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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Letter from the Great Master

I am very much pleased to learn that you have been working hard at your spiritual meditation and got benefit out of it. If you continue to persevere in your labour, you will be successful one day. When a disciple works at his concentration, he must get internal peace and joy. He becomes pure-minded, and his words will correspond to his deeds; and the rays emanating from his pure mind will affect the minds of his associates and his companions. This is the benefit which is derived by the people around and in contact with a disciple.

Regarding your question as to how you can be of service to the Master, the latter does not accept any worldly presents, all of which are perishable. The best service that a disciple can render to the Master is to follow his instructions, to concentrate and to cross the stars, the sun, and the moon, and contact him on the astral plane within.

You are quite right in not troubling your head with far-off matters. Your only concern should be to control your mind and to go in.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



The Floating Twig

Creation in unison screams,
“There is no one but the One.”
The worldly clever is busy trying to
determine where he can cash in.
The ocean’s bosom heaves in Love,
the floating twig takes the waves personally.

Abu-Saeed Abil-Kheir, *Nobody Son of Nobody*
as rendered by Vraje Abramian

Maharaj Charan Singh often tried to tell us that we look at the Lord’s love, grace, and mercy from a very limited perspective. Baba Ji has said we need to open up our parameters. To hear the way most of us talk about grace, we sound as if our parameters are about as narrow as the twig’s in Abu-Saeed’s poem.

For example, if something good happens, we say it is his grace. Maybe I got a promotion, maybe the weather is lovely, or maybe in the crowded streets a parking place opens up. We say this is his grace and mercy on me. And the words, “Thank you, Master” escape our lips.

If our perspective becomes a little bit broader, we begin to notice “blessings in disguise”. Something terrible happens – maybe we are in a car accident, maybe we lose our job. We’re very unhappy for a while. Then something good comes our way, and we realize that this good thing never could have happened except for the loss and misery we suffered. So now we say the tragedy was his grace; it was a blessing in disguise. And we say, “Thank you, Master” for the very thing we were earlier cursing.

If we mature spiritually just a bit further, we might begin to see his grace in disaster itself. We lose our job, our money, our health; we lose everything, and in our desperation we turn to prayer and meditation like never before. And now we say that all these painful things that happened were his grace because they forced us to turn to him.

Our parameters are opening up. But we are still trying to map his grace against events and circumstances – things we can observe and feel and judge. We are trying to use the finite to measure the infinite. As Hafiz puts it, we are trying to sound the depth of the ocean with a six-foot pole. There we are, poking and jabbing down into the ocean with our six-foot pole of an intellect, hoping to find the ocean floor.

We form concepts about what is utterly beyond our understanding. We're like the young ocean fish who swims over to another fish.

“Excuse me”, says the young fish, “you are older and wiser than I. Can you tell me: where is this thing they call the ocean?”

“The ocean”, says the older fish, “is what you're swimming in right now?”

“This?” says the young fish. “But this is just water.” And he swims away, disappointed.

What are our concepts about grace? Do we think he sends his grace to us when we are good and withholds it when we are bad? Do we think his grace is for some and not for others? The *Tao Te Ching* describes beautifully how the sage gives and gives without condition:

*The Sage is like Heaven and Earth
To him none are especially dear
nor is there anyone he disfavors
He gives and gives without condition
offering his treasure to everyone.*

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*
as translated by Jonathon Star

In another verse it says:

*He sees everything as his own self
He loves everyone as his own child
All people are drawn to him
every eye and ear is turned toward him.*

Maybe we don't know what his grace looks like, what it feels like. Most importantly, we don't know what it is supposed to feel like. We have no way to judge what's going on. Maybe all we can say about his grace and compassion – if we're going to say anything – is that it is vast, unfathomable and utterly beyond our ability to measure or judge.

Is it possible that his grace and mercy surround us in abundance without let or hindrance, all the time? In that case, if our hearts actually were open to his grace, then every breath, every step would be filled with a silent, wordless, joyful “thank you” welling up inside us. Could it be that all the ever-shifting circumstances of our lives, the ups, the downs – all those movements – are nothing but his grace? As Abu-Saeed puts it, “The ocean's bosom heaves in Love”.

And what of the twig riding those ocean swells? What does the twig know but that it is supported? Deep currents and vast forces beyond the twig's paltry imagination move the waters. Resting on the ocean's bosom, the twig can let go and enjoy the rising and falling motion. The wave supporting it will certainly carry the twig wherever the wave is going.

We, too, are supported. The ocean of Oneness swells and forms a wave. And perhaps the “wave” that is the perfect Master takes shape simply because “the ocean's bosom heaves in Love”. We can't comprehend the oceanic movement that raises us up, then drops away beneath us, the ever-fluid motion that tosses us. But we can know that we are supported, and that the Master, like a wave on that incomprehensible ocean, will carry us wherever he is going.

What Is Essential

In a poem, translated from the Hindi text *Sant Kabir*, Kabir talks about what the Guru does for us, the transformation that he brings in our lives and what our obligation is to such a benefactor. He says:

My Satguru took hold of me, otherwise I would have been swept away.

Here Kabir is praising his Guru by saying that without his Satguru, he is nothing; without him, what would he be? He could not even bear to think about it.

Picture the situation. There is a fast-tumbling, roaring river in which souls are helplessly being carried away. Each moment, a soul tries to come up for air, the next second the currents pull it down. The soul comes up for air, a new birth begins, the soul drowns again, and a life ends. This cycle goes on relentlessly. Along the way there are huge boulders, rapids, whirlpools and waterfalls, all kinds of dangers that have befallen souls in every life. Some souls come together for a brief moment, and the next moment they are thrown apart.

This is our state, pitiable and helpless until the Satguru comes in a boat, and offers us his hand. Some souls question him and ask how they can know that the boat is safe. But some fortunate souls cling to him without question and come and sit in the boat.

The truth is we do not have the ability to find the Guru in these raging waters by ourselves. Even if we see him, we have no strength to move in his direction. We are helpless until he comes to us, right next to us, and gives us the strength to hang on to him.

The Satguru tells the souls that they are now safe in the boat and all they have to do is sit. All we have to do is sit! But some insist on

rowing the boat backwards, while others see an attractive object in the water and jump back in. But he again pulls them back out of the water by the scruff of their necks. Then the Satguru tells the souls there is no going back, that they are going to their destination and will reach there safely. He asks them to just help him in that task.

Kabir says, of such a Guru, no words of gratitude are enough. Then he says:

He took all of my karmas and burned them.

We have been in this world for ages and ages. We have indulged in each life, adding to our karmic burden. In just this life alone, we have committed all types of unkind acts, lied to get ahead, hatched schemes and indulged in petty behaviour; not to mention those millions of lives before this one. Do we have any idea what we have done? Through newspapers and TV we are shocked to see what atrocities are committed every day in the world – rape, murder, genocide. Man's inhumanity to man is visible every day. And we too have perhaps done all these acts in previous lives.

This is the burden we carry upon ourselves. Is it possible for us to burn this vast heap of karmas that we have on our shoulders? The Satguru says: My child, take Nam, sit in meditation, listen to the Sound and slowly your karmas will be wiped out. Is that possible? Maharaj Charan Singh used to say: What will our poor meditation do? For the two and a half hours we sit in meditation, how much time is actually spent in repeating the names? Maybe ten to twenty percent? Even if we spent the entire meditation time in full concentration all of our life, could we really eliminate the burden of our karmic debt?

The truth is that the Satguru burns our karmas, he forgives them. All he wants from us is our effort. Meditation is the channel for his

grace to flow. There is a way to ask and a way to receive anything in this world. Meditation is the way for us to receive his grace. Kabir continues:

He helped me escape from the clutches of greed, attachment, all those illusions. Oh, how merciful is my Satguru.

We constantly fall, make mistakes, give in to our five passions. And, as disciples trying to follow this path, we can get frustrated and depressed. So long as we are in this world, until we reach Trikuti, we are in the realm of mind and maya. And as Maharaj Charan Singh says: If you fall, rise again, and if you must fall again, fall forward. We must accept our weaknesses and try to overcome them, and also put our best effort into our meditation – because this is what will purify us, and wean us away from the sense pleasures. But we should always remember he is doing it, he is the one slowly weaning us away from our passions. Let us lean on him.

The Satguru knows us, knows our weaknesses, yet never humiliates us. When anyone asks a question, does he ever judge that person, does he ever say, “Hey, what kind of a question about meditation are you asking – you are asleep half the time?” No, he never humiliates us. Why?

As Baba Ji once said, the Satguru is shackled by the disciples’ love. Shackled by our love? Our love that is here one moment and evaporates the next? Our love that hardly has any depth? Our love that we give more freely to everybody else other than to our Master? All he is looking for is an excuse to give and give. The excuse he needs is our genuine effort. Kabir continues:

A crow became a swan. I lost all illusions of caste, family and lineage.

We are so full of attachment, lust and pride, how on earth can we ever be fit to be present to the Lord? But that is his miracle. Kabir explains what a washer man does: He takes the clothes to the river, to the stone where he washes the clothes, using soap as he beats the clothes against the rock and cleans them. Similarly, we disciples are cleansed by our Satguru every day, every moment at our eye centre; using the soap of Shabd, he cleans us.

Slowly but surely, he makes us lose all our illusions. The pride of caste, family, wealth, education – all of these – is slowly obliterated. As Baba Ji once said, the saints come not to fulfil our desires, but to shatter our illusions.

Slowly he starts making our ego visible to us. Can we hurt someone's feelings and then be able to enjoy blissful meditation? Can we spend the evening at a party gossiping and criticizing, and then the next morning be able to get concentration in our meditation?

The Guru has promised to transform us either by his love, or knocks, or trials and tribulations. This is why everything we face is his gift. As Lord Krishna said to his disciple Udhō: I give my dearest disciples three wonderful gifts – poverty, illness and slander! Gifts! How we detest these gifts! But each has its place in our transformation. Anything we encounter on this journey is part of his individual divine plan to transform us.

Part of this plan, part of the transformation, is failure. J. K. Rowling, one of the most successful authors of our time, once spoke about her failures – she had failed in her marriage, she was jobless, she was a single parent and poor. She said:

I was the biggest failure I knew... Why do I talk about the benefits of failure? Simply because failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything

other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me. Had I really succeeded at anything else, I might never have found the determination to succeed in the one arena I believed I truly belonged.

Commencement Address at Harvard University, June 5, 2008

So failure in this world can be a true blessing because it moves us more towards our real work.

What is the only work that matters to us? What is the one arena in which we truly belong? Kabir continues:

*One merciful glance from him, and he washed away my sins.
But, despite knowing all of this, I was wandering in this world,
ignorant, and full of pride.*

What then is the remedy for this ignorance? Kabir continues:

*The Satguru made me hear the Shabd, and my ears got a taste
of the sweet melody.*

Yes, we can improve ourselves to some extent; yes, we can avoid circumstances that feed the five passions; yes, we can exercise some self control, but ultimately, the path of Shabd is the only way. Baba Jaimal Singh says in *Spiritual Letters*:

The blessing in this age of Kaliyug is that with a longing born of unshakeable trust in the Satguru as the Anami Lord, if the mind attaches the inner hearing and seeing faculties to the Shabd-dhun for an hour, a half-hour, a quarter-hour, or for ten, five, or even one minute, even then you will reach Sach Khand.

So do your bhajan and simran every day – they are not to be omitted....To return to our home, my son, there is no means other than listening to the Sound.

Finally, Kabir talks about this transformation again:

Illusion, attachment, all of this I have lost. The temptations cannot now harm me. Says Kabir, listen O lovers of the Lord, I escaped from the limits of this world and went into the limitless.

How can we too escape into the limitless? We have to strip away the inessential and focus on the essential, the essence. The beauty of this path is that by focusing on the essence, the Shabd, the inessential is *automatically* stripped away.





Sharan

Sharan is a Hindi word that means shelter or refuge. To seek sharan means to seek protection, safety, and support. It also means to seek a place that is strong, hidden away and well protected, such as a fortress where someone can go to find peace and comfort.

In Sant Mat to seek sharan means to seek all of this with a perfect Master. We look to him for refuge, strength and comfort when we have had enough of the sorrow, the suffering and the insecurity that life in this world has to offer us. We look to him when we want to find the source of true peace and happiness.

Sharan is realized when we turn our attention away from the world and give ourselves over in loving surrender to the Master, or the Lord, within. For in seeking our own depths, we find perfect peace resting in the Master's loving presence.

There is a sweet story that is told about an incident in the life of the sixteenth century Spanish mystic, Saint John of the Cross. As Saint John was a spiritual teacher to a particular group of Carmelite nuns in the hills north of Granada, he would go there regularly to visit them.

One day the cook, a simple soul called Sister Catalina, asked him this question: "Padre, why is it that the bullfrogs, which are in the garden near the water, throw themselves into the stream whenever I come near?"

"Because," he said, "it is in the water's depths that they feel safe. There they feel secure and protected; and, it is in this manner that we too should behave: We must turn away from created things and plunge into the depths, into the centre of all things, which is God – hiding ourselves in Him."

And so, if we are to find what we are truly seeking with the Master within, we must be like the frog that jumps into the water's depths. We have to turn away from the world and dive into the very depths of our souls, into the very depths of love and life itself.

When we turn our attention within and focus our whole being at the eye centre, we are taking refuge with the Master. We are taking refuge in his love. We are quietly and secretly hiding ourselves with him who is the centre of all things. As love is the true being of the Master, it is by means of his love that he carries us to him.

If we are to be with the Master in this way, we must give ourselves over to him. We cannot experience the Master's love within us as long as the ego is present. Real surrender, true sharan, requires total self-sacrifice. Over time, everything that is false is gradually shed from the soul, until the soul itself, the last thing to be given away, is merged into the very heart of the Master. This is real sharan. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

We have to surrender our self to the Master. It means that we have to take our ego out of us and blend our whole heart with his heart. He is already merged into the Lord, and by merging our self into him, we are automatically merged into the Lord. That can be done only by meditation.

The Master Answers

We surrender our ego to the Master. Through surrender, we become that divine being. Mystics tell us that our true reality is spirit, part and parcel of the essential being of God. This, our very life, is the final sacrifice, the ultimate gift to our Master in the final act of letting go. Consequently, we surrender simply to give up that part of ourselves which is false and to grow into the beauty of our

own true divine nature. We, the ego-self, will not exist then. We will simply become God.

At one time or another we may have been stuck in thinking that we are actually our “little selves”. We actually think that we are the sum total of everything that makes up our bodies, such as the color of our skin, the length of our hair or the shape of our nose. We also think that we are the sum total of everything contained in our minds – our accumulated knowledge, our particular talents and abilities and our desires and tendencies to believe or act in a certain way. But the truth is, we are *not* the sum total of all the things that make up our external selves. This is *not* what we can really call “I”. We are something much more. In fact, we have become so identified with this “I”, this ego, we actually feel that we cannot exist consciously without it.

Some years ago a lady asked Master a question about the ego. She didn't quite understand how a person, whose soul had merged in God, could still be conscious if the ego no longer existed. She was very worried that she might fall into some strange state of unconscious oblivion while sitting in meditation. He very sweetly answered her by saying something like: Sister, your consciousness doesn't disappear, you just become God.

So there is no oblivion. There is only God. When we merge with the Master within, we realize our true nature. Through meditation our soul is joined with the Shabd. In this way, our awareness moves beyond the limitations of the ego and becomes expanded into God. We become fully conscious human beings. This is the case with the Master. His own surrender in the Lord's love is complete. The Master has found everything that we are seeking.

Humility is the result of self-surrender. It happens automatically when we come into the presence of divine love. We suddenly realize that we are nothing. Because the false cannot exist when faced with the truth, the ego must disappear in the presence of the Master. Surrender

is nothing but a spontaneous condition of helplessness when facing our Beloved. Love compels us to give ourselves entirely to him.

We accept everything in life – no matter what it is – because our love for the Master is so great that it is impossible for us to do otherwise. When we live in his love, then it is easy to accept everything. Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

*We should live happily in accordance with the Will of the Lord
in whatever state He keeps us .*

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV

There is no greater example of true humility than the Master. Because his surrender is complete, the Master is both the greatest and the least all in the same moment. Years ago someone asked Maharaj Charan Singh, “How can Master be the Lord and also the servant?”

In a very soft voice, he replied: “The one who is the most high is the servant of everyone.” Repeating these words again, he said: “The one who is the most high is the servant of everyone.”

The perfect Master is the highest being in creation, yet he is the most humble. He has no personal desires, as his desires are solely the Lord’s desires. Having reached the absolute state of helplessness in the Lord’s love, he has also reached the absolute state of surrender. Nothing is left in him but God.

Describing this state of being, Rumi says:

*The Beloved has infused all my cells.
Of me only a name remains,
All the rest is Him.*

*Jalaluddin Rumi
as translated by Muriel Maufro*

Taking refuge in the Lord is the ultimate satisfaction of all desire. There is nothing left to desire as there is no one left who can desire. The soul has achieved the end of all desires by becoming transformed into the very being of God. An entirely new consciousness has arisen in which the soul has become a perfect channel for the Lord's love, grace and will.

Looking again to Saint John of the Cross, we find the following passage in which he writes of the beauty, joy and intimacy that we experience when we take refuge with the Master in meditation. It begins with the following question:

Padre, since the Lord, whom my soul loves, is within me, why don't I find him or experience him?

Saint John replies:

The reason is that he remains concealed and you do not also conceal yourself in order to find him and experience him. If you want to find a hidden treasure you must enter the hiding place secretly and, once you have discovered it, you will also be hidden just as the treasure is hidden. Your beloved Bridegroom is the treasure and the hiding place is your soul. Therefore, if you are to find him, you should forget every worldly thing and hide in the secret inner chamber of your spirit. Closing the door behind you, pray to your Father in secret. Remaining hidden with him, you will experience him in hiding, love and enjoy him in hiding, that is, in a way that goes far beyond all language and feeling.

The Spiritual Canticle, Stanza 1.9

We don't meet the Master, because our attention is focused outside and he is inside. But if we turn our attention in his direction, he will no longer be hidden from our awareness and we will be with him.

This is meditation. This is where we find ourselves concealed with our Beloved – concealed and held by love within the “secret inner chamber” of our soul. The eye centre is the secret chamber where we come to perfect rest. Closing the door behind us and taking all of our attention within, we call to him by repeating the five holy names with love. “Remaining hidden with him”, we experience the exquisite beauty of the Master's loving presence.

He is the treasure that we are seeking, that we are longing to love and to enjoy. He is the treasure that will be found in all of its fullness when our surrender is complete.



The reality of life is the soul.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

The Practice We Wouldn't Choose

When we were children, we might have been urged to practice the piano. Our tennis coach might have told us to practice our serve. As adults, we practice our profession. We take up new hobbies and practice our skills. We may even seek out a spiritual practice of meditation. But some practices come uninvited into our lives. Rumi, the thirteenth century Persian mystic, tells a remarkable story of such an uninvited practice in *“The Sheikh Kharraqani and His Wretched Wife”*, that goes something like this:

A seeker goes off on a long journey to find an enlightened teacher, a Master who can bestow peace to his conflicted mind with a single glance. The young man becomes deeply touched by the teachings of one Master and spends months travelling across mountains in search of the sheikh. He arrives at the sheikh's house, knocks on the door, and then his wife sticks her head out of the window and screams, “What do *you* want?” The man replies that he is intending to see the great, holy teacher, the sheikh. To which the wife lets loose with a barrage of insults, recriminations and accusations. With a sneer and a hoot, she yells, “You have nothing better to do than to waste your time travelling the world looking for a fraud? You are an idiot, a time waster! The sheikh is a parasite, and an arrogant, lazy imposter who fleeces the stupid ones. Go home and attend to the real rituals and ceremonial prayers!”

The young man is taken aback, but undeterred. He says, “I recognize truth and light in the words of the sheikh. Your angry words do not diminish his stature, nor can they stop my quest for wisdom. For you to try to blow out his candle is as futile as someone trying to blow out the sun.”

And so he continues his search. He goes into town and learns that the sheikh is in the forest collecting firewood. The young seeker runs to the forest, but now he has a troubling question on his mind. Why would an enlightened sheikh have such a wretched, miserable wife?

Suddenly, the sheikh appears riding on a lion. The sheikh has the power not only to tame the wildest of beasts but also to read the doubt in the young man's mind. The sheikh immediately answers the unspoken question of the seeker. "I didn't choose my wife, nor do I desire her company. But enduring her public disdain has made me strong and patient. She is my practice. In her presence I am forced to distinguish between what is true and what is false, what is kind and what is violent, what is ultimately important and what is a distraction."

Rumi's story suggests a whole new way of looking at what is troublesome, difficult or demanding in our lives by renaming those challenges: my practice. It could be a specific person or it could be our own grumpy, stubborn, self-centred personality that is the cause of our anguish. This is my practice. In its presence, I am constantly forced to remember my centre, my source of ultimate strength, what is most real. This is my practice. And while it causes an enormous amount of grief and trouble, I have become stronger and more patient. I would never have chosen its companionship, but it does bring a peculiar kind of blessing.

A dear friend once wrote to me and said, "I am glad and grateful you are here." It struck me as one of the nicest things you could say to someone; something we ought to say to one another more often. But going even deeper, we need to say it about our own lives. I am glad and grateful I am alive in this creation, and I am glad and grateful for my own particular circumstances, and for my practice, especially the un-chosen practice.

I am glad and grateful for what challenges me. I am glad and grateful for what teaches me compassion. I am glad and grateful for opportunities to learn to discriminate between what is false and what is true. What is real lives in companionship with what is illusory. The soul lives with the mind. What is the best in us lives right next to what is the worst. We, too, may one day find ourselves riding on lions, when we are at last able to be grateful in every circumstance.



It Is Never Too Late

*My advice to you all is to stop wasting your lives;
I fall at your feet to advise you to cleanse your hearts.
Only concentrating your mind
And meditating on his Name will help you.
Engage yourself in a business that will profit you.
What else can I teach you? asks Tuka.*

Tukaram: The Ceaseless Song of Devotion

Cultivating Our Garden

Sant Mat teachings show up in the most unlikely places. Recently, I came across a book called *Square Foot Gardening*, by Mel Bartholomew, and was astonished to find how neatly it fits into the teachings of the saints. It's meant to show gardeners how to plan and cultivate their private gardens efficiently and effectively. But I found it to be all about our spiritual lives, our precious garden of meditation protected by the fence of our vows, our discipline, and the guidance and the encouragement of our Master.

Square Foot Gardening begins with a rundown of how and why gardening efforts fail. We waste space and seed; we don't follow through with the weeding and feeding necessary to sustain it. We may try some exotic plants that are inappropriate for the soil and climate we live in. The harvest, if it comes at all, may be more than we need. We discover that we are overplanted and overwhelmed. We have too many squash and not enough tomatoes, and we give up the effort altogether because it's just too much, too difficult.

And so it is with the garden of our life. As young adults we decide what to study in university, what we want to be. Then we get that first serious job. We need a car. Then we decide to get married, so we need a better place to live and all the furnishings and appliances, cake tins and blankets that go with that. Then a baby arrives, so we need a bigger house, a better neighbourhood, a minivan. Soon there are summer camps, a promotion, more work, more friends and more obligations. Then one day we wake up and discover the garden of our life is overplanted and we're overwhelmed. Our spiritual path is full of weeds; too many obligations and not enough spirituality, too many squash and not enough tomatoes.

The square foot gardener gives us some concrete tips on planning and managing a sustainable garden. He points out the need to pace ourselves and to re-evaluate after every season to see if our gardening goals are being met. Have we planned for some to share and some to save? Have we planted more than we can take care of? We need a pattern of “controlled planting”, the gardener says.

Just so we should plan and discipline our lifestyle so that our spiritual goals are met.

In *Spiritual Primer* the author talks about how we are bombarded by advertising and mass media, sold on the idea that more is better, and reminds us that:

Rich is the person who has not the most, but who is happy with whatever he or she has. We have raised our standard of living, but sadly our standard of contentment has not followed suit.

Contentment has become almost a foreign word in today's vocabulary and yet we have so much more than we really need.

The next lesson of small gardening is “keep off the soil”. The gardener points out that plants need aerated soil to thrive. If it's packed down with too much machinery and traffic, its growth is thwarted.

What's this got to do with Sant Mat gardening? Our spiritual work too gets jammed into a life over full of stuff and people and busyness. It tends to get smothered by the sheer traffic of life. The Masters remind us that we should consider every one of our actions and our attitudes. Will this take me nearer to my goal? Or will it prove an impediment to my spiritual progress? Leaving ample time, space, silence and solitude to consider our actions will help keep us on the right track and help improve our attitude to life and to meditation.

Next our gardener recommends regular garden maintenance and soil improvement: a trowel full of leaf mould, some compost, a sprinkling of fertilizer, and maybe some lime to keep the proper acid-alkaline balance, applied routinely between harvest and replanting.

Our spiritual garden too needs proper maintenance to keep it strong and growing: a mid-day break for a few rounds of simran, attending satsang regularly, as well as reading the books and *Spiritual Link* to enrich our spiritual soil. Eating light vegetarian meals keeps us healthy both physically and spiritually. And that bit about balance? Master tells us that balance is important for all of us on this path. A little honest work, a little family obligation, a little fun, a little seva along with our regular meditation all make for a balanced spiritual garden.

The Masters implore us to arrange our lives so that our daily meditation takes place regularly and punctually. Of course there will be times when that daily routine gets interrupted. But if we adjust to the situation, plan the work and work the plan, we can slip back into our maintenance, growth and harvesting without suffering any major disruption.

As a final bit of advice, the garden author says we should plant our square foot garden plots close to our living space. “Don’t plant your garden in the back of the yard away from your daily life,” he says. “Keep it close where you can keep an eye on it.” Similarly, we should not banish our meditation to those two and a half hours in the middle of the night and never think about it during the day. We must try to keep it always in the forefront of our consciousness as we go about our daily lives. Using simran to keep us mindful of Master’s presence in our daily activity, we will be aware when those pests – anger, attachment, greed, lust, and pride – make their inevitable appearance and be able to nip them before they cause any lasting damage.

The Master has given us the seeds and tools to make our garden grow, but we must make the initial effort. In *Living Meditation* it says:

We cannot force the growth of a tree we have planted. The tree has its own time to grow. Our job is to dig a hole, plant the seed, cover it with the soil, fertilize it, water it, protect it from pests and take care of it every day. That is the extent of our effort. The speed at which it grows is not up to us. If we have this attitude towards our meditation we will not obstruct the Master's work and the tree of spirituality will undoubtedly grow and yield fruit in our lives. If we try to speed up the growth of the tree without first properly waiting for it to be rooted, then it can be torn up and destroyed by the winds of Kal's world. If we try to hurry, impose our expectations or force visions, then we will just be complicating the Master's work.

Our only concern is to keep our mind in simran at the eye centre, and to be receptive to the Sound. For that, and only that, are we responsible. It is for us to follow the instructions of Master and leave the rest to him. Whether results appear in our meditation or not, we will do well. Our part of the meditation is to keep our attention in the effort, not the results. The effort is up to us. The results are not.

All of us are spiritual gardeners. Some of us have old established gardens; some are newly planted. Some of us are raising flowers, some are raising food. Some could use a little more fertilizer. Some have more weeds than they should. But we're all doing our best to protect our little crop of meditation and praying for showers of grace.



In the Buddhist tradition, a practice is viewed sometimes as a path, sometimes as a stream. The metaphor of the stream invites you to imagine a strong but gentle current that is already there to speed your journey. Just to enter such a stream makes you a different person. Even if you should go back to shore, you would feel its power. You might enter the stream then return to shore many times, but if you keep practicing you're finally there for good – in the stream, on the path. Just to consider getting started expands your vision and lifts your spirit. Taking the all-important first step with a sincere heart can be a sort of enlightenment. It presages an evolutionary adventure, and offers inner peace.

Michael Murphy and George Leonard, *The Life We are Given*

When day by day the mind's faculty of focused attention, which is an aspect of the soul, becomes pure through continuous practice, and all worldly desires have left the mind, the mind will never follow any external attractions, but stay only with the Satguru's form. Then the Satguru will look upon the disciple with his glance of mercy; and as the Satguru's compassionate glance keeps falling on the disciple, all the gross and evil tendencies of the mind will go away, and the mind will love the soul.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

With the Master

To sit at the feet of a perfect Master is, no doubt, the greatest good fortune anyone could possibly have – supreme good fortune. When we're in his presence, waves of spiritual energy automatically draw us inward and upward. Something inside us wakes up, and there is an outpouring of love, a sense of fulfilment beyond words. The intensity of the experience goes beyond anything we are used to feeling, and with the feeling comes an even greater desire to be closer and closer to our Master.

A Master possesses the unique magnetic power of love which draws a devotee towards him and creates within him a feeling of indifference to worldly attractions. This magnetic power is an inherent quality of the Master and emanates from his every action and movement. Everything that radiates from the Master – the light on his beautiful face, the lines on his forehead, even his indifference when he is displeased with the devotee, the lustre round him when he speaks smilingly – all pierce the heart of the devotee and thus attract him to his Master. Through the lustre of the Master's face shines the lustre of God, and one sees God in his Master.

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

Master is showering grace on us all the time. If we could see the spiritual light in which he bathes us, no doubt we would be blinded. Who knows what profound effects his presence has on our stubborn earth-bound natures? We do know from experience that these moments of darshan grow rather than fade in our memory. They stay



with us, and when recalled, revive in us the same feelings of love and devotion. They become the fuel for our spiritual practice.

However, in his presence we sometimes begin to feel very frustrated with ourselves. In the light of his spiritual purity all our own defects come up before our mind's eye. At those times we may have to force ourselves to concentrate, to fight with the aches and pains of our bodies, and to look at him through a barrage of wayward thoughts and feelings of guilt. It can be a painful experience. But as he tells us, diagnosing the illness is the first step towards recovery. The longing to be at peace with him, to be one with him, spurs us on.

At other times, he makes us feel that we are his beloved children. His love completely overwhelms us, leaves us breathless and satiated. These times of bliss are to be experienced and digested.

How little we understand our good fortune and the limitless nature of his gift. Like a loving father, our Master is very eager for us to share his wealth. Certainly we cannot achieve spiritual progress by our own efforts and even the extent of our love for him is not in our hands, but he reassures us that simran and bhajan will create that love in us. So at least the sitting part we must try to do.

Master keeps telling us we'll find what we are looking for inside ourselves. Do we really believe him? At times it seems that we're too busy, too worried or too excited about some outside obsession that we hesitate to even try it out. But sooner or later, he brings us round; through his grace and the constant hammering of satsang, and perhaps occasionally after a series of hard knocks, we eventually start trying it out for ourselves.

The time comes when we just have to face the fact that our lives are never going to be quite the way we would like them to be. We may never really be happy with the way things are going. Certain problems we'll never be able to solve. No matter how much we long for peace,

we never actually seem to experience it – unless, that is, we remain in the present and in the thought of our Master.

We get discouraged because we cannot see, as no doubt the Master does, the gradual lightening of the load and the imperceptible centring of our attention. Sometimes we get so weighed down by our miserable performance that we might even stop trying, or we try so little that we cannot hope to achieve anything. But as Master has told us: if we don't take the correct dose of the medicine we cannot hope to be cured. Meditation definitely works, if we put enough effort into it and keep at it.

If we can concentrate in meditation as easily as we can concentrate at the time of darshan, and if we can just realize that he is there in front of us when we close our eyes, then the same currents of love will automatically spring up. As soon as we think of him with love and devotion, we start to concentrate and become absorbed in him. The more we think he is there, the more we feel he is there, and then we know that he is there. Then the love comes into play, and we become lost in him.

As a satsangi recently put it: I think the key to simran is giving; it's the sense of lovingly offering each word to the Master inside. Then comes the sweet feeling of communion, the touch of his presence, fanning the flames of our love.

We need the outer Master to get started, but the real thing is inside all the time. As Master explains, the physical Master is a guide. He is there to generate love in us, but the true form is the Shabd, which is inside us. He assures us that the discipline and balance he is asking us to have in our lives, and in our meditation, will make us receptive and give us more love and faith.

The grace is pouring out. As the Master opens the storehouse of Nam, giving initiation to thousands of souls, it seems that wave upon

wave of love and compassion are flowing out towards the sangat. What a wonderful guide and companion we have to inspire us. It is marvellous to see the Master smiling and laughing. It is as though the whole world is right again. Real joy is so uncommon in our lives; his laughter seems like a wellhead of happiness, evoking images of a state of limitless bliss.

So even if we cannot comprehend the extent of the gift, at least we can try to make a real effort to acknowledge his love and grace. Meditation is the best way to thank the Master.



God troubles about nothing but our good will. He is quite unconcerned about any other of our qualities or lack of them. All he wants from us is an honest, straightforward, simple, submissive and loyal heart. When he finds such a heart, he takes possession of it, controls all its responses, and so uses it that it finds in everything, no matter what, something which is invaluable in its progress to holiness.

Jean-Pierre du Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*

Faith and Love for the Master

Even just thinking of the Master, if a disciple is focused, can raise the disciple to great heights and he can overcome physical, spiritual and mental obstacles. Baal Shem Tov was an eighteenth century Jewish mystic who is considered to be the founder of Hasidic Judaism. The faith and love of the Baal Shem's disciples was so great, that just telling stories about him transported them to spiritual heights and had the effect of a miracle in itself. Here is a story about the telling of stories:

A rabbi whose grandfather had been a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov was asked to tell a story. "A story," he said, "must be told in such a way that it constitutes help in itself." And he told: "My grandfather was lame. Once they asked him to tell a story about his teacher. And he related how the holy Baal Shem used to hop and dance while he prayed. My grandfather rose as he spoke, and he was so swept away by his story that he himself began to hop and dance to show how the Master had done. From that hour on he was cured of his lameness. That's the way to tell a story!"

Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*



An Open Heart

Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Quest for Light*, “His grace is always there, but we do not open our heart to receive it.” Similarly, when someone recently asked Baba Ji to explain grace, he said that grace is what he is showering on us all the time, if we would only open our hearts to it.

Is it true? Do we close our hearts to him? On the one hand with simran we are knocking on his door, knocking and knocking – and waiting for him to open the door. But what if he is also knocking on our door, the door of our heart, and we’re keeping it locked and bolted?

In ordinary worldly relationships – in a friendship or marriage or with our family members – if we “open our hearts” to each other, it means we don’t hold anything back. We are unguarded, open, and we let the other person in. Whatever we are, we don’t have to hide it. In essence, we give ourselves away. The foundation of all that is trust. If we don’t quite completely trust the other person, we don’t quite completely open our heart. We are guarded.

Is it the same with opening our hearts to the Master? Is this a friendship we can trust? Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Light on Sant Mat*:

Shabd and Nam are the only real, everlasting and unfailing friends, and these we should try to cultivate. Shabd never deserts, nor does the Master.

But these are easy words to say, easy words to read. Can we believe them? Probably no one’s life on this planet is free from the experience of being unheard, uncared for, unloved. We all have some experience of being betrayed or abandoned or disappointed. We’ve

all learned to be a little guarded when it comes to human relations. Do we carry what we've learned of distrust into our relationship with the Master? Maybe.

Baba Jaimal Singh says that this most fundamental trust was severed at the dawn of creation. He writes:

The day the individual being, that is, the soul, separated from Sach Khand and the Shabd Dhun, that very day its trust in the true Lord and the Shabd Dhun was also severed. The Shabd Dhun looks after it all the time, but it does not realize this because its love and loyalties are deeply entrenched in mind and maya, and in maya's objects and the senses that deceive.... It is dizzy in the love of the mind, and the mind is dizzy in the pleasures of the senses. Maya has spread such a veil over it that it may never regain awareness.

Spiritual Letters

And here we are countless lifetimes later. Baba Jaimal Singh says that the Shabd is still supporting us, still nurturing us, still taking care of us. But we don't know it, so we try to take care of ourselves. He goes on to say:

So have full faith in the words of the Satguru, my son. These words are specifically of the Lord himself. The Satguru, attaching the disciple again to the same Shabd Dhun, will guide him back to Sach Khand. So the disciple's trust that remained broken in life after life has been restored by the Satguru.

Spiritual Letters

We've come at last to the Master. We've come at long, long last to the court of love. Our poor, well-defended heart can finally let its guard down. If we would only open our heart to him through daily meditation, we might find that we are already swimming in an ocean of grace and mercy. Rumi writes:

*My tired heart, take a sigh of relief.
The time has come for you to heal.
The friend who helps all lovers
has come into this world
in the form of a man.*

Rubai 810

We might wonder if we are worthy of the extraordinary grace that has come our way? We know what we are. We know our weaknesses, our pretensions, our deceptions, as well as our jealousies, pettiness and cravings. But if we focus too much on our failings, we may scuttle back into the dark recesses of a closed heart.

Shame is a great closer of hearts. If we are to give ourselves to him, all we have to give is what we are. Therefore, the Sufi mystic poet Jami begs:

*Beloved
no fear if you break my heart a thousand times
but do not abandon me in contempt
because of what I have here become
for in this garden every flower has its roots in dirt.*

*This Heavenly Wine: Poems from the Divan-e Jami
as rendered by Vraje Abramian*

When Jami says he has “no fear if you break my heart a thousand times”, he is begging to keep his heart open to his Master’s grace, no matter what form that grace might take. But, what if the Master’s grace breaks his heart? He begs to stay in his Master’s company. What if his heart is broken? So what. What if it is broken a thousand times? He still begs to stay in his Master’s company. After all, it just may be that the heart that is open is the heart that has been broken.

Ansari of Herat expresses the humility of one who knows his faults, combined affectionately with the intimacy of one who knows he is loved. In *Ibn ‘Ata’ Illah the Book of Wisdom/Kwaja Abdullah Ansari*, he writes:

*With your eternal knowledge you saw me.
You saw what you were buying, in spite of my faults.
You and your knowledge.
Me and my faults.
Don’t send back what you once approved.*

Intimate Conversations, translated by
Victor Danner, Wheeler M. Thackston
and Annemarie Schimmel

Ah this sounds like the ease and warmth of a heart that is open to the Master’s grace. But maybe it is Ibn ‘Ata’ Illah who offers us the ultimate reassurance:

*If you were to be united with Him
only after the extinction of your vices
And the effacement of your pretensions,
you would never be united with Him!
Instead, when He wants to unite you to Himself,
He covers your attribute with His Attribute*

*And hides your quality with His Quality.
And thus He unites you to Himself
by virtue of what comes from Him to you,
not by virtue of what goes from you to Him.*

Intimate Conversations, translated by
Victor Danner, Wheeler M. Thackston
and Annemarie Schimmel

Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that we are all puppets dancing on a string. The only difference, he would say, between realized souls and unrealized souls is that the realized souls know they are puppets. The unrealized souls say, “We are dancing! Who can make us dance?”

We believe we are acting, that we are choosing, that we are doing. Actually, the Shabd, that current of love and mercy, is not only supporting us, nurturing us and caring for us; actually it is also doing everything. In *Spiritual Letters*, Baba Jaimal Singh says:

All work, temporal or spiritual, is done by the Shabd-dhun, but the mind takes undue credit for it, which is false. In fact, the Shabd-dhun does it all. So, you should make your home in the Shabd.

He says, in effect, this is the reality, the fact. Shabd is doing everything. Master in his Shabd form is always present, always with us, aware of us, waiting for us to turn to him, to open our hearts to him. He waits for us to know that there is no separation, that Shabd is doing everything.

And we carry on longing to be relieved of our burden of separateness, all the while clinging to it. We form concepts that place God far from us. Love, we picture as a distant goal. We imagine the Shabd in a fortress atop a high cliff, and we down in the plain must storm that

fortress. Simran is our battering ram as we drive forward to break down that heavy oaken and iron-studded door that separates us from the Lord's treasure of love, the Shabd. Jami writes:

*I assumed you outside of myself
beyond the reaches of my imagination
Now that you have dropped the veil I realize
You are the one
I left behind with my first step.*

*This Heavenly Wine: Poems from the Divan-e Jami
as rendered by Vraje Abramian*

The first step. That age-old first step we took believing ourselves to be separate. Ever since that fundamental trust was severed, ever since creation, our actions have bound us. Why? Because we have believed we were the only one to take care of ourselves. Because we have believed we were separate, isolated from Lord's love, and that we were the doers. Maharaj Sawan Singh spells out our situation with precision:

Actually, all actions that are performed under the influence of the ego – whether good or bad – are equally responsible for the ties of attachment which bind an individual to this world.... So long as a person considers himself to be the doer, he is weighed down by the shackles of karma.

We are bound by the “shackles of karma” so long as we believe we are the doers. What will happen once we place ourselves in the Master's loving hands? When we open our hearts to him, to his grace, and we come to know that the current of the Lord's love and mercy is

actually doing everything? Won't the shackles of karma, shackles that have gripped our ankles since time immemorial, shackles rusty with age – won't they creak open and clatter to the ground?

We'll be free to give ourselves away. As Maharaj Charan Singh once said, "You give me whatever you have, and I'll give you everything I have."



Search the Darkness

*Sit with your friends; don't go back to sleep.
Don't sink like a fish to the bottom of the sea.*

*Surge like an ocean,
don't scatter yourself like a storm.*

*Life's waters flow from darkness.
Search the darkness, don't run from it.*

*Night travelers are full of light,
and you are, too; don't leave this companionship.*

*Be a wakeful candle in a golden dish,
don't slip into the dirt like quicksilver.*

*The moon appears for night travelers,
be watchful when the moon is full.*

The Rumi Collection
edited by Kabir Helminski

The Sky Is Falling

Is this the beginning of the end of the world? Is the economy going to crash globally leaving us without money, jobs or retirement funds? The fear that is permeating throughout the world around these topics is rampant. It seems that fear is everywhere you go, on everyone's mind. Well, there is our first hint. We are talking about the mind. The mind is designed to grab on to anything and everything to keep us attached to life in this plane. And yes, the current world condition is a very captivating, all-consuming distraction for the mind. In fact, embracing fear may be at its all-time high.

There is a children's fable entitled, "Chicken Little". There are many versions of this story, but the basic premise is that a chicken believes the sky is falling down because an acorn falls on her head. The chicken jumps to a conclusion and whips the populace into mass hysteria by screaming, "The sky is falling, the sky is falling." The chicken's fearful thoughts permeate the entire community, much like the fear in today's world. We could easily describe today's populace as heading into mass hysteria believing that the sky is indeed falling.

But, as lucky followers of this path, we are not really part of this world, are we? We need not be fearful. We are spiritual beings temporarily living in this world. Whatever is happening in the world is divinely unfolding. It has purpose, perfect design and optimum outcome. If we really do believe there is a divine plan then why would we have any angst about worldly affairs? We need only concern ourselves with our spiritual progress.

Maulana Rum, as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, says:

*O brave friend! Catch hold of the Master's garments,
For he is above all ups and downs.
He will be with you both here and hereafter,
Whether you are in this world of mind and matter, or beyond.*

God is providing every single thing that we need. Perhaps not what we want but exactly what we need. How fortunate we are not to have to be burdened with the weight of the world crises, falling economies, wars, terrorists and environmental resource depletions. For whatever will be, will be.

But when we forget this and allow the fear to creep in, it is our best friend, our Guru who is there to support and console us. For our focus to turn to God and become one with him, our Guru – our teacher, our friend, our guide – tells us in very simple terms what to do. Meditate. That's it. That's all. The world is turning upside down; our lifestyles may be at risk. But whatever worldly drama our karma is directing us to experience, our real job, our real purpose is to meditate. Even if we let go of worrying about the world, the mind however, as is its nature, even continues to worry about our spiritual status.

But the Master tells us not to worry. Worry activates the mind. Not to worry about results of meditation but just put in the effort to meditate.

Struggling with the thoughts of the mind and repeating simran during our meditation does take enormous effort. Stilling the mind of thoughts requires constant, consistent effort. We must be on alert during our meditation to catch our mind, for before we know it, the mind is off and running with many errant thoughts. We bring it back to simran over and over and over again. Does this practice get boring? Perhaps, but it is the effort in the practice that is being acknowledged.

We can allow ourselves one worry; whether or not we are putting in enough effort. That can be our primary worry, not if the world is falling apart or if the sky is falling.

The Master knows the effort it takes. Maharaj Charan Singh in *Die to Live* says:

I don't think there is anything more difficult than meditation. Meditation is the most difficult. It looks simple, and yet it is so difficult to attend to it. It's easy to understand Sant Mat because the whole philosophy is very simple, but when we put it into practice, many obstacles come in the way. To live Sant Mat, to live the teachings, means a constant struggle with the mind.

He has brought us here to his feet at this point in time. He is the one giving us the grace to put forth the effort. So, is the sky falling? Do we care if it is? Do we have any worries left about the world? Let us open our hearts with gratitude so that we don't have to worry. Through his grace we sit at his feet even with all our imperfections.

Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. V*:

We should sit at the feet of a person who knows our heart, who can understand our difficulties and sufferings, who can share our sadness and who can remove it. We should sit in the shade of a tree bearing fresh flowers and fruit, which will refresh our mind and heart, and from which we will get the fruit of spiritual life to eat.

Whether we sit at his feet, in the beautiful cocoon of love called Dera, or sit under trees bearing fresh flowers and eating fruit, or are in the midst of the chaos and stress of the world, he is always with us. For us, it is not that the sky is falling. What is falling away is anything that comes between us and pure love.

A Tale of Angels

One time the angels gathered together and shared their objection with the Lord that man was bestowed with this title “top of the creation” meaning that humans are even higher on the ladder of creation than the angels.

The Lord said, “You yourself can make the decision about the label. One of you can volunteer to spend time on earth and experience life as a human being.” Many eager angels came forth but only one was chosen for the experience.

As soon as the angel reached earth he was enchanted by the world and its natural beauty. He began experiencing the tastes, sights, sounds and fragrances that abounded. Soon he noticed a gorgeous young woman in need of help to which he obliged. Shortly they became friends; friendship led to love which paved the way to marriage.

For the first few years the angel was very happy. But gradually the freshness, newness and charm began to wane. He had to face hard work to support his ever-growing family. His friends disappointed him by not keeping their word and some of his loved ones even died. As the burdens of life weighed him down he felt suffocated and depressed. His unhappiness led to constant complaints, depression and suffering. Finally, he cried out to the Lord for help, begging to be relieved from the burdens of what he thought would be an ideal life. God heard him and sent another angel to rescue him.

The beautiful sounds, sights and smells also enchanted the second angel. He too was going astray when he met up with the first angel who gave him a full account of his experiences. He said, “Brother, you don’t want to go there. We have to get out of here!” The awareness of

the downward pull and worldly attachments gave them the strength to break through the worldly web of human life and soar back to God.

Upon their arrival the Lord inquired of their experience and asked about man's title of "top of the creation". The angels hung their heads in shame.

Then the Lord explained, "Even the angels cannot resist the temptations of the earth. The lure of the world is so strong that even they tend to go astray and forget me. Should I not then be proud of man, who in spite of going through these temptations, burdens and difficulties of life, remembers me and thinks of me sometimes? Does he not deserve to be honoured as top of the creation?"



*This aloneness is worth more than a thousand lives.
This freedom is worth more than all the lands on earth.
To be one with the truth for just a moment,
Is worth more than the world and life itself.*

Rumi, Thief of Sleep, as translated by Shahram Shiva

The Last Page

DECEMBER 12, 1916 – JUNE 1, 1990, man and Master in one, Maharaj Ji danced the dance of life magnificently, selflessly, serenely, flawlessly. In laying down his mortal frame – fearless, calm, reassuring, radiant and resplendent – he affirmed his message of the eternal Shabd, of love; and he showed how this brief act upon creation’s stage should end.

Is it a wonder then, when we think of him or when life brings his image before us, that we miss his physical presence? As Hafiz so poignantly put it:

*His face, moon of form, we beheld not to our fill;
and he departed.*

*In the rose garden of union with him, we moved not;
and he departed.*

*On his face, we fully cast not our glance;
and he departed.*

*Alas! For bidding him farewell, we arrived not;
and he departed.*

It is his legacy of love, his most precious gift to us, that holds us on the path he placed us on. He always said, “Love is within you, and is not to be found anywhere outside.” The love and recognition that we seek from the body Master is already there within us. “Our souls are already in love with the Lord,” he would say. His gifts can be had, here and now, at the eye centre. We only have to believe and look.

Consummate friend and inseparable, divine companion, he is both the life-giving Shabd that sustains us, and he is his successor,

with us still on the physical plane. Our Master is at all times giving us his immeasurable protection. It is a great, good fortune to meet a perfect saint such as he in one's lifetime. When we view it from the standpoint of total existence, life after life and aeon upon aeon, such good fortune cannot be conceived. We can only marvel that any being can be so blessed.

Legacy of Love



If love is there, it is there. If it comes, it just comes. But by meditation everybody can grow that love... If somebody inherits riches, that is the grace of the donor, but everybody can become rich by hard work. Everybody can grow that feeling, that love, that intensity, by meditation.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Book Review



Adventure of Faith

BY SHRADDHA LIERTZ

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In the spring of 1937, at age 13, coming home on the train from school, Shraddha Liertz suddenly

felt as if an invisible light, coming from above, was flowing over her. She was spellbound, completely overwhelmed by what was happening. At the same time she “heard” a clear and distinct voice inside, saying, “Preserve your heart’s capacity to love, for you know not whether God will one day ask you for your undivided heart.”

And so begins the extraordinary account of Liertz’s spiritual quest. She writes, “*With the twofold experience of light and voice, God had entered into my life in his own inscrutable manner.*”

Brought up in a devoted German Catholic family, Liertz sought inspiration reading books of the Christian saints, but soon realized that her soul’s real guide was inside herself. After living through the horrors of World War II in Munich and losing her father, her only desire was to dedicate herself to a life of prayer and contemplation. She searched for several years before she found the Benedictine abbey where, after five years of preparation, she took final vows as a nun.

Life at the abbey revolved around chanting, recitation of the liturgy, and communal prayers. But Liertz became restless, driven by an urge to live a more intense religious life. She longed for more intimate contact with God in her personal prayer. She prayed earnestly and, in her words, God’s response

fell upon me like fire, in just the same way that it had in my youth. Again it lasted only for a fraction of a second – like a flash of lightning – and God had taken possession of me. At least I was

convinced that it was he who had attracted the eyes of my soul to him by this experience. It was no longer me longing to belong to him; now it was he who wanted to “possess my undivided ear,” as he had intimated all those years ago.

This experience put an end to her practice of meditating on Christ’s picture. “Not only had it become superfluous, but it even, paradoxically, covered up the face of God.” Liertz’s only choice now seemed to be unconditional submission. “I found that it was impossible to divert my inner gaze from God. I was quite unable to turn away from the inner light that radiated imperceptibly from his hidden face. All I wanted was to respond to his gaze, without words or thoughts.”

Yet she was torn between her duty of monastic obedience and her irresistible urge to remain in silence before God. This conflict crushed her. Her heart froze “until in the end it felt dead.” God now seemed to her very far away. She fell into a state of deadly emptiness, an immense mournful loneliness. In this desolate condition, the words “All is nothing – God alone suffices” came into her heart. From that point on, in spite of the monastic schedule, she was determined to use every minute for silent prayer. With renewed energy, she renounced all the “trivialities” and rededicated her life to God unconditionally. “I wanted to shun neglect, infidelity, forgetfulness and everything that might displease God, while openly confessing all my faults.” She refers to this milestone as her second conversion.

As in the title of the book, Liertz portrays her life of searching as an adventure. One period, she says, was like walking along a narrow, steep ridge with abysses on both sides. In spite of the sense of danger, Liertz recalls the walk as glorious, for it made her experience God’s invisible presence, his gaze obliging her to look to him ceaselessly. Another period she describes as “the call into the desert,” where the soul is called to face God, to realize that “all is nothing – only God exists,” and to make a “total surrender of my entire being, of my whole existence, to him.”

Driven by her spiritual search, Liertz requested and eventually obtained permission from the Church to leave the abbey. Her quest then took her through many twists and turns. She resolved to travel to India,

to look for a contemplative community to make her spiritual home. She went through periods where all doors seemed closed to her. Yet she always felt guided by the divine will of which she writes: *“In the course of the years to come, experience showed me more than once that one cannot intervene in the realization of the divine will, either in one’s own life or in the lives of others.”*

After arriving in India and some months of uncertainty, Liertz heard of a Hindu ashram seeking a visiting nun. Accepted to join the ashram, she immersed herself in its routine, which included the daily study of Indian philosophy and religions. These writings, superficially so foreign to the Christian texts she knew, revealed to her *“the universality of the spiritual, mystical experiences of humanity,”* and that the experience of God is the same for all, no matter the religion. She became convinced *“that the ‘universal Christ’ is present in all the religions of the world in a concealed form, and the divine Word or Logos is also manifest in the holy scriptures of these religions.”*

Her course of study included the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and philosophical works of Advaita Vedanta. In the Ishavasya Upanishad she read *“The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden disc; Do thou remove it, O Sustainer, so that I, the seeker of Truth, may behold it.”* From this she understood that it is not just the material world that comes between us and God, but also our mental pictures. The intellect and the experiences of the senses veil the eternal truth that can only be experienced with closed eyes and a mind made completely motionless. Her study of the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta reinforced her intuitive understanding that God can only be experienced. As Shankaracharya writes, commenting on the Brahma Sutra, *“Brahman cannot be known by the perception of the senses, because he should not be considered an object amongst other objects. Nor can he be known by logical reasoning, because no logical reasoning leads to him. Brahman can only be known through anubhava (experience).”*

As she studied, she became obsessed with the question “Who is God?” Eventually, unable to overcome inner blocks, she became convinced that she needed a spiritual guide. This led her to Maharaj Charan Singh, the living Master at Dera Baba Jaimal Singh in the Punjab. After spending

some weeks at the Dera she faced an agonizing dilemma: if she accepted a living Master as guide in her inner life and meditation, would she not have to abandon the inner guide who had brought her so far? Then, by a sudden spiritual experience, she realized that her two guides were one: the eyes she had perceived as those of Jesus Christ, peering through the veil inside her, were and had always been the Master's. From this point on, meditation and her relationship with the living saint became the core of her spiritual life.

This book gives deep insight into the spiritual quest of a seeker after truth. While focused on the personal story of Liertz, the book offers a wealth of information about Christianity and Hinduism. In her search, Liertz went through periods of conflict, both inside and outside. Moments of despair, when she felt completely out of touch with God, were followed by moments of bliss and realization. Along the way, she made a deep study of mystical writings from a wide array of sources. Readers of *Adventure of Faith* will find inspiration in her description of a quest that was not easy but that led to a complete transformation of the individual.



