiritual duties and worldly work, Hazur Maharaj Ji says, “Our worldly duties and obligations are to be fulfilled along with spiritual practice.” Sant Mat encourages us to attend to our worldly work and also find time for our real work. Saints tell us that as we persist with our simran, our lower desires and tendencies will gradually weaken and fall away. Through simran, the soul currents that permeate every pore of the body will withdraw from the nine apertures and collect at the third eye.

Maharaj Jagat Singh reminds us: “Simran is the foundation and the foundation must be very strong.” The mystics tell us that ceaseless simran means thinking more of the Beloved than of ourselves. It entails tremendous sacrifice. How many of us can do this? Usually we do concentrated simran only in times of trouble. At other times, can we truthfully say we do it with love and devotion?

It is not that we can't do it. We are capable of making sacrifices for our loved ones. We sacrifice quite readily for those we love in this world – spouse, children, parents, friends – but we have to go one step further and include our Beloved.

Habits are easily formed and soon become a part of our daily routine, and then if we neglect them, we start missing those things.

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

As we know, the mind is a creature of habit. So in the same way that we go about our daily routines, performing them day after day, week after week, repeating them over and over, we must also do our spiritual

duty. We have to create a habit of simran, so that it becomes ingrained in our lives.

Hazur Maharaj Ji explains further:

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

Die to Live

Through simran we cleanse the mind of all the impressions that obscure our path. The reason the spiritual path is hard is because we are trying to eliminate old habits that come to us so easily and replace them with difficult new ones. Regularity and punctuality in our meditation are essential conditions that help us develop the habit of simran.

In *Die to Live*, Hazur Maharaj Ji says, “If you are late today and feel guilty, then the next time you won’t be late. If you don’t feel repentant, then you will always have a habit of being late.”

The approach of attending to simran as a habit may appear to be mechanical at the onset, but it is the first step on the spiritual ladder. It is a systematic approach that requires discipline. To begin with, we have to make the effort and put our mind in simran, and then automatically love will develop.

Hazur Maharaj Ji reminds us:

We should also honour the commitment which we have made with the Father, that we have a certain time to attend to meditation. We have to sit, whether our mind is still or not. Whether we have to fight with the mind or not is a different problem, but we have made a certain commitment with the Father, and we should try to honour it by giving our time to the Father at that particular time.

Die to Live

We do not have to worry about results or whether our effort is good enough. Master sees only our sincerity and honest intention. The results are not in our hands – they are a gift from him. We can only renew our effort day after day, and pray to the Lord that our every thought, deed and action is inspired by his love for us.



*Why do you lose patience, O seeker?
Forget not, progress is always slow.
However freely you may water the tree,
It needs time to burst into bloom.*

Saint Paltu, His Life and Teachings

Did You Know?

The third eye is the seat of the mind and the soul. This is the pivotal point that holds the mystery of life. It is from here that our attention continually descends and spreads into the world through the nine outlets of the body, namely, the two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, the mouth and the two lower apertures. From here every minute the mind wanders out. It does not sit still at this spot even for a moment. Its activities are legion. The ageless secret, the ancient wisdom, the path of the saints lies in drawing the attention back to this point and contacting there the Voice of God which ceaselessly calls us home.

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

To follow the Master means to follow his teachings, to live the Sant Mat way of life, to attend to meditation, to withdraw from the sense pleasures. Following him does not mean running after him physically. That is why Christ said: If you simply claim that you are my disciple and I am your Master, but you do not follow my teachings, you will not be able to go back to the Father. To withdraw to the eye centre and be one with the Spirit within – that is following the Master, not running after him outside.

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

Bring Your Own Cheese

A disciple went up to the microphone at a question and answer session and presented her dilemma to the Master. She said that whenever she goes out for a meal with her friends, she can never be sure if the cheese that the restaurants use is vegetarian. So, to ease her mind, she started bringing her own cheese and would discreetly request the restaurant to use it for the pizza and pasta that she and her friends had ordered. Her friends were not vegetarians so it did not make a difference to them. They did not mind accommodating their friend. But they did think she was a little obsessed with her level of vegetarianism. What she wanted was confirmation from the Master that she was not being a fanatic and was in fact doing the right thing. So she asked, “Is it okay, Master, for me to bring my own cheese?”

And there it was. The “Oh no!” that detonated in my mind in the millisecond of silence that filled the air before the Master responded. How many times did my own conscience nag me every time I ordered a pizza and wondered about the cheese? “What you don’t know will not hurt you...” was its clever quip. But how many explanations did I come up with to quash its nagging?

...it is very difficult to stay in this world without killing anything at all. When we walk, we kill. When we breathe, we kill. When we talk, we kill. When we drink, we kill. Since the whole world is filled with souls, we can't exist in this world without killing.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

My mental dispute would invariably end with my pitiful closing statement, “When we eat cheese, we kill.” And that would be the end

of it, at least, until the next time, when the whole exhausting exercise would start all over again.

Here is one of the more confounding ironies of Sant Mat: as long as we keep to the four vows we can use our comfort level to make decisions about our way of life. But just when we get comfortable comes the reminder that it is time for an upgrade; time to take our commitment up a notch and ask ourselves if we are prepared to narrow that comfort zone to get closer to him.

The question is, where do we draw the line? How does one stand up to seemingly logical advice such as “we have to be practical” and “nothing we eat can ever be 100 percent vegetarian”?

The fact is, while the vows taken at the time of initiation are the same for everyone, the degree to which every initiate applies those vows to their daily life is deeply and profoundly personal. It is not a matter of one disciple being a fanatic and the other one being indifferent, nor is it about one disciple being more “good” than another. It is simply about every individual being able to live with himself after the fact.

Just as no two human beings are the same, every disciple on the spiritual path is different. Each one is a unique by-product of his complex karmic history and deep-seated mental impressions, all of which influence his approach towards the path.

For this reason, everyone has a different threshold for following the vows. So, while all initiates are vegetarian, teetotalers who abstain from drugs and practise meditation – the degree to which these vows are implemented is based on everyone’s own individual moral compass. As long as the person is comfortable and happy with himself and he feels that he is doing his personal best to keep the vows, he will grow spiritually.

The word growth, in any context, implies a gradual development – a work in progress. Spiritual growth is no different. As an individual matures on the path, so does his level of awareness. That automatically fine-tunes the sensitivity of his moral compass. The problem arises when one refuses to acknowledge that still small voice and denies the feelings of doubt that arise in the mind. Eventually, when no action is taken by the individual to resolve those feelings sincerely and honestly within himself, it becomes a weight on his mind and a stumbling block in his spiritual practice. Hazur Maharaj Ji explains it very clearly:

If you feel guilty about doing it, then you should not do it. If you honestly feel that it is all right under the circumstances, I do not bother, I do not mind – go on doing it. 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. We should always do the best we can under the circumstances. Sometimes we are caught in such a net that we find it difficult to escape. We just have to do what is practically possible in that situation. We do many things which we cannot justify, which we should not justify, but we have to do them. But all the same, the law of karma will take its own course.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

So while intellectually a person may be able to justify his actions with perfect logic and flawless reasoning, the question to ask at the end of the day is: “Am I happy with myself?”

Of course, regardless of the answer, the Masters have always said that from the karmic perspective, the law will still always take

precedence. Poison is poison and if taken, there will be a price to pay. From that there is no escape. So when the Master reminded us that it is easier to run with only the weight of a shirt on our back and that every penny makes a pound, good conscience once again prevailed and the conclusion was clear. There is room for improvement.

But long after that special encounter between Master and disciple, what lingered in the mind was not anything that was spoken. What was most impressive was the tenacity of that young disciple. Following the teachings of her spiritual path was clearly the priority in her life. Never mind the inconvenience of carrying a block of cheese in her handbag or the impression her friends would have of her. She made a commitment to mould her life according to the teachings of her Master, and that was exactly what she was doing. She was walking the walk.



It is much better to be strong within yourself. There is no need to feel inferior in this society that we are vegetarian and do not drink, also that we do not serve such things. If people do not really love you, you have no concern with them. Do not bother about them. If they are interested in you, they will respect your principles. They will respect your feelings.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

His Infinite Love

After his heart attack in 1971, Maharaj Ji's physicians put many restrictions on his satsang activities. When Maharaj Ji visited Indore for satsang, Dr. T.N. Mathur accompanied him. Mr. K.L. Khanna, the Dera Secretary at that time, had requested Dr. Mathur to look after Maharaj Ji's health and not to allow him to conduct more than one initiation session per day.

Maharaj Ji had set aside two days for initiation, and his next programme after the Indore satsang was also fixed. But when the initiation started, it was discovered that the number of applicants was larger than expected and could be completed only in four sittings, not in two. When Maharaj Ji came to know of the situation, he said, "I would not like to disappoint the village people who are too poor to bear the expenses of travelling to the Dera." So he decided to give two sittings daily and finish the initiation within the scheduled period of two days.

Dr. Mathur, hearing of Maharaj Ji's decision, protested, saying, "In consideration of your recent heart attack, I earnestly beg of you not to hold two sittings a day."

Maharaj Ji listened patiently and replied in a tone of kindness and love, "Doctor Sahib, when a fisherman throws gram (small roasted chick peas) in the water to attract fish into his net, if the fish gather in large numbers, he does not then refuse to pull in the net, saying that it is too heavy. This he should have realized when he threw the gram into the water. Now he has no option but to haul in the entire load. Now there is no way but to initiate these souls. Do not worry, I will be all right. Doing the Great Master's work never tires me. I am happy to do my duty."

Treasure beyond Measure



A Plea from Soami Ji Maharaj

*Open the window of my heart
and show me what lies within.
A hard struggle has left my mind exhausted,
none of its efforts have met with success.
You are all-powerful, what can you not do!
Then why this delay in coming to help me?
I am buffeted by the waves of pain and pleasure –
why have I still not achieved my goal?
Be merciful to me now, my Lord,
and raise my mind and soul to the inner skies.*

*My evil mind doesn't feel the separation –
please grant it the gift of love.
It puts no faith in what is true and permanent,
but hankers after ephemeral pleasures.
It craves indulgence in carnal passion
and has no taste for the nectar of Surat Shabd.
How can I explain to the mind?
How can I make it understand?
It doesn't absorb the Master's message.*

*There is something peculiar in the make-up of this mind,
it has neither love nor longing for Shabd.
Trapped in birth and death, how can it be saved
when it refuses to board the Master's ship?*

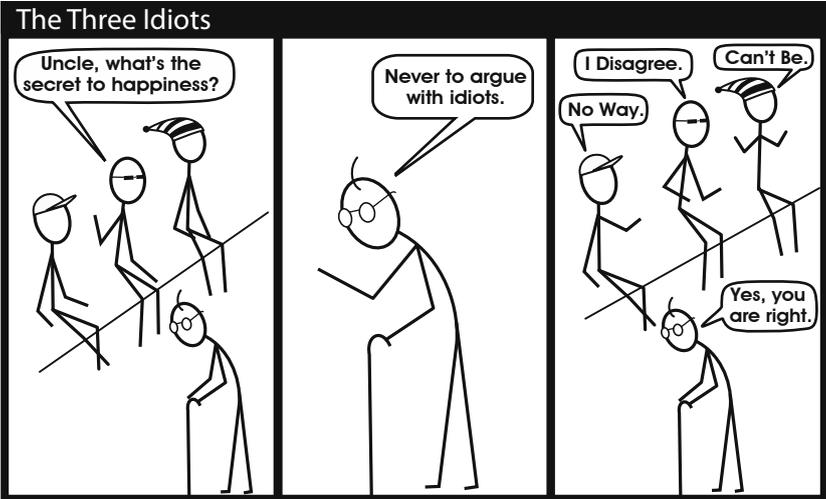
*It is punished and kicked around in the world,
and after death it will go to hell, thrashed by Yama.
It will have to endure numerous such miseries
if it doesn't listen now but goes astray.*

*You are the persuader in every heart, O Master!
Why do you not call back this soul in distress?
No one but you really belongs to me,
for in all the four planes of existence
I see no one else, only you.
Show me your mercy now, Radha Soami.
Carry me safely across the ocean – in any way possible.*

Sar Bachan Poetry



SPIRITUALISTICKS®



The Lighter Side of Wisdom

In the 1971 tour of the Far East, Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh Ji often had to answer unusual questions. Following a discourse in Bangkok, one gentleman asked: “Maharaj Ji, for centuries we have been trying to find the Lord in the same old way. Yet science has made rapid progress and has opened new horizons to man. We have even reached the moon. Then why is it that we are following the same outdated ways to realize God? Can the path not be changed? Can some concessions not be made so that one can realize God without having to give up eating meat and drinking alcohol?”

Maharaj Ji smiled gently and replied, “You are right, brother, much has changed; human intellect and science have made enormous progress. But please do not forget in spite of all the changes, birth and death are changeless realities. In this ever-changing world, the law of karma is irrevocable. As we sow, so have we to reap. God is the same, was the same, and will always be the same. He is beyond all changes, and so is the path leading to him. It cannot be changed. There is no favouritism at his door, no bribe is accepted, and no concessions given. There can be no relaxation in the mode of living for those who tread the path, nor are special favours available, as the path is the same for all.”

Then the Master laughed softly and said, “But if you can change the old God to a new one, you will surely be able to change the way to meet him.”

Heaven on Earth

Rhubarb Radish Paprika Pie

Sitting at a café by the side of the road, I noticed that the sky was a bizarre shade of green. A waiter approached on ice skates and offered a portion of rhubarb radish paprika pie. I savoured it.

It was truly a weird dream, but haven't we all had one of those? When we can remember them, we are perplexed by their lack of logic, and we laugh at their strangeness. Yet, when we are inside such a dream, we believe it is reality.

We take an active part in it, responding and reacting as though it is our reality.

The mystics tell us life is like a dream. Do they mean that life is strange? Are they telling us that life is illogical? Yes, and yes. But also much more. They are telling us that our perception of reality is distorted; that we cannot tell the difference between reality and illusion.

*Now that you have received this human form,
Strive to accomplish your own real work.
Do not get embroiled in the affairs of this world,
Think of it as no more than a night's dream.
This body is false, as are its relationships,
So why exhaust yourself over an illusion?*

Sar Bachan Poetry

There are many metaphors to illustrate what the mystics have discovered; for example, that this world is a bridge over which we must cross but on which we cannot build a home. That it is an inn where travellers meet and pass the night together but where everyone leaves the following morning, each one travelling to his destination.

That it is a stage where we are all just actors playing a part. There is even a nursery rhyme that says, 'Life is but a dream'.

Despite that, we find it difficult to accept that our situation is just a dream, an illusion, a mirage or a play. This is because we are extremely infatuated with this world. Our senses tell us that our experiences are tangible, substantial and real. We are able to touch that wound. We are able to taste bitterness. We can smell the fumes from that fire. We can hear the cries of our loved ones. We are even able to perceive the steamroller of death approaching. Truth be told, our dreams feel just as real to us when we are asleep as our daily lives feel when we are awake. Both awake and asleep, our consciousness participates completely.

A question was put forward to Maharaj Charan Singh: "We are told that all things in our life are an illusion or a dream. Is that right?" He replied:

What it means is that what we see has no reality – reality in the sense that nothing will exist, nothing will remain, everything is perishable, it's not everlasting. Where is Christ now? Where is Nanak now? Where is Moses now? They were all reality when they were in the flesh, but where are they now? Flesh is no more, so flesh is not reality. That spirit in them was real, not the flesh that is made of five elements, that merges back into the five elements and then you cease to exist. Where are those old civilizations now? New civilizations are coming up; old ones are vanishing. What is real here? Everything is perishable, nothing is everlasting. In that sense, it is illusion.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

If a character in one of our dreams were to confront us within the dream and tell us that we are dreaming, we would probably not believe him. We would instead try to assert the tangibility of the dream – perhaps by pinching our dream-hand or stomping our dream-foot on the dream-ground. Then we would feel satisfied that we had proved the reality of our dream world. Yet, when the alarm clock rings, or rays of sunlight pour in through our bedroom window and wake us from our sleep, our entire dream world and our dream-body-mind completely vanish. Similarly we can only prove what the mystics say – that this life is just a dream, an illusion – by waking up from it. This only happens when we reach a higher state of consciousness. How? Yes, through meditation. By dying while living.

Through meditation, when we raise our consciousness to the eye centre, we will slowly and steadily bring our attention out of this world. Only then will we realize that this world is a dream and treat it the way we treat our sleeping dreams: unreal and not something we should be attached to.

Sooner or later, we will wake up from this dream. So take a deep breath and relax. Now that I am awake I know that the sky cannot be green, waiters do not glide around on ice skates, and rhubarb radish paprika pie is definitely not something I would savour!



*This world, which is only a dream,
Seems to the sleeper as a thing enduring for ever.
But when the morn of the last day shall dawn,
The sleeper will escape from the cloud of illusion.*

Maulana Rum, *Masnavi Ma'navi*,
as translated by E. H. Whinfield

The Master and the Teachings

A Master would often repeat at the end of his discourse: “Remove the self, and realize truth.”

A disciple was compelled to ask one day: “Master, if this is so, why don’t you remove the self for us and just explain the pure truth?”

The Master smiled and asked the disciple to get him water to drink.

The disciple brought a glass of water and placed it in front of the Master. “What is this?” asked the Master.

“This is the water you asked for,” murmured the disciple. “But did I ask for a glass or water?”

The disciple was confused.

“Never mind,” the Master explained softly. “Just as you cannot bring water without a vessel, so too, the Master is required to express the Truth through the teachings.”

The teachings are of paramount importance – they were then, are now, and will remain so – even a thousand years from today!

The teachings remain constant, but the Masters change – yet the teachings can be taught only by the Master.

Now let us get a deeper clarity on this.

In every era, there is a Master to show the way to the truth. When one Master leaves the physical plane, another succeeds him, because it is imperative to have a Master to teach the truth. So even though the Masters continue to change, they continue to teach the same truth because there is only one truth.

The teachings cannot manifest in disciples by themselves; that is like trying to bring water without a glass. It is impossible. A glass is essential to hold water. Water needs a glass, a container, a vessel, a

stream, a river, or an ocean – it cannot contain itself by itself. The teachings too, cannot contain themselves without a Master.

The Master is the glass, the container, the vessel; he holds the water and dispenses the water. The Master is the custodian of the teachings because of his inner experience. The Master is the glass holding the teachings and only he can teach the truth.

So the Master and teachings cannot be separated. They are bound together; they are inseparable. Teachings cannot be taught without the Master and the Master cannot teach without the experience of truth.

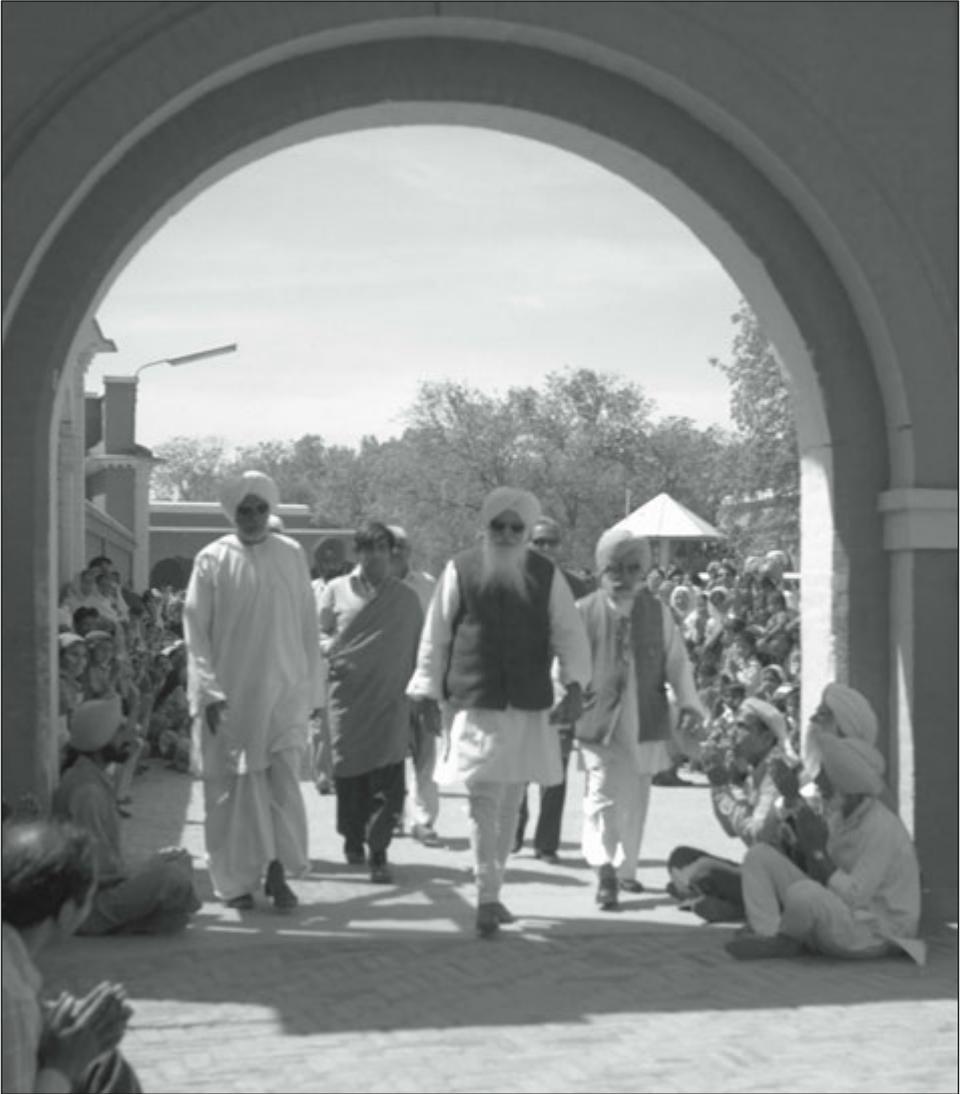
The Master is not greater than the truth, and the truth is not greater than the Master – they are blended into one, merged into a whole. It is like the water and the enormous pit that holds the water – together they are called an ocean. There is no ocean if the pit and the water are separated, but together they form a mighty ocean. Without each other they are incomplete. In the same way, the Master and the teachings cannot be separated – they are the ocean, they are merged together, they are one blended from two!

Concepts & Illusions ~ A Perspective



Going to the saints and merely listening to their teachings is not enough. We must make these teachings a real part of our life. When we follow their directions, we will experience spiritual transport and transcend the earth plane.

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



Maharaj Charan Singh

Heart to Heart

Yesterday I had an appointment with the Master at seva so I stood up on the guest house top verandah to watch for him going by, so that I would not keep him waiting. Whilst watching the road outside, I saw a little old blind man, feeling his way to the site where seva was to be held. Faithfully every day he goes to do his stint, finding his own way everywhere. Just then, I espied Maharaj Ji coming along the road alone, except for Manohar, his personal servant. I hurried down and followed a little in the rear and presently they came abreast of the blind man, both of them not talking and no one else within earshot. At the same instant, I marvelled to see the blind man half turn and, falling on his knees, prostrate himself at Maharaj Ji's feet. Maharaj Ji greeted him and talked a little and then passed on. How did that man guess the Master was there?

Flora E. Wood, *In Search of the Way*

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- Articles should focus on the Sant Mat teachings and may also draw on the universal teachings of other mystics.
- Articles should not be based on, or discuss, the personality of the Master or the writer.
- Articles must be your own original work. If quotations from other sources are included, complete source references must be given.
- Articles should be between 500 and 1500 words in length.

If accepted, your article will be edited according to the requirements of the magazine. You will be contacted only if your submission is accepted. Please include your name, age, postal address, and email address with your article.

Book Review



The Spiritual Guide: Perspectives and Traditions, Volume One

EDITED BY BEVERLY CHAPMAN

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2 VOLUMES.

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This book, in two volumes, seeks to shed light on the nature of the master-disciple relationship across different spiritual, religious or philosophical traditions. Volume One covers four such traditions: Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, and Graeco-Roman philosophy. The focus of the book is on spiritual teachers and disciples and not on the doctrines, history, or teachings of any religion. The questions that are explored include: Why should one seek a spiritual teacher? What are the characteristics of such a teacher? How do those who have contact with these mentors understand their relationship with them?

Written by a team of contributors, each with a background in a particular tradition, the chapters all have their own style and approach. Each chapter illustrates the master-disciple relationship with quotes from scripture, various sacred texts, and poems and sayings from mystics, giving the reader a glimpse of each tradition's rich imagery, vivid depictions and revealing anecdotes.

The Hinduism chapter begins with a story from a section of the Skanda Purana known as the Guru Gita. Lord Shiva is seated while many great beings are bowing before him. However, his consort Parvati sees Lord Shiva bow to show respect to a human guru. She asks why the great Shiva would bow to a human, when the entire universe bows to Shiva. Shiva proceeds to explain the "Supreme Truth" which is the "greatest of all secrets." He tells her, "By constant meditation on the guru, the individual soul becomes God and is set free."

The Hinduism chapter describes the Hindu view of the guru-disciple relationship, with particular emphasis on *bhakti* (devotion). The nature of discipleship is illustrated through incidents from great epics, such as the Ramayana, where we meet Hanuman, the monkey god whose devotion

to Ram was so intense that once he tore open his chest and there, inside, was Ram. Similarly, we meet Shabari, a very poor, simple woman. “Every day she would lovingly clean the path to her house and sprinkle water to settle the dust, expecting Ram to visit her that very day.” Though her social status was very low, her devotion was so pure that Ram did visit. He ate the food she offered and explained the “nine-fold path of devotion” to her.

The twentieth-century teacher Swami Vivekananda explains the importance of a living guru in more modern terms. He explains that intellectual knowledge will not help us evolve spiritually because “the soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else.” He says that when this contact is made with a spiritual guide, “spiritual life is awakened, growth is animated, and man becomes holy and perfect in the end.”

The Taoism chapter is organized thematically, divided in three parts: What Is a Sage?, Discipleship, and How Does the Sage Teach the Disciple? In the first part, we read that a sage is someone who has attained oneness with the Tao, the eternal and unchanging power that is the cause behind all ever-changing phenomena. The sage “embodies” the Tao. Having all the same qualities as the Tao, the sage is a model of balance and harmony. Chuang Tzu, an ancient Taoist sage, describes this state of balance and harmony: “The sage’s heart is stilled! Heaven and Earth are reflected in it, the mirror of all life. Empty, still, calm, plain, quiet, silent, non-active, this is the centredness of Heaven and Earth and of the Tao and of Virtue.”

The second part of the chapter, Discipleship, begins with the importance of recognizing that one needs a teacher who has attained the Tao. Until that recognition comes, even the most earnest seeker will wander along byways, missing the great Way of the Tao. Finding a true teacher, however, is difficult. A true sage is so subtle, with manners so natural and unassuming, that seekers often have trouble recognizing his wisdom. And even after finding a sage, one must also become teachable. The point is explained, as so often in Taoism, by a teaching story: A disciple named Yang Chu had been brought up to be well-mannered. However, when he approached the great sage Lao Tzu, carefully observing every formal way of showing respect, Lao Tzu declared that he was unteachable and sent him away. He said, “You are so unnatural. Who can live with one like you?” Yang Chu went away and took the lesson to heart, freeing himself

from his affected manners and learned behaviours. Lao Tzu then found that he was teachable.

The third section of the chapter, How Does the Sage Teach the Disciple?, shows that the teaching is not primarily through words.

Yeh Ch'ueh was questioning his teacher, Wang Ni. Yeh Ch'ueh asked Wang Ni four questions, who did not answer any of them. In silence, the truth would be expressed to him; so Wang Ni remained quiet but answered with the integrality of his spiritual nature. This response made Yeh Ch'ueh jump with joy.

Similarly, the eighteenth-century Taoist master Liu I-Ming describes the subtle way in which sages are able to guide others: "Like the wind getting into everything, they can open up people's knowledge and wisdom; like the earth nurturing everything, they can save people from calamities."

The chapter on the spiritual guide in Judaism is organized chronologically, discussing specific spiritual teachers in each historical period: the prophets of the biblical period, the great sages of the ancient rabbinic period, the kabbalists of the medieval period, and the hasidic tsadiks of the modern period. For example, we learn about several of the revered rabbis of the rabbinic period (first through fifth century CE) who were believed to be endowed with extraordinary powers and were often compared with the biblical prophets like Abraham and Moses. As one scholar of Jewish mysticism, Jacob Neusner, describes the relationship between students and these sages of the rabbinic period:

Disciples were not students who came to a master only to learn facts or holy traditions. They came to study the master as well as what the master said... The master would sculpt the soul. Entry into the rabbinic circle, like initiation into a mystery cult, marked the end of an old existence, the beginning of a new life, a new being.

The chapter's title, Ladder to the Divine, refers to a biblical story in which Jacob in a dream sees a ladder, on which angels descend from and

ascend to heaven. In the eighteenth century the Hasidic master, Ya'akov Yosef, wrote that the spiritual mentor, then called "tsadik" (righteous person), is that ladder:

And this is what was revealed to our father Jacob (in his dream in the Bible), a ladder fixed in the earth whose head reached the heavens, which means – even when the tsadik is fixed in the earth, with the lowly, common people of the earth, among scoffers and gossips and the like, nevertheless his head, his thoughts, reach the heavens, joining his thoughts to his Creator. For the Divine Name is before him.

The Graeco-Roman chapter introduces us to such philosophers as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, and Plotinus. It was Pythagoras who, in the sixth century BCE, established the model of spiritual guidance that was followed by philosophers for the next twelve hundred years. In this model, the key element was friendship. The master was the "friend" of the student, just as students shared a deep friendship with fellow seekers after wisdom. Friendship was conceived as a life-long commitment to support one another in the pursuit of truth.

The chapter describes how philosophers in ancient Greece and Rome met with their students and helped them "turn their gaze inward to purify their minds through a variety of exercises." Daily practice was essential. Socrates used dialogues with his students to help them see their own ignorance, indeed that everything they thought they knew was only arrogance. When they reached the point of total and utter confusion, they were ready to learn. Socrates described these dialogues as a "soul-to-soul" communion that used words: "You and I are conversing with each other soul to soul while making use of words." As one scholar, Charles Kahn, puts it, "Socrates plays a role among his followers like that of a Zen master or an Indian guru."

The review of Volume Two, which covers Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, and Sikhism, will appear in next month's issue of *Spiritual Link*.



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