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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 I Will Place You in My Soul
- 5 Love One Another
- 9 Broken Things
- 10 His Greatest Gift
- 14 Fear – Rational or Irrational
- 18 We Are Not What We See
- 22 The Roles People Play
- 23 The Upside-Down Language of Kabir
- 27 The Gift of Initiation
- 31 Nothing Can Prevent You
- 35 In a Nutshell
- 37 Our One True Friend
- 40 Book Review

Spiritual Link

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I Will Place You in My Soul

*I do not keep you in my heart,
Because you will be wounded.*

*I do not keep you in my eyes,
Because you will be diminished.
But I will place you in my soul,
Not in either heart or eyes,
So that you will be coupled with
My last breath.*

*In this love for you,
No one persists but me.
In the salt marsh,
No one plants a seed but me.
With both friend and foe,
I speak ill of you, so that
No one will love you but me!*

Shams-e Tabrizi



Love One Another

When all is said and done, the Masters' message, in a nutshell, is the same as that which Christ taught:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you.

Bible: St John 13:34

Is it any wonder that loving one another is such an important and essential prerequisite to living? But how do we live this in our everyday life? How can we, in fact, know that we are loving one another?

The Book of Mirdad provides us with some helpful clues and insights into what love is, and how we are to love:

And what is it to love but for the lover to absorb forever the beloved so that the twain be one?

And whom, or what, is one to love? Is one to choose a certain leaf upon the Tree of Life and pour upon it all one's heart? What of the branch that bears the leaf? What of the stem that holds the branch? What of the bark that shields the stem? What of the roots that feed the bark, the stem, the branches and the leaves? What of the soil embosoming the roots? What of the sun, and sea, and air that fertilize the soil? ... The love that singles out a fraction of the whole foredooms itself to grief.

We can learn from this that our love is only for a minute part and not the whole. In fact our love is often no more than attachment. Now, perhaps we can understand why we often have grief in our relationships. How often have we seen our love turn to hate, or been victims of this type of love?

Mirdad shares several gems on love in this book, such as: "You do not know the joy of love so long as there is hatred in your hearts." In effect, he tells us that if we have the capacity to hate, we cannot have the capacity to love, and if we have the capacity to love we cannot have the capacity to hate. They are mutually exclusive.

Great Master tells us in *The Dawn of Light*: "Love is the richest of all treasures. Without it there is nothing, and with it there is everything."

Because we cannot escape from the fact that the love we know and experience is far removed from what the Masters speak of, how then does one cultivate this type of love? Let's take different aspects of our lifestyle and see how we can practise this love in our everyday lives.

If we love the whole creation and not fractions or selected parts of it, how can we inflict pain and suffering upon other creatures by mercilessly slaughtering them merely to please our palates for a few moments? Can we ever love God if we eat animals, birds and fish? With compassion for the rest of creation, we will develop love for all of creation.

We all know of the effects of alcohol and drugs and the actions performed under their influence. As aspiring lovers of the Lord, we should constantly be in control of our thoughts, words and actions to ensure that all our actions are congruent with those of a lover of God.

The actions of lovers of the Lord must be moral, ethical, fair, compassionate, forgiving and humble. This responsibility extends from earning our own honest living to the entire spectrum of good conduct and ethical behaviour – being kind, respectful and not speaking ill of others or hurting them. If we love all of creation, as we should, we can see the importance of this lifestyle.

All the above behavioural traits are important and are a prerequisite for the journey to union with the Lord. But, have we wondered why we exist separately from him? What gives us our individuality and separateness? If we haven't merged with the Lord and become one with him, what are we?

Unfortunately, most of us don't know the answer to this question, which has plagued humanity since creation began. However, the Master tells us that until we merge with the Lord, we are nothing but the mind or the ego. Some may think we are this body and at a material level, this may seem so. But when we die and leave this body, or raise our consciousness above this material level, it will become apparent that we are not this body at all but rather a form of energy or life force.

Owing to the dominance of the mind over the soul, we think we are the mind and are still unaware of the soul. Only when we become aware of the soul, can we say we are self-realized. The only way to realize the soul is to remove the coverings of the mind. When the soul regains its dominance over the mind, it escapes its clutches and rises beyond the region of mind.

By shedding the mind, the ego and I-ness are also shed, thereby losing the identity we have, and we – as we presently know ourselves – cease to exist. Then, all that remains is for the soul to merge with the Lord himself. This is God-realization.

The Masters teach us that the only way to achieve this is through meditation. Great Master said:

Meditation means dying a living death in the prime of life. It means staying awake, eating sparingly – in short, restraining the mind's cravings and bringing it under control. All this is no child's play. It is only possible when love for the Satguru takes possession of your heart, driving out all other attachments.

As quoted in *Heaven on Earth*

We have been given the gift of initiation, and our commitment is to do our daily spiritual practice, through which our consciousness will gradually begin to rise. When this happens we begin to further our own enlightenment – ultimately developing love for the whole creation. As this love grows it gradually displaces the conditional love and attachments we have for minute parts of creation.

As a result of our meditation we develop our spiritual faculties to see and hear all the worlds that lie within us. Our consciousness will become fully awakened and we will be able to see everything beyond the physical. Then, when we look at a person, we will see their true self, their soul manifesting as light. Then we'll know what the Masters see when they look at us.

Once, when Baba Ji was asked what he sees when he looks at us, his response was that he only saw potential. Imagine overlooking all our flaws and weaknesses – seeing only our potential to be that pure light, our potential to achieve our goal of losing our false identity and becoming one with him.

Maulana Rum said:

The current of love from the one God is flowing through the entire universe. What do you think when you look at the face of a man? Look at him carefully. He is not a man, but a current of the Essence of God (Love), which permeates him.

As quoted in *Glimpses of the Great Master*

When we develop our spiritual faculties, we see only the positives and we don't see any weaknesses or flaws, as we see in both ourselves and others now. Let's ignore what we can see with these eyes and let's focus on our potential. Let's focus on our meditation, which will enable us to realize our potential.

We have often asked the Masters for a final message. There can be none better than that of Hazur who said:

I can only say a few words; I have nothing more to give in advice – the books are full of the teachings – but I can only suggest that satsangis and everybody should try to love one another. The more you are nearer to one another, the more you will be nearer and dearer to me. The more we are nearer and dearer to one another, the more we are nearer and dearer to the Lord. So this we should always try to keep in our minds. ... So I can only ask you again, as Christ also taught you, 'Love one another.'

As quoted in *Heaven on Earth*



Broken Things

*Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

Leonard Cohen (Songwriter)

Particularly in the West, and in countries that have become influenced by Western culture, we are individualistic and self-conscious. And this is a great barrier on this path. More than perhaps anything else, our yoga is the grinding away of the ego barrier that keeps us separate from the Divine.

This path is many things, but the journey of Sant Mat is largely that of gradually losing our individuality, our 'I'-ness, our I'm-special-ness, our I'm-unique-ness, our notice-me-ness and finally our I-can-do-this-alone-ness.

Over the decades many a strutting bantam, attractive young stallion or intellectually arrogant whizz-kid have slowly been broken down by life, reality or perhaps the Guru himself until eventually we just give up – surrender – and experience our true helplessness. Where the ego is, love is not. When the ego is not, only Love is.

The Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi made an extraordinary observation:

God uses most for his glory those people and things which are most perfectly broken....God must have broken things.

Those who are broken in wealth and broken in heart, broken in their ambitions, broken in their beautiful ideals, broken in worldly reputation, broken in their affections, and broken sometimes in health, and those who are despised and seem utterly helpless and forlorn, the Holy Spirit is seizing upon and using for God's glory.

The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. I

Ultimately only the pull of the Lord is real. We have to get our 'self' – the ego – out of the way, so that the pull of the Holy Spirit can work its miracle of returning us to the lap of the Father. On this narrow road there is no room for two. Why do we cling to the agony of egoic self-encasement and run the risk of being 'cracked', when every day the Guru just says ... Let go?



His Greatest Gift

If one were to ask what's the hardest thing asked of us on this path, probably most would say: meditation. But perhaps there's one thing harder still: to regard the good things that come to us and the bad things as the same – and to be equally grateful for both.

Let's imagine that a letter comes in the post for you, to tell you that you've just inherited ten thousand dollars from an old aunt who died recently – a welcome inheritance because your car has to go for some major repairs. So you're happy and excited, and you run out into the garden to tell your husband or your wife or whoever, and you trip over a tree root and break your ankle. Do you think you could be equally as grateful for that as for receiving that letter about your inheritance?

How logical is it to be expected to regard good karma and bad karma as the same – and to be thankful for both? It's quite hard to see any logic in this – until we look beyond worldly logic.

Let's think in Sant Mat terms. We, as disciples of a true Master, have been singled out by the grace of the Supreme Lord and marked to make that journey back to him. Through the Master who initiated us, he has taken total control of our karma and is dishing it out to us in packages that we can handle – precisely because he loves us and is busy mapping out our return to him. We are totally and utterly subject to his will. He will steer us through this life exactly as he wishes – all for our own good.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV, Great Master tells us that complying with the Lord's will means acceptance of it, without murmur or complaint. And we should not distinguish between the pleasure or the pain that comes from the Lord, but regard them both as his gifts. In his words:

We may be rich or poor, healthy or diseased, happy or unhappy. All these states are boons from him, a result of our own karmas. Accept them cheerfully. Be happy in his will.... His will is his greatest gift. Nothing else excels it.

His will is his greatest gift. Nothing else excels it. In other words, whatever he wills for us is perfect, exactly what we need at that time. If we want to follow this path as best we can, what this amounts to is total

acceptance of his will, no matter what he sends. And also acceptance of what he *doesn't* send. So this means we should be happy with what we've got, resigning ourselves gladly to what he has willed for us, cheerfully accepting everything in our lives, good or not so good, as his gift.

And if we have this acceptance, or if we at least try to cultivate it, ultimately there will be tremendous benefit. After all, what are we in this world for? To pay off our karma. And the sooner we can get rid of all that we have to go through, the better. In one of his own satsangs Maharaj Charan Singh Ji told us:

If we can learn to be indifferent to pleasure and pain so that they do not take us away from our path, it would not only lessen the weight of our karmas, but they would also be paid off in much less time. If you can take what comes to you through him, then, whatever it is, it becomes divine in itself; shame becomes honour, bitterness becomes sweet, and gross darkness becomes clear light.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. I

Real acceptance can lessen the pain of absolutely everything – severe illness or a real tragedy that might befall us. Complete acceptance that whatever happens is good because it comes from the Lord himself also means that there's no room in our lives for worry. In the book *In the Footsteps of the Master* we find words of great comfort, taken from the writings of Great Master:

Do not feel perturbed; after all, adversities do come to human beings. We should face them with patience and steadfastness. All days are not the same. When good days do not last, why expect bad days to persist? Much of our bad times have passed away. Only a little is left; bear it with fortitude. Satguru is within you and is every moment looking after you. Have faith in his grace and compassion, and do not feel dejected.

When we experience adversities we can do nothing but submit to what has been destined for us. Moreover, in anything we do, success or failure is not in our hands. In fact, we may think: we're quite willing to try to live in the will of the Lord. But how do we know what the will of the Lord is? Here too Great Master has the answer:

We cannot see the Lord and are, therefore, not fit to understand his will. But the Guru is the manifested form of the Lord. It is necessary, therefore, to act in accordance with his will. ... Whoever follows the will of the Master is the recipient of the Lord's grace.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV

So if we don't know what the will of the Lord is, at least we can try to live according to our Master's will. But even that is not always easy. We live our lives according to what we think best, what we want to do, what we like or don't like, and according to how we have been conditioned to act from birth.

But if it were possible to live with absolutely no desires of our own – wanting only what he has given us and being completely happy with that – then we would have achieved everything. There'd be nothing more than could hold us back, ever. And here Great Master tells us something quite startling:

As far as possible, the Master avoids giving the soul rebirth. The soul can make good the deficiency at stages within. Rebirth in this world is only for those who are extremely tied down with the world. If the mind could throw away all the worldly desires this moment, the soul would go up like a shot, instantaneously.

The Dawn of Light

So, if we could throw away all worldly desires, at the time of death we could go right up. No more time to be spent in any of the intermediate stages. No wonder the saints tell us that surrender to the will of the Lord, to the will of our Master, is the greatest thing we could wish for.

When we are initiated by a true Master, we take him as our guide, our Father and our Lord. Right from the moment of our birth he has taken full control of our lives. In fact, from the time that we were marked for initiation, everything that happens to us can happen only according to his will, down to the smallest detail.

That means that even our struggles on the path are in accordance with his will. If we could be convinced of this, then perhaps we could come to see our meditation in a different way – that we're meditating not to get anything out of it, but simply because he has asked us to do this. If we had the attitude that we meditate because we love him and want to please him,

every meditation would be an act of faith. We are sitting in full trust and humble obedience, simply because he has asked us to, without making any demands or requests or even without hopes or expectations.

In *Die to Live* somebody asks Maharaj Ji what we should do when we realize we are helpless, that we are nothing and shouldn't expect anything from our meditation.

He answers:

Just give yourself to him. To love somebody means to give yourself without expecting anything in return. To give yourself, to submit yourself, to resign to him is all meditation. We are losing our own identity and our individuality and just merging into another Being. We have no expectation then. Expectation comes when there is 'I-ness,' that I exist and I want this. When I don't exist, what do I want? In love you don't exist. You just lose yourself, you just submit yourself, you just resign to his will. There's no question of expectation or frustration. The more we give, the more it grows, the more we lose ourselves, the more we become another Being.



Fear – Rational or Irrational

Fear is a part of life. It is something we are all familiar with in one form or another, as it ranges from mild anxiety to debilitating panic. It is an emotional reaction – often quite irrational – that we experience when faced with a situation in which we feel threatened. This is enhanced by our lack of knowledge and our perceived sense of having no control over the events unfolding in front of us.

Some people are able to react positively to fear because their thinking is rational, while others are so overwhelmed by it that they become totally irrational. Fear overrides logic and reason and is due to a lack of clear thinking. When we face a recurring perceived threat and fear grips us – and we give in to that fear – we entrench it firmly in our psyche. This happens because we cannot find the inner resolve and strength to face our fear and overcome it, even though we know that many fears are psychological and in most cases there is absolutely no danger.

In the face of fear, when we give our minds the power to run wild, we evoke an irrational response and we literally think ourselves scared. It may be that in a specific situation we could be so gripped by fears that we may find it is impossible to think realistically about what we are facing. This is the time to recall our simran. But in the face of adversity we generally forget the Master and we forget our simran – the two things that could help us face the fearful situation confronting us. In *The Dawn of Light* Guru Arjan is quoted as saying: “Repeating the Name frees us from fear.”

Fear of the unknown is said to be the root of all fears, and death is generally feared because it moves us into the unknown. Rabindranath Tagore gives a reassuring description of death:

*Death is not extinguishing the light;
it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.*

In a similar vein the Great Master says in *The Dawn of Light*:

Death is not to be feared. It is only the name given to the phenomenon of the soul leaving the body... There is life after death, although we may not be able to see it.

So why fear death? If the Master's presence is to be found within, and we are to meet him there when we discard the body, then why should we fear death? We follow a spiritual path that teaches us that we are soul – that eternal and indestructible essence of our being that is only temporarily encased in our physical body. It is only the body that dies. If we did not accept this teaching, the fear of death would be understandable.

But even though we believe that our life continues after death – still we fear death as we cling to life. This is because our most important, deep-rooted interest in this life is ourselves, and the fear of our own death and the end of our personality, is extremely difficult to cope with.

Patanjali explains this fear in greater detail when he says:

Attachment and aversion bind us to the impermanent and illusory objects of the world. This keeps us subject to the repeated trauma of death and rebirth. We are thrown time and again into lives of unknown and torturous conditions while we keep struggling to fulfil our unending desires. Since death follows us in every life, we develop a terrible dread of it.

As quoted in *The Spiritual Guide*, Vol. I

And in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Hazur Maharaj Ji says:

We are deceiving ourselves that we are enjoying ourselves. Constant fear of death is there. It can come from anyone at any time, at any place. ... It is a self-deception.

Death heralds change, and we fear change because it disrupts the status quo of our lives. Change can be a shattering experience when it moves us into the unknown – which we fear. But, our progression through aeons of time and countless lives has been nothing but change – and as a result of those changes much of our fear is still deeply rooted within us. However, it is also those changes that brought us to the feet of the Master and made us ready to accept the path. Change made us worthy of initiation.

A sixteenth-century English poet, Edmund Waller, beautifully describes the effects of change:

*The soul's dark cottage,
Battered and decayed
Lets in new light
Through chinks that time has made.*

But we don't remember. We only see ourselves as we are now, in this life, and the fear of change and its effects can be overwhelming. The Master's focus is on our souls. He sees no differences because in essence we are all the same – our souls are drops of the ocean of divinity. But we are not conscious of this. We relate to the fact that on the surface we are unique, and we are afraid of losing this uniqueness – our individuality, the part of ourselves that we can relate to. Meditation will reverse this. It corrodes the roots of attachment, and it slowly rubs away our uniqueness as it cuts the strings that still bind us to the personality.

But nothing happens by chance. The Masters assure us that the Radiant Form is constantly with us. If we could only be aware of this we would know that he guides us, and that change comes from him for our spiritual growth. The more we allow fear, anxiety and worry to dominate us, the less likely we are to realize the Master's inner guidance, as these emotions rob us of the mental tranquillity that is so vital for our meditation and for overcoming fear.

For, as Hazur Maharaj Ji says in *Die to Live*:

We must attend to our meditation, and slowly and slowly we are able to shed those fears, and we become fearless. Then we're not frightened of anything, whatever may happen in this creation. Meditation makes us fearless, and it is the only remedy for fear.

Yet we continue to live with self-imposed fears and we inject fear and limitations into our practice of the path.

The effects of meditation are crucial for dispelling our fears and helping us face so many situations daily. If our experience of the path has not yet led us to an appreciation of how vital the correct practice of meditation is, then we have to ask the question – can we afford to waste the time we do? Soami Ji tells us in *Sar Bachan Poetry*:

*Your breath is like a drumbeat,
constantly proclaiming the departure
of the caravan of life.*

How much time do we still have to make the Master's reassurance a reality?

For, as Hazur Maharaj Ji said, death “can come from anyone at any time, at any place.”

It seems that many satsangis have fears relating to meditation. However, in *Die to Live* he assures us that no matter what form our fear may take, we are always protected. He says:

Whenever a disciple sits in meditation, he's never alone. He's never alone, and he's never allowed to go astray within. There is always a guiding hand, a guiding force, to lead the disciple within. There is no danger of the disciple going astray, so one should have absolutely no fear. The one for whom we are meditating is always there with us to guide us, and we shouldn't ever worry or feel fear at all.

What an astounding reassurance. This is the benefit of having a living Master to guide us – both outside and inside. How remarkable would it be to be conscious of the Master's inner presence, rather than simply intellectualizing about it? We have his assurance that through meditation our awareness will grow and we will begin to experience the elevated consciousness that will bring us into the orbit of his inner radiance, dispelling our myriad fears once and for all.

When we grasp the hand he offers us, we are actually agreeing to the complete destruction of our personality. It is the process of cutting the strings that tie us to our background, our culture, our body, our personality – it is the annihilation of ourselves, and the fear of this is unbearable. In return, though, he offers us a reality that is so indescribable, so beyond belief that we cannot comprehend it: something to look forward to rather than fear.



We Are Not What We See

When we look at a person, what do we see? Since we are aware only of our physical sight we perceive only the physical aspects of others: their body, size, shape, gender, race and other features that are relevant to us. Once we find out more about a person such as where they live, what work they do, what language they speak and so on, we categorize them. We do this according to our assessment of them, and we generally develop an affinity or dislike towards them based on our prejudices.

However, do the physical attributes and our distinctions of a person really matter? While we would like to answer “no,” the truth is that because of our habit of differentiating, discerning and even judging, we automatically evaluate people according to both their physical attributes and our social categorizations.

But is there another way in which we can see or perceive others? Are there other dimensions to people that we are not aware of? And if there are, what are they and how can we become aware of them? To be able to know and perceive this possibility we first need to understand what people are really made up of.

At this gross level we are all familiar with the physical body as perceived through our physical senses. For most of us this physical body is our only reality. It shapes our entire existence, and therefore most of our focus and attention revolves around it.

Second, we also know that we have a mind, which is not tangible and therefore cannot be perceived with any of our senses. Our perception of the mind is through its ability to think. Although we are familiar with the thoughts generated by our own mind, we know very little else about the mind itself and the much greater function it performs.

The mind is subtle and very manipulative. It can be highly beneficial or extremely destructive – depending on the thoughts it generates and what it persuades the body to act upon. When the mind is pure and noble in its thoughts it can be considered a friend, and is often called the higher mind. However, when the same mind is impure in its thoughts it is considered an enemy, and we refer to it as the lower mind. The challenge we all have

is to tame or control the mind – to ensure that it manifests goodness in its habits and avoids debasing thoughts.

The third and most critical element of human beings is the soul. If we think that the mind is subtle, then the soul is finer, purer, far more subtle, and even more difficult to perceive. Its subtlety is such that even though the soul enlivens or animates the mind and body, many people deny its existence. And of those who do acknowledge the soul, very few have any clue as to what it is, where it can be found and how it can be experienced.

Let's imagine for a moment that we each had that faculty to see, experience and perceive beyond the physical realm. Then, when we looked at another person, wouldn't we be able to perceive their mind and their thoughts and know everything about them – their past, present and future? If this faculty of perception went beyond the astral and causal realms, would we be able to then perceive the soul? Yes, we would know what the soul is, how it functions and what its relationship to the mind and body is.

Wouldn't it be amazing to be able to transcend the physical world with its billions of galaxies, and travel through the subtle realms of the astral and causal worlds? Imagine the joy of going beyond these worlds to the spiritual world of pure light, enchanting sound, eternal bliss and permanent peace and happiness.

But how do we even know that all this exists on those ethereal levels? Is it fiction, a dream or a fantasy? Only those who have transcended the physical, astral and causal realms, who have achieved an inner state of pure bliss and peace, know of its reality. These are the spiritual Masters and they can teach us how it can be reached.

But why should we believe them? Well, they have all spoken the same truth irrespective of the time they existed, the language they spoke, the religion they were born into, their caste, race or gender. Unfortunately the reality is that when these Masters are alive, few people accept the truths they come to share with us. The majority seek to persecute them for fear of their own beliefs and convictions being challenged.

Very few people are willing to explore beyond the comfort of their own beliefs and seek the real truth. At a superficial or perhaps even intellectual level, we all profess to want to know the truth, but how many of us are

prepared to accept it – especially if it challenges our own beliefs and traditions? So the question for us is: Can we handle the truth? Perhaps it's not as easy as we may think. When the truth in any way contradicts us – our beliefs, our way of life, our identity – we get upset and offended, and immediately react to preserve our self-image and our ego.

How can we know that these Masters have achieved the heights of spirituality they speak of and that it isn't a figment of their imagination? There are two ways to corroborate these spiritual truths. The first is at an intellectual level, where we can compare the teachings and experiences of spiritual Masters from different eras. They can be thousands of years apart; from different parts of the world where they couldn't possibly share their experiences with each other; and from religious backgrounds that are so different that they couldn't possibly produce the same experiences.

And yet the teachings and experiences of all true Masters are the same, namely that we should seek God within us. If we seek God in external places and worship him through external observances, rites and rituals, conflict and discord are often the result.

The second and best method of corroborating these spiritual truths is to experience and verify them for ourselves. Living Masters practise and teach what their Masters taught them, therefore the same unchanged message and technique is taught by all living Masters. The message has consistently been *love for God*. As simple as this may sound it is perhaps the most difficult to practise, because we first need to understand what love is.

The love we are familiar with is a worldly love. It entails emotions or feelings of fondness for someone, and often this form of worldly love is conditional – it must be reciprocal and of some benefit to us. Most relationships in the world are based on this form of love. But real love is unconditional. In fact, in perfect love the lover doesn't exist, only the beloved exists. Maharaj Charan Singh beautifully expresses this phenomenon in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I: "Love means that the other one exists – you don't exist at all."

When we cease to exist and only the Lord exists, we experience this love, which is God. As Saint Dadu Dayal is quoted in *Spiritual Perspectives*,

Vol. II: “Love is the Lord’s essence; love is his nature; love is his form, love is his colour.”

This love requires that we eliminate the “I,” the ego, the individuality that causes our separateness from God. And we can experience this, but only if we are prepared to do exactly as the Masters did. They followed their Masters’ instructions without question, without hesitation, and without compromise. And they live a lifestyle of love, where every thought, word and deed is based on their pure love for the Lord, and respect for the entire creation, with total obedience and submission.

In one of his last satsangs the Great Master said, “Everybody desires to become Christ, everybody wants to realize Truth, to become a prophet, but very few, if any, are ready to pay the price.”

Could the same be said of us? Are we prepared to pay the price?



The Roles People Play

If you are awake, aware enough, to be able to observe how you interact with other people, you may detect subtle changes in your speech, attitude and behaviour depending on the person you are interacting with. At first, it may be easier to observe this in others; then you may also detect it in yourself. The way in which you speak to the chairman of your company may be different in subtle ways from the way you speak to the janitor. How you speak to a child may be different from the way you speak to an adult. Why is that? You are playing roles. You are not yourself, neither with the chairman nor with the janitor or the child

When you walk to the store to buy something, when you go to a restaurant, the bank, the post office, you may find yourself slipping into pre-established social roles. You become a customer and speak and act as such. And you may be treated by the salesperson or waiter, who is also playing a role, as a customer. A range of conditioned patterns of behaviour come into effect between two human beings that determine the nature of the interaction. Instead of human beings, conceptual mental images are interacting with each other. The more identified people are with their respective roles, the more inauthentic the roles become. ...

So *you* are not reacting with that person at all, but who you think you are is relating to who you think the other person is and vice versa. The conceptual image your mind has made of yourself is relating to its own creation, which is the conceptual image of the other person. The other person's mind has probably done the same, so every egoic interactions between two people is in reality the interaction between four conceptual mind-made identities that are ultimately fictions. ... There *is* no true relationship.

Eckhart Tolle, *The New Earth*



The Upside-Down Language of Kabir

The great saint Kabir lived in the fifteenth century. And though not a Sikh himself, his verses constitute the largest non-Sikh contribution in the *Adi Granth*. His poems are still sung and recited today throughout North India – by learned pundits, illiterate villagers and classical musicians – as they have been for the past five hundred years.

But he was no gentle mystic. Kabir was an uncompromising iconoclast. Famous for his outspoken and powerful voice, he often set out to oppose the illusions of those who were caught up in rigid orthodoxies and pretentious religious beliefs.

He taught that to gain true spiritual knowledge, one had to find a Guru who could initiate his disciples into the mysteries of the divine Word or Shabd, which is one with the supreme Lord himself – the only way in which one could become one with him.

Like other Bhakti and Sufi poets – among them Tulsi Sahib and Soami Ji – Kabir often used symbolism and the ‘upside-down language’ or *ulatbansi*. Apparently the reason for this was to make the teachings incomprehensible to the uninitiated listener or reader. Without the practical knowledge of yoga teachings, the symbolism and ‘upside-down language’ seem impenetrable, absurd, paradoxical and even crazy.

Professor Vinod Verma, from the University of Delhi, wrote an article that was published in 2017, in *The International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*. Entitled “Pilgrimage Upside-Down: Kabir Ulatbansi Pilgrim,” this article explains the tradition of *ulatbansi*. It belongs to the category of absurd poetry that conveys meaning by nonsense verse questioning conventional structures of devotion, pilgrims and pilgrimages.

Let us take a look at a Kabir poem from the *Adi Granth*:

*Hermit, that yogi is my guru
who can untie this song.
A tree stands without root,
without flowers bears fruit,
praises sung without tongue,
the true teacher reveals.*

*Seek the bird's, the fish's path.
Kabir says, both are hard.
The being beyond boundaries
and beyond beyond.*

In these verses Kabir not only questions conventional devotion, but more importantly, he emphasizes the need for a yogi, a Guru who has true understanding of spiritual matters, who has gone beyond the boundaries of this physical world and the 'beyond beyond,' and who can initiate seekers into the mystery of the Word. And another *bani* tells of animals busying themselves with human activities, like playing various instruments, dressing up, dancing, and being occupied with more mundane, everyday activities like preparing meals:

*The elephant is the rebeck-player, the bull plays the timbrel,
the crow beats the cymbals.*

*And, dressed up in skirt, danceth the donkey, and
the he-buffalo stageth the play.*

*My Lord, the King, hath roasted the balls of Frost, but
only the Wise one can Taste them, yea.*

*The lion sitting in the den prepares the betel-leaves,
with the lizard bringing in the nuts,
And the mice sing the wedding songs, the tortoise blowing the
conch.*

*The son of the sterile woman is out to marry, and
is welcomed under the tents decked with gold.*

*Sayeth Kabir: "Hear ye, O Saints, the ant hath eaten up a
mountain,*

*And the tortoise says (besides water) he needs the coals too:
hear ye men, I have uttered the Word Full of mystery."*

Most of us would not be able to make sense of these absurdities. But accompanying this *bani*, there is this note: "All this verse means is that the impossible becomes possible if we take to the Lord."

According to Dr Linda Hess, a scholar, writer and lover of Kabir: "Upside-down language should make you feel like a fool: that is part of its

function.” This is Kabir’s way of drawing our attention to how absurd we are in our never-ending worldly activities day in and day out. By making animals impersonate humans and do human activities, Kabir makes all our actions seem comical and meaningless.

However, analyzing this language by trying to decode its symbolic meaning will not bring us closer to Kabir’s truth. We know things of this world only from the worldly perspective. Kabir, on the other hand, sees this world from the perspective of a God-realized soul. What seems upside-down to us, with our limited faculties, makes perfect sense to Kabir. Where he stands, in communion with the Lord, the impossible becomes possible.

When reading these verses we laugh like a child lost in a world of make-believe cartoon characters. But in that childlike state of mind we have the opportunity to break free from our habitual thought patterns and reflect on our main objective in life and how easily we get distracted and put our spiritual practice on the backburner.

From Kabir’s point of view all players in this world are lunatics, forgetting what matters most. Kabir on the other hand is sane, because his reality is true and permanent. The language makes us stop and think. Baba Ji also keeps telling us that we shouldn’t take life so seriously – it is only meditation that deserves our earnest attention.

Mystics come among us to throw light on our spiritual heritage and the purpose of life. Every single word uttered by a mystic is infused with meaning and wisdom. They do not say things lightly. With this in mind, even the confusing, unintelligible, ‘upside-down language’ spoken by a true Master contains an important and profound message.

Baba Ji is clearly in tune with Kabir. Whenever he contradicts himself, giving different answers to the same question, and someone brings this to his attention, he laughs it off by saying that the Master is here to confuse you – perhaps one day you will shrug your shoulders, give up the questions and surrender to the Lord. Our intellect is ill-equipped to deal with matters of the soul, so Masters encourage us to do our spiritual practice in order to convert all Sant Mat concepts to personal inner experiences.

Whenever we complain to our own Master about our lack of time for meditation, he simply reminds us that we make time for everything else. We work overtime to purchase all the things we want. We make time for leisure, for watching TV, for socializing and playing sports. The problem doesn't lie in the shortage of time but in our misplaced priorities. In Kabir's verses he holds up a mirror to all of us with his vivid, visual portrayal of how we waste our precious time and our gift of human birth on trivial pursuits. Kabir's inner wisdom is the right way up – it is humanity that has chosen an upside-down life.

The “upside” of human life is devotion to the Lord in order to escape the “upside-down” life of endless desires and attachments. Our Master is eager to show us how to loosen our attachments one by one, but we also need to make an effort in meditation to stir up our soul's desire for liberation. The aim of our meditation is to catch hold of the inner sound of our merciful Lord calling us home.

In answer to a question on how we can receive the Lord's love, Baba Ji simply said: “We cannot receive it, we must graduate to it.” Our graduation to divine love takes place within us. No invitations are handed out to friends and family. This graduation is an intimate affair of our soul merging with the Lord in divine communion.



The Gift of Initiation

Speaking on the Master's protection at the time of death, Tukaram wrote:

*The lord of death says to his messengers,
Wherever people are repeating the Name,
there you have no power. ...
God's discus spins round them in protection.
The Lord stands guard by their door.*

Many Voices, One Song

One cannot help wondering whether we always remember and fully appreciate exactly how great a blessing has been given to us. We all give and receive many gifts during our lifetime. Some can be small and insignificant and yet treasured. Others can be of great material value, such as rare jewellery or priceless artworks. And then there are the gifts such as true friendship and love, of no material value, but rare and priceless.

However, nothing on this material plane can compare to the gift we have been given by the Master – the greatest gift possible – initiation into this inner spiritual path. Perhaps from time to time we should ask ourselves whether we are treasuring this gift as we should. It should be the most important aspect of our lives. We were reincarnated as human beings, which in itself is a rare privilege. Great Master said to a disciple: “My dear daughter, I will repeatedly ask you to value this lifetime of yours.”

We conscientiously perform our earthly duties, earning our own living and fulfilling obligations to family and friends. We should be careful not to be deceived by the mind into thinking that we are on this earth to achieve material fame and fortune and impress the world. Once we have received initiation, our objective in life should be to follow the Master's instructions without compromise. Unless and until this objective outweighs all else in our mind and we afford it top priority in our planning and actions, we cannot expect to be successful.

It is no easy task to tame the mind and get it under control. In fact it is undoubtedly the most difficult venture we will ever undertake. If our attention and effort are not applied to our task, our goal will not be

achieved. It is futile to have one foot on the spiritual path and the rest of our being still completely absorbed in worldly pleasures and activities.

We cannot and do not have to shun the world and its innocent pleasures. But we need be involved in the world only as much as is needed to do our duty. The greater part of our time and effort should be in striving to make progress on our spiritual path. We should be like the bee that drinks honey while sitting on the edge of the jar and then flies away with its wings dry.

We know what needs to be done, and we should in no way compromise the four principles to which we committed ourselves at initiation. We usually have a little voice inside that alerts us to what is right and what is wrong, and we need to pay attention to it. It warns us when the mind tries to make us think something is acceptable when actually it is not. We know how important these principles are, and especially how vital our meditation is. Meditation can be very difficult, especially when we are busy with the things of this world. This is the area where the mind can be the most convincing. It never tires of providing excuses and seemingly valid reasons to keep us from doing our meditation. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

As long as the mind is the slave of the senses, it is our greatest enemy. When we are able, by meditation, to withdraw the mind from the senses and attach it to Nam or Shabd or the audible life stream inside, the mind starts taking the soul along with it back to Trikuti, the origin or home of the mind, and in doing so, it becomes our best friend.

Initially we must force the mind to sit in meditation. When we struggle and feel we are failing and not always managing the full time, we need to remember what the Masters tell us: that every minute of meditation is to our credit. We must keep on trying. If we want success on the spiritual path, then we must build our life around the four principles; and not try to fit them into our lifestyle. Let's not bluff ourselves that half-hearted attempts at walking this path will get the results that it promises.

We live in a results-oriented world. Even from a very young age, when we had to strive to learn to crawl and then to walk, we discovered that if we made certain efforts, certain results would follow. Now more than ever, as we embark on the most important job that we have ever tackled,

definite qualities and behaviour patterns are required for success. We need determination, patience, perseverance, sincerity, and buckets full of effort and commitment to succeed on this path.

But it often feels as though the results are so slow in coming that they are non-existent. This is where perseverance in simran becomes so important. The Masters continually emphasize simran. It is a gift with the power of the Masters behind it. The Great Master makes this clear when he says in *The Dawn of Light*:

Only the holy names imparted by the Master are to be repeated. These names are energy charged and help the transference of spiritual energy to the disciple, with the result that rapid progress follows. They also save the devotee from many difficulties and pitfalls. Simran of such holy names is beneficial both here and beyond.

When we read the words ‘rapid progress,’ many of us may heave a sigh. It sometimes seems that it is taking so very long to even begin to feel that we are progressing on this path, or that simran is helping at all. But initially simran is the crux of the spiritual path. It is important to the Master and it should be important to us.

In *Many Voices, One Song* various mystics describe the importance of simran and how precious it should be to us. Sena Nhavi reminds us of the importance of constant simran, saying:

*Wherever you may find yourself,
do simran – no other practice exists.*

In another poem Tukaram tells us exactly how simran should be done:

*My one daily practice is your Name –
it’s my thought, my conduct, my commitment.
I’ve no wealth nor possession worth mention,
says Tuka, other than that of your Name.*

If that is what simran is to us we have nothing to worry about! If not, we should try harder. If we are determined to succeed we will persevere with our efforts, for nothing of any value can ever be achieved without determination and perseverance.

Our minds are deeply rooted in this material creation – roots that have burrowed and grown through countless lifetimes – and we cannot expect to uproot the mind without a determined struggle and continuous effort. We become disheartened when we are unable to persuade the mind to turn in a completely different direction, but it can be done. The Masters assure us over and over that we would not have been initiated if we did not have the potential to tame and control the mind. We have to persevere.

We must be sincere in our efforts and not just give lip-service to the Master and the path. It is no use giving the impression of being a dutiful and obedient disciple if it is not honestly true. The more sincere we are in our efforts, the more we will experience the benefits of being on this path.

This life is very short. We need to strive with genuine longing to accumulate the treasure that we can take with us when this human existence comes to an end. We should be thankful to the Master for the gift of initiation and for showering his love and mercy on us.



Nothing Can Prevent You

The first essential thing, therefore, is to enter this laboratory within ourselves, by bringing our scattered attention inside of the eye focus. This is a slow process. But we are not justified in saying that we cannot do it, or that it is impossible, or that it is useless. ... It is our job and we must do it; and we must do it now, in this very lifetime.

Spiritual Gems

This message from Great Master is like a blueprint for what we have to do on this path. The first important thing he tells us is that to successfully tackle the task, we must enter our own 'laboratory' – which is within us. Now this may not be the most encouraging image for some of us unscientific types. But actually, if one thinks back to those early days in the science lab at school, it was all quite a lot of fun. Powders, test-tubes, bubbling concoctions and the odd explosion or two.

And we can remember being given an exact formula to follow, having a teacher's perfect example in front of us, and still never quite being able to deliver the goods. But the truly remarkable thing was that the teacher didn't seem to mind the repeated failures and only very limited successes that most of us could produce. In fact, the teacher seemed to expect disasters, and often said that they were a necessary and enriching part of the experiment. And, provided we pitched up to class and participated with enthusiasm and good will, we all passed – despite our failures.

How pertinent for Great Master to use this analogy as we attempt to walk the path of Sant Mat. The obvious inference is that this, too, is going to be like the laboratory, where there is a formula, but the route to the end product is bound to be littered with experiments – most of which will seem like complete failures – but all of which will be necessary to the process.

Then Great Master goes on to explain the nature of the experiment and what we should be aiming for. Within our own laboratory – our bodies – we are to attempt to gather our scattered attention and bring it to the eye centre, the point between and behind the two physical eyes. If we can bring our attention to this point and keep it there, in a concentrated focused beam, we can go through that centre, as through a gate or portal, and enter into the finer, spiritual regions.

He describes this in more detail, saying that once the soul has gone inward, in that centre between the eyes, a star will become visible, and then the sun and the moon, and then our Master, in his Radiant Form, will be seen in the third eye. It is at the eye centre that we will begin to get a glimpse of his real beauty and power. It is this form of the Master which is always with the disciple, always watching and guiding, and which will take the soul upwards. This is where the true spiritual journey of the soul starts and is where the Master anxiously awaits us.

Then also the sound of the Shabd, God's creative and sustaining power, will be heard and will begin to attract and pull the soul upward. Shabd has the qualities of sound and light that the soul can recognize and follow. So, the big question is how to get there. Great Master said it must be done by gathering our attention at the eye centre, and this is done through meditation.

Many of us have had hobbies or professions that required intense, prolonged periods of concentration and practice, which we have given gladly – driven by love for the activity and a desire to improve. And mostly those hours have yielded improvements, successes and even rewards. This should encourage us to have the confidence to follow the path under the guidance of the Master.

Consciously or subconsciously we bring this attitude of reward and success with us when we receive initiation, and we apply it when we approach our meditation. How can we not? It is natural that we should approach meditation from this perspective because we have only worldly experience to draw on. And the Masters know this and understand where we are coming from.

In *Spiritual Gems* we get these inspirational and reassuring words from the Great Master:

Let nothing discourage you. This is no light proposition, but your getting Nam means more than if you had inherited a million dollars, or many millions. You are one of the lucky sons of Sat Purush, and he has chosen you to get Nam and go with the Master to Sach Khand. You must reach there. Nothing can prevent you.

We all want to do our best in our meditation. We want to please our Master, be obedient, and hopefully reach the eye centre. But, some of us may feel that we have achieved very little, particularly when we do the human thing and compare meditation with our worldly endeavours. We didn't become saints when we were initiated – we brought our mind's patterns and our egos with us. But the journey through the eye centre is not a worldly human activity. This is a spiritual endeavour for which we have no comparison.

We are told that this all takes place in our own inner laboratory. So where are the results, where are the tangible end products? We cannot be blamed for thinking like this. We mustn't think these thoughts are ridiculous, unique or unnatural. Remember, the science teacher expected and accepted all the mangled experiments. So does the Master, who is the embodiment of love. He wants what the science teacher wanted – that we should pitch up and participate with energy and enthusiasm – even though we know by now that it is really Master pulling our strings who gets us there. But still, we do seem to do the rolling out of bed ourselves!

And this in itself is no small thing. Master asks this of us and we do it, out of love, gratitude, obedience – the reason doesn't actually matter. Pitching up is what matters. The Master knows we are there and loves us for replying to his pull. Is this not success and reward on a daily basis? Does this not represent progress? No matter how we personally feel, we still pitch up. This is what counts because it is enough to stave off negativity and feeling a failure.

Somewhere along the line, during our many years of attempted meditation, the penny will drop. This is when we finally realize that our efforts don't necessarily produce the results we may be seeking. This is because we are either totally and utterly useless and untalented in this sphere, or because results come only from Master's grace and loving discretion, or both! We need to throw ourselves at Master's feet and rely on his mercy and love to move us forward. We must put in the effort, but actually even this is in our Master's hands.

From our limited, human, worldly perspective, we think: no sound, no light – equals no progress, no results. We are probably very wrong in this

assumption. Great Master asked his disciples to bring him their failures. Why? Because he could do something with even them. An apparently failed effort is still an effort and is a hundred times better than no effort.

Great Master said in *Spiritual Gems*: “There are no failures in Sant Mat.” We must reach there in the long term. Every time we fall he lifts us back up, dusts us off and gives us the courage and desire to try again. These are his love gifts, all day, every day, being showered upon us – the rewards for our effort, his amazing grace. We can reach out for his grace with open hands and upturned faces, through our simran and our meditation.

Nothing must daunt us on this journey as the Master awaits us eagerly and anxiously at the eye centre. It is a glorious path, with glorious outcomes, even on a daily basis, if we choose to see things through a wider lens. The Master has given us a direct link to him through our simran. Let’s keep the channel open and flowing as he hears and answers in his own unique masterly way. Let’s trust in his love and his promises and simply do our best, leaving the rest to him.



In a Nutshell

Our mind on this material plane is forever asking questions. On the one hand this is its natural inclination, and on the other hand, it has been encouraged to do so by our parents and teachers. “Try to figure out how things work,” they told us as they taught us that two and two makes four and c-a-t spells cat. And so our mental development continued to grow through whatever schooling and training we had. From that simple beginning more complicated and difficult things were explained to us as our understanding grew.

So when we are presented with something that sounds very much like a fairy tale, the mind wants it explained. However, when we first came into contact with the Master’s teachings the soul instantly recognized it as the truth and could not resist the pull. We read the books, we listened to discourses and we were elated because at last we were being given answers to questions that had been troubling us.

We heard about the eye focus, the higher regions and the wonders waiting for us within. We learned that we could experience all this at no financial cost. In this life where nothing is free, that really sounded almost too good to be true. And because we had the astounding good fortune, grace and mercy to have been chosen for discipleship, the Master drew us to him and we were initiated. Joy of joys! Miracle of miracles!

But all too soon the mind decided that it was not going to accept this at face value. The mind is arrogant enough to query the words of a saint, a true Master. Instead of happily listening to what the Master tells it, it wants to know more. With its finite intellect it wants to understand something from the infinite – the highest plane of consciousness, far above the material, astral and even causal planes. Suddenly it wants the fairy tale explained. How does it all work, it starts to wonder. Why did it all happen, it asks over and over.

The result is that we start paying attention to these questions because, at this stage, the mind still has a strong hold over us. But no blame can be attached to the mind, which is merely doing what is in its nature to do, because the mind is used to this creation, and will not easily agree to leave it. So when a soul is initiated an alarm bell rings in the mind, and it does everything in its power to create confusion and doubt, as it desperately tries to waylay the soul.

The question we must ask ourselves is: are we going to listen to the mind and continue analyzing, or are we going to listen to our Master? In *Divine Light* Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us that if we spend all our life in hair-splitting and analyzing we will get nowhere. He says that our time for research and theorizing is past. Now is the time for practice and meditation.

But the mind agitates. It wants to know how far we have progressed and why we are here – question after question. And again the Masters explain that by trying to analyze things that are beyond our human understanding, we are attaching ourselves to those thoughts, and creating grooves in the mind that we could well do without.

We should leave all that to the Master who knows every answer and will reveal it to us as we progress on the path. In the meantime, let us try to simplify not only our lives but our thoughts as well. The whole of the path and everything we have to do is put in a nutshell in this quotation from Maharaj Charan Singh:

Just change your way of life according to the teachings and attend to meditation. That is all that is required. From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come.

Die to Live

Why do we continue questioning and analyzing? What could be simpler and easier to understand than these words from the Master? “Everything will come,” he tells us, because all the answers we want will come through meditation. When a Master says *everything* he means *everything*. This is not an ordinary human being speaking.

In the *Call of the Great Master*, Hazur Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

Outwardly, the Guru looks like an ordinary man, but inside, his position and power are beyond estimate.

And Guru Arjan said:

*The Lord and his servant are one and the same,
Make no distinction because of human form.*

As quoted in *Die to Live*

Are we really going to allow our mind to question so great a Being? Or are we going to try to overcome this natural tendency?



Our One True Friend

After countless lifetimes we have finally become weary of this fickle world of illusion. The world, with all its transitory attractions, has lost its allure. In our ceaseless quest for happiness, we have become increasingly ensnared by the chains of our attachments and desires, and have found only disappointment again and again – until, wounded and disillusioned, we throw up our hands in despair and cry out for help.

It is then that the Master, taking pity on us, comes to show us the way out. The compassionate Master takes us by the hand and shows us the way to our true home in the highest spiritual regions, by revealing to us the reality that lies within.

A true living Master is all love. He does not judge us, regardless of our shortcomings, but sees only our potential. So, to enable us to experience the bliss of the treasure that lies within, he bestows on us the rare and precious gift of initiation. He attaches us to the audible life stream that is permanently resounding within us, and throughout all of creation. It is then that we begin to take the first shaky steps on the spiritual path under his loving guidance.

From this point on the Master becomes our only true friend. He teaches us to become more loving and caring; he teaches us to be better at fulfilling our daily duties; but most important, he teaches us to focus on finding his Radiant Form within. He stays with us constantly, guiding and supporting us.

In *Spiritual Gems* Great Master says: “Fly upwards upon the wings of faith and love so that you may talk to him every day and be with him always.” Perhaps we should take a closer look at what Great Master is saying here. What does faith really mean to us and what does it entail? During a question and answer session at Dera, Baba Ji said that as soon as the disciple develops faith in the Master, the relationship is formed.

As most of us have undoubtedly experienced, having this sort of faith is not always easy, particularly when our lives seem beset with difficulties and we experience fearful and negative thoughts. Often when our problems seem to be insurmountable, we lose sight of the fact that Master is always with us and that we are constantly blessed by his grace.

To have faith in our Master means that we have to let go and trust him. Then we will begin to understand that the circumstances in which we find ourselves are exactly what we need at this particular time, so that we can change and grow, not only as human beings but also spiritually. Our Master has taken charge of our destinies and we need not worry about anything, for in the end the results are all in his hands. It is through his grace that we are where we are.

Only through meditation do we learn to withdraw the mind to the eye centre and offer it something better than the world, by attaching it to the Shabd within. When we have reached this point, we will see that we are only puppets in the Master's hands, and we will finally understand that he is in charge.

Our Master constantly encourages us to be his friend. Then, since he is our best friend, we should be in the habit of talking to him every day – throughout the day. We can begin our day by thanking him for his grace and all the blessings that he showers upon us. We do this when we sit in meditation and quietly repeat each round of simran.

But when we have completed our meditation, do we get up and prepare for the day ahead and forget about him completely? Do we forget to talk with him – that is, do our simran – as we go through our daily duties, as we go to work or go shopping, or spend time with family and friends? Or do we remember him and talk to him?

We all know and accept that after initiation our Master is with us constantly. This raises the question: *are we with him?* By talking to our Master every day, through our simran, we begin to create a closer relationship with him. By consciously *being with him*, a subtle shift in awareness takes place, as we are actually stepping back and loosening our hold over our lives. We begin to see subtle changes in our lives as we observe how he constantly assists us and that, naturally, must also positively influence our daily lives.

We begin to learn, albeit very slowly, that he knows what is best for us, regardless of whether it causes us pain or pleasure. We begin to develop a sense of letting go and handing our lives over to him. Most importantly, we gradually start trusting him to take care of everything.

When we learn to be with him, we will quickly find that our meditation becomes a time to look forward to, as we consciously spend this precious time in the company of our true friend – our beloved Master. As we develop this awareness, we will find it easier to stop the mind from wandering out, so that we can focus more fully on doing our simran and our bhajan.

When we cultivate the habit of being with him we find that we are calmer, and that many of our difficulties are easily resolved, and the constant inclination to worry dissipates. But often, with great regret, we also begin to realize how often we have left him behind after completing our meditation, as we hurry out into the world to fulfil our numerous worldly obligations.

So it stands to reason that regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in, when we reach out and take his hand, and spend our day focused on keeping the loving company of our Master, he will most graciously reciprocate, and we will receive all that he has to give. Through talking with him all day long – repeating the names – and by learning to be with him at all times, we improve the quality of our most important spiritual duty – our meditation – and slowly but surely, move ever closer to meeting our beloved Master within.



BOOK REVIEW

The Essence of Jainism

BY K.N. UPADHYAYA

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In this book the author presents “the essential aspects of Jainism from a practical spiritual perspective.” His focus is not on Jainism as a religion in the cultural, social, or historical sense, but on the essential spiritual teachings found in its ancient scriptures, the “core concepts of the soul.” The roots of Jainism reach far back into prehistory, beginning with a series of twenty-four enlightened teachers, the first of whom was Rishabhadeva or Ādi Nāth, who was referenced in the Rig Veda, and the last of whom was Mahāvīra (599-527 BCE), a contemporary of the Buddha. These were teachers who “obtained liberation,” having “overcome all evils, including attachment, aversion, anger, pride, greed, and delusion,” and “attained ultimate peace.”

The book is organized thematically, taking up such topics as “The Soul, Bondage, and Liberation,” “Non-Violence,” “Human Life,” “The Guru,” and “Divine Sound.” The author seeks to elicit from the ancient sacred texts of Jainism their essential teachings on each of these topics. For example, discussing the soul’s reaching the state of oneness with God, he quotes Shubhachandrāchārya, who is believed to have lived in the 11th century BCE:

The state in which the soul is absorbed in God without any differentiation is the state of equanimity.... When the soul is absorbed in the meditation of God, it is said to be in the state of oneness... Then the soul is in its pure state and, its nature being the same as that of God, it is itself God. In this way, by meditating on God the soul becomes God.

According to Jainism, it is only by recognizing oneself that one can be transformed into God. The renowned contemporary Jain thinker Hukumachand Bhārill said:

Not to recognize one’s self is the biggest mistake, and to understand one’s true nature is to rectify one’s mistake. God is not different from us. By striving in the

right direction, every soul can become God. Know yourself, recognize yourself, and be absorbed in yourself; you will become God.

It is only the illusion of 'I-ness' that causes the soul's bondage and all human misery. As the sacred text Anubhava Prakāsha explains:

By having the conceit of 'I-ness' and 'mine-ness' toward that which is different from yourself and which is not your own, you have become miserable. There is no one else causing you pain. It is your own attitude that has created the bondage of the world for you; it is your own mistaken notion that has caused the [birthless] soul to assume birth.

The practice of meditation is the only way to eliminate this 'conceit of I-ness,' as the great Jain rishi Rishibhāsita says:

Just as the head of the body and the root of the whole tree are of the highest importance, in the same way meditation is of supreme importance in the entire spiritual discipline of holy people, because without meditation, one cannot get rid of the conceit of I-ness and mine-ness; without getting rid of the conceit of I-ness and mine-ness, one cannot be free from the body, world, passions, and karmas.

The Jñānārṇava explains that the way to achieve this stillness is through listening intently to the unstruck Sound:

In order to make the mind absolutely motionless, after achieving concentration, one should contemplate successively upon increasingly subtler Sound, as if contemplating on the tip of a hair. One should contemplate from subtle to even more subtle sound and finally upon the most subtle unstruck Sound.

This divine Sound is praised in many of the Jain sacred texts. For example, in Amritanāḍopaniṣad it says:

This Melody (nāda), called praṇava, is ... that divine Sound which can never be destroyed, i.e., it remains ever-present in the form of unmanifested Melody. Therefore, [in order to still the mind] one should devote oneself to the practice of listening to praṇava with restraint and should keep the mind ever absorbed in the Melody.

The Mahāpurāṇa of Jainism speaks of “A great divine Sound endowed with exceeding excellence, resembling the thundering of clouds ... dissolving the darkness of delusion from the minds of aspirants of liberation and ... splendorous like the radiance of the sun.”

Liberation through meditation is, as the Jñānārṇava points out, dependent on purifying the mind:

A person who wishes to be truly liberated without purifying his mind is only drinking water from the river of a mirage. How can there be water in a mirage? Likewise, how can there be liberation without purity of the mind?

To purify the mind, non-violence is vitally important. The principle of non-violence applies to thoughts and words, as well as to deeds. It applies to non-violence toward all creatures but also towards oneself. The Jñānārṇava teaches:

There is a world-famous saying that ‘non-violence is the greatest dharma (religious principle), and violence is condemned everywhere.’ Non-violence ... offers happiness, welfare, and prosperity, which cannot be obtained through penance, the study of scriptures, and the observance of moral injunctions and prohibitions, because among all components of religion, non-violence alone is the foremost.

Therefore, expressing one of the core values of Jainism, the Jñānārṇava insists that it is essential to adopt an attitude of compassion and friendliness toward all, along with a desire to protect them:

O soul! Put aside your carelessness; and to have the purity of your thoughts, look upon the multitude of living beings with a brotherly attitude [considering them to be your brother, well-wisher, and friend]. In other words, have no animosity against any being; have a friendly attitude toward all, and be prepared to protect all with your thoughts, words and deed.



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