

June 2016

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
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VOLUME 12 • ISSUE 6 • JUNE 2016

Yours Affectionately

The Master or the Satguru who initiates a disciple, from the moment of initiation, does always take charge of him and keeps on watching, but the disciple is aware of this only when he goes up and contacts the Radiant Form of the Master within. Besides, the Master's protection and help are more effective when the disciple's attention is directed toward him, which is the beginning of *gurmukhta*.

I am glad you are eager to contact the Light and to get the Shabd, but you know the way to do it is to take your consciousness up to the eye centre, the *tisra til*. That which is to see and hear inside, now is night and day involved in worldly affairs outside. All that we have to do is to try to practise vacating the body, that is, to take our attention away from everything else and from the body, up to the eye centre. Concentration of the attention at the centre between the two eyebrows is achieved by means of *simran*. Then the attention is automatically taken in and up by Shabd.

Heavy work and heavy duties do not stand in the way of the performance of *simran* and *bhajan*. On the contrary, they cultivate in us the habit of concentration and hard work, which is actually helpful in meditation.

When we are tired, our attention naturally tends to go in, instead of going out and thinking of things and persons. Thus also the tiredness resulting from the performance of our duties proves helpful. You will find that as you develop good concentration and proceed regularly with your meditation, you will be able to attend to your outward duties also in a better and more efficient way.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



Allergic to Humility

Recently at an English satsang, the speaker said something quite thought provoking. Quoting from the writings of the saints, he said, “Soami Ji says, ‘the Lord loves humility.’” It was something we had all heard many times before so it did not really catch our attention. At least, not until we heard what the speaker said next. “What a pity!” he said. “Because if the Lord loved anything else, we might be able to give it to him, but humility? We are allergic to being humble.”

It was a compelling statement. It was profound and true on so many different levels that it made you want to stop and consider its implications. What did it mean?

The word ‘allergic’ generally implies having an adverse reaction to a particular substance, condition or situation. For many people, it is not easy to respond to a situation by humbling the self and saying something like ‘I am sorry’, ‘you are right’ or ‘it was my mistake’. The average person’s initial response is usually defensive and self-justifying. And the more superior one feels to the other person, the harder it is to concede.

But humble words come naturally to humble people. It is said that the word humility is derived from the Latin word *humus* (earth) implying that a humble person has his feet on the ground. Level headed and truthful, those with humility are not the centre of their own universe. Rather, they are centred on God and the happiness of others.

Mystic wisdom explains that this is the spirit of humility. It does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself one way or another.

Problems arise when one is too focused on the self. Individual importance is magnified to such unhealthy proportions that reality becomes distorted.

It is like looking through the lens of a camera. When one zooms into the face of a person, every pore, every strand of hair, every blemish is amplified to such magnitude that a small pimple resembles a giant crater. But zoom out until you see the entire face, and then the full body and then the entire group of people and suddenly the pimple vanishes – like it never even existed.

The spiritual Masters teach their disciples to zoom out and take their attention away from the self through service, or seva, and meditation. When we do seva, we take a break from pleasing ourselves and focus on someone else's happiness. This allows us to wean the attention away from the self in small doses, until we eventually learn to forget our egoistic existence.

The Masters explain that even more effective is meditation. It is the best exercise for forgetting the self. When we repeat our simran, we compel the mind to stop the endless onslaught of thoughts about our lives, our problems, our desires and our goals. Instead, we turn all our attention to the eye centre where we immerse ourselves in the love of the Master.

You will get the feeling that you are nothing when you merge in the love of the Master. You will just forget what you are. When you absolutely blend yourself into the love of another person, then you forget what you are.

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

This is why on this physical plane, true spiritual Masters exemplify perfect humility. Centred upon the Lord and his service, they have

totally eliminated themselves and are one with the Father. And as the physical embodiment of the Shabd, they inspire us and remind us of our true potential.

There is an incident of a spiritual Master who had completed a tour around the world. When asked, “Isn’t it harmful to you to receive so much honour?” The Master replied, “No. When the donkey went into Jerusalem, people put garments on the ground before it. It was not proud. The donkey knew that it was not he that was being honoured, but Christ, who was sitting on his back. When people praise me, I know it is not me, but the Lord, who does the job.”

So is there an antidote to this allergy? The answer that is offered by the path of the Masters is nothing new. It is simply more seva and more meditation. Hazur Maharaj Ji explained it perfectly once when he said that the Father is indescribably great and mighty. When we realize this, we will also realize how insignificant we are before the Father. Then we will not see anybody else in the world but him. That is when humility will come.



The way to God is firstly humility, secondly humility, and thirdly humility. Again, unless humility precedes, accompanies, and follows every good action which we perform, pride wrests wholly from our hands any good work on which we are congratulating ourselves.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. III

Something to Think About

Imagine that you are in a fort with no doors and you wish to gather around all that will ensure your happiness. How can you go and acquire it? There is no exit from this fort. Only by making a door in its wall can you go out and get the treasure with which to embellish your fort. Similarly, the soul must find a way out of the fortress of the body and mingle with the ocean of spirit. The only bliss it can obtain is in merging with this ocean. Why then suffer? It remains for the soul to be taught the direction it must take. The Lord has put a treasure within us, locked it up and removed the key, and only he can give us back this key which is Nam.

In Search of the Way



We always try to give the time we have no use for to the Father. Once we are rejected by society, by our children or friends, then we want to devote our time to the Father. When we become old and our senses don't go with us, our eyes refuse to cooperate, ears and limbs refuse to cooperate – then we want to worship the Father. We have to give the best time of our life to the Father.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Legacy of Love*



Life is simple but we people create so many problems and complications that we spend the whole of our life in solving them. I do not know when we are going to learn to take simple things in a simple way.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Treasure Beyond Measure*

Nourishment

Many years ago, a story was told of a man who once wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that he did not see how it helped him to attend spiritual lectures every Sunday. “I’ve gone for thirty years now,” he wrote, “and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 lectures. But for the life of me, I can’t remember a single one of them. So, I think I’m wasting my time and the preachers are wasting theirs by giving them.”

This is the opinion of a person who is merely expressing his views on the value of spiritual discourses. It is possible that we have shared the same view at some point in our lives. We too may have asked ourselves, “Why do we go to satsang when most of the time our mind runs out thinking of other things? Why go to satsang when we end up falling asleep? What is the benefit of satsang when, before we even leave the hall, we have already forgotten what we heard? Are we also wasting our time?”

Life is all about routine, and in the performance of our daily routine, our mind is continually active, and our body is in constant motion, resting only when we go to sleep at night.

Once or twice a week, our routines are punctuated with satsang – forty-five minutes of sitting quietly and comfortably in a peaceful atmosphere where we are asked to leave the outside world and pay attention to a spiritual discourse.

Karo ri koi satsang aaj banaaè is a beautiful poem which appeals to us like an invitation from Soami Ji Maharaj, in which he writes: “How good it would be if someone had the company of the truth ...”

In this poem, Soami Ji is encouraging us to seek the company of the truth – in other words, to find a true Master. He is the embodiment

of truth and imparts the teachings that will lead us to an awareness of spiritual Truth. The word *satsang* comprises of *sat*, which means truth, and *sang*, which means company. *Sat-sang*, therefore, means to be in the company of truth.

The saints tell us that nothing we see in this world has existed on its own. There is a Creator, and he is the one Lord, the one God of us all. We remember him with love and devotion by thousands of names. He is the supreme reason for our search and spiritual yearning. Our soul is the essence of the Lord and we are a drop of the vast ocean of his divine love.

In satsang, our mind is required to focus and listen to discourses about the Lord. Satsang is a refresher course meant to inspire and energize our daily routine of sitting in meditation with love, devotion and concentration.

As Maharaj Charan Singh explained, to sit in meditation for a couple of hours in a closed room is a very difficult thing. However, he also asserts that all these meetings, all these satsangs and question-and-answer sessions, are meant to help us do our best in our spiritual practice. The purpose of satsang is to strengthen our meditation. It dissolves and resolves the doubts, questions and obstacles in our mind.

It does not matter what stage of our spiritual journey we are at; as a seeker and as an initiate, satsang is crucial.

If you don't attend the satsang meeting, you might be rushing to some other social gathering, and God knows what you might collect there. If the stone doesn't dissolve in the water, at least it saves itself from the heat of the sun. That's the example Great Master used to give us. If people in the satsang don't attend to meditation, at least they are saving themselves from the vices of the world to a great extent.

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

The Masters explain that if we are inconsistent with our meditation, satsang serves to remind us about the benefits of meditation and the bounty of God's grace. When we are away from the atmosphere of satsang, the mind becomes active again – it makes us dance to its tune and pulls us towards the senses. However, all that hammering is sure to make a dent one day, and eventually, we will love to sit for meditation.

Even those who attend to their meditation regularly need the atmosphere of satsang. The saints say if we have a good crop, we need a good fence as well, lest somebody destroy it. Satsang works as a strong fence around the crop of our meditation.

Let's go back to the story of the man who wrote a letter to the editor complaining that he did not see how it helped him to attend spiritual lectures every Sunday. His letter started a big controversy in the 'Letters to the Editor' column, much to the delight of the editor.

The discussion went on for weeks until someone wrote: "I've been married for thirty years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of them. But I do know this: they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to those lectures for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

Maharaj Sawan Singh explains:

If the waters of rivers and rivulets, on joining the Ganges, lose their own identity; if the knife of the butcher turns into gold on touching the philosopher's stone; if a margosa tree growing

near a sandalwood tree imbibes its fragrance; if it is true that whatever is kept in a salt mine becomes salt; then there need be no doubt that whoever goes to satsang is dyed in its colour. You may be good or bad. There is nothing to worry about. You should gain the company of a saint and listen to his satsang. The fresh air of his invigorating spirituality will bestow upon you spiritual health and freshness, and in a short time you will become good yourself.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I

Satsang is, therefore, the means to an end – a crucial aspect of our spiritual journey. It gives us the inspiration and energy to sit for meditation every day, and provides us with the spiritual health to allow the love and devotion for our Satguru to bloom within us.



The mere hearing of discourses and attendance at satsang is not sufficient. You should also ponder over and mentally accept what you have heard so that you might move on to the next step of practice. If you do not let it sink in your heart, you remain as you were.

Soami Ji Maharaj, Sar Bachan

Prayer

The real prayer to the Lord is submitting ourselves to the Lord. What is prayer, as it is ordinarily understood? Our mind creates desires, and we are praying to the Lord to fulfil those desires. We are not explaining to our mind to adjust to the will of the Lord, but we are trying to explain to the Lord to adjust to the wishes of our mind. Actually, we are a slave of the mind and not of the Lord. We have to become a slave of the Lord, and then there is really nothing to pray for. We are just to submit to what he wants us to do. We should pray to him to give us strength to face gracefully and boldly whatever he wants us to go through.

When we are devoted to the Lord, naturally he is not unmindful of what we need. For example, if a maid works in your house and she does beautiful work, is always willing and pleasant about it and never asks you for anything, then you always feel like giving her something, without her asking. You are so appreciative of what she does and of her attitude that you want to give her something, more than if she had asked for it. If another maid does not work well or even if she works well but is always grumbling and asking for something, you do not feel like giving her anything, and you would even like to dismiss her.

Generally, we pray to the Lord for worldly possessions – health, wealth, and prosperity for ourselves and our loved ones. In the first place, we do not know what is best for us, much less for anyone else. Many things are received from the Lord after praying for four or five years, and perhaps we have to kneel in prayer for another ten years to petition him to relieve us of the very things that we had been praying for. When we ask, we do not know what is good for us. When we do not know what is good for us, why not submit to him? He will give us what is best for us.

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

Lemon or Milk?

Think of your cup of tea. You would either have put in some milk, or perhaps a slice of lemon in black tea. Never both. We know this so well, but there was once a man for whom tea meant Lipton's, a pitcher and some ice cubes. So when he was invited to the Minister's house for tea, he was pretty clueless. The hostess asked him, "Lemon or milk?" He did not quite know what to say, but he did not want to be rude, and he did not want to miss out either. So he said, "Both." "You don't mix lemon and milk in the same cup," said the hostess softly, "unless you want a cup of curdle."

Does that resonate with us at all? The sheer amount of immense grace showered upon us mixed with our ingratitude? They make a sour concoction. In the Lord's cup, we need to pour in our sense of gratitude. With every breath, with every heartbeat, we should thank him, because everything in our lives is a reflection of his grace. And not only should we be grateful when it pleases us, but under all circumstances. Meister Eckhart inspires us: "If the only prayer you say in your life is 'thank you,' that would be sufficient."

Gratitude means thankfulness, counting our blessings and acknowledging everything that we receive. It means learning to live our lives as if everything were a miracle, and being aware on a continuous basis of how much we have been given. Gratitude shifts our focus from what is lacking to the abundance that is already present. When we open up to being grateful, we clearly see how much good there is in our lives. Gratitude affirms.

Of course there will be things we are still lacking, but most of us tend to focus so heavily on the deficiencies in our lives that we barely perceive the good that counterbalances them. There is no limit to

what we do not have, and if that is where we focus, then our lives are inevitably filled with endless dissatisfaction. This is the ethos that lies behind the great Talmudic proverb which asks, “Who is rich?” and then answers, “Those who rejoice in their own lot.”

Lala Munshi Ram also had a very beautiful prayer. He said: “O Lord, don’t give me delicious food, but give me hunger. Don’t give me cars, but give me strength in my legs. Don’t give me a comfortable bed, but give me sleep.”

We all have this capability within us. We are like an ocean wave that believes it is fragile and ugly and that the other waves are more beautiful or powerful. But when this wave gets in touch with its true nature – water – it sees that water goes beyond all concepts of beautiful, ugly, high, low, here and there. Whether the wave is large or small, whether it is half a wave or a third of a wave, it is still made out of water. Water is beyond all these qualifications. A wave is really only water, and as far as water is concerned, all waves are equal.

The seemingly most unacceptable and painful situation hides a deeper good, and within every disaster is contained the seed of grace. Throughout history, there have been people who, in the face of great loss, illness or imprisonment, accepted the seemingly unacceptable and thus found “the peace that passeth all understanding”. Acceptance of the unacceptable is the greatest form of grace.

Gratitude comes when we no longer ask, “Why is this happening to me?” Instead, we practise the beauty of ‘sweet is thy will’ – *tera bhana meetha lage*.

Gratitude becomes so much easier when we realize the fleeting nature of all our experiences, and how the world cannot give us anything of value. We then no longer demand that a situation, person, place, or event should satisfy us or make us happy. And the beauty is that when we are no longer placing an impossible demand on them, every situation, person, place or event becomes much more peaceful

and satisfying. When we cultivate the quality of gratitude within ourselves, we no longer seek it through other people. Rather, we bring our own sense of calm to everyone we encounter. We no longer view circumstances in terms of whether they warrant our gratitude. Instead, we bring our equanimity to the chaos we encounter and our presence soothes the outer turmoil.

What is the ultimate form of gratitude? Meditation. Our meditation is nothing but our small way of saying “thank you” for all that the Lord gives us. The problem is we often do everything but the one thing he wants. We go to satsang, we do our physical seva, we are strict vegetarians, we follow a moral way of living, but we slack off when it comes to our meditation.

Our Master has given us everything. In return, he asks us for just one thing. If we do not do that, are we not being ungrateful? The one gift we can give him is the gift of our meditation. In a question-and-answer session with Hazur, someone once said to him, “I just want to thank you for your love.” To this, he responded:

To love is nothing but giving thanks. It is all his grace that he gives us his love, he gives us his devotion, and our words are too inadequate to express that feeling, that depth, that gratefulness to the Father. It is impossible.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Elsewhere, he answered another questioner: “We owe our existence just to the Father. This very human birth is nothing but his grace. So at every step we must thank him. We must find every excuse to thank him. We need that understanding to thank him for what he has given, but we are always protesting what he has not given. We must believe that what he has not given is not meant for us, is not good for us, is not

to our advantage. So we need a thankful heart, a heart full of gratitude, rather than praying for worldly things or to fulfil our worldly desires.”

In fact, when we start meditating, we will realize that we come to it with a decreasing number of demands and without looking for any rewards. We meditate simply because this is what our Master has asked us to do – it is the most direct route to oneness with him. In meditation, we will realize that the acceptance of this gift is what life is meant for: to be whole, to be one with him. And just as our Master tells us, we meditate because it is our life-support system. And that alone is enough.



The spark of longing and receptivity to his love can be ignited by gratitude – gratitude to the Master for giving us initiation, for teaching us to meditate, for teaching us what to do with our mind and how to live our life; gratitude for putting us on the right path, for giving purpose and direction to our life, for teaching us, by his example, to love beyond our self without thought of reward.

Living Meditation

Attitude of Gratitude

There is a story in the Masnavi of Rumi which illustrates the attitude we should have in difficult times. Ayaz was much favoured by the king. One day, a rare and special melon was brought to the court by a traveller. The king had the melon cut up and, as was his custom, he gave the first slice to Ayaz. Ayaz ate the slice and when asked how it tasted, he told the king it was delicious. The king thought that since Ayaz likes it so much and since it is a delicacy, let him have as much as he wants. So Ayaz started to eat each slice, one by one.

Finally, there was only one slice left and the king thought to himself, “If I do not eat this last one, it may be I will never be able to experience such a sweet melon ever again.” So he asked Ayaz to leave the last slice for him. No sooner had the king tasted the fruit, he spat it out. To his shock, it was extremely bitter.

The king turned to Ayaz and said, “How could you eat a whole plate of this poisonous fruit?” Ayaz humbly replied, “O king, I have eaten many sweet and delicious things from your hands over the years. If something per chance is slightly bitter, I feel it would be very unworthy and ungrateful of me to express my dislike.”



In this vale of tears, all of us have to taste the bitter fruit of sickness and death due, no doubt, to our own past karmas. But those who are under the protecting and guiding influence of the Shabd form of the Master have nothing to fear or worry about. The only way to escape suffering is to leave the body and go into Shabd. There death, pain and sickness have no place. Vacate the body and die in life so that we may not have to be born and die again.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Fleeting Four Days

Time, or lack thereof, is usually our top excuse for not doing something we know we should be doing. We avoid everything from exercising to visiting the dentist, because we think we don't have enough time. Time flies and before you know it, a month or a year has gone by usually leaving us with little to show for it. Burdened by our heavy workload and responsibilities, a free moment has become a precious commodity.

The logical approach to this problem would be to utilize our time efficiently and not waste it. Our aim therefore is to meticulously plan our days to create free-time – time we would not ordinarily have if we did not plan carefully.

However, while we strive to achieve perfection in our time management, often we end up squandering or misusing our time. It could be by staying up late and binge-watching TV shows or spending countless hours on social media or playing addictive games on our computer. In our hi-tech lifestyle, there are myriad ways to distract our attention.

From where does this contradiction arise? We know what is right and what is good, yet we choose not to do it. Our mind persuades us to do the opposite with relative ease. Why is it so easy to turn off our phone and spend three hours in a cinema completely engaged, but find it so difficult to do the same when we sit for meditation?

Spiritual masters teach us from their own personal experience, and reassure us that twenty-four hours is ample time to carry out our responsibilities towards our livelihood, our families and our spiritual practice. Spirituality does not require us to give up anything, become a recluse, or even stop watching TV and movies. It does, however,

require us to live a balanced life while keeping meditation a top priority.

*Dear, without achieving anything you will depart.
It is high time that you learnt some wisdom.
You may make merry for the fleeting four days,
You will at last be humbled, for sure....*

*On what have you spread your feet?
It will last but a fleeting moment.
For the winking of an eye, this fair will last;
Do something, your time is short.
This day, this minute, is a rare occasion.
On what have you spread your feet?*

Bulleh Shah

Bulleh Shah clearly understood how precious our time is. He reminds us about our fleeting four days of human life and urges us to make them count.

The resolution to our living in constant contradiction and disconnect is the setting of priorities and learning to keep a balance. Not knowing how to balance our time often results in prioritizing almost everything else above our spiritual practice. We then do meditation as a chore and try to fit it into our routine, rather than building our routine around our meditation.

To make a change, introspection is the key. We need to think deeply about what we want from life. If all we want is to enjoy life to the fullest and cherish each moment, then that is certainly an easy goal to

accomplish. If our focus is to earn a comfortable living, raise a family, be happy and eventually retire, that too is a rather simple and obtainable task.

However, if we want to learn about the mysteries of our origin, realize who we are, where we have come from, and for what purpose; if we want to understand the nature of our relationship with God, realize his splendour and magnificence, and experience infinite peace, bliss, grace, tranquillity and true love, then that is a more challenging but immensely more rewarding pursuit. A task for which we need to prioritize our life's activities, remain focused, and not waste our fleeting four days.



We think, "I would very gladly take an interest in spiritual things and in prayer, but I have no time. The fuss and cares of life give no chance for such a thing." Yet what is really important and necessary – salvation and the eternal life of the soul, or the fleeting life of the body on which we spend so much labour?

The Way of a Pilgrim

Did You Know?

The Guru never accepts a penny from anybody. If he does, he is not a Guru, but only a beggar. Gurus come to bestow and not to receive. They always live on the honest earnings of their own hands. They may even work as labourers, run shops or farming, but will never live on others' bounty or become parasitical burdens to society.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, as quoted in *Call of the Great Master*



Regarding cremation, you may do as you like; just as when your shoes have become old and worn out, you no longer wear them, but dispose of them as convenient. The dead body is like a cast-off garment which may be disposed of as convenient. Sant Mat is concerned with the soul and not the body. Burial or cremation are merely customs.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Anger is a feeling which is harmful in more ways than one. It not only makes us miserable after the fit is over, but also does great harm to our health. Any physician will tell you that during anger, instead of gastric juices which help digest the food, certain poisons are secreted inside, which do incalculable harm. Apart from this, in anger our attention scatters and it is like fire that starts raging. In meditation, we have to make our mind one-pointed, while in anger the attention is scattered. We do many things under its influence which we regret later and sometimes the result puts one in very serious situations. Please try to control this feeling, reason with the mind and tell it not to get out of hand, but lead a peaceful, happy and relaxed life.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

The Broken Jar

Amidst the cocktail of smells I had become accustomed to, I sat and watched the white coats rushing around the sterile white hallways of the hospital. A few moments before, the doctor had delivered my sentence: “I’m sorry. The results came back. The cancer has spread. At your age, surgery is not advisable. You should prepare yourself, here or back home with your loved ones.” With that he gave me an involuntary smile, an awkward pat on my back, and left me to my thoughts. I looked out the window and realized what a beautiful day it was. It felt ironic that the things most people never appreciate are so obvious in the last days of life. The reflection in the window was a wrinkly face with a balding head. Vanity over my smooth complexion and black hair had vaporized over the years. I looked around the room. In the corner was a small suitcase filled with my belongings. Not much considering it was a lifetime’s worth. My eye caught the picture frame next to the bed – my family. In this lifetime – but not forever.

I asked myself, “Am I ready to go?”

At that moment, I recalled a parable from Jesus, in the Gospel of Thomas, about a woman carrying a cracked jar on her head, not realizing it was damaged. As she walked on the road, the contents inside it trickled out. She was not aware of this until she reached home and set down the broken and now empty jar.

The parable reminded me how I too had become distracted by my journey not realizing my own jar was broken and leaking its contents. I spent my life fulfilling a hierarchy of needs. I was hungry so I ate. I was cold so I put on clothes. I was lonely so I made friends. As I satisfied the basic needs, I became aware of still further needs. I got married. I expanded my business. I had cats, then a dog, then children

came and I needed a bigger house and a car. Restlessly and relentlessly, I tried to experience and enjoy everything, without realizing that nothing in this world could give me any lasting satisfaction. Until I was diagnosed with a terminal illness.

It was then that I saw the broken jar, its spilled contents and the end of my journey. Alas, old age had crept in. Neither the body nor the mind cooperates and both had become unfit for meditation. It was difficult to hold the body motionless for long in one posture and to keep the mind still at the eye centre. Helpless and hopeless I approached my Master with my broken jar, which once had been filled with spiritual potential. I vowed to change. Meditation would no longer be a hobby, Sant Mat no longer something to decorate my shelves with and seva no longer something done to impress others.

With open arms, he welcomed me and together we fixed the jar. Two and a half hours each day, every single day, we sat, and he taught me how to harvest the spiritual wealth I had been given. There were days it became dry and tedious, but he was by my side throughout. He never gave up on me until the jar became my only focus.

The pain, fear, anger, loss and dread associated with death are never easy to deal with. However, everyone must die, be it today, tomorrow or sixty years from now. And the only way to prepare for it is to rehearse it to perfection, to die daily through the practice of meditation. As meditation became a habit, I learned to look beyond appearances and sought out that which survives death: the reality of love, the permanence of the inner radiance and the Lord's infinite grace.

The Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, wrote:

I am an immortal soul tied to the body of a dying animal.

My body is ill but I am not. I am an eternal being living in this temporary play we call life. And I have come to learn that through dying while living.

So, again I asked myself, “Am I ready to go?”

I smiled and thought, “Yes, I am ready to leave this play called life and return home ... and my Master is waiting for me.”



You have already overcome much and the inner Master is always with you, eagerly waiting for your arrival at the gates within, to receive and welcome you. When you meet him inside and talk to him face to face, as man to man, then he will be always ready to answer all your questions and to guide you all along the path. He is there now, but you cannot see him until you remove the intervening curtains. But you can easily do that. Go ahead and do it. Great will be your reward.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Looking for Motivation

It is not uncommon to see the prey outsmarting the predator, probably because one is fighting for food whereas the other is fighting for his life. He, who needs something badly, will somehow always find a way. So could it be that the reason we have not found a way to outsmart the mind is because we don't feel the need to do so?

We are often reminded about the reality of our soul, about the peace and bliss that is our heritage and about the ecstasy of love that lies in our eventual union with the Lord.

But the truth is, until we experience it ourselves, these are just concepts. Concepts that are intangible and thus difficult to hang on to or strive towards. So the question is: Where do we find the motivation to work harder on the spiritual path?

A customer once asked an employee, "When did you start working here?" He replied, "Ever since I was threatened with getting fired!"

The most effective motivation comes from within. It comes from our need to achieve something. We may not understand the grandeur of what awaits us beyond the domain of the mind, but we can surely relate to the pain, the uncertainty, the feeling of confinement, the fear and loneliness that are the features of life on this side of the fence.

Motivation comes in many forms but the objective of motivation is always to spur us into action. Hence, if we are not working hard and running with all our might towards the unseen Light, maybe we should be focusing on working hard and running with all our might away from the well-known darkness.



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *How does the satsangi know when the Master is pleased with him?*

A: Well to be very frank, the Master is never displeased with any soul. If he were displeased, why would he put us on the path? It is our own conscience which pricks us. He knows our sincerity, and he's here to help us to rise above our weaknesses. It's our own conscience which hurts us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

* * *

Q: *Would you advise us on whether or not it is good to go to sleep after meditation in the morning?*

A: You must have read about this in *The Science of the Soul*. Whatever atmosphere of happiness and peace we have built within ourselves during meditation, why lose it by sleep? Why not live in that atmosphere the whole day and cheerfully face the ups and downs of the day? We definitely gain something of happiness by meditation, and we should want to enjoy that peace and bliss the whole day. That is the only idea, not that we lose the effect of meditation if we go back to sleep.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

* * *

Q: *Could you explain what it means for us to be honest in our meditation?*

A: We have to be sincere with ourselves. We must live with ourselves rather than living for others. We have to put in honest and sincere efforts, then leave the result to the Lord.

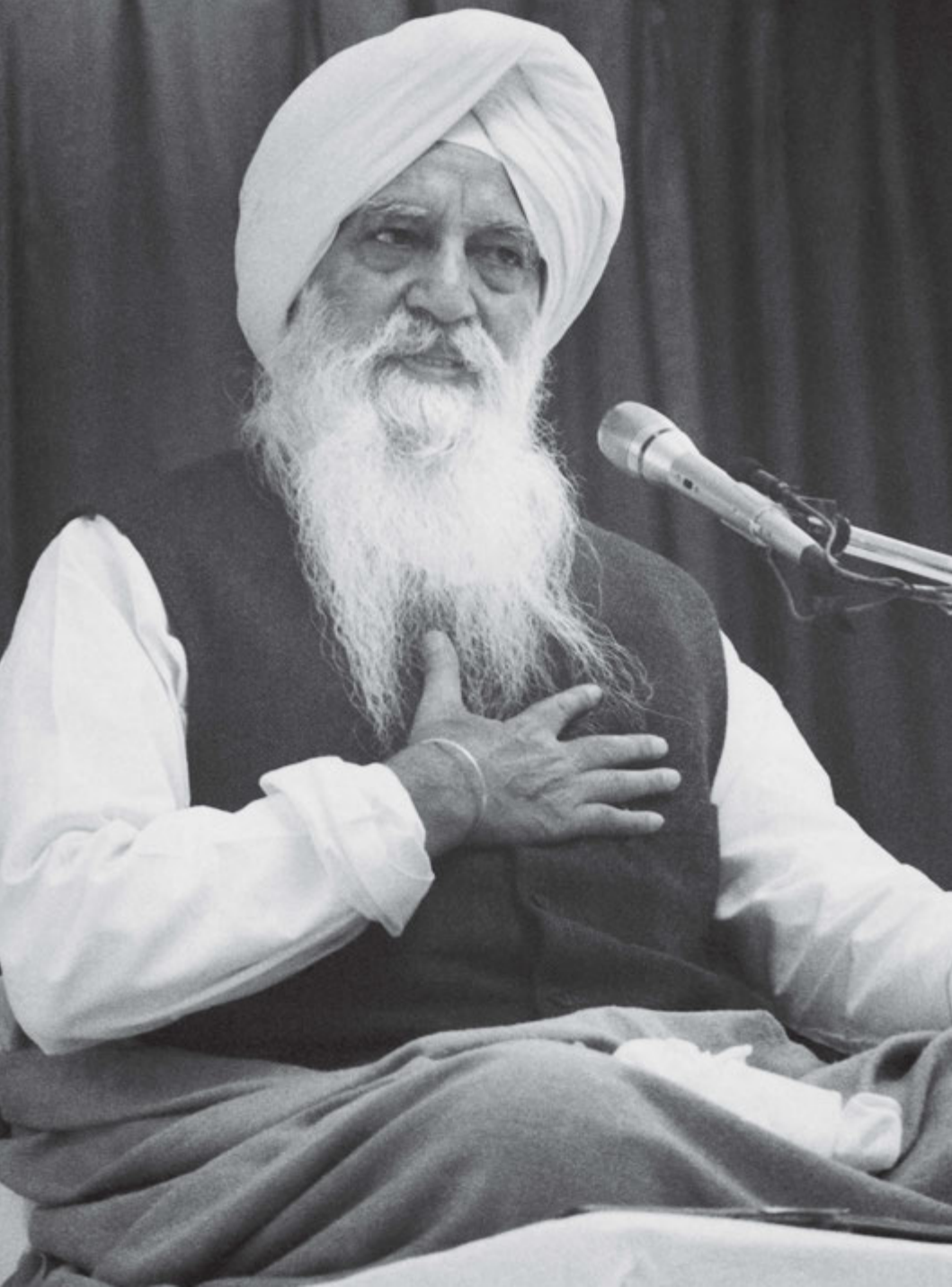
Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

Q: *Maharaj Ji, in my meditation I strive to have the experience of dying while living, and yet I know that I have a very deep fear of dying. This fear seems to prevent me from giving myself completely to meditation, and I wonder if you would please help me understand and overcome this fear.*

A: Well, brother, there's always fear of the unknown in our mind. Something which is unknown to us, we are always frightened of. If you go to a different country, and you don't know anybody at all, there's some sort of fear in you about how you will face things there, how you will conduct yourself in that foreign country. That fear is always there. But when we know we're going to our own destination, we are going back to our own house, there should be no fear at all. There need not be any fear because we are going to meet our own Master there. And we are not going alone at all, we are going along with him. That is why we need the Master – to not feel frightened of anything unknown to us. He is known to us, and we're happy to be with him, so the question of fear doesn't arise at all. It is only our mind which tries to frighten us. There's nothing to feel frightened about. We are to be met by somebody who knows us, whom we know. Christ said: My sheep recognize my whistle. When I whistle, they all flock to me, run to me, because they know me, they know my whistle – they're not frightened of me. That is the object of knowing the shepherd, of recognizing the whistle. It means I will not feel frightened.

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Carpe Diem

This Latin aphorism means, 'seize the day'. The urgency of this phrase perfectly captures the message that the mystics and saints have been conveying to us throughout the ages by sharing their experiences, teachings and even their personal life examples. They tell us that it is critical that we stop procrastinating and wasting our precious breaths by dwelling on the past, worrying about the future and immersing ourselves obsessively in our temporal affairs. All we have is the present moment, today, here and now, and there is no guarantee of a tomorrow. They maintain that this lifetime is not a mere coincidence for us to simply eat, drink and be merry, but a valuable opportunity to prepare and embark upon the most important journey we will ever undertake. A journey that will take us back to our source, our Father, where we can finally experience true and lasting joy.

We began the journey when the Master blessed us with the gift of initiation. We committed to doing two and a half hours of daily meditation. In addition to following the three other vows, we voluntarily pledged to devote ten percent of our day to this most important task. This daily practice of two and a half hours, dedicated to stilling the mind at the eye centre, is not an arbitrary length of time chosen at random by the Master. The mystics say that it is the minimum time required to break through the surface level of ordinary consciousness and raise it to the eye centre where our true journey begins.

Are we living up to our commitment? We have the rest of the day to deal with our needs and responsibilities. But in today's fast-paced world, this somehow does not seem adequate. The irony is that although we have acquired many so called 'time saving' devices and instant modes of communication, we have also become enslaved

by them, thereby eliminating many of their benefits. If we simply observed how much time we spend on our mobile phones, tablets and computers, we would be very surprised to learn how much of that precious time was actually wasted.

The mystics explain to us that meditation itself is an exercise in being here and now. It exemplifies *Carpe Diem*. When we live in the present, we become fully alive as our consciousness reaches far beyond the limitations of our ego. By helping us become still, present and concentrated in the now, meditation is a great training. When our attention is in the now, it is difficult for us to be trapped by our own mind. We develop the strength, will power and fortitude required to go through life experiences that are a result of the unfolding of our karma.

So what can we do to seriously take heed of the Master's advice? When we take any other type of worldly journey, we plan and prepare; we make sure we have everything that we need to make the trip successful. Likewise we need to prepare for our spiritual journey by adjusting our lifestyle so that we can make time for meditation rather than fit it in as an afterthought.

We must have self-discipline and make some sacrifices so that priority is given to this aspect of our lives. We also have to filter carefully what we expose ourselves to every day. Our mind by nature is very impressionable, and quickly absorbs all types of stimuli. The choices that we make, and the actions that we take are guided by our thoughts. To create a state of mind that is conducive to meditation, we can consciously try to abstain from anything that promotes anger, lust and tension. These make strong impressions on the mind and will be the first things that will come to mind when we try to concentrate.

There is no perfect formula and no shortcut to our destination. We can only ride on the wings of his grace by putting in genuine effort in our spiritual life. *Carpe Diem* – who knows what tomorrow will bring.

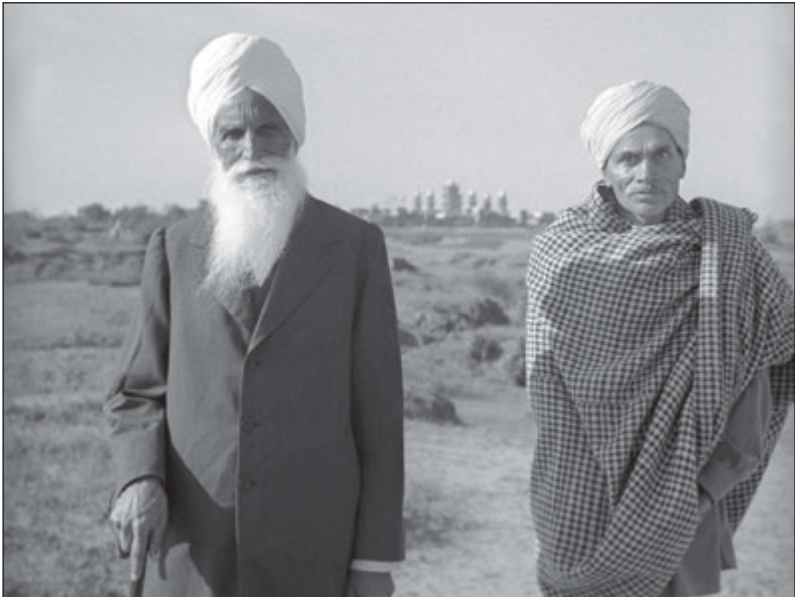


*Foolish wayfarer, why do you delay?
Take heed, the day is short,
And long is your way.
The sun in the east has lit the torch;
Now is the time for your homeward march.
Move swiftly, reach home
Before the sun turns pale;
The hours are fleeting and long is your trail.
Treasure the chance, don't falter or lose heart;
Be free of all cares and make a start.
Reach home, and from fear and doubt be free;
Loitering midway, you will come to misery.
Foolish wayfarer, why do you delay?
Long is the way and soon will end the day.
O kind Lord of Mira, Thou in Thy grace
Gave her a path, short and easy to pace.
Mira, The Divine Lover*

The Perfect Disciple

Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh's entire life was dedicated to meditation. He had no interest in the pleasures and attractions of the world. Neither fond of expensive clothing nor of rich food, he spent most of his income on others. Conscientious about his college duties and meditation, he was unaware of other things around him. If he was ready to go to the college ten minutes early, he would utilize the time in meditation; while his servant would heat his food, Sardar Bahadur would sit in meditation. If someone happened to accompany him on his evening walk, Sardar Bahadur rarely said anything, for he was busy in simran. As soon as he returned, he would go to his room and sit in bhajan.

Whatever happened in his life, Sardar Bahadur accepted as his Satguru's will. Happiness or pain, prosperity or sickness – he



Maharaj Sawan Singh with Maharaj Jagat Singh

would accept everything with an unshaken composure. He never complained about anything; he never appeared to be discontented or disappointed with anything. In 1920, fairly early in his teaching career, Sardar Bahadur was selected by the Imperial Agricultural Service Commission for the Indian Agriculture Service. It was a prestigious post, but even as the letter of appointment was being written to Sardar Bahadur, the post was given to another person because of his political influence. Sardar Bahadur's friends and colleagues were much upset and urged him to protest against the injustice and apply to the higher authorities for a revision of the decision, but he refused.

The following Saturday, while on their way to Beas, Pundit Lal Chand several times urged him to stand up for his rights. Sardar Bahadur's only reply was, "My officer is Hazur Maharaj Ji. What has happened has happened at his command." In Beas, when his brother, Sardar Bhagat Singh, told Maharaj Ji the whole story of Sardar Bahadur's being unjustly superseded, the Great Master turned to him and said, "What about it, Jagat Singh?" Sardar Bahadur replied, "What Hazur has done, has been well done."

Greatly pleased, the Great Master said, "Good, Jagat Singh! This is how a satsangi should be."

Heaven on Earth



You see, a true disciple is one who really worships the Father for the sake of the Father, who is full of love and devotion for him and not concerned with anything else in the world. We become that real disciple of a Master when we cross the stage of Brahm, the second stage – when the soul gets released from the mind. Then we are really true disciples of the Master. Before that, we are more or less disciples of the mind.

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

Seventy Times Seven

When we were children, it was common to have petty quarrels with our siblings and friends. We would get angry, maybe even call each other names, and at times our teachers or parents would intervene. It was easy in those days to say, “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you”. Our squabbles were soon forgotten and we became good friends once again. Things, however, have become more complicated now that we are adults. Arguments and disagreements leave us heavy hearted, angry and resentful, sometimes severing relationships completely.

Often, when hurtful words are exchanged, the ego is offended and we feel the need to retaliate or take revenge. But, in the midst of a heated argument, an inner voice urges us to keep calm, and our conscience reminds us: “If there is one fool under a roof, then there is no necessity for two.” Yet, we ignore it. We allow ourselves to react, determined to have the last word. And at what cost? Not only do we disturb our peace of mind by engaging in one of the negative passions – anger – we also incur heavy karma by hurting another child of God. And when it is all over, where do we stand? Burdened with regret.

It takes great effort to try and remedy such conflicts; it is easier to hold a grudge. But we all know what the Master would want us to do – apologize and ask for forgiveness. Hazur Maharaj Ji says it very clearly:

If ego is in your way, you don't want to bend before him, you don't want to apologize, then you won't be able to clear it by meditation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Christ very beautifully explains in the Bible that we should ask for forgiveness “seventy times seven” times. In other words, there is no limit to the number of times we should ask for forgiveness. We need to keep knocking on the Lord’s door for forgiveness, until we are forgiven, not allowing the ego to stand in our way. The Great Master once explained that only a brave man knows how to forgive; it is beyond the power of a weak person.

Every day when we sit for meditation, we are asking the Lord for forgiveness for the sins we have committed over innumerable lifetimes. Saints and mystics point out that if we want the Lord to forgive us, then we should imbibe humility in our hearts by asking for forgiveness for our mistakes and also by learning to forgive others for their mistakes. For the love of the Lord to manifest in our lives, we need to develop the qualities of love, humility and mercy. By doing so, we prepare a place in our hearts where we can experience his presence. The Lord is always forgiving and drawing us towards himself, but if we have anger and negative feelings for others, when we sit for meditation those disturbing thoughts haunt us.

We need only to look at the Masters as perfect examples of compassion and forgiveness. Once a sevadar who had a dispute with another approached Sardar Bahadur Ji to ask for justice. Sardar Bahadur Ji smiled and said: “This commodity is not available here.” The sevadar once again insisted and asked for things to be set right. Sardar Bahadur Ji responded: “Justice is not available here. In Hazur Maharaj Ji’s court nothing is available except mercy and grace.”

If our Master can forgive us for all the failures that we bring to him, then our forgiveness and tolerance for others should be boundless. As disciples of a perfect Master, our conduct and behaviour towards others should be such that the Lord always smiles upon us. The heavy

burden of karma we have accumulated over innumerable lifetimes stands between the Lord and us. Through our spiritual practice and by following the teachings, we avoid creating additional negative karmas.

As we attend to our meditation, through the cleansing power of the Shabd, the negative passions of ego and anger are gradually replaced with humility and forgiveness. And when our hearts are filled with love, harsh words and conflicts do not affect us. We learn to respond to every situation with calmness and compassion seventy times seven.



*O beloved Lord, redeemer of the fallen,
While under your shelter I have committed many sins.
Eating, drinking, talking or walking –
At all times I commit bad deeds.
Only your mercy can liberate me.*

Sahjibai, Voice of the Heart

The Lighter Side of Wisdom

Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh would never lose his sense of humour. I remember one day – you see, he used to drink cow’s milk at breakfast time. And that morning, cow’s milk was not available, so the servant, Manohar, mixed a little water in the buffalo’s milk to make it look like cow’s milk. Sardar Bahadur could taste the difference and asked, “Is this cow’s milk, Manohar?” And Manohar reassured him with great confidence that it was. Sardar Bahadur, with a slight smile on his face, turned to me and said, almost in my ear: “And still he says I am all-knowing.”

Spiritual Heritage



Talking once about the mind, Maharaj Charan Singh related this incident: When my daughter was very small, her mother asked her, “Why are you not studying today?” She said, “Papa said in the satsang today, ‘Never obey your mind.’ And my mind says I should study, so I’m not going to.” This is how we justify it!

Legacy of Love



The Flavour of Meditation

When we want to make a good stew, we must first peel all the vegetables and meticulously cut them into bite size pieces. We then sauté the ingredients over high heat stirring constantly so that they do not overcook. We then add the stock, the spices and herbs and keep it over very low flame to slowly simmer, allowing the flavours to come together infusing every bite with its zest and aroma.

Meditation is somewhat similar – we first prepare ourselves for the practice by making sure that we are fresh and alert. We then carefully and attentively stir in rounds of simran, one by one, ensuring that we do not lose our focus.

But this is where we forget that in order to attain the desired results, we must exercise patience and allow time to pass so that the mind can simmer in the flavour of meditation. Through this process, karmic debt is reduced, the ego is dissolved, and the spices of love, contentment, gratitude, obedience and surrender penetrate and soften our entire being.

Progress is something that we need to keep on the back burner and forget about. Our job is to put in our best effort and have faith that the fire of his grace and love will, in time, bring about the transformation.

The Masters have always told us that meditation is a gradual process, but let us not think that this means that we can take our own sweet time to put in the effort! The effort has to be put in now, though we must patiently wait for the results.

Being patient is not easy. It can be as suffocating as holding our breath under water, but it is this virtue that helps expand our capacity to experience peace, bliss and love. Patience is what prepares us for the joy that we look forward to.

Although the bitterness of patience is suffocating, it will become in the end a wonder of joy.

Rumi, as quoted in *Teachings of Rumi*

It is hard to be patient when the winds of karma blow hard against us and when the uncertainty of life casts its shadow, and we long to be by our Master's side.

We are often tempted to give our Master a nudge; a visit to the Dera, a question, a letter, a request or anything that might get us a visible reaction from him. But we are just showing our lack of faith. Just because we cannot see the changes that are subtly taking place within us does not mean our efforts are in vain or that our Master has forgotten us.

There are many instances where we judge ourselves and ask: "How can I meditate and yet behave in such a manner?" Have we ever stopped to think how it would be if there was no meditation to begin with? How much worse could we have been?

If we could only see how the flavour of meditation is slowly and steadily infusing every pore of our being, we would never feel exasperated. But not seeing does not mean we cannot have faith and patiently wait for the Master to complete his final masterpiece.



Crossing the Threshold

To enrich his life, man goes about amassing wealth in abundance. Trapped by his limited vision, he seeks pleasure from his acquisitions and continues to yearn for more. He soon realizes that no matter how hard he tries to find fulfilment from his material gains, he often feels disenchanting. He begins to realize the brevity and uncertainty of life and questions the purpose of his existence. He longs for genuine fulfilment, and a voice from deep within beckons him to seek his purpose.

Without a purpose, life is motion without meaning, activity without direction, and events without reason. Without a purpose, life is trivial, petty, and pointless.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?*

To realize such a purpose, the lost soul needs to discover who he truly is. That is why saints and mystics remind us that time is fleeting. Like sand in an hourglass, our breaths are slipping away. The mystics graciously invite us to enter into a sanctuary where peace prevails and we can lose ourselves in God's loving presence. Only by striving to live according to their teachings can we come to appreciate God's eternal treasure and companionship. The loving Father beckons us to heed the call within to cultivate a deeper relationship with him. The question that should arise in the heart of every sincere aspirant is not "Who will God call?" but rather "Who will respond to his call?" Are we prepared to respond to God's invitation, which requires a change in our attitudes and values? Are we prepared to shift our priorities from

life's mundane concerns and take charge of our lives so that we can reach our ultimate goal?

This persistent beckoning from within is actually evidence that a spark of divinity exists inside every one of us, and it is for us to heed this call of his love. By sitting in silence, the aspirant is working to build a suspension bridge so that his soul can go beyond the dark alleys of its own mind and make its way to its beloved. It requires fortitude, perseverance and unwavering faith. These three ingredients require the aspirant's strong will power to continue despite the difficulties and setbacks he encounters. This practice, done with sincerity, stirs the deepest forces of the soul, invoking a downpour of heavenly grace. It gives him the strength to hold on and wait, no matter how troubled or distressed the soul may be. It is not a once-in-a-while practice or performance, but a whole-hearted passion validated by the disciple's daily commitment.

Saints and mystics advise us to persevere with our practice regardless of what happens or does not happen. We must faithfully sit in silence without expecting any results. The profound reality is that something is transpiring, but at a level beyond our consciousness; the real change is taking place in our deep centre. If we just let it be and trust, meditation allows a conversion to take effect within, a shift of emphasis from the physical self to our true self. A stone-cutter hammers away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without so much as a tiny crack visible on its surface. Yet, at the hundred and first blow, it will split in two. The stone-cutter knows full well that it was not the last blow that cracked the rock, but all the persistent hammering that had been done before.

In the book *Embracing Destiny's Crossroads*, there is a beautiful quote:

There is no failure for the man who realizes his power, who never knows when he is beaten; there is no failure for the determined endeavour, the conquerable will. There is no failure for the man who gets up every time he falls, who rebounds like a rubber ball, who persists when everyone else gives up, who pushes on when everyone else turns back.

Orison Swett Marden

Maharaj Charan Singh reassures us in the same light:

Every moment that we spend in meditation takes us nearer to our destination, though we may not realize it. A thick layer of heavy karmas bars our vision. If a man tries to cut through a thick stone wall with an iron chisel, the man on the other side of the wall will not be able to measure his progress unless a hole is made clear through the wall. So please have no worry. Progress is being made slowly and gradually.

Divine Light

Answering his call of love one step at a time is a process that grows and deepens our relationship with our beloved. Establishing direct contact with him takes patience and effort. We definitely cannot build an intimate relationship with him if we are going to rush through our meditation or become dejected because of our shortcomings.

Our hearts will definitely be tested because God wants to know that we are seeking and entering into this relationship solely for him and not for anything he can give us. He does not want our seeking him through some spiritual path to be just a momentary or half-hearted quest.

*Come, beloved Lord, grant me Thy darshan;
Away from Thee I cannot stay alive.
Like the lotus without water,
like the night without moon,
is Thy dear one without Thee, O Lord.
In anguish I wander day and night.
And pangs of separation keep gnawing at my heart
What can I say? I have no words to convey my longing;
Pray, come and quench this fire that's searing my heart.*

Mira, The Divine Lover

His love for us is fathomless, and when he sees that the shift within us is genuine and complete, the floodgates of his sanctuary will open. Then, in a moment of indescribable bliss, we will stand before our beloved and, hand in hand, step over the threshold to new horizons.



During prayer, God lifts the veils and opens the gates of the invisible, so that His servant is standing in front of Him. The prayer creates a secret connection between the one praying and the one prayed to. Prayer is a threshold at the entrance to God's reality.

Muhammad, as quoted in *Adventures in Prayer*

Why Even Try?

As it is destined, so it shall be. We have heard this phrase – or some variation of it – in almost every satsang we have attended. Countless times, questions have been asked about destiny and whether or not anyone has the power to change their destiny. Time and again, the answer has been consistent – no one can change their own or anyone else's destiny.

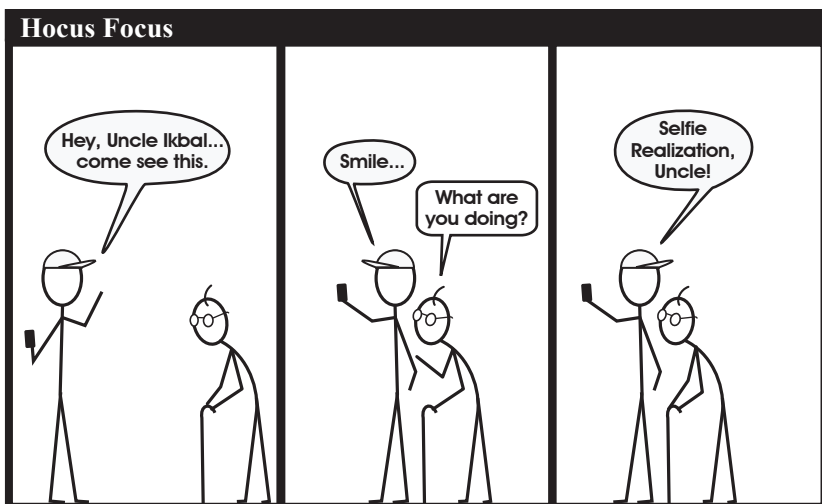
A natural question then arises about the relevance of effort. On one hand, we have repeatedly heard that we need to put in effort in order to find our way back to our true home. On the other, we are faced with the inevitability of our destiny. If our going back to God is already destined, then it will happen with or without the effort because no one can change that. In the same way, effort becomes irrelevant if we are not destined to go back to our true home. So why even try?

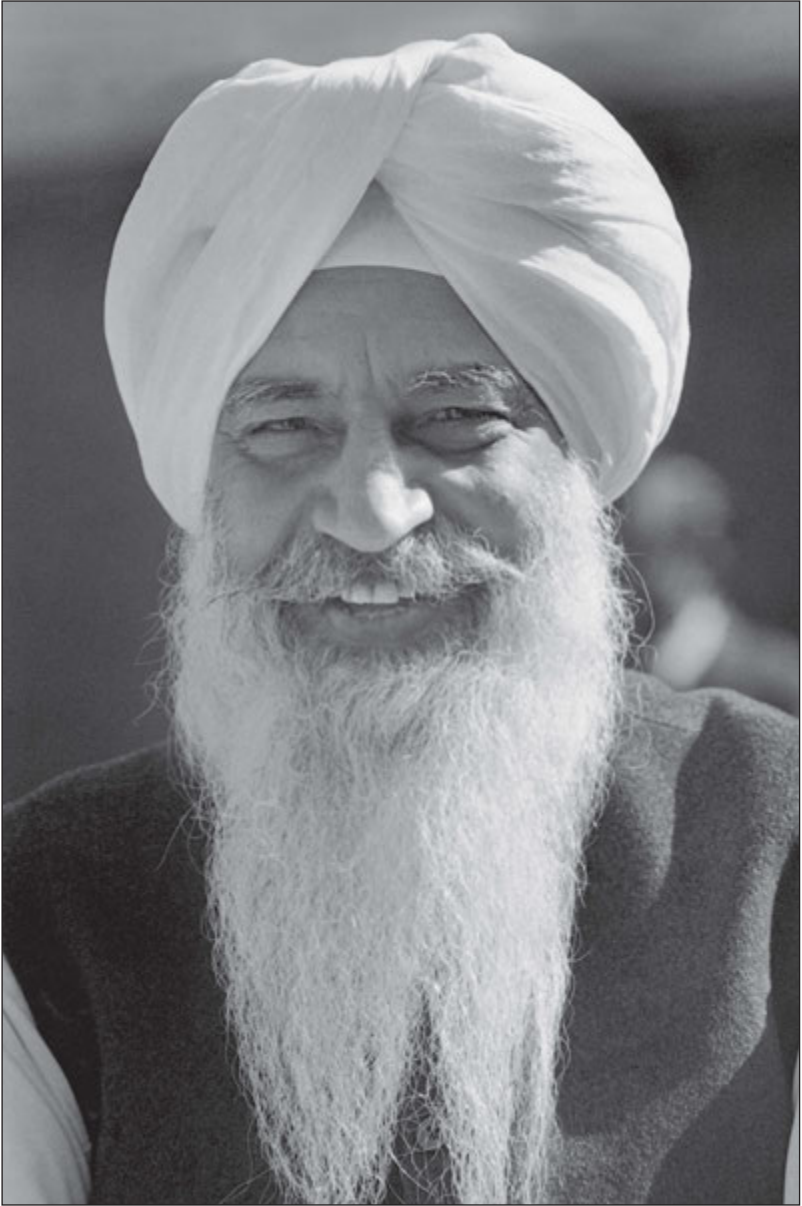
But think: Any effort that we put towards our spiritual pursuit may only be a tiny droplet in a huge ocean, but it is still a droplet that counts in our favour. It is still a step towards preparing for our final journey. We may not know where we are going to end up, but we can hope for the best and prepare for it. In worldly interactions, we always do our best to be prepared. We may not know who we will bump into when we leave the house in the morning, but we make sure that we look presentable – our hair is done, make-up is in place and clothes are ironed to a crisp. We would never walk out of the house in pyjamas, with our hair undone, to face other people. When anticipating an important business meeting, we start working weeks ahead of time to have all the details in place before facing the client. Presentations are made in advance and rehearsed multiple times before the actual date. When athletes prepare for a sporting event, training starts months

ahead, and exercise and diet regimens are strictly followed. Even going on a short trip requires planning and preparation – what clothes to pack, what type of transportation will be taken, and so on. We put so much thought and preparation into our worldly life, spending considerable time making sure that we present only our best to the world. Do we not owe the same to our almighty Father?

Yes, coming to the path and finding our way home may be a result of our destiny. The Master has often referred to the use of a bulldozer in extreme cases – if a soul is meant to go back, it will. It now depends on us – whether we willingly and joyfully walk the path leading home or if we need to be dragged by the Master’s bulldozer. The latter will be much more painful. Our effort is what pleases him most, so let us be prepared!

SPIRITUALISTICKS®





Maharaj Charan Singh

Heart to Heart

Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh used the evening meetings as a way of creating an intimate bond, a relationship of love and support, and a deep sense of friendship with his sangat from abroad. Everyone had the sense of being taken care of, on every level of their being. The words of the Master became a cocoon of safety and a prism of beauty and light through which we could look at our lives and our world, with fresh eyes. In his gentle, humble, yet regal manner, Hazur Maharaj Ji imbued every moment in his presence with a magnetic energy that immersed us in his love.

When people would step up to the microphone to ask a question, they would feel that they were the only ones in the room with the Master; time would literally stand still as they interacted with him. Maharaj Ji would intently focus his attention on the questioner, and in his response he often touched on an unexpressed, perhaps unconscious aspect of the problem being presented. He once commented, “I’m trying to understand you, rather than the question.”

Introduction, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I



In a question-and-answer session, a disciple asked Hazur Maharaj Ji, “Master, why do you like photographing flowers so much?”

Hazur replied, “Flowers are your best friends, always smiling. You can stand before them weeping and they will still be smiling. They were made for that – so many colours and shapes, different expressions and shades. Nature wants us to enjoy these innocent pleasures.”

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III



Pathways to Liberation

BY K. SANKARANARAYANAN

PUBLISHER: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, 2016.

ISBN: 978-81-8466-452-2.

The Vedas are among the world's oldest sacred texts, estimated to date back at least to 1700 BC. Encompassing both ritualistic and metaphysical elements, Vedic teachings are at the heart of Hindu philosophy and customs. But a serious study of the Vedas, while aspired to by many, is attempted by few due to the sheer volume of texts, complexity of concepts and differing translations.

Students of the Vedas approach them in different ways, each according to his own proclivities. The author states that his own approach is framed by his lifelong search for supreme truth as a practitioner of Surat Shabd Yoga. He takes as his objective to identify the various pathways to spiritual liberation, meaning liberation from the cycle of transmigration, taught by these ancient scriptures. This book is, in essence, a summary of the philosophical underpinnings and essential concepts for such paths as taught in the Vedas, Upanishads and allied scriptures such as the Brahma Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita.

The author does a commendable job of maintaining academic rigor while avoiding a scholastic style, so that the book remains accessible to the larger audience not intimately familiar with these texts. The book will certainly appeal to the interested layperson, and its logical and clear progression will keep the reader amply engaged.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section titled "Primary Texts" gives the reader a brief introduction of the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. The Vedas are divided into four parts: Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The Samhitas are collections of hymns, prayers and formulae chanted to invoke the gods while pouring oblations into a sacred fire during sacrificial rites. The Brahmanas serve as reference manuals for priestly guidance. The Aranyakas are meant for

recluses or forest dwellers. But it is in the Upanishads that the highest purpose of the Vedas is expressed. The author says:

The Upanishads are part of the Vedas, generally appended to the Brahmanas or embedded in the Aranyakas. However, they seem to come from a different world. In their conception and expression they make very little reference to the Vedic hymns. Instead, they stand on their own wisdom, strength, and authority. This does not mean that their ideas or concepts are completely alien to those in the Vedic hymns, but that they take them further. They develop the germ of reflective thoughts embedded in the Vedic hymns, refine and polish them, and lift them up to a profound philosophical or mystical level, aimed at leading seekers towards God-realization.

Due to the special importance of the Upanishads, they are discussed separately from the Vedas in a dedicated chapter, even though they are contained in the Vedas. The Bhagavad Gita, which translates to “Song of the Lord”, is part of the great Indian epic the Mahabharata. The Gita, the author explains, “is full of metaphysical and philosophical truths as revealed by Lord Krishna, who is revered by Hindus as a manifestation of the Supreme Lord himself.” In a short but succinct chapter, the author describes the Gita, offering a summary of the Mahabharata as the context in which Gita was expounded. In addition, he describes why the Gita is also considered to be an Upanishad.

The second section of the book, entitled “Concepts”, explores the key concepts employed in these primary texts. The author notes: “Hinduism is unique among world religions in that it has no central defining entity, no single founder, no single or central holy scripture and, therefore, no single pathway to liberation.” Many different doctrines have evolved as a result. The section begins with a very common question people have about Vedic times. Were Vedic sages monotheistic (believing in one God) or polytheistic (believing in many gods)? Scholars, historians and theologians have heavily debated this question. The author quotes the Vedas, as well as the views of many experts and scholars, and comes to the conclusion that:

It is clear that the Vedic people believed in one supreme Lord – the formless, indescribable, transcendent, and immanent reality – who was the architect and ruler of all aspects of creation. This reality was known in later Vedic literature as Brahman.

Concepts of the soul, the human form, action and reaction, transmigration, the purpose of human life, inner sound and light, and other key concepts are discussed, with many quotations from the primary texts.

Scriptures rely on concepts but with the purpose that these concepts guide practice. The third and final section of the book is aptly titled “Practice”. In this section, the author explores some of the well-known pathways to liberation that are based on the *shad darshanas* (six doctrines) and are in practice today: Nivritti Marga (the path of renunciation), Karma Yoga (the path of desireless action), Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the path of love and devotion), Raja Yoga (the royal path), Prapatti Marga (the path of self-surrender) and Nada Yoga (the path of divine sound). The author notes that these seven pathways are not mutually exclusive, and several elements are common across all paths. Moreover, he states that “while Vedic tradition is goal-specific, it is not path-specific. It is believed that although the paths to the top of the mountain are many, the peak is one.”

As all the paths stress the need to discipline the mind and the importance of the practice of meditation, these two topics are discussed before the seven paths are taken up individually. Then seven chapters follow, each discussing one of the paths in depth, quoting the various scriptures and commentary by various experts, and interspersing fascinating and illustrative stories from the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita. As one reads about these various paths and notices how similar they are in so many aspects, the following statement by the author becomes increasingly self-evident: “Following one path does not preclude following the tenets of another. In practice, they complement each other.”

The importance of the guru and the grace of the Lord are emphasized in the last two chapters of the book. The author states:

When there are so many possible pathways to liberation, when the scriptures say so many contradictory things, when the mind is a strong adversary and worldly distractions and attachments are deep, how is a genuine spiritual aspirant to know the way forward? In all the paths, two things are noted to be essential: the guru and the grace of the Lord.

The author's writing is logically structured, using the hierarchy of sections, chapters, headings, sub-headings and bullet points to great effect. This aids in understanding this complex material as well as in recalling it later. The author looks at each concept or teaching from diverse angles and quotes various experts, all to enhance the reader's comprehension of the subject. Appendices explore certain concepts, traditions and scriptures in still greater detail. The book also includes an extensive glossary and a comprehensive bibliography.

Pathways to Liberation will serve as a valuable reference for readers by bringing together material and commentary from many sources on many topics, and, for particularly committed readers, as a starting point for further research in Vedic literature.



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