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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Rise, O Moon

Rise, O moon,
and spread your light across the heavens;
the stars remember you in silent prayers,
their hearts glimmering with hope.

Now, like beggars,
we roam the alleyways of earthly life,
when once in our own Homeland,
we were merchants of rubies.

O, may no one ever have to leave his own home,
for one is not worth a piece of straw
in this alien land!

They need not clap their hands
to startle us out of this world, O Bahu;
we are already disposed to fly back
to our long-lost Home.

Sultan Bahu



Our Gift to the Master

Imagine if we could give our Master a gift, a gift that he would truly appreciate. Probably we'd all like to give him something that would, in some small way, thank him for all he has given and continues to give us. But he neither wants nor accepts worldly material gifts from his disciples. So is there anything we could possibly offer that he would value if we cannot offer material things? Yes, there is.

We know that we can all offer him our obedience and gratitude as we follow our vows and try to live as good human beings. Love and devotion might also be on the list of what we can offer. But the most valuable gift we can offer, worth more than gold on this spiritual path, is our attention.

As human beings we can choose where we place our attention. We have the faculty of discrimination and are able to direct our thoughts, our attention, throughout every waking moment. When we give constant attention to our Master, our whole day becomes a day devoted to him and his service.

But it's neither simple nor easy, is it? Wanting and doing are two completely different things. Probably we all want to give him our constant attention and be devoted disciples who are always focused on the spiritual goal. There may well be advanced disciples who are able to do this, but for the rest of us it's a hit-and-miss business – generally more miss than hit!

This inconsistency must not make us despondent. The desire alone is praiseworthy. In this incredibly fast-paced stressful world, how many fortunate souls are there who even want to give a spiritual master their attention? We are so blessed that every day we are able to present to the Master whatever little efforts we are able to make.

However, we must also realize how much more we could be doing in this sphere of our active lives. We need to strive consciously to become more aware of where we are directing our precious attention and how can we improve the quality of the gift that we offer?

Saints tell us that we should strive to become good human beings. This means that we should be mindful of our general behaviour, including our diet and our lifestyle. We should generally ensure that we are behaving in a manner consistent with our stated objective of spiritual liberation.

All of this requires attention, a monitoring of our thoughts. If we aren't constantly mindful, then this mind of ours just sets off on its own mission, giving in to the promptings of the ego and the senses.

The most important part of our spiritual journey is to meditate for at least two and a half hours every day for the rest of our lives. This is where our attention is most crucial. Every aspect of our meditation requires focused, concentrated attention.

The one thing we learn as we travel on this path is that meditation is made immeasurably more difficult if we haven't kept our attention on the goal as much as possible throughout the day. If we never rein the mind in during the day, how do we expect to do it when we sit for meditation? Maharaj Charan Singh said:

To live in the teachings, to live in that atmosphere is itself a meditation. You are building that atmosphere every moment for your daily meditation. Everything you do must consciously prepare you for the next meditation.

Die to Live

Our priorities, our goals in life, must be reflected in where we choose to focus our attention. And the seriousness with which we view those goals must be demonstrated by how we live our lives, how we think and how we choose to interpret our Master's requests. Our whole day needs to prepare us as much as possible for our mediation. For any disciple on the path leading to reunion with God, the single most important activity in our lives must be meditation.

The meditation technique we are taught by our Master consists of three aspects: simran, bhajan and dhyān. Simran is the repetition of the five holy words shared with us at the time of initiation. In bhajan we are asked to try to listen for the inner spiritual sound, and in dhyān we are asked to visualize our Master. Simran is the first and initially most crucial ingredient and requires the exercising of our faculty of attention. This is the gift we can give our Master, the one he will always appreciate.

Our Master wants us to reach the spiritual centre situated in our forehead, known as the third eye or eye centre. Simran is the tool he has given us to collect our attention and focus it at the eye centre. The masters

tell us that the real spiritual journey only begins once we have reached the eye centre, so we just have to keep on trying to get there. Maharaj Sawan Singh said:

The first essential thing, therefore, is to enter this laboratory within ourselves, by bringing our scattered attention inside of the eye focus. ... It is our job and we must do it; and we must do it now, in this very lifetime.

Spiritual Gems

He also said:

The problem is not complicated at all. The whole thing is just attention, and then unbroken attention, at the eye center, allowing no other thought to intrude itself into the consciousness and lead you away from the center.

Spiritual Gems

The treasure is our Master in his Radiant Form, and the Shabd itself, waiting for us in full glory. So what exactly is the Shabd? What is the Radiant Form? And why must we contact and connect with them? The Shabd, the Word, is the creative power of the Lord.

Mystics tell us that, originally, only the Lord existed. When he ordained creation, this creative power became manifested and created everything. We all arise from Shabd and we will eventually merge back into it. Without Shabd, the mystics explain, everything would simply disappear.

Throughout the ages, all true mystics have taught this one central spiritual truth: God himself is the Shabd through which he ordained and created every living thing. Maharaj Sawan Singh said:

The beginning and end of all things is Shabd. All gross matter, the sky and so forth, subtle matter, sound, form, taste and scent are all Shabd. Whatever exists is Shabd. Whatever is manifested from Shabd cannot be anything but Shabd. Shabd is our creator. Shabd is our sustainer. We are of Shabd and Shabd is ours.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol.IV

This formless power, which cannot be discerned or experienced in any ordinary fashion with our normal human senses, is everywhere and is everything. It is also the cornerstone of the teachings of all true mystics.

This is what the path of Surat Shabd Yoga is all about. The path tells us that our true selves are of this Shabd, which is God's own power. So, to connect with it, let us commit ourselves to giving our Master our love and devotion by giving him our attention. Our precious attention is our own unique and individual gift. Let us direct it to him every day.



*The true Master is Shabd personified –
his home is in realms beyond space.
Since your own real form is soul,
you should follow his trail of Shabd.
The Master's form is in your eyes –
if only you would open your inner vision!
The Master's Shabd resounds in your ears –
if only you could hear him calling from the heavens!
This is the essence of the path, says Radha Soami.
Fortunate souls who accept it
will sail across the ocean of life.*

Sar Bachan Poetry



Our Relationship with the Master

Many of us are satsangis who've been on the path for quite a few years. And over time we've been growing in appreciation of what the path means to us – we might even shudder at the thought of having to live without it. Probably we've come to realize our good fortune at having been found and initiated by a living master. Very likely our relationship with our Master is the most meaningful thing in our lives.

This relationship has existed for longer than we can imagine – from the moment when we were born in fact, or perhaps even before. It started because the Lord saw our hunger for him and so created a longing within us to get closer to him. From that time onwards we have been seeking for a way to establish a meaningful relationship with him.

As we now know, for serious seekers it's necessary to find a master who is living, so that we can relate to him and learn from him, and love him. Only a living master can reveal to us the reality of God himself, beyond any conceptual thinking. What's more, we should never underestimate the importance of the role that our love for him and his love for us has to play. Ultimately, this is going to let us find God.

In truth, we never found the Master. When we were ready for him, he found us. And this may have arisen from our general feeling of not being comfortable in this world. We might have always had a sense that we didn't quite belong. We may even have felt lonely.

The masters tell us that loneliness is one of the ways that we're drawn to seeking God. If we were always happy in this world, we probably would have never given him a thought. Maharaj Charan Singh has told us that our loneliness is the soul's hankering to go back to the Father.

Our Master has also revealed to us that we are not simply physical beings. We are spiritual beings who yearn to return to that state of bliss from which we originally came. And we've learned that, just as we are not mere physical creatures, neither is our Master simply a physical being. The Master has an inner form which is one with the Creator himself. And through our love for him and his love for us he will bring us back to the Creator.

Ultimately the only thing that really counts is our love for our Master and his love for us. Maharaj Charan Singh told us that there is no stronger

bond that exists than the bond between master and disciple. And it all comes from him. It is his love for us that makes us respond by falling in love with him.

This is how Great Master describes a true master and why he draws us to him. In the second volume of *Philosophy of the Masters* he writes:

A Master possesses the unique magnetic power of love which draws a devotee towards him and creates within him a feeling of indifference towards worldly attractions. ... Everything that radiates from the Master – the light of his beautiful face, the lines on his forehead, even his indifference when he is displeased with the devotee, the lustre around him when he speaks smilingly – all pierce the heart of the devotee and thus attract him to his Master.

Our souls recognize him and want to become one with him. The wonderful thing is that our Master has been sent here to make that happen.

We may feel lost sometimes. We may feel our Master is so far away we can't reach him. But he assures us that he's always with us. He will never leave us. And now we need to work with him. Our walking the path is a partnership with our Master – in which he is playing the biggest part. We can't see what's happening, and the part we're playing is probably very small. Considering our helplessness and ignorance, we just have to do what our Master tells us to do.

The little bit we can do – our meditation and trying to live the path – is how we work with him. We do what we can on this side of the eye centre, while he does his own work in that inner space that we can't see now. And if we find this process slow, the only way we can maybe speed it up is to work hard. And then trust that when he thinks the time is right, he'll give us everything.

One thing our Master won't do for us is take away our karma – he won't change the destiny that we have to go through. But he will help us go through it. He will give us the strength to cope with what we have to endure. And he may even make the load seem lighter, easier to bear.

He also won't stop us creating new karma, because just by being alive we're constantly doing that. We're told, of course, that the simple act of meditation deals with much of this. And living a moral life may prevent

us from incurring heavy new karma. But still, we have to admit that some of our words and actions are not perfect. Perhaps we even feel shame afterwards about something we've said or done; or that our meditation remains so very shaky. But even then, he doesn't get upset with us. Maharaj Ji told somebody once:

Let me assure you, we never displease him. How can we displease him? ... when he knows how helpless we are, what victims we are of our mind, that at every step we are full of failures.... But definitely we can please him by living the Sant Mat way of life, by attending to our meditation. This definitely pleases him, but nothing displeases him.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol.III

Knowing that, what can we do to please him? Only love him and obey him. For us, at this level, our obedience is love. Maharaj Ji has also repeatedly said that love comes from meditation. We can grow love, by meditation. It's true that when we're in his presence, we may feel intense love for the physical master. But even that can waver sometimes. Still, he promises that when we finally meet him inside, we'll know what it means to love him.

Until then, we can only obey him. We can only keep working at our meditation with which we may struggle so much. And the masters have warned us: this could be a struggle for a lifetime. Because what we're trying to do is control the wandering mind that perpetually distracts us.

There's really only one way we can stop our attention straying out into the affairs of the world: our simran – getting our minds to work at saying the words that our Master has given us. Simran is the only thing that can stop our thoughts and make the mind still, even if for very short moments. But these moments can become longer, with attention. And when we do our bhajan, again we have to become still and just listen. We may hear nothing, but we should listen with attention. Simran and bhajan are the only way to contact our Master in his Shabd form.

For most of us, however, meditation remains a struggle. No doubt all of us have felt some frustration, or perhaps heartache, that we seem to be getting nowhere. But it may be that our very struggle is intended to increase our longing for him.

What is it that we're actually longing for? The chances are we meditate because we want to see our inner master. If we can't be with him outside, we want to be with him inside. But the inner master, we're told, is pure Shabd. In other words, divine sound and light. If we're longing for sound and light, it means we're longing for our inner master. They're all the same.

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Ji tells us that longing for the darshan of the Master will lead us to meditation. And when we can't find the Master outside, we will try to find him inside. Our desire for his darshan will lead us within and bring our level of consciousness to where our Master is, where he will always be with us.



*O maiden, the night is running out;
Moment by moment it is waning,
And the terminal time is approaching.
Please your Beloved –
Why are you sleeping so soundly in comfort?
This opportunity is gliding by.
If you miss Him in this body,
 where else will you find Him again?
You will repent later on.
Your Beloved is awake –
Why is the beautiful maiden asleep?
Hurry, wake up and clasp His feet.
Humbly approach Him
And embrace Him from head to foot.
Kindle love for the Beloved and enjoy its bliss,
 O fortunate bride.
It is a great good fortune, says Dadu,
To obtain such a Beloved, the Supreme Lord of all.*

Dadu



The Magic of His Love

Human perceptions are all awry and very limited. When we think we have been abandoned, He may be protecting us. When we wonder where His help has gone, He may be supporting our every step. When we think we are unloved, He may be cradling us in His arms. When we think we can never be forgiven, He has already forgiven us, and is only waiting for us to forget ourselves and our guilt. When we think we have doubts, He may be deepening our faith. Such is the magic of the love with which He tends us, and which He weaves around us. But since He Himself has given us this illusion of freedom and separateness, He plays the game of letting us slowly discover things for ourselves. Time is no problem for the Being who has created time. And in the end, we discover that we have never had a separate existence, but have always dwelt within the sanctuary of His love. So we evolve spiritually. And as our consciousness expands, as our little being merges increasingly into the One Being, so we come nearer and nearer to what folk have called nirvana, enlightenment, God-realization, union with God, merging with the Ocean of Love. And when we experience Him within, we find Him everywhere. Then we come to understand that every thing and every place is sacred and holy.

One Being One



The Gift of a Human Birth

We are not this body. Nor are we our thoughts, actions or feelings. At our core is our truest identity: our soul. The mystics describe the soul as being a drop of the divine ocean and of the same essence as the supreme Lord himself. Our Master tells us that the soul does not belong in this transitory world. Its home is the realm of eternal truth and bliss.

Through this physical form we became associated with the mind and the senses. The sense pleasures of the world distracted the mind and gradually the soul's luminosity was dulled by the weight of those distractions. The soul, encased in a physical body, became increasingly attached to the creation with each passing life. As a consequence, our souls lost their purity and forgot their true purpose.

The mystics explain that it was not intended for us to stay in this creation permanently. We were meant to return to our spiritual source and reunite with our Maker. With the passage of time we lived and died in many different life forms before we attained the gift of a human birth. This human form is precious because it is only in this form that we can ultimately return to the Lord.

When our soul first descended into this realm, the mind became its constant companion. The mind follows the senses, and the senses in turn follow the objects of our desires. The mind constantly seeks out what it perceives as better: more wealth, more status, more power, more material possessions – all in pursuit of happiness. Under its influence we are led further and further away from the Lord. Our souls, however, have become restless, and we yearn for spiritual fulfilment and divine love. The masters have taught us that the mind can be a deadly foe, but when properly disciplined it can become a useful servant.

Mystics throughout the ages have advised us that the Lord resides within this human body. We do not need to look outside of ourselves to pursue God. All that we need is already within us. We are advised to turn our attention inwards, redirecting our thoughts to the pursuit of the divine. There we will find the peace and contentment our souls yearn for.

Getting a human birth is the first step in our journey back home. Being reminded of our purpose and true identity is the next step.

God, in his infinite wisdom, knew that this was not a task we would be able to accomplish on our own. He took mercy on us and sent saints and mystics to this earthly plane to awaken us from our stupor of ignorance.

The full understanding of the gift of our human birth and how to access the knowledge of ourselves and our purpose unfolds only when we take refuge in the company of an authentic, contemporary master. He reminds us that we are pure soul, not this physical being which is so influenced by our mind and senses. Once we start following the teachings of the Master, we begin to realize that the true purpose of this human birth is to merge our soul back into the Lord within. Through the guidance of our Master, we learn how to unlock the door to this precious treasure.

For those who earnestly seek the truth, the masters share with us life's greatest treasure – the gift of Nam. Mystics across different times, religions and countries came to reveal this one common truth: that this Nam – the dynamic aspect of the Lord himself, by means of which he has created all that is, and by means of which he sustains it still – can be found within. The method of meditation given to us at the time of our initiation is a technique called Surat Shabd Yoga. Through its practice, we merge our consciousness into the Shabd, and by its power rise upwards through increasingly subtle spiritual regions towards the Divine One.

This is a path of self-realization and ultimately God-realization. This is a simple path but not an easy one, which is why the masters, after blessing us with initiation, continue to guide us, taking us under their protection and bearing responsibility for us, until we reach our final destination. The immeasurable wealth that we attain when we unite with the Lord makes even precious gems pale in comparison. Through love and devotion, we can realize the divine light of the Lord.

The practice of Surat Shabd Yoga connects our soul to the Lord when we contemplate on his Name, thereby helping to awaken our love for the Lord. It is Nam, the Word of God, that sustains the whole universe and is the manifestation of the Lord's creative power. As the Lord's emissaries, true saints are Nam in human form. Being God-realized, they are in the unique position of knowing how to accomplish this goal and can teach their disciples to do the same.

Taking refuge with a spiritual master and practising the meditation technique he teaches is the only way to escape the cycle of birth and death. By attaching our consciousness to the Shabd inside, our store of karma is gradually burned away. Only when the store of karma has been eliminated, can the soul enter the realm of pure spirit. Our inner journey culminates in our merging with the supreme Lord.

The practice of meditation, as taught by a true master when he bestows the gift of initiation on us, is simple to understand but harder to put into practice. The first stage of the journey takes us up to the third eye, the point just above and behind our two physical eyes. The second stage is from the third eye to the highest spiritual region. It is only once we can open the third eye that the second stage can commence.

Our attention is constantly scattered as our thoughts flow out into the world through the nine apertures of the body. The mind resists our numerous attempts to focus. We are advised by the masters to use the mind's natural tendency to dwell on worldly things and do simran instead. To prepare the mind for when we sit at our chosen hour, we can do simran throughout the day when engaged in tasks that do not require our full attention.

Practising constant simran will keep us in a spiritually charged atmosphere, making it easier to concentrate at the eye focus at the time of meditation. Dhyan is a gift from the Master that he will bestow upon us when the time is right. In bhajan, we endeavour to listen to the Shabd that is constantly reverberating within. Once connected to the Shabd, we are swept up within its light and sound, traversing the wondrous inner regions with our Master at our side, until finally we are carried to the feet of the Lord.

In this day and age, it is easy to get bogged down by the stress and routines of our lives. Those of us blessed to keep the company of a living master must reflect on the gifts we have been granted. These gifts, both of a human birth and of Nam, open our eyes to the truth and purpose of our existence. We can live within this creation, but not stay attached to it, looking past the illusion to the treasure within.



Karma in the Real World

What do we see when we stand in a crowd, watching the world go by – do we just see people enjoying life and going about their business? What we are witnessing, in fact, are tides and waves on the ocean of karma, rising and falling, manifesting in the dynamics of the scene before us. And it's not only true in the limited, local sense – it is the reality behind everything that's happening in the world all the time.

When we analyze this, we realize that what we are seeing is the outcome of actions performed in the past, coming to fruition in the present. This material domain was not designed to be a paradise. In reality we find ourselves on a dark and dangerous ocean, having to navigate the ebb and flow of a fate that we ourselves created. In light of this, it is no surprise that Soami Ji made this observation about the world we live in:

*Heavy, intense darkness prevails in the world
and the body is a storehouse of shadows.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

It is not difficult to see why he describes the world like this. Who has not observed that the world is obsessed with the pursuit of sense pleasures, power and position, and possessions of every kind? People commit all kinds of misdeeds in their quest for satisfaction of their personal desires. Countries go to war in order to serve their own self-interest. Even now there are nations and people locked in deadly conflict. One wonders if there was ever a time when peace and harmony reigned in the world.

If we analyze this situation in light of what we have learned under our Master's guidance, we can clearly see that all the elements of this unhappy situation arise out of ego and a desire to further one's own interests. People chase after their desires, believing them to be the source of their happiness, but they never stop to consider the consequences of their actions. They behave as though there are no consequences, but, as we have all discovered, there is no action without consequence. There is no benefit to be had in this world without paying a heavy price.

The fact of consequence following action means that every time we act we are bound to the consequence that follows. These consequences build

up over time, and it should be noted that they do not necessarily follow immediately after the initiating action – it could take years, decades, even lifetimes. So, it is unlikely that in one life we will be able to account for all the actions that we have performed in this life, let alone those performed in previous lives.

In addition, the circumstances in which we find ourselves are entirely circumscribed by the karmas assigned to this life. If we continue chasing after the pleasures of the world, incurring additional karmas day after day, how are we any better than rats in a maze, chasing after the promise of cheese? Without help and intervention from someone who is not lost in this maze, what hope would there be for us?

The mystics tell us that there are eight million four hundred thousand different species into which the soul may incarnate. It is therefore a rare and precious opportunity to incarnate in the human form. What makes it particularly special is that it is only in the human form that we may aspire to liberation. Since one cannot rely on this opportunity to come our way in every life, it is vitally important that we realize just how unique an opportunity this human birth represents.

It would be foolish to allow such a gift to go to waste by continuing as we have always done. We have laboured under the shackles of mind and maya since the dawn of time, but now we find ourselves in a situation in which we can work towards our ultimate freedom.

Since we have been blessed with the human form, it may be said that we have crossed the first barrier to liberation from the wheel of coming and going in this world. But if we continue doing the same things we have always done, we will continue perpetuating the same misery from which we want to escape. How then shall we free ourselves from the tyranny of the mind and senses that have held us captive all this time?

The true mystics have come among us for the express purpose of liberating us from this maze of illusion. They approach us with all the answers to our many questions and the solution for our desperate situation.

Our Master points out how it is that we remain trapped in misery in the prison house of this world and how the constant activity of the mind has blinded us to our true identity, namely that we are the immortal soul-children of the Creator.

Our true heritage is that of the Lord himself, yet we continue to wallow in the mire of the world's ephemeral attractions. We are slow to recognize and respond to the magic of the Master's message. He tells us that it is only by stilling the mind through meditation and rising up to the eye centre that we can escape the confines of this world. The only way for us to escape the clutches of mind and maya is by going within and contacting Nam. This is what will ultimately return us to our true home and our true Father.

This Nam is the all-pervasive power of the Lord by means of which he has created everything that was created, and by which he maintains it even now. That power has many names: Word, Logos, Shabd, Kalma, Tao and many more. But the underlying reality is one and the same; this is the divine current within us all that may be contacted by anyone whose desire is to return home to our true Father. This may be achieved by following the methodology provided by a true living master.

There are certain conditions however that we must meet, or our efforts are likely to prove fruitless. First, we need to adopt a vegetarian diet. In doing so we consciously elect to consume food that carries the least amount of karmic debt, to keep our karmic burden to a minimum.

Second, we must abstain from substances that scatter our minds. These include alcohol, recreational drugs and tobacco products. Since the object of spiritual practice is to concentrate and still the mind, it is self-evident that indulgence in these substances will be damaging and contrary to our primary goal in life.

Third, we need to live a moral life, as prescribed by most religions, such as in the ten commandments of the Christian faith. Finally, we must practise meditation, which is the great driver of our divine destiny.

Only by implementing our Master's guidance in this way do we have any hope of ascending into the subtle realms within. This will put us in a position to contact the divine Shabd that will purge us of our karmic debts, remove the coverings of mind and maya from our souls, and render them fit to stand in the presence of the Lord himself.

We should recognize that we are, in fact, helpless and ignorant. Our only true resource is our Master, and to accept his guidance and teachings is the most logical course of action. This will lead to success.

The thing that has caused more problems in our life than any other single factor is our ego. Now we need to cultivate the habit of putting it aside and surrendering ourselves to the Master's guidance, and put all our attention into doing the spiritual work that he has asked us to do.

Let us not delay. Time is not our friend – this life is not designed to last forever. The list of our family and friends who have passed on is getting longer, and our turn is certainly coming closer. The time to act is now. We cannot afford to procrastinate.

Each day should start with meditation, and should continue with our consciousness permeated with the Master's presence. We can hold him close by doing our simran, and whenever we have some time to spare we can sit, even if only for a few minutes, and do concentrated simran and bhajan.

Being constantly aware of his presence will accelerate our progress, and we will find our daily lives suffused with an atmosphere of devotion and grace.



*Not knowing the mystery of life,
you get more and more entangled
in the web of illusion.*

*Have faith
that no one other than the Guru belongs to you.*

*Go to the Master's harbour
and tie your soul to the primal Shabd.*

*Only the Shabd, and nothing else,
can liberate you from this web.*

*So take hold of the Master's key
and open the door of Shabd*

Soami Ji

The Imminence of Death

How do we think of death? As a friend or a foe? As a release? As the end, or a new beginning? All we know for certain is that we will die – maybe in twenty-four hours, or in twenty-four years. But either way, our death is imminent.

In our society it is not polite to talk about death. People think it is macabre, that a person talking about it has a death wish or is morbid. It reminds them of something they do not wish to be reminded of. That's strange, because when we watch TV, we see death, and when we read the papers, we read about death. This one shot in a hijacking, that one killed a little girl, hundreds die in earthquakes, plane crashes, tidal waves. We are constantly reminded of death. But somehow, we spin a gossamer cocoon of invulnerability around us: it won't happen to us.

And yet, if this world and all its trappings is not our goal, if our goal is God-realization, freedom or enlightenment, then we have to think about death. We need to ask ourselves two questions: Do I remember at every moment that I am dying, and that everyone and everything else is also dying, and therefore I must treat all beings with compassion? Has my understanding of death become so keen that I am devoting every second to the pursuit of enlightenment? If we could say yes to these questions, then we would be learning to die while living – becoming aware.

This world that we live in is an illusion. Our minds, however, are so befuddled that we think all this is real and lasting. Our myopic focus on this life and this life only is the great deception. And in truth, this is the purpose of the mind: to deceive us. The more our attention scatters, the less chance we have to focus and be aware of the truth.

The first step in awareness is to realize just how far we have fallen, and then to decide to do something about it. Our lives seem to possess their own bizarre momentum. It seems like this because we have let our minds take control. Soami Ji says:

*Weigh thou justly in thy mind;
The (so-called) gyanis say
by their intellectual understanding*

*That the world is a dream.
But by the currents of the mind
are they carried away every moment,
And then they take the world as a waking reality.*

Radha Soami Teachings

Soami Ji is not saying that we shouldn't use the intellect. We who live in this kind of world must use the intellect. First, we need to realize intellectually that the world is a dream, but then we need to realize that intellectual understanding actually means nothing. The intellect can only point us in the direction we need to go. But it can't take us there! To get there, we need our Master's grace.

When so many great minds have been deceived by the mind over the aeons, how lucky we are to have somehow acquired this grace to look beyond the mind. Unfortunately, even though we have a master, we still get trapped by the illusion and we sometimes feel lost and confused. Nothing seems to work for us, and it feels as if he has abandoned us.

When this happens, it is not because the Master has gone away or abandoned the soul or because he is not physically present. The Master cannot be anywhere else but right here, inside us, and in everything that we see or touch. But we lose focus, we lose our awareness of who and what we are and where we are going.

It is like going to watch a movie. When you sit down, you are aware of the people around you, the smell of popcorn, the chair you're sitting in. But then the movie begins, and you become engrossed in the story. The movie becomes your reality.

Isn't this exactly what happens to us in this world? Intellectually, we know this is an illusion: a play, as the masters call it. But birth after birth, we have become more involved in the play. The play of the world becomes our reality, as do our very intense and time-consuming jobs and relationships, our children, friends, our houses, or lack thereof. We have lost our awareness of the true, ultimate reality.

This illusion that we live in may be so all-pervading that the soul cries out, in Soami Ji's words:

*Life is so uncertain, brother,
and I still haven't unravelled its secrets.
What am I to do? ...
what can I hope for now, except death?
The Master then uttered his words of wisdom:
Have patience, O thoughtless one, why seek death?
Repeat the Name incessantly with your mind
and hold the form of the Master in your heart.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

All the masters have said that we should do our meditation and keep the thought of the Master with us at all times. If we do this we are practising awareness and the process of 'dying while living.' It means bringing the scattered mind home. This meditation, this practice of death, is not something that we can force or make happen, as we do with so many things in the rest of our lives. It has to be approached differently. In our daily lives we strive. In meditation we must let go.

Isn't this what our Master keeps on telling us? Just do your meditation. Leave it to the Master. Let go, let him do it. Don't try to achieve anything. So-called 'success' in meditation is not in our hands. All that happens is by his will. Just be still. Be there. The more we struggle, the more obstacles come in our way, and the road becomes difficult and tedious.

Our first misconception is that we have to get 'results' quickly. That can only lead to disappointment. Of course, that does not mean we should neglect our meditation. It just means to approach it differently. We have to trust the Master implicitly and believe him when he says that everything will be okay if we just do our meditation.

Contrary to what we may think, meditation does not start when we sit down for it. Meditation has no start or end – it should be an ongoing practice. But for practical purposes, let's say meditation starts with thinking about it. This is the beginning of awareness. It is making the mind receptive. These moments of awareness can be practised at all times, even during our busy days. All it requires is a quiet moment of stillness, a moment of remembrance, and then it is as if we never stopped meditation. The practice just continues seamlessly.

In that moment when we let go, when we stop thinking, when the mind is suddenly empty, the Master is there. He's always been there, but at that moment, we remember. These moments are rare, and we therefore need to work at this, to just break our train of thoughts for a moment. Gradually these moments will increase until they become one continuous stream of remembrance. He will be in every thought, every action.

All of this is just the background. We haven't actually sat down for meditation yet. Then when we do sit, we can go through a similar process.

We must start meditation with a clear mind, which first of all means to be awake – literally. Take the time to wake up. Why are we in such a hurry to start simran? Will it get us anywhere faster if we have a five-minute head start? We may fall asleep, or just give up if we rush.

Start the meditation by getting into the right frame of mind. Just settle down and think of him. Just let him be there. Take as much time with this as necessary. Being in the Master's company in this state is meditation. This creates a state of calm waiting. Now we can start with the simran. This may just happen spontaneously. But don't let go of the Master. Keep the awareness.

The power of simran lies in the fact that the Master gave those holy names to us. That means that the words we repeat are not just words. They carry the power of the Master. So, when we repeat them, let us treasure them. Let them remind us of our Master.

Just as we moved from calm waiting into simran, so there will come a point where we will move as naturally into the bhajan, or listening for the sound. At that point, simran stops. Everything stops. There is just sound. And this is where we really let go – where we can finally merge with the Sound of sounds. This is dying while living.



A Perspective on Emotion

Imagine the pleasure of living without excessive emotion. Sounds too good to be true? Emotions are part of our system of responding to the world. Without them we'd be like robots. Music wouldn't move us. Loss wouldn't affect us. Nothing would bring us to tears or make us fall down laughing.

The aim is not to become emotionless, but to manage their effects on us. We need to develop the ability to tame our emotions, or better, to detach from them. We often don't see them for what they are – just thoughts. Recognizing them, and detaching from them can prevent our emotions from controlling us.

True detachment comes ultimately from our meditation. Meditation is the magic that can help us manage the emotional reactions that arise within us. It helps us keep a balance.

Our emotions are erratic and dynamic because they are linked to thoughts generated by our mind. The process is continuous – changing from moment to moment, often without our awareness. Uncontrolled emotions can wreak havoc and spread pain throughout our lives.

That is where meditation comes in. It doesn't make us emotionless – it makes us aware of our emotional reactions and enables us to control them so that we are not unduly affected by them. In *Awareness of the Divine* the author writes:

When the mind is burdened by thoughts and emotions associated with material existence, the essential inner spirit is forgotten. Though this spirit is the source of life, awareness of its presence becomes lost amid the demands of everyday existence.

Confronting the mind is the most formidable task we will ever undertake, and we should be aware of its power when we challenge it. We will never conquer our mind and the emotions it stirs up in us without our Master's grace and considerable effort from our side.

We are plagued by numerous emotions, some so subtle that we don't even recognize them. Whatever situation we face, our rapidly shifting emotions change the way we feel and think, disrupting our concentration

and focus. The only way to transcend or conquer emotion is to raise our consciousness to the eye centre.

The spiritual journey is characterized by change; change that leads to personal spiritual growth, culminating in enlightenment. It requires that we make changes in every aspect of our lives, such as our lifestyle, thinking, actions and beliefs. As we make these changes, our meditation becomes more fruitful. The path becomes more real to us, and we become more aware of our emotions and their effect on us.

We may then consciously try to control emotions such as fear, irritability or anger, because we are acutely aware of their harmful effects on both ourselves and others. Strong emotions like anger and fear can flare up suddenly and unexpectedly make themselves felt, sometimes even violently.

We are very aware of our limitations and weaknesses on the spiritual path. When this was put to Maharaj Ji, he explained:

When you're on the Path and meditating, you don't become worse than before; you become more aware of your weaknesses.... And when you become conscious of them, naturally you are ashamed of them, and that makes you want to get rid of them.

Die to Live

Different events, situations and mental activities trigger different emotions in us. When we receive good news we feel happy, possibly even exuberant; when something unpleasant happens we feel distressed and unhappy; when we are threatened we feel fear. We often make decisions based on whether we are happy, angry, sad, bored, or frustrated, but those decisions are not necessarily the right ones.

We tend to accept our thoughts as facts when we constantly regurgitate them, and then marry them with associated emotions that produce a turbocharged unnatural response, which in turn derails us. Being aware of our internal thermometer and what triggers its fluctuations can help us control our mental state, which ultimately helps us to manage stressful situations better.

Understanding the effect emotions have on us can help us navigate life with greater ease and stability. Understanding the nature of emotion gives us a level of self-control that helps us not be victimized by excessive emotion.

Our desire on the spiritual path is for peace and spiritual growth. Outbursts such as anger are unsettling and disturbing – especially since we meditate in the hope of creating an environment of equanimity, composure and self-control. Loss of control is inconsistent with spiritual growth.

While we strive to pursue the spiritual path to the best of our understanding, we need to accept that until we reach the eye centre varying emotional situations will occur that will be disruptive, painful and unsettling. We cannot map, plot and predict what situations karma will deliver to us, but if we stay balanced and keep our eye on the compass guiding our emotions, we will come through most situations calmly, irrespective of karmic circumstances.

It also helps to remember that our destiny was determined before we took birth, and that the Master is guiding us through karmic situations that cannot be changed. But with practice and simran, we can control our emotional reactions. To develop self-restraint we can follow the advice given in the book *Essential Sant Mat*:

The Master explains that we can withdraw our attention from our powerfully distracting thoughts and emotions by replacing the constant replaying of these thoughts and emotions with a more powerful, inner-directed, form of repetition. This is called simran.

It's unfortunate that when we experience fluctuating emotions, we tend to forget that remembering our simran and the Master can help us maintain our balance.

We're standing now before the formidable mind like the Biblical David before Goliath. We may have imagined that, like David with his slingshot, we could quickly overpower the mind. But we soon discover that although the purpose of meditation is to turn our attention inwards and gain control over the mind, this is a lifelong struggle.

In meditation we may try to still the mind and focus our attention within, only to find that the mind has the continuous upper hand with its habit of running out through our scattered thoughts, emotions, perceptions and sensations. When we continue to repeat the same thoughts and memories, we are like wind-up toys, repeatedly bumping

into the same walls, never realizing there may be an open door just to our left or right. That open door is simran.

We are mostly unaware of this frustrating habit of repetitive thinking because it is so ingrained in us. But we can interrupt our repetitive thoughts and emotions by creating new grooves in the mind with simran, which is simply a different form of repetition.

As we negotiate our way through the karmic entanglement we call life, we often don't know which course to take or what lies ahead. We don't have lookouts and physical guides to steer us on the right course. Instead, we have emotions like fear and anxiety, which do nothing but cause confusion and paralysis.

Now we're discovering that our own efforts to control our thoughts and emotions often fall short. To become detached from them we have to rely on the grace and guidance of our Master. When we come to the spiritual path, its magnificence captures and enchants us. We embark on it with awe and wonder, ready to take on whatever the path demands of us. But it is unquestionably the Master himself who captivates us and draws us to himself. We can trust him and his promise to support us and be with us throughout our journey to eternity.



Keeping a Balance

Keep a balance. These three little words are loaded with meaning and apply to countless situations in our lives. We lose our balance in so many ways: focusing on our jobs to the detriment of our families, with one more email, one more phone call, one more issue to fix – the list goes on and on.

We get so busy with being busy that we forget the importance of balance. But if we go off balance, we won't be able to sustain ourselves on our chosen path. So, the Masters say: keep a balance.

The law of karma leans heavily on the concept of balance. Karma is the law of nature which requires us to reap the consequences of our actions. It is nothing more nor less than the well-known law of cause and effect.

All human activity is a search for a balance between survival and happiness – in other words, a search for a balance between the logical mind and the soul. To live in balance we must have both logic and soul, but many of us believe that is impossible. The world tells us to reject the soul while spirituality tells us to reject the mind.

We may think that since meditation is the key to the spiritual path, perhaps it would be best to spend as many hours each day in meditation as possible. We may think it best to avoid marriage, leave off developing any profession, not have children, live in solitude and meditate all day. But when we go to extremes, our God-given natural system begins to revolt. Therefore, we need to maintain a balance.

Thus, the Master says that we should live in the world as a householder. Masters also have families, yet they keep their balance. Whenever we go to extremes in any aspect of our life, we lose perspective and balance.

Why is it so difficult to maintain a balance? Our culture has always taught us to be special, to be better than others, to be competitive. We attach our worth to being considered special and superior.

But spirituality is not about being unique. By living on the surface of life for so long, our effort has been to be special. But this is the opposite of spirituality, which is to melt and become one with existence. The more we try to be special, the further we get from the truth. If we genuinely make the effort to become one with everything, with God, our internal struggle will completely go away.

Discontentment and expectations also lead to a loss of balance. We magnify our needs and justify why we should not have to wait to see them fulfilled. If we live this way, whatever we have is never enough, so we sacrifice all to get more, and in doing so lose our balance.

Adversities and difficulties in life can also cause us to lose balance. We all have personal troubles. We have times in our lives when a loved one passes away or is struggling with illness, or when it seems as if our family is falling apart. At times we may feel like the whole world is against us. And sometimes we may feel spiritually dry and bereft – we feel forsaken, which may cause us to lose balance.

However, Maharaj Charan Singh often referred to adversity as a blessing in disguise, for it is during the most difficult times that we are pulled closer to the Lord. The mystics explain that suffering purifies us and makes us worthy of eternal joy within.

As harsh as it may sound, a death in the family, financial difficulties, illness or humiliation are all signs of the Lord's grace. We should be grateful for any occurrence that reminds us of him and his love for us and makes us shift our focus to him. We can also take comfort in the fact that adversity is a balancing of karma and strengthens our power of resistance.

How can we maintain consistent balance in our lives? We need to take a step back and define our priorities. We need to consider both the physical and spiritual aspects of our lives. The physical aspect of life includes how we treat other people and ourselves – even our own bodies. After all, without mental and physical health we can't enjoy life, including meditation.

Our spiritual life is what defines our foundation, our identity and our reason for living. We should try to remember that we are not the centre of our own universe; we need to prioritize making God our focus. We can do this by taking to heart the Master's simple, down-to-earth advice to keep a balance.

When we first come on the path, in our excitement, we may suddenly want to become ascetics and renunciates. We may try to shut ourselves in a room so that we can meditate all day and run away from our responsibilities. But the saints caution us to live a normal life and fulfil our responsibilities. They advise us to live with detachment and weave meditation into our everyday lives – to follow the middle path and be moderate.

We must be ordinary people, living ordinary lives. We must just make meditation a part of our ordinary routine. Even when life becomes challenging, with professional and family obligations, we can place ourselves in the Master's refuge. The Masters emphasize that to find balance in our behaviour and actions, we need to bring our mind to a state of stillness where we can experience peace of mind.

How can we do this? For most of us, the mind seems totally uncontrollable. It flits from one thought to another and hardly ever stops. If we give up worries, then desires march in and we start obsessing and worrying. Our challenge is to quieten and calm the mind.

Mystics give us various hints on how to achieve this inner balance – how to find the point of equilibrium. The masters tell us that if we want to return to our source and become one with the Lord, we have to achieve inner stillness.

When we feel we can't possibly control our mind to restore balance, let us remember that the Master himself has come to lift us out of this worldly existence. He is always there to help us, but it is our responsibility to maximise our efforts to do our simran and become good and balanced human beings.



Create Your Own Future

We live in an amazing and very interesting world. The diversity among human beings is fascinating and then consider the rest of the creation, and its various life forms. It is a marvel to see just how many different and intriguing forms function in the physical universe. Looking at all this, one may wonder: how did all this come to be? And how much more to it is there, other than what we can perceive with our senses?

If we find ourselves in a crowded place, like a busy mall, we may see all kinds of people, all going about their business, each in their own way, with their own agendas. It's fascinating to see all these different people – all bustling about in their so-called 'normal' lives. One wonders what shape these lives have taken, and the varied pathways that they will follow.

But if we consider what we have been told by the various spiritual masters who have come to us to show us the way to Truth, we can also discover something more fundamental – the manifestation of karma. All these beings, whether human or otherwise, are being swept along by the irresistible tides of their individual destinies. In fact, all that we observe on this plane is in the same category. The entire material plane is a field of karmas, where the driving force behind everything is the momentum of consequences following actions.

We are not exempt from this. We too are driven by the inexorable force of our individual karmas. Fortunately, however, under the guidance of our Master, we have been blessed with insight into the laws of cause and effect. He has explained to us the fundamental principle of karma and reincarnation, which is the key to understanding what is going on around us.

We need to understand one simple principle, because although they may seem like two separate concepts, karma and reincarnation are inextricably bound together; they are both part of the same truth. Armed with this understanding, we find ourselves equipped to shape our future positively or negatively. We can choose to live selfish lives without compassion for all living creatures, or we can embrace positivity, and we can try to be good human beings who bring loving kindness to all that live. The latter option allows us to shape a most wonderful future which, together with the Master's teachings, will speed us on our way to spiritual liberation.

Come to the Master's Country

Soami Ji tells us that we don't really belong in this world. He calls it an alien world. The things that seem so real and familiar to us here are illusory. He invites the soul to come rather to the Master's country:

*Come now, dear soul, to the Master's country,
where there is neither body, nor karma, nor conflict.
This world, this alien land,
is a game of body, mind and senses.
Discard these coverings,
these extraneous fragments of your Self.
Listen to the Guru's message with full attention,
through Surat Shabd practice head for your home.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

Soami Ji tells us that body, mind and senses are not who we truly are. They are part of a game in which we are caught up. This game is vast and complex: it is played by the soul, assuming different life forms and in varying circumstances. It takes place in the arena of space and time, governed by strict rules or laws. We believe that the game is real but the mystics teach us that it is all an illusion.

We don't belong here. We come from the highest source, a place where even gods cannot gain access – a region where Kal, the ruler of the physical, astral and causal universes, has no power or influence.

The soul has been moving from life to life, body to body, for aeons, driven by the consequences of the mind's actions and desires, in an endless cycle of transmigration. In this process, the soul accumulates an ever-increasing load of karmas, desires and attachments, all of which keep it locked in the game until it knows neither its true self nor its source.

Mystics teach that our true life force is the soul. The mind has usurped the soul's power in order to pursue its own ends and it, in turn, is trapped by the distractions of this phenomenal world. We have become entangled in the creation through the senses and the desires they engender. Mind has thus become a slave to the senses and we have lost touch with the soul.

We have become blind to true reality. Driven by our karmas, we are the puppets of our destiny.

The mind, body and senses present formidable challenges to us, and the process of discarding them could take an entire lifetime. The influence of the mind is extremely difficult to overcome. We hear the teachings of the masters and we accept them. We tell ourselves how blessed we are, yet the mind still runs its own way; we still find ourselves caught up in greed, anger, jealousy, ambition and our various attachments.

To enter the spiritual realms within we must raise our level of consciousness as directed by the saints. This is probably the hardest task anyone could undertake. This practice is the very essence of the path we follow. It is the process of reuniting the soul with the Lord by immersing ourselves in the Shabd, the audible life stream. Without merging with the Shabd, we will not be able to rise above the realm of mind and maya and return to our true home.

Saints teach that this Shabd is the source of all creation. It is in fact the dynamic aspect of the Divine, and if we immerse ourselves in it, we will ultimately merge in the true Lord. Before we can effectively hear the Shabd, however, we need to be able to withdraw our attention from the world of external phenomena to the eye focus, where the mind and soul are knotted together.

Sadly, most of us don't know the soul: it is so buried under the weight of karma, desires and attachments that we are unaware of its existence. This path is for the liberation of the soul, but the practice has to be done by the mind, through our attention and our will. So, our task is to awaken our mind to the reality of our soul, and to do this requires commitment, discipline, obedience and devotion. As Great Master wrote in a letter to one of his disciples:

Stilling the wild mind and withdrawing the attention from the body and concentrating it in the eye focus is a slow affair. A Sufi says: "A life period is required to win and hold the beloved in one's arms." Concentrating the attention in the eye focus is like the crawl of an ant on a wall. It climbs to fall and falls to rise and to climb again. With perseverance it succeeds and

does not fall again. ... But one should do simran and bhajan, not as a matter of routine with a heavy heart or as a task, but should take to it with love and eagerness.

Spiritual Gems

Great Master explained in another letter to a disciple that our lack of success on the path is because we see our spiritual work as secondary – the world and its objects are more important to us than spiritual matters. Success even in the material world only comes when we put ourselves wholeheartedly into the work. He says that our minds have too many worldly cravings and we allow it too much freedom.

The only way we have of overcoming the weaknesses of the mind is by rising above them, and the only way we can do that is by committing ourselves to our spiritual practice. Daily we brush our teeth, wash our clothes, clean our houses, and wash and feed our bodies – these tasks are necessary for our physical well-being. But we are not just physical beings – we must also take care of our spiritual needs. Meditation fulfils those needs. We need to care enough for our soul to cleanse, nurture and feed it.

We need to recognize the profound importance of our meditation and persevere with faith and love. Initially it may be a struggle, but as we persist, we realize that we cannot do anything without the grace and help of the Master.

As long as we remain in bondage to our mind and senses the pain of the separated soul continues. Our Master is waiting for us to come home. He is ready, willing and able to help. He makes everything possible. When he graces us with love, then we apply ourselves to this work with love and devotion. Without love for the Master, our spirituality is likely to remain conceptual. His presence in our life makes this path real to us. We are irrevocably changed by our association with a true living master.

We cannot accomplish this journey through our own efforts – we have embarked upon it because it is his will. We are on our way home after aeons of separation. This is an indescribable blessing. What grace and good fortune! This time round we get to go home. For how many lives have we been bound to the cycle of birth and death, our soul concealed under layers of causal, astral and physical forms, and everything that

goes with them. Even though beset by past impressions, desires and attachments, the soul always yearns for its source.

Over time we begin to realize that our very perseverance is in itself a clear sign of grace. And sooner or later, when the Lord wills it, we will rise within and be transformed. Then all our doubts will dissolve. As Eknath says in *Many Voices, One Song*:

*I saw the Light of the three worlds,
and I saw the Master within my heart.
The wick of a lamp and its flame –
I'm illumined inside by this blossom of light.
Full of life, this flame is my very soul.
Now, says Eknath, my doubts are gone.*

We begin to trust the teachings more, trusting that the Master will help us. Our love begins to mature, and we devote ourselves to deep practice with devoted attention. The time will come when we will traverse the vast inner regions and eventually arrive in the Master's country.



Searching for the Default Mode

There is a man who knows nothing. Maybe more accurately, he knows nothing about anything outside of this world, this earth, this matter or this life. Even his view of the things of this planet is extremely limited. He understands that the things of earth are studied, but what about the things not of this world? He does not have any proof that any person in human form knows those things. No proof that death has been transcended, nor that any living person at any time has seen what is going on beyond life as we know it. It is all based on hearsay and faith.

So many ideas, so many religions, so many truths. The different beliefs are exactly that – different.

His faith is already weak, and as he ponders these ideas, it weakens further. He needs to keep his wits about him in this crazy world. He needs to find his place of solace, his safe space. He needs to set his mind to go there automatically – to set it as his default mode.

Where does he find his default mode? There is a voice inside him that pushes him to go on, throughout the day and into the night. In his mind he steps back and tries to simplify things. He has to look for things he knows without doubt. He has to find proof. Or maybe not? Then the morning comes, and he realizes it is going to be another hot day. As the sun rises he tries to take in this phenomenon over a cup of coffee – a sun which rises.

His mind wanders on. He starts thinking that soon, within a month or two, the heat will begin to dissipate. Autumn will approach and winter will follow. And then before he knows it, spring will arrive, bringing new life. Again he wonders what it is that makes all of this happen. This life-sustaining fireball further up in the sky now, and tonight a moon. Birds twitter, ants are hard at work, storms are blowing, flowers blossoming, trees are swaying in a breeze that will bring rain.

Some energy is in operation. There cannot be any doubt. He takes it in as simply and plainly as it is presented; no hidden meanings. Then it strikes him – if he ever needed proof, this is it! His thoughts of the sun, the moon, the planets and galaxies, the animals and plants on earth, the winds, the clouds, the land and water, suddenly make him feel alive. This abundance of life and movement, the existence of a sustaining energy, this is proof!

Can there be different words from different religions for the same thing – an energy or a creative life force?

And then he remembers there is a path that he knows of which encapsulates all religions. A path which does not divide, but unites. Which says it does not matter what beliefs you follow; you don't have to let it go to walk this path.

It explains, with the concepts of reincarnation and karma, why some have it so good here and others live terrible lives.

He remembers a quote by Hafiz, which reads:

*The Beloved is with us day and night, O Hafiz!
He is the very life that flows in our veins.*

Khwaja Hafiz

He realizes that he can hardly grasp the enormity of this statement. But then he remembers, no, he knows, that that energy is present, here and now, every moment. He is looking at it right now!

The path tells him that his intellect is too small to understand the creation, that he sees it from a very limited perspective. That he does not have to know it all. He only has to know very few things. He doesn't have to remember anything else.

And yes, faith is important, but now he can actually work it out for himself. Because it is the Truth. And to this path he can just come with humility and sincerity and love. He can just come and listen to a true, living teacher. And he can decide to have faith, or he can decide *not* to have faith, but either way, as he contemplates his weaknesses, he remembers that he actually *has* proof.

So he goes back to the very few things he needs to know, the basics taught by the teacher. He doesn't have to know anything else: lacto-vegetarianism, no alcohol or drugs, a pure and moral life, and prayer.

And how does he pray? Oh yes! He's been taught – meditation.

Suddenly relief washes over him, and he sets his default mode before pouring another cup of coffee.



Book Review

Sant Eknath: One with the Lord

BY JUDITH SANKARANARAYAN

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Sant Eknath (1533–1599 CE) was one of the most beloved of the Maharashtrian saints. A prolific writer, Eknath wrote in his native Marathi so that his works were accessible to all. His writings include philosophical works, numerous translations of Hindu scriptures into Marathi with accompanying commentary, biographies of saints who came before him, and more than four thousand simple verses. *Sant Eknath: One with the Lord* is divided into four main sections, three describing his life, teachings, and works, and the fourth offering translations of some of his poetry.

Eknath had an early yearning for *bhakti* or devotion. Even as a boy, he demonstrated a masterful knowledge of the scriptures, and by the age of twelve his elders advised him to find a guru. He was led to Janardan Swami, who recognized his devotion and earnestness. Eknath says of his initiation: “When his palm touched my head, the whole world, I felt, vanished into nothingness. The firmament was completely filled with an ineffable light, along with overflowing bliss.”

After a short period of study, Janardan sent Eknath on extended travels, where he met with people from all walks of life and started teaching the way of devotion. He realized his life’s work was to bring spiritual light to all people – high or low, rich or poor, educated or illiterate. The author writes:

Eknath treated all people alike, irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, gender, religion, standing in the society, or profession. His attitude towards caste hierarchy and the equality of all, no matter their social position or religion, is clear from his writings. For example, in his Eknathi Bhagavat he writes: “The low-born who is bound by love to the Lord is greater than the brahmin who has turned his back on Hari (God).”

The “Life” section of the book includes many such examples of Eknath’s compassion, generosity, and empathy.

In the “Teachings” section we learn Eknath’s message, that, through devotion or *bhakti* to Nam and guru, we human beings, the very crown of creation, can realize our oneness with God. But human life is fleeting:

*In the deep sea of earthly life,
Nam is the ship of salvation – so make haste!*

*When you are drowning in the sea,
the Lord is the ship – so make haste!*

*Kal has not attacked you yet,
so don’t delay, but hurry, says Janardan’s Eknath!*

Eknath counseled seekers of God to constantly remember God and practise feeling his presence within.

*Those who ceaselessly repeat the master’s Nam
and whose daily routine is the master’s seva
become the Lord.*

He states clearly that his advice is based on the reality he himself has experienced:

*With meditation I vanquished my mind
and attained mystical stillness –
there is no separation between me and the Lord.*

*To unite with the Lord, it is imperative to keep him close
at all times, says Janardan’s Eknath.*

Eknath often expressed his teachings through vivid metaphors. In praise of Nam, he wrote: “Mountains of sins are blasted by the thunderbolt of Nam.” Calling the guru “the season of spring,” he described the arrival of the guru: “The withered and parched leaves of ignorance have fallen and tender new leaves with the colour of desirelessness budded sublimely. A profusion of blossoms appeared on the trees – these blooms are the flowers of *Sohang*, I am That.” To show that God is the only reality in the whole universe, he says, “Just as the thread which forms the warp and woof of a piece of cloth gives existence to the cloth, so is the world completely made of Brahman.” Comparing the human body to farmland, he says: “I inherited it through the Lord’s grace and embarked on the journey of working it well, sowing the seeds of the master’s words within. A crop of love emerged – even the

sky was not high enough to store it.” To demonstrate the fleeting nature of life on this earth, he states: “The world is like a ripple on water; it is like a doll made of salt that will dissolve in water. So will the body perish, says Janardan’s Eknath.”

In the section “Works” the book describes his prolific output: his translations and commentaries on various scriptures; his Bhavartha Ramayana – a Marathi rendition of the great epic, the Ramayana; his philosophical works; his tributes to saints and sages; his *abhangs* (short verses); and his *bharuds* (folk ballads). Short excerpts from these works are presented in this section, and longer selections in three appendices.

The “Poetry” section is divided into two parts: the first includes a selection of his simple and inspirational verses organized by theme with short introductions, enabling readers to easily find verses by subject matter; the second gives other examples of his verses organized by first line in Marathi. Several of these verses were included in the RSSB book *Many Voices, One Song*.

The three appendices of this book bring together extensive excerpts from Eknath’s most popular works. The *Eknathi Bhagavat* is his translation and commentary on the eleventh canto of the Bhagavat Purana, one of the great classics of bhakti scripture. His *Rukmini Swayamvar* (*Rukmini’s Wedding*) – a metaphor of the soul’s love for the Lord expressed through the story of Rukmini’s love for Krishna and Krishna’s battle to win her – is based on the tenth canto of the *Bhagavat Purana*.

The third appendix presents a selection of Eknath’s *bharuds*, folk ballads which were performed by traveling groups who went from village to village, dramatizing deep truths in entertaining ways. Here we see Eknath taking on the roles of a wide assortment of characters. As a watchman he warns us: “Wake up, my friends! Don’t let sleep devour you. Here it comes! Here it comes! Death – the Lord’s noose!” Taking on the role of a fortune teller, he chants: “I am the fortune teller of Nirgunpuri; O friends, listen to your fortune! Do not run after the mind – it has deceived many great ones.... Janardan’s Eknath gives everyone this same fortune: those who repeat Nam will surely be saved in good time.” As the village sweeper, he says: “I, a low-caste servant, am a saint from the kingdom of the Lord. Please accept my heartfelt greetings!... Eka, a disciple of Lord Janardan, exhorts all people to be vigilant about the way to benefit their true self! Follow the path of the Lord and keep repeating the Lord’s Nam, O my respected ones!”

In summing up Eknath's life and teachings, the scholar L.R. Pangarkar says that this "beloved of all saints" was "an ornament of the Lord's devotion, ... a beloved of his master and a storehouse of knowledge and dispassion." This book is a soothing voice in a chaotic world, giving down-to-earth advice on how to live a life of devotion. It will be enjoyed by anyone seeking to follow Eknath's example and dedicate themselves to the divine.

*When these eyes became one,
I stopped looking outward.*

*Hearing the Unstruck Sound,
I realized I was yours –
silent, tranquil – wedded to your Word.*



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