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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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The Master's Philanthropy

*Oh think thou deeply and deliberate;
Without the guidance of a Master
The way cannot ever be found.
He will dye thee in satsang's colour,
Take thy soul to regions celestial,
And reveal the firmament within.
If thou desirest to revel
In realms spiritual within thine own self,
None will help thee except the saints.
In a short moment wilt thou depart,
And thy body be reduced to dust.
Thy Master alone, O Tulsi, will show
The entrance back to thy home.*

Tulsi Sahib, Saint of Hathiras





The Path to Spiritual Unfoldment

Perfect mystics have always said that it is possible for us to live successfully in this world and, at the same time, follow a course of spiritual unfoldment. They say that we are capable of living and working on two levels: on the physical, material level around us and on a spiritual level.

It is through the activity of mind and ego that we are held in this creation, but just as air surrounds and fills everything on the surface of this planet, or as water fills everything in the sea, in the same way mind and matter are permeated by spirit. To learn to control the mind and to become fully conscious of spirit is to achieve what religions have called 'eternal life', 'enlightenment', 'salvation' or 'dying while living'. Whilst carrying on our trade or profession, mixing with family and friends, in good times and in bad, we can come to know spirit – our true selves – and to know God.

Three short quotes from mystics follow. The first is by the fifteenth-century Indian saint, Kabir Sahib, from the book *Kabir, the Weaver of God's Name*:

*Kabir, simran is the essence
Of all paths,
All else is nothing
But a fruitless task;
I have scanned
The origin and the end
Of all practices,
And found them all
Within the bounds of Kal.*

The second is from a Christian mystic, Walter Hilton, writing in *The Scale of Perfection* a hundred years earlier:

There is one activity which is of great value and, as I think, a highway to contemplation.... It is for a man to enter into himself and come to the knowledge of his own soul.

The third is from a discourse given by Maharaj Charan Singh in the twentieth century. Hazur asks:

What work will enable us to become one with the Lord? Love and devotion for him. Everything else is cause and effect, giving and taking, love with a motive.... As long as the Lord grants us the opportunity of being in a human body, we must maintain our quest for that home which is real.

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

Despite the differences of time and place – contemporary and past, east and west – there are strong connections. First, all three mystics are talking about somewhere we want to reach. Kabir Sahib talks about paths, Walter Hilton about a highway. You have paths and highways only so that you can arrive somewhere. And Hazur talks about “our quest for that home which is real”.

Second, they all mention an activity, something which is essential to the project. Kabir Sahib says, “Simran is the essence of all paths.” Walter Hilton says, “It is for a man to enter into himself.” And Hazur asks: “What work will enable us to become one with the Lord? Love and devotion.”

They are each naming a different aspect of the journey – but it is the same journey. They all point out that although many tasks

and activities are open to us, there is one thing which is of major importance and that it is a matter of urgency that we carry it out.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us: “As long as the Lord grants us the opportunity ... we must maintain our quest.”

Seen in this context, the advice that simran is the essence of all paths, may seem surprising. Simran is, in fact, just a part of the course of study. It is not the whole of the path, not our final destination. The essence of the teachings of true mystics is that the divine spirit which supports the creation can be contacted as sound and light within the human body. It is this sound – the word or Shabd – which has the power to take us to higher levels of consciousness.

So let's go back to Walter Hilton, who recommends that we “enter” ourselves. Entering into ourselves is made possible when we successfully carry out the practice of mental repetition or simran given to us by a perfect mystic. This focused repetition leads us to the Shabd, and Shabd is the catalyst that reveals the natural love and devotion of the soul for God. This is why Kabir Sahib says, “Simran is the essence.” Simran is the tool which will enable us to take the very first step from the world outside to the world within. Simran takes us from the very beginning to the point where Shabd, the sound current, takes over.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that the practice of simran is so easy that it can be undertaken by both a child of five and a very old person. Simran is extremely simple. It is an inspired practice because anyone sincerely carrying this out will find that they cannot both think of the world and practise simran at the same time. They can work and play and live in the world, but they cannot think of the world and do simran.

We should understand why, in order to gain mystic experience, we need to suspend our usual activity of thinking. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

Whenever we wish to withdraw our consciousness inwards, the thoughts of the world invade us. These are the impressions that have continually entered through the sense organs. Thus, the affairs of household, office, shops and other places, also the forms of relatives, friends and foes that we have been seeing, project themselves on the mind's screen and obstruct concentration. The first step for spiritual uplift, therefore, is to eliminate them.

Another Christian mystic, in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, says basically the same things. He writes:

I will leave on one side everything I can think, and choose for my love that thing which I cannot think! Why? Because he may well be loved but not thought. By love he can be caught and held but by thinking, never.

The way to eliminate the distracting flow of impressions, to control the mind and awaken our spiritual power – at present dissipated – is through replacing the worldly thinking or repetition with the spiritual repetition. Kabir Sahib is quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol.I:

One should remember one's simran in the same way as a passionate lover remembers his love at all times of the day and night... One should attend to one's simran in the same way as a water carrier girl keeps her attention in the pitcher on her head while she walks on rough, uneven ground conversing with her friends.

He is referring to the practice of simran carried on throughout the day, as an extension of the regular meditation period. We can't afford to be without this practice!

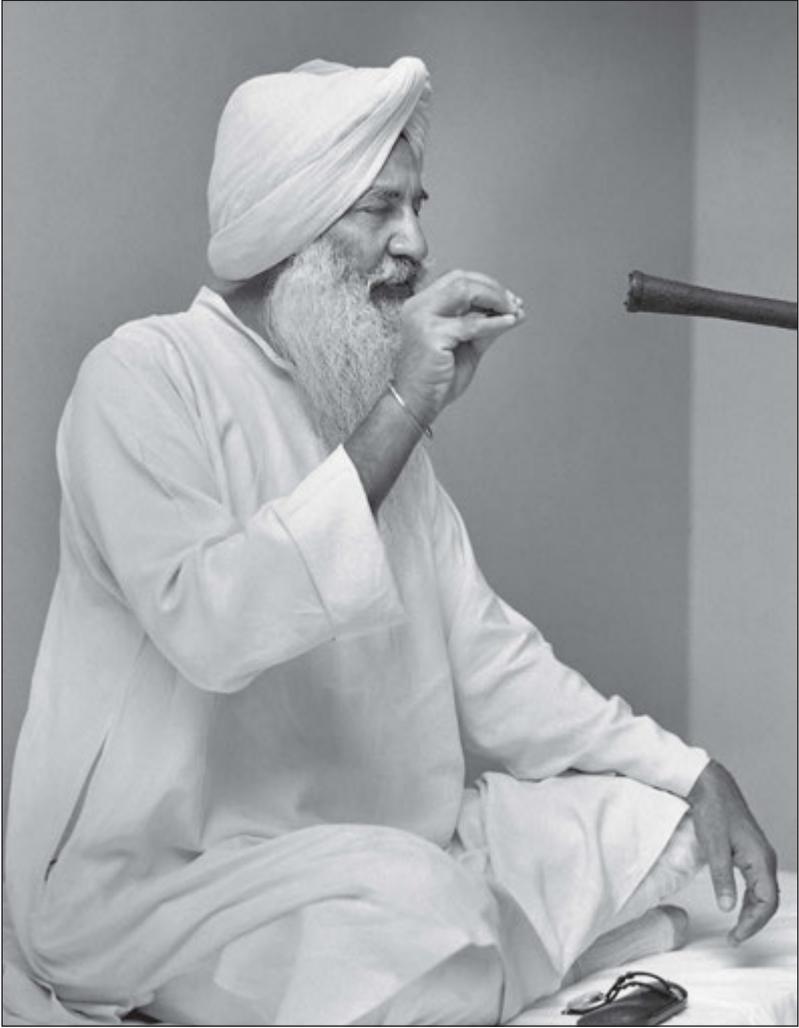
What happens in the morning when a disciple awakes, thinking of the meditation that he has promised to do each day? If he just thinks about it, he is likely to fail to even get out of bed. The mind is so strong that despite its higher intentions, it is likely to find excuses. By thinking, we can never succeed on this path. This is the difficult lesson we have to learn.

For everything else in life, we rely on reason, mental development, thought. But when we talk about training the mind on the spiritual path, we mean training it to rest completely quietly, leaving thought temporarily behind. When we can focus on the names given to us by our Master to such an extent that they are automatically there as we wake to start the new day, then on that flow of positive energy, we will automatically arise to carry out our meditation.

Kabir Sahib says that other practices are fruitless because they are not stronger than the mind (referred to by Kabir Sahib as Kal). This is why we come back to simran: because, by calming the incessant thoughts of the mind, it collects the mind at the eye centre and brings it to Shabd. Once absorbed in Shabd, we are on that royal route leading far beyond the territory of Kal.

Simran also brings us to the point at which, in our meditation, we see the inner form of our Master. The relationship which was begun in the physical world now develops in the world of spirit, and the love and devotion which were once a struggle to find are now ours in increasing depth and richness. So through simran we do indeed come to true love and devotion, knowledge of our own soul and, finally, to union with God.





Maharaj Charan Singh

The Role of the Master

Sometimes, we find it a little strange that although the Master himself creates a strong attraction in us for him, he tells us not to confuse the physical Master with the real Master, the inner Master. As disciples we are always longing for those precious moments in his company. We rush to be with him, like birds flying back again and again to drink at the same fountain. We yearn to see him, to hear his voice. The memory of our friends and loved ones fades over the years, but the memories of the Master grow over time and increase in their power to move us.

Some of the most precious moments in our lives have been spent in the company of the Master. So why is it that he is continually keeping us on our guard against a blind adoration of his physical person? Baba Ji has spoken very clearly about this question. The point – without minimizing the importance of the Master’s physical form – is that if we think that being with the Master will compensate for not attending to our meditation, we’re not going to get very far. Being at the Dera, however encouraging, is no substitute for our meditation. The real form of the Master is Shabd, and it’s the Shabd that we have to attach ourselves to.

We speak of Sant Mat as a science, so we should apply logic to our understanding. We are in search of Truth. What is true is eternal; it does not change. Everything that comes and goes is maya. If we only attach ourselves to the physical, we are not attaching ourselves to the permanent. Rationally, the attachment to the physical Master will have to end. The physical form will die and be consigned to the flames. Our attachment will take us that far and no further, and so we need to attach ourselves to that which is changeless and eternal, which never dies.

Sometimes it seems that we want to put the Master on a pedestal but this is completely contrary to the message that the Master is so lovingly trying to get across to us. He tries to show us that the Master is a normal person like us and that if he can do it, so can we; that those of us engaged in the activities of a very average life are capable of a life of meditation too. Putting the Master on a pedestal suggests that there is a gulf between us – that people like us *can't* do it.

The role of a father is to build confidence in his child so that he can grow to walk shoulder to shoulder with the father. The Father doesn't bring the child up to be dependent upon him, but to come to his level. Otherwise when the parent dies, the life of the child would be shattered and he wouldn't be able to function. The father brings him up so that when he is no longer there the child can stand on his own two feet. And that is the role of the Master. He walks by our side so that we can walk *with* him. He does not walk in front because we would not be able to follow, nor behind because we would not be able to lead. We have to walk the path together.

We can look upon the Master as a friend, as a brother, or as a parent or a teacher – whatever we are most comfortable with. The Master-disciple relationship is realized at a high stage and develops only slowly. To trust him as a Master doesn't come straight after initiation, but comes when we do our spiritual practice and gain inner experience.

There are no words to describe the feeling of love the Master inspires. There are no words to thank him. But we can recall Hazur Maharaj Ji's response when asked if there was any gift we could give him. He said we should attend to our meditation. By attending to our meditation, he explained, we are doing the Master's own work. Nothing else can liberate us, he said; we must come to the eye centre to see him.



The Slaying of the Minotaur

There is a Greek myth in which Theseus, a hero, is sent into a labyrinth, a maze of tunnels in the middle of which lives the minotaur, a horrible monster. Theseus' task is to slay the minotaur, but the problem is that even if he were to find his way to the centre and slay the creature, how would he ever find his way out again in total darkness, a maze of dead ends and false turns?

This is a bit like us in the world. However bright life seems, do we ever know who we really are, where we came from and where we're going? In this sense, life is a maze.

The solution is offered by Theseus' friend and well-wisher, Ariadne, who secretly gives to Theseus a ball of tightly wound silken thread. The end of this thread, she keeps in her hand. It's only the finest of threads, but it serves the purpose. As Theseus makes his daring journey to the centre of the maze he takes the thread with him, in fact he fastens it to his person, unwinding it as he goes. He does find the monster, he fights it and slays it in a fierce battle. Through all this, the thread has remained with him. As he starts to make his way out, he takes hold of the thread and consciously follows it all the way, gathering it up until he thankfully reaches the daylight.

The secret of his escape lay in this connection: firstly the connection with Ariadne, whose plan it was that he should find his way back to her. But that mental link between them would not have been enough without the ball of thread. The thread was the means to really connect them together and to enable Theseus to have something to hold on to and follow.

The presence and the purpose of Shabd can be explained by this analogy. Every created being is connected to the Creator – whether we

call him God, Allah, Enlightenment, or Supreme Consciousness – by means of a current of audible, primal energy. Saints have always taught that if we wish to become conscious of the sound current and follow it to its source, we can do so. Access to that sound and that method lie within the human body at the centre between our two eyes. It is the Creator who has given us this link with himself and he has also sent to this world his saints who can show us how to slay the monster – conquer our minds – grab hold of the thread (the shabd) and return to our Creator.



Our relationship with the Master is that of love and devotion, of meditation. It is not any worldly relationship; it's only a spiritual relationship. And the more we are filled with love and devotion for the Master, the nearer we feel to him. The Master is always near to us; it is we who are away from the Master. The more we are filled with love and devotion for the Master, the nearer we feel to him and the more we feel that he belongs to us and we belong to him. Actually, that is our own feeling. We come to that level of consciousness where we feel the nearness of the Master. Otherwise the Master is always near every disciple.

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

Marriage

Our Master frequently recommends that we marry and live a settled householder's life. In this modern age we look for so-called freedom and sometimes we are afraid of the commitment of marriage. Yes, marriage is full of ups and downs, yet these obstacles strengthen us, help us let go of our selfishness and actually teach us to believe in love rather than our passions and attachments. This little story is to help us have a realistic attitude to marriage:

A lively young couple were attending a colourful festival full of passion and frolic. They decided to take a break and walk into the peaceful countryside nearby, away from the noise and crowds. They wandered over the fields towards a mountain and rested under a tree. Suddenly a huge white bird gently landed on the branch above them and started to speak to the couple.

"I believe you are searching for me," said the bird. "My name is Love."

The couple were so amazed by the majesty of the bird, they just nodded their heads in awe.

"I live at the very top of that mountain in a beautiful, peaceful home. Inside the home there is all the nourishment anyone could crave, plenty of clear fresh water and a cosy fire that never goes out. Sweet music enchants every space and the huge windows allow in beautiful light at all times. The house on the peak of the mountain is called Marriage. There is a special path up this mountain. One must take and keep the marriage vows to receive the blessings that will help overcome all the difficulties on the way to the sacred home at the peak. Courage, commitment, forgiveness, perseverance and purity are essential for success because there are many cliffs to climb, many traps and challenges to face. But I believe you both want to climb this

mountain and I believe you can do it! Remember, I am always here to help if you call me. Are you ready for the adventure?”

The young couple knew their inner desires were already seen by the bird called Love, so they said together, “We are, but what are the obstacles we have to face?”

The great bird answered, “I will tell you. But do not fear, I will introduce you to a powerful friend who will also support you. Your friend is the Eagle and his name is Duty. With his powerful focus he can spot difficulties from afar and can help you avoid them. A number of unfriendly birds live on the mountainside and you will have to deal with them. The first one is the Peacock called Pride. This beautiful looking bird is selfish and vain and will make it impossible for you to ascend the upward path together. Ignore it, don't even look at its fine feathers. Instead, follow the Song Bird of Humility, and the Blue Bird of Kindness. They will always take you in the right direction.

The next dangerous bird is the Crow called Expectations. It will try to lead you to its cave full of treasure, wealth and luxuries beyond your imagination. All these goods are stolen and if you accept or take anything, you will have serious problems. It promises you admiration, importance, and the comfort of having all your wants addressed. Don't be tempted; rather, work hard honestly for your own treasure.

If Expectations is around then you will probably encounter the angry Woodpecker called Nag. This bird loves to make a noise and get what it wants by nagging and arguing. Resist this bird, although its methods initially appear useful, and instead cultivate silence and learn to understand another's point of view.

Then you will meet the fat white Dove called Indulgence. This lazy bird encourages you to enjoy its billing and cooing but you'll find it gradually saps all your energy. Turn away from this dove as there's no

real peace at this point. Rather, maintain discipline, work hard and walk to the peak to experience true peace.

Finally you will meet the House Sparrow called Selfishness. It seems modest and humble – what could be wrong? But it will keep you confined in a narrow place at the foot of the cliff and demand constant feeding so that you forget your goals. Stay away, otherwise your journey will halt and you will end up frustrated.

Many try the mountain but turn away because of the pressure and pain on the way to the top. Remember, this mountain called Marriage is steep, but the climb will make you strong and fit. In life, though separately you are vulnerable, if you stay together and help each other your bond and commitment will make you powerful. Don't listen to others walking down the mountain – they are the ones that have given up. The reward on reaching the top of the mountain will be worth it. Good luck. *You can do it.*



The disciple will never love the Master unless the Master plants that seed of love in the heart of the disciple, unless he nourishes that seed in the disciple, strengthens that seed in the disciple, pulls the disciple towards him. His inner hand of strengthening that seed of love is always there at the back.

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

The Bridge

In *Legacy of Love* we read that, “The Masters become a bridge for us to cross. By loving a perfect Master, our soul eventually comes to love the formless and indescribable one and only God. Although the Lord, like electricity, pervades everywhere, the Master is the point where he shines out as light.”

We were born with a mission, and in the course of our life that mission becomes clearer. We are to restore our lost relationship with the divine and in the process get in touch with our true selves. The living Master is a bridge because he is anchored in both worlds, the spiritual and physical. He is our link to divinity. Our relationship with the physical Master is therefore of tremendous importance.

Although Masters have been born in the East since time immemorial, ever since the second half of the twentieth century they have travelled the globe as well, opening their doors to seekers from all parts of the world. For example, in the 1960s Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh made his first visit to the West, to the eternal benefit of seekers there. The spiritual thirst with which we were born could be quenched only by meeting the Master in person and by being embraced by his love. A turning point and a sacred moment, meeting the Master is the beginning of a long relationship played out over time.

We can't imagine a life without our Master. Though we are hardly aware of it, our Master forges in us a strong inner bond with him – he becomes a part of us. Masters keep their promise never to leave us. Naturally we go through tough lessons in life – at our jobs or within our families there are issues which may remain unresolved. We may face dilemmas within the sangat, maybe things we weren't expecting. We may waver, but always something happens that pulls us back onto

the path – a seva, perhaps that we couldn't refuse and which keeps us in line; or a shattering life event that forces us to turn to the Master, grateful that he is there, giving his support and comfort. On the departure of Maharaj Charan Singh from this world, Baba Gurinder Singh has guided and inspired us, and so, like children, we have been provided for, loved, protected.

A way of life

Looking back over our life, we will see that our pathway across that spiritual bridge is made up of the way of life taught by the Masters and the values they inculcate; we imbibe these through association with them. Our memories of visits to Dera and of the Master's tours to his satsang centres at home and abroad reveal to us how we grew into the path, so that slowly but gradually the depth of the spiritual way of life began to sink in. It permeated our behaviour. For older satsangis, the sense of responsibility grows in terms of living the life, serving the Master by serving his sangat, and giving a helping hand to the next generation.

So much of our life isn't lived to the fullest. We're so consumed by our daily activities that we constantly forget our real purpose. That's why we can't do without satsang and seva. Attending satsang has been made so easy for us now that we have Science of the Soul centres of our own. The same goes for doing seva. Perhaps we don't realize how beneficial for our spiritual lives these opportunities are. As we rub shoulders with fellow satsangis and learn to bring respect, compromise and a sense of service to our dealings with each other, we feel the Master's power at work. To serve well, we must attend to meditation; then, inspired by the atmosphere of seva, we attend to meditation with renewed enthusiasm.

Our meditation is a driving force and an act of gratitude. The spiritual life we live and build up over a lifetime is based on a steady, daily rhythm of practising meditation. Living the life and practising meditation is the way we take our first tentative steps across the bridge to spiritual understanding. There is no handbook for how to do it. You can only do it by *doing* it. ‘Talking’ the path won’t lead anywhere. What helps us immensely is first of all sticking to that daily practice, hanging on to it for dear life. An unbroken rhythm of meditation forges daily links of an unbreakable chain. There is also a simplicity and beauty to it which somehow opens our eyes to the beauty and simplicity of the everyday. In other words, we begin to perceive the workings of the divine in the small and seemingly insignificant things around us.

Stepping across

It says in the Bible that “he [the Lord] comes like a thief in the night”. The meaning of this is that spiritual transport comes to us quite unannounced – like a thief who doesn’t announce his presence. Spirit is everywhere but with our limited consciousness we are unaware of it. Still, that unannounced presence will touch us and reach us from time to time. This is what we are working towards when we do what our Master wants us to do – to actually make use of his bridge by stepping across it. These are most precious moments in life, breaking through life’s routines, giving one a sense of aliveness to that something within us which is so much greater than our individual personalities. That embrace of love also gives us a sense of the presence of the inner Master. It touches the stillness of our being.

Sant Mat is the path of Shabd meditation, and the Shabd can be experienced within ourselves in the form of sound and light when we learn to concentrate our attention at the eye centre. Getting closer to the divine, getting closer to the inner Master, is the reward of all

our efforts and failures. At the end of the day, we can only pray that the sum total of all our actions will be closeness to the Shabd. It is an awakening to the living God – the Shabd within us – to which we aspire through the practice of simran, dhyan and bhajan. Saint Kabir says:

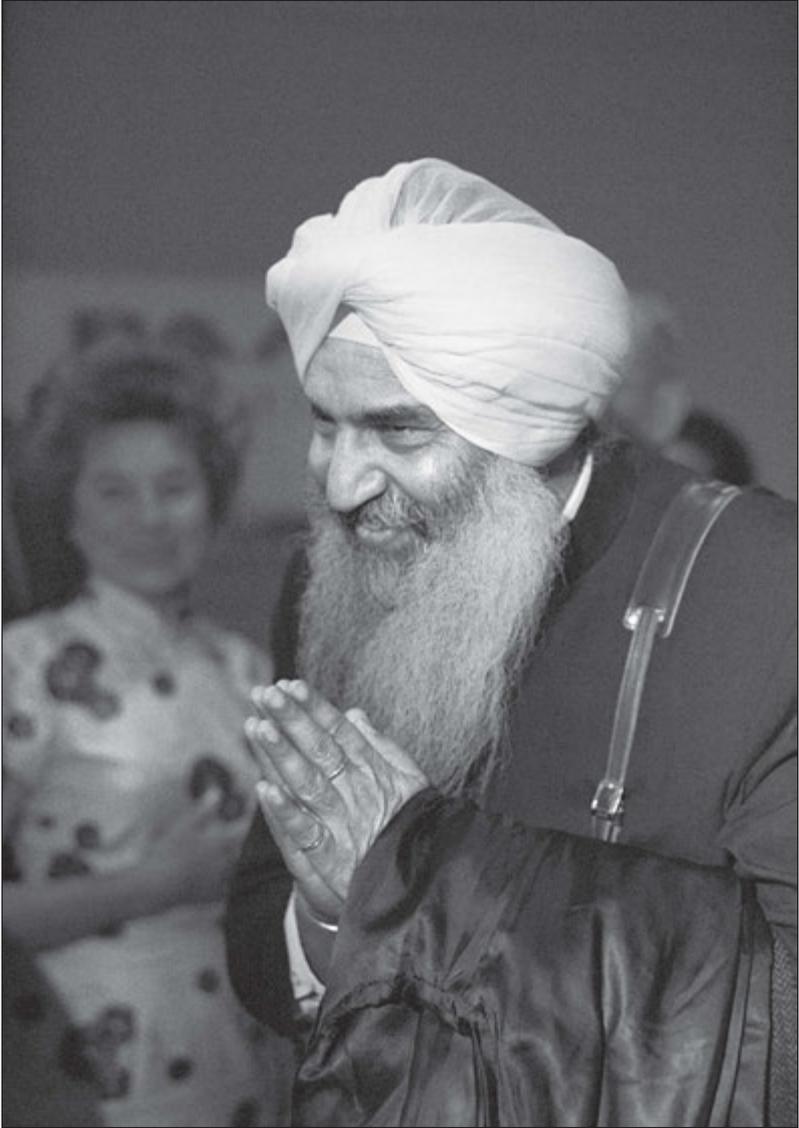
*He who obtains Shabd,
Who keeps his soul in Shabd absorbed,
Reaches the royal audience hall;
Kabir, there he will see the Supreme One,
My Beloved Lord.*

Kabir, the Weaver of God's Name

When we come to experience this living reality within our being we will “reach the royal audience hall” – meet the inner, radiant form of our Master. His physical presence has guided and sustained us, bringing us into sight of the other side. We realize that his physical being is actually a manifestation of Shabd, and that the bridge we walk on is itself nothing but Shabd.

Loving the physical Master and accepting his guidance, we end up by loving the inner Master. He is our bridge to our real home in Sach Khand.





Maharaj Charan Singh

Nothing and Everything

We live in an ever-changing world in which the pace of life seems to be accelerating all the time. In this digital age our consciousness is more and more invaded by external stimulation. We were led to believe that the advent of the computer would free us to have more leisure time and more independence, but the reality seems to be that we are sucked into ever greater use of our digital devices.

We are bombarded by subtle advertising, with the result that we lay ourselves open to constant manipulation at a subconscious level. Everywhere we look there is advertising – in hospital waiting rooms, at bus stops, on tube station escalators – and our computer screens bring up advertising with almost every keystroke. We are left wondering whether, before long, we will be going about our everyday business wearing ‘augmented reality’ headsets, i.e. having digital information superimposed on top of what we are physically seeing.

Identifying the essential

On the one hand, we may find the trend towards virtual reality deeply disturbing, as it interferes with our personal and direct contact with the physical world. On the other hand, perhaps it awakens us to the fact that, as the Masters have always told us, life on the physical plane is *all* illusion – ultimately nothing more than a tangle of nothingness.

However, it is within this illusion that we, as satsangis, must seek the real, which, like a strand of gold, runs throughout the illusory world. What a relief to find that our task is quite simple. In every discourse of a perfect Master there is one message of supreme import, which is that we must *do our meditation. Nothing else matters*. When we come to look death in the eye, as we inevitably will, the one thing

that we are sure to regret is that we did not give more time to our meditation – that we did not build our lives around meditation rather than simply fit it around everything else we had to do.

As we go deeper into Kal Yuga, the ‘iron age’, we can see so clearly how, in their mercy, the perfect Masters have dramatically adjusted the qualification for discipleship. It appears that in bygone times, disciples had to wait many years before being allowed to ask for initiation and would also be put through tremendously difficult tests before being accepted. To qualify nowadays we simply have to abide by the first three of four vows: we remain lacto-vegetarian; abstain from alcohol, mind-affecting drugs and tobacco; and lead a clean moral life for one year. In this way, we gain the confidence that we can live the path and find the strength to adhere to the fourth vow of daily meditation.

Being vigilant

Because of conditions in society today, and the muddled ways of thinking that we have become accustomed to, many of us find even these requirements challenging. To ensure that we remain vegetarian, we must be vigilant and check the ingredients of the food we buy. Our commitment to abstaining from alcohol and mind-altering drugs may mean that we must cut out some of our social habits. And we must accept a cultural shift which values celibacy outside of marriage. These lifestyle changes are achievable if our conviction is strong enough. Once that longed-for day of our initiation has passed, our most important task, however, is simply to *turn up* (metaphorically speaking) every day and sit down to do our meditation. The quality of it is not the point. None of us feel that we actually can do it properly, but it is the effort of being regular and punctual and building our lives around this precious time which is so important. Our minds are constantly on the go and, try as we may, they will not be stilled easily.

We all know that it will take a lifetime, but we should not become discouraged but simply continue to sit and try, try again. In the book *Concepts and Illusions*, it states that:

The Master can instruct only at the level of the disciple's understanding. His philosophy is simple; be desireless, accept everything – hot or cold, sun or rain. The teachings are the foundations necessary for the disciple's spiritual development. Just as a child cannot understand the attainments of a learned person, in the same way, a disciple cannot understand the Master. The Master is a paradox, an enigma! We can understand his teachings, not his ways. We make silly comparisons like, this did not happen during the Great Master's time or that was not so during Hazur Maharaj Ji's time, little realizing that the Master deals with present-day situations according to the needs of the changing times. The Master's style, choice of words and actions can change to adapt to a new generation, but the teachings don't change. The Master is here to relate to us and that is possible only if he speaks to us in the language we understand ... in a manner which we can comprehend.

When you take the road along a spiritual path you have an enormous task ahead of you, as you are slowly turning your awareness in the opposite direction from the one in which it has been going for aeons of time. The task is so huge that it could almost be likened to trying to push a glacier back up a mountainside. We will spend our lives trying and failing again and again until finally we learn to let go of all aspiration, relax and simply learn to *be*. It will be at this point

that the Master will be able to dye us in his love, imbue us with his qualities, and take us in and up.

As new initiates we so often feel that if we try hard enough, we are sure to go within, but little by little we begin to understand that our meditation is not to be done with the expectation of inner experience. It is to be done simply as a way of turning our attention to the Master daily, building up our love for him and thanking him for the constant grace he is showering upon us. There should be no expectation of results, but simply a genuine desire to please the Master, nothing else. In the book *A Wake Up Call*, we read:

The Masters have all stressed the importance of approaching meditation without expectations. Sitting in meditation without any expectations settles us into the right frame of mind for spiritual practice. When we attend to meditation without looking for results, we can be focused. We can be relaxed.

Maharaj Sawan Singh made it clear that we should never anticipate a time schedule in which we would expect to go within. Writing to an initiate, as recorded in *Spiritual Gems*, he said; “No period can be fixed as to when the attention of any person will begin to stay in the focus. It depends on the longing, faith, perseverance and his past record.”

We often hear people talk about what good karma they are going through when things are going well in their lives, but the paradox is that periods of what *seem* to be very difficult times may actually be much more beneficial to us than the so called ‘good’ times. Serious challenges often help to bring our attention sharply into the present, thus making us focus on what is truly important. During these times, we often become increasingly aware of the inner support that the

Master gives us every moment of our lives, and our appreciation of what he does for us increases.

He is always there for us, willing us on and carrying us along. We can never overestimate his love and compassion. We are all his beloved children and he has come to take us back to our true home. On one level the job has been done already; we are already part of that golden thread, already firmly seated in the real rather than the illusory, but our awareness has not caught up yet with the reality. When we have given up all feeling of self, of I-ness, and become one with our Beloved, we will have given up everything and also attained everything all at once. We will have gone from nothing to everything in the blink of an eye.



It is the Master's love that creates the disciple's love for the Master. It is the Master who creates that love in the disciple for him. He's the one who is pulling the disciple from within. Then the disciple becomes helpless to love the Master; he starts feeling that probably he's in love with the Master. But actually it is the Master who has filled him with his love. Otherwise, but for the grace of the Lord, we are so much attached to the senses and to worldly faces and worldly objects that we would never be able to love the Master. He is the one who is pulling us from within.

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

Food for Thought



Two Feet in the Grave

Many of us are familiar with the phrase 'one foot in the grave.' It's a humorous way of saying that we are approaching the end of life.

Recently at a Q&A session, an elderly lady, well-known in the sangat, asked Baba Ji if he would give her good notice before she died. Baba Ji laughed and asked her why she needed any notice since she already had two feet in the grave!

Baba Ji's answer made everybody laugh, but it was delivered in such a very warm and loving way that the elderly lady laughed along with him. As the saying goes, Baba Ji laughed with her and not at her.

Let us put that exchange into perspective. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, Maharaj Sawan Singh explains:

The Master is that form of the Lord which can be seen.... The Master is a realized God-in-man, a God-man or man-in-God. All the qualities from Sat Lok (the True Region) to Bhu Lok (the created world) are to be found in him. He helps the disciple in every region. He reigns over every region with a glory and a splendour that is unique. He sustains the devotion of the disciple. He is the Supreme Lord in the human form.... Although the Lord, like electricity, pervades everywhere, the Master is the point where he shines out as light.

So we can understand that even an apparent throwaway remark by a Master has a deep significance and meaning, because although he speaks to us at our level, his perspective is from eternity, from the throne of God. And if we think about it, don't we have two feet in the grave as soon as we are born, so transient and vulnerable is human life?

If we consider the great scales of time even in this physical world – 13.8 billion years since the ‘big bang’ of physical creation, 4.54 billion years since planet earth emerged from a gaseous state – what is the average human life-span in comparison? In fact the scriptures tell us that this physical world is just a minute part of the astral world, the astral a tiny part of Brahmand, and so on up to Sat Lok. Cosmically speaking, our lifetimes are over in a split second.

The Venerable Bede, a Christian monk (d.735 CE), in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, gives a profound metaphor for the short human lifespan when he explains to a local ruler:

Such, O King, seems to me the present life of men on earth ... as if, when on a winter's night you sit feasting with your ealdormen and thegns [noblemen and retainers], a single sparrow should fly swiftly into the hall, and coming in at one door, instantly fly out through another. In that time in which it is indoors it is indeed not touched by the fury of the winter, but yet this smallest space of calmness being passed almost in a flash – from winter going into winter again – it is lost to your eyes. Somewhat like this appears the life of man; but of what follows or what went before, we are utterly ignorant.

Life passes in a flash, explains Bede, and we are completely ignorant of where we have come from and where we go.

Not only is the human lifespan very short, but the Masters explain that this human body is just a dream:

Since the human body is unreal like a dream, always be apprehensive that we won't stay in the world forever. As the

body itself is unreal, everything else in the world is unreal too. Nam-dhun alone is real, so hold fast to it.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

The human body is unreal because it exists for such a brief time. The whole world too is unreal. The perfect Masters realize this and encourage us to do something worthwhile in this life that fades away so rapidly. If we don't, we could be trapped in this dream world forever. Baba Jaimal Singh advises, "Nam-dhun alone is real, so hold fast to it."

When we find out about the perfect Master – that is, when he finds us – we must take his advice: If we live by his four principles he will make us conscious of the Shabd-dhun. This alone is real, and when we experience this reality, we will see that though we have two feet in the grave, the amazing truth is that beyond the grave lies eternal life.



Meditation is the only way to follow the path. And love will definitely push us and pull us towards our destination. That is very essential. But love without meditation is just emotion – sometimes you feel it, sometimes you don't feel it. Sometimes you feel you're full of devotion; other times you feel you're absolutely blank. By meditation you develop love that comes with experience, with conviction. Meditation takes our roots very deep in love; nobody can shake us then.

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

Truth in a Nutshell

Knowing by Loving

For he comes down to our level, adapting his Godhead to our power to comprehend.... Only he himself is completely and utterly sufficient to fulfil the will and longing of our souls. Nothing else can. Our soul, when it is restored by grace, is made wholly sufficient to comprehend him fully by love. He cannot be comprehended by our intellect or any man's – or any angel's for that matter. For both we and they are created beings. But only to our intellect is he incomprehensible: not to our love.

All rational beings, angels and men, possess two faculties, the power of knowing and the power of loving. To the first, to the intellect, God who made them is forever unknowable, but to the second, to love, he is completely knowable, and that by every separate individual. So much so that one loving soul by itself, through its love, may know for itself him who is incomparably more than sufficient to fill all souls that exist. This is the everlasting miracle, for God always works in this fashion, and always will. Consider this, if by God's grace you are able to. To know it for oneself is endless bliss; its contrary is endless pain.

The Cloud of Unknowing, translated by Clifton Wolters



Without love there can be no meditation at all. By meditation we travel on the path which leads us back to the Father. And without love for the Father we will never try to travel on the path at all. Love is the first essential quality. Rather, it forces us to travel on the path. So love automatically leads us back to the Father. And what is love? As you have often heard: Love is God and God is love.

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

Theirs but to Do and Die

Some very famous lines from Tennyson's poem, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, can serve to remind us of the attitude we should have as disciples of a perfect Master:

*Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die ...*

The poem celebrates a cavalry charge during the Crimean War of the 1850s and emphasizes the valour of the cavalymen bravely carrying out their orders despite the certain outcome of death. When Baba Ji quotes these lines, he is, of course, referring to our attitude towards meditation. Instead of agonizing over it, he suggests, just do it and start the process of dying while living.

Only the bravest of souls can fearlessly embrace death as in Tennyson's poem, and most of us would acknowledge that we are far from brave. But if we try our best with our meditation, our minds will gradually open to the bigger picture. After all, life starts at the eye centre – below this point is only death and decay. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Die to Live*:

In meditation we withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre in the same way that we all die when death comes.... That is why meditation is known as dying daily.

At our level of consciousness it is hard to believe what the Master tells us, because we can only believe when we experience these truths for ourselves. But we can make a start in our journey to belief by

summoning the faith to move forward. If we are initiated, we can resolve to make more effort at meditation, and if we are seekers, we can resolve to attend more satsangs and read Sant Mat literature more regularly. Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Quest for Light*:

The only way to subdue your mind and make it more receptive to spiritual efforts is to make more spiritual effort. For millions of ages our mind has been out of its centre. This outward and downward tendency has become such a habit that naturally it requires some time and constant effort to bring the consciousness back out of the lower centres.

He explains that it is the nature of our minds to go downwards and outwards but if we want to go inwards and upwards – that is towards our true home – a lot of hard work is required. But Hazur continues by pointing out that the more effort we make, the more our mind wants to make more spiritual effort:

To regain affinity with Sant Mat teachings we should devote ourselves to spiritual practice with greater love and faith. Sincere effort is always repaid in the terms of more pleasure in meditation. Therefore I would advise you to read Sant Mat literature every day and perform meditation with one-pointedness.

That very effort of ours is rewarded because we start to enjoy meditation more, and the more we enjoy it, the more we want to do it.

Making effort comes in stages. The very first stage is attending satsangs. We're told that attending satsang has a profound effect on our mind because we hear eternal truths and the mind is encouraged to

put in the necessary work to take it back to its home in Trikuti. At that stage our true self, our soul, is released from the mind and continues towards our real home in Sach Khand with the help of the Shabd. But this is a very advanced stage indeed. Right now it's about convincing the mind. Satsang helps because everyone attending is a fellow seeker after the truth. We are in good company and we tend to take on the attributes of the company we keep.

As well as attending satsang, Maharaj Charan Singh advised us that we should read something from a Sant Mat book every day. He writes in *Quest for Light*, "Keeping some Sant Mat books in one's daily study is a very good habit. This practice maintains one's earnestness and zeal for meditation and increases one's love."

Keeping a Sant Mat book by the bedside and reading it before sleeping or evening meditation focuses the mind and helps one to get one's priorities in perspective. The problems of the day are not important! What is important is our path back home.

Seva is also an important way of making us stay focused on the path. In seva we mix with fellow seekers as we endeavour to best serve the Master. In *Divine Light* Hazur says the following about seva: "It purifies the mind and ennobles the soul, provided of course that it is performed without self-interest, with a detached mind and without lapsing into discussions or arguments."

Another way we can really help ourselves once we are initiated is to try to do simran in the daytime when the mind is free. Instead of letting the mind wander, we can be in touch with the Master through our simran. Simran, after all, is remembrance. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Prophet Mohammed is quoted as saying:

Persons who repeat the holy names of God have angels around them.... They enjoy peace and bliss. God remembers them.

What beautiful imagery from the holy Prophet – if we remember our God throughout the day, he remembers us. And once we develop the habit of doing simran whenever the mind is free, we remain more focused and it is easier to concentrate at the time of meditation.

But the best way of making more effort at meditation, is just to meditate. Meditation is the most important action in the life of an initiate and we mustn't allow any of the challenges of life to undermine the effort we should make. If we put meditation first in our lives, everything else will fall into place.

We will help ourselves in our efforts if we remember the first line of the quotation from Tennyson's poem: "Theirs not to reason why". As a disciple, it is up to us to train our mind not to look for endless explanations and reasons but to unquestioningly accept whatever guidance we are given. This point is illustrated in a story which appears in the book *Tales of the Mystic East*.

King Janak, one of the ancient kings in India, was an ardent seeker and asked the holy man, Ashtavakara, to grant him true knowledge. Ashtavakara said that he would do this in exchange for three things: the king's body, his wealth, and his mind. King Janak agreed, so sincere was his quest for spirituality. Ashtavakara then gave three commands. The first command was that the king should go and sit amongst his subjects' shoes. Everyone was shocked because such a thing was only expected of the lowest of the low and to have a king sit amongst shoes was a grave insult to him. King Janak obeyed, but though his body had been humbled, his mind was running pleasurably over his wealth and possessions. Ashtavakara reminded him that his wealth was now his – King Janak had nothing. The king's mind then became quiet, having nothing to interest it.

At this point, Ashtavakara asked the king, "Where are you?"

"I am here," was the reply.

“No,” answered Ashtavakara, “Your mind is mine and you have no right to talk of ‘I’ or think with it at all.”

In that moment, having surrendered all three: body, wealth and mind, the king’s attention went inside and the sage took him up and opened his inner eye. King Janak’s desire to find true knowledge was realized. Ashtavakara then told him that he had no need of the king’s body, wealth or mind, and that he should take them back and from then onwards use them as a steward.

It was through unconditional obedience that King Janak became spiritually enlightened, receiving the precious gift of Nam from his Master. If we endlessly question, we are putting our minds in first place rather than our Master. These days we are not asked to give up mind, body or wealth but merely to live by four simple principles: vegetarianism; abstention from alcohol, recreational drugs and tobacco; a moral code of living; and daily meditation. These principles are wonderfully beneficial for everyone in this stressful age – but to initiates, they are priceless. Baba Ji asks us to do only that which will help us get through life and death.

Tennyson writes, “Theirs not to reason why/theirs but to do and die!” We can apply this to our spiritual life: not questioning but just doing our meditation. Then our true spirituality will start to unfold as we begin to die to live.



The Effect of Meditation

Advice from Maharaj Charan Singh

You mean sometimes you feel devotion and love, and sometimes you feel dry and void? You don't see the sun every day. There are clouds sometimes ... but that sun is always there. We have to pass through so many phases of our karmas. Sometimes favourable karmas come and we feel full of emotion and devotion for the Father. Sometimes an unfavourable layer of karmas comes and we feel absolutely void and dry. We pass through so many phases of karma.

That's all the more reason why we should attend to our meditation, to get through that dryness. Sometimes also in meditation a stage comes when we feel a great void in our life, because the effect of meditation is that we get detached from all the worldly pleasures, worldly faces. They don't interest us anymore. And nothing holds us inside to catch our attention or our thoughts, so then we feel a void. The world doesn't please us, and we have nothing else to please us within. But we pass through that dry spell ... one shouldn't feel discouraged. As long as we were attached to the world, we always had something to look forward to. When we got up in the mornings, we'd say: "I'll go to a movie, I'll go to the theatre, I'll go to a party, and I have so many dates and this and that." So you feel attached, and you plan your day and you feel interested in how you will spend the whole day. But when those things don't interest you any more at all, when you are not being pulled by them in any direction at all, and you are not getting any attachment within, or any enjoyment of meditation or blissful feeling within, then you feel that dryness and void in your life. Practically every seeker has to pass through that period. That's even more reason why we should attend to, cling to meditation.

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

A Practical Approach to Meditation

If we have been initiated and we haven't been able to sit in meditation, or we started to sit but we stopped doing it, then we need a practical approach to renew our commitment to sit for meditation. The important thing is to begin with what time we can. Then gradually and persistently we can increase that time, not jumping full-blown into two and a half hours for one or two days then falling away to ten minutes or nothing at all. That is not the way. The way is slow and steady: to increase the time gradually....

If you force your mind to meditate and say, "Even if I can't give the proper time to meditation, let me give at least half the time, even if I'm busy," then you'll get regularity.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Meditation is a way of life

In the beginning, our meditation may seem divorced from our daily life. It is like two people who live in the same house and do not talk to each other. In time, daily life and meditation become integrated and support each other. From meditation we learn to be present, more concentrated, more generous, in whatever we do throughout the day. The attitudes of surrender, patience, contentment and awareness that are strengthened through the process of meditation are naturally applied to every aspect of daily life. Our lives then reflect the peace, joy and calmness that develop automatically through the practice of meditation.

Meditation helps us to see how there is oneness between everything and everybody in the creation – that, externally and internally, all is Shabd. We see how everything is interconnected. As we bring

this realization to all aspects of our daily life, we demolish the walls we have built that separate our spiritual life from our daily life. The fracture that is experienced by so many people in the wholeness of their being is gradually healed.

If we analyze our tendency to see our meditation as separate from our daily life, we will understand that it is simply a symptom of this fracture, or fragmentation, that we typically experience in many aspects of our lives. What we say is different from what we do. Our spiritual desires are not reflected in our actions. We are in one place but wish we were in another. We are doing one thing but thinking of doing something else. Since we are never in the present and never being where we are, it's no wonder that meditation seems so boring; we are never there. And yet meditation is the only remedy for this fragmentation, this cosmic fracture that has not only separated us from God and the Master, but has also torn apart our inner being.

Meditation is devotion

Devotion is a practical way to become receptive to the teachings of the Masters. If we see the Master as a teacher of logic and intellect, then we will get words and explanations. If we try to know the Master as he really is, without the hindrance of the intellect, then we will come to know him as the embodiment of Shabd. For those who are intellectual by nature, this is very difficult to do, but we need to start somewhere. However artificial and stone-hearted we may have become, raised as most of us have been on scientific materialism, we still yearn to experience feelings of love, awe and longing, like those recorded by the lovers of Shabd.

*Love came and emptied me of self,
Every vein and every pore
Made into a container to be filled by the Beloved*

*Of me, only a name is left
The rest is You my Friend, my Beloved*

Shaikh Abu-Saeed Abil-Kheir

A time will come when we will see our Master as something more than a mere human being. When, through meditation, we are able to relate to him as the embodiment of Shabd, we will be able to receive the full transforming and purifying power of his teachings. This receptivity we will only get from meditation. Without meditation, we will be able to perceive only a fraction of a fraction of his love and wisdom. That is why it is so important that we try to develop the highest type of devotion through meditation.

Living Meditation



I can tell you one thing: just attend to your meditation. There's no other way, there's no other short cut. By attending to meditation you are automatically progressing towards your destination, and you will become another being and lose your identity. Meditation is the only remedy. There's no other way to lose your identity. When there is so much rust on the knife, the only way to remove it is to rub the knife against the sandstone. Otherwise, the rust won't go, the knife won't shine. Mere talk won't solve your problem; intellectual discussion won't lead you anywhere. The main thing is practice.

The Lord gives us hunger; the more we attend to meditation, the more hungry we become. When we become hungry. He provides us with food. As Christ said, the harvest is ready. The harvest is always ready, but we have to lift our consciousness to that level where we can collect that harvest. ... Just change your way of life according to the teachings and attend to meditation. That is all that is required. From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

As Rich as Croesus

Croesus was a king of fabulous wealth who ruled over a country called Lydia several thousand years ago. At that time Croesus was said to be the richest man in the world, and to this day we talk of a very wealthy person as being ‘as rich as Croesus’.

One day he was visited by a great man from Greece, Solon the law-maker of Athens. Croesus was pleased to be able to show off his sumptuous palace and grounds, and in the evening, as they dined together, he eagerly asked Solon: “Tell me, who do you think is the happiest of all men?” Rather than giving the expected answer, Solon was silent for a minute, then he gave the name of a poor and honest Athenian workman of his acquaintance. When pressed further, he again gave examples of the poor and selfless. Croesus was disappointed – in his blind and childish egotism he had been sure that this wise man would see and confirm his own status as the most fortunate man alive. When he angrily asked Solon why he disregarded the richest man in the world, Solon replied:

O King, no man can say whether you are happy or not until you die. For no man knows what misfortunes may overtake you, or what misery may one day be yours in place of all this splendour.

Many years after this, Croesus’ kingdom was invaded by a marauding army. He put up a strong resistance but eventually was taken by the enemy, King Cyrus, who determined to make an example of him. He was dragged to the market place where enemy soldiers built up a great pile of timber taken from the ruins of his once

beautiful palace. They tied the unfortunate Croesus in the midst of the pyre and prepared to set light to it.

As Croesus lay on the pyre, all his friends and entourage gone, all his possessions plundered, he thought of the words that Solon had spoken to him years before, and he began to moan, “O Solon, O Solon, O Solon.” It happened that King Cyrus was riding by at that very moment and heard his groans. “Why do you call on the name of Solon?” he asked curiously. Croesus was silent at first but after Cyrus had repeated his question, he brokenly told him of Solon’s visit to his palace and all that he had said.

The story affected Cyrus deeply. He thought of the words, “No man knows what misfortunes may overtake you, or what misery may be yours in the place of all this splendour.” And he realized that all men are brothers in that they share the same vulnerability to the winds of fortune.

“After all,” he said to himself, “ought not men to be merciful to each other? I will do to Croesus as I would have others do to me.” So he caused Croesus to be given his life and his freedom, gifts more precious than all the wealth in the world.

Based on a story in William Bennett’s *The Book of Virtues*



The inestimable wealth is within us all but can be gathered only after learning the technique from a perfect adept and practising it with love, faith and humility.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

The River of Existence

A man who doesn't know how to swim falls into a river. He looks around for some means to remain afloat and not be washed away by the strong current. In his desperate attempt to stay alive, he catches hold of anything that comes his way – a log of wood, floating straw, twigs – anything at all. Holding tightly onto these supports he survives, but the strong current is carrying him swiftly, along with his 'supports,' towards an unforeseen danger – the great waterfall.

He doesn't know that a waterfall lies ahead. Will he survive this hazard or will he get trapped in the underwater weeds, or hit his head against a rock and drown? What if some unseen danger is lurking in the deep waters far below: a crocodile or something just as menacing? It would be wise for him to try to get out of the river before reaching the waterfall instead of complacently accepting his present situation. He needs to look around now for a rock or an overhanging branch to get hold of so he can haul himself to the safety of the river bank and go home.

We, like that unfortunate man, have fallen into this great river of existence. The laws of karma and transmigration are the strong influences that help this river flow onwards. We cannot swim against their forces and are being carried swiftly and surely towards the great waterfall by their strong currents. The waterfall is the great wheel of 8,400,000 species through which we could be taken before we again qualify for a precious human birth.

Like the poor adventurer in the water, we too are only partly aware of our situation. We might know that we must be saved but how and from what? Do we still cling onto our relations, possessions and achievements, positions in society, the rites and rituals of our

respective religions and so on, hoping they will help us? These supports are helpless against the strong currents that are carrying us. If we do not try to find a way out now, while we still have time, we shall soon reach the end of our existence in the human form. All chances of grabbing that strong sturdy rock, or overhanging branch could be lost for a long time. Will we surface in the human form again, or will we become trapped in some lower form of existence?

But look! There is a guide on the river bank – someone who knows the river and its currents well, and who will reach out and catch the unfortunate man in his strong grip. He will call out that there is danger ahead and tell him just what to do to save himself.

In just the same way, God, in his immense grace, sends his saints into this world to rescue souls who have been swept away in the currents of materialism.

All we need to do is to trust and obey them.

*Many mighty men, scholars and thinkers too,
Have been swept away by the strong currents of attachment;
But the purified soul like a tiny fish
Swims against the current and climbs to its goal.*

Kabir, the Weaver of God's Name



*We must dive within our own selves in order to come in touch with Nam,
for whatever is in the macrocosm is also in the microcosm.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, Light on Sant Mat



Great Master initiating children, Kalabagh.

Patchwork

Seen from the air, the workings of man on the earth below often resemble a vast patchwork – fields of ochre, brown and green welded together by roads and boundary lines. It seems that each set of shapes repeats itself; every local pattern links with another. Viewed from a plane at night, towns and villages appear like stars, with trails of light radiating from their hub.

Looking down through the plane window during a flight, it's easy to get into a philosophical mood. Perhaps we wonder whether this is how humanity appears from the saints' perspective. Are we part of a huge interconnecting pattern?

Absorbed in our own little lives, closed off from each other by walls of ego, we may feel ourselves to be unique, possessed of unusual circumstances and subject to intensely individual problems or delights. But isn't it actually the case that who we are, what we do, what we feel, are things that fall into quite predictable patterns which link us to a million others?

What is new under the sun?

“Very little”, the saint might reply.

Now consider a patchwork quilt constructed by a needle worker who carefully pieces together tiny scraps of fabric to make a whole. Unlike the natural landscape, this is the creation of just one hand.

When the Master sits on his dais before his sangat and sevadars, perhaps it is a patchwork of this sort that he looks on – a vast assembly of us, all individual yet all harmonized. Each separate part, like a scrap of fabric, may have a design which is different from its neighbour's, yet we form an intricate pattern, linked by some special magic into a sympathetic whole.

The needle worker's art ensures an overall tone which blends the separate parts. The Master's art binds us with the love of God, making a patchwork beyond compare.



Love is losing your own identity and becoming another being. To lose your individuality and merge into another being - that is love. And only shabd can help you to achieve that.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol II

INFORMATION ON ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

If you wish to submit an article for publication in *Spiritual Link*, please mail a printed, typed version by post to one of the following addresses. *Emailed submissions will not be accepted.*

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

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

Book Review



Prior to Consciousness and Consciousness and the Absolute:

THE FINAL TALKS OF SRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ.

BY SRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ. EDITED BY JEAN DUNN

PUBLISHER: ACORN PRESS, DURHAM, NC, 1985 AND 1994.

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These two texts edited by Jean Dunn and published nine years apart represent the final talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj which took place between April 4, 1980, and July 1, 1981. The 'talks' are recorded conversations or question-and-answer sessions. Numerous translators worked on converting the conversations from Nisargadatta's native Marathi into English, but Jean Dunn (1921-1996) organized them for publication. Dunn was a longstanding devotee of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who carried on his work after he died. She did so from her home in California until her death.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1983) was born Maruti Shivrampant Kambli. He was a disciple of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj (1888-1936). When he met his master in 1933, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was a householder and shopkeeper, married with children and living in humble circumstances in Bombay. His master died three years later, and soon after he became a renunciate and wandered in India. But after eight months he realized that true renunciation lay within, and returned home. For the following twenty-five years Nisargadatta divided his time between his family duties, managing a small dispensary, and discourse with his fellow disciples. In 1951, following an inner revelation from his master, he began giving initiation. In 1966 he retired from work into full-time spiritual instruction. With the publication of Peter Brent's 1972 book *Godmen of India* and Maurice Frydman's 1973 book *I Am That*, Nisargadatta's teachings reached a worldwide audience. He died in 1983 at the age of 86.

Nisargadatta was an exponent of Advaita Vedanta, or non-dualism. These teachings are also known as Jnana Yoga or Atma-Vicara, the path of

self-inquiry into knowledge of the Absolute. He belonged to the Inchagiri Sampradaya, a lineage of teachers from the Navnath Sampradaya (the Nine Masters tradition originating from Dattatreya: a syncretistic deity considered as an incarnation of the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) and Lingayat Shaivism (a monotheistic religion mainly of South India). Nisargadatta stressed that a profound difference exists between consciousness and primordial formless awareness, which he calls the Absolute. The title *Prior to Consciousness* indicates the importance he placed upon going beyond all form, that is, beyond all duality. As he told one disciple:

Things to be done must be done, things to be understood must be understood. Things to be done are normally your present worldly life and these you must carry out. In spirituality, you have to understand, there is no question of doing. In spirituality there is no name and form. Name and form are necessary for your practical worldly life. The one who understands that name and form are not his identity is in spirituality... One who understands spirituality through various concepts will be caught up in a vicious circle ... the circle of concepts ... rebirth, reincarnation, these are all concepts. If you are caught up in these concepts you are bound to have them. Out of concepts the forms are created, such as buildings, etc. Originally you make a plan, you have a concept, the concept is born out of you, and you give the concept a shape, but it remains a concept.

In Nisargadatta's teaching, our awareness of our existence, the first concept 'I Am,' spontaneously arises from the Absolute and becomes consciousness. Consciousness, he explains, arises from the three gunas (attributes born of Nature) and is associated with form. Ramesh S. Balsekar, one of Nisargadatta's disciples, put it this way: "Consciousness is with a form, a reflection of awareness on the surface of matter. One cannot think of consciousness apart from awareness; there cannot be a reflection of the sun without the sun."

This reflection creates duality, which is sustained by food. Identity, says Nisargadatta, is the outcome of the food we eat. When the food-body is discarded, consciousness returns to the Absolute. We experience

something of this situation in deep, dreamless sleep, where consciousness rests while awareness remains.

We have this conviction that I am, I exist, I'm alive. That conviction is because of the consciousness, and consciousness is not aware of itself unless the body is there.... Consciousness is the taste of the physical form. If the form is not there, the taste is not there. The body is the essence of the food and the consciousness is the essence of the physical form. If this is understood, is there any individuality? This individuality is a process of manifestation.

Consciousness, Nisargadatta points out, is our constant companion. Much of his teaching consists of reminding his audience that continuous awareness to one's stream of consciousness is what takes one back to pure Awareness. To accomplish this task, thought, memory and anticipation must be gradually replaced by awareness: this is the mind directed within. This directing of the mind cannot be accomplished by the intellect; rather, repetition and devotion are needed. As he said, "Recite the sacred name, that is all right, but the important thing is to recognize and understand what is the presiding principle by which you know you are and by which you perceive everything else.... The riddle of spirituality cannot be solved by your intellect." The purpose is to eliminate all duality: "There is no duality between the Guru and the Bhakta. In That which Is, there is no duality, has never been any duality. The word Bhakta means devotion, but in actuality it indicates togetherness, one only, unity."

At the time Ms. Dunn began transcribing these talks, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was in a great deal of pain, though she tells us he never showed it. In the introduction to *Consciousness and the Absolute*, Ms. Dunn notes: "He was whatever was needed: kind, gentle, patient, abrupt, abrasive, impatient. Moods passed over him like a summer breeze. The force of his message resounds with his singleness of purpose: 'Give up all you have heard and just BE. You, as the Absolute, are not this "I Am-ness"'

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's last talks, recorded in these two books, are unique, even within the powerful but often confounding literature of non-dualism. These talks, coming from a time when he was so close to dying,

are terse and aphoristic. No room is left for questions beyond our ultimate purpose in having life. Every word of each session is extemporaneous. His answers are compact, even abrupt, but still convey an overwhelming sense of concern for each questioner. When a questioner asks, “Oh, when will I understand what Maharaj is telling us?” he responds:

It will come gradually, because of all the concepts. You have to get rid of those and that takes time. Some people are in search of knowledge which is acceptable to their mind and intellect, but the sphere of mind and intellect is of no use to receive this knowledge. All your experiences and visions depend upon your knowledge ‘I Am’ and this itself is going to dissolve. For this knowledge there are no customers, no devotees, because they want something concrete in their hand, but when your knowingness itself is going to dissolve, is it possible to hold onto something? Your guru tells you that you have a true identity, but it is not this. It is formless, Parabrahman. That Parabrahman is without any doubts. It is not conditioned by maya, because with reference to Parabrahman, maya does not exist.

Nisargadatta’s last discourses give us a modern perspective on the ancient tradition of non-dualism. His language is precise and focused upon what he believes we, as individuals, need to do to understand our true inner nature. The talks are also stark, even austere, representing a worldview almost void of emotional and bodily concerns. At one point he says:

Finally, what is the result of all the experiences that are going on in the realm of consciousness? They are just gone, ending up in pure space. The whole world is in an ever-changing state. No form will remain permanently. Finally all the forms will vanish in space and become formless. I am talking directly from my own experience.



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