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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# The Elect of God

The elect of God are those  
who meet with his approval;  
they receive honour in his court.  
They stand gracefully at the royal portals,  
meditating one-pointedly on the Guru.  
Whoever reflects on the creation  
and tries to describe it will realize  
that beyond count are the works of the Creator.  
The mythical bull of dharma  
is born of God's compassion,  
and contentment brings order to the system.  
One who realizes the truth will understand  
what kind of load the bull carries,  
for there are worlds beyond worlds,  
universes beyond universes –  
what power is supporting their weight?  
The ever-flowing pen has specified  
the kind, colour and form of every creature.  
If someone knew how to relate that account –  
how colossal would that account be!  
Who can fathom the scale of his bounty,  
his awesome power, his superb beauty?  
With but one Word he created this vast expanse;  
from that one Word  
a million streams of life began to flow.

How can I fathom your power,  
as I am not in the least worthy  
to sacrifice myself to you?  
Only that is a good deed which earns your pleasure,  
eternal and inviolate as you are, O formless Lord!

Guru Nanak Dev, *Jap Ji*



# This One Moment

The present moment may be one of the most underrated and undervalued aspects of our lives as human beings. We are caught up in the past, with memories, regrets and guilt, and consciously try to second-guess the future, allowing our minds to fill with anxieties and worries. Where then, is there any thought for right now – this very moment?

If we think about it logically, what possible value can come from incessant rehashing of the past? It cannot be relived, corrected or improved upon. It is finished. The Masters certainly want us to learn from our mistakes, and they ask us to try not to repeat them. Wallowing in those negative memories is not productive and does not assist us in making something positive of the now or the present moment.

As for the future, well, that is a most uncertain lottery. We fill our minds with hopes, fears and expectations based on past experiences. But there is no guarantee that yesterday's experiences and outcomes can be relied upon to predict tomorrow's events. We agree that there are only two certainties in life – change and death – and neither of these can fill us with joy or confidence where the future is concerned. But, like it or not, we cannot evade them.

This is what Soami Ji Maharaj had to say about death:

*Keep the fear of death in your mind,  
for who knows when that moment will arrive!  
Stay alert with every breath of your life,  
O thoughtless one,  
and devote every moment to the repetition of the name.  
Indifference now will cost you dearly in the end,  
when nothing more can be done.  
So do what must be done, right now,  
and don't rely on that uncertain tomorrow.*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*

Soami Ji sets it out very clearly for us. At some point in the future, death will certainly come for each one of us. So, the big question is, what are we doing with our precious moments as death marches ever closer? Some of us

might be actively longing for death, some might be dreading it. But whatever our own personal attitude, we all have moments that have to be filled before death arrives. We all must choose how we fill them. Will our choices be spiritually positive and productive or not?

We cannot plead ignorance as to how our Master wants us to fill those moments. We know he wants us to do our simran as often as possible during the day, and, most important, he wants us to do our daily meditation with as much focus, energy and concentration as possible. Although it is easy to comprehend the importance of the Master's request, most initiates discover, sooner or later, that fulfilling his request is not so easy to do. The difficulty lies in the fact that to fulfil his request, we need to use the self – the same mind that anchors us in the past, obsesses about the future, and leads us into all kinds of entrapments in the present. The mind has its own ideas about how we should fill our moments, and sadly, simran is seldom the first choice.

The spiritual journey we have embarked upon is actually a journey of our soul. It is our attempt to reunite our soul with the Lord. In order to take this journey to its completion, we must connect to God's creative power – the Shabd – which will draw the soul home. The Shabd is contacted at the third eye, and the mind, powered by simran, is the vehicle that will take us to this point of contact.

In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh said:

*The saints really have only one message to give, and that message they give in the manner which suits the times. Their message is: "Soul, thou hast forgotten thy source. That source is in Sach Khand, and the sound current within you is the way to it, and we guide you to that."*

We have forgotten our Source. Most of us have absolutely no first-hand knowledge or experience of our soul. We are told that in its pristine state, the soul is indescribably dazzling, bright and pure. However, as it descended into the creation, its light was obscured by the coverings associated with each level of its journey. Now, it finds itself in the physical domain – dominated by the mind, the body and the overwhelming power of the senses, all of which conspire to keep it trapped firmly in the creation. We are well aware of the power of our mind and our senses.

Again in *Spiritual Gems*, Great Master explains our situation: “Mind alone is our enemy. It is with us to keep us out from the eye focus. We realise its power when we practise simran and bhajan.”

When we concentrate on our Master and try to keep our simran going throughout the day, we are adding to the treasure we have already been given. The gift of initiation gives us access to the jewel of the Shabd. We must put our heart and soul into focusing on this task. In so doing, we will be building our spiritual treasure. Whatever is left of our lifespan, we must use it as effectively as we possibly can. We must invest in a future that will yield spiritual results, and it must be done now – in every possible moment.

Our daily challenge is to recall our simran every time the mind leads us astray. It is a difficult task, but we must attempt to do it as diligently and lovingly as possible. Soami Ji told us to stay alert with every breath because indifference now will cost us dearly at the end.

We have all had to struggle, persevere and work hard in our lives. We are not strangers to the concept of battles – physical and mental. So, we are well equipped to take on the challenges presented by the mind to ultimately gain control over it. The well-known saying ‘old habits die hard’ is true where the mind is concerned. It does not want to relinquish its freedom or power. It is our task to constantly chip away at its foundation little by little. Every moment we turn away from the mind carries the opportunity to turn towards the Master, to empower the soul and draw closer to the magnificent sound and light of the Shabd. Surely this last battle is worth the effort?

Only as a human being can the soul seek to fulfil its purpose – to return to the Lord. But to achieve this, we have to disempower the mind and empower the soul. We have the privilege of human birth that affords us the golden opportunity to step off the wheel of reincarnation forever.

In *Many Voices, One Song*, Kanhoba, a Maharashtrian mystic, said: “What a treasure has been placed in your hand!... Nothing can compare with being born human.”

If we want to take advantage of this treasure, we have to infuse ourselves with a sense of urgency to reach the eye centre and contact the Shabd. Moment by moment, throughout the day, we need to choose simran over worldly thoughts. Simran is how we feed that beautiful little

seed of love given to us by our Master. It needs care and attention to grow and blossom. This spiritual blossoming will drive our efforts during meditation so much more effectively than only duty or habit. When love powers our meditation, nothing – not even the mind – can stand in its way. Simran helps our love grow, and of that, there is no doubt.

Maharaj Charan Singh said:

*Constant simran helps our attitude towards meditation, helps to draw our mind towards meditation.... That is why whenever we get time or we are mentally free, we do simran.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

We must never give up trying. Every time we notice we have strayed, we must return to simran and claim every precious moment for our Master and our soul. Our long-term spiritual future is magnificent – it really is worth fighting for throughout each and every day.

Great Master said in *Spiritual Gems*:

*Do not lose heart but fight courageously. The battle has just begun. Mind is not stronger than the sound current. The Master is with you. He is watching your every movement. He is prepared to fight your battles with you. Take him as your helper. Have faith in him. Fight the mind and you will succeed.*



*Our way in and our way out of this world are shrouded in the same essential ignorance that accompanies our life. We may shed tears at the departure of a loved one, but what has really taken place, we cannot say. One moment, the body was infused with life; the next, the life essence that we call the soul has departed.*

*Awareness of the Divine*



# The Importance of the Master

When we consider what we know, we may realize that we only know a fraction of what there is to know, and this knowledge is confined to the material realm, being the only realm we are familiar with. From a higher perspective, this realm, in relation to the entire creation, is a mere drop of water in a vast ocean. It is insignificant when considering the magnitude of the material, astral, causal and spiritual realms. We may assume that we are very knowledgeable and wise, but how accurate is this assumption when our total knowledge can be compared to a grain of sand on an infinite shore?

What do we know of life, and how do we decide what is important and what direction we should take? We exist in the material world in physical bodies, believing we know enough to make intelligent decisions that will lead us to positive outcomes. But how have we fared so far? Have we achieved lasting happiness or freedom? Can we recognize the difference between reality and illusion?

We soon realize that we are lost in the world and have no idea where to take refuge or where to turn for advice and guidance. Is there anyone who is truly knowledgeable and wise who can guide us out of this situation? Or are we destined to endlessly repeat the same mistakes that have created our current predicament?

From their higher spiritual perspective, true mystics tell us that all living beings in the causal, astral and physical realms are lost in illusion, and consequently, suffer endless births and rebirths. Our karmas direct us from one incarnation to the next, where we reap the consequences of our own previous actions performed without the knowledge of the law of karma. Unwittingly, we incur endless karmic debts, in exchange for the paltry, transitory benefits of our actions. We do not realize that the creation is the home of endless cycles of action and reaction, birth and rebirth, pleasure and pain.

Mystics tell us that the true value of the human form is its potential for the eternal liberation of the soul, but under the influence of the mind, souls lose this golden opportunity. It is squandered in pursuit of momentary pleasures, sensual gratification, and obsession with wealth



and possessions. Oblivious of the entrapment caused by its actions, the mind becomes even more securely bound to the wheel of transmigration, binding the soul with it.

Only the wise heed the advice of mystics and capitalize on the valuable opportunity of human birth, for it is only in this form that we can realize the Lord within us. But we are ignorant of this until the Lord, in his mercy, arranges for us to meet a true living master. The master teaches us how to use the opportunity of human birth to achieve the true purpose of life.

*Company of the realized  
Is fruitful,  
Company of others  
Is futile and vain.  
The entire world is an enemy,  
Only he who loves the Lord  
Is your friend.*

*Kabir: The Weaver of God's Name*

Kabir Sahib emphasizes that the company of unrealized souls is pointless. We know that most relationships are transactional, as they all have an element of self-interest – everyone prioritizes the pursuit of their own selfish ambitions. Although it may seem harsh to consider everyone other than realized souls as enemies, we need to reflect on who our true friend is. Surely, it is the one who has our soul's best interests at heart – and that is our Master. His only concern is for our soul, as he guides us and helps us to extricate ourselves from this material realm. Without him, we would muddle on, driven by our desires and creating endless karmas, while in total ignorance and helplessness. If it were possible for us to achieve spiritual liberation by our own efforts, we would have done so by now.

The difference the Master makes is incalculable. His love, guidance, advice and encouragement keep us steadfast on the spiritual path. The sooner we submit to his will, the sooner we will achieve our goal of spiritual liberation, along with the realization that, apart from him, there is nothing in the creation that is worthy of our attention. Eventually, we will realize it is all him.

Many people devote their lives to family, community, country and religion, and from childhood, we have been influenced to do the same. Unfortunately, these interests are all part of the illusion we call life, and they have responsibilities that we must fulfil. Certain events may oblige us to prioritize our family obligations, but that does not imply that they will deter us from our spiritual goal.

The one certainty in life that we all ignore is our inevitable death. Keeping this in mind, we need to focus on where we build our treasure. The reality is that when we die, we leave this world empty-handed. Only our Master and our spiritual treasure will accompany us beyond death. It is therefore incumbent on us to build that treasure by focusing all our attention and effort on our spiritual practice while we have the opportunity of this human birth. Nothing else will be of any value to us at that crucial time.

When the Master initiated us, he gave us the key to the mystery of life – the gift of meditation. It is up to us to use the key to unlock our inner door and release our hidden potential. With steadfast devotion and dedicated spiritual practice all our doubts and questions will ultimately be resolved. The spiritual practice of meditation will also result in the emergence of our love for him. As this love grows, we become more positive and appreciative of all the blessings bestowed upon us by our Master.

We slowly realize just how truly blessed we are and how much we have to be grateful for. How fortunate we are to be disciples of a true master who will not only release us from our karmic bondage, but is also our guide and companion throughout our life and beyond our death.

The Master is the only one who will accompany us beyond this worldly existence. He will always be with us until he has delivered us safely to the lap of the Lord. Who could possibly be more worthy of our love and devotion than the Master?

In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh inspires us when he says:

*There is hope for every disciple on this path. When the Lord has arranged for our initiation into this science it means he wants us to come back to him one day. And if that is the Lord's wish, what power can keep us back here for long? It is only a question of time until our burdens are*

*lightened and we are pure enough to stand in his presence. This is the greatest blessing that the Lord can shower on any human being, and we should be grateful for that. We can show our gratitude by attending to our meditation every day and by listening to the voice of the Lord with our entire attention. There is no other way to get out of this world. All intellectual reasonings, questions and arguments will lead us nowhere. It is a path of action, not of words.*



*There comes a time in the course of each student's demonstration in spiritual science, when steep and rugged mountains must be climbed, even the dizziest heights. Then he needs not only an experienced guide, but the strong right hand of that guide must support him in places where he could never make the grade alone. Then it is that the value and absolute necessity of the living Master is fully realized. Then it is that the great love of the pupil for his Master is born.*

*With a Great Master in India*



# The Master's Friendship

One of our greatest gifts is that of friendship. Human beings are company-loving by nature, and we often hear the Master talking about our need for companionship.

What is a friend? A friend is someone we like, who accepts us as we are, and with whom we develop a special bond of affection and understanding. Friends lift our spirits and enrich our lives. Maharaj Charan Singh always reminded us that we should surround ourselves with positive people who lift us up. These are the special people we call friends.

Through observation, we realize that our real friend is the one who supports us during the difficult times, and who is worth so much more than a thousand fair-weather friends – those who disappear when the bad times arrive.

As we know, in mystic philosophy the Master is regarded as the true friend, for as Julian Johnson writes in *The Path of the Masters*:

*He not only shows us the way out, but he offers to help us where we could not possibly make our way alone.... The greatest friend we could possibly have is one who not only tells us how to escape from our difficulties, but who offers us the needed help. This is the real Master.*

There is a well-known quote by French philosopher and author Albert Camus, who wrote: "Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow. Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Walk beside me. Just be my friend."

We may have heard the Masters use this quote when talking to their disciples, but what would be the implication of being the Master's friend? Could we even imagine the consequences of such an association, and how would we approach this friendship?

Supposing the Masters were to invite us to be their friend, they would not be inviting us to the movies or asking us to chill with them. To think this would be unimaginable ignorance on our part, as is echoed by Shams-e Tabrizi when he asks:

*How strange! What do you think God's friendship is, this God who has created the earth, the skies, and this universe? Do you think His friendship can be had so easily, that you can enter... sit by Him and converse with Him?*

*Do you think it is like the porridge maker's shop, where you can simply come in and begin to eat?*

*It is beyond your wildest imagination.*

*Shams-e Tabrizi: Rumi's Perfect Teacher*

So what do the Masters imply when they suggest we be their friend? Perhaps it is their way of saying they want us to be natural and at ease in their company, just as we would be in the company of a good friend. We are so in awe of the Masters that we may find it impossible to be relaxed in their presence. However, in a more informal situation, such as in the question-and-answer sessions, we may find it easier to interact with the Master.

During these sessions, we witness the lovely interaction between the Master and his disciples, where he patiently and eloquently explains aspects of the spiritual path, as we reach a deeper insight into the teachings. It is during these informal sessions with the Master that we develop a feeling of friendship toward him, as he becomes a reality to us and not simply a framed picture on our wall.

In the introduction of *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, the writer expands on the thinking behind the question-and-answer sessions that Maharaj Ji started in the 1950s. She goes on to capture beautifully the effect of these meetings on the sangat. She writes:

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

Just as Maharaj Ji so patiently answered our many, and often repetitive questions, so too, does the present Master patiently engage with his sangat. Possibly, one of his most compelling and sincere responsibilities is his loving relationship with his disciples. For as the Sufi master Sheikh Sa'di said of his disciples:

*Who else but I can try to talk of loving you?  
Since others have no basis, their words  
do not ring true.*

*The Spiritual Guide, Vol. II*

In his role as our spiritual mentor, the Master guides us inward towards the realization that the disciple and God are one, and that separation is a misconception. He gently makes us aware of our spiritual ignorance, explaining who we really are, why we are here and the real meaning of the gift of human birth.

He illuminates the illusion of the creation for us, making us aware of the necessity to turn our attention away from the world by focusing on the inner path through the technique of meditation. He watches over us as we negotiate our karmic path, aware of our mental struggle as we attempt to free ourselves from the gripping burden of karma, in our fight for our soul's freedom and its return to its true home.

Sheikh Farid described the role of the spiritual guide saying: “The *pir* works to bring out the true beauty of his disciple. He perfects every facet of the disciple's potential.”

We have little knowledge or understanding of the pivotal role the Master plays in our lives and in our spiritual transformation. He is the spark that ignites the light within us. The Master grants us initiation because we have the inborn capacity to achieve the spiritual goal, and through his guidance, he perfects our spiritual potential. Through our meditation practice, we realize the eternal gift he has given us.

The Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan beautifully describes initiation as an oath of allegiance, sworn at the time of initiation, that belongs to eternity:

*I heard from my murshid, from my initiator, something which I shall never forget: “This friendship, this relationship which is brought about by initiation between two persons, is something which cannot be broken; it is something which cannot be separated; it is something which cannot be compared with anything else in the world; it belongs to eternity.”*

*Sheikh Farid: The Great Sufi Mystic*

In the same book, we are told that, informally, Sufis refer to initiation as ‘grasping the hand of the sheikh’. This image gives a hint of the loving

relationship that is cemented at the time of initiation: "The Master offers his hand to help and support the disciple; the disciple grasps his hand to accept his loving protection."

We too have a beautiful and eternal friendship: an oath of allegiance, sworn between the Master and ourselves at the time of our own initiation. An oath that even death, which severs all other relationships, has no power to break. Perhaps, from time to time, we may need to reassess our role as disciples, for grasping his hand means we must honour our agreement to do the spiritual work we have undertaken to do. When we grasp his hand, he lights the way forward, and we must follow diligently and conscientiously.

As a result of his friendship, guidance and love, we will one day merge our soul back into the infinite soul of the Lord and experience the bliss of perfect love. Ultimately, it is his love for us that will lead our soul out of the creation to return home, ending aeons of the false belief that we were ever separated from the Lord.

In *The Path of the Masters*, Julian Johnson writes: "In the march of the ages, cycle after cycle, in every planet where human beings reside, the great Masters are the light bearers of that world. Until the end of the ages, they will remain the friends and saviors of those who struggle toward the light."

Who can comprehend such a friendship?



# Our Swan Song

The Master often speaks of the importance of building a relationship with the Lord. Normally, there are two parties in any relationship. In the relationship of love for the Lord, the two parties would be the beloved and the lover. Our initial perspective is that the Lord is the beloved and we are the lovers. On this premise, we cultivate our love with him – initially through the living Master and then the Shabd Master. The question is: who is the real lover and who is the beloved?

Once the mind returns to its home in Trikuti, the soul is released from the clutches of the mind and realizes that the lover and the beloved are one and the same. The beloved sowed the seed of love in the seeker, who responded thinking that he was the lover. Without the beloved, there would be no love, no lover and no beloved.

Maharaj Charan Singh often said that the Lord worships himself through us. Initially, this may make little or no sense, but when the soul loses its separate identity and merges with the Lord, we realize that the lover and the beloved are one and that he worships himself through the soul and is therefore, both lover and beloved.

Being one, the lover and the beloved must have the same role, which is to love. The Lord is pure love and can, therefore, only love. Our dilemma is to identify the role of the seeker in this mystery. If the Lord worships himself through us, we are merely the conduit or channel that can either allow or restrict that love to flow freely. So, the seeker's role is to cooperate with the Lord and allow love to flow between them. Since the seeker comprises soul, mind and body, how do the mind and body affect this cooperation?

Cholesterol or arterial plaque in our bodies can clog the arteries and restrict the flow of blood. Similarly, the mind creates a very effective blockage by using the senses, desires and passions to restrict the flow of love. For love to flow freely, the mind must be focused at the eye centre and this enables the soul currents to temporarily withdraw from the body. The withdrawal of the soul currents to the eye centre mimics death and is called dying while living. Our challenge is to enable the withdrawal of the soul currents.



As a conduit for the flow of love, we can cooperate with the Master to prevent the accumulation of ‘plaque’ created by our mind, senses and passions. The simplest way is to follow his instructions, and diligently and conscientiously focus our attention at the eye centre through meditation.

The Masters acknowledge that their teachings are very simple to understand but not so easy to practise. Maharaj Ji explains:

*Sant Mat teaching is very simple, but to follow it is much more difficult than it looks. It's a constant struggle with the mind, and one has to change one's entire way of life and one's attitude towards life. To follow Sant Mat requires a complete transformation, so it's not easy. One has to sacrifice a lot in life.*

*Die to Live*

Most religions speak of the Lord's all-pervading, omniscient creative energy, which is known by different names, including: Holy Spirit, Word, Logos, Nam, Shabd and many more. Sant Mat emphasizes the importance of developing an awareness of this Shabd, without which nothing can exist. It is the creative and sustaining energy that animates all creation, and our soul is a drop of Shabd.

Experience of the Shabd is only possible with the help of a true living master, which is not a novel concept. There have always been living masters, saviours, prophets, saints, or mystics upon whose teachings all religions are founded. Only a living master can teach us the correct way to experience the Shabd within us without the distractions of external religious rites and rituals. Once we are initiated by a living master it is incumbent on us to follow his teachings diligently and without compromise.

Although the Master's teachings are all-encompassing, two aspects are worthy of special attention – a positive attitude, and living in the will of the Lord. A positive attitude is beneficial for a happy and contented life. How does one maintain a positive attitude amidst the drama of life? The key lies in our perspective. A perspective of gratitude will improve our attitude. Maharaj Charan Singh is quoted in *Treasure Beyond Measure*:

*Maharaj Ji always says that we should be grateful to the Lord for whatever He gives us. At every step in our lives we should feel gratitude; whether the turn of events appears to us to be good or bad should be no concern of ours. We do not know the spiritual good which may be hidden behind the apparently bad – and vice versa. So we should make our best efforts to live in His will, and be thankful to Him for whatever He has arranged in our destiny.*

A positive attitude is a product of clear thinking, whereas our mind is often prone to negative and confused thinking, born out of worry, analysis and overthinking. On the spiritual path, this attitude is developed by living in the Master's will and by accepting that the law of karma and our destiny cannot be altered. Such an attitude helps us accept the fact that protesting cannot change the events of life and that, in time, everything will unfold according to our destiny.

Ultimately, acceptance is the best attitude towards life. The ability to accept our destiny without the desire for change results in contentment and happiness. We can accept anything when we accept that it is happening in accordance with the will of the Lord. Initially, it may seem impossible to live in his will, but with clear thinking we realize that there is only one way to live – in his will. The sooner we realize that the Lord's will is supreme, the sooner we will learn to accept our destiny.

In *Divine Light*, Maharaj Ji said:

*We should leave everything to the Will of the Master and try to live in the circumstances in which He wants to keep us. Our wishes and desires are the outcome of our mind's longings and we want them to be fulfilled by God on the basis of our devotion. This is a wrong attitude and should be avoided. Rather, we should try to adjust ourselves to the Will of the Lord.*

The only way we can live in the will of the Lord is through meditation. Maharaj Ji explained in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*In prayer, we speak to God. We expect something from him to fulfil our desires. In meditation we hear God, we submit to his will. In meditation, you hear the voice of God, and you submit your will to him. You live in his will.*

Meditation is the key to living in the Lord's will. Every action has a consequence, and meditation is the action that grants us the best consequence.

After millions of lives in various life forms, we are now blessed with a human birth and the unique opportunity to make this life our swan song – our final performance. According to folklore, swans are normally mute but burst into beautiful song moments before they die. The swan song is therefore a metaphor for a final gesture, effort or performance, given before the end.

Our Master always gives his best in everything he does. Unless we want to reincarnate in another body, this life must be our final and best performance – our swan song to our beloved Master. It is our gesture to him in gratitude for the treasure that awaits us, which will be beyond our imagination.



*To be receptive to the Father's love in our everyday lives, to accept whatever he gives us unconditionally.... To accept with gratitude what he gives, because he never does any wrong. When you are not there, then who's to judge what is wrong and what is right? The realization will come to us that we don't exist – only he exists. Whatever comes from him, we accept with cheerfulness, with gratitude.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*



# The Divine Connection

We have been drawn to our path and received initiation, but this does not mean we have found God. We are now being guided along a path towards realizing God; a journey that, we are told, will culminate in our return to our original home and our true Father. We are fortunate to have a true spiritual master guiding us through all the perils and obstacles that life in this illusionary existence presents. The masters are committed to returning each of their disciples to their original home.

In order to know God, we need to undertake some meaningful spiritual practice. Irrespective of our limited understanding and our imperfect grasp of truth, it is our desire to know him that keeps us moving forward, and compels us to continue with our spiritual journey.

In the book *Adventure of Faith*, the author tells the story of her spiritual search for God, which took most of her life to complete. It culminated when she met and was initiated by Maharaj Charan Singh.

Her story starts by describing how she had her first profound spiritual experience at the age of thirteen. While travelling home from school on a train, she was overwhelmed by the feeling of an invisible light coming from above. From this light, 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.” This experience was so profound that it created a complete about-turn in her life. She wrote: “This was the beginning of my Adventure of Faith.”

She had no doubt that it was God who had spoken to her. She described the voice as “insistent and at the same time infinitely gentle and full of love.” The direction she was guided to take was clearly a spiritual voyage of discovery. She described the effect:

*He had laid his hand upon me and had thus become my personal God, to whom I surrendered my life unquestioningly, and unconditionally, not knowing what the consequences would be.*

*Adventure of Faith*

The masters affirm that we are all spiritual beings and therefore, in essence, one with the divine. As our attachments to this illusionary world are severed,

and with conscientious spiritual practice, we will begin to experience this divine connection. This is confirmed in *from self to Shabd*, where we read:

*Little by little, with spiritual practice, we will begin to detach from all those things that used to have a strong grip on us. This will give us the confidence that we are on the right track and on our way to truly identify with Shabd consciousness. As our awareness of our true nature – our oneness with Shabd – develops, we will experience far more peace and happiness than this world is capable of giving.*

This detachment, the mystics tell us, comes as a result of our meditation, especially the practice of simran – the repetition of the five holy words given to us at the time of initiation. When we substitute the habit of thinking about the world with the habit of simran, we feel more peaceful. Simran distracts us from the world, helping us to detach from the character we are playing and the events playing out around us.

If we acquire the habit of switching to simran, we will eventually reach a calmer, more serene mental place – a sanctuary in which the world starts to lose its attraction. This state of awakened consciousness is exactly what the masters require of us if we are to overcome the resistance of our mind and connect with the divine.

It is worth reminding ourselves that remaining in the present moment, through concentrated simran, enables us to control the mind's obsessive activity. Stilling the mind is possibly our most important task and is to be performed each time we meditate. The nature of the mind is activity – it needs to be constantly busy, and simran satisfies this need in the most productive way possible.

We may be spiritual seekers on the path of Sant Mat, but we still need to act out our roles in this illusionary stage show. Our destiny has been allotted to us, and we must attend to our responsibilities to the best of our ability. At the same time, we need to avoid becoming obsessed with the illusions of the world. There is nothing permanent in this region of duality – happiness does not last, contentment is fleeting, security is fragile and relationships are impermanent.

This world is designed to imprison us, using anything and everything to distract us from our spiritual purpose. Our true, original home is with the

Lord in Sach Khand, and we need to prepare for our return home, which entirely depends on our spiritual practice and the grace of our Master.

We need to use our allotted time in the world to attend conscientiously to our worldly duties, but while doing this, we need to keep our attention directed towards the Lord. In other words, while working through our destiny in this world, we must not lose focus on our spiritual goal.

Constant simran is the antidote to our mind's absorption with the world. Only our conscious, focused application of simran will enable us to still the mind sufficiently to achieve what the masters call 'dying while living.'

In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*By the grace of the Master, we cut asunder our attachments with the world and forget its troubles and miseries. Daily, through the practice of meditation, we die. We Die to Live, to enjoy the eternal bliss and peace of our True Home, and live forever.*

The mystics stress the importance of keeping our objective in mind during our spiritual journey. We cannot afford to be distracted by the world's fairground, brimming with delights and temptations. We know where our attention must be: awareness of God is only obtainable by sincere and focused meditation.

In *Message Divine*, Guru Nanak is quoted as saying: "Constant simran is the ladder to the palace of the Lord. It is priceless and comes only to a rare fortunate one through the grace of the Master."

We all have a yearning for some form of divine connection to enable us to live more in the presence of God. The following quote from the book *Awareness of the Divine* effectively sums it up for us:

*Ultimately, it is all so very simple, and it has all been said before. We are spiritual beings living in the ocean of the divine Being, of God. All the problems of the world, personal or otherwise, have just one source – our forgetfulness or unawareness of this one Reality, of the divine presence in everything. The meaning and purpose of life are enfolded in this mystery, and enlightenment is to discover who and what we truly are.*



# The Human Body Is the Temple of the Lord

*The Lord in whom are contained many creations,  
Dwells within me.  
Why search for him in temples  
When the human body itself is the temple of the Lord?  
Go into that temple,  
Meditate there and find the real form of God.  
Experience gained through such practice  
Makes the devotee realize that the origin of the creation  
And the Creator himself are verily within his own being;  
They exist within his own soul.  
The devotee discovers  
That the Lord has neither roots nor branches,  
That he has no family name,  
That he is beyond comprehension.  
Truly, he is permanent and immutable;  
The four walls of a temple do not confine him.  
Where he is, there is neither time nor timelessness,  
Neither emotion nor devotion,  
Neither salvation nor liberation,  
Neither day, nor night.  
My Satguru, Baba Ji, has graciously let me see all this  
And made me one with the Lord eternally, says Tuka.  
Tukaram, The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*



# Perception versus Reality

Our perception of everything is based on our perspectives, which are coloured by the information we have available to us and our unconscious biases. It is, therefore, difficult to perceive things objectively.

We cloud reality with personal biases and then adopt that clouded reality as truth. This applies equally to our religious and spiritual beliefs. True mystics, however, share their experiences with us as empirical evidence, and do so in an objective and impartial manner. They teach us the fundamental truths of spirituality, as well as how to experience the spirit ourselves.

One spiritual truth, or reality, is that every action has a consequence. The precision of this universal law is applied as meticulously as every other natural law. No one is immune to the natural laws of science, such as: gravity, physics and motion, and similarly, no one is exempt from the natural law of consequences.

This law is better known as the law of karma, or to use the biblical phrase, 'as you sow, so shall you reap.' When we perform good deeds, we earn the appropriate rewards. Performing bad deeds equally earns their exact consequences. The law is fair and impartial and ensures that perfect justice applies equally to everyone, without favour or bias.

Another spiritual truth is that our existence does not begin with our birth and end with our death. Our body is only a vehicle for our sojourn in this particular period of our infinite existence. Maharaj Jagat Singh said:

*This life is but a link in an infinite chain of existence. The body perishes but the soul lives on – immortal, treading the path back from its painful separation and prodigality to its blissful return to the mansions of the Lord.*

*The Science of the Soul*

This leads us to yet another natural law – the law of reincarnation. Under this law, the soul migrates from one body to the next, to reap the consequences of its actions from innumerable previous births.

While the application of both the laws of karma and reincarnation are precise, it does not demand that the consequences of actions be applied immediately, and neither is it necessary for them to be applied in the same



life. Since these consequences are carried from one life to another, it is also impossible to link an action directly with its consequence.

This scenario is the perfect trap for our continued existence in the creation, because we act ceaselessly while unconscious of the direct consequences of our actions. We therefore act without fear of repercussion and without awareness of the huge amount of debt we are accumulating that must be settled in some future life.

Most religions and spiritual paths have a moral code, or a code of ethics by which an aspirant should conduct his life. These codes are generally rooted in the biblical principle 'as you sow, so shall you reap.' Despite this, many assume that we are governed only by man-made laws and judged by these laws. When someone commits an illegal act, they invariably plead not guilty. Sometimes, through a loophole, they evade justice and assume their actions have escaped any consequences. But no one can escape the natural law of consequences.

Maharaj Jagat Singh explains:

*The law of karma is universal. It is the fixed and the immutable law of nature. Each soul must reap what it has sown. Every soul shall have to bear the exact consequences of its actions.*

*The Science of the Soul*

This law matters because the debt, or karma we create keeps us tied down to this creation for eternity. To free ourselves from the creation, we must remove this karmic barrier. We must confine our actions to those that yield desirable consequences. We must stop accumulating unnecessary new karma, and we must clear the existing accumulated karmic debt.

Mystics, who have attained this spiritual liberation, are authorized to teach us how to achieve the same freedom. They prescribe a lifestyle that is conducive to achieving this goal. Their teachings cover every aspect of living, including our diet and our moral code. They also explain how we accumulate karmic debt. Sant Mat literature deals extensively with our diet, providing cogent reasons for it. The literature also provides a comprehensive guide on how we ought to behave and live in this world.

*Treasure Beyond Measure* quotes a letter Maharaj Charan Singh wrote to an initiate:

*When you started taking liberty with your diet and compromising with the basic principles of Sant Mat, it terribly pained me, as I knew its consequences, but I never said anything to you about it lest I may hurt you.... For the last three or four months you were insisting to know from me as to why you have to suffer so much, though all through you were conscious within yourself of its cause.*

As human beings we make mistakes. The Masters advise us not to focus on past mistakes but to live according to the Sant Mat principles. Then all that will remain is for us to remove the barrier of our accumulated karma.

Maharaj Ji used the analogy of a light bulb to give us a concept of our predicament. When a bright light bulb has numerous wrappings of black cloth wrapped around it, the light, no matter how bright, will be obscured. If we remove one layer it will make no difference at all. Similarly, if we remove the second and third, it will still appear to make very little difference to the obscured light. This may tempt us to give up our search for the light, but if we do, the light will remain obscured forever.

Similarly, our daily meditation is our endeavour to remove our accumulated karma. If, with courage, faith and obedience, we continue to remove one wrapping at a time, no matter how laborious and futile we perceive our effort to be, we will make progress. Eventually, when all the wrappings have been removed, we will realize the full brightness of the light.

The consciousness, or soul, within everyone, is like the light bulb. However, it is not visible because it is encrusted with karmic debt, similar to the black wrappings over the light bulb. Only when we clear this enormous barrier will the light shine clearly once again, and we will realize our true self.

Self-realization is the process of raising our consciousness and developing our awareness of what we truly are – pure soul. We are not aware of this because our attention is scattered and focused externally. To experience this reality of our soul, we must redirect our attention from the outer physical, material world to the spiritual world within us.

As a concept this is simple to understand. However, only those who have tried to walk the spiritual path, or attempted self-realization, understand that putting these concepts into practice is overshadowed by the difficulty of achieving this goal.

We must differentiate between walking the path and realizing the goal of the path. Walking the path requires that we live a particular lifestyle, which we all can do. But achieving the goal is a long process that often takes decades or even a lifetime to attain. This should not discourage us because the masters assure us that achieving the goal is inevitable. Our disciplined and obedient efforts at daily meditation are our attempts to reach the goal, and these efforts help us build an essential relationship of love with our own beloved Master.



*On reaching Par Brahm, all the material, astral, and causal coverings of mind and matter that envelop the soul are removed. Then the soul is pure spirit. This is self-realisation. Here there is no form, no cover, no shape, no youth nor old age – only the soul, shining in its pure radiance, a drop of existence, knowledge, and bliss, capable of comprehending the great ocean, its creator.*

*Spiritual Gems*



# Pleasure and Pain

We often hear it said that our Master asks very little of us in return for all that he does. Some of what he asks of us is fairly easy – what we eat and drink, for instance. There is, however, one request that is not so easy: we are asked not to distinguish between pleasure and pain, but regard them both as equal.

We can accept all the good things that come to us very happily. It can also become possible to accept unpleasant things if we start thinking of them in the context of Sant Mat. Our ultimate goal is release from the cycle of birth and rebirth in order to return to our original home.

If we are initiated, it is by the grace of the Supreme Lord who has seen the hunger in our souls. The Master has taken control of our karma and is allocating it to us in packages that we can handle because he loves us and is busy mapping out our return to him. Our Master will steer us through this life exactly as he wishes, and when we accept the Lord's will, we will also cheerfully accept whatever comes to us.

In *The Dawn of Light*, Maharaj Sawan Singh wrote:

*Take for granted that all that has happened, is happening or will happen is with his will. So whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we should remain contented. If he sends us misery, we should accept it with pleasure, and if he keeps us happy we should take it as his children. So do not consider that your life is not a bed of roses. Take it as his gift and be happy in it.*

As human beings our karmic debt is twofold. Our destiny is the payment of our current debt. Simultaneously, we create new debt with virtually every breath and action we take. All karmas must be settled which is why we have to be careful about the choices we make. Without divine intervention there could never be full repayment of all our karmic debts but with our Masters help, our debt can be reduced, if not paid in full.

Again, in *The Dawn of Light*, Great Master tells us:

*Whatever good or bad happens to you, through whatever person or object, directly proceeds from our loving Father. All persons and objects are but tools in his hands. If an evil befalls you, think it to be his greatest mercy... Our Master, by taking us through this suffering speedily, intends to relieve us*

*of our burden earlier. And by this early payment of debt – because debt it is – the amount of the suffering is very much lessened. If we had to pay one ton at first, now we are released by paying one pound only.*

Our Master is doing all this because he loves us, and we learn to love him in response to the love he gives us. Love for the Master is necessary because if we love him, we will want to obey and please him. And that love also cuts us loose from our many attachments to the world and it lessens, or even eliminates our desires for the objects of this world.

We are warned that every desire will have to be fulfilled. It is these desires that bring humans back into one life after another. What we are aiming for now is to get off the wheel of reincarnation. Our souls have become weary of this endless coming and going; therefore, we want to do what our Master asks of us.

Even though our meditation may sometimes be more a source of frustration for us than a pleasure, we still need to do it. We have been told that it is our meditation that is going to free us from our entrapment in this world, as Great Master explains:

*If one's faith is firm and unshakeable, and one daily gives time to the practices, and has no worldly desires, then there is no power which can bring one back to this plane. There is no rebirth for such souls. Birth is for those who die weeping with desires unfulfilled.*

*Spiritual Gems*

Maharaj Charan Singh has echoed this, explaining that our desires become the karma for our next birth. The very fact that we are here now is proof of our past desires. Our desires helped to shape the lives we are now going through. We need to keep reminding ourselves that we must be careful what we wish for, because every desire will be satisfied, in this life or in the next.

*All desires are fulfilled, but they may not be fulfilled in this life....  
Whatever you want from him, whatever you ask him for, he will give you.  
He will never be tired of giving to you, but you have to come back again  
and again and again and again to get all that you want.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

Even now, we are learning to be content with our destiny. If we look within ourselves, we find that we have no passionate desire for any other kind of life than the one we are living. When we take initiation from our Master, we accept that we are totally in his hands. We also accept that from the moment of our birth nothing can happen that is not in line with the Lord's will. In *Spiritual Letters*, Baba Jaimal Singh told us:

*Whatever is to happen, happens according to the will of the Supreme Lord, Radha Soami. Without him no one can do anything. Have firm faith in this, my son. Man can do nothing: he can neither increase nor decrease anything.... The Supreme Lord, has assumed the human form to direct worldly affairs on the material plane. This is the divine law.*

That means that even our long struggle on the path is in accordance with his will. There may be times when we feel impatient or upset about the difficulty and length of our struggle. We make the effort and would like to experience the results of our effort. However, we learn to accept that results are in the Master's hands, and he tells us that he is happy with our poor attempts at meditation. Even these have a purpose.

Perhaps we should try to see our efforts in a different light. We are meditating not for success but because he has asked us to do this and because we want to please him. We trust that every meditation, no matter how good or bad it seems to be, is being used by our Master to clear our karmas and cut our attachments.

So we meditate as an act of humble obedience, without making any demands or requests. Even if our meditation does not appear to bring results, we should sit there in simple acceptance of his will.

If nothing else, at least our meditation is helping to crush our ego. There is probably nothing more humbling than meditation! And eventually we do learn that we should have no expectation attached to it.

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Ji shows that even with our poor meditation, we are in the process of becoming something more than we are now. Through our meditation, and living in his will, we are slowly becoming a more spiritual being. We will continue growing until we are ready to merge with his Radiant Form.

*Just give yourself to him. To love somebody means to give yourself without expecting anything in return. To give yourself, to submit yourself, to resign to him is all meditation.... In love you don't exist. You just lose yourself, you just submit yourself, you just resign to his will.... The more we give, the more it grows, the more we lose ourselves, the more we become another being.*

*Die to Live*



*Happiness lies in worship of the spirit within and nowhere else. Happiness doesn't lie outside at all. It is a self-deception to think that I can be happy here, I can be happy there. If I have this, I'll be happy. If I have that, I'll be happy. It is a self-deception. And the moment comes in everyone's life when we do realize that nothing belongs to us, and we don't belong to anybody at all. So unless we belong to the One to whom we really belong and who belongs to us, we can never be happy. And that One is the Father, the Lord.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*



# Taking Refuge in the Master

We live in a troubled world, and consequently, we all have troubles to work through. There are times when a loved one passes away, when we may be struggling with illness, or when it seems as though our family is falling apart. There are even periods when our spiritual life feels dry, and we feel forsaken.

And yet, believe it or not, we should be thankful for these difficult times. Maharaj Charan Singh often referred to adversity as a blessing in disguise, for it is then that we are pulled closer to the Lord. As harsh as it may sound, a death in the family, financial difficulties, illness or humiliation are all signs of his grace because grace is anything that turns us towards the Lord.

From our perspective, we may define grace as being given a good partner, a comfortable home, a prosperous life, and so on. But the saints have a different concept of grace. Maharaj Ji explains:

*He may take your wife from you or your child or your friend. And you may become frustrated by this world and turn back to the Father. That may be his grace, to pull you out of all the attachments of the world and make you realize the reality which you never would have thought about otherwise. You were so much engrossed in your own love, your achievements and your own wealth that you have practically forgotten him. That is not his grace. His grace is what pulls you back to him, and that may be a very bitter pill.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

In times of adversity we can keep our balance by holding on to our love for the Master, even if our love for the Master seems weak or non-existent.

There may also be periods when we are going through difficulties and are unaware of his presence and love. At these times, we look for comfort in the people who are close to us. But life teaches us that to expect perfect love in human relationships is folly because human love is short-lived. The love that is permanent is the love between Master and disciple, which, in truth, is the love between the Lord and the soul.



How do we grow in this kind of love? Maharaj Ji gave a simple answer in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II: “In love we always give.... It is just giving and giving.” Love means to give, to the point of removing the self.

The only things we really have to give are our time and attention – our daily two and a half hours of meditation practice. Nonetheless, it is a gesture of our love and gratitude.

In almost every question-and-answer session there is someone who expresses their gratitude to the Master. This is how Maharaj Ji responded to such words of thanks:

*Actually, we have no words with which to thank him – we cannot thank him at all with this tongue, whatever the Lord or the master does for us in this life. We owe our very existence, all these privileges, just to the Father. This very human birth is nothing but his grace.*

*Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III

We owe everything to the immeasurable grace of the Lord and the Master. And, we can express true gratitude in the way that pleases him the most, which is by giving him our attention, effort and love through our meditation.

It is possible, with absolute obedience, to go through our destiny while focusing on our meditation. Difficult, perhaps, yet it is possible. We must make Sant Mat the central theme of our lives, and meditation the absolute core of our existence. Meditation must take precedence over everything that destiny throws our way. This focused practice will bring the changes in attitude and behaviour that will make us the better human beings that the Masters suggest we become. As we undergo these changes, our ego starts to dwindle and our attention shifts to the Master, rather than being focused on ourselves. Ego is the primary obstacle to our spiritual growth.

In *Living Meditation*, the author compares the ego to a glass bottle filled with water floating in the ocean:

*We thought we were the bottle instead of the water. Eventually, the bottle will be smashed by the waves against the rocks and the glass will break. Once the bottle is broken, where is our separate identity? Where is the single drop? It doesn't exist any more. It has become the ocean.*

By transcending the ego we realize that we are, in fact, pure consciousness and limitless love. But we will only experience this reality when we go beyond the ego and merge back into the ocean of the Lord. Simran is critical in achieving this realization, because it is vitally important that we replace worldly thoughts with simran. This will help us conquer the ego, which will release the soul from its bonds. It is our ego that keeps us from experiencing the refuge that the Lord so freely offers.

To rise above the ego is the fundamental principle of love, where the desires of the lover narrow down to living in the will of the Beloved, and the self is dissolved into the Beloved. The fading of the ego loosens the ties of worldly attachment, gradually allowing the soul to transcend the illusion of the world and merge with the Beloved.

A true spiritual seeker may still feel very alone at times because of the intense longing and nostalgia that love for the Lord creates in him. However, an insatiable longing in the heart is the prayer that never ceases. It is this prayer that God answers by drawing the soul closer to him.

Oddly, the closer we come to him, the further we may feel he is from us because the hunger grows. In *The Book of Mirdad* we read about the great longing or nostalgia:

*Like fever also is the Great Nostalgia. As fever, ignited in the body, saps the vitality of the body while burning up its poisons, so this Nostalgia, born of the friction in the heart, debilitates the heart, as it consumes away its dross and every superfluity.*

*And like a thief is the Great Nostalgia. For as a sneaking thief relieves his victim of a burden, yet leaves him sore embittered, so this Nostalgia, by stealth, lifts all the burdens of the heart, yet leaves it most disconsolate and burdened by its very lack of burdens.*

Mikhail Naimy's description of the Great Nostalgia here paints a desolate picture. But we must not be discouraged because the Lord himself longs for his disciple. He has deliberately created within us an inner desire – a hunger – to know him and find refuge in him. So we meditate, and his heart rejoices when we draw near to him through meditation.

We are not alone on this journey. Even when we feel desolate and it is hard to perceive him, our Master is ever-present. He is our refuge

and strength, present in times of trouble. He is more eager for us to be successful in our journey than we are. Life presents us with many challenges, but if we keep holding on to his hand by practising our meditation sincerely, we will always have his shelter and protection.

Responding to a disciple's concern regarding his fear of losing the atmosphere of the Master's presence when he is no longer with the Master physically, Maharaj Ji asked: "Are you sure that I am not here when I am not here?" He continued:

*If we can just know and understand that we are never alone, that our Master is always with us, we are never without him, then the atmosphere would always be the same. We try to tell ourselves that he is not here when actually he is here. So we have to know that he is always with us.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*



*Without the Satguru's refuge, the being (jeev) can achieve nothing. Whatever spiritual goal is to be attained will be through the grace and mercy of the Satguru. But the being is exceedingly impure, so all the time, every single day, he has to live within the Satguru's refuge and his will.*

*Spiritual Letters*



# The Chariot of Righteousness

## An extract from Ramcharitmanas

When Goswami Tulsidas wrote his Ramcharitmanas in the sixteenth century, he chose to convey his spiritual message using the story from Maharishi Valmiki's Ramayana, an engrossing tale and one of the greatest epics of all time.

It describes how the Lord took birth in human form as Ram, grew up as a prince and married Sita. The epic then recounts how Ram was exiled to the forest, where Sita was kidnapped by Ravan, and then tells of Ram's search for Sita and battle with Ravan and his demon army to rescue her.

Sage Bharadwaj, a great devotee of the Lord Ram, dwelt in his ashram at Prayag. On one occasion, he met the sage Yajnavalkya, who was well known for his wisdom and understanding:

*Please explain to me, O merciful lord, Yajnavalkya,  
who is Ram?*

*One Ram I have heard of is the son of King Dashrath  
of Ayodhya, whose deeds are renowned.*

*This Ram suffered greatly from the pain of separation  
when his wife was kidnapped by Ravan,  
and in fury he slew Ravan in battle.*

Ravan was the demon-king of Lanka... He was a great Vedic scholar, but found that all his wisdom deserted him when he was overcome with lust for Sita.

Vibhishan was Ravan's brother but he looked upon Ram as his spiritual master.

As the final battle between Ram and Ravan is about to commence, Tulsidas speaks of the chariot which leads to victory. He offers this allegory to those who seek spiritual liberation and wish to develop qualities that will be needed to win the battle with the mind... Ravan boarded his magnificent chariot, which could move as swiftly as the wind...

Vibhishan was greatly concerned seeing Ravan on his war-chariot and Ram had none. His great affection for the Lord caused a feeling of doubt in his heart, and moving forward he bowed and said: "Dear Lord, how will you be able to overcome this mighty warrior? You have no chariot or any protection either for your body or your feet? "

In order to dispel Vibhishan's doubts and fears, Ram answered his friend lovingly by saying: "Listen, dear friend, the chariot that leads to victory is different." He continued:

*Valour and patience*

*are the two wheels of this chariot.*

*Firm adherence to the truth and noble conduct*

*constitute its banner and flag.*

*This chariot is pulled forward by four horses:*

*strength, discrimination, self-discipline  
and benevolence, which are controlled  
by the reins of forgiveness, compassion  
and equanimity of mind.*

*Devotion to God is the wise driver of the dharm-rath*

*(Chariot of Righteousness) and detachment is its shield.*

*Contentment is the dagger, charity the axe,*

*discerning mind the most powerful missile,  
and highest wisdom the tough relentless bow.*

*A pure and still mind is the quiver,*

*and calmness, self-restraint and adherence  
to well-established ethical principles and rules  
are the sharp arrows.*

*Reverence and devotion for the learned*

*and for one's own master is the coat of mail  
that provides impenetrable protection.*

*To attain victory, there is nothing else*

*that could be more efficacious than these.*

*O friend! One who owns a chariot of such spiritual piety*

*has no enemy to conquer anywhere.*

Again and again he reiterated his devotion to Ram and happily bowed his head to him.

Tulsidas tells us that victory can be gained only if we ride the dharm-rath, the chariot of righteousness. This chariot is not something external; it is within.



# Book Review

## Novice to Master: An Ongoing Lesson in the Extent of My Own Stupidity

BY SOKO MORINAGA, TRANSLATED BY BELENDA ATTAWAY YAMAKAWA

PUBLISHER: SOMERVILLE, MA: WISDOM PUBLICATIONS, 2004.

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This autobiographical work describes the trials, struggles, and triumphs of Soko Morinaga Roshi (1948–1995), a renowned Zen monk and teacher who lived in Japan but travelled the world to deliver talks of guidance to the lay community. He wrote many books and articles and was the head of Hanazono University that provides training for the Rinzai sect. He was affiliated with the Buddhist Society of London which he visited every year.

The book is an honest, funny, and profoundly insightful account of the difficulties of the spiritual path, delivered in a spirit of humility and of humour directed primarily at the author himself. There are three parts of the book: Part I, titled Novice, describes Soko Roshi's relationship with his teachers and the humbling trials of his novitiate; Part II, titled Training, describes the spiritual practices and insights he gathered throughout the long years of his training; Part III, titled Master, describes the spiritual guidance he offered to his disciples and friends. The chapters are short, only two to four pages, with titles such as *The Meaning of Courage*, *The Death of My Grandfather*, and *To Die While Alive*.

The book is a hymn to life lived without expectations, in the present moment.

Its main message is that “there is a state of mind that surpasses cause and effect, a state other than the one in which we seek to gain ‘that’ by doing ‘this.’” It also contains a warning: “living a life solely based on the law of cause and effect – acting in anticipation of future or immediate results – a person will, without fail, come up against a barrier and feel despair.” Such a person will not be able to glide smoothly through the unique challenges posed by old age, illness, and death.

Soko Roshi illustrates the ideal and the falling away from this ideal with real-life examples from his own struggles and from the confusion and challenges faced by others. Particularly dramatic is the story of Miss Okamoto, a nun at his monastery who had served as attendant to his

deceased predecessor. She was diagnosed with cancer in her old age. Miss Okamoto had a strong reaction to her impending death: “Not only was Miss Okamoto afraid of dying, she was also ashamed of that fear.”

In such a turbulent state of mind, she came for guidance to the much younger Soko Roshi who understood her problem as lack of balance. She had meticulously fulfilled the demands of day-to-day morality. She “had led a flawless, commendable life,” endeavouring always to do better, “but always with her teeth clenched fast.” What was lacking? Soko Roshi comments: “The kind of effort in which one bisects good and bad and then chooses one over the other with the intent to stack up causes for positive results does not in itself produce peace of mind.”

Soko Roshi uses Miss Okamoto to convey his teachings and insights about the balanced life that simultaneously fulfils the responsibilities of life to the highest standard and keeps death and demise in sight: “Without staring death in the eye, as the perpetual reverse side of life, we cannot live life fully and completely. Of this I am quite convinced.” He adds: “The person who has lived an exemplary life as a member of society will be especially frightened to witness the siphoning away of their own physical and mental power.” According to Soko Roshi, life is not what is between birth and disposal in a coffin. “True existence is birth and death, repeating itself, instant by instant.” The way to live is “always now – just now – come into being. Always now – just now – give yourself to death. Practising this is Zen practice.”

One can easily make the mistake of focusing more on the tangible aspects of the spiritual path and forget about the foundation – the practice of “emptiness.” In Buddhism this means not being empty but rather letting go of clinging and attachments through regular spiritual practice. Soko Roshi says that this spiritual practice is “inexhaustible dharma” – “dharma” meaning spiritual teachings, their practice, and the realities they reveal – which is indispensable for fulfilling the external duties of “exhaustible dharma.” He explains the two types of dharma:

*All being is without fail exhausted. But the voidness or emptiness, which is the very foundation of all being, is inexhaustible. That the exhaustible and inexhaustible are not separate is expressed in the well-known line from the Heart Sutra: “Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form.”*

Focusing just on the exhaustible, or form, robs us of tranquillity in the evening of our lives and makes it harder to transcend the barriers of old age, sickness, and death. On the other hand, focusing on the inexhaustible alone, misunderstanding it, one can fall into nihilism and pass one's life in vain. "But there is another way: the middle way, falling into neither extreme. The middle way is called the dharma way of liberation, liberation from both the exhaustible and inexhaustible." He means that the middle way is the realization that the exhaustible and the inexhaustible are not separate realms, are not opposed and mutually exclusive realities. Liberation is to realize the intricate interplay between the two – temporary form dissolves into eternal emptiness, and the eternal emptiness pours itself into temporary form. Thus life and death are tightly interlinked: "I understand the words birth and death as Great Life, dynamic and dancing lively."

To fully realize this is doable, though one must "wring sweat of oil from one's body." It is a new, transformed way of looking at one's life that anyone can achieve with practice, seeing even the most dire of situations – dying of cancer – as a play. Miss Okamoto's last words were: "Looking back, I have led a pretty stuffy life all these years. So I think I'll just take a ball and go out and play in the woods now."

Under Soko Roshi's guidance, during the last days of her life, Miss Okamoto attained what he calls "the samadhi of play," "samadhi" meaning a state of inner concentration.

*The samadhi of play is the state of mind in which one performs an activity without appraising its relative value, just as the child who plays in the sand would never dream of letting someone else take her place. It was with this mind that Miss Okamoto went out to the woods to play ball.*

The samadhi of play is not a rejection of the strictures of form, of exhaustible dharma. It is rather a full and deep realization of the limitations of form – of our own body and the external aspects of the spiritual path. The samadhi of play is the discovery of the middle way that embraces the mysterious fluidity between form and emptiness. According to Soko Roshi this is the knowledge, the science, most worth attaining – realizing that form is just a game, a temporary, exhaustible play, and that behind it is an eternal, inexhaustible reality.

Soko Roshi emphasizes that it is in the human heart that form and emptiness intertwine, and so it is only within the human heart that this great knowledge can be attained:



*Your heart is the life of the great universe. Our own hearts are the womb from which everything originates, and just as I am a manifestation of the Buddha, so are you a manifestation of Buddha. Therefore, the Zen school teaches that we should not set out to know “everything”; we should investigate that which is closest at hand, our own bodies and hearts. So it is that just by looking into your own tiny mind, you can ... realize the truth of the entire boundless universe!*

The author hopes that his simple narrative will inspire others to live “each and every instant with great care, aware that just this is the great, dynamic, lively dancing life.”



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