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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# Enter Here, Dear Friend

*Enter here, dear friend.  
Enter the holy shrine of your self.  
Leave your torrential downpour of sorrows  
outside with your muddy, worn-out shoes  
and all your tortured thoughts about  
your disintegrating kingdom.*

*Leave behind all that burdens your soul,  
all that destroys your peace,  
all that scatters your love  
into the four winds of the world.  
Let go of all you have cried for  
and all you have won.  
Just let it all go...*

*Enter here, while you still can,  
while you still have holy breaths  
and tears that dare to hope  
for the unseen Beloved.*

*Enter here, dear friend.  
Enter the holy shrine of your self.  
Immerse your soul in the stream of Holy Sound.  
Become a radiance of adoration.  
Become ineffable bliss.  
Become one again  
with the sea of resplendence  
at the end of the world.*



# Monkey Island

Maharaj Charan Singh lovingly explained that the teachings of the saints should make us better humans rather than pull us down to the level of animals. For initiates and seekers who still operate below the eye centre, we need to learn how to live less like animals. In particular, less like monkeys.

The American writer Anne Lamott calls our monkey-like behaviour “living on Monkey Island.” Monkeys, she observed in her book *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*, have three notable ways of behaving: (1) They live with constant chatter and distraction. (2) They live in a continual state of grievance, umbrage, and complaint. (3) When angry and unhappy, they throw their poop at one another.

These actions make up an all too accurate description of what goes on in our minds. First, we absorb the constant chatter and distractions from smart phones, computers, and TVs. Second, we live in a state of continual grievance. We ask the universe, why isn't my life better, easier, happier? Some of our complaints are petty: Why does my hair look bad? Why don't my packages come on time? Why is the weather not to my liking? Behind all our grievances are the shouts of the ego – I want more of what I think is rightfully mine! Third, throwing dung is the easiest trait to translate: We throw our worst judgments at our fellow human beings – we blame, condemn, criticize, and get angry.

Luckily, even those of us who have spent way too much time on Monkey Island can leave. The saints offer us clear directions on how to inhabit a completely different environment.

The alternative to a life of constant chatter and distraction is a life of focus and remembering our goal.

For a disciple of a Radha Soami master, that means doing simran. Baba Ji has told us to let go of our plans, worries, and daydreams and focus on God. We could occasionally turn off our cell phones, for example, or seek out and cherish moments of quiet and solitude.

What are those of us to do who have lived with the noise and the distraction on Monkey Island for a long time? Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Spiritual Gems*:

*Just as a man, weary with the day's work, resorts to his home to take rest, so we habituate our soul, on being tired with worldly work, to take rest in the holy Sound. The attention has to be brought inside, and when it likes to rest there, like the wanderer coming home, it will find peace within. This bringing in of the attention is done by repetition [simran], with the attention at the eye focus.*

In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, Soami Ji tells us:

*Attach yourself to the melody of Shabd, dear soul...  
Lift up your soul to the higher regions,  
where the melody of Shabd resounds day and night.  
The aim of human life will be realized  
and you will find rest in Shabd.*

Bachan 19, Shabd 5

A satsangi who lived in a city where there was no satsang, and no satsangis, who spent all of her time joyfully meditating, put it this way in a letter to friends: “The thrill and joy of it all is having our beloved Master. Even moving to a distant place, there will be Love in every breath, as you well know.”

The true alternative to constant distraction and chatter is simran with every breath, sensing the Master's presence with every breath, remembering love with every breath.

The second aspect of living on Monkey Island is when we find ourselves in a state of constant grievance, umbrage, and complaint. The word “grievance” comes from the same root as “gravity.” It actually means to make heavy and burdensome. In the book *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, someone asked Hazur what makes us hold on to grievances. He replied: “As long as we don't forgive someone, we are actually punishing ourselves. The grudge we keep within ourselves, the malice we keep within – we are also punishing ourselves.”

How do we stop feeling entitled to getting what we think we want? The spiritual alternative is to attempt to live in God's will – to want what God wants to give us, to surrender.

Baba Ji reminds us that all mystics come with the same message: Thy will be done. He explains that we don't know anything about anything, so we should just relax, appreciate what the Lord gives us, and do our meditation. Hazur told us that we can't change the events of our life, so we might as well accept them cheerfully. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, he tells us:

*You have to face them, you have to swim along with the waves – then why not accept them smilingly? Why howl and cry, why have a sorrowful face? There's nothing much to weep about, because the events of our life are not going to change.... Then why worry? Take them as the will of the Lord.*

One version of a Zen Buddhist meditation describes surrender this way:

*In this passing moment, karma ripens.*

*I vow to affirm what is:*

*If there is cost, I choose to pay.*

*If there is need, I choose to give.*

*If there is sorrow, I choose to grieve.*

*When calm, I choose peace.*

*When happy, I choose joy.*

*When it is my birth, I choose to live.*

*When death takes me, I choose to go.*

*This life is only as real as a dream.*

In Appreciation of Shodo Harada, Roshi

Behind all the choices we make, saints promise us the Shabd, which is eternity, truth, and love. Our spiritual practice enables us to turn toward that power within. Our practice becomes our refuge. As the Master repeatedly tell us, the Lord's will is that we do our bhajan and simran.

And the last aspect of Monkey Island? How do we stop throwing the worst in us on to others and at the world? How do we instead offer the best in us – our kindness, forgiveness, and understanding and our generosity of spirit?

We made a sacred promise to meditate for two and a half hours every day. We must make every effort to keep that promise. Meditation is a must,

and being a good person is simply the foundation upon which our meditation rests.

Hazur tells us that meditation is nothing but seeking the Father's forgiveness, and we learn to seek his forgiveness by first learning to forgive our fellow human beings.

He also said we must offer all sorts of goodness to one another, such as a kind and loving heart, a sympathetic and helpful heart.

It may sound like a miracle that we can leave Monkey Island for good – that we can become focused, kind, forgiving, and accepting of the Lord's will. But the path of the saints offers us much greater miracles. They tell us we are destined for unimaginable joy, that the Shabd will focus our attention and silence the noise and chatter of our minds, and that our minds will gradually submit to God's will. It seems that the goodness we have longed for has been within us all along, just perhaps in a part of our consciousness we haven't yet been able to reach. The Master and our meditation practice will lead us to realize that we are truly the children of God, and that we are destined to be with our Master, not on Monkey Island but in our true home, Sach Khand.



# The Peace We Carry

My recent trip to the Dera, being with the Master, and then re-entering the world was a powerful lesson in how we can carry the peace we find in that place of inexplicable beauty and sustain it long after leaving the Master's physical presence. Along with that experience came a slow-dawning awareness of the pendulum swing between emotions and the mental clarity and subtle insights that come when we expose ourselves to the Master's teachings and the sincere practice of meditation.

Being at the Dera – held by the Master's benevolence and love, the sheer spiritual force of the atmosphere there, and the humility and kindness of the sevadars – filled my cup. I thought I was ready to come back home to my family and my life. But returning to “the world” is hard. I didn't want the deep peace I felt, the sense of experiencing something I couldn't put into words, to dissipate. I didn't want to be swallowed up again by the unceasing, loud happenings of the world. I wanted to keep the peace I had felt like a secret tucked away into the very depths of me, a peace that no one or no earthly circumstance could touch or mar.

How could I carry away with me this peace from the Dera and the subtle magic it wove around me? How could I retain the love and clarity that felt so accessible there, so immediate?

I could hold on by walking with simran and by remembering the Master's message, both spoken and unspoken. By re-committing to my priorities and by walking the path with discipline and joy.

It is the simplicity of the daily routine at the Dera that allowed me to tread a little softer and breathe deeper, to imbibe the experience of being close to the physical Master. Despite the dramatic changes the Dera has undergone since its beginnings more than a hundred years ago, it feels like a place untouched by time, cocooned away from the scattered humdrum of everyday life. It is a place where the profound teachings of the saints shared at satsang provide essential nourishment.

I hope to carry this peace, the Master's peace, here in my ordinary life. If I think back and try to digest what I heard and felt during my visit, I know that he is always with me and that the peace I seek to cling to is right here, within me, waiting for me to realize it's – his – presence.



## **A practical approach**

Mystics of all spiritual paths and religions have emphasized that the peace and joy we seek can only be found within. It is the responsibility then, for each one of us to cultivate moments of freedom and equanimity as we go through our lives. But how do we do this?

The only way to hold on to and carry this peace is by infusing our life with meditation. This takes immense discipline; it requires us to refocus and recalibrate when we are off course.

Through our meditation practice we attain true knowledge – self-knowledge, and then we come to know God. We teach the mind, through consistent and regular practice, to come to stillness and silence, so that we can unearth and discover the self that lies hidden within. It is almost as if, through our spiritual practice, we start to chip away all the impressions, pain, and burdens – this heavy load we have carried for so long – to discover the light and the gold within.

At first, back in the rat race of modern living, it seemed the peace I had found at the Dera was only a distant dream. But our Master has provided us with all the tools we need to live consciously, so that we can access this peace in whichever place or time we find ourselves.

The question is: Are we making good use of his guidance, his simple instructions, or are we being pulled along by the senses, the world, and our relationships?

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Maharaj Sawan Singh explains, “Guru Ram Das says that so long as a man does not withdraw his attention from the outer music, he cannot find rest in the court of the Lord.”

The world and all our doings scream for our attention, but as warriors of peace it is up to us to turn away, gently but resolutely. It is up to us to turn inward, toward our Master, again and again. It seems that this fight between the mind and the reality of the soul, between the pull of maya and the truth of the Master, are the natural workings of this physical reality. But among our weapons are his constant guidance, his strength, and his love. In this battle, perseverance and effort are what allow us to wield those weapons.

In his book *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*, Thich Nhat Hanh, a peace activist and Zen master, offers a sustainable solution to the many

crises our planet faces. He writes that we must begin with ourselves – we must cultivate inner peace, compassion, and understanding before we can even think about saving the world. Reassuringly, he writes: “With mindfulness [meditation], you can sit in the heart of the marketplace and still be alone and have peace and freedom. It doesn’t take years in a cave.”

We can find peace right here, right now, in the heart of the marketplace. We know that the Master does not want us to run away from the reality of our lives, from our duties as mothers or wives or any other roles we play in society. Rather, the call is for us to face life, to live out here in the world and carry with us the teachings, the holy names of simran, and the Shabd. The call is to remember him in the busyness of life, through both the mundane and the inspiring. The call is to realize that he is always present and that his peace is the peace that we carry.

*The boat floats on water, but water should not be allowed to get into the boat. If it does, the boat will sink. The same has to be the state of mind of the devotees who live in the world. The world should not be allowed to get into the mind. If it does, the mind will sink down into the deep waters of the world. Therefore, lead a family life and do your duty as a householder, but keep thinking of God all the while.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Discourses*



# Our Adventure of Faith

The book *Adventure of Faith* is a deeply personal account of a young woman's quest for God, first as a Catholic nun and then, in her middle and old age, as a disciple of Maharaj Charan Singh. The book begins with an epigram by the Hungarian theologian Ladislaus Boros: "God always remains an adventure whose outcome we do not know."

All of us are on our own individual adventures of faith. We're explorers in the transcendent world of spiritual experience. Through initiation into Surat Shabd Yoga, we're seeking God, hoping to understand our true identity and the meaning of our human existence.

We can't deny that this path is an adventure, though that probably isn't what we thought we were signing up for when we asked for initiation. We thought we knew the outcome. We would follow the instructions given at our initiation, we'd live and meditate per those instructions, and we would achieve peace and bliss within a reasonable time and live happily ever after, hopefully never to return to this world, this "vale of tears," as the saints call it.

No doubt, parts of that scenario have come true, or may yet come true, but walking our spiritual path has not turned out to be such a tidily summarized pursuit. Having gained some maturity, by now we might agree that this path is indeed an adventure whose outcome we do not know. Having undertaken this adventure, we do know, at least intellectually, that the Master's love, the Shabd, is annihilating our ego (as promised!) and thereby freeing us from every image and concept of God our minds have ever conjured.

Through our spiritual practice of bhajan and simran, our ego identity – whether Christian, Hindu, Muslim or Jew; man or woman; in success or in failure – is being turned upside down. We may not yet have experienced the ultimate blissful outcome, but, like the author of *Adventure of Faith*, we have left the shore of the known to venture into the unknown, which is to lose our identity and merge with our divine source.

When she was 13, in 1937, the author, Shraddha Liertz, heard and felt God speak to her. She writes:

*Through that inner experience [of hearing God's call], God became my fate.... Since that moment my goal has been to encounter him – the One who called me by name and demanded my undivided heart. In the following years I realized more and more that it is truly an adventure to get involved with God and surrender your life unconditionally to him, because you do not know what He will make of it. It is indeed an adventure to step onto the path of abandonment to God, since the way ahead cannot be seen.... If I had known in advance the countless twists and turns and the steep ridges awaiting me, I would never have had the courage to step on it. Yet the longer I followed this path, the clearer it became to me that there was no turning back.*

Many of us can identify with the author's description. Would we have had the courage to undertake our own journey if we had known what was in store? For this author, it all began one spring day, she was taking the train home from school. She was standing in the open doorway of her train car, ready to jump off at her stop. She writes that she might have been thinking of that day's lessons or about her homework. She might also have been thinking about the boy she liked who rode on the same train as she did. She notes that "the one thing she certainly was not thinking about at that moment was God."

She goes on:

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

Our stories of how we've been pulled to the path are quite different, but they are each just as miraculous in their own way. And each of us is responding to that pull, that call, as best as we can. We are pursuing our own inner adventure, which, this author writes, "cannot be done without a conscious 'Yes' to [the Lord's] will as it manifests itself in all the circumstances of our daily life."

As adventurers, we have to be bold, courageous, curious, and persistent. To develop those qualities, we need the capacity to live with ambiguity, paradox, and a certain amount of insecurity, because we do not know for sure – yet – those unknown outcomes that are part of our spiritual exploration.

For example, we are told we must live according to God's will. But how do we know what that is? Maharaj Charan Singh clarifies that we can know for sure the will of the Father only when we go beyond the realm of the mind, beyond the realm of karma, and then merge into the Shabd. He explains that in the meantime, we must be firm on the principles of Sant Mat and attend to our meditation. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, he tells us that all we can do until we've risen above the mind is to try to live in his will:

*We are trying not to compromise with the principles. We are trying to give our full time to meditation. We are trying to mould our life according to the way of Sant Mat. So we are trying to live in the will of the master. That helps us.*

Then he confirms our sense of the futility of our paltry efforts:

*[But] if it is not destined that you will accept your destiny, how will you accept it? You think something is in your hands and another thing is not in your hands? Your thinking is not in your hands; to accept your destiny is not in your hands; not to accept your destiny also is not in your hands. Your thinking will be conditioned in that way which has already been destined.*

And then he turns this brain twister around in a way that shows us how we can resolve the paradox:

*What more could we want, if we can trust ourselves to the Lord? What more do we want? We think we know more than the Lord? What else could we want – that he will take care of us, he will absolve us from all our plannings, all our thinking, that he takes our destiny in his own hands – what more could we want in life? These are the most fortunate people.*

We are the most fortunate people. Explorers trust the goal of their undertaking, and that trust makes it possible for us to persevere through our difficulties. For many of us, that trust that the Master is taking care of

us in every way is difficult to hold on to. But we learn, over time, that it is a gift from him, and that it comes from within.

God instills in us just enough love to be drawn to him in the form of the Master, and then the adventure begins. First, we must build a preliminary faith to practice the path. Hazur tells us that we can develop real faith only by attending to our meditation, and that it comes from within, not through other people's experiences or by following the Master around. He says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II: "Real faith you will be able to build up only by experience, and you get that real faith not by the whole experience, but with glimpses of experiences."

Glimpses of experiences, he emphasizes. So, we're imbibing the path in little bite-sized pieces – glimpses of the truth. He continues:

*If you meditate, you do start seeing the signs. It may be glimpses, it may be visions, it may be some other sorts of things. You start seeing the signs and that deepens your faith; that strengthens your faith. Actual faith you will get only when you have the right experience, not before that. So we have so many types of faith, I would say.*

Certainly, we can see this in our lives. After initiation, and even before, we begin to see signs of grace, even in the most mundane situations. For everyone those signs are different, and very personal. In one way or another, they give us enough faith to take the next step, and then the next. They encourage us to persevere.

We learn, as the author of *Adventure of Faith* learned, that without a relationship with a true, living Master, we cannot take even one step on this path. We learn that we cannot force or will ourselves to "make progress." Everything that comes to us – every effort we make, every insight, every round of simran, every inkling of surrender – is a result of the Lord's grace. She writes that it is God himself who wants the return of our soul, "that tiny drop out of the limitless ocean of divine Being. Who is anyone to desire union with God? It is God who infuses the longing into the human heart – it is the working of his grace."

Towards the end of the book, the author, by now an old woman, reflects on what she experienced over the decades:

*Even if [disciples] cannot yet experience the presence of their Master and the purifying and transforming effect of meditation, they may be sure it is working inside. They can trust that the moment will come when they will consciously realize everything that secretly has taken place within them. Then they will be able to look back on the way behind them and be able to continue and complete the way ahead in the light and sound of the Shabd. Until then, they must walk in darkness and trust the word of their Master.*

While it may sound bleak, walking in darkness could be the greatest gift of all. Because when we feel helpless, frightened, and maybe even hopeless, we reach out to someone or something to help us. We are stripped of all preconceptions and assumptions. We surrender our ego – it just happens naturally. We realize our utter helplessness, which enables us to grab on to our Father's hand, because we have nowhere else to go.

If it's dark, so be it. Our meditation is just holding on to the Master's hand. The more we lean into his love and grace, through our meditation, through sheer need, the more our trust grows. The more we surrender to the Master by doing what he has asked us to do, the more we feel his guiding hand and the more we're able to trust in him, like a child who's never been hurt.

Hazur has told us, in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*Everything is done by the grace of the Father in this world. A seeker can achieve nothing without his grace.... Unless he wishes, nobody can reach him. We are all blind, groping in the dark. He is the only one who can show us the light out of this darkness. And he has his own ways and means to show that light to us.*

And so, our adventure continues...



# Our Real Master

To be around a spiritual master and to be in his company is to receive a continuous stream of spiritual inspiration. His spiritual wisdom, his focus and dedication, his example, his approach to the difficulties of life, his sense of fun and laughter, and above all the powerful atmosphere of spirituality that surrounds him, combine to lift up the aspiring soul, with seemingly little effort being needed. For the beginner and veteran alike, it can feel that there is no better place to be, and this may well be so.

Yet such proximity has its own dangers, for the real guide and master is not the physical human form, however entrancing that may be, but the formless and universal spirit that dwells within and which pervades every being, every form, indeed every particle of creation. Too much focus on the human form of the master can distract the mind from the universal, nameless spirit which is the true guide of the soul. ... This universal spirit ... transcends all doctrines and religions, mystical or otherwise, and which is the common heritage of every human being. ... As Maharaj Ji himself wrote, shortly before he died, to a devoted disciple who had spent many years in his personal company, “May your love of the form culminate in the love of the formless.”

John Davidson, *Awareness of the Divine*





# First Aid



# This World and This Body: Trap or Trampoline?

The saints mince no words in warning us that this world is a trap, a deception, an illusion. In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, Soami Ji exclaims:

*Oh, soul, what foolishness you are caught in!  
You wander about with the mind,  
    mised, confused,  
    not listening to the Master's words.  
You fall into the trap of wealth and sex –  
    day and night you are obsessed with them.  
Kal has spread this web of attachments  
    and baited it to entice souls like you.*

Bachan 14, Shabd 11

Obsession is a mental habit that is hard to shake. Obsession comes in various forms: humans are obsessed, societies are obsessed. For example, in the Victorian age people were prudish and did not talk about sex. Today, we have swung to the opposite extreme and there is hardly any other subject that takes up as much media time as this. Samarth Ramdas, in a poem in *Many Voices, One Song*, identifies wealth and sex as the most significant enticements and chains on the soul:

*Eyes, ears, heart and mind  
    captivated by money and sex –  
    this is called bondage to the world.*

The modern mind uses both sex and wealth as bait “to entice souls like you.” There may be variations in how the bait is placed, but the web of attachments and the tricks the mind uses as bait to capture souls have not changed much over time. Obsession with wealth arises from greed, ego, attachment, pride – our negative tendencies. Sex travels along with lust and all lower desires. The outcome? These obsessions flash out as the extreme aggression that is war, the source of the greatest human misery. Obsessions also flash out as family feuds, property disputes, and alienation.

Saints not only warn us about the origin of our obsessions and their outcomes, but also give us hope and a helping hand. The Lord has entrusted them with the task of leading us from bondage to liberation, from entrapment to freedom. They awaken us to the danger we are in. They identify the sources and the outcomes of our negligence and ignorance of not paying attention to our real situation. We cannot use our will to cut our desires and attachments because they are an expression of our corrupt will that has become weakened over lifetimes of misuse and indulgence. So, what solves this problem? In his next verse, Soami Ji describes the remedy:

*I am here to explain to you now  
that only the Master can save you.  
Burn your attachment to the world  
in the fire of your love for the Master –  
the kind of love that should make you forget your body and mind.*

The intensity of our love for the Master burns up all our desires, whether low or noble, or even spiritual. They all become forged into a focused, one-pointed desire and love for the One that naturally puts an end to all desires and blends our misguided will with his all-pervading will. Eknath, rejoicing in his ability to see the One in everyone, shares his secret:

*But his servant has forged  
all his wants into one –  
that One alone lives in his eyes.  
that One alone lives in his thoughts.*

*Many Voices, One Song*

Love for the Master is not just the most intoxicating experience there is, but it is also the bridge from the world of duality to the world of oneness. Soami Ji continues in his shabd:

*Obtain the alchemy of Nam from the Master  
and be free of all your confusion.  
Then break free from your body  
and soar unimpeded through the barrier of the sky.*

Our ultimate freedom from confusion and duality, from the bondage of the body will be achieved through the alchemy of the Master's Nam. Alchemy transforms base metal into gold. The alchemy of Nam – the process of meditation – transforms the base metal of our inner darkness into the experience of Nam's light and sound inside. We may feel that our meditation is filled with darkness, confusion, and fast-moving chaotic thoughts. The masters know our situation. Baba Ji frequently gives satsang at the Dera on the hymn by Soami Ji that begins:

*Heavy, intense darkness prevails in the world...  
Whether they are awake or asleep, I see people  
helplessly caught in the maze of the creation.*

Bachan 14, Shabd 12

Saints want us to be aware of the darkness, to be fully present to this darkness because behind its veil is the Master's radiance, the inner light. Without confronting the darkness, we cannot access the light. This darkness, with our attention focused on it, is the cauldron in which the alchemy of Nam takes place. Experiencing this transformation brings spiritual maturity. It requires inner alertness and the opening of the eye of the soul, once our attention is trained to concentrate on the inner darkness. The soul must first come to terms with that darkness before it can experience and appreciate its own reality – the light and sound inside. Progress within requires a mature understanding of the value of the world and the human body as the cauldron in which the alchemy of our transformation through the philosopher's stone, Nam, can take place.

To a beginner in spirituality there may seem to be a contradiction in that the masters talk so much about this world's false, deceptive, and illusory nature. However, they also talk about the priceless value of human birth. They actively emphasize the beauty and magnificence of this God-created universe. They do not reject the world or turn their back on it. How to reconcile these opposing perspectives?

The truth is that the masters are the only ones in a position to see the true nature and the true value of the world. They speak about it as a trap because they come to liberate us from it; they also speak about it as beauty and order because it is our door to reality. If we practise meditation

within this mysterious, false, confusing world, it becomes a trampoline or a springboard for us. If we foolishly let our mind and senses guide us, it is a hopeless trap. Only by obtaining and practising the alchemy of Nam as taught by the saints can we appreciate the body and its karmic circumstances as a trampoline, from which we can ascend to higher levels of consciousness, to the unifying force of the inner Shabd.

Through a dualistic lens, the world and our body on the one hand and spirituality on the other seem locked in a stark antagonism. However, those on the way to unity begin to see the value of this world. Bahinabai, in *Many Voices, One Song*, has beautifully captured a unified vision that does not see the world as dualistically opposed to spirituality. She does not present the world as an obstacle, but as a trampoline, as the platform from which the soul can rise:

*It takes clear thinking  
to reach the Real through the unreal.  
Only within this dream of a body  
can you awaken to Truth and rest in the One.*

It is an axiom in spirituality that spiritual progress is faster in the human body than on the inner planes. The Neoplatonists believed that the soul can only realize its own true power from within matter. The foolishness, nonsense, and imperfection inherent in the material world can sidetrack the soul. However, the soul can also make the best use of its time in the material world and in the body to attain its goal and longed-for objective – reunion with the One. Realizing this is clear thinking.

One of the trickiest aspects of spirituality is understanding the correct use of the human body without falling into the pitfalls of overindulgence on the one hand or what modern psychologists refer to as “spiritual bypassing” on the other. Spiritual bypassing is the phenomenon in which practitioners use their spiritual practice as an excuse to bypass, or sidestep, family obligations, or the responsibility to earn an honest living, or the obligation to be a useful member of society. While there are mental conditions that do prevent some from fulfilling all these obligations, simply neglecting them with the excuse of pursuing spiritual work is a sign of spiritual immaturity. It may lead to further karmic entanglements

due to the harm others sustain from our negligence if they are forced to shoulder our neglected responsibilities.

Bahinabai talks of spiritual bypassing when she says:

*If you abandon your family  
because it isn't your real family,  
this will be your loss, friend.*

*It takes clear thinking  
to reach the Real through the unreal.*

*Many Voices, One Song*

If we are to overcome the trap of this life and instead use it as a trampoline to propel us toward our true home, we must find a balance between our spiritual commitment and our worldly obligations to others. Our effort to reach the Real requires a tough yet delicate balance between engaging wholeheartedly in our liberating spiritual transformation and fulfilling our obligations and commitments to a world full of foolishness and deception – the unreal. The alchemy of Nam is possible only through association with a true Master and following his guidance, through the practice of simran and bhajan. As Bahinabai reminds us: “If you walk the way of a teacher of Truth, you’ll reach the Real through the unreal.”



# Tune In and Call Home

During an exchange with Baba Ji, a young woman asked him to please tell Maharaj Charan Singh how much she loved him and missed him. Without missing a beat Baba Ji said something like, no need – you can just dial him up directly. Just imagine, you can direct dial the Lord! How? Through our meditation, we are in touch with him 24/7.

The masters constantly remind us, cajole us, urge us and, by their example, inspire us to do the meditation taught to us at the time of initiation. We are to focus our attention at the eye centre with the help of simran – repetition of the five holy names given to us at the time of initiation; bhajan – listening for the Shabd, the sound current within; and dhyān – contemplation on the form of the Master if we have seen him physically. Through these essential practices, we can tune into the Shabd, enabling the soul to begin its journey back to the Lord.

Meditation facilitates our inner connection to our Master. It allows us to communicate in his language, using the names that he has given to us. These names are saturated with his presence and power. Through simran, we can hone and strengthen our relationship with him. Bhajan and dhyān are his gifts that flow from simran.

Maharaj Charan Singh once was asked, “With our simran, are we really calling to the master all the time?” He answered:

*Yes. In meditation, there is nothing else. In meditation we are calling the master at every stage, all the time, even to the last moment. For a disciple, meditation is nothing but the master, at every level.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

So, we do not struggle alone. According to Hazur, we are receiving help from within at all times and in all places – in front of us and behind us, pushing and pulling. He tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*: “We are never left alone. We are not orphaned. All the help we need, we always get within.”

The mystics encourage us to have faith that our Master knows what is best for us and that he will give us the strength we need. Even if we find ourselves thoroughly mired in difficult circumstances, the mystics always

encourage us to continue meditating and to practice gratitude, including taking whatever comes as “his sweet will.”

Mystics support their disciples at every step of this journey. Through meditation we begin to grow in awareness of the help we receive from him. Hazur tells us that it is the Master alone who plants the seed of love in the heart of the disciple. We can only marvel at the range and reach of his grace. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, we read:

*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.*

Our role is simply to faithfully attend to our meditation, thereby nurturing our connection with him. This is how we can tune in and direct dial home. Baba Ji was once asked to summarize what we are supposed to be doing in meditation. His short response was that all we need to do is sit down, close our eyes, think of the Master, and start simran.

It's that simple. We wonder how something so simple can be so hard. However difficult meditation may seem, it will be easier if we remember the essential step: think of the Master.

This should give all of us hope. The image of the Master as helmsman of his great seaworthy ship of Nam is a familiar spiritual metaphor. Although we may stubbornly cling to our frail, leaky ego-driven boats, the grace of the Master can easily lift us, along with our heavy load of accumulated karma, out of the stormy seas of this world and onto his ship. However, we do have a part to play; we must seek his help, rely on his strength, and take refuge in him. If we want safe passage on the spiritual journey to our true home, we need to take refuge in the only one who can guide us and knows the way – the Master.

Sant Mat disciples need never feel disheartened on this path. The Master provides refuge, and for that refuge, we can feel eternally grateful. Through meditation we can reverse the outward flow of our attention and direct it inward. Yes, it is a struggle to bring our attention up to the eye centre; but with simran we can bring it back every time it runs out. Our role in



meditation is simply to put in our best effort. Our daily meditation is the foundation upon which our lives can and should rest. We simply are to do the best we can as we continue to persevere.

We need only to remember:

- Meditation is how we plant the strength of the Master in our heart.
- Meditation is how we learn to live in his will.
- Meditation is how we grow love and gratitude.
- Meditation is how we take refuge in him.
- Meditation is how we tune into the sound current.

The invitation to meditate is his gift. It is a standing invitation, available to us all the time. We simply need to tune in and direct dial home. The line is always open. He's waiting for our call.



*Remembering the sweetness of your love  
is a challenge  
during a life of pain  
and of distractions and doubt.*

*Please let me feel your presence  
and have the courage to let go of all else.*

*The inner call is great  
but not enough yet to clear the obstacles  
or the tears  
or the deep heartaches  
first of wanting you more  
then of not wanting you enough.*



# The Machinery of Love

The writings of the saints ripen as we do – over the years the same passages we've read many times reveal different meanings to us. We understand the teachings in stages. Maharaj Sawan Singh wrote in *The Dawn of Light*:

*As for your visit to India, you are in the right, because spiritual progress has nothing to do with any particular locality.... The holy Master keeps each one of us in the place best calculated for our spiritual good.*

Each one of us, right now, is in the exact place – physically and even mentally – best calculated for our spiritual good. In all the vast universes, the billions of galaxies and moments of time, the Master has arranged our karmas so that we can be in this setting, and in this century. Where we are right now is the best place and time for our spiritual growth and well-being.

It boggles the mind. But the saints want to push us beyond our limited thinking. They want us to shrug off the narrow way we conceive of the Shabd and our discipleship. We are not as limited as we think we are. We have more capacity than we think we do. They want us to give up the minutiae of analysis and go with the flow of the big picture. And that big picture is love. Great Master said, also in *The Dawn of Light*:

*Our Father is love and we are small drops from that ocean of love. This huge machinery of the universe works by the eternal principle of love. So try to bring yourself in harmony with this principle of love.*

Often people tell Baba Ji that they feel jealous of other disciples who receive his outward love or attention. Baba Ji reminds us that love isn't limited; it's expansive. Because we perceive life from a physical perspective, we feel that if the Master loves someone else, he can't love us. But he always reminds us that God's love is so immense that all of us can experience it. There is enough for everyone.

In our physical selves, we experience the body as a closed container – of thought and physical function. We consider ourselves separate and individual. But physics tells us that there is no division in matter. We just think we're separate, divided, and limited. Remember, we are spiritual

beings having a physical experience. As spiritual beings, our core, our soul, is a piece of the vast machinery of expansive love. This machinery literally expands our awareness of the divine. When we forget this, we contract. We shrink into denseness and defensiveness – into our fearful psyches – and forget that love overcomes all barriers. When we protect ourselves with fight-or-flight instincts, our awareness collapses.

The medieval Sufi mystic Shaykh Ibn Ata'illah speaks to this tendency to limit ourselves:

*If you were to be united with Him  
only after the extinction of your vices  
and the effacement of your pretensions,  
you would never be united with Him!  
Instead, when He wants to unite you to Himself,  
He covers your attribute with His Attribute  
and hides your quality ... with His Quality.  
And thus He unites you to Himself  
by virtue of what comes from Him to you,  
not by virtue of what goes from you to Him.*

*The Book of Wisdom*

At our level, we experience our Master's love with simran. When someone asked Maharaj Charan Singh whether the Lord's names (simran) were the same as the Lord himself, Hazur answered with one word: "Yes." In very practical ways, simran is the nugget that expands into limitless love. Baba Ji has said it's the one thing we can do. Dhyān and hearing the sound are not in our hands. It's simran that will allow us to concentrate at the eye centre.

The Great Master wrote in *The Dawn of Light*: "Every time you repeat a Name attentively, you are trying to rise up, and sooner or later the eye focus will become the headquarters of your attention." We'd like sooner rather than later, but in the meantime, Great Master tells us what to do: "You should remain confident that... you will one day see and know what you so long for.... Until that time, go on strengthening your trust in his mercy."

We can strengthen our trust in his mercy by remembering that the Lord is lightening our karmic load in ways that we cannot always understand. Great Master said, “If we had to pay one ton at first, now we are released by paying one pound only.” And to add to that thought, Hazur noted in *Light on Sant Mat*: “He minimizes most of our troubles. We see only what we have to pass through but not what we have been spared.”

We can strengthen our trust by accepting where we are on this path. The Master is not here to judge us, to rub our noses in our weaknesses. He is not disapproving. He knows we’re trying our best, and he doesn’t judge us. We tend to believe our best is not enough. He will pull us toward greater effort at the right time. He knows the pace.

There are as many ways to live on this path as there are disciples. Each of us is different. Each of us has ups and downs. But every single one of us is living a life perfectly calculated to move us through our karmic account in the fastest, best possible way, under his guidance. As Great Master said, “The holy Master keeps each one of us in the place best calculated for our spiritual good.”

He’s got us covered. Where we are, what we’re doing, and yes, even what we’re thinking are part of his script. We just need to follow his instructions and keep playing our part. In time, we’ll realize we are just puppets in his show. We can relax and allow him to pull the strings. He is directing the whole performance perfectly.



# Overriding the Mind's Default Network

Moment after moment, the mind wanders. It is never still, always thinking about this and that. And yet, we generally believe that the mind is who we are; our personality and rambling thoughts define our concept of self. We may believe intellectually that the mind and the soul are different because the teachings of the saints tell us so, but we often feel as if they are the same.

Yet the saints are clear on this point, and we can take it on faith: the mind and soul are different entities. The soul is our true nature; the mind is merely a tool to enable the soul to function in this creation. The problem is that we have forgotten our true nature and have been held back in this creation, deceived and entrapped by the mind. But while the mind is the cause of our bondage, it can also become the means of our liberation. In *Light on Sant Mat* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*Mind and soul form one working unit, and wherever the mind goes the soul has to go along with it. The mind is the instrument by means of which we make our contacts with the outside world and gather experience. Owing to its outward tendencies it keeps us away from God, but if it is turned inward and directed to the inner centers it enables us to contact the Divinity within ourselves.*

Various scientific studies have documented the restless, wandering mind. In one study a phone app was created and 2,250 people were randomly called throughout the day, as they went about their daily activities, to collect a database of their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The study found that people's minds wandered frequently, regardless of what they were doing. Mind wandering occurred in 46.9 percent of the samples. The nature of people's activities had only a modest impact on whether their minds wandered. Generally, people were less happy when their minds were wandering than when they were otherwise occupied. Finally, what people were thinking was a better predictor of their happiness than was what they were doing. Even science agrees that if we want to be happy, we need to learn to control our minds.

MRI scans of the brain have documented that there are particular areas of the brain that are active when the mind wanders. The brain's frontal

and parietal cortex areas are called the “default network.” When we are not busy with an external activity, this default network automatically kicks in. In other words, the mind is set up to automatically wander and is spontaneously activated within the brain. The existence of this default network has been scientifically documented, which demonstrates that the wandering of the mind is not just a mental phenomenon but is also the result of our physiologic brain process. We certainly have a lot to overcome!

Talking to the mind is of no use, as it is just the mind talking to itself, running around in circles. When the mind is talking to itself, it remains in the default network. Clearly that is no help. In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, a disciple lays out the problem:

*My restless mind doesn't listen to me –  
how can I deal with it?  
The Master always advises and explains the method,  
and I sit in satsang with an attentive mind.  
When I listen to his words I deeply repent of my actions,  
but then the mind deceives me again and I go astray.  
I devise many ways of my own to crush this mind,  
but I never get to the threshold of Surat Shabd,  
so how can I rise to the inner sky?*

Bachan 31, Shabd 4

What is the disciple to do? The mind is an impediment at every step. The disciple may think of all sorts of techniques, gimmicks, and lifestyle changes to control the mind. Some of them might work for a time, but the mind does not quit. The disciple also attends to meditation but finds progress to be slow or apparently nonexistent. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*It is not so easy to control our mind when we have given it such a free rein. It has been spreading into the whole world all of our life, not only in this life but also in previous lives. It has gotten into the habit of running out and not staying at all in its own place. So naturally, it takes time to curb it, to bring it back, to withdraw the consciousness to the eye centre. It takes time. We want to achieve this in a day or two, but we have to make a regular habit of doing it.*

So, we have learned that at least nearly half of the time our minds are wandering. But the Shabd is resounding within all the time. Shabd beats the wandering mind! We must switch from the brain's default network to the current of Shabd. We can do this through meditation. Shabd or simran must become our new default. Then we will have more than a neural default network; we will have a spiritual network – a Shabd network, which wirelessly maintains our connection to the network of the Master.

Meditation helps. Master says it. Neuropsychologists say it too. Those same neuropsychologists who study the default network that traps the mind in a wandering mode tell us that meditation has a definite functional and physiologic effect. In an article published in the online journal BioMed Research International, “The Meditative Mind: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis of MRI Studies,” the researchers write:

*Meditation practice induces enhancement of at least four different abilities: sustained attention, monitoring faculty (to detect mind wandering), the ability to disengage from a distracting object without further involvement (attentional switching), and the ability to redirect focus to the chosen object (selective attention).*

Though we usually don't speak of it in these terms, that is the effect of simran in a nutshell.

Research studies using MRI scans show that meditation is associated with reduced activation of the default mode network – the activity in the brain when our mind wanders. Additionally, meditation, over time, supports even structural changes in the brain. Studies found that, compared with control participants, expert meditators showed increased grey matter throughout the brain and the brainstem. So, meditation even causes measurable physical changes in the brain.

Meditation helps us on so many levels. It is the only way to control the mind. Simran is the key to curbing the constant firing of the default network and stilling the rippling waves of the wandering mind. Soami Ji reminds us that this gift of simran from the Master is the key to our happiness and our salvation.

*Hold the Master's key in your hand –  
turn the rosary of your mind with simran.  
Tune in to the unstruck music of Shabd  
and pierce through the cloud in the sky of Trikuti.*

Bachan 20, Shabd 28

The Master asks us to conduct our own research, and he gives us the tools of simran and bhajan. Throughout the day, every time we find our minds wandering, we can switch to simran. If we make a conscious effort to do this, we can experience the results for ourselves. Over time, we may find that we are calmer, more focused, happier. The added benefit of practising “default simran,” as opposed to living under our current default network, is that our meditation will become more natural and essential, like breathing.





# Balancing Like a Flamingo

Part of our work on the path back to the Lord entails leading a balanced life – supporting ourselves, being a good citizen, and maintain loving relationships with friends and family, all while doing our spiritual practice of solitary meditation.

Masters, through the example of their own lives, show us what a truly balanced life looks like. They have earned their own living, married, had children, and carried out their social and civic duties, all while making spiritual enlightenment their priority. And once appointed as Master, they spend their time doing their seva, which is to shepherd us home to the Lord by way of the same path they have traveled.

They repeatedly tell us that we must detach ourselves from the world and attach ourselves to the Lord through meditation. It is precisely that shift in focus from the world to the Lord that allows us to lead a balanced, detached life. We need to rise above the world so that we don't get bogged down in the quicksand of worldly attachments.

That is easier said than done. In nature, maybe the elegant flamingo can provide another example. They're tall, stately birds with long legs. They often stand in the water on one leg, the other tucked beneath their body. No one quite understands why they stand on one leg, but there are a couple of theories. One is that the flamingo, like some other animals, can have half of its body go into a state of sleep, and when one side is rested, the flamingo will swap legs and then let the other half sleep. Another theory is that standing on one leg may allow the birds to conserve more body heat, given that they spend a significant amount of time wading in cold water. While standing in the water, flamingos occasionally stamp both their webbed feet in the mud to stir up food from the bottom so they can catch something to eat. They effectively utilize their legs to rest, restore energy, and feed themselves.

Just like a flamingo, many of us have tried to balance on one leg during an exercise or in yoga class. The teacher instructs us to pull one leg up, one foot pressed into the opposite inner thigh, while folding our hands together in a prayer position. Sometimes, just when we think we're about to fall over, the teacher may tell us to hold the position for another 15

more seconds. Sometimes we can hold the pose, and sometimes we fall over. As with most things in life, the more we practice balancing on one leg, the longer we can hold the pose. However, sometimes when we're tired, worried, or distracted, we may lose our balance.

Living in the world while seeking the Lord is just such a balancing act. For example, if we are stressed at our job, that stress leaks into our home life and may affect our relationships and ability to set aside time for meditation. A chain of cause and effect can easily ensue. To stem this chain reaction, we must reset our attitude and regain our balance.

We must stand tall, just like the flamingo standing on one leg. We are marshalling our energy through meditation so that we can function in a more detached manner out in the world. While one part of us is dealing with the day-to-day trials of life, the other is stockpiling our spiritual treasure. Like the flamingo, we may periodically have to stick that second leg down into the world to live our daily lives. Then, as we regain our strength and balance, we can pull back from the world a bit, as we keep building up our reserves through meditation.

Our journey home is assured. Like the flamingo, we may stand on one leg or two, as needed, to allow us to maintain our balance and then rise above the muddy water of this world. Now is the time of our spiritual awakening, as we stand still, calmly focusing on our inner Master.



# Happiness Is Within

Saints tell us that true happiness comes only from within, when we merge with the Father. Sorrow comes from our separation from the Lord; union with the Lord is the missing link of our existence that eludes us. But how do we come to realize that something is missing in our lives?

Many of us first become restless. Eventually we realize that happiness has little to do with external things. We may have all the luxurious possessions money can buy, a satisfying career, good health, and even a loving family, yet still we feel that something is lacking.

Through the Lord's grace, we start to search and question what more there is to life, what our purpose is, and why we feel so alone and lost. We start to look below the surface of our possessions, circumstances, and relationships. We want to discover the truth of our existence.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that happiness is possible. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, we read:

*No doubt the world is unhappy. We see misery all around us, but we can build our own happiness within ourselves, and then wherever you go you radiate happiness. Happiness is within. It is not in sensual pleasures or anywhere outside. You will never be able to achieve happiness outside.... Unless you let the soul go to its own source, it will never be happy.... So happiness lies in worship of the spirit within and nowhere else.*

How to worship the spirit within is what saints teach. Through their grace, we begin to realize that spirituality is something completely different from worldly accomplishments and that it is only through spirituality that we can achieve true happiness. Saints teach us how to refocus our lives for a spiritual purpose. They teach us about the practice and the power of meditation, which allow us to turn our attention inward toward the Lord and to discriminate between the truth of spirituality versus the illusions of worldly life.

Finding a true master is key in this pursuit. The relationship between a disciple and a master is personal and precious. We all want unconditional love from someone we can count on and trust, and we can find that in our relationship with our Master. We soon realize that his love is limitless

and is ultimately what motivates us to take the journey inward to meet the Lord. That love awakens in us the realization that we do not belong in this world and that happiness here is an illusion.

Saints enjoin us to test this path. We must resist asking for initiation until we are sure we can commit ourselves to it. If we are fortunate enough to receive Nam, then the journey of a lifetime begins. We are going home. The more we appreciate the journey, the more we understand that it is the purpose of our life. In doing so, we begin to reorient our focus from our outer pursuits to the internal pursuit of self- and God-realization, through our meditation. Now we have an opportunity to commune with the Lord, which is the only thing that can bring us true happiness.

In our worldly lives most of us multitask to get as much done as possible. Our actions and thoughts are so complex, and we often get so busy that we fail to see the bigger picture. The bigger picture is to break free from the endless cycle of birth and death that keeps us trapped here and separates us from the Lord. After initiation, we have only one purpose in life – to go home to the Lord. To do this, we must focus on one single task, that of becoming a true disciple. How do we do that? By following the instructions of our Master.

Rather than multitask, we need to single task, which is to do our meditation, day in and day out as our preparation to die daily. The Master tells us that if we fulfill our duty to him, he will do all the rest. We need to trust that he is guiding us and has our best interests at heart.

We must trust in and surrender to the Lord by obeying our Master. In submitting ourselves to a higher power, we are making a humble appeal to the one who has the power to grant our request to become one with him again. But we have to ask the Lord for the right thing. If we ask him for himself, he will make us one with him. We need to be careful not to get diverted by other desires.

Our journey home is not a free ride. It requires effort. We must find the balance of living in this world without getting bogged down by it. Hazur Maharaj Ji often used to say that we need to build a bridge over the world so that we can walk over it rather than become mired in its sticky depths. We build that bridge by honouring our promise to attend to our

meditation every day and living according to the Sant Mat principles. Then everything else will fall into place.

Everything that happens in life has a purpose. Life gets confusing sometimes, and we may wonder why certain things happen to us. But the events in our lives are karmic-burning opportunities, so it really doesn't matter if we see them as good or bad. They are all part of our karma. Once we balance our karmic account, the world no longer has a hold on us. Then we are free and ready to return to the Lord.

As we embark on our spiritual journey, we begin to learn that happiness partly comes from having the right perspective. We need to put aside our frustration and fear that we can never be happy and never make it to our spiritual home. Everyone has ups and downs, pleasure and pain; ironically, the sorrows and disappointments of the world drive us toward inner happiness. Worldly pursuits and material goods, no matter how glorious, are transitory and empty and can never bring sustainable happiness. Our ability to handle these ups and downs is what allows us to keep our balance and maintain our inner focus, which is ultimately what brings us true happiness.

Happiness is learning to be in sync with our destiny. Being in sync is like finding the last piece of the puzzle to complete the full picture of life. Hazur Maharaj Ji addressed the issue of happiness when he said:

*What is happiness? It's when you have no worry, when you're relaxed. When are you happy? When you are in the lap of the Beloved. The real happiness can only come when the soul shines and becomes one with the Father. Before that there's no happiness at all.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

Happiness and home are within our grasp. They lie within the worship of the spirit, the Lord. He has placed a golden treasure of true happiness within each one of us, and that treasure is just waiting to be revealed as his most precious gift.



# BOOK REVIEW

## Jalal al-Din Rumi Masnavi (Selections)

BY FARIDA MALEKI

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Rumi's *Masnavi* is generally acknowledged as the greatest masterpiece of Persian literature. It has also been called "the pinnacle of all knowledge and experience" of Muslim mystics. Farida Maleki's translation of selections from Rumi's *Masnavi* offers readers an accessible and authentic portal into this epic treasure of spiritual teachings. Her translations are easy to read and understand, and the poetry seems to capture something of the melodious rhythm of the original. She also explains unfamiliar terms well.

A *masnavi* is a form of Persian rhyming poetry. It is more flexible than other poetic forms in Persian, ideal for relating extended stories in verse. Rumi began his *Masnavi* late in life, when his dearest disciple, Hosām al-Dīn, observed how his fellows liked to read other mystics for their beautiful teaching stories. He requested Rumi to write a book in a similar style. Rumi said he would compose it orally if Hosām would write it down. And so he began, with the famous cry of the reed flute, a symbol of the soul's longing for its home:

*The sound of the flute is fire not wind –  
may those without this fire not exist!  
What is caught in the flute is the fire of love.  
What bubbles in the wine is the fervour of love.  
The flute befriends those parted from a friend;  
its melodies rend all our veils.*

The structure of Rumi's *Masnavi* is often baffling to modern readers. Rumi, like other Sufis, uses teaching stories or parables to convey his spiritual insights. In his *Masnavi*, he starts a story, then interrupts it with verses reflecting on the deeper meaning of the story. Then he starts a different story, again interrupting its plot to muse on its meaning. Even a third story may start and be interrupted, before he returns to the first one. Rumi uses all the stories and their characters flexibly to illustrate different

teachings at different points. And all this mix of storytelling and teaching continues through six volumes!

For this book Maleki has made selections from this voluminous masterpiece. She assembles the pieces of a particular story to tell it in sequence. She presents the narrative of the story in prose, but keeps in verse Rumi's frequent interspersed commentaries, which draw from the story the deeper lessons he wishes to convey.

To take an example, consider the story of the clever hare that killed a lion. The lion, the king of the forest, was tormenting all the animals with his periodic hunts for prey. Wanting to live in peace, the forest beasts proposed a system by which they would send the lion one of their number each day as his daily food. The lion objects to the proposal with arguments about the value of effort. Here, Rumi cuts through the tangled theological question about the relationship between trust in God and effort. Effort, he says, is simply the gratitude to God for the gift of hands, feet, intelligence, and all the things that make effort possible:

*Your effort to thank Him for his gifts is your strength;  
waiting on fate denies his gifts.  
His gifts multiply with your gratitude;  
fatalism removes his gifts from your hands.  
Waiting on fate is like sleeping on the road;  
don't sleep till you see the gate and threshold.  
If you trust in God, trust him as you strive;  
sow the seed and then rely on him.*

Eventually the lion accepts the proposal, and for a long time the beasts all live without fear of being hunted. Then it is the hare's turn to be torn apart by the lion. The hare delays going to the lion, and the other animals urge him on. The hare explains, "O companions, God inspired a weakling like me with a great idea!" This gives Rumi the opening to write verse after verse about the prophets and saints who bring the message of deliverance to suffering humanity.

The hare tricks the lion into believing that another lion has come as his rival. Furious, the king of the forest immediately sets out to fight with the other lion. The hare brings the lion to a well, saying that the other lion took abode in that fortified well. When the lion looks down, he sees his reflection and, enraged, he plunges into the water to his doom. The cautionary tale of the lion serves as a backdrop to a stern warning: "O you who are cruel, you

are digging a well for yourself with your own hands.” A further message is that our own negative qualities get reflected back to us:

*Many flaws you see in others  
are your own nature reflected in them.  
In them shines forth your hypocrisy,  
wickedness and jealousy.  
You are striking those blows at yourself.  
You are that; you are cursing yourself...  
The Prophet said, “The faithful are mirrors for each other.”*

Rumi wittily presents the ego as stolen, borrowed godhood:

*Dishonest godhood has no hand or sleeve,  
stolen godhood is heartless, soulless and blind.  
The godhood given by people will be taken back  
from you like a loan.  
Give your borrowed godhood to God  
and he will give you Godhood by union.*

The hare is triumphant, but Rumi does not let the reader be carried away with the elation of victory. Instead, he urges us to fight our own mind which is “part of hell.” This is the “greater holy war.”

*O kings, we have slain the outward enemy,  
but the worst one remains within.  
To slay that one is not the work of intelligence or wisdom;  
the hare cannot subdue that inner lion.*

Throughout the *Masnavi*, Rumi weaves the themes of divine love, longing, separation, and union with themes of how the disciple must “polish the mirror of the heart” to reflect the “light of the Beloved”:

*How can I know what’s ahead or behind  
if it’s not lit by my Beloved’s light?  
Love wills that these words should be known,  
what else but reflect can a mirror do?  
Do you know why the mirror of your soul reflects nothing?  
Rust has yet to be cleaned from its face.*

Only by becoming dead to the false self and the world can the lover experience the Beloved as alive, as the one truly existent:



*All is the Beloved and the lover is a veil,  
the Beloved is alive and the lover is dead.*

The *Masnavi* challenges the reader at every turn to look beyond form and find meaning, to go beyond the visible to the invisible. Rumi says, “If that world and the path to it were visible, no one would remain even a moment here.” God is beyond duality and therefore hidden:

*By their opposites hidden things become manifest,  
but without an opposite God remains concealed.  
God’s light has no opposite in creation,  
so you can’t find him by his opposite.*

The soul is also beyond form:

*A person’s image on the wall shows the form of a human being,  
but what does it lack of that person’s form?  
That image lacks the soul; go seek that rarely found jewel!  
The sun-like soul can’t be contained in the sky;  
it shines into the body from No-Place.*

Rumi, for all his eloquence and mastery of image and idiom, helplessly gives up when it comes to describing the mysteries within. For example, when telling us how, upon hearing the inner melodies, dead souls come back to life in a state of ecstasy beyond words, he adds,

*If I told you just a bit about those melodies,  
souls would lift their heads from their tombs.  
Bring your ear close for it isn’t far,  
but to tell you about it is not allowed.*

Everything in the *Masnavi* – its stories, profound mystical verses, and suggestive silences – irresistibly pull the reader into its enchanted sphere of influence. Maleki’s translation and her choice of verses make this book an inviting and illuminating introduction to Rumi’s magnificent work.



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