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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Celestial Melody

*The flute has suddenly burst forth into melody!
On hearing it I have forgotten all other things.*

*I am shot with the wondrous shafts of Unstruck Music;
And the world appears fake, false its pursuits.
O Master, I have come to bargain
for a sight of your face
I have forgotten all other things.
The flute has suddenly burst forth into melody!*

*Now I have entrapped the restless deer.
He it was who had tied me down
I have taught him the prayer of love;
Only a verse or two remains to be taught.
The flute has suddenly burst forth into melody!*

*O, the Spouse of Bullah, I now cry in ecstasy,
When the lord has played upon the flute.
Driven crazy by its notes I run to you.
Where do the seekers wander in quest of you?*

*The flute has suddenly burst forth into melody!
On hearing it I have forgotten all other things.*

Bulleh Shah



Becoming Another Being

We've often heard it said that Sant Mat is a path, not of information but of transformation. And perhaps we've looked at ourselves and thought that if the final goal of this path is becoming one with the Lord himself, then there's an awful lot of transformation that has to take place first! It's a goal that seems so very far away that we tend to file it away under the heading of 'very far distant future' and we put it out of our minds for now. It just seems to be too unreal for us to think about it seriously yet.

What we probably don't consider is that the more mundane things we find easier to deal with are what are actually unreal; and that the whole point of the path is to move away from our familiar world, which is transient and unreal, to the reality which we don't see, the true and lasting reality. In fact, the very purpose of the meditation that we've been asked to do is to help us move from our present ignorance to a greater understanding of the true reality and our true identity.

But we probably don't understand any of that yet. And certainly we have no understanding whatsoever of God, the Supreme Lord with whom we're going to become one.

The Masters tell us that the difference between our soul and the Lord is simply the level of consciousness. What all our effort and all our devotion are now doing is slowly removing all the obstacles that are blocking us from reaching that level of divine consciousness and becoming the Lord. And we're also told that, more than anything else, it's love that helps us to grow and grow till we can reach that level.

Love for whom? At this stage probably not love for the Lord. We don't understand who or what or where he is. He's a complete mystery to us. So we can only love our Master. To achieve God-realization,

Great Master says, we necessarily have to devote ourselves to a true Master. And the time will come when we'll discover that loving him means the same as loving God. This is a love that will grow and grow in us as we do our meditation.

Devotion to a Master and our Shabd meditation – the two big essentials about this path. We don't have to study anything; we don't really need to understand anything; we don't have to go to the Dera (although this helps). But if we love and obey our Master and do what he tells us, that can be enough.

And then we also have to accept the fact that by ourselves we can actually do nothing. Everything depends on his grace. To quote Maharaj Charan Singh:

Everything happens by grace. Without his grace nothing can happen. Unless he wishes, nobody can reach him. We are all blind, groping in the dark. He is the only one who can show us the light out of this darkness.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

Ultimately our transformation is entirely thanks to his grace – grace which goes side by side with our meditation. In the book *Living Meditation* we read:

Meditation is the means to realize the fleeting and impermanent nature of human life, of all our attachments and endeavours – even life itself. Meditation is the means to realize a higher, more permanent level of reality. ... The Masters teach us that just as it is the very nature of the world to change unceasingly, so it is the privilege of human beings to experience the changeless, deathless and blissful nature of their true Self.

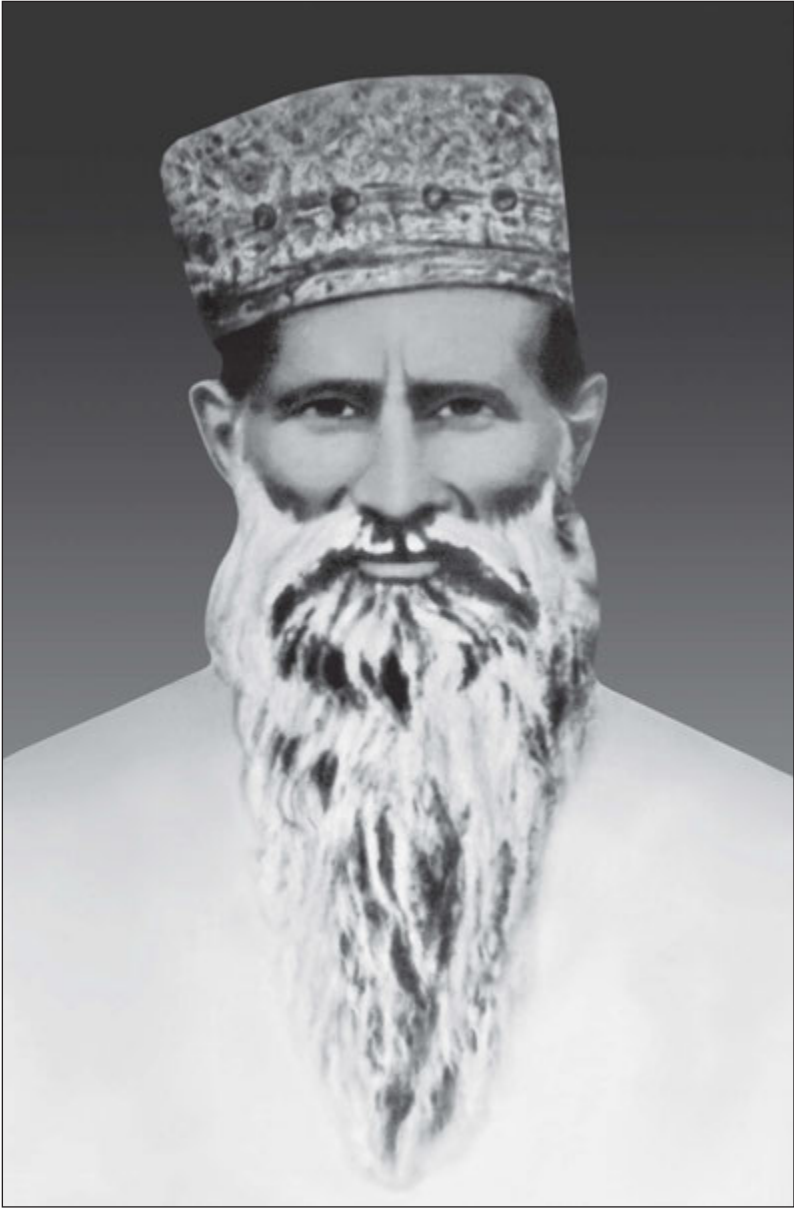
And that incredible realization will come about through our meditation. In that same book the author also says:

Through Shabd meditation we actually experience that we are not these ever-changing identities that we assume through our feelings and neuroses, but that we are fundamentally pure and constant. We are not the small self that we thought we were, but rather the Shabd Self – this light, bliss and love that is within us.

How does this change come about in us? Surely by curbing, little by little, the antics of the mind, which is trying its utmost to keep us asleep, trapped in this world of illusion. The mind does this very largely by distracting us from the goal of human life, by locking our attention into meaningless compulsive thinking.

And this is where our simran comes in. The purpose of simran is chiefly to stop the mind's indulgence in too much thinking. It's our thoughts that keep our attention outward, away from the eye centre. What our simran has to do is reverse the direction of our attention from outward to inward – as often as possible to direct the attention to the eye centre.

We need to keep remembering that our simran has been given to us for a definite purpose. Simran, with attention, is the instrument given to us to check the mind. As long as the mind runs around unchecked, flitting from one inconsequential thought to another, it's doing its own work of keeping us under its control, of keeping us unconscious. But when we remember to say our simran with attention, so that other thoughts can't slip in unnoticed, then we're starting to curb the mind and harness the power of simran.



Soami Ji Maharaj

If we're honest, we must admit that we really have no idea of what's happening behind the scenes when we try to meditate, when we repeat the words of our simran. But each round of simran must be subtly changing us, cleaning us, growing our consciousness. We don't need to understand our simran. We only need to do it – for the slow process of transformation to take place.

And sometimes we do have a sense that something has already changed. We are not the same person we were 10 or 20 or 30 years ago. And it's not that we've simply grown older. We are changing. We are being transformed. We're coming to realize that we're not just this body or this mind-created image we have of ourselves. We may even start to have an inkling that our real being is sublime and infinite.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Die to Live*:

Your real self is not this body. Master's real self is also not the body. Your real self is the soul, and the real self of your Master is the Shabd, the Word. The soul merges into the Shabd. ... Ultimately the Radiant Form becomes the Shabd and you become pure soul, without form and shape, and the soul just merges into the Shabd.

Baba Jaimal Singh went even further. He told his disciple Baba Sawan Singh:

You are not separate from my own sarup. ... You appear to have another form only for the purpose of carrying on your worldly duties.

Spiritual Letters

In other words, he told him, you are already one with me: there is no separation. Would that also be the same for us?

Of course, at this stage we don't have the slightest understanding of how it all works. All that we know and feel, with such grief sometimes, is the sense of separation from the One we long for. And then we're told, even as we feel swamped by our feeling of separation, that actually we've never really left him. How can we understand this? It's all a profound mystery.

Through all our confusion and bewilderment, we're now being told that the One who sent us out into the creation is guiding our steps back to him. He is nurturing our slow growth and the development of our understanding, and will do so up to the time that we are clean enough and mature enough to merge back into his ocean of love. We're even given to understand that there never was any separation from him and that we have always been part of him.

In *One Being One* the author writes:

Human perceptions are all awry and very limited. When we think we have been abandoned, He may be protecting us. When we wonder where His help has gone, He may be supporting our every step. ... Such is the magic of the love with which He tends us, and which He weaves around us. He himself has given us this illusion of freedom and separateness. He plays the game of letting us slowly discover things for ourselves. ... And in the end, we discover that we never had a separate existence, but have always dwelt in the sanctuary of his love.



The Mystery of the Creation

God, say the mystics, is One. The creation, however, is manifestly diverse and manifold, with everything in a state of constant flux. Nothing remains the same; everything constantly changes. Modern scientists, delving into the heart of the matter, have determined that not only are the forces, molecules, atoms and subatomic particles comprising matter constantly in a state of highly energetic agitation, but that their very motion contributes to their existence. It is the motion or vibration within things which makes them appear to exist. If the motion stopped, then the universe would simply disappear like a mirage from the desert or like ripples from the surface of a pond. Motion and existence are virtually synonymous.

It is generally supposed that in any man-made system perpetual motion is unobtainable because there is always a loss of energy, in one way or another, causing it to slow down and stop. The universe as a whole, however, appears to have no such built-in constraints. The activity of the tiniest particle, possessing spin speeds of thousands of revolutions and oscillations per second, shows no inclination to diminish. Yet no scientist can say where the primal energy comes from which keeps the universe in existence. They can measure it, describe it and also harness its energies, but they cannot say where it comes from or what it really is. At its most fundamental level the universe remains a complete mystery.

Mystics say that this primal energy or vibration is the Word itself. It is this Power of God which drives things and sustains them in existence and creates the fundamental order and organization not only in the physical universe, but in the higher regions of creation, too.

John Davidson, *The Gospel of Jesus*

Lost in the Maze

The world is a thick forest, thickly populated, where all have lost their way and are ceaselessly and aimlessly running about, life after life, harassed by the great dacoits: lust, greed, anger, attachment and pride. The remarkable thing about these dacoits is that people associate with them joyfully and, knowing that the result of their association is suffering, have not the courage to dissociate themselves from them. They eat the poison, cry, and eat the poison again. Lucky is he who begins to understand the game of these dacoits, luckier is he who tries to dissociate himself from them, and luckiest is he who meets a master-guide and is put by him on the path of the Sound Current that leads him out of this wilderness to his eternal home of peace and bliss in Sach Khand.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

As Great Master tells it, we are lost in the maze of this world, bamboozled and bewildered by influences that pull us this way and that; seduced by the immediate attractions of being in a physical body in a physical world where everyone says: “Sweet is this world, who has seen the next!”

So when we feel that inner discontent that is the voice of the soul longing for its true home, we say: “I am feeling bad, let me go out there and do something to make myself feel better.” And we visualize the various things that are our predilections for pleasure, whether these be indulgence in the sense pleasures or other things that cause our minds to turn away from the one thing that can truly give us real and lasting satisfaction. Instead of turning within to the true reality, we

turn to the ephemeral and the false. We convince ourselves to believe in the deception that these worldly distractions are really good and worthwhile, and that the inner discontent we feel is really evidence that there is something wrong with us.

What a cruel deception the mind has practised on us: to convince us that the one avenue of escape from the eternal wheel of coming and going in this world is something akin to a psychological malfunction that we need to expunge and root out! And yet we continue to fall for this trick, even though our Master has taught us to know better. We know that there is really only one way that we will ever be truly happy, contented and fulfilled, and the means to achieve this is not to be found in the world.

Still, we have to face the fact that we are in this world and have to continue functioning in it, while pursuing our one true objective, and that is to free ourselves once and for all from the tyranny of the mind, and to find our way to the loving embrace of our Master's Radiant Form within.

It is the inner nature of our search that causes us so many problems. We seek something that we cannot even prove exists. There is nothing tangible about it. It is like giving someone the promise of the ultimate oasis and then telling him to head out into the desert, because that's where it is. And once one heads out into the desert, and one looks back to see the last vestiges of civilization disappearing over the horizon, one cannot help but feel a pang of regret and misgiving. We are giving up so much. We are leaving so much behind us, and here is only sand before us, stretching it seems to an infinite horizon. We are abandoning something familiar and heading into nothing!

There comes a point, to use the desert analogy again, where one reaches the point of no return. Beyond a certain point there is no turning back. Water and provisions will only last so long, and beyond

this point there will not be enough to see us back to the familiar and the comfortable. Beyond this point one is irretrievably committed, whether one likes it or not.

One suspects that at the moment of initiation we passed beyond the point of no return. We are out in the desert of dissociation, of separation, pulled forward by an inner yearning that surpasses all our attempts at understanding, while still feeling the tug of all that was comfortable and familiar – the ordinary life we have left behind. And all the time, behind the veils of our delusion and our disorientation, the Master is present, guiding our struggling feet with a certainty that is the domain only of one who knows.

So we find ourselves involved in an inner conflict of desires – one for the things of this world and another for the unknown, unseen wonders of realms beyond our experience or understanding. We find ourselves torn between these forces. And yet somehow there is a certainty within us that is so powerful that we know beyond any doubt that in the end, all the attractions and desires of this world have absolutely no chance of succeeding in keeping us from that goal which we set ourselves when we applied for and received initiation. When our Master initiated us he placed before us the path that will lead the soul back to its true and original home, and the means for us to reunite with the Lord, our true Father. The soul within us is an innocent child, with its arms upstretched in a wordless gesture for its father to pick it up.

The saints of old have often said that the pathway to the Beloved is through a river of tears, because the great motivator for us all is that pain of separation that torments our hearts and will never go away. Read the poems of Mira Bai to see a reflection of our inner heart. This pain within us is not a psychological malfunction, it is not an indicator that we are maladjusted or need medical help. It is in fact

his blessing – if we could only summon the strength to deal with it adequately, and have the insight to recognize it for what it is: the grace of the Beloved to make us long for him!

And in our longing, through our tears, we should turn to him alone for comfort and consolation. In silent contemplation we can be with him and draw from his strength. And though we may not yet have reached the stage where we can see him and speak to him face to face within, we should know that he is not limited as we are. He knows and he sees. He is intimately aware of every aspect of our being. He knows our pain, he knows our longing, and he responds in a way that he deems most appropriate to hasten our journey home. If we consciously turn to him, he will help.



A Master possesses the unique magnetic power of love which draws a devotee towards him and creates within him a feeling of indifference towards 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 of his beautiful face, the lines on his forehead, even his indifference when he is displeased with the devotee, the lustre around 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

The Pain of Separation

Love is painful because it has separation in it; it wants to merge. Unless it becomes another being, it is separated, and separation is always painful; so love is painful. When we merge back into the Father, then there is no pain at all. Before that we have to go through that pain – we can't help it. The more we feel the pull within, the more painful it becomes because we become more anxious, more anxious and more anxious to become one with him.

The more we love him, the more the feeling of becoming one with him is growing. We become more anxious to become one with him, so naturally it will become more painful. Its blessing is also there, peace is also there, happiness is also there in the presence of the beloved.

This is a very strange feeling. It is like the example of a lady delivering a child. She has to go through the pain of the delivery, but then she's the happiest woman in the world after the child is born. She can't avoid that pain; that's a part of what she has to go through. Similarly, we have to go through that pain, but it is nothing compared to what we are going to achieve. Even when we feel the pain, would we like to get rid of that love? We would never want to get rid of that love.

Separation is painful. If anybody advises you to forget, what is the sense of that? You will never leave it. There is some satisfaction and pleasure within at the base of that pain. So it is a mixed feeling. The more we grow in love, the more separation we feel and the more anxious we are to become one with him.

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



No Other Way

Who else but a true saint can explain the whole teaching of Sant Mat in just twenty-seven lines? In *Sar Bachan Poetry* Soami Ji achieves this quite effortlessly:

The Master explains fully:

Attach yourself to the unstruck music of Shabd.

*There is no way, other than through Shabd,
to break free from the vessel of the body.*

*The Master reveals to you the path of five melodies
and shows you your real home within the body.*

*Attach your consciousness to the melody now
and go from this home to that home –*

*the one that is unfathomable and boundless,
the one you will see after you cross the tenth gate.*

Rise within and open that gate,

penetrate the inner sky and experience Sat Shabd.

*Without the Master's grace no one can find Shabd
and without Shabd nothing is attained.*

*The essence of the path is to first withdraw,
then raise the consciousness through the inner sky,
then listen to the melody of Shabd within.*

*But the mercurial mind never stays still,
so how can it be cleansed and purified?*

*Apply yourself to the practice of Surat Shabd,
discarding all other methods.*

*Put complete faith in this practice,
never give it up out of sloth or apathy.
I have explained the truth of all truths,
I have explained the path of the Saints.
I have unveiled the secret of Radha Soami.
Listen. Accept. I have revealed the essence.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

Seldom does such complete and pure truth come in such a compact package. This poem is a comprehensive synopsis of what is required to realize the salvation of the human soul.

At the start, Soami Ji states that the task assigned to mystics appointed by the Supreme Being is to explain Sant Mat fully to the seeker. However, the purpose of our existence is the one thing, the Saints say, that cannot be explained to us at our present level of understanding. In *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Volume II, Maharaj Jagat Singh offers a story-like explanation of the purpose of the creation. He calls it a game of love, a game of hide-and-seek, set in motion by the Lord. God himself created the whole creation, Sardar Bahadur says, and then he hid a spark of himself inside each one of us. That is our soul. We were placed in this creation in a state of ignorance, and then he, as our soul, starts searching for himself through a method that he himself has devised and in which we have an ennobling role to play: he allows us to participate in his search for himself.

So he, the Lord, comes to our level to give us an understanding of himself. Yet, as the Lord, he remains hidden. He takes on the role of the Master, and then gives instruction to himself, in the person of the devotee – that is, as us – although we have as yet no distinct consciousness of who or what we really are.

Soami Ji explains in this poem that as long as we do not find the Lord in this world in the form of a Master, we cannot return home – that is, we cannot go back to him. So he comes to this world as a Satguru, proficient in the mysteries of Shabd. And until that spark of the Lord within us contacts the manifestation of himself outside of us, we shall remain separated from God. So it is a game of hide-and-peek.

In *Sar Bachan Prose* Soami Ji tells us: “It is through the Shabd that the soul has descended into bondage.” It is therefore through the Shabd we must return to our origin. As Soami Ji says in the poem, “There is no way, other than through Shabd, to break free from the vessel of the body.”

And the compensation to us for participating in this game of worship is incomparable. Our reward is the manifestation of the Lord within our very being. Soami Ji tells us that this is the game that the Lord has made: He himself – *i.e.*, as the Master – gives us the rope of Nam or Shabd, which is the Master’s real form – just as spirit is our real form – and we must use this rope to pull ourselves out of this world.

Then he says:

*The Master reveals to you the path of five melodies
and shows you your real home within the body.*

So he, the Lord, is present internally in the heart and mind of each person, and externally as the Master. He himself gives us instruction and guidance, and ultimately, with a little – but essential – effort from us, he takes us within.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, Great Master explains:

Only man can make another man understand. This is the law of nature. ... The Lord works in this world of matter through living persons. ... If the Lord wishes to make people understand, He must take human form. He has to take the form of a Saint.

We human beings respond to others of our own species. We learn most quickly through our association with living teachers – in every sphere of life. We need a Master to teach us and we need a Master to love.

In *Light on Saint John* Maharaj Charan Singh makes the point that without falling in love with the One whom we do not see – the Lord – we can never escape from this creation. He says that this is the human problem, and this is why we need a living Master. Maharaj Ji has also said that we love and become attached to the Lord by loving his Sons – in other words, the Masters – and this is actually love for and attachment to the Lord. Because we go where our attachments are, this attachment to the Lord will take us back to him.

In the fourth verse of the poem Soami Ji says:

*Attach your consciousness to the melody now
and go from this home to that home.*

This simple statement is the essence of the truth that Soami Ji reveals in this poem, namely that it is the Shabd that takes us up from this outer physical home to our inner home in Sach Khand.

Great Master also tells us:

God is one, His instructions are one, and they are the Sound Current. The Path lies within you. The Sound Current is the direct road.

Spiritual Gems

Further on in the shabd Soami Ji makes his crucial point as to how to kick-start ourselves on the spiritual path – how to get things moving. And this is the bottom line. He says:

*Apply yourself to the practice of Surat Shabd,
discarding all other methods.
Put complete faith in this practice.*

As said earlier, the Master's job is to persuade us to get down to business. In *Spiritual Gems* Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji brings home this fact by saying the saint's teaching is expressly to make the soul attend to the Holy Sound. Then the Great Master gets to the ultimate 'knockout' punch line of the spiritual teachings – that there are two things alone of substantial importance: having love for the Satguru and listening to the holy Sound. "This is the only way," he says, "to go out of this world and leave the sphere of Kal."

We attach ourselves to the unstruck music by attaching ourselves to its embodiment, our Satguru. Love for the Master is first; it is our beginning. And our love for the Master, or our soul's love for its Source, is brought to light through sitting in meditation every day, as we agreed to do at initiation. This humble obedience will be repaid with the gift of love, and there is no greater joy than to love a saint.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, Great Master says:

*Complete and imperishable spiritual success can be had
from a living Guru only. There is a dynamic power of higher
consciousness in Him. His touch charges us and connects us
with the current of the Shabd.*

In *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Volume II, Maharaj Jagat Singh summarizes the unfolding of this revelation of the path, or initiation by a Satguru, when he quotes Soami Ji as saying: “When the Lord bestows his grace, he turns the key inside you and love for the Lord awakens within you.” Or as Soami Ji commands us here: “Apply yourself to the practice of Surat Shabd.” And then, as we discover for ourselves, automatically the path is travelled. Our awareness and discrimination develop and we do gradually travel “from this home to that home.”

One of the many astonishing discoveries we come upon as we develop under the care of a Satguru is the pivotal role his grace plays. As Soami Ji puts it here: “Without the Master’s grace no one can find Shabd.” Slowly we are brought to the realization that the creation is so constructed that without the grace and guidance of a Master we will not be able to travel the path. We need to obey him and submit ourselves to him, in absolute humility.

In *Sar Bachan Prose* Soami Ji goes so far as to say:

The truth is that so long as the mind is not truly humble before the Satguru, the Jiva (soul) cannot be liberated even if the Lord Himself were anxious to save him.

The key, as Soami Ji said, is courageous and determined daily application: “Apply yourself to the practice of Surat Shabd, discarding all other methods.”

In the last couplet Soami Ji says: “I have unveiled the secret of Radha Soami.” And he ends the poem with a bold assertion. He commands: “Listen. Accept. I have revealed the essence.



A Simple Way

Everything here is impermanent. Between the cradle and the grave destiny holds sway and we all must die.

Yet, touched by an unfathomable nostalgia – an instinct of the soul – we somehow sense a sacred part of ourselves which is immortal and never dies. Thus the question must arise in the short time remaining: do we squander all our precious life energy investigating the part of ourselves that dies or that part of us that never dies? Put differently, how, with both feet solidly planted in the marketplace of life, do we once more re-connect with the Real?

The mystics, those rare beings who have themselves made the journey to God-realization, come to tell us how and why. There is only one God. He is everything, and everything comes from him and returns to him. And he has planted a particle of himself, the soul, in each and every human form. And at the deepest level the soul yearns to become one with him. And so that primal longing, the weeping and waiting for the Beloved is born again in another tiny human heart, on a little blue marble called Earth hurtling through space.

But from our point of view, we have no such perspective. Like a person sitting in the front row of a cinema with his nose pressed up against the screen, we are fully engrossed in the drama playing itself out on the theatre of our lives. The world is like that, designed like that. Its only law is volatility, change, cause and effect, all registered on the inner screen of the mind. It is never still and takes this whole projected illusion to be real.

How to escape? The mystics say: just still and concentrate your mind through meditation day by day. Any other effort only leads to further entanglement, like a panicked bird in a thorny bush. The

remedy is simplicity itself, but since an egotistical and powerful mind can't accept its own demise, it entangles itself again and again by trying to think its way out of creation.

All will be revealed in time to a humble, receptive and quiet mind. As the turbulence subsides we begin to sense the presence of the divine within us, and even the subtle presence of our Master, guiding and protecting us like a mother her child. As we meditate, a sense of perspective and balance arises. The mind gradually stops turning simple pain into true mental drama, and our self-created suffering starts to ease. We're less inclined to look for happiness in fleeting and hollow outer forms and we turn inward to find our joy.

*It's just to hear the call and obey
To surrender the self and enter the Way
Let love lead you to our Beloved
Without delay.*



*I am happy tonight, united with the Friend.
Free from the pain of separation,
I whirl and dance with the Beloved.
I tell my heart, "Do not worry,
The key to morning I've thrown away."*

*Rumi: Whispers of the Beloved, Translated by
Maryam Mafi and Azima Melita Kolin*

The Mind Trap

On 5 August 2010 some tunnels collapsed in the San José mine in Chile's Atacama Desert, trapping 33 men deep underground. No one knew whether the miners, seven hundred metres below the surface, had survived the collapse. Several exploratory shafts were bored through the rock in an attempt to locate them. Finally, after seventeen days, when they withdrew one of the drills, they found notes attached to the drill bit, written by the miners. So the men were still alive!

A small shaft was drilled wide enough to supply the miners with food, medication and other essentials. On 13 October, after spending 69 days underground, the men were eventually brought to the surface, one by one, in a metal capsule called the Phoenix – named after the mythological bird that burns itself to death, after which another phoenix arises from the ashes. The phoenix appears in literature as a symbol of death and resurrection. So in the circumstances it was an appropriate name.

An estimated television audience of one billion round the world watched the drama unfold. The miners reported that just before they were located, their supplies were exhausted and they were in a desperate situation. They were totally dependent on help from above and time was running out.

One cannot begin to imagine the trauma those miners had to go through: the mental suffering, the emotional turmoil, the psychological anguish. Would they be found in time or would they starve to death? Would they die in this underground tomb? One of them reported: "There was the waiting for death, the hopelessness, the petty squabbles and the unspoken fear of cannibalism. We were waiting

for death.” Similarly, one cannot imagine the relief and elation they experienced when they were finally brought to the surface.

But if we look at ourselves, aren't we in a similar situation? Plato referred to our soul as being trapped in the tomb of the body, suffering indescribable pain, limitations and indignity. Other mystics also refer to the soul being captive in the prison of the body. And just like those miners in Chile, we can't get out of this situation by ourselves. We desperately need help.

For countless lives we have been trapped in these physical bodies, chasing illusions that we think will bring us happiness, peace and joy. But what has happened? We have become attached to family, wealth, status and possessions – with no lasting peace or happiness. All we have succeeded in doing is locking ourselves more securely in our prison in the physical realm. Each successive incarnation has added to a mountain of karma that stands between us and the Lord. This is what keeps us entombed in these physical bodies.

What is the main obstacle that prevents us from getting out of this mess? The mystics tell us it is the mind. Just as the miners had seven hundred metres of rock and earth between them and freedom, so we have a barrier of the mind and the karmas it has created which stands between us and freedom. And when we have finally removed this obstacle from the soul, when we have finally jettisoned the mind on our upward journey, then our joy will be of a magnitude far greater than that experienced by those miners when they were brought to the surface.

So let us give some thought to the mind, and to the role it plays in our lives. In the days of ancient Rome the emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius concluded that life is what our thoughts make it. The quality of our thoughts determines the quality of our lives. Our

character and personality are moulded and influenced by thoughts generated by the mind. Everything we do has its genesis in a thought.

And the mind never gives us any rest. It seems to have inexhaustible energy. Oddly, we never question what it does. We just let it do its own thing. We give it all the latitude it wants.

But when we come on to the spiritual path, we need to know what we are dealing with. We have to keep a constant watch over the mind, just like a mother who watches over her infant. If we don't, we will suffer the consequences. It is really only when we meditate that we actually begin to realize how much mastery the mind has over us.

From the earliest time, great thinkers have tried to figure out the mysteries of the mind. It's only the mystics, though, who have ever been able to tell us about the nature of the mind, and how the soul fell victim to its machinations.

Let's think about how we came to be in this predicament and what we have to do to extricate ourselves. Most of us would have wondered how it all began – why the Lord sent his souls down into the creation in the first place. Well, we don't have an answer to that question. At our level of understanding and awareness we simply don't know. So let's try to fill in the gaps with some guesswork.

It could be that when we were in our Father's abode, our true home, perhaps we didn't appreciate or realize the value of what we had. We didn't realize the worth of that joy, that bliss we experienced when we were at one with the Father because we had never experienced what the opposite felt like. The Lord, in his wisdom, decided that we should go and experience the rest of his creation in order to understand the value of what we'd possessed in our original home, so the soul was made to leave his kingdom. But before it left, the Father promised that when each of these souls became exhausted by its wanderings, he would send his emissary down to the physical plane to bring it home. That was his pledge.

Then the soul left the region of pure spirit and began its descent. On entering the regions of mind and matter the soul took on a covering of mind in order to function in these regions. Our mind is a drop of what Sant Mat refers to as universal mind or Kal, the governor or administrator of the causal, astral and physical regions. Our mind is an agent of this power.

When the soul entered the regions of mind and matter, it struck another problem. When you enter a foreign country and you are not familiar with its laws, sooner or later you are likely to land in trouble. Likewise with the soul, with its covering of mind. For a long time we may have thought that we were free to act as our mind and senses prompted us. But finally, after countless lives in physical bodies, it has eventually dawned on us that we have to pay for our transgressions. The penny has dropped: there are no free lunches – everything has a price tag. We have finally realized that we can get away with nothing. We are accountable for every deed, every word, every thought. And what is the penalty we have to pay? Another life, another body to pay off these debts that we have incurred.

At the root of all this karmic misery is the mind. The mind is the originator of our karma because every action that we do has its origin in a thought. Over numerous lifetimes the actions that have stemmed from these thoughts have created an insuperable barrier of karma, which has left the soul helplessly trapped in this low plane of consciousness.

Much of our karma stems from the mind's hankering for pleasure. But just as the soul has become weary here, the mind too has become vaguely dissatisfied – because the pleasures of the world simply don't last. And therefore even the mind has become unhappy here. Just as the soul wants to return to God, the universal soul, its true home, so the mind wants to return to its true home in universal mind. We need

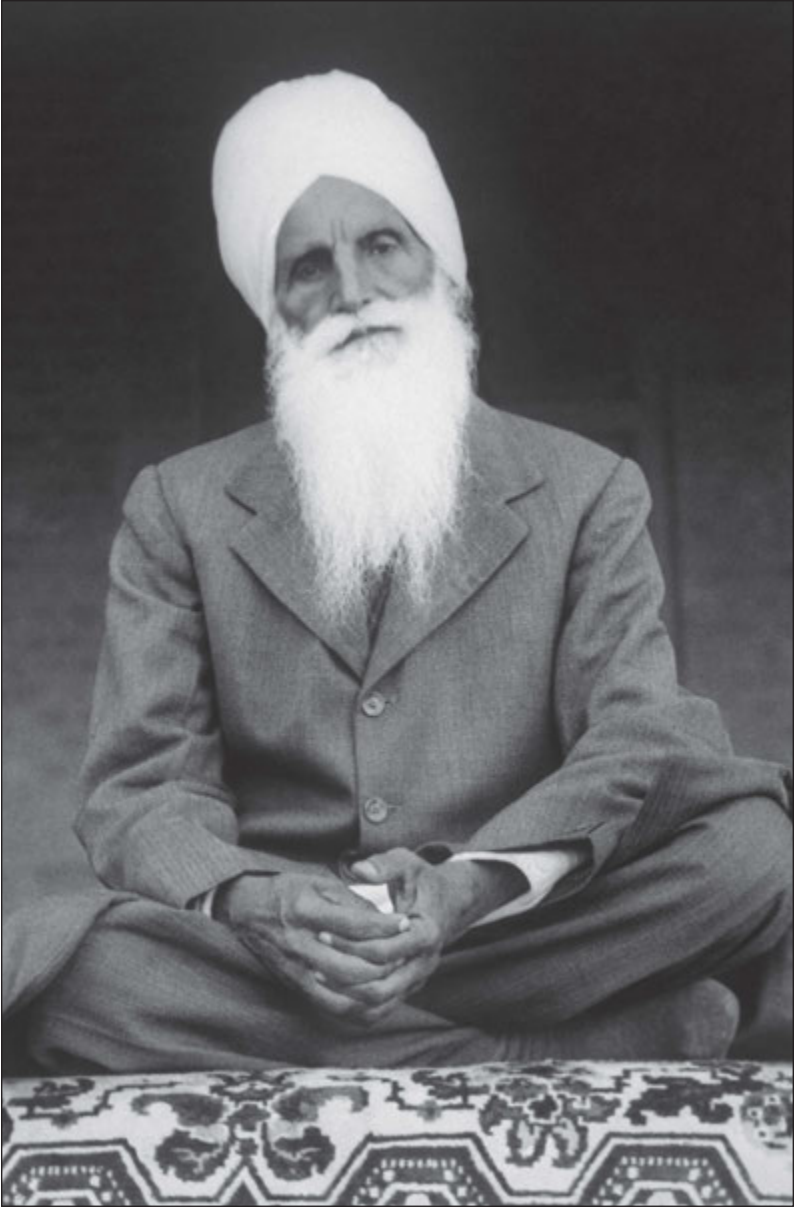
to take advantage of this. In order to persuade the mind to look for a better pleasure, we need to put it in touch with a higher attraction to which it can become attached.

When this weariness of soul and mind sets in, this is when the Lord intervenes to fulfil the promise that he made to the soul before its journey into the creation. Now he sets in motion the procedure to bring us home. He draws us into the orbit of a living Master, his promised emissary, who can show us the way out of the prison. The Master teaches us the technique of meditation – he gives us the means of working off the dark, heavy layers of karma that have trapped us here. And he gives us each our personal Phoenix as our means of escape – he puts us in touch with the Shabd, the divine sound that sustains all creation. It is the Master who teaches us that only through the Shabd can we return home.



The beginning and end of all things is Shabd. All gross matter, the sky, and so forth, subtle matter, sound, form, taste and scent are all Shabd. Whatever exists is Shabd. Whatever is manifested from Shabd cannot be anything but Shabd. Shabd is our creator. Shabd is our sustainer. We are of Shabd and Shabd is ours.

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



Maharaj Sawan Singh

The Unity of Consciousness

The Great Master tells us that the Lord is the great storehouse of consciousness and we are each a part of him. If he is the ocean of consciousness, then we are a drop of consciousness. Maharaj Jagat Singh described our soul as superconscious energy. Therefore, the essence from which our souls are made is this superconscious energy which we call the Lord.

The author of *One Being One* explains it as follows:

The One Being is the ultimate energy source, the central powerhouse. And He is conscious energy, too. His energy is imbued with an intelligence and wisdom way beyond human capacity to grasp. So He projects himself as a series of energy levels. ... And the bottom end of this beam of energy is what we call the material world.

An Indian-born quantum physicist, Dr Amit Goswami, defines the word ‘quantum’ as a ‘discrete quantity’. He says that a quantum of light called a photon is a discrete, indivisible amount of energy, a localized energy bundle. What a lovely analogy for the soul – a discrete quantity, or a defined amount, an indivisible, localized bundle of conscious energy – our drop of consciousness. It can never be divided, therefore it remains a part of the whole.

The essence of life that both sustains us and fills all space around us – it is in us and we are in it – is this superconscious energy. Whether we refer to it as God, Shabd, the Word, Logos, Ultimate Reality or by any other name, it is all the same thing – consciousness.

A disciple asked Maharaj Charan Singh if the real form of the disciple is the same as the real form of the Master. He replied:

What is the real form of the Master? Shabd. And what is the real form of the disciple? Soul. And what is the difference between soul and Shabd? It is the level of consciousness.

Spiritual Heritage

So the spiritual difference between us and the Master is only the level of consciousness. Consciousness is one. It is indivisible, but it operates on various levels: from being dormant and unaware to super-awareness in ultimate consciousness. We are conscious beings and we are aware of our own consciousness. However, there is a stark distinction between what we refer to as consciousness and the spiritual reality which the Masters know, for the two are worlds apart.

Our sense of consciousness is more in tune with the functioning of our brain than with spiritual reality. It has more to do with our own awareness and mental activity, which enables us to interpret the world around us. As we move through the process of existence we have a continuing sense of this consciousness which, although it appears to be ageless and timeless, is still very much grounded in the physical. The whole object of following this path is simply to move up the scale of consciousness, until we are able to comprehend ultimate consciousness – to merge our drop back into that vast ocean.

Both science and mysticism accept the existence of consciousness, but they cannot agree on its source. Materialists are scientists who theorize that all matter began from the minutest forms and evolved upwards into any and every form of matter we know, including the brain with its perceptive powers and intelligence. They propose that

matter is the basis of everything, and therefore, consciousness is simply a function of the brain.

Mysticism, on the other hand, teaches that consciousness is the source of all being, that it is an all-pervasive life-giving, life-sustaining energy. This is also the belief of Dr Goswami, who describes consciousness as having the ultimate power to create what we see and experience physically, so that consciousness is no longer seen as being a creation of the brain, but rather as the ground of being in which all material possibilities, including the brain, are embedded. So here we have a quantum physicist who reaches a conclusion which is exactly in line with what the Great Master wrote all those years ago – that the origin of being is pure consciousness. Great Master further discusses consciousness by saying:

The same qualities that exist in the original can be found in that which is created out of it. ... If there was no consciousness present in the creative originating power, then from where has consciousness come into this universe? ... Consciousness can only come from consciousness.

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

He goes on to say that the resultant can have different qualities, but its essential nature cannot be different from that of its cause. Therefore we see countless different forms in the material universe, but the essential ingredient – the glue that holds each form or object together – can only be one, and that is consciousness.

We become so excited by these many material forms that we chase after the illusion and miss the reality. We fail to recognize that it is the consciousness within them that illumines them and gives them their light and beauty. If we would only follow the Master's instruction

and do our meditation to the best of our ability, we would come to know this illuminating light and realize the futility of chasing rainbows.

An American researcher, Professor Eric Hoffman has studied brain waves and their relationship to states of consciousness. He measured the brainwaves of many people while they were meditating, and he also researched *deeksha* – a form of a blessing found in many Indian traditions. This is where a Master or an enlightened being puts his hand on the head of a disciple. Ancient Hindu scriptures describe it as the Master transferring divine energy to the disciple. However, Hoffman's research indicates that the enlightened one is raising the disciple's consciousness through his own elevated conscious vibration.

When our Master gives us darshan we simply accept that we are receiving something special. However, the Master could well be lifting our consciousness through his own powerful vibration – which is probably what we believe is happening.

We may find scientific experiments such as those mentioned above to be very interesting and intriguing, but the only thing that matters is that we follow the four simple instructions given to us by the Master and make that our life's goal.

Spirituality is an individual undertaking and every human soul is capable of experiencing the truth – that all spiritual reality is within the essence of one's own consciousness. We have to reach deep within ourselves to experience that level of consciousness first hand. No amount of theory or scientific proof will take us one iota closer to our goal. It is only of any benefit if it motivates us to greater effort and regular meditation. With practice, our own consciousness will lead us inwards to the divine presence and the love that we so desperately seek.



Paying the Price

So much of this path is just words for us, and we really have so little understanding of all these words. We blithely say things like “God is love” or “the Master is the Shabd.” What do we understand of this? If we’re honest we’ll admit – probably nothing! It’s not within the scope of our own personal experience. We don’t know what we’re talking about. It’s not real for us.

So then, what about this path is real for us? It’s quite hard to single out anything. There is one thing though: the hunger of the soul – that made us look for the path in the first place, that makes us want to work and do whatever we can to be better satsangis; that compels us to struggle day after day with our meditation. We know about that hunger of the soul. We’ve all felt it.

What else is real for us – so real that our doubting minds can’t ever deny it? Perhaps the rare moments of looking into our Master’s eyes and seeing that here is someone infinitely more vast and powerful and loving than any ordinary human ever could be – and realizing the bond of love that ties us to him.

So often the path feels unreal to us as we flounder among the deceptions of this world. We yearn for those times of unshakeable reality when our minds can’t raise any more questions. And so, even though our efforts may seem to produce so little, we keep trying to do what our Master has asked us to do: live according to the principles and meditate every day to find him inside.

It’s not always easy to be an odd-man-out in a world that feels no need to pursue a spiritual life – to live up to a standard that many find illogical and unnecessary. And it’s certainly not easy to tailor our whole routine to make meditation our first priority. But it’s this hunger

of the soul that drives us to get up early in the morning, and to sit and wrestle with our demons as we try to do this difficult task he has given us – as we sit through those long, lonely hours in the darkness, trying to find the still point of calm where he is waiting in silence. For some of us, perhaps many of us, the path can be a lonely affair.

It's very possible that this path is not meant to be an entirely happy experience. Mirdad talks about the pilgrim climbing the flint slope – a steep slope of broken flint – on which he is cut to ribbons as he climbs to reach his goal. He struggles on because he knows there's something worthwhile at the top of the mountain. Our souls hunger for something sublime. But there's a price to pay for it, and surely part of that price is our struggle.

There's an old saying: "You get nothing for nothing in this world, and very little for sixpence." We have to pay for everything. And the same applies to the path. Do we really imagine that there's not a price to pay for God-realization?

In a poem by the eighteenth-century Indian saint, Paltu, entitled 'The Path of Love', we read: "This is the abode of love, not the home of your aunt... only a severed head can gain admittance to it." This means, of course, that we have to be prepared to make the greatest sacrifice for it: not of our life as such, but of our ego, our will, our very identity. This is something huge that's expected of us. The ego has to go. In *Thus Saith the Master* Maharaj Ji is adamant about that. Our ego is keeping us away from the Father, he says. When we are able to eliminate that ego, the soul can merge into the Supreme Being.

And so everything that gives us our own sense of identity may well be broken down. We may be made to feel our unworthiness, our helplessness, our utter dependence on our Master. And most probably the most effective means he has to bring this about is our meditation.

We do struggle with our meditation. And sometimes we fall into despair – and we feel terrible when we just can't get it right. But perhaps even that despair is necessary. We may need to be cut down to size, perhaps every single morning, to teach us the humility that will eventually allow the camel to go through the eye of the needle.

There are many reasons why it may be necessary for us to struggle. Great Master said this about the battle to subdue the mind:

The rise and the fall are natural, and so is the struggle. For that which is achieved after struggle gives strength, self-reliance and incentive to go ahead.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

We have to become strong to continue this fight against the mind, because it could well be a long fight. Maybe we underestimate the magnitude of this task that we're trying to accomplish. Look at what we are. And look at what we want to become. Insignificant little flawed creatures aspiring to become God-realized saints!

When asked why meditation takes so long, Hazur Maharaj Ji replied:

Sister, the reason is very clear. Can you know when the creation came into being? Can we calculate when the creation started? Since then we have been in the creation. We can't even extend our imagination to grasp how long we have been in this world and how many karmas we have been collecting in every life and how much of a load of that dirt we have collected – and we want to burn it just in a second, comparatively? Naturally it has to take time. The bigger the heap, the more the time, so that is why meditation takes so long. It's not so easy.

Die to Live

There's also the benefit that our meditation is slowly cutting us free from whatever ties us to this world. We have long-standing bonds with the outside world, and all these outside attachments constantly hamper our meditation. Instead of holding our attention in our simran, our minds are constantly thinking of all those other things that interest us so much. It's a habit we're not going to overturn easily. So of course it's going to be a long struggle.

But most of the time we don't think logically during those times when we're caught up in the struggle. Perhaps we get up in the mornings with the best of intentions. Then, day after day, our efforts are so fuzzy and feeble that we're disgusted with ourselves. And for the rest of the day we feel dissatisfied, wanting him, and grieving that perhaps he doesn't want us.

It's certain that nothing could be further from the truth. Through our seeming failure in our meditation he's giving us his most precious gift – the gift of longing for him. Great Master tells us that longing is created in the disciple when he is unable to get what he yearns for. When the mind finds little apparent progress despite its labour, it begins to feel a sense of separation from the Master, and it's this longing which burns up worldly attachments and desires and eventually makes us fit to travel inwards.

If we think about it calmly and logically, we can see that there must be value in our struggle – so much so that we could say we're not failing in our meditation at all. In his writings the 18th century saint Dariya Sahib of Bihar has quite a revealing description of his own Master. He describes him as the “living Lord who shatters pride and dissolves sin”. By shattering pride even our ineffectual efforts are serving a valuable purpose. The Masters keep telling us there's no need to become despondent or frustrated about our meditation, because we can't tell what the Master is doing with our efforts.

No doubt at some stage everybody struggles with meditation. Everybody has to pay a price for God-realization. If we read the books we see that even the saints had to struggle to achieve their goal. In her poetry Mira Bai, for example, was absolutely honest about her own battle:

*Steep is the climb to my Beloved's Palace.
I am unable to ascend and reach it.
The four lanes are blocked.
How am I to go and meet the Lord?
Far is the dwelling of my Beloved,
The path is narrow, hard to tread,
And my soul quivers at every step.*

Mira, the Divine Lover

Haven't we all thought like this at some time or another? There's a kind of comfort in knowing that we aren't alone in this – that even the great saints struggled with meditation.

It's going to take time and a lot of effort. The saints tell us this. But they also say this is something infinitely worth working for. So let's not complain that it's not falling into our hands after just a few decades of ineffectual effort. God-realization does not come cheap!



The Human Face of the Divine

What do we ordinary mortals know of God or the Master? When we talk of God, do we really know what we are talking about? More than likely, we have an unclear, abstract idea of God as some being who lies beyond our understanding.

Typically, we turn to God when we are in trouble. We hope that God can extricate us from whatever difficult situation we find ourselves in, and we hope that he can make our suffering come to an end. Our simplistic view of his nature is that of a kindly old man with a white beard whose main purpose in life is to see to our needs. Our prayers are essentially one-way traffic, and we have no way of knowing if he is even listening.

The Master, on the other hand, appears to all intents and purposes to be a human being in a normal human body, just like the rest of us. But what do we mean when we refer to someone as a Master? We say that he is someone who, through rigorous spiritual practice, has raised his consciousness to the highest level, and merged his being into that great light which we call God. At our level we can no longer distinguish where the Master ends and God begins. At the highest level of consciousness they are one. Yet the great advantage that we get from having a Master is that he also exists at our level, speaks our language, and understands the challenges we face in this world. He can talk to us and we can talk to him.

The Master explains to us how to reverse the downward and outward and fundamentally negative tendencies of the mind, and how to journey back to the Lord. Not only does he teach us about the path that leads us home, but he also guides and assists us every step of the way.

The truth is that unless we have the guidance of a spiritually advanced soul, one who has completed his spiritual journey to become one with the Supreme Lord himself, we have no guarantee that we are getting the real truth. Any other information that we have access to has been filtered through the limited understanding of people who are themselves ignorant of this truth.

We need the guidance of one who knows; we need a perfect living Master. We say that the Master is one who has merged his consciousness into the Lord, and in so doing has become one with him. So we might say that, in a sense, the living Master is the human face of the divine. God is completely beyond our understanding and remains a concept to us, but the Master is real for us in the sense that he comes before us in a human body; he speaks to us in terms that make sense in the modern world, in the climate and culture in which we live.

Before we came into contact with a Master we lived our lives immersed in this world. In the process, and out of ignorance, we have considered things to be important which are only temporary and thus unreal. We commit ourselves to family, job or country in the firm belief that these things are real and important and will provide us with the security and happiness that we so passionately seek in life. In fact they do exactly the opposite. By our attachment to these things we bind ourselves to return again and again to this world in order to continue these relationships.

In addition, in the pursuit of worldly desires we have committed many acts, not all of them noble and selfless. In this manner we have bound ourselves to the consequences of our actions. All in all, in our ignorance, we have forged for ourselves bonds of steel, which bind us tightly to the faces, places and objects of this world.

The fact of the matter is that none of these things ever live up to their promises. The very best that the world has to offer may please us



Maharaj Charan Singh

for a short while, may provide some short-lived respite from pain and suffering, from solitude and loneliness, but sooner or later they all – without exception – leave us feeling empty. Absolutely nothing in this world lasts. We devote ourselves to the pursuit of worldly desires, we pay a heavy price to attain them, and then we end up disappointed and alone, with an additional burden of karmic debt that must be repaid. The bottom line is that we need help, and we need it in the person of a perfect living Master – the very embodiment of truth. Without a Master our best efforts merely enmesh us further in an endless cycle of misery.

Soami Ji gives us the following advice, as quoted in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II:

*Attach yourself to Nam, dear friend,
and patiently hold still within yourself.
Understand the will of the Beloved –
whatever he does is entirely for your good.
Your thinking is corrupted,
your restless mind has a downward tendency.
Not knowing the mystery of life,
you get more and more entangled
in the web of illusion.*

Currently our attention is focused and directed downward and outward into the material world. As a consequence our entire mode of thinking is based on our experience here. We say that seeing is believing, illustrating our need to perceive things through our senses before we believe that they are real. In contrast, Maharaj Charan Singh used to say: “The pity is that what we see, what we feel, what we

touch is not real; what we don't see, that is real". (*Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I)

We have therefore started off at a huge disadvantage. The Master has the difficult task of convincing us that our thinking is corrupted, that we have put the cart before the horse. But how is he going to convince us, since we are so entrenched in this delusion of materiality?

The Master knows that there is only one way of changing our thinking, of changing our perception of what is real and what is not, and that is by giving us the actual experience of what he is talking about. With this in mind, he directs us to change our lifestyle and habits in such a way that we will move towards this experience – which is the only thing that will really convince us. He tells us that there are certain assumptions that, pending the experiential proof that we will eventually have, we should take on faith in the meantime.

So what are these assumptions? Firstly, that there is a God. He is the one who created all of this and who sustains it even now. Secondly, he tells us that we are neither this body nor this mind; what we really are is soul, which is also divine in nature, and is in fact a drop from the divine ocean of the Lord. Thirdly, the Master tells us that our true home is not in this world but with the Lord in his home, which we call Sach Khand.

Using these as postulates, the Master asks us to do the spiritual practice in order to raise our consciousness out of the morass of this world and up to that level where we can witness the ultimate truth and experience the true reality for ourselves.

It is only by following the teachings of one who is the human face of the divine, and who has made the journey to God and merged with him, that we too will come face to face with the divine.

Three Vital Words

Let's begin with a bit of fun:

*Devoted disciples of true worth
Work hard at avoiding a next birth.
Faith, love and devotion,
Ensure their soul's motion
To Sat Desh and not back to Earth!*

Faith, love and devotion – three vital little words with enormous significance. These three qualities are inherent in every living human. Only man has the vital fifth element of discrimination: essentially an ability to discriminate between right and wrong and to be aware of the need to worship – and therefore to become imbued with faith in, love for, and devotion to the Lord.

That every human being should have this ability in his make-up is a necessary part of the divine plan: that souls marked for rescue from the creation should return to the regions of pure spirit beyond the reach of Kal, the negative power. But since the ultimate departure from Kal's realm of all such souls will depopulate his own kingdom, he has equipped souls with a mind, the lower aspect of which he has programmed to delay this event as long as possible.

Although the Supreme Lord pervades his entire creation in the form of Shabd, it is simply not possible for us to comprehend the Lord with our limited intellect. Yet we are instinctively aware of the need for the guidance, protection and blessings of the Lord. This awareness can translate in time into faith, a belief in the Lord's guidance and protection, even though we cannot understand him.

Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us:

A devotee must have faith. Firm belief is a prerequisite. When that belief takes the form of faith it turns into devotion, and eventually culminates in love. Worldly attractions and pleasures do not interest such a devotee. Only love for the Lord remains.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II

But considering the magnitude of the task and the length of the journey, in order to succeed we require much more than mere belief and faith in our concept of the Lord. Spirituality and spiritual growth are complex concepts and, considering the limitations of our mind, these are definitely beyond our reach unaided. This is where the divine plan provides for the necessary help in the form of the perfect Master. This is the Lord's way of enabling our soul to travel the path to reach him.

Maharaj Charan Singh was once asked whether there was any other way to God-realization except with the help of a Master. After explaining that in all branches of science and philosophy requiring learning and understanding a teacher is essential, he said:

Spirituality is the most difficult subject. For this we need a Master, a teacher in spirituality. He tells us why we have to meet the Lord, and where the Lord is; how to find the Lord; and what is between us and the Lord that keeps us away from Him, and how to overcome these barriers between us and the Lord.

The Master Answers

He pointed out that the journey after death through the astral and causal regions is extremely difficult without a guide. The obstacles and temptations increase and we could never overcome them on our own. But the guide or Master must be perfect. He must know the path and have travelled it himself many times.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, Great Master tells us:

Religious books are like directories. They simply point the way. The Saints-incarnate take us to the higher regions in the ship of Nam. We can obtain tickets and passports from them and cross in their ship of Nam or Shabd. They are themselves the captains. We can thus reach the region of the Lord.

The perfect Master knows who the souls are whom the Lord has selected for commencing the journey. The shepherd recognizes his marked sheep. And so at the start of the journey, we will come into contact with the Master in his physical form. This is so that we can, with our limited mind, relate directly to him and start preparing for the journey. The real form of the Master, the form that will be our guide all the way up to the final destination is the Radiant or Shabd Form.

Our soul being a drop of the ocean of the Lord is also Shabd; and the Master's Shabd form and our soul are merged within us at the time of initiation. When our inner senses of seeing and hearing are fully developed with the help of meditation and his grace, we will be able to realize his Radiant Form within. The recognition by the disciple of the Master as his Master is instinctive. You simply know. It is an inner conviction. Thus faith begins and starts to grow with meditation. Love too may come initially when a disciple first meets his Master. Again it is instinctive; an inner feeling which somehow bypasses the barrier of the mind.

Great Master explains:

Love is awakened when the currents of love, which emanate from the Beloved, enter into our hearts. This is true love, and it is not dependant on any outside influence.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II

This true love is totally unmixed with ego. It is in fact attaching us to the Master, and it is a priceless treasure which we must nurture and strengthen. The Masters teach us that the way to do this is by living the teachings – by being vegetarian and avoiding addictive substances, by living a moral life and especially by doing regular meditation. If we do this then automatically we will be increasing our love for the Master.

That we have come to the feet of the Master and been accepted by him is an inestimable gift for which our gratitude should be boundless. Naturally the way for us to express our gratitude to him is through our obedience to him and through our regular meditation. And let us always have firm faith that he is fully aware of our efforts because he is always with us. There is never a moment that he is not with us. We are told in *One Being One*:

He is never apart from his creation. He is always there within every little being.... He is within. He is without. Whenever the mind is quiet, we will find Him in our being. He is not what we think; He is what we are.



Book Review

An Introduction to the Devout Life

BY SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES, TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY JOHN K. RYAN
PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: IMAGE BOOKS, 1989. ISBN: 0 3850 3009 6

John K. Ryan, the translator of this edition, writes that when *An Introduction to the Devout Life* was first printed in 1608, it was immediately recognized “as a masterpiece of mystical and devotional literature.” Throughout the four centuries since then it has remained one of the great classics of Christian spiritual literature – “one of those rare productions of human genius.”

St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622) lived in a time when it was assumed that the only way to live a life truly devoted to God was to withdraw into a monastery or hermitage. In a profound break from tradition, St. Francis believed that people in all walks of life could attain a life of devotion. As he states in the preface, his purpose was to give spiritual instructions “to those who live in town, within families, or at court, and by their state of life are obliged to live an ordinary life as to outward appearances.” Using images familiar to those living at the time, he explains:

I shall show to such men that just as. . . springs of fresh water may be found in the depths of the sea, just as the firefly passes through flames without burning its wings, so also a strong, resolute soul can live in the world without being infected by any of its moods, find sweet springs of piety amid its salty waters, and fly through the flames of earthly lusts without burning the wings of its holy desires for the devout life.

As the Bishop of Geneva, de Sales had responded over the years to many requests for spiritual advice from people ardently wishing to grow in devotion. In *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, he compiled and systematized the advice he had given in these letters, addressing his insightful words on spiritual development now to a fictional person

named Philothea (literally, lover of God), “since I wish to direct what was first written for one person alone to the general benefit of many souls; hence I use the name that can refer to all who aspire to devotion.”

St. Francis begins by explaining what he means by true devotion. One person may fast often, another may recite many holy texts, another may give money to the poor, all of them thinking themselves devout, but their inward state may not be filled with devotion at all. “Genuine, living devotion, Philothea, presupposes love of God, and hence it is simply true love of God.”

The reader who is unfamiliar with Christian spiritual literature may occasionally struggle with the terminology used here. For example, ‘charity’ is used to mean divinely inspired love, a love that impels one to yearn for and worship God and that also arouses universal compassion toward all God’s creatures. Thus, in explaining true devotion, St. Francis says that divine love comes into the soul through grace and takes the form of charity.

Charity and devotion differ no more from one another than does flame from the fire. Charity is spiritual fire and when it bursts into flames, it is called devotion. Hence devotion adds nothing to the fire of charity except the flame that makes charity prompt, active, and diligent not only to observe God’s commandments, but also to fulfil his heavenly counsels and inspirations.

Philothea’s first need on her spiritual path, St. Francis counsels, is a guide. “Look for a good man to guide and lead you. This is the most important of all words of advice.” This spiritual director is “a faithful friend” and a “strong defence.”

For you such a director ought always to be an angel. That is, when you have found him, do not look on him as a mere man; do not place confidence merely in him or in human learning but rather in God for he will befriend you and speak to you by means of this man. God will put into his heart and mouth whatever is requisite for your welfare. Hence you must listen to him as to an angel who comes down from

heaven to lead you to it. ... Confide in him with a daughter's respect for her father; respect him with a son's confidence in his mother. In short, such friendship must be strong and sweet, completely holy, completely sacred, completely divine, completely spiritual.

St. Francis leads Philothea through a series of meditations, prayers, and exercises. A 'meditation' in this context means certain ideas to ponder and reflect upon as a preparation, as setting the atmosphere, for prayer. For example, in one of the first meditations, he invites Philothea to pause and reflect deeply on the fact that God created her out of nothing. "God has drawn you out of that nothingness to make you what you now are and he has done so solely out of his own goodness and without need of you." After these reflections, she is advised to humble herself profoundly before God. "Say with all your heart: 'Lord, before You I am truly nothing. How were you mindful of me so as to create me?'" These reflections lead her then into the right frame of mind to give thanks and to pray.

St. Francis encourages Philothea to free herself of past mistakes. She should make a full confession with "a humble and confident mind," trusting fully in God's goodness, and afterwards let all burdens of shame be released from her mind.

I ask you, don't let any fears of any sort disturb you. The scorpion that bites you is poisonous at the moment it bites, but when reduced to oil it is an effective remedy against its own sting. Sin is shameful only when we commit it; when it has been converted by confession and repentance it becomes honourable and salutary. ... It is a kind of relief for us to inform our physician rightly as to the nature of a disease that torments us.

Philothea is advised to pray and to direct her attention to the presence of God. Vocal prayer can be a first step, but it should lead to deep, inward mental prayer. The first requisite for developing inward prayer is "a lively, attentive realization of God's absolute presence, that is, that God is in all things and all places. ... Just as wherever birds fly they always encounter the air, so also wherever we go or wherever we are we find God present."

Moreover, while God is everywhere, “he is present in a most particular manner in your heart. . . . He is there as the heart of your heart and the spirit of your spirit.” So long as a person cannot see and know this truth for himself, however, the work of devotion is to “bring it home to himself” through continual recollection. St. Francis explains with a parable:

Blind men do not see a prince who is present among them, and therefore do not show him the respect they do after being told of his presence. However, because they do not actually see him they easily forget his presence, and having forgotten it, they still more easily lose the respect and reverence owed to him. Unfortunately, Philothea, we do not see God who is present with us.

Therefore, he advises her to recall as often as possible during the course of the day “that you are in God’s presence. Consider what God does and what you are doing. You will see his eyes turned toward you and constantly fixed on you with incomparable love.” St. Francis assures Philothea that she can always withdraw into that place of God’s presence and feel his love, regardless of what else is happening in her life:

Birds have nests in trees and can retire to them when need arises and stags have bushes and thickets where they can take cover. . . . Always remember then, Philothea, to retire at various times into the solitude of your own heart even while outwardly engaged in discussions or transactions with others. This mental solitude cannot be violated by the many people who surround you since they are not standing around your heart but only around your body. Your heart remains alone in the presence of God.



