

November / December 2024

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Take a Step Towards Me
- 6 Realizing Human Potential
- 12 The Art of Devotional Prayer
- 14 Mr Smart and Mr Wise
- 17 Food for Thought
- 18 Is Free Will an Illusion?
- 22 Truth in a Nutshell
- 23 Faith
- 25 Why, Oh Why, O Lord
- 28 Meditation Is a Way of Life
- 30 A Universal Message
- 33 Are We Overestimating the Impact of Physical Darshan?
- 38 The Final Word
- 40 Book Review

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
Copyright © 2024 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

Articles and poems that appear without sources have been written by the contributors to this magazine.

VOLUME 20 • ISSUE 6 • NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2024

Take a Step Towards Me

*Take a step towards Me, I am your faithful Friend.
Bring all you possess – I am the purchaser of all.**

*If you have set your heart on seeing My wonders,
come towards Me.*

I am in the open market – present everywhere.

*If the weight of sins has made you despondent,
come to Me – I am the physician of ailing hearts.*

*I do not remain in seclusion like the devout.
I am the Saqi of the tavern, I am the singer,
and I am the ecstasy from the song.*

*You seek Me in the mosque.
Emerge now from these veils –
I am present everywhere.*

*Whether you crave a royal crown
or a faqir's tattered cloak,
know for certain that I am your cloak and your turban.*

*Forget your despair – do not weep over your poverty,
O My lover.*

For you, I am present everywhere as your Beloved.

*Never confide the secrets of your heart to anyone else.
In the seclusion of your soul,
I am the faithful confidant of your secrets.*

*How long will you revolve
like a point encircling the circumference?†
Sit at the centre and know
that I am the compass that surrounds you.*

* Both good and bad qualities.

† Coming and going in the world through death and rebirth.

*Your transient existence is like a treasure trove of pearls.
I am that rare pearl found in the depths
of the ocean of Truth.*

*Like wood, Moin has been consumed
by the flames of love;
having become an ember,
I can say that I am now fire!*

Khawaja Moinuddin Chishty: Ajmer's Benefactor of the Poor



The One Being is never absent. How could He be, when only He exists? Deep in the heart of every little being lies the big Being. The Silent One. He who cannot be named. And He is love. At the centre of every conscious being and at the heart of every inert particle of existence lies the same essence of love. And love means bliss and supreme consciousness. It is the essence of life and existence. ... Every being no matter who or where, has love. Can a wave exist without the ocean? A sunbeam without the sun?

One Being One



Realizing Human Potential

Phrases such as ‘Become your best self’ and ‘Live your best life’ epitomize contemporary notions of human potential. At first glance, such slogans seem rather appealing as they imply some form of self-improvement. However, aside from vague calls about living life on ‘your own terms,’ rarely do those promoting the importance of maximizing one’s potential provide meaningful insights about what exactly this entails. According to social media, human potential is about looking flawless, wearing exquisite clothes, and enjoying speciality dishes prepared in fine-dining establishments in fashionable destinations.

The mystics offer an alternative vision of human potential to these images of luxury, exclusivity and perfect looks as promoted by present-day influencers. Instead of external beauty, mystics focus on internal beauty. Instead of fulfilling individual desires and ambitions, mystics talk about annihilating the ego. Instead of exclusivity, mystics emphasize that all human beings are equal. Mystics explain that human potential is about becoming God-like and that realizing this, i.e. becoming divine, constitutes the primary purpose of life. In the book *My Submission*, for example, Maharaj Sawan Singh states:

There is but one objective for every human being to fulfil – that of becoming a perfect individual. According to spiritually enlightened people, we can only become perfect by being one with God, the perfect being.

Elsewhere, the Great Master explains that to attain union with God, one should recognize the divine in yourself. The ability to recognize the divine within ourselves is a universal truth explained by mystics throughout the centuries. Drawing on their own spiritual experiences, they inform us that to be born as a human being is one of the greatest gifts that God can bestow upon us. In fact, enlightening us about the significance of one’s human birth is where the mystics begin their spiritual teachings. Saint Kanhoba, a 17th-century Maharashtrian mystic, declared that no other good fortune is comparable to being born human, for it is the storehouse of immense treasure:

*What a treasure has been placed in your hand!
Unlucky souls turn this treasure to dust –
 this body that holds the essence of all goodness,
 this body that holds a library of scriptures,
 this body that breathes true holiness into holy places.
Kanhoba says, Nothing can compare
 with being born human.*

Many Voices, One Song: The poet mystics of Maharashtra

The treasure Saint Kanhoba refers to is God; illuminating the Hindu sages' description of the human form as *nar narayani deh*, the body that holds man and God within it. Likewise, in the Bible (Luke 17:20-21), Jesus states, "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you", while in the Sikh scriptures, Guru Amar Das tells us:

*The Lord who has given life
To the entire creation,
Who is the supreme Giver,
Who nurtures and sustains everyone,
Resides within the human body.*

It's natural to ask, if the divine is within us, why can't we see or talk to such an entity or power? The mystics explain that of the three parts that comprise a human being – body, mind, and soul – divinity resides in the last. As one Persian mystic put it, "You are the image of God for God is your very soul." However, for some of us, this too is an unsatisfactory explanation and raises more questions, for example: How do we know that there's a soul in the body? Isn't the idea of God or some ineffable superconscious being an old-fashioned way of controlling our behaviour by promising some perfect afterlife as a reward for being good now? These are not new questions; seekers have been posing them since the beginning of time.

True mystics do not evade such questions but tackle them head-on. In fact, true mystics discourage blind faith and urge seekers to gain an intellectual understanding of the theory of a given spiritual path to clarify queries and dissolve lingering doubts, before they commit to a particular path. This advice may appear to contradict mysticism's central tenet about spirituality constituting a path of *action*; however, theoretical knowledge

is an integral first step to realizing one's human potential. Maharaj Charan Singh explains why in *The Master Answers*:

I generally advise the seekers that even if they spend their whole life in seeking, it is not time lost, but it is time gained. We should never plunge blindly into anything. We must satisfy our intellect, so that this intellect may not become a barrier in our way.... We are just building a strong foundation. We are digging deep for a building. The deeper the foundation the bigger the construction you can put up.... And once we have satisfied our intellect, then we should not let our intellect interfere with our progress. We should set aside the intellect. What we need then is practice and faith.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains that learning about the fundamental principles of a spiritual path is necessary to establish a solid foundation from which to practice its teachings wholeheartedly, so that it becomes a way of life. Without this foundation, it becomes harder to cultivate the clear thinking needed to ensure that our actions align with our spiritual goal. Without clear thinking we could be easily side-tracked from the path's lifelong principles. Yet, before we even get to this stage, it's useful to think about how we approach spirituality. Are we willing to keep an open mind and be receptive to ideas that may challenge our existing views?

Approaching spirituality with critical open-mindedness

Detailed below is the Surat Shabd Yoga technique (the science of connecting the soul with its Creator) taught by the Sant Mat Masters. The technique enables us to realize our true self during our lifetime. However, realization of our human potential requires single-minded focus, dedication, diligence, and perseverance. Consequently, there is a time lag between intellectually understanding the mystics' teachings and realizing the truth for ourselves. Therefore, we must be prepared to take a leap of faith as to the veracity of Sant Mat, and this begins by approaching the philosophy with an open mind.

In the book *Liberation of the Soul*, the author emphasizes the need to approach spirituality without preconceived ideas or biases, drawing attention to the limitations of our physical senses and our mind. Regarding the former, the book explains that while we use our physical

senses to make sense of the world, some things exist beyond what we can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. For example, our hearing is limited to a specific range so that, unlike dogs, we can't hear the sound of a dog whistle. Likewise, x-rays penetrate the body and interact with tissues but are invisible to the human eye. The same is true of gravity; at best, we can observe the effects that this fundamental force of nature has on the objects in everyday life but we can't actually see gravity. Just because we can't see or hear things with our senses in the material world doesn't mean that they don't exist. This principle extends to mysticism.

Turning to the human mind, the author of *Liberation of the Soul* reminds us that, although remarkable, the mind has its limitations and is unable to answer the really big existential questions like: Where do we come from? Why are we here? Does God or some super-conscious power exist? If so, did it create the universe and why? Studying spiritual literature may provide modest insights into these questions, but knowledge of reality is beyond the reach of the intellect. To fully grasp the truth, we must go beyond the mind's intellectual reasoning and experience that truth for ourselves.

Another way in which our mind is limited is that it processes information selectively. Specifically, its natural inclination is to accept ideas that support our existing beliefs and to reject those that challenge them. We may even go so far as to think: If what I'm told about mystics' approach to human potential goes along with the way I see things, I'll accept their spiritual teachings. Approaching spirituality in this way hinders our ability to learn the truth because our starting point is biased, as we believe that our view of reality is correct. The risk of approaching mysticism in this way – as concluded in the *Liberation of the Soul* – is that “it will always appear to be a philosophy of nonsense taught by colossal fools.” What can we take from this? It's essential to keep an open mind to understand why mystics view human potential as centred on God-realization and how to achieve this while alive.

Do human beings have a soul?

One way to think about whether a soul exists is to consider what distinguishes a living person from a dead one. Scientists inform us that there is no difference in the physical composition of the human body after death; it comprises the same elements as it did. If the body's material composition

remains the same, then something non-material must change. According to the mystics, this points to the departure after death of the body's power source or the energy that sustains it. That something is our soul. It is our life force; without it, we cease to exist. There is something else extraordinary about the soul. While we mistakenly believe that our self-constructed identity is the real us, mystics inform us that the soul is our true self. They also tell us that the essence of the soul is the same as that of divinity – God's creative power. In Sant Mat, this power is typically called the Shabd or Nam but other spiritual paths and mystic traditions have given it a different name, such as the Word, Logos, Kalma and many others.

To recap, what makes a person human is not the parts that are perishable (the physical body and the mind), but the soul. As a particle of God's creative power, the soul possesses the same attributes as those of the divine. Therefore, by coming to know our soul – our true self – we come to know God and become God. When Socrates said – “Self-realization before God-realization” in one sentence, he encapsulated the two stages of human potential in a nutshell.

How the mystics approach human potential

We need help to realize our full potential and the purpose of life, and only a living Master can provide it. To reach the level of perfection mentioned by Maharaj Sawan Singh at the start of this article, we need a master who has realized what is true and can convey that truth to us. As described in *Essential Sant Mat*, a true living master shows us what is needed; he is one

who leads us to the understanding of how things really are, a true perception without illusion. This is not the kind of truth that can be expressed in words. It can be realized only through experience. A true master shows us the practical steps needed to experience truth for ourselves.

In *Light on Saint John*, Maharaj Charan Singh elaborates on the role of the Master by likening him to a shepherd who is responsible for a flock of sheep. Drawing on an image from the Bible, he said:

The master is our loving shepherd, and the eye centre or third eye in our body is the door to our house. It is through this door that the master in his Radiant Form receives his disciples and ... leads us out of the prison

of this world to everlasting freedom and peace – our heavenly home. He never calls us from behind, but is always in front of us. He remains ahead, always guiding and protecting us on the way.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains that the door leading to our home of eternal bliss is at the third eye, and it is through this door that he will receive us. Surat Shabd Yoga is the meditation method taught by Sant Mat masters, taking seekers up to and through the 'door.' By practising meditation diligently, we will gradually be able to withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre, which is located above and between the two physical eyes. Here, at the gateway to liberation, one's soul sees a radiant light from which emanates a melodious sound – the Shabd. Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

It is by listening to this sound that we find the direction of our home, and we travel the inner journey guided by the light, so that stage by stage we reach our destination.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. II.

It is God's creative power – the Shabd – that lifts and raises our soul to spiritual planes; and the only way to hear and see the Shabd is to induce his grace. We devote our whole lives to things which have no permanent value; meditation is the one genuine act that helps us to achieve our potential as human beings. As our soul moves closer to divinity, the joy, peace, love, and bliss we'll experience will be immeasurably superior to any happiness we may derive from becoming one's best self as envisaged by mainstream society. Samarth Ramdas, the 17th-century Maharashtrian mystic, expressed our full potential beautifully:

*Sit in solitude, meditate and rest in the Lord.
Concentration will come – this is spirituality.
When you're listening and repeating
every moment, fulfillment will come.
When your knowledge of God is perfect,
you'll be whole, you'll want nothing else.*

Many Voices, One Song, The Poet Mystics of Maharashtra



The Art of Devotional Prayer

The orthodox Christian writer of *Way of the Ascetics* advises, “When you pray, you ... yourself must be silent; let the prayer speak.” Silent prayer is more than not using words; it encompasses complete stillness, concentration, active listening and, above all, love. Practitioners perfecting the art of devotional prayer in this way tune into prayer emanating from their heart and acknowledge it as the voice of divinity speaking through them.

Becoming silent during prayer is probably one of the most challenging aspects, and this is explored by the author of *The Power of the Name*. The author draws on four definitions of prayer. The first is from *The Paperback Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines prayer as a “solemn request to God.” This definition characterizes prayer in terms of spoken words and focuses on its external aspect.

The second definition is taken from an anthology about the art of praying in which a 19th-century bishop exhorts that every prayer “must come from the heart” and that “the principal thing is to stand before God with the mind in the heart, and to go on standing before him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life.” From this perspective, prayer is not about reciting passages from religious scriptures. Rather, it must reflect our innermost feelings and be practiced wordlessly with the tongue of our soul. Nor is prayer an activity undertaken at set times or when one feels like it, but it is a perpetual state of being. To pray is to establish a direct and intimate connection with God, realizing that in every aspect of our existence, we are in God, and he is in us.

Although the second definition of prayer is superior to the first, both emphasize the actions of the individual. Yet when it comes to the true nature of inner prayer, it is the actions of the divine that are of paramount importance. The idea that it is God who initiates prayer in the individual is expressed in the third definition of prayer, which is taken from a passage by a 14th-century Christian monk, Saint Gregory of Sinai, who wrote:

Why speak at length? Prayer is God, who works all things in all men. Prayer is God – it is not something that I initiate but something in which I share; it is not primarily something that I do but something that God is doing in me: in Saint Paul’s phrase, ‘not I, but Christ in me.’

The essence of inner prayer is distilled in Saint John the Baptist's statement in the Bible (John 3:30), concerning the Messiah, "He must increase, but I *must* decrease." In this context, true prayer involves silencing one's own voice and concentrating on doing God's work. The fourth definition of prayer takes this a step further and sheds light on the transformative effect of true prayer. Saint Gregory of Sinai theorized that prayer is "the manifestation of baptism." Here, baptism does not refer to the ceremony symbolizing admission to the Christian church. Rather, it refers to the purification of the soul and an awareness of divinity residing within one's being. The effect of true prayer, therefore, is to move from a state where one is wholly ignorant and unaware of the divine grace flowing throughout our entire being, to a state of conscious awareness of the presence of the spirit within and all around us.

While the different definitions of prayer help us to perfect the art of devotional prayer, perhaps the essence of true prayer is best captured by the idea of becoming who you already are. In other words, prayer is about uncovering one's true identity, listening to the voice calling us from the depths of our being, and embracing the spirit within. This is God's core message to everyone who prays: "You would not seek me unless you had already found me."



Mr Smart and Mr Wise

In the beautiful web of human life, we contain two different perspectives on our quest for spiritual enlightenment: Mr Smart and Mr Wise. These characters embody two different approaches to our meditation practice. Let's explore their distinctive personalities.

Mr Smart possesses a library of sacred texts and scriptures from various spiritual traditions. He diligently pores over these texts, absorbing the knowledge contained within their pages. Mr Smart is the master of trivia. He can quote scriptures and spiritual texts and debate philosophical concepts with ease.

Now meet Mr Wise, sitting in silent meditation, his eyes closed, and his mind attuned to the music of the divine. Through meditation, Mr Wise transcends the limitations of intellectual knowledge. He delves into the depths of his being, exploring his spiritual nature. He meditates every spare minute, remembering the Lord, and showing immense gratitude and love in everything he does.

Mr Smart symbolizes knowledge, which consists of facts and data that builds the basis for intellectual comprehension. He may have memorized scriptures, but his knowledge is superficial, lacking depth and insight. He may know about the path to salvation but has yet to experience the teachings he has studied. Mr Wise, on the other hand, embodies understanding, synthesizing knowledge, faith, and experience to bring meaning to our understanding of reality. He might not be able to recite scriptures word for word; however, his grasp of spiritual principles is rooted in direct experience of the divine.

These two approaches boil down to knowledge versus understanding. Knowledge is similar to acquiring all the puzzle pieces in the world. Every time we learn something new, we find a new piece to add to the puzzle that we've worked on since birth. Understanding is an entirely different ball game; it isn't just about putting the pieces together; it's about stepping back and seeing the entire picture in a fresh light. It is breaking free from theoretical concepts but connecting to them through experience.

We can't neatly package reality and pass it on like a textbook; it's something we have to experience for ourselves. We can talk about it and

describe it, but our words can never quite capture its essence. We can't fully understand the Lord and the path to salvation by reading scriptures; it's like trying to describe the taste of your favourite food to someone who's never tried it before – it doesn't quite translate. As quoted in *Basic Principles of Sant Mat*, Vol. II, Tulsi Sahib states:

Some speak about the Lord based on knowledge

but remain unaware of his mystery.

They give discourses from religious texts

but do not know the secret of realizing the Lord.

Says Tulsi the slave: The ignorant person who believes in them

squanders his life without realizing the Truth for himself.

Knowledge has its place: it is the scaffolding upon which faith is built, providing the framework for understanding and belief. With knowledge as our guide, we navigate the concepts of spiritual teachings, gradually cultivating trust and conviction in the path to attain God realization. As faith takes root, it sparks the flame of love within our hearts, igniting a desire to connect with the Lord. However, it is only through the deliberate practice and application of Sant Mat that we can experience this love. Through consistent effort and dedication, we nourish and strengthen it, allowing it to permeate every aspect of our being. The synergy of knowledge, faith, and understanding form the essence of spiritual growth, leading us ever closer to the Radiant Form of the divine, the Lord himself.

A Guinean proverb tells us that “Knowledge without wisdom is like water in the sand.” And we can see how this plays out when Mr Smart discovers Mr Wise. He quickly perceives that even with all his knowledge, he feels lost on the path to enlightenment. He looks to Mr Wise to explain how to find true understanding. Mr Wise, by way of example, tells of a traveller who carries a gleaming lantern to light his way. It is only when darkness descends that the traveller realizes the lantern must be lit. Until it is lit, he cannot take the first step into the unknown; until it is lit, he will remain in darkness. Mr Smart realizes it is the lantern of knowledge that he holds, and that it must be lit with the desire to experience the Truth – it is only then that it can illuminate his path. It is with direct experience and inner exploration that Mr Smart will find the true understanding

that Mr Wise possesses. Mr Smart now appreciates that his accumulated knowledge was a platform, leading to understanding this true wisdom, self-discovery and spiritual realization.

In the Bible (James 1:22), Christ said, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” Therefore, we must actively apply spiritual teachings in our daily lives rather than passively listening to or talking about them. Our actions should be aligned with the values and teachings of the path. Books, satsangs, and seva are aids keeping us connected to the teachings of the path.

The present Master continually reminds us that our real work is experiencing the divine within. He encourages us to sit and meditate. The journey from Mr Smart to Mr Wise is a journey from spiritual knowledge to devotion, from intellect to insight, from analysis to direct experience of the Lord. While books and scriptures are valuable guides on the spiritual journey, true enlightenment will come from experiencing the divine within. Only through meditation can we practice and explore our inner selves.



Blessed are those who dance through life
loving God, singing his Name.
Merciful towards all, they feel
happiness and sadness as one.
Fountains of wisdom, love and devotion,
they've forgotten the senses,
forgotten 'I' and 'you' as two –
they live in contentment and certainty.
They've dropped the baggage
of intelligence and skill,
and walk through the world as tourists.

Many Voices, One Song, The Poet Mystics of Maharashtra



Food for Thought



Is Free Will an Illusion?

We are often advised to live in his will, but what does that mean? How do we live in the Lord's will when we're faced with decisions and cannot see a clear path forward? Let's begin by defining free will. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, free will means the ability to think and act out of choice, and without coercion. At first glance, this definition resonates with our perception that we are masters of our destinies. Upon deeper reflection though, the definition highlights how little control we have over our physical existence. Take the simple act of driving a car; we must follow rules like staying on a specific side of the road and obeying traffic signals. These constraints limit our choices and highlight the boundaries within which we can make decisions. Spiritual masters draw a similar parallel between free will and destiny.

Some of us have grown up in a culture that values individuality, which has instilled in us both the belief that we can be whatever we want to be and choose to do whatever we want. However, as Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Spiritual Gems*, our whole life was mapped out before we were born according to a combination of good and bad actions (karmas) that we performed across previous lifetimes:

The disciple's material welfare and his success or failure in business ventures is a matter of karma. Before he was born, his life course was all chalked out. The number of breaths he is to take, the steps he is to move, the morsels of food he is to eat, his pain and pleasures, his poverty and riches, his success and failure, were determined beforehand. He himself was the maker of his fate.

Echoing the last sentence of the Great Master's quote, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Cassius remarks, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." Whatever happens in our life is the result of something we did in the past. Mystics explain that, under the divine law of karma, our every action is recorded in what can be described as a unique cyber-file, which the book *from self to Shabd* calls "the sinchit-cloud (or storage in Sanskrit)." Each time we take a new birth, a small proportion of the karma in the sinchit cloud is downloaded to shape every

facet of that life, from our birthplace and parents to the schools we attend, our circle of friends, financial standing, physical attributes, and health status. In short, everything that unfolds in our lives, big and small, is the product of a personal karmic blueprint.

Of course, the question that naturally arises upon learning about the intricate workings of the divine law of karma is, if everything is predestined according to our previous actions, how is it possible for us to add new actions to the sinchit cloud? *In Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh, addresses this apparent paradox:

Three-fourths of what we go through in this life is nothing but our pralabdh karmas, seeds which we have already sown. One-fourth, practically speaking, are new seeds we are going to sow, and they are conditioned by our parentage, our environment, our education, our associations. Our new seeds which we are sowing today are influenced by all that. So in the long run you can't say that you have any free will at all.

Hazur Maharaj Ji explains that while three-quarters of our life is programmed, the remainder is governed by a new set of choices and actions. However, even here, our free will is limited because our choices are influenced by the interplay of our upbringing, environment, past experiences, and societal conditioning. Hazur Maharaj Ji illustrates this point by likening free will to a game of chess, where the initial move sets the course for subsequent moves, stating, “When you start playing chess, the first move is in your hand, but all the other moves are conditioned by the first move.” In other words, while we may exercise free will in certain aspects of our lives, this is constrained by a complex interaction of background causes and influences beyond our conscious awareness.

Given that our past decisions and actions influence our present circumstances and future outcomes, how is it possible to escape this cycle? The mystics encourage us to combine our vivek, our sense of discrimination, with willpower and obedience to comply with the Lord's will. But what is the Lord's will? At our level of spiritual maturity, this means not compromising with the principles of Sant Mat, as Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

What is the master's will? Just to be firm on the principles on which we have to build our meditation and attend to our meditation – that is his will, that is his teaching, those are his instructions. That is the base on which we have to start. The real will of the master we can know only when we go beyond the realm of mind and maya.

A practical way of adhering to Sant Mat principles is to stop ourselves from being thrown off course by forming a habit of clear thinking so as to invert the five passions into virtues such as patience, acceptance, courage, honesty, discipline, and selflessness. Patience can be a challenge to master, especially when it comes to being patient with ourselves. It dawns on us that attaining spiritual enlightenment is neither quick nor easy. Frustration may arise if we feel like our progress is lacking. Yet, spiritual growth unfolds over a lifetime. During moments of discouragement, it's helpful to remember that initiation is a sign of the Master's faith in us.

Similarly, acceptance is crucial on this journey – who are we to question the wisdom of the all-knowing? If he has the power to bestow, does he not also possess the power to know? In the realm of the physical world, numerous circumstances may not unfold as we desire. We might miss out on securing that coveted parking spot for our car. We may find ourselves halted at every red traffic light. A sibling may have consumed the sweet treat we had eagerly anticipated all day. In each instance where things do not proceed according to our expectations, we can embrace the will of the divine. Our reactions to life's events can sever our karmic bonds, guiding us towards liberation, or they can fasten us to fresh karmic chains that burden and confine us further in this realm.

Courage is needed to face our weaknesses, recognize our role in problematic situations, and then take steps to correct our mistakes. Critics are our best teachers; if their feedback is accurate, we can use it to change, if it isn't, we need to let go of any grudges and move on. If we are courageous, we accept responsibility for our own happiness. Just as we can delete the junk mail in our inbox without reading it, we can decide which of the opinions of ourselves or others we ignore or allow to influence us.

The Master knows best how to help us – he knows our past, present and future. Aware of our karmic ties, missteps, and acts of kindness,

the Master tailors his support to each disciple so we can do our part to attain spiritual liberation. Upon receiving the technique of meditation, we commit to fulfilling the four promises necessary to live a life dedicated to Sant Mat. The Master promises to open our awareness to the divine sound within, and it is then we may realize we are part of the infinite. Mystics explain that embracing our destiny transcends mere physical existence; it marks the beginning of a profound journey. By placing our trust in the divine design and striving to embody our highest potential, we start the process of becoming the best version of ourselves. In *Light on Sant Mat*, we understand what it means to be a good disciple:

He who keeps all his love and attention in the Divine Sound, and performs his worldly duties as a matter of routine. He is not affected by anything that comes in his life – good or bad – because he has perfectly submitted to the Master.

This article began by asking how we can know the will of the Lord. The true answer is that we can never know why things are how they are. Living in the Lord's will comes when we accept the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Accepting someone else's plan for us can be the most challenging thing when, from a young age, all we've been told is to be unique and individual. However, if we use the faculties bestowed upon us, discrimination, and love for the Master, we will slowly recognize that since very little is in our hands, the best we can do is to accept everything that comes our way. Above all, daily meditation will open our awareness to the Shabd. Consumed in its melody we ultimately will surrender ourselves, realizing there is only One. This is what it means to live in the will of the Lord.



Truth in a Nutshell

Prayer of the Heart

The repeated invocation of the Name ... [makes our prayer] more inward, more a part of ourselves – not something that we *do* at particular moments, but something that we *are* all the time; not an occasional act but a continuing state. Such praying becomes truly prayer of the *whole person*, in which the words and meaning of the prayer are fully identified with the one who prays. All this is well expressed by Paul Evdokimov (1901-1970): “It is not enough to *possess* prayer: we must *become* prayer – prayer incarnate. It is not enough to have moments of praise; our whole life, every act and every gesture, even a smile, must become a hymn of adoration, an offering, a prayer. We must offer not what we *have* but what we *are*.” That is what the world needs above all else: not people who ‘say prayers’ with greater or less regularity, but people who *are* prayers.

The kind of prayer that Evdokimov is here describing may be defined more exactly as ‘prayer of the heart.’

Kallistos Ware, *The Power of the Name*

When we do not know the reality, praying loudly holds us back from preparing the spiritual ground, and the thought of gaining praise from others sometimes enters our mind. There is danger of our becoming impostors by praying aloud. Such prayers, which contain no truth and do not come from the heart, are simply meant to please others... Human passions cannot influence the Lord. It is not necessary to cry loudly to enable our prayers to reach him. He is not far off. His unseen ears are everywhere. He knows the secrets of every heart and mind, and he can fulfil every desire. Spiritual wealth cannot be gained by praying aloud. One should offer silent prayers with the tongue of the soul, and should pray that he may always act according to the will of the Lord.

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



Faith

The Online Cambridge Dictionary defines faith as “great trust or confidence in something or someone.” In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, Soami Ji Maharaj writes:

*Have faith
that no one other than the Guru belongs to you.
Go to the Master’s harbour
and tie your soul to the primal Shabd.
Only the Shabd, and nothing else,
can liberate you from this web.*

We are immensely blessed to receive spiritual guidance from a true living master – he inspires us to take an initial leap of faith to follow Sant Mat. However, taking a leap of faith differs from having complete confidence in the teachings. Unwavering faith can be attained only by practising meditation, which is why in his hymn, Soami Ji urges us to connect our souls to the Shabd.

Undertaking meditation is itself a sign of faith. Without faith, our minds can come up with all sorts of reasons why today’s meditation can be done tomorrow. So, how do we move from a preliminary, intellectual faith to one that compels us to meditate? In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh uses the analogy of a journey from Beas to Delhi to explain the evolutionary process of faith. Before one starts driving, we must be confident that the road beginning at Beas will take us to Delhi, our final destination. Looking at road maps and speaking to others gives us sufficient faith to start the journey. However, as we drive, all sorts of worries creep into our minds: What if I’m on the wrong road? What if I’m on the right road but the road ahead becomes blocked, or I die in an accident before I get to Delhi? The list of what-ifs goes on and on.

If we let our anxieties get the better of us, we’ll undoubtedly stop driving. If we stop driving, we’ll never know whether we were driving in the right direction. Some of us might find this uncertainty more troubling than the fear of driving on the wrong road or the journey itself. So, with greater determination and a come-what-may attitude, we start anew. This time, we pay more attention to our surroundings than the thoughts swirling around

in our heads. Eventually, we're rewarded with road signs and landmarks that verify we're on the right path. These experiences are the glimpses that confirm the intellectual faith with which we commenced the journey. The closer we get to the journey's end, the more our confidence grows that we'll reach Delhi. But despite our newfound confidence, an element of doubt niggles away at the back of our minds. As Hazur Maharaj Ji explains, absolute, unwavering faith only occurs upon reaching our destination:

If you meditate, you ... start seeing the signs and that deepens your faith; that strengthens your faith.... Actual faith will come only when you reach the destination.

Therefore, we must embrace the Master's teachings with discipline, faith, and perseverance. These virtues should be woven into the fabric of our daily conduct, with our gaze turned inward. By taking the initial leap of faith, we risk nothing, but stand to gain everything. Even in our bleakest moments, we can discover joy if we choose to face the light. We must not forsake our meditation. Our task is to concentrate on repeating simran, gather our focus at the eye centre, and journey toward an existence far more profound than anything the material world has to offer.

Although our spiritual quest presents challenges, with doubts and queries arising as we navigate life's experiences, an inner force guides us back to the path. The teachings of Guru Nanak attribute this to the purity of the guru's Word and its transformative power to dispel our doubt and fear. So, despite our struggles and doubts, the guidance of a true master has a profound impact on us, inspiring us to stay steadfast on the spiritual path. In addition to this, satsang and seva remind us of our purpose in life, and reinforce our commitment towards spiritual growth. Approaching our meditation with such determination, we are expressing our gratitude for receiving the teachings from a true living master.

Having a physical master offers us the opportunity to build a relationship with the real master within: the Shabd. If we seize this opportunity with all our might and search for him within, we'll establish an everlasting relationship that transcends all barriers and leads us back to our divine Father.



Why, Oh Why, O Lord

Do not be surprised at fortune's twists and turns; that wheel has told a thousand tales before.

Khwaja Hafiz

There was once a moneylender who was filled with an intense yearning to find a perfect master who could show him truth. At that time, Guru Nanak Sahib's fame had reached every part of India and the moneylender longed to meet him, believing that the famous Guru might be able to initiate him into the secrets of spirituality.

In his journey from place to place, it happened that Guru Nanak came at last to the moneylender's village. Settling down in the village, Guru Nanak blessed hundreds of people with initiation; included among them was the moneylender.

Close by the house of the moneylender there lived one of his oldest and closest friends, Ram Das, a man who also was a moneylender. Hearing many stories about Guru Nanak, Ram Das was eager to attend one of his discourses, and one morning the two friends started out together to sit at the feet of the great Light-bearer. On the way Ram Das saw a pretty prostitute and was so bewitched by her looks and manners that he decided to stay with her.

"Why give up the bliss of heaven and go headlong into hell-fire?" his friend said, in the hope of dissuading him.

But all his arguments were of no avail. Ram Das stayed where he was, and his friend went on alone to the satsang. The next day, the same thing happened, and it continued day after day, Ram Das staying with the prostitute, while his friend, becoming ever more devoted to Guru Nanak, went regularly to the satsang. Every day the moneylender tried to bring his friend to the right path, but nothing he could say would induce Ram Das to give up his dissolute conduct.

Now, after a month, the moneylender said to Ram Das, "Today is a day when the Satguru will distribute parshad. Give up your evil ways for once and come with me to the satsang. No matter how sinful a person may be, I am told that attending the discourse of a saint gets rid of all one's fears and doubts, and when one has faith, the sins of many lives are washed away.

In the name of friendship, come with me. You will then realize how profitable the company of the Saint is and what bliss you can enjoy.”

Ram Das, however, would have none of it.

“You go to satsang every day and earn great merit. Instead, I do evil. Let us see what we reap today as the result of our actions. Meet me at my house at noon, and we will then compare notes.”

So, for the time being, the two friends parted company.

Ram Das went at once to the prostitute’s house, but she had gone out. He walked moodily back to his own house and began to wait for his friend. But his friend was late, for he had been so fascinated by the discourse and the discussion afterwards that he stayed much longer than usual.

While he was waiting, Ram Das began to pass the time by pushing his stick into the earth. The earth was soft and after he had dug at it for some time, his stick struck an earthen pot with its mouth covered by a lid. When Ram Das removed the lid, he saw a sovereign lying on the top, and he quickly pulled the pot out of the earth, hoping to find it filled with sovereigns. To his great disappointment, he found that the pot contained only one sovereign, the rest of it being filled with pieces of charcoal. His only consolation was that he got one sovereign without working for it.

Just then his friend arrived, limping along and apparently in considerable pain.

“What has happened to you?” asked Ram Das.

“Why, of all things, I stepped on a long thorn,” said his friend. “As luck would have it, it broke off under the skin and this has made it much more painful.”

Ram Das laughed heartily at this.

“O brother, you can now compare for yourself the fruits of going to satsang and my evil act. I have received a gift of a golden sovereign, but you have stepped on a thorn. Are you still going to sing the praises of satsang?”

These words, though uttered by someone who had no inkling of the joys of the discourses of a saint, nevertheless put doubts in the mind of the moneylender and made him ask himself how God ran His world: why the evil prospered while those who were trying to lead good lives suffered.

“Why, oh why, O Lord?” he asked. “Why is it that despite his evil actions my friend has been given a sovereign, whereas I, who am trying to love you with all my heart, have been given a painful injury? Is there

any good, after all, in going to the Guru's satsang? Should I keep on trying to lead the spiritual life? Or is it all a mirage – a palace in the air without substance, that may vanish any moment?"

After discussing the matter, he and Ram Das hit upon the idea of going to the Satguru and asking him if he could give them an explanation for this riddle.

When they told their story to Guru Nanak, he saw at once by means of his inner vision the past lives of the two men and the causes of their present experiences.

"Sit down, brothers," he told them, "and I will explain these things to you."

"In your last life, my friend," the Guru said to Ram Das, "you gave a total of one sovereign in charity. Your karma for this act, in this life, was to receive a pot filled to the brim with sovereigns. But due to your actions, each day you did the evil deed one of the sovereigns turned into a piece of charcoal. This morning, by accident, you did not do an evil deed and as a result you got one sovereign. Otherwise, that also would have turned into a piece of charcoal."

The Satguru then turned to the other moneylender.

"You, in your last life, were a despot and a tyrant, a monarch by whose orders many thousands of people were killed. You killed others in pointless battles. For these deeds, you should have paid in this life by being tortured and hanged. But because you attended satsang and met the master, the payment for your karmas has been very much reduced. How did you pay for all the murders you committed? By a pinprick instead of death by torture."

Upon hearing the Guru's words, the two friends fell at his feet and begged for forgiveness of their sins. In due time, both were purified and flooded with the inner light of God's Word, and both attained union with the Lord.

See how satsang and the glory of the Guru are precious beyond measure, that punishment by hanging becomes a pinprick!

Tales of the Mystic East



Meditation Is a Way of Life

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh describes meditation as a way of life, explaining:

You do not merely close yourself in a room for a few hours, then forget about meditation for the rest of the day. It must take on a practical form, reflecting in every daily action and in your whole routine. Everything you do must consciously prepare you for the next meditation.

What does consciously preparing for our next meditation entail? At a minimum, this means adhering to the first three principles of Sant Mat. First, we must eat a vegetarian diet that respects the well-being of all living beings and does not cause harm. Second, we must abstain from alcohol and mind-altering drugs because they cloud our judgment, scatter our attention, and undermine our ability to maintain focus during meditation. Third, we must lead an honest life based on high standards of morality and ethics. If we don't follow these principles, our meditation will be hampered.

Other ways of creating a conducive environment for meditation include practising positive thinking, maintaining harmonious relationships with others, and being kind and compassionate. However, focus and concentration are the core components of meditation. So, how can we improve these faculties?

To say that it's challenging to be mindful of where we keep our attention during the day would be an understatement. Our mind is ensnared in a web of constantly flowing thoughts, which strengthen our ego and validate our perception of an illusory world.

In fact, most of us live our lives in our minds, in a storm of scattered thoughts. Sometimes we obsess about what somebody has said, what we imagine they meant, and what we think they think of us. But these thoughts are mere suppositions because we don't know what's going on in someone else's head. Thoughts also take us away from the present moment; either we're dwelling on the past or planning for the future. But we can't change what happened yesterday, and what will happen tomorrow is imaginary since we can't even be sure we will be alive.

Mystics explain that our uncontrolled thinking is preventing us from making the spiritual breakthrough we desire. In *Quest for Light*, Hazur

Maharaj Ji repeatedly emphasizes the importance of guarding our minds against its chatter. He advises us not to become “beguiled by futile thoughts,” as they will only serve to “retard your [spiritual] progress.” Hazur Maharaj Ji is telling us that the reason we find ourselves struggling to concentrate during meditation is because the mind is addicted to uncontrolled thinking – this is its normal state. Because thinking is such a deeply ingrained habit, it’s unrealistic to expect one’s mind to cooperate willingly during meditation. Concentration is not something we can do automatically by simply saying, “I will now focus solely on my simran and block out all other thoughts.”

By allowing our thoughts to wander freely during the day, the same out of control thinking spills into our meditation practice. Naturally, we become frustrated and begin questioning whether controlling our mind is even possible. Mystics assure us that when we make the effort, with their grace, it is possible to tame the mind. Our effort includes repeating simran during the day whenever possible, as this will help settle the mind when we sit for meditation. Instead of struggling to control and eliminate those thoughts, we sit in gratitude and watch those thoughts from afar – we let them drift away rather than hook onto them. When we listen attentively for the Word of God, the silence has much to reveal.

Our meditation practice is deeply intertwined with our daily lives, and how much simran we do throughout the day. Achieving a calm and focused mind in meditation requires a holistic approach in which our daily actions and thoughts align with the principles of Sant Mat. When we prioritize meditation, our entire day is shaped by this commitment, and it becomes the foundation of our daily routine. In essence, our meditation practice influences the quality of our days, just as our daily experiences impact our meditation sessions. This symbiotic relationship emphasizes the idea that meditation is not a single, stand-alone solitary practice but a way of life.

Returning to Hazur Maharaj Ji’s guidance at the start of this article, that meditation is not something we do for a few hours a day in a closed room by ourselves; it must be reflected in every aspect of our daily life. Of particular importance is being mindful about where we keep our attention as this improves our ability to concentrate during meditation, which in turn helps us become more detached from the world and enhances our human experience. In this way, meditation becomes a way of life.



A Universal Message

In the iconic Hollywood film *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*, a pivotal moment occurs when one of the main characters says to the protagonist, Luke Skywalker: “The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us.” There’s another memorable exchange in the film when a central character, Han Solo, sceptically remarks to Luke Skywalker, “Kid, I’ve flown from one side of this galaxy to the other. I’ve seen a lot of strange stuff, but I’ve never seen anything to make me believe there’s one all-powerful Force controlling everything. There’s no mystical energy... that controls my destiny.”

If we were to substitute the word Force with Shabd, Logos, or Kalma, the essence of the first quote aligns closely with the teachings of mystics, who proclaim that a divine energy envelops and permeates us constantly. More specifically, this is the interpretation that is likely to be drawn by the millions of people across the globe attending satsang. By contrast, individuals that don’t follow a spiritual path are more likely to resonate with Han Solo’s scepticism, believing that the concept of an all-encompassing conscious energy is implausible and that each individual is the master of their own fate. This raises a fundamental question: Are such teachings meant for a select few who adhere to a specific spiritual path, or do they hold universal relevance for all of humanity?

As explained in the children’s book *The Journey of the Soul*, all individuals will ultimately travel the same spiritual path. People become drawn to the universal teachings of saints at different stages in their lives and for any number of reasons. Some grow weary of the material pursuits they once cherished, while others experience a life-changing event that prompts existential questions about the purpose of life and what happens after death. There are true mystics who travel extensively to answer these very questions and to offer a pathway to everlasting happiness. An example of such a saint is Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, whose entire life was dedicated to teaching the path of Nam Bhakti to people of his day, some 500 years ago.

Out of love and compassion for humanity, Guru Nanak walked thousands of miles through sweltering heat to encourage people to seek salvation by meditating on the Shabd, as opposed to engaging in ceremonial worship advised by priests and other religious leaders. Accompanied by a disciple or two, Guru Nanak travelled not just across India, but ventured as far as what is now Bangladesh in the east, Sri Lanka in the south, and reportedly even to Mecca in the west, where he preached and initiated disciples onto the path of Nam Bhakti.

An incident from Guru Nanak's time in the Middle East illustrates that God can be found in all places and by all people, regardless of their background, country, and beliefs. One day Guru Nanak was resting in a mosque with his feet, inadvertently, pointing towards the sacred Kaaba in Mecca. Viewing this to be blasphemy towards God, the mosque's priest was furious and demanded an explanation. Guru Nanak apologized and kindly requested the priest move his feet in a direction where God didn't exist. Further enraged, the priest grabbed Guru Nanak by the feet and attempted to point them in the opposite direction. However, no matter how often and in which direction the priest tried to position Guru Nanak's feet, they continued to point in the direction of the Kaaba.

Those with a spiritual mindset view everything through the lens of mysticism and can therefore discern spiritual teachings in the most unexpected places, such as fairy tales or commercial films. For instance, throughout the ages, children have been inspired by fairy tales depicting the battle between good and evil. From a spiritual perspective, tales of a brave prince coming to the rescue of an imprisoned princess can symbolize a satguru coming to the rescue of individuals imprisoned by the tyranny of their mind.

Parallels to Sant Mat teachings can be drawn in a more recent Hollywood blockbuster, *The Matrix*. In the film, Morpheus explains to Neo that the whole world is an illusion created by a supercomputer, which keeps human beings' minds in a comatose state and their bodies trapped in metal cages. To free himself from the prison of the supercomputer, Neo is advised to let go of fear, doubt and disbelief. From a Sant Mat perspective, our real self is the soul, which is trapped in a physical body and subjected to the grand illusion of maya that is projected by the mind.

Following the instructions of a true spiritual guide enables us to become so concentrated as to raise our consciousness beyond the physical world and begin our return to Sach Khand.

In conclusion, there is but one God for all of humanity, and the path that leads back to him is open to all, irrespective of background, country, or beliefs. By opening ourselves to the universal message shared by the saints, we have the opportunity to engage in daily meditation. This practice will allow us to reconnect with the Shabd – or, in the fictional words of *Star Wars*, the Force – and ultimately find our way back to our true home in Sach Khand.



The Lord has granted us the human form so that we may do our real work. Our real work is to labour to return to our true home. This is true devotion to the Lord. This world is like an immense dream. Actually, it has no permanent reality, substance, or existence. We should not forget that all our friends and relations, our wealth and possessions, our honour and glory, are transient and fleeting. Even our body is fragile and short-lived. It will soon decay. Neither the body nor anything else will accompany us when we leave this world. The saints therefore say with great emphasis that we should not fail to make the best use of this wonderful opportunity of having a human body. Family and children, eating and drinking, we have had in all of our lives. The one thing that we did not have was the opportunity to practise devotion to the Lord. This is the sole purpose of human life. This is our true work.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Path*



Are We Overestimating the Impact of Physical Darshan?

The mystics encourage us not to focus on their physical form. Maharaj Charan Singh wrote, “May your love of the Form culminate in the love of the Formless.” Similarly, to keep our gaze fixated on the inner Master, the present Master reminds us that neither his physical form nor our human self constitutes the real guru or disciple – both are within.

Nonetheless, the mystics’ physical form is magnetic, drawing us to them like moths to a flame. Whether 100 or 100,000 of us are waiting for Baba Ji to arrive, the atmosphere is electric. As he greets us with folded hands, it’s at this moment we become highly attuned to the yearning of our soul. But in that same moment, we may also be acutely aware of two additional truths captured in Sahjo Bhai’s poem. She states:

*O beloved Lord, redeemer of the fallen,
while under your shelter I have committed many sins.*

Essentially, we recognize that while the Master has not been remiss in his duty, we have failed to comply fully with his instructions. Consequently, the joy of having darshan may not be, as one would expect, absolute but accompanied by regret, remorse, and sadness. Our heightened awareness of the soul’s yearning, and the Master’s love, despite our disobedience, brings to mind the words of Bulleh Shah, who wrote, “You alone exist! I do not, O Beloved!” While these sentiments inspire intense feeling during darshan, all too often the intensity of our determination to prioritize Sant Mat dissipates soon afterwards. This never-ending loop we’re caught in – remorse without actual change – is our tragedy. In fact, we could go so far as to say that we’re enacting our own Greek tragedy.

In a Greek tragedy, the protagonist, usually a person of importance and outstanding personal qualities, falls to disaster through a combination of personal failings and circumstances that he or she is unable to control. With one important difference, this describes our situation perfectly. While we may not be important to the world, we are important to the Lord and to our Master. And since our soul possesses the same qualities

as the Shabd, our individual self possesses outstanding personal qualities. Finally, we are currently at risk of disaster; not because of our personal circumstances, but our inaction.

The disaster awaiting us is our failure to take full advantage of this gift of human life; we realize that our meditation has been half-hearted, and we fear that we will not attain the spiritual liberation we crave.

Overestimating the impact of physical darshan

Undoubtedly, a master's physical form impacts his or her disciples. There isn't really a word which captures the joy, peace, gratitude, optimism and, above all, the love seekers feel when in the presence of their Master. The spiritual vibration a master exudes fills seekers' hearts so much so that they feel love is pouring out of them too. In fact, in the early stages of spiritual evolution, a disciple's faith often rests on the hunch that what they feel in the Master's physical presence is just an inkling of what awaits them when they meet the Master's inner form in meditation.

When not in a master's presence, we're engaged in our own private war between our desire for spirituality and our unreformed actions. Our inner turmoil often reaches its zenith whenever we find ourselves in the Master's presence, so that instead of being absorbed in him completely, part of our attention is occupied with making silent apologies, begging his forgiveness, and promising to do better. But when not in his presence, the demands of the world come to dominate our attention. As this occurs, our determination to prioritize Sant Mat fades as does our feeling of love. Our condition is captured by the following lyrics from the song, "Raye" by Sultan + Shepard, Shallow:

*Waiting for your love
A million miles away,
I can't feel you now,
There's something in the way.*

Whether we are conscious of it or not, our failure to prioritize Sant Mat makes us unhappy. Instead of recognizing this, we project our unhappiness onto the Master, asking ourselves, where has the love gone? Does he not love me anymore? Subsequently, when the opportunity to

have darshan arises, naturally we jump at it. But why do we seek darshan? Is it because we are yearning for him or are we expecting something?

Given that we yearn to see him or feel revived after his darshan, it seems our desire for darshan is motivated by the need to reignite the love we think is a million miles away, and to recommit to meditation. The mystics, however, explain that real darshan means losing ourselves in the Beloved. But how can we lose ourselves in our Master if our motive for darshan consists only of our own needs and expectations?

Of course, there will be occasions in a disciple's spiritual journey when physical darshan is exactly what is needed to keep one on the straight and narrow. The problem arises when our desire for darshan is consistently driven by self-centred motives because not only do we overlook our responsibility to cultivate love for our Master, but we also risk undermining the real value of darshan. Darshan is not a substitute for our year-round spiritual effort.

Is our joy all down to darshan?

During formal satsang programmes, we often wish we could take the Dera atmosphere home with us. We may see the Master for 90 or 100 minutes at most. And what of the occasions when he passes by and we are blessed with just a few seconds of darshan? Why do we still long to bottle the intensity of whatever it is we're feeling each time we see him?

Maybe what gives us as much joy as darshan itself is the anticipation of darshan. More specifically, it's what's happening inside our heads. By looking forward to being with him, we're thinking about him more intensely than we would otherwise. While carrying on with our days as normal, he is at the very forefront of our thoughts, and it is this which forms the basis of our love and joy – our remembrance of him.

We often believe that just seeing him is physical darshan, and this accounts for the happiness we feel in his presence, but we could just as easily feel nothing. Mystics remind us that we need two hands to clap. When we are in Master's presence, we do not passively sit there waiting for the love to be poured into our hearts, but are rather active participants in the experience. Therefore, the joy and love we feel in his presence is not all attributable to the Master's form, or the atmosphere of a satsang centre,

but to our very own self. Since our self is always with us, we can choose to be just as elated when not in Master's presence. If we tried this, and spent the whole day thinking of our Master, we would find that no longer do we complain to him that we can't meditate; instead, we would beg to not be caught up in the demands of the world and for him to remain constantly at the forefront of our minds.

Trusting a true master

We believe that the Master is a God-realized soul, and that we are living our life in accordance with this knowledge. If we truly believed this with conviction, we would trust everything that he says. However, taking the present Master as an example, while he is telling us that we can live the Sant Mat way of life, we insist that we can't. When he says that there are no failures in Sant Mat and that we can do it, do we wonder about the basis for his reassurance? We ourselves are the evidence. The one thing, above all else, which sustains us on this path is love, and love is something we are not short of. Our love for the Master is abundantly clear in the facts that we seek initiation, follow the vows, do seva and attend satsang. We try to turn away from the world to seek him within.

In our own imperfect way, every single one of us tries to love, honour, and obey the Master as best we can. However, this only takes us halfway. When we tell him that we doubt our capabilities and that we're anxious about tripping up, he tells us that the Master is within us, that the true guru is the Shabd and the true disciple is the soul. Why do the mystics continually remind us of this? We need to be reminded that the real Master is within, and be reminded of who we really are. Our real self is not our outer physical covering, but the soul. There is no difference between the soul and the Master. We are him; he is us.

Fundamentally changing our perception of who we are constitutes the next phase of our spiritual evolution. Why? It's precisely because our sense of self is wrapped up with our physical body that, while we have faith in the Master, we have little faith in ourselves.

Our physical form will always capitulate to the mind; our mind will come up with a million reasons why today's meditation should be put off until tomorrow. The more this happens, the more we begin to distrust

ourselves, and the more we distrust ourselves, the less motivated we are to practise meditation, because who wants to spend time doing something where the starting point is one of inadequacy? But if we can move away from seeing ourselves in terms of our weaknesses and limitations, our spiritual practice will become so much easier. If we remain unconvinced, let us think about it another way. The reason our love for the Master intensifies in his presence is because he awakens our soul, and it is our soul that is responding to the spiritual vibration and magnetic power of love emanating from him. Taking this a step further, since the Master is the Shabd, and the soul is a particle of the Shabd, where is the love coming from, and who is doing the loving?

Conclusion

All the Master wants from us is that we spend time with him daily... inside. If we did that, we would experience the deeper meaning of Bulleh Shah's words: "You alone exist! I do not, O Beloved!" The Master's presence will become so intoxicating that it will awaken every nerve, fibre, and cell in our body, and so completely absorbed will we become by him that thoughts of our inadequacy will be completely crowded out.



The Final Word

A New Year's Message from Maharaj Charan Singh

Maharaj Charan Singh sent the following message to the American sangat in 1967 and it was reproduced in Radha Soami Greetings, the American equivalent to Spiritual Link at that time. Hazur Maharaj Ji's seasonal wishes are shared with contemporary seekers of the truth.

The divine plan of the Supreme Father is to send masters into this world from time to time to help suffering humanity to get out of this vale of tears. The Supreme Father sends his beloved sons to bring back his “marked sheep” to him. During this new year’s season, Christmas is celebrated by many as a day of great joy and happiness, as on this day the arrival of a master into this world long ago is remembered. This world is never without such masters. One cannot return to one’s eternal home without the continued and constant help of such a guide. Such is the law laid down by the creator himself.

The Bible says that “the good shepherd” comes and calleth his own sheep by name into one fold, and leads them out of this universe of fear and death. The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep. He giveth unto them the eternal life and they never perish; neither can any one pluck them out of his hands.

The Master, who initiates us, assumes a very heavy responsibility. He will not relax his hold until he has escorted us back to Sach Khand – the eternal home of peace and bliss. He does not ask us to travel alone through those unfamiliar and unexplored regions where even angels fear to tread, but accompanies us right up to the end of our journey. All of our friends and relatives leave us, but this true friend remains always with us, in this world as well as the next. He stands by us to give unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s. He takes our burden on his own shoulders and pays the ransom needed to free us of our sins and to see us safely through this realm of the prince of darkness.

Even if we give him up, he will not desert us, for he knows his responsibility and is true to his vows. In fact, he is “the word which was in the beginning and was with God and was God”, which here and now

“is made flesh” and takes the human form to help us out of this miserable existence, a task that is impossible for the soul to accomplish by its own unaided efforts.

With this message I send Radha Soami greetings and best wishes to each and every one of you for a very happy and joyous new year.



Our spiritual maturity is reflected in our relationship with the Master. Many of us have reduced love to its physical expression, and consequently we believe that we need to be physically close to the physical Master to experience divine love. We may even believe that we should get directions from him concerning every aspect of our life. This is a misunderstanding of the role of the Master. His role is not to get involved in solving the problems of our life. Those are to be addressed by us. Sant Mat is meant for God-realization, for liberating the soul from its entanglement with the mind. The function of the Master is to be of help and guidance in achieving this goal. Baba Ji says his role is to inspire us to meditate, and he frequently guides us to start our journey by being natural to ourselves. If he is telling us to be natural, it is because our relationships with him, with the teachings and with life in general have become mechanical, superficial and artificial; all centred in the physical sphere. With such relationships as our yardstick, the results of any efforts are likely to be equally superficial. We behave in the way we think we ought to, based on concepts of what we believe spirituality and life to be, rather than starting with where and who we naturally are. Meditation gives us the means to develop a living relationship with the Master, with the teachings and with life, a relationship that will grow and flourish out of experience, that will mature with us and with our practice, and that is wholesome, natural and increasingly profound.

Living Meditation



BOOK REVIEW

Khawaja Moinudeen Chishty: Ajmer's Benefactor of the Poor

BY DR. T.R. SHANGARI

PUBLISHER: PUNJAB: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, 2023.

ISBN 978-81-19078-30-1

Moinudeen Chishty was born in 1142 into an affluent family in Iran. His parents had a spiritual bent of mind, and he grew up in that atmosphere. He had a good education in the local Islamic school (*madrassa*) and, by age nine, had memorized the Quran. His father died when he was just fifteen. After experiencing a spiritual awakening after a meeting with a travelling dervish, he sold his lands, distributed the proceeds to the poor, and searched for a *murshid* or spiritual guide. He visited many lands, met many leading Sufis and scholars, and completed advanced studies in Islam. Eventually, he met his murshid Usman Harooni, of the Chishty order, whom he served for the next twenty years. When Moinudeen was fifty-two years of age, Harooni declared Chishty as his successor. After further travel, Chishty settled in Ajmer in Rajasthan, India, where he taught and served the poor until he died in 1238. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have travelled to Chishty's shrine in Ajmer each year to pay their respects. He is remembered for his simple philosophy: "Be as generous as the river, as warm as the sun, and as hospitable as the earth."

Prepared with assistance from the Chishty Centre in Ajmer, this book captures the basics and the intricacies of the Sufi path through the words of one of its great masters. It begins with a brief introduction to Sufism, covering its history, basic teachings, and the phenomenon of the Sufi order (*silsila*), including the Chishty order, followed by a biography of Moinudeen Chishty and summary of his teachings, quoting from his works in both prose and poetry. Next appear several writings surviving from Chishty's time, among them a composition by Chishty's spiritual successor Bakhtiyar Kaki, seven enlightening letters Chishty wrote to him, and the text of Chishty's final sermon. But the bulk of the book is selections from Chishty's poetry.

Reflecting the principle of "oneness of being" (*wahdat al-wujud*), fundamental to the teachings of the Chishty order and many other Sufis, Chishty writes,

The very thought of “I am; I exist as a separate entity from God” is deceptive. There is no duality, no separate entity. There is one entity alone, and that is the Truth of God. As long as you continue to see yourself, you will not see God; when you no longer see the self intervening, then God will reveal Himself to you.

And,

*Do not say, in this world of duality, oneness does not exist;
if you look with the eye of your heart,
in every place you see only Him.*

On the seeker's need for a murshid:

*Do not step into this wilderness
without a Friend, O Moin!
Do not travel alone! Wait, for He has come
just to be your companion.*

Chishty taught that three spiritual practices are essential for the seeker: ritual prayer (*ibadat*), remembrance (*zikr*), and contemplation (*shaghl*). He calls *zikr* the backbone of the spiritual life. Chishty encourages us in *zikr*, adopting the voice of God:

Pray, that is, remember Me in your heart. Know Me to be present in your body. Give place to My love in your head. I have created you for this purpose, that you may know Me, glorify Me, and love Me.

A person should spend his life in God's *zikr*, always feeling God's presence close to him, and not waste time trying to fulfil worldly desires. Chishty writes,

*If you wish to become one with God,
repeat his Name each moment.
You will attain union with Truth
when you attain union with God's Name.*

Chishty urges us to become a mirror for God's beauty. Even our body plays a part. “The body is both the cause of separation from God and the means of merging back into Him: Do not consider yourself dust, for dust is darkness. Look – you, yourself, are the very mirror of God's beauty.” To polish the mirror one must keep close watch on one's mind in contemplation.

For Chishty, the path to God is to live in God's will, learn how to love, and lose the self so that we may be able to listen to the voice of God and ultimately achieve oneness. Love and living in God's will are interconnected for him. He often quotes the advice of Mansur al-Hallaj on how to succeed in love: “Align

your will to the will of the Beloved and become so absorbed in His love that you are completely oblivious of all the suffering you undergo. This is how you can succeed in love.” Chishty describes the voice of God with various poetic images:

*The drumbeat of My love resounds in both worlds,
remove the cotton wool from your ears
and listen to its call.*

*The flute of Love’s mystery can be heard again in my heart.
With heart and soul, I have established a relationship
with your flute.*

Chishty’s surrender to God wiped out all his desires, even the desire to see God: “I never desired to see Him because once I have handed myself over as His slave, what business does a slave have with desire?”

Chishty tells us that it is God who gives us love and draws us to Him:

*The declaration of Love has been inscribed
on each heart
that has come to this transient world
from the beginning of time.*

*“I love Him, He loves me” – why such commotion over this
if He is not the one to initiate that love?*

*I offer Wine to lovers and then pull them towards Me;
if they do not come then, distressed,
I go to them Myself.”*

Some of Chishty’s most beautiful poetry is on the self-annihilation (*fana*) and oneness that come as love reaches its culmination. Self-annihilation erases the boundaries between self and God, and ultimately one realizes that there is only Him:

*With no hesitation, the heart disclosed the secret of love;
when I peered within my heart, it was only Him,
only Him!*

*If you are trapped in the fallacy of ‘me’ and ‘you,’
leave behind such senseless thought –
‘me’ and ‘you’ are only Him!*



Book reviews express the opinions of the reviewers and not of the publisher.