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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Yours Affectionately

A satsangi should fully realize the great value of human life and the true purpose for which the Creator has bestowed this rare gift on us. Eating, sleeping, procreation and sense pleasures, all this we have experienced in millions of lives even in the lower species to which we transmigrated before again obtaining the human body. The purpose of human life is to enable us to know ourselves and to know the Lord, which cannot be accomplished in any other form. For this a soul has to have a human form, so our main attention now should be towards God-realization. All other things and interests are secondary and unimportant.

We should attend to our meditation so vigorously every day that it actually becomes a part of our life. If we do not perform our devotions for at least the minimum time of two-and-a-half hours every day, we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we have been granted a human body. If a disciple regularly does his duty towards his Lord, with love and devotion, he will realize that the Master guides and protects him at every step, that the Master is always with him, not only in this life but also helps him at death and throughout eternity. So take a pledge from today that whether your mind likes it or not, you will give a full two-and-a-half hours to simran and bhajan every day, most regularly. Never let a single day go by without it, and try to meditate at an appointed time every day, preferably in the early morning hours. Regularity is most essential for spiritual progress. You must do your duty without asking anything in return.

Do not mind whether you see any light within or not, or whether the Sound is audible. You simply do your duty and leave the results to the Master. When a man pays wages to one who works for him, do you think that the Lord would not do so? He alone knows what is good for us and when it is to be given. He will pay in abundance. Have faith in him.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*



The Voice of God

When we look up at the night sky and see the shimmering stars, it is difficult to imagine that they are many light years away. Yet, the Shabd, or audible life stream, which resonates throughout the entire universe and permeates every pore of the human body, seems so distant and inaccessible.

There is not a cubic millimetre of space in existence which is not filled with this music. Sweeter and sweeter its heavenly strains vibrate through every living being, great or small, from world to world, and from universe to universe.

The Path of the Masters

Seldom do we pay attention to the space in between the stars. This vast expanse that we think of as empty sky has also been created by the Shabd. It holds the creation and is permeated with Shabd. Our minds focus on the stars and completely miss the wonder of how they are suspended in seeming nothingness. This empty space does not demand our attention or ask for recognition for the 13.8 billion years it has been sustaining the physical universe – it simply is. Our minds are so attached to the physical that we miss the most perfect example of selfless service right before us.

Astronomers have yet to find an end to the universe, and so we'll never know the exact number of stars. With the help of modern telescopes, scientists estimate there are a trillion galaxies and approximately 100 billion trillion stars, a number so enormous that it is said to surpass every grain of sand on earth.

There is not only one world like this but, as you may suspect, numberless such worlds revolving about their respective suns, and each one has its own spiritual ruler. The number of planets thus inhabited is so great that no mathematician could count them in a thousand lifetimes, even if he could see them.

The Path of the Masters

Each of these stars is like our sun, deriving its heat, energy and light from the Shabd. In *The Path of the Masters* it is written, “Every ray of light in the universe is a phenomenon of this infinite stream of light. Upon its power hangs every star in its orbit.”

The sheer size of the universe is beyond our intellect, and yet everything, down to the tiniest fairyfly, is a manifestation of the very same Shabd. However magnificent it may be, the physical universe is only the starting point when it comes to understanding the magnitude of the sound current, or Word as it is called in the Bible. Above and beyond our universe are numerous other planes which become brighter and finer as one ascends towards the higher regions.

The Word has created all the grand divisions of the great universe. Guru Amar Das says:

Through the Word is the creation and the dissolution.

Through the Word is the evolution of creation again.

Adi Granth, as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV

When we grasp the fact that the Shabd, which is available to us twenty-four hours of the day, is not only sustaining this boundless physical universe and all forms of life but has also created and is sustaining limitless spiritual planes beyond the furthest stars, it is mind-boggling.

The audible life stream is the supreme Creator himself vibrating through space. It is the wave of spiritual life going forth from the Creator to every living thing in the universe. By that current he has created all things, and by it he sustains them.

The Path of the Masters

This omnipresence of the Shabd helps to explain the omnipresence of God. The sound current cannot be given any worldly labels; however, three attributes can be assigned to this self-luminous reality: love, wisdom and power, and the greatest of these is love. But what is love? Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

Love is God and God is love. And it is through the magic of love that God can be realized.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. I

By great good fortune, this infinite power of love, which has created and sustains a universe of over 100 billion trillion stars and endless

heavenly realms, is available to us in a very personal way from the time of initiation by a true master.

The Shabd, which pervades our inner world as well as the outer world, is closer to us than our own skin and is the only means of our salvation.

All saints teach us the same truth: that the only way to find salvation from this world of suffering is through the celestial Sound. Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I: “The union of the soul with the music of the audible life stream which resounds at the third eye in all human beings, is the only way to return to our home.”

True living masters constantly encourage us to meditate and make contact with the real Guru, which is not the physical form that we see, but the divine Word that reverberates in every one of us. In *Sar Bachan*, Soami Ji tells us, “It is via the Dhun (Sound) of each region that the soul can, by degrees, ascend from one region to another, up to the highest stage.” What a wonderful paradox that the quietest, most perfectly hidden Sound in our world happens to be the most powerful, the wisest and the most loving Sound of all – the Voice of God.



When a true living Master – one who has fully experienced spiritual reality and embodies this divine power – imparts the method to experience the Word and gives the key to unlock its inherent potential, this voice of God can be heard within and its light illumines the darkness. It exists equally within all human beings regardless of where they live, their ethnic background, their place in society or their religious or political beliefs.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

Something to Think About

The purpose of the Master's physical form is to create love and desire for the Father within us, to put us on the path, and to create that longing to be one with the Shabd and Nam within. That is why Christ said in the Bible: it is expedient for you that I leave you now, because then you will give more attention to the Holy Ghost within. Now you are so much attached to my physical outside form that you're always running after me and you're not giving proper attention to the Spirit or Holy Ghost within. But when we can't find the Master outside, and we know how to find him within, naturally we will try to find him within. We know the way, we know the Path, so automatically we will go within to the Holy Spirit, the real form of the Master.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

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Ups and downs come into the life of everyone in this world, but a satsangi, who has always the protecting hand of the Master to guide him, should never lose heart in any circumstances. You should valiantly fight the battles of life. A satsangi is never advised to run away from the world or to shirk his duties towards his family or leave his kith and kin. Try to find a good job for yourself and stick to it. We are sure to get what is our share in life. Worry never helped anybody. It does not become a satsangi to lose heart.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

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Whatever comes to man from the Lord is the result of his own actions, and the Lord makes him go through them for his own betterment. On such occasions, although it is sometimes a bitter pill, he should acquiesce in the will of the Lord. If, on the impact of worldly events, he loses concentration and becomes conscious of joys and sorrows, then it is apparent that satsang has had no effect on him so far. Take courage and strengthen and elevate your mind, and perform your duties faithfully.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Stillness in Chaos

Overstimulation and constant noise have become the “new normal” in modern society, creating an environment where inner peace feels elusive. On the other hand is the serenity of the ashram – a place that embodies simplicity, silence, and communal harmony – it bestows on visitors the transformative power of stillness. The ashram serves as a metaphor for the sanctuary we can create within ourselves, where silence and simplicity offer solace from the chaos outside. True peace is not found by fleeing the world, but by cultivating inner power that can endure amidst life’s demands, inspiring us to seek this tranquility in our own lives.

Oneness, stillness, silence; these are alien concepts in today’s frenetic world. Blaring horns, glaring neon lights, and the incessant chatter of banalities create a clamor that some embrace as music, while others deem them mere noise. This urban roar is an endless dirge pulsing through the veins of the city. Even in the supposed quiet of night, it creates an unrelenting buzz, reminding me that somewhere someone is always awake. This concrete ocean envelops me. Every pore of my skin feels the collective energy of the multitudes around me; I cannot escape. Skyscrapers rise like sentinels, their glass facades reflecting the dizzying speed of those traveling beneath them.

How does one breathe when the air smells of gasoline and ambition? How does one steady the mind when the city beats faster than one’s own heart? How does one find peace when the night emits a cacophony of chaos? For us outliers, those who seek an escape, where can we go?

The ashram. It is a sanctuary of simplicity amidst the storm, purposefully positioned just beyond the city’s grasp. The ashram’s gates, wide and open, beckon me with an unspoken promise of retreat. Within these walls, the world falls away, giving rise to something gentler, something ancient. The buildings here do not reach for the sky like the city’s skyscrapers; instead, they sit low, close to the earth, blending into the landscape as if they’ve grown from the soil itself. The towering trees, silent witnesses to centuries of seekers, whisper their secrets to the wind, their leaves chiming with a wisdom too old to be spoken aloud.

The city's chatter and din fade into distant murmurs, replaced by a deep, resonant quiet. The air is thick – smelling of earth, incense, flowers in bloom, and something ineffable that clings to the wind like a lingering breath. The ashram's gardens are a symphony of color: vibrant pinks, purples, and yellows dancing together in effortless harmony. Every petal, every blade of grass seems to exist in perfect accord with the universe, swaying gently in rhythm with the heartbeat of the earth.

Here, silence is alive. It is not simply the absence of sound; it is a palpable presence. The smallest sounds – the rustling of leaves, the soft crunch of feet on a dirt path, the distant chant of a shabad – can be felt within. Amidst this solace there is motion, too. I walk the pathways, weaving among fellow seekers united in our search for peace. Mothers glide along, their vibrant dupattas trailing behind them like flowing rivers, the little hands of their children clutching each end of the fabric with total trust. Here people move with purpose but without hurry, revering a higher power. Devotees from all corners of the world arrive, shedding their armors of ego – no titles here, only a shared thirst for peace.

We sit on woven mats surrounded by thousands of fellow souls, the atmosphere charged with an expectant serenity. The vast expanse of devotees forms an ocean of bodies, yet there's no restlessness – only an unspoken kinship. Eyes closed, we gather as one, bound not by proximity but by purpose. The sheer magnitude of the crowd is unfathomable, yet it feels as though the world has shrunk to this shared moment. The silence is dense, and even the softest whoosh of cloth or a whispered breath echoes like a bell. Gratitude fills the gaps between us like a gentle breeze. The external world fades away, and the only sound that matters is the silence we share, each soul tuned to the same sacred frequency.

After the sermon, crowds rush to the ashram's langar, a testament to humility. The mouth-watering scent of golden dal wafts through the air, its velvety texture infused with fragrant cumin and earthy turmeric. Steaming heaps of basmati rice glisten, their delicate grains perfumed with hints of cardamom and bay leaf. As I chew, the flavors linger, warming the soul as much as the body. This humble feast, free of pretension, is richer than any Michelin-star experience; its true richness lies in the spirit of sharing. We sit side by side – strangers, yet bound by deep equality, embodying the act

of serving and being served. After eating, we each wash our own plates – this simple deed of service leaves a taste far deeper than flavour alone.

As the sun sets, the sound of shabads ripple through the open spaces, their melodic cadence rising and falling. It is not just music; it is a vibration that touches deep within. Devotees sit with their eyes closed as the sacred hymn washes over them like a cleansing tide, dissolving all worldly tension.

In this stillness, the mind, once cluttered with the noise of the world, finds space to breathe. Here, I begin to understand that peace is not the absence of sound or movement but the presence of a profound quietude within, untouched by the chaos outside. This is the ashram's gift: the discovery that within each of us lies a wellspring of calm, an inner refuge waiting to be unearthed. It reveals a simple truth: peace is not found by fleeing the world but by stilling the mind amidst the tempest of life.



People who have made spiritual progress need not look for the solitude of forests and caves. They have found serenity in the stillness of their own minds; they can be poised amidst boisterous crowds because they can, at will, retire into that inner solitude. No outside peace can match the inner tranquillity, for what enduring peace can a brook or grove bring when the mind is not calm?

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *My Submission*

Did You Know?

Trials and troubles come to us in our life to imprint on our heart the true nature of the ephemeral pleasures of this world. To a thinking mind these unhappy moments often prove a blessing in disguise.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

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The Master is always with you and is giving proper help and guidance. If at times things go against your wish, it is for your benefit. For the Master is to do what he thinks best for you and not what you may think is best for you. Persevere with love and faith, and you will succeed. Guru Nanak says: “In this path let your foot take a step forward always and never turn your face backwards. Make good in this very life so that there will be no more rebirth.” Says Maulvi Rum: “In this path struggle on and on and do not rest even at the last breath.” It is the weakening of the mind that brings failure. Success, even in this material world, comes when one puts himself wholeheartedly into it.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

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Do not indulge in idle, frivolous talk. If you are conscious of your spiritual poverty, devote every minute to becoming worthier to receive your rich heritage. Mere light-hearted gossip (frivolity) makes a mockery of your prayers before the Lord. It brands you a hypocrite and cuts at the very roots of spirituality. Extravagant spending of precious time and energy is incompatible with your pleading for grace. Think more, and talk less.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*



Lighten to Enlighten

One of the few qualities unique to humans is laughter. We are perhaps the only species that can really laugh. We don't come across a bird or a dog laughing; they may smile, but the privilege of laughter is given to humans alone. Because God created humans in his own image, perhaps it means that God laughs too, so we can assume that laughter is innately spiritual.

Maharaj Charan Singh clarifies the line between being humorous and being offensive:

Everybody wants to be happy in this world. When you have happiness within, you want to share it with others. And that is humour, nothing else. Humour doesn't mean taunting anybody or making a fool of yourself. You see, enjoying a joke means that you enjoy it and the other person also enjoys it. You can't enjoy a joke at the cost of another person; that is no humour at all. That is taunting or ridiculing the other person, which is wrong. Humour means the other person enjoys as much as you enjoy. And when you are happy within, you can't help radiating happiness and sharing it with others. You go to a miserable person, he'll make you miserable. You go to a happy person, he will automatically make you happy. He will relax you in two minutes.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Humour should predispose us towards positivity and untie us from our baser, more primitive tendencies. While fixing those raw spots in our personality, we forget to take our personality lightly (reinforcing the fear of exposing it). However, having a sense of humour helps us to laugh at ourselves, the situation and even have compassion for the pain it might be masking, eventually helping us to accept ourselves completely. Humour also helps us to relax and keep our balance, both of which are necessary for meditation.

Often the Buddha would make an analogy that was simple, concrete and undeniable to get his point across. A particularly impressive example of the Buddha's use of examples from a disciple's own everyday life is shown in his conversation with Shrona, who had been a musician, skilled at tuning an instrument called the vina.

Once upon a time, Ananda, one of the Buddha's closest disciples, was teaching meditation to Shrona. Correct meditation would not come to Shrona because he was sometimes too tense and sometimes too loose. He went to see the Buddha, and the Buddha asked, "When you were a layman, you were a good vina-player, weren't you?"

"Yes, I played very well."

"Did your vina sound best when the strings were very slack or when they were very taut?"

"It sounded best when they were neither too taut nor too loose."

"It is the same for your mind," said the Buddha, and by practising with that advice Shrona attained his goal.

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2

Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us that "a sense of humour is a God-given gift." Only when we are relaxed can we be humorous. If we are happy within, we naturally radiate happiness. Now, if humour is innately spiritual, then the way to cultivate it has to be spiritual.

*In pain, O Nanak, creatures all remain
Yet happy they whom Nam doth e'er sustain.*

Guru Nanak, as quoted in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. I

We are aware that meditation leads to true happiness, but often there is a misconception that meditation leads to seriousness.

Seriousness in what way? Doesn't it lead to happiness?... Seriousness means you see that you are not taking life very lightly. You are serious about your destination, your path, your principles – of course you are serious about them. But if you are happy and travelling on the road, you are travelling happily.

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

The lasting bliss we seek comes when we put our mind in touch with the light and sound – when we shift from being world-oriented to God-oriented. We embrace the spiritual life, seek a guru, follow his teachings and practise regular meditation. Consistent meditative practice trains us to withdraw our consciousness from the nine portals of the body where the insipid pleasures of the senses flow. By withdrawing our attention,

we transcend the sensual pleasures and are able to rise above them by holding our attention at the eye centre. We begin to taste the ambrosia of real joy. With meditation, the inner self is realized, and so is the transitory nature of this illusive world. With gradual awakening, we understand that everything we go through is because of our karmas and is temporary.

*The false are in love with the false,
and have forgotten their Creator;
whom to love and make one's friend,
when the whole world is in a state of flux?*

Guru Nanak, as quoted in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II

Why worry about all the things or forms of this world when they are perishable and transitory? Why worry when we are aware that everything is regulated by divine will and will get resolved for our best interests anyway? Regular meditation trains our mind to accept things easily and to laugh them away, invariably learning to stay within God's will.

It is a scientific fact that light things rise easily and resistance holds them back. Let us lighten ourselves with a sense of humour and instead of resisting the events of life, laugh them off so that we may ascend naturally beyond the domain of the material to realize the Truth and merge with the ultimate radiant reality.



We should be serious about following Sant Mat, but that doesn't mean that we should disregard the cheerful side of life altogether. Rather, we should feel more relaxed because we are following the Path. Concentration helps you to get rid of your tensions. Meditation helps you to rise above your problems, and when you are able to rise above the problems, naturally you are more relaxed, you're not so tense.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

The Value of Longing

Sultan Mahmood saw a phoenix fly by. He told the entire army to go out and try their luck. It is considered good luck if the shadow of a phoenix falls on one's head. Everyone began running right and left, but he did not see Ayāz among them. He said to himself, "My Ayāz has not gone? I hope that phoenix's shadow falls upon him."

He looked around and saw Ayāz's horse, but he heard moaning and crying, so he bent down to investigate. He saw Ayāz, bare-headed, beneath his horse, crying. He asked, "What are you doing? Why did you not go?"

Ayāz answered, "You are my phoenix and if I seek such a shadow, it would be your shadow. If I had to leave you to get it, why would I want it?"

Mahmood brought him to his side, their shadows mingled, creating a shadow unequalled by the shadow of a thousand phoenixes.

Shams-e Tabrizi: Rumi's Perfect Teacher

As disciples, everything we have ever looked for in life seems to be embodied in our Master. Nothing makes us as happy as he does. His words soothe our aching hearts, his smile is the antidote to our worries. His gaze conveys an affinity we have never experienced with anyone before.

We know what we feel when we are with our Master does not come just from the intellect or our preconceived notions. There is something about him that taps into the deepest recesses of our being, and whatever this may be, it makes us feel complete.

We understand through the teachings that what we feel in our Master's presence is just a glimpse of the relationship that we share with our Creator. We can establish that relationship with the Lord, just as the saints do, through devotion to the Shabd. The Master always tells us that the physical form is not the end, but rather the means for us to return to our real self – God.

The object of the body Master is to fill us with love and devotion for the Father, to put us on the path, to create that deep longing to become one with the master. Naturally when the physical master is there, we're running about, we feel contented, we feel happy. But this is a means to achieve something much higher. Sometimes it is in our interest that we are

away from the master. Since we can't find him outside, we have no other option but to find him within.

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

Our Master inspires us to carry out the journey back to God within ourselves, and he does this by playing an exquisite game of love, longing and separation with us. Separation from one's Master is the greatest source of pain for a disciple, but also the biggest blessing that he can receive. Unless we miss something, we will never put in the effort to work towards it.

Without longing there is no fuel for love's fire; there is no motivation to seek the Beloved. This is why, as painful as it may be, longing is needed for us to make the sacrifices that are required to become worthy of union with the Beloved.

Many of us know the joy of being in the physical presence of our Master. We also know the ache of missing him when we are away from him. But in this missing, painful though it may be, is a sharp memory of him that is infinitely preferable to having no memory of him at all.

A lover is usually swamped with the thoughts of the beloved at two particular times; just before his arrival and just after his departure. Distances exist physically, but when the heart is immersed in the thoughts of the beloved, can one truly say that he or she is separated from him?

Mira Bai was in love with her guru. Somebody asked Mira, "Why don't you forget him? You are so miserable and so unhappy in separation." She said: "Don't take this love from me. Take anything from me, but don't take my love for my guru. I appreciate this separation more than giving it up." There is pleasure in that love, and at no cost would the lover like to be out of that pain of separation.

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

It is said that the sword of longing cuts both ways; while the heart grows in its capacity for pain, it also grows in its capacity for pleasure. The heart, or in other words, the consciousness, has no limits; the pleasure and pain that we feel in longing are a result of its expansion.

Our Master executes all these moves. We just have to follow his lead; he will give us separation or inspire us with his presence when he thinks it is needed.

Meditation is what will ultimately fan the flame of love that our Master inspires in us.

The more time we devote to meditation, the more we strengthen our love, grow our love, become rich in devotion. I personally think the more time given to meditation, the more pain of separation you feel. And the more pain of separation you feel, the more progress you make within because ultimately this pain of separation will make you one with the Being, with the Lord.

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

The longing we feel for our Master is his gift to us. If we work with it, we will eventually be able to expand our hearts to the point where we realize that we are not the body, the mind or the ego, but rather we are soul. We are that soul which was never separated from the Beloved to begin with.



*What you most want,
What you travel around wishing to find,
Lose yourself as lovers lose themselves,
and you'll be that.*

Attar, as quoted in *Love is a Fire, The Sufi's Mystical Journey Home*

The Path of Spirituality

An explanation by Maharaj Sawan Singh

Spirituality is the path of soul (surat) and Shabd – the inner experience of God by soul consciousness, God being manifest in the creation as the all-pervading Shabd. It is called Sant Mat, the teachings or path of the masters, the path that imparts the intrinsic principles of spirituality. It is beyond the capability of religions to offer this experience because religions are confined to rituals, theories, institutionalized beliefs, accounts of miracles, and so forth.

Spirituality is true science; it does not call for blind faith. In whatever age people have practised it, the results have been the same, like a mathematical calculation. The sole purpose of a spiritual science is to free ourselves from the coverings of matter. Only then can we recognize our identity as a conscious being or a soul, and see the soul as a drop of the ocean of superconsciousness. As the soul merges with God, it acquires the characteristics of God, just as a drop merging with the ocean acquires the characteristics of the ocean.

This task of detaching ourselves from the creation and attaching ourselves to the Creator is a task that we have not been able to accomplish for millions of years. But it can be easily completed with the help of a saint who teaches the simple method of Surat Shabd Yoga, the joining (yog) of soul (surat) and Word (shabd). This easy and natural path can be followed by all people – be they from the East, West, North or South, rich or poor, high or low, literate or illiterate – for the path is the same for all human beings. The practice of Surat Shabd Yoga bestows eternal life and bliss. Like all other blessings of God, it is simple and natural for the individual who follows it with care and understanding, but hard for the undiscriminating. Saints are the boatmen who take souls across this ocean of phenomena. They are fully responsible for uniting the souls of their disciples with God, in whom we have our origin and towards whom we always feel a natural affinity.

*The soul, which is a bird of godly qualities,
is encaged in the body and seeks deliverance.
It has come down from its divine source
to discharge its earthly obligations,
but its attention is always drawn to its origin.*

Rumi, *Masnavi*

Saints, who are one with God and above sectarian ties, provide guidance and benefit for all, not just members of a particular religion or community. Their invaluable expositions on the practice of joining the soul with the Word, Surat Shabd Yoga, are preserved in various scriptures, which constitute a common heritage for all humanity.

*The Lord accepts none but those who love him.
The smokescreen of attachment is cast over the world;
only a devotee is kept free of this affliction.*

Satguru Ravidas Vani

Surat Shabd Yoga is the means by which a soul can experience reality; its practice is an attempt to effect direct communion between human beings and God. The master explains the details of this practice and puts the disciple on this path at the time of initiation. This science has been devised by God himself and is as old as humanity.

An Extract from *My Submission*



Learning to Learn

In Hindu mythology, Ravana is the legendary multi-headed king of Ancient Lanka. He had many good qualities that made him a learned scholar. He was revered as a pundit as he was well-versed in the six shastras and the four Vedas. He is depicted with many heads to symbolize his immense knowledge, but his ego led him astray and eventually caused his downfall.

As the story goes, he fell prey to his desires, abducted Lord Rama's wife Sita and held her captive in his kingdom. Lord Rama gathered his staunch allies and with the support of his army, rescued his beloved wife Sita. In the process, Ravana was vanquished. The triumphant return of Lord Rama and Sita back to their kingdom is celebrated as good overcoming evil.

We learn from this story that even the most learned scholar faced defeat due to his weak mind. The masters explain that knowledge used unwisely is counterproductive. It creates arrogance and ego within us where we think that we know everything. However, the further we tread the path and deepen our spiritual practice, the sooner we realize we know nothing.

That is how our life should be: we need to live with an attitude of humility and understanding that we do not know anything. If we realize that we don't know, then we are learning. Even the renowned artist, Michelangelo, said: "I am still learning." The moment we say we know everything; our learning process stops and our ego takes over.

Learn as if you were to live forever.

Live as if you were to die tomorrow.

Mahatma Gandhi, as quoted in *Quotations for all Occasions*

Every day is a new day, so every day presents opportunities to learn new things. If we open ourselves to learn and if we broaden our horizon, we will go forward. However, if we get entangled with the ego believing that we know everything, then we will not get far in life.

What we are seeking through the spiritual path is a greater awareness. As we become more aware, we understand that there is truly little that we actually know. Knowledge is vastly different from wisdom. In this day and age,

information is always freely available. Search engines are the guru of information; at the click of a key one can obtain unlimited information about any subject. On the other hand, wisdom or the lessons that life teaches us cannot be bought at any cost.

The Greek philosopher, Socrates, once acknowledged, “As for me, all I know is that I know nothing,” as quoted in *Socrates, A Complete Biography*.

The more knowledge we acquire, the more we will realize how limited we are. Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh explains that real knowledge is to know the Creator, his creation, and to know the laws that govern the creation and the means to go back to the Creator.

What Hazur Maharaj Ji has explained can only be attained by going inward. It is through our meditation practice that we can fill ourselves with that love for the Father. When we are filled with love and devotion for the Father, we attain real wisdom. When the mind is in pursuit of the Father, then we get real intellect, real intelligence, real wisdom. A simple person who sees the Lord in everyone, in every part of the creation, he is a man of wisdom. However literate or illiterate he may be, however ignorant from the worldly point of view, he may have real wisdom.



I think the wisest person is he who realizes that he knows nothing.

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

What Is the Sabbath?

In the Bible, we are told that Ten Commandments were given to the children of Israel on Mount Sinai – these are:

- I am the LORD your God.
- You shall not have strange Gods before me.
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not kill.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against a neighbour.
- You shall not covet.

The fourth commandment is the one we wish to think about today. After the first three, which establish the foundation for belief and action, of love, adherence and loyalty to singular unity, one God, without any accretions or modifications, we are told to “remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” In another biblical text, the word *remember* is replaced with the word *keep*.

Why is this important? It is not the specific seventh day that is at issue, it is the concept of the holiness of a special time when we focus our attention on God – on keeping our mind on the remembrance of God. This idea of devoting our time to God is what the twentieth-century philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel called the “Sanctuary of Time,” rather than a physical sanctuary or cathedral.

It symbolizes a time of rest and renewal, a time to refresh our outlook on life – a time to delve deep into ourselves in meditation.

It is a reminder to focus on the purpose of life: our commitment to return our soul to its origin in God, our primal home – a time to focus our mind on God and his love, to be thankful for the gift of life.

So, how can we enter our inner sanctuary, our sanctuary in time? Through meditation. We have been given a technique, a method, a practice. Once we have learned this practice from our spiritual master,

we just need to do it: simran (repetition), dhyan (contemplation), bhajan (listening to the inner sound).

As stated in the introduction to *Spiritual Gems*:

Our soul is a drop from the ocean of bliss, life, and energy, from which it separated many millions of ages ago. It is a stranger in this foreign land of agony and grief. There is nothing homogeneous to it here below in this world of earth, water, fire, and air. Unless it returns to its ancient original home, its sorrows and sufferings cannot and will not end. For this purpose, it need not seek anywhere outside itself. Our body is the temple within which the Lord resides. No one has ever found Him nor will ever find Him outside.

All the saints, sages, and prophets of the world affirm that “the Kingdom of God is within us,” and that one is not to wander outside to achieve salvation. The Lord dwells in this “temple of nine gates” (our body). One only needs a teacher or guide who knows the secret of the path to enter this palace of the Lord, our loving Father. This is possible only in human life. No subhuman species has this capacity or privilege. A teacher of the science of spirituality is as much needed as is a teacher of any other science or art. This unknown path is so curved, complex, and labyrinthine that one cannot tread it without the help of a guide – an enlightened soul. This guide must be a living master, who can take us to the highest region, beyond death and dissolution, whence there is no coming back. Such masters are always present in the world. The masters who died long ago, or their writings, can be of little help to us.

The method of God-realization taught by all the saints, to whichever country or religion they have belonged, has always been the same and will ever be the same. It is not designed by man, that it may need alteration, addition, or modification. It is the Lord’s own design and is as old as the creation itself. It consists of three parts:

First is simran, or the repetition of Lord’s holy names. It brings back our scattered attention to the tisra til – the third eye (behind our eyes), which is the headquarters of our mind and soul.

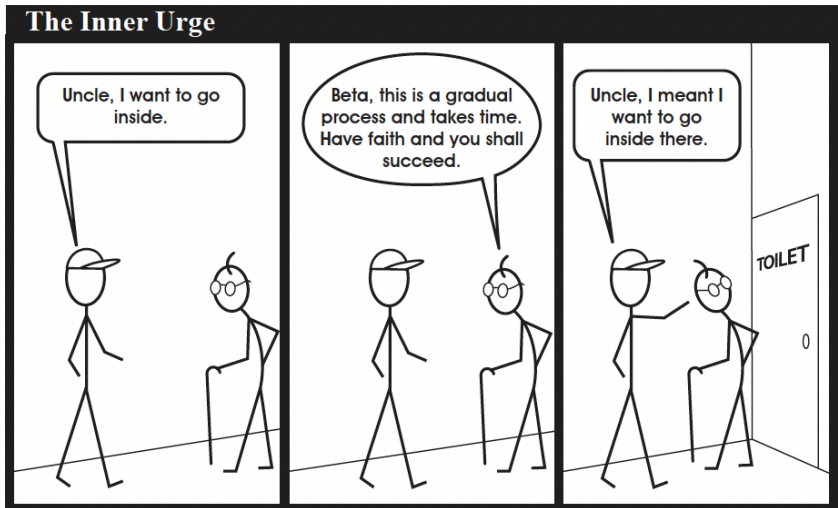
Second is dhyan, or contemplation on the immortal form of the Master. This helps in keeping the attention fixed at that centre.

Third is bhajan, or listening to the Anahad Shabd or celestial music that is constantly reverberating within us. With the help of this divine melody, the soul ascends to higher regions and ultimately reaches the Lord.

This, in a nutshell, is the gist of the spiritual practice which the saints of all ages and countries have been teaching to their disciples for the purpose of God-realization. Blessed are those who come across a perfect Master, who takes them back to their original home.



SPIRITUALISTICKS®



The Master Answers

Question and Answer Session with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Maharaj Ji.*

M: Yes.

Q: *Once again, I have no problems, I'm happy, and no questions. In the United States, on December 12th, we celebrate the birthday of our saint, Maharaj Charan Singh and I should like to cordially invite you to your own birthday party. And if Maharaj Ji has previous commitments, we'll settle for his Radiant Form. So, you please, you come, you are the head of our family, you know, you're the honored guest.*

M: Well, brother, I have never celebrated my birthday, I can assure you. I always try not to be at one place on my birthday, I generally move on and travel on.

Q: *I know.*

M: So that nobody, I am not at one place at all. And nobody makes a fuss about it.

Q: *Especially at that time our thoughts are with you so, please, you know that our thoughts are with you.*

M: You see, I can't understand the celebration, the birthday of an old man who has completed 72. He looks ahead, not backwards. Birthday is for children. You see, I know you are a very advanced nation, how this birthday started, now it has become, you see, now it is commercialized, more or less – cards and so many things, you see, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Valentine's Day. I mean these all are commercializing things – Christ's birthday and doomsday and God knows how many days are there.

See, parents are always happy when they find their child has started crawling, then they are very happy when they find their child has started standing, child has started stammering, child has started walking, so all those events are associated with the development of the child. So, they celebrate those events, all those years in which the child develops. After six, seven years, when the child has grown

and started going to school it is meaningless to celebrate the birth. Still, you can justify it till he stands on his own legs, gets married and settled in his own life and even forgets the parents.

And at my age, when you see, when there is little that's left to go to the grave and more in the past, what is there to celebrate? Just reminding a person – “Very little is left and if you have forgotten it, please, we have come to remind you.” And don't worry, I always constantly remind myself. So, I won't give you opportunity to remind me at all. I don't need that opportunity.

Q: *But, Maharaj Ji, you always, in my eyes, you look so young and youthful, I see no old man. I see a young man, I see ...*

M: But I have, you see, started standing and running and talking, don't worry. Standing on my own legs and looking after my own self, so I don't need any celebration for that at all. But I won't like to be reminded of my end. I'm quite conscious of it always, don't worry. Rather I'm looking forward to it.

Q: *Let me not be accused of not inviting your grace, you are most cordially invited, most cordially.*

M: When my family sometimes try to make a fuss of it, I try to always explain to them and they understand, they don't make a fuss anymore. In India, people never used to celebrate birthdays, but now they have started copying the West. So, you people also have corrupted our society, rather have commercialized it.

I start getting greeting cards from September till April, can you imagine? Thousands and thousands of dollars are being just wasted. First comes Diwali, in India, it is celebrated, and everybody is fond of sending me the card. I assure you I have never opened them. Professor opens them or not, I don't know, but I never open any greeting card of anybody. If I have to start that, every day 400 or 500 cards are there in my mail, I don't know what I'm going to do with them.

And then you see, it starts coming. Guru Nanak's birthday, then it starts coming my birthday, then Christ's birthday, you see, then some Valentine's Day, I don't know what is that. Then Easter day, then comes some Dussehra – I don't know an Indian festival.

And such beautiful cards, you see, sometimes children open them, they play with them, but I say, why waste this money?

I have so many times, I have addressed in the meetings also, I say, “Please, don’t waste your money, don’t waste your energy and time on these things, they are meaningless. We are grown up now, you see, we’re not children, that we have to remind ourselves.”

You see, these celebrations are all right for you people where your daughter is somewhere in Australia and boy is in New Zealand and the third daughter is in Spain, so mother wants to remind the children that I’m still living. Our families are just together, we don’t have to tell each other that you are living or you are dead. You people just meet with these greeting cards, but we have other ways and means to know each other, and very often we meet.

We are all knitted families, joined families, so we don’t waste, you see, we shouldn’t waste money on these things, but still we have also started doing the same thing, like you people.

Q: *We do one thing in America, and I think Maharaj Ji will enjoy this. We have padlocks, you know, combination padlocks for locking doors, and we can set the combination to whatever combination we want, and there are four rollers, from one to ten, so everybody sets their padlock automatically without thinking – what’s a good birthday – Maharaj Ji’s birthday – so we set it on 12-12, 1-2-1-2. And I think in thousands of satsangis, I know several hundred, they all set their padlock for Master’s birthday.*

M: You will be surprised to know that when I got admission in the school and the gentleman who went with me to the school, to admit me in the school, didn’t know my birthday. The headmaster of the school asked him when I was born. He says, “I don’t know, you can write today.” That very day was written as my birthday, in the school register, when I was admitted in the school.

You can imagine how much importance our family gives to these birthdays. So, my official birthday is that day; my real birthday is very different. On my passport you will find my birthday is

somewhere in August. I have to carry that because all my degrees, educational degrees, all mention that very day, of my birthday.

When I passed matric, first time the university gives us certificate of our qualifications that we have passed the matric and certificate. And I was probably the first in the family to pass that school certificate. I took the certificate to the Great Master. He read it. He said, “Your name is wrong, your birthday is wrong.” I was surprised. Because I myself didn’t know. He said, “Your name is not Charan Singh, your name is Harcharan Singh. And your birthday is not in August, your birthday is in December.”

Then he called Mr. Shaadi, who was his most devoted disciple who went to ... went with me to the school to register me there. He said, “I... we all call him *Chano Chano*, so I wrote him Charan Singh.” And, he said, “I didn’t know the birthday so that very day I told him, write.”

So this is the importance given to the name and given to the birthday which you want to celebrate. Then I asked Maharaj Ji, “Should I change all that?” Because it’s a very long process, you see, to change your name in the university, and change your name, birthday in the university once it is registered there.

Then Sardar Bhagat Singh was called. He was our family lawyer and family head and family advisor, you see. Everything Maharaj Ji used to weigh after consulting him. He said, “Maharaj Ji, let it remain now because it’s a very, very long and lengthy process.” So, Maharaj Ji said, “All right, now live with it.” And I am living with that. So, I don’t know which birthday to celebrate now. My education birthday or my real birthday, I don’t know. So, I’m just ... my purpose of telling it, how much importance we give to these birthdays.

Q: *I just wanted that as an excuse to invite you, Maharaj Ji.*

M: But I won’t be here even on that day.

Q: *It makes no difference, well you’re invited, that’s all, you’re invited. Thank you.*

M: Thank you very much.



Understanding Time

The division of time into days, months and years that make up calendars is man's own creation. For the Lord there is no time. Sant Mat attaches no significance to any particular time or day. There are no bad days or good days.

In the physical realm where time exists, change happens all the time. Nothing stays the same. Maharaj Charan Singh used to call it the 'shifting sands of time and space.' But within us there is something unchanging.

Time changes and will go on changing, but Nam does not change.

The current of Nam goes on as usual.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

Our soul, because it is a spark of the Divine, never ages. It is never born, it never dies – it is eternal and timeless. Yet trapped in a mortal body that ages and decays, man can see that he is bound by time on this physical plane. He needs time to shower and get ready for the day; he needs time to make a mug of coffee. Even as he sits idly, time is passing him by.

God is the axis of the wheel of Time. Though all things rotate about Him in Time and Space, yet is He always timeless and spaceless and still.

Though all things proceed from His Word, yet is His Word as timeless and spaceless as He.

The Book of Mirdad

It is indisputable that time is not in our control. Rather it is time that directs and governs our physical life. Therefore time is an immense stress factor and causes tremendous agitation in one's life. To catch a plane or a train; to send the children to school; to get to an appointment, all require us to compete against time daily.

If it were possible, man would create a machine that could put time on hold – a pause button that would allow him to complete his tasks on time. A rewind button would allow him to go back in time to redo any mess-ups; and a fast-forward button would accelerate his difficult and sorrowful times. Life would definitely be easier to handle.

Mirdad says that time exists for us because we identify with our senses. Through our senses we perceive the illusion of time. We sense the changes

in the season; we perceive the growth of things as well as their decay. It is our senses that are involved in this deception.

Time is a wheel created by the senses, and by the senses set awirling in the voids of Space.

The Book of Mirdad

Escape from the illusion of time is only possible when we close the doors of the senses, still the mind, vacate the body and escape to the region of timelessness and spacelessness.

Till we are able to put our consciousness in Nam, we will be subject to changes, now happy and now miserable. That is why the saints repeatedly exhort us to withdraw our conscious attention from the nine doors of the body and fix it in Shabd. As we do this and our attention is withdrawn from the body and enjoys the bliss of Nam, we develop power of endurance and spiritual depth. After crossing the perishable state of maya, we enter the eternal state of Nam and, freed from the cycle of births and deaths, are entitled to everlasting happiness.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

The saints tell us that by gradually scraping our mind with the emery stone of the Shabd, the mind is eventually polished and humbled and releases its tight grip on the soul. To explain the soul's confinement, consider the example of a drop inside a bottle floating in the ocean. The drop is our soul. It is part and parcel of the ocean, but it is isolated by the bottle. The bottle is not only our body but also our mind, senses, desires, and everything else that is part of this illusory world that binds us within the realm of time. If that soul drop is able to escape from the bottle, it will merge into the ocean of universal consciousness and be one with the Lord.

The elated and joyous soul that was trapped in the cage of the body from the beginning of time then flies out of its cage at will and dips into the divine nectar of the ocean of all consciousness. Saints call this process dying while living. It is the ultimate preparation for death, at which time its bottle is shattered and the soul drop, freed from the shackles of birth and death, at long last merges back in the ocean of light and love.



Endurance

An excerpt from Heaven on Earth

Maharaj Ji's (Great Master's) tours in far-flung villages were rigorous, involving transportation by bus, train, horseback, and on foot, and accommodation was often uncomfortable and inconvenient. In many villages, Maharaj Ji slept in huts hardly large enough for his cot. Improvised bathrooms were made by leaning two cots against each other and covering them on the open sides with a white sheet. Once, on a cold winter morning in the mountains, I remember going into one of these bathrooms to wash; I was shivering – and with the icy cold water, the most I could manage was a hasty washing of my face and hands. But Maharaj Ji, without any complaints about the inadequate and cold 'bathrooms' and the ice-cold water, would take a bath at five in the morning and be ready to meet the sangat at about six.

These tours required incredible endurance by Hazur. When he was on long tours, he frequently arrived around the time for satsang, had a brief rest, and went straight to satsang, leaving orders that his travelling companions should have dinner immediately. He would not eat, as he always left a space of two hours between a meal and satsang. By the time satsang ended, it would be 4:00 p.m. Then he would go to the langar to bless the food. There were usually interviews and visits to satsangis' homes after that, so he often did not eat until 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., with only a glass of milk taken in the morning to sustain him. Through all of this he was smiling and cheerful, and satsang organizers never knew that he had not eaten or rested.

Walking with Hazur on the hilly tracks of Simla and Dalhousie was a challenging experience. He would climb so fast and with such agility that even young soldiers were reminded of their rigorous army routines. A short account of one of Maharaj Ji's tours will give an idea of his great capacity for endurance. He was just finishing a tour in Abbottabad and planned to return to Beas after delivering the morning satsang. His day began, of course, with meditation early in the morning. After giving satsang in Abbottabad, Hazur went by car to Rawalpindi, where he gave an unplanned two-hour satsang, and drove to Lyallpur, three hundred

miles from Abbottabad. At Lyallpur he gave his third satsang of the day and left immediately afterwards for Beas, driving through the night and arriving at 4:30 a.m. At 6:00 a.m., he was ready to proceed to Kapurthala to attend a marriage ceremony. From Kapurthala he went on to Jullundur, arriving there at about 11:00 a.m. Dismissing the driver he had been given at Rawalpindi, the Master gave him a turban and some money as a gift. The driver, a hardy Pathan from Jalalabad (Afghanistan), said to Hazur, “Sir, remember me again. Though I am only thirty years old, I am utterly exhausted from trying to keep up with you. You did not eat or sleep, yet you do not seem tired. You are not a human being. To look at you is to look at God himself.” At that time Hazur was over eighty years old.



Soami Ji says that saints and Masters have left no stone unturned in their efforts to explain their message to us: they spend their entire lives explaining simple, straightforward and basic truths to us. They have spent long periods – often as much as forty or fifty years – serving us. They have written many great books and, by collecting together the writings and discourses of many saints, have explained to us how this world is transient and perishable; we will never find happiness and peace in it; peace can only be found through devotion to the Lord and by loving Him.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol II

The One Who Hath Sent Me

A living master is essential for our soul's ascent to its true home. This journey is fraught with unknowns, and we are dependent on a guide who has already travelled the path and been sent on a mission by the Lord himself to show us the way.

If a spiritual seeker calls upon God, he is addressing the One whom he has never seen, never heard, never touched. His belief in the reality of the One he calls upon is, therefore, shaky. But when he calls upon, or speaks of, or thinks of his murshid, he knows through his own experience that the person he is referring to is real. Because it relates to a real, lived experience, his "calling out" is different and it has the power of true faith.

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2

Many of us come from religious backgrounds where we already began forming a personal relationship with the Lord. But what attracted us to *The Path of the Masters* was the opportunity to love someone real because love for an unseen Lord was too illusive for us to draw inspiration from. Abol-Hasan Kharraqani says:

*Who am I to love you, Lord,
I'll love those who love you.*

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2

However, not being able to access and experience the physical form of the Master as easily forces us to reflect on our relationship with him. It results in a wake-up call: we are compelled to examine to what extent we have truly understood the essence of the teachings.

Sufi teachers have recognized that the struggling disciple cannot get rid of his ego, along with all that he clings to in this ephemeral world, all in one step. Only gradually and through stages does he annihilate all that separates him from the One. Inayat Khan (as quoted in *The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2*) explains the stages of annihilation: "One step is the annihilation in the ideal form, the next in the ideal of name, and the third step is annihilation in the nameless and formless." He continues:

In order to attain the final goal, he (the Sufi) gradually raises his idea, first to fana fi al-sheikh, the ideal seen in a mortal walking on the earth, and he drills himself as a soldier before battle in devotion to his ideal. Then comes fana fi al-Rasul, when he sees his ideal in spirit, and pictures him in all sublimity, and fashions him with beautiful qualities, which he wishes to obtain himself. And after this he raises it to fana fi al-Allah, the love and devotion for that ideal which is beyond qualities and in which is the perfection of all qualities.

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2

This prompts us to consider whether we are as impelled to seek the Shabd form of the Master within, ‘the ideal of name,’ during separation from his physical form. What more motivation, even provocation, do we need to attend to our meditation to progress to the next step of self-annihilation, which has the added benefit of helping us rise above the turmoil of the world? Do we want to continue to scratch the surface, practising the teachings at a superficial level, or dive deeper to unravel the truth we have already been empowered to experience in the present?

It is natural for disciples to revel in the presence of the Master. But if we have inadvertently put the physical form of the Master on a pedestal or relied excessively on it, we can just as easily fall into a trap of limiting our ‘devotion’ to merely attending satsang, doing seva, and seeking outer darshan. In *The Spiritual Guide*, Vol. 2, Rumi explains, “The true teacher knocks down the idol that the student makes of him.” That is, the murshid turns the disciple’s attention toward the Truth which is to be found inside himself. Additionally, Bahauddin Naqshbandi says:

We are the means of reaching the goal. It is necessary that seekers should cut themselves away from us and think only of the goal.

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2

The necessity of turning the disciple’s attention away from the teacher and forcing us to focus on the reality within and the goal he has set before us, may be explained in the following story quoted in *The Spiritual Guide*, Vol. 2.

One wealthy young man became a disciple of Abu-Saeed Abil-Kheir. He gave away all his property to the poor and dedicated himself wholeheartedly

to the path. For three years, without a murmur of complaint, the young man served the congregation of disciples, doing all manner of menial chores.

Then Abu-Saeed told the other disciples to ignore the young man and treat him harshly, which they did. Through all this the murshid himself continued to be sweet with the young man, and he bore his suffering patiently. Then Abu-Saeed also began ignoring him. He treated him coldly and seemed never even to notice him. Although free food was available to all in the murshid's kitchen, Abu-Saeed ordered that this young man was not to be given any food. For three days the young man did not get even a crust of bread.

On the fourth night, there was a gathering with lots of delicious food served to all, but even then the youth was ignored and left standing near the door all night, without a crumb of food. Finally, Abu-Saeed looked around and, seemingly noticing him for the first time, scolded him and told him how disgusted he was with him. He ordered the youth to be thrown out and told him not to return. Utterly distraught the young man left. Collapsing at an old mosque, he wept all through the night and prayed, "O Lord, now I have no one to turn to but you." Suddenly, he was flooded with a great peace.

Just as this peace came upon the young man, the Master asked the disciples to bring a candle and, leaving the khanqah, they headed toward the old mosque. When they reached there, the man was still in that strange state, weeping tears of joy. 'O Master, what is this you have done with me, I am beside myself, vanished in this state'...

'My child,' the Master said, 'you had given up all and everyone, but there was still someone between you and your Lord: me! I was the only idol left in the temple of your hopes, wants, and fears and that had to be taken from you for your ego to surrender and take refuge in the Beloved. Rise now, let's relish this victory!'

This story highlights what would truly please the Master. He never forsakes us, but the question is to what extent are we obeying his directives? He has ignited a divine possibility within us. To what extent are we unlocking the greatest opportunity of all – to unite with the one who hath sent him.

At his death, Abu-Saeed's last words of advice to his disciples were: "Do not forget God, not even for a moment. Know that during my time, I did not invite you to myself. I declared that in reality we do not exist. I say that He exists, and that is sufficient."

The Guru is the Word. He is a link between man and God. He is the one who takes people back to the Lord. After fulfilling his allotted task, he merges back into the Word. Likewise, the soul is also a ray of the Word, and through the grace of a true Master it is able to return and unite itself with the Word. Guru Nanak says, "The Guru is Shabd, and the soul is its disciple."

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Path*



The guru is the human expression of God's love. Service to the guru awakens in our heart true love for the Lord and his creation and inspires feelings of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *My Submission*

You Are Exactly Where You Are Meant to Be

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something – your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever.

Steve Jobs as quoted in *Master the Future: Dominate Your Life with Foresight*

If you spend a lot of time on social media, you will see these words plastered on motivational messages across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram: “You are exactly where you are meant to be.”

But let's face it, when we are in the middle of extreme difficulty or pain, we often ask – why? Why is this happening to me? Why didn't life go the way I had planned? Is this really where I am meant to be? Would life have been different if I had chosen a different course of action?

We spend a lot of time dwelling on the “would've, could've, should've” of the past. The fact is, the ups and downs we have to go through in life are all destined. Just as we cannot predict or change the course of the weather, we cannot predict or change the events of life. We have no other option but to go through what is written in our destiny.

The masters have said our destiny was written when we came into this world and we have to face it. Destiny will put us in situations that will facilitate settlement of our karmic debts. If you have to get hurt in an accident, you have to get hurt in an accident. Karmic debts have to be paid. There's nothing we can do to change the course of events in our life. As the song goes, “Que Sera, Sera, Whatever will be, will be.”

There will be times of difficulty and sadness. But there will also be great times filled with joy and satisfaction. These ups and downs are inevitable. What matters is our attitude. Do we choose to be miserable and complain about the imperfections of this world? Or do we choose to just keep swimming in the sea of life?

A professor walked into her class with a glass of water. All the students were expecting her to ask if the glass was half full or half empty. But instead, she asked “How heavy is this glass of water?” Several students shouted their answers: “Eight ounces!” “Half a pound!” “Three-and-a-half ounces!”

The professor then replied, “From my perspective, the actual weight doesn’t really matter. It depends on how long I hold the glass. If it’s just for a minute or two, it’s fairly light. If I hold it for longer than an hour, my arm will probably start to hurt. If I hold it for much longer than that, I may start to feel cramps and may even drop the glass onto the floor. The weight of the glass doesn’t change. But the longer I hold it, the heavier it feels.”

The same can be said about everything we go through in life. If we think about our problems for just a little while, we feel light and can move on. But if we dwell on the stressful situations and obstacles, we feel the weight and become paralyzed, incapable of doing anything until we let go.

What is key is our attitude. We can choose to accept that we are exactly where we are meant to be – that everything that is happening is for a reason. We can put our trust in the Master, that whatever we are going through is meant to be and he will help us through it.

If we are attached to the spirit within, we definitely get strength to face that destiny cheerfully, without losing our balance.

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

Meditation helps us go through all the trials and tribulations of life, so that we can clear our karmic debt and travel to our true home. When we sit in meditation, we take steps towards our final destination.

It is difficult not knowing what comes next or why certain things in life are not going our way right now. But when we look back, we can connect the dots and realize that everything happened perfectly and that right now, we are exactly where we are meant to be.



Book Review

Stories from the Heart

BY MIRIAM CARAVELLA AND WAYNE CARAVELLA

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Human beings love to tell stories, and we love to listen to them. It's part of our nature to communicate through storytelling. According to the authors of this book,

Stories invite us into them. We don't simply listen to a story; we become the story.... Humans are storytelling animals. From the moment we awake to the moment we go to sleep, our primary means of communication is the story. Our stories define us, instruct us, create us. Without our stories, we do not exist.... For us, our story is our self.

Most of the stories in this book are from the Hasidic tradition, a religious movement within Judaism. These tales were passed on orally through many generations. Like most good stories, these are easy to understand and relate to because they deal with problems and issues that all of us face as we live our lives.

Hasidism originated in Ukraine in the 18th century as part of a movement that responded to the lack of spirituality in modern life. Focusing on the needs of the common people, the Hasidic teachers, known as rabbis, rebbes, or *zaddiks*, emphasized devotion and prayer, rather than religious law and learning. They sought ways to convey spiritual teachings not only to the learned but also to simple people, and one of these methods was folk tales and spiritual stories. The authors write,

One can say that storytelling is at the heart of Hasidism.... According to Hasidic philosophy, a person hearing a religious teaching may be impressed by its truth, but a tale about someone actually fulfilling the teaching motivates the listener to action. The teachings explain what to do; the stories show that someone in fact did it.

The rabbis were believed to channel divine energy from God. According to the authors, "The idea is that in every generation, there are righteous persons through whom divinity flows to the material world." Before the start of Hasidism, awareness of the mystical nature of Judaism had largely been confined to the learned; through simple storytelling the rabbis sought to reveal it to common people as well.

Inspiration for the stories often came from the Bible – such as the Ten Commandments, tales of creation, and divine laws. Though the stories are set amidst mundane, everyday life, they convey profound spiritual teachings on themes like humility, divine providence, ethical behaviour, hospitality toward strangers, the duty to serve God in every aspect of one's life, and the faith to surrender to God in all situations.

For example, in the story “Just Do It,” a man didn't know how to stop sinning, so he went to his rabbi for help. The rabbi had a very practical solution for him:

A man who had done bad things his whole life, realizing that he did not have much longer to live, decided to go to the rebbe and confess his sins and seek forgiveness. “I have been a lifelong sinner,” said the man. “I have done many bad things and hurt many people. Now I want to stop my sinful ways and repent for my sins.”

“So go ahead and repent – what's stopping you?” asked the rebbe.

The man was surprised and confused. “But, rebbe,” said the man. “I don't know how to repent. That is why I came to you, so you could teach me!”

“Well, may I ask who taught you how to sin?” asked the rebbe.

“Nobody taught me,” the man replied, “I just did it.”

“So now you think you need a teacher to teach you how to repent?” the rebbe replied. “Like sinning, just do it!”

Hasidic tales abound in humour and cleverness. In the story “Buttered-Side Down,” we see the people of the village of Chelm excited to know whether an event was a miracle from God or a more practical matter having to do with the scientific laws of physics. The wise men of the village in the end attribute the episode to neither God nor science, but, irrationally, to the fault of an individual. This story demonstrates another characteristic of Jewish culture at the time – poking fun at oneself, thus encouraging beneficial introspection and reflection.

Shlomo, Chelm's one and only baker, was enjoying his breakfast of fresh bread and butter when by accident he hit the plate and his freshly buttered slice of bread went flying onto the floor. Oh no, he thought, my bread is spoiled. However, to his amazement, when he looked down, he saw that his bread had landed buttered-side up! How is this possible, he thought? Everyone knows that bread, when dropped by accident on the floor, always lands buttered-side down. It is an unwritten law of physics! This is a mystery, he thought. Perhaps it is a sign from God? A miracle, a revelation announcing some important upcoming event! I must tell the rabbis what has happened!

So Shlomo ran and informed the rabbis of this mysterious event. They in turn convened a meeting with the twelve wise men of Chelm. For three days they remained in the synagogue praying, reading scriptures for insight, and debating among themselves. The entire village could talk about nothing else except the mystery of the falling bread. After three days the rabbis and wise men emerged from their discussions and announced they had the answer to the mystery. They asked all the villagers of Chelm to assemble. They called Shlomo in front of the crowd. "Shlomo," they said, "after great debate we have determined that there is no mystery or miracle, but rather, the problem is that you have buttered the wrong side of the bread!"

The story "Sharpening the Axe" offers a deep lesson on how best to fulfil worldly obligations:

Once upon a time, two men went into the forest to chop wood. One man worked all day without stopping except for a brief lunch break. The other man took many breaks throughout the day and even had a short nap after lunch. At the end of the day, the man who had worked continuously was upset to see that his companion had chopped much more wood than he had. "I simply cannot understand it," said the first man. "Every time I looked up you were sitting down, taking a break!" The other man replied, "I guess you didn't notice that every time I took a break, I sharpened my axe."

If we view this from a spiritual perspective, it points out how the calm, focus, and positive attitude we achieve through meditation sharpens our mental axe, making our daily work much more productive.

Spiritual stories can guide us as we try to lead a spiritual, ethical and moral life. They make us reflect upon ourselves, even laugh at our human foibles, thus helping us remain positive and balanced. They can awaken us to profound spiritual truths hard to absorb in any other way. Weaving a thread through all cultures, such stories remind us of the divine presence that permeates our daily lives.

As one great Hasidic storyteller, Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlov, said, "Others think that tales are a good remedy to put one to sleep; I maintain that stories are useful to awaken people."



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