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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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A New Year's Message

You want knowledge. Knowledge lies within you. Sound current is knowledge. The more you study it, the higher you rise and the wiser you become. And this knowledge is complete in Sach Khand. So first withdraw your attention; bring it inward by repetition. Sit in the eye focus and catch the bell sound, then follow it to the fifth stage. The path may appear long and unattractive to begin with, but there is no other way. God is one, his instructions are one, and they are the sound current.

The path lies within you. The sound current is the direct road. The Lord himself is within you. Only he who has gone within can appreciate and comprehend this. Others have no idea of it. With repetition of the holy names, bring in the scattered mind; and with the help of the Master, ride on the current and reach the home of eternal bliss, beyond the mind and maya.

It is given to man (human beings) only to rise upward. In no other form, not even that of angels, is this possible. Man is the top of creation. Hence every moment is valuable, and it is the duty of man to utilize it. Only the time spent in this path will count. This is my New Year's message. This New Year's Day, my message is that you give as much time as you can to catch the Word, and see the Man of Nazareth face to face, on your way to the shore of eternal peace and bliss.

—Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Entirely Essential

We are not happy here in this world, which is why we dream of being a butterfly – why the soul dreams of being free. Why would we want to live in the dream of this life when we can awaken to the joy of living eternally in the Dao?

Introduction to the Dao

It takes time and determination to shape our lives according to the teachings of the saints so that we become immersed in spirituality at every moment. As disciples we have chosen to embark on a journey back to our source, and managing our expectations for such a journey is important. Karma is the inescapable reason behind all our actions, where we can expect physical and mental highs and lows. As the requirement is to settle all accounts before we merge into the Dao or Shabd, we may expect a tough and arduous journey back, even though things may seem smooth.

Many prisoners spend their time in prison preparing to reintegrate into society – they further their education, learn new skills, strengthen connections with loved ones and deepen their faith. If they spent their prison stay planning for their next crime upon release, we would consider them foolish. Similarly, if we spend our life sentence in this prison house of transmigration engaging in activities that keep us bound here rather than practising our meditation to secure our eternal freedom, we are none the wiser.

The lifelong struggle of stilling the mind and clearing our karmas can feel exhausting with no respite in sight. Where some may give up, spiritual aspirants surrender. Giving up implies admitting defeat, while surrendering involves going to the edge of our effort and then acknowledging to the Master that now it is over to you. If, as the saying goes, God does not give us what we can handle but helps us handle what we are given, then we can take comfort in the belief that by remaining steadfast in our spiritual practice, we can strive to escape from this cycle of birth and death. Our sincere effort is in the interest of our soul's progress, as the story below illustrates.

A woman found the cocoon of a butterfly and watched how the butterfly struggled to force its body out of the cocoon. Eventually, the butterfly stopped, seeming to have gone as far as it could and unable to go any further. The woman decided to help the butterfly by taking a pair of scissors and snipping at the cocoon so that it could come out more easily. The butterfly

did emerge, and the woman watched expectantly for it to stretch its wings and fly. Instead, the butterfly had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings which couldn't enlarge and expand to support the body. This resulted in the butterfly spending the rest of its life crawling around, never able to fly. What the woman in her well-intentioned but hasty gesture did not appreciate was that the struggle was required for the butterfly to get through the cocoon's tiny opening. It was nature's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom.

Similarly, the Master's grace is supporting us during the entire process of our spiritual growth so we can be strong enough for our return journey. A life free of obstacles is in fact crippling. The duration and intensity of our struggle is exactly what we need but we cannot see the inner workings of what is accomplished for us. During challenging times, we must appreciate that what is happening is strengthening our wings for our spiritual flight. The whole process is entirely essential.

Two pieces of wood

when rubbed together ignite;

When kept close to fire, metal becomes molten;

Round things normally spin,

Hollow things chiefly float.

It is their natural inclination to do so.

Hence, when the spring winds come,

they bring the timely rains;

And the myriad things are produced

and nourished.

Feathered creatures incubate

and hatch their eggs,

Furred creatures conceive and give birth

to their young.

Plants and trees bloom, ...

Without anyone ever seeing the actual doing,

the deed is accomplished.

Huainanzi, as quoted in *Introduction to the Dao*



Something to Think About

The physical body is like a coat that we took from Kal at birth, and we have to return it to him one day. There should not be any hesitation in returning what was borrowed. The devotee goes to a far better state and he does not hesitate to take a velvet coat in exchange for this one of coarse material. And if the devotee has made preparation for this day during his lifetime, he does not suffer even at this transition period, but is happy like a bridegroom.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

* * *

Ups and downs in business and in most things in life are natural, but worry never helped anybody. The proper thing is to handle the situation in the light of your experience and worldly wisdom and with faith and hope.

Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

* * *

Sometimes the Master, out of His Grace, appears before us even when we have not crossed the stars, the sun and the moon and have not reached the centre where He can always be contacted. It all depends upon His Grace and Mercy. But in order to have this privilege at will and permanently one has to cross the stars, the sun and the moon. We are subject to laws and rules, but He is not. He can contact us whenever He likes. A beggar in rags may not be allowed to enter the palace of a king, but nothing can stop the king from going down to the beggar's hut.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*



He Who Fills My Heart with Joy

One of the questions often asked is: How does one recognize a true master?

We have read in our literature and heard in satsangs that there are some prominent signs by which one can recognize such a saint. They come as benefactors and do not require payment from their disciples; they live off their own earnings and preach the way of the Shabd. These characteristics convince our intellect of the masters' sincerity, and we need to satisfy our intellects before we embark upon any spiritual path or journey. However, as Maneri, a Sufi mystic, says:

It is unseemly that a novice go around weighing men of God in the scale of his feeble intellect, or should hope that he can see by his limited vision who has attained divine communion and become intimate with God!

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2

But then, how would a seeker know that he has found his Master?

Since the Master is the human manifestation of Shabd, and we too are part of Shabd, when we meet the physical Master he seems very familiar. We may feel we have known him forever or that we have met before. In reality, at a deeper spiritual level, he is us. How can anyone be more closely connected to us? He is our own true Self. The only difference is that the physical Master is aware that his real form is that of Shabd while we are not aware of this truth.

Living Meditation

The masters or true saints are those beings who have realized God within themselves. Their souls are awake, fully energized with the Lord's love. They are here to bring us that love in a measure that we cannot understand, given our limitations.

Ibn Khafif, another Sufi mystic, writes (as quoted in *The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2*) that the seeker should look for someone "the sight of whom reminds you of God and the awe of whom will move your heart, someone who will counsel you with the tongue of deeds, not words."

We do not know what God looks like or feels like. However, we do know that when we are with our Master, we are experiencing something

that is not of this world, something that taps into the deepest recesses of our being and tells us that we are close to home.

The Master's words come from his experience, so they have the power to convince our intellect. Similarly, we intuit that he is love personified, and so he captures our heart. Our Master tells us that we are all Shabd, that we are all drops of the ocean of God. But it is only when we feel that love, that comfort and freedom that he radiates through his being, that we actually begin to believe in the existence of God. The Sufi poet, Shirin Maghribi, writes about his Master:

*With one alluring look, your eyes promise release from the discords of time
for a thousand weary souls like me.*

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2

When we stand before our Master, we draw from this wellspring of bliss, according to our receptivity.

Not everybody feels the same way; not everybody feels drawn to the Master with the same intensity. But the soul who recognizes his Master will definitely be drawn to him, whether intensely or half-heartedly – the attraction and love will always be there. In fact, in the scriptures it is said that one of the surest ways to know that we have found our Master is to assess whether his presence brings joy to our heart.

One does not need hard facts and figures or convincing speeches and arguments to find a Master; all one needs is to feel that inner happiness in his presence.

In reality, it is the Master who is seeking us. We may think that we have some discretion to exercise here, but our efforts to find him and be with him will prove to be as limited as our capacity to understand him. It is our Master who draws us to himself; it is he who makes us feel secure and loved; and it is he who leaves us no choice but to strive for more of that bliss that we feel when we are with him – that bliss which he refers to as the Shabd.



Did You Know?

When the Satguru is remembered with love, all spiritual and worldly work becomes pleasing and the mind does not feel any distress. Then even worldly activities yield spiritual fruit.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

* * *

Saints know all about the past, present, and future. When you will go within, you will begin to know. The knowledge is within. The current is knowledge, for everything is derived from it. The more you rise on it, the better informed you will be. That will be your firsthand knowledge. But this knowledge is not to be utilized in the shaping of worldly affairs, whether personal or of others. This knowledge is to be utilized for advancement within. If one begins to use the acquired power, the mind naturally turns outward and gets scattered. And not only does further progress stop, but there is an actual setback.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

* * *

The whole creation is under the control of what you call the Lord of Karma. Only the perfect Masters, the saints, who are the beloved sons of the merciful Lord, the positive force, are beyond this control. They are Masters and can control whatever karmas they like, but do so only according to the will of the supreme Father, while the rest of the creation is all under the force of the law of karma.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



Active Duty

Just because we are sitting still in a corner without gadgets, books or papers does not mean that sitting during meditation is going to be a time to plan our day, solve problems, daydream, or take stock of our actions.

In meditation, it may seem like we are not doing much, but we are actually engaged in deep, vital and essential inner work. In fact, one could say that it is the most important thing that we could ever do because it is for the betterment of our true selves – our soul.

This work, therefore, requires a lot more care and attention than what we would give to our other important worldly tasks. Do we give as much attention to our meditation as we do to writing checks, administering medication, drawing blueprints, cutting someone's hair, or even cooking meals?

Before we sit down to meditate, do we prepare ourselves mentally for what we are about to do, or do we just carelessly dust ourselves off from whatever had our attention before and grab our corner? Just because the meditative process is simple does not mean it is easy. We would do well to prepare ourselves physically and mentally before doing the most important task of the day.

Our minds often get carried away by random thoughts, and meditation is the practice of bringing our attention back to the eye centre again and again. The mind is used to working on autopilot and takes us wherever it pleases. It is our spiritual practice that helps to switch off autopilot mode and take the reins of stilling the mind into our own hands.

The following instruction given by Tibetan master Jamyang Khyentse to his disciple Apa Pant provides an explanation:

“Look, it’s like this: When the past thought has ceased, and the future thought has not yet risen, isn’t there a gap?”

“Yes,” said Apa Pant.

“Well, prolong it. That is meditation.”

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying

The mind is bound to run off, and when it does, without any resentment or judgement, we must simply recognize that it has wandered away and gently bring it back to its resting place. Our bodies may be

relaxed, but our mind has to be totally alert during meditation, constantly repeating the holy names at the eye centre.

To do justice to our meditation, we must be fully present in the moment, aware that we are doing our most important work and giving it our best. When we attend to our meditation, we are on active duty – like military soldiers that are alert, guarded and ready to strike while posted on enemy lines. We are definitely not on reserve duty, waiting to be called on to act or waiting for our attention to focus on its own.

It is a very strong fight with the mind.... Our enemy is within all of us.... And we never know when he may deceive, when he may betray us, when he may put us off the path.... So we have a constant struggle with the mind. We have to be watchful. We have to watch its activities, every day, every moment.... Ultimately, success is ours if we just struggle, just carry on.

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

During meditation, we are perfecting our innate ability to focus by strengthening our awareness muscle. This awareness will enable us to become more conscious of the Master's presence in our lives; it will make us mindful of our own shortcomings and what we need to work on. It will give us a broader perspective on life's problems and help us rise above the ties that bind us to this temporary, illusory world. Every bit of active meditation makes us more equipped to continue the struggle to tame the mind and finally become one with the Radiant Form of the Master.

To reach the eye centre and cross the starry sky, the sun, and the moon, and come face to face with the Radiant Form of the Master, is the duty of the disciple, whether he does it in this life or the next. It is his work and he is to do it. So why not do it now and why postpone it?

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Dying while Living

An explanation by Maharaj Sawan Singh

Everyone has to die some day. Whether man or beast, rich or poor, healthy or diseased, nobody escapes death. All have to pass through its gate. The soul that has taken the physical form has to leave it. Everybody knows that he has to quit this world some day, but he knows not when.

Death is real, but life (in this world) is unreal. "Dust thou art, to dust returnest." We have never cared to think about what kind of a journey lies beyond the gates of death. We lament the death of others. But actually, we should be concerned with our own end and should prepare ourselves for our own life beyond death.

What is death? Do we feel any pain at the time of death? In the Bhagavad Gita there is a statement to the effect that the pain of death is so acute that it is equivalent to being stung simultaneously by a hundred thousand scorpions (the sting of one scorpion is exceedingly painful). And the Qur'an says: "The pain of death may be likened to that caused by a thorny shrub penetrating forcefully through the body." In the Adi Granth also there are references to the pain of death.

What kind of country do we have to pass through after death? Whom are we to deal with? We must ponder over these questions. The scriptures make occasional mention of this subject, but we pay little heed to them, for we always believe them to be either fantasies or fairy tales, or efforts to wean people away from sin, or to induce them to perform good deeds. We have to cross the gates of death. No one can be an exception to this. Saint Paul says: "Death is the last enemy to be conquered." We should not shut our eyes to this subject.

It is our common experience that whenever we have to go to another country, we make preparations for it and carry with us the necessary funds. We make arrangements for the means of transport, be it an automobile, a horse-drawn carriage or a railway train. We write a letter to a friend in that country, and also decide about where to stay. We are so careful in these worldly matters that we never undertake a journey without making adequate arrangements. When we have to go to a new country, we even provide for a guide to accompany us. Yet for the journey

after death, which hangs over our heads like the sword of Damocles, and which we all must undertake in due course, we care very little. Have we arranged for food, which is Nam or Shabd, for this journey? Have we decided upon a guide or a Master, who has personal knowledge and experience, to accompany us? Have we ever thought of the place where we are to stay? Leaving aside these matters, we are even completely ignorant of our destination and of the person who can help us to get there. Nay, we have even forgotten death.

We are very clever about our worldly affairs and always make appropriate arrangements for their successful execution. But with regard to death, which has no time fixed for it and may come at any time – in childhood, in youth, or in old age – we have never given a moment's thought.

A Master alone knows everything about death. At the time of death, when family and children, our wealth, possessions and body, all leave us, it is the perfect Master alone who accompanies the disciple. For this reason he is our only true and genuine friend.

The perfect Master is a true guide in the astral, causal and the higher, purely spiritual regions. That is why the scriptures have strongly emphasized the need for us to meet such Masters and to keep constantly dwelling upon them in our mind. In this way alone can we strike at the very root of transmigration and achieve everlasting bliss.

The saints have solved the mystery of death. They leave the human body at will and travel into the higher regions. In their company we learn the means by which we too can triumph over death.

Death is not to be feared. It is only the name given to the phenomenon of the soul leaving the body. After discarding the physical body, the soul ascends to the astral, causal, and higher regions. In Persian this phenomenon is called intiqal, which means transfer. It is merely the withdrawal of the soul from the gross senses, and its entrance into finer regions. It is merely giving up the present garment, namely, the body. It does not mean annihilation. There is life after death, although we may not be able to see it. All saints accept this principle.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I



Selfless Action

Selfless service or seva is an important aspect of the spiritual teachings in Sant Mat. In fact, all spiritual paths encourage their disciples to render service of any kind to humanity. This service is entirely voluntary and can be performed according to one's capability.

The principle that happiness lies in giving not in receiving is one which all great men and women have followed in their lives. To serve another being with an attitude of selflessness, without any thought of reward is what the Bhagavad Gita calls *nishkaam karma* or desireless action.

Masters often tell us that everything in Sant Mat has a parallel. Satsang, seva, darshan – all these outer disciplines are there to finally lead us to the inner discipline. Besides meditation, outer seva is no doubt the most enriching and fulfilling act in a disciple's spiritual journey, but it is just a means to the end.

What is real service to humanity?

To free the soul – which has been for ages subject to transmigration – from the cycle of births, and to raise it to the pure spiritual region from where it will never be sent back to undergo births and deaths. All other forms of service are merely temporary. Serve yourself first of all, then think of serving others. A prisoner cannot liberate another.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Service rendered by body, wealth and mind is done to awaken the higher qualities in us. Each of these create humility in us and detach us from greed for possessions and pride of status, and help us control our wayward tendencies and desires. However, these are preparatory steps for the highest service for which a human being has evolved – the service of the soul.

The highest service or *nishkaam karma* for a human being is to bring our consciousness out of the nine doors of the body and collect it at the eye centre. Here the consciousness comes in contact with the Shabd, the ever-resounding music of the creation. This divine contact starts to pull the soul or the consciousness out of the illusion of the mind and body;

from then on begins the real spiritual journey of the soul towards its home, its Creator.

Only such a one is in a position to serve the Master as has abundant grace of the Lord, because this service is imprinted on the individual's forehead and was preordained as the result of his actions or karmas in previous lives. He is fortunate indeed who devotes himself to the service to his Master, because the Lord himself is manifest in him.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. 1

Masters perform the greatest seva, *nishkaam karma* or selfless action. They impart the Word of God, which destroys the ego; that Word which makes the mind and body pure and enables one to unite with the Lord. A true saint or guru initiates and inspires the disciple into the spiritual practice or meditation which is the repetition and contemplation of the Word of God – the Lord's Name or Nam.

Saints are steeped in love and devotion for the Lord; they have merged their consciousness with the divine Name; and now they carry out the mission of the Lord to bring more souls to render the highest service man can offer – the service of the soul.

Guru Arjun Dev says:

Service to a Saint lies in meditation on the Name.

Jap Ji

The ultimate act of giving or selfless action lies in following the instructions of the guru implicitly and meditating on the Lord's Name. Through this constant practice, our consciousness merges into the ceaseless reverberating Shabd within.

*Fruitful is service to the true guru
If one does it with a sincere mind.
The treasure of Nam is obtained
And the mind becomes free of anxiety.*

Guru Amar Das, Adi Granth
As quoted in Seva



Be Happy

Being happy despite the ups and downs of life is the hallmark of a good spiritual life.

On the Sant Mat path, we meet a master who introduces us to the true aspects of spirituality. We learn about the sound current, the audible life stream or Nam, that we can experience through the practice of meditation. The discovery of our true nature begins with lifestyle changes that include following the vows of adopting a vegetarian diet, abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and drugs and living a moral life. With initiation we get the opportunity to practise meditation as taught by the masters, who become our guide through this spiritual journey.

The Master never leaves us. We know that the Master is with us at all times – good or bad – and that he is helping us every step of the way. We count our blessings and are grateful for this gift of Nam, as indeed it is a priceless treasure.

In whatever circumstances the Lord keeps us, we should try to be happy. Take it as his grace, whatever he gives us. That is why Christ said: Be like a little babe. You give him a stone to play with, he's happy; you give him a diamond to play with, he's happy. He doesn't discriminate between the stone and diamond. So we shouldn't try to discriminate among these events of life, whether a cold wind is blowing or a hot wind is blowing. We are happy in whatever circumstances the Lord keeps us.

And we can have that attitude only if we attend to meditation. Only with the help of meditation will we be able to build peace within ourselves, and then we share peace with others. You go to a miserable person and he will make you miserable in two minutes. If you go to a happy person, however miserable you may be, you will just come out laughing and smiling – because we give what we have, we radiate what we have.

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

This chance to taste the divine nectar every time we sit in meditation is the powerful tool that changes us, as it is the means by which we are purified. We transform into far better versions of ourselves because meditation gives us the will to overcome our passions and gives us the

right attitude towards life. We truly end up happier, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. Furthermore, Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us that this world is just a stage, where we play our roles:

We can be better actors on the stage of life by playing our part well. Whatever destiny has been allotted to us, we should accept it cheerfully as the will of the Lord. And that you can do only if you attend to your meditation. There is no other way. Otherwise we align ourselves with the acting and take that as the reality, forgetting that we are acting. So we should always keep in mind that it is acting. There's no reality in it. We must have that realization, and that can come only by meditation. There is no other way. Otherwise we get involved with the other actors in the play.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

This world is but a stage with each of us designated by our destiny to play a part. It is all an illusion and we must not drown in our roles because there is no reality in them. By keeping this in mind, we learn to be happy no matter what role we play. After all, it is just a role, nothing more and nothing less. We simply are content with whatever comes our way. We should not compare ourselves and our lives with others, as this creates more problems and difficulties for us, as the following story illustrates.

A crow lived in the forest and was absolutely satisfied in life. But one day he saw a swan. “This swan is so white,” he thought, “and I am so black. This swan must be the happiest bird in the world.”

He expressed his thoughts to the swan. “Actually,” the swan replied, “I was feeling that I was the happiest bird around until I saw a parrot, which has two colours. I now think the parrot is the happiest bird in creation.” The crow then approached the parrot. The parrot explained, “I lived a very happy life until I saw a peacock. I have only two colours, but the peacock has multiple colours.”

The crow then visited a peacock in the zoo and saw that hundreds of people had gathered to see him. After the people had left, the crow approached the peacock.

“Dear peacock,” the crow said, “you are so beautiful. Every day thousands of people come to see you. When people see me, they immediately shoo me away. I think you are the happiest bird on the planet.”

The peacock replied, “I always thought that I was the most beautiful and happy bird on the planet. But because of my beauty, I am entrapped in this zoo. I have examined the zoo very carefully, and I have realized that the crow is the only bird not kept in a cage. So, for the past few days I have been thinking that if I were a crow, I could happily roam everywhere.”

When we make unwarranted comparisons with others, we create our own sadness and do not value what God has given us. This leads to a vicious cycle of unhappiness.

Instead, we can learn to be happy with what we have instead of looking at what we don’t have. There will always be someone who will have more or less than we have.

A person who is content is the happiest in the world. We must be cheerful and stay happy as we navigate both material and spiritual worlds, never forgetting our ultimate goal of merging with our spiritual source, like a drop merging in the ocean, in this lifetime.



What is contentment? To be happy to go through our destiny; not to have any desire and not to pray to the Lord for anything in the world. We are happy with whatever he gives us; we are contented to go through our life. We just see the drama of our life as a spectator in this creation. So we are contented with whatever he gives us. In other words, we live in the will of the Father – that is also contentment.

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

The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *If you haven't attended to your devotion and meditation, will the Master still greet you at the time of death?*

A: Well, sister, Christ has said two things. He says, when you see the Son and believe on him, then I will raise you at the last day. 'See the Son' means you go to the company of a living Master. 'Believe on him' means if you follow the teaching sincerely, then he will raise you at the last day. If you don't follow the teachings, don't live the teachings, then it is for him to decide whether he comes or not. But we can have a claim if we live in his teachings and follow the teachings. Otherwise, it is just his grace.

Light on Saint John

Q: *In Maharaj Jagat Singh's book, Science of the Soul, we read that if a disciple criticizes another, it is a very bad sin. What is the consequence upon a person who criticizes others?*

A: Every mystic has been telling us the same thing. Christ also says that you do not see the beam in your own eye, but you see a mote in another person's eye. What Sardar Bahadur Maharaj Ji meant was that instead of criticizing others, we should criticize ourself – what is our weakness that we cannot live with another person? Rather than criticizing him for not cooperating with us, cooperation has to come from us. We have to adjust to a situation; the situation cannot adjust to us. We have to be good to another person and not expect him to be good to us. We always expect others to be good and nice and loving to us, but we never realize that it has to start with us. That is what he means, that it is sinful to criticize anybody unnecessarily and not to look within our own self and find our own faults and try to remove them.

Light on Saint Matthew

Q: *Is running after the Master out of love for him the same as outwardly expressing our inner experiences and feelings of devotion and love?*

A: Running after the physical form of the Master is something very different from having love for the Master. Running after the Master doesn't mean that you have love. You may be empty within and still you may be running after the Master. Yet, you may be filled with love for him and you may not move even an inch. You would like to remain in discipline, but that doesn't mean you have no love. Running after the Master doesn't show any special love.

Love is always within. When you try to dramatize your love, you lose the depth of the love. You have to digest that love within. If you have that love within, the moment you try to dramatize it, you lose its depth.

Die to Live

Q: *Master, I was told that if one is doing very heavy manual labour, that perhaps you'll get tired because you're doing this type of work, and that it's actually a little harder for you to withdraw from your body because you're more attached to it, having to work very hard with it.*

A: I don't think physical exercise, physical work, has anything to do with your withdrawal within. In fact, it has nothing to do with it. It is your attachment to the senses which makes it difficult to withdraw to the eye centre. Hard exercise doesn't make it difficult to withdraw from the body, because the body does the exercise, not the mind. It's wrong. Do you mean to say that weaker people who don't do any manual work withdraw more easily?

The only problem is that people who work very hard get too tired, and they should not try to sit in meditation at the cost of sleep. Physical work makes no difference at all in withdrawing.

Die to Live



From Ignorance to Awareness

The true spiritual path is a path of light. The essence of God and the essence of our souls are also pure light. Minerals, plants, animals, virus or bacterial germs, and even astral beings are sustained by this energy of light. At the core of every atom is nothing but powerful energy.

But a nagging question arises. We see so much light outside of us physically, such as the sun and numerous artificial means to provide light, so why is there spiritual darkness in our souls? If we are of the essence of God, why are we not experiencing the power of that light within us?

Brother, a diamond is a diamond. If you throw it in the mud, it will be encrusted with mud, but the moment it is washed, it is again as brilliant as before. The soul is a diamond. Every soul is the essence of the Lord. It is pure in itself, but having taken the company of the mind, and the mind having become victim of the senses, it has covered itself with evil, darkness and filth.

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

Hazur Maharaj Ji often used the image of an electric bulb. If you place many dark coverings over the bulb, its light is obscured. Likewise, it is unimaginable what karmas we have collected from the beginning of time. Layers and layers of these dark coverings conceal the tremendous light of our soul.

The soul ... works under a serious handicap.... This world is not its native habitat. Here it is obliged to work under and through a series of coverings ... coverings of mind and matter. Though mind is a refined sort of matter, we are accustomed to speak of it as apart from matter. Under all of its coverings, the soul finds it exceedingly difficult to express itself and have its own way.

The Path of the Masters

Our soul consciousness once fed on divine nectar. Unfortunately today, it feeds daily on darkness – the darkness of pride, anger, attachment, lust and greed.

If darkness tries to understand light, it will never succeed. Its darkness is its own limitation. But one thing is assured; where there is light, darkness cannot remain to prove its existence. So on a positive note there is no darkness, just the absence of light in our minds. In this dark state we have created an identity separate from our true inner self. This compels us to dwell in illusion and misperceptions. The result is that everything we feel, sense or experience projects through our own distorted perception and has no reality.

Everything we perceive with our senses is just a projected image. There is the light in the projector: that's the One Being. Then there's the film through which the light shines: that's the mind. And then there's the screen on which the projected images appear: that's this world.... Switch off the light in the projector and everything disappears.

One Being One

Let us suppose that we possess a well-cut piece of glass. Looking at it, we see it as a diamond. Yet all the while it is glass. Where is the diamond? Where does it exist? It does not exist on the outside because on the outside it is actually glass. It only exists in our mind. If a diamond expert assesses it, he will confirm it is glass. The illusion it was a diamond disappears, and if we lose or misplace it, we are not distressed by the loss.

Light in our mind is borrowed from our soul, much like the moon reflects the light of the sun on its surface. When one has transcended his mind, he is enlightened. In other words, light has entered his mind and he is awakened to the truth. He now sees the world as it is in its true nature. His inner vision is clear and he can see with the eyes of the soul that wealth, fame and human relations are all false, so he does not suffer their loss. He is detached from the material world and attached only to the inner true love of the Lord.

“What does it mean to be enlightened?”

“To see.”

“What?”

“The hollowness of success, the emptiness of achievements, the nothingness of human striving,” said the Master.

Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Nonsense*

The Buddha taught that all suffering is caused by ignorance. When he was asked what he meant by such suffering, he gave a clarifying example. He explained how on one very dark night, a person fell down from a cliff. In his anguish, he caught hold of the branch of a tree in the pitch darkness of the night. He was unaware of what was beneath him – the ground, a deep valley, or water.

All night long he trembled and wept. In utter fear, he clung even tighter to the branch. When morning light came, he saw he was only one foot away from the ground. This is what ignorance is and what it does to us.

The masters have often said that darkness symbolizes ignorance because we are unaware of who we truly are. Outwardly we may “practise” awareness – staying in the moment, keeping track of where we left our keys, and thinking before we speak, for example. These are good skills to acquire, no doubt, but true awareness is an inner consciousness of the Shabd.

Nam, or Shabd, is the only power that can liberate us from our ignorance and thereby from our suffering. Being enslaved by the mind, we do not know the way or have the means to connect with the Shabd by ourselves. It is the living Master who explains to us the proper procedure at the time of our initiation. He guides us all the way to our true source – Sach Khand.

*Were a hundred moons to rise
together with a thousand suns,
it would be, with all that light,
utter darkness without the Guru.*

Adi Granth, as quoted in *Gurbani Selections*, Vol. 1

In Sanskrit, *gu* means darkness and *ru* means light. The Guru shows us how to apply the collyrium of Nam on our inner eyes by the practice of meditation – a metaphor that conveys the power of the Word that brings light to the spiritually blind so that they can see.

Progress in meditation is slow because it takes time to adjust to the tremendous light of our soul. It would be very easy for the Master to pull up a soul prematurely and bring it face to face with the light within. But it would not be easy for the disciple to bear seeing that tremendous

brightness all at once. Our inner eye needs to gradually open, without losing our balance in this world.

Coming closer to the Truth is like coming closer to the sun. Our objective is to come closer to the inner light until the ego burns. Then the soul becomes like a moth whose desire for the lamp is so intense that it rushes towards the flame to burn its very self and lose its identity.

Darkness is the first step we must go through to appreciate light. When we meditate and see nothing, it isn't nothing. It is a dark sky we see. Keeping our attention at the focus without wavering awakens the inner Shabd of light and sound.

Until then, darkness plays its part in the scheme of life. Everything has its time, everything has its reason and season. A seed has to be placed underground away from sunlight for some time to germinate and then sprout out into the light.

We have that light within us, but unless we see that light within, unless we merge into that light – as Christ said, if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light – we are not aware of it.... You have to open that single eye in order to see that light.

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



True Wealth

We often refer to our materialistic, financial possessions as our wealth. Money is a means to fulfil our worldly requirements, however it cannot be described as our true wealth. Wealth is defined as having a sense of abundance. If we understand that, then true wealth is something that we experience and not what we possess. True wealth can have a different meaning for everyone; for some it is good health, for others it may be contentment or even compassion. It is difficult to measure true wealth, but it can be expressed in love, happiness, opportunities to do good, and many other ways.

As seekers or initiates on this Sant Mat path, our spiritual wealth is our true wealth. Nam has been referred to as true wealth by Mirabai:

*The jewel of Nam I have found;
Precious wealth I have obtained
A rare gift did my Master bestow;
In his mercy he has made me his own.
My original treasure I have regained,
And am rid of all I had in the world.
It can neither be stolen nor squandered;
It keeps on increasing from day to day.*

Mira, The Divine Lover

Meditation is the way to grow this spiritual wealth. Maharaj Charan Singh explains that by meditating we are building a treasure in heaven:

If you earn ten rupees in a day and in the evening you just spend it all, you are back to where you started at the beginning of the day. Satsang will help you to preserve that treasure of meditation. Satsang will help you to remain humble and not to become the rival of the Lord.... Satsang will help you to remain in his will, which is real humility and meekness. It will help you treasure all of the grace of the Father that is within you.

Die to Live

The Sant Mat path uses a systematic approach. It is designed in such a way that it leads us to meditation. Each step on the path makes us spiritually prepared for the final redemption. When we are seekers, we get to know the basic tenets of the path. At initiation, we are taught how to apply them and set our priorities in our daily lives. We have the four vows to help us become better versions of ourselves. Then we are bestowed with the support of satsang and seva. Satsang creates a spiritual atmosphere and provides protection from negative tendencies and constant reminders of our spiritual duty. Seva humbles us as we get to count our blessings while learning the importance of collaboration and respect for our fellow sevadars. Finally, we have countless books, hours of recorded satsangs and multilingual channels to help build our spiritual wealth.

We are investing in our spiritual wealth every time we relentlessly adhere to our vows. The seva we do, the spiritual books we read, and the satsangs we attend help to strengthen our meditation. Each second that we spend in meditation, we work towards our spiritual destination.

However, we must not forget that satsang, seva, and the four vows are all means to the end, but not the end itself. Nam is a treasure which is bestowed on us by our Master and it has to be earned with our daily effort. We need to build on it with our meditation. If we fail to earn this, all our other efforts, or deposits to our spiritual wealth, will not bear dividends.

It takes every drop of water to fill an ocean and it takes each of these steps to grow our spiritual wealth. The investment to build spiritual wealth requires our faith, effort and dedication, but once this wealth is built there is no risk of loss. What we have gained, we keep with us until our last breath and beyond.

You have been given the passport to go back to your own home where your supreme Father is waiting to receive you. What greater joy, blessing or bliss can one have in this world of misery and suffering? In fact, no other person should be so happy in this world as an initiate who is on the path. He should always keep his final goal in sight – the treasures, the joys and the bliss that await him in his true home.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Our spiritual wealth is our treasure, our true wealth that will give us a sense of abundance, bliss, contentment, peace and purpose. We cannot measure this wealth, but only cherish it. It should be our daily endeavour to add to this wealth and not squander it.

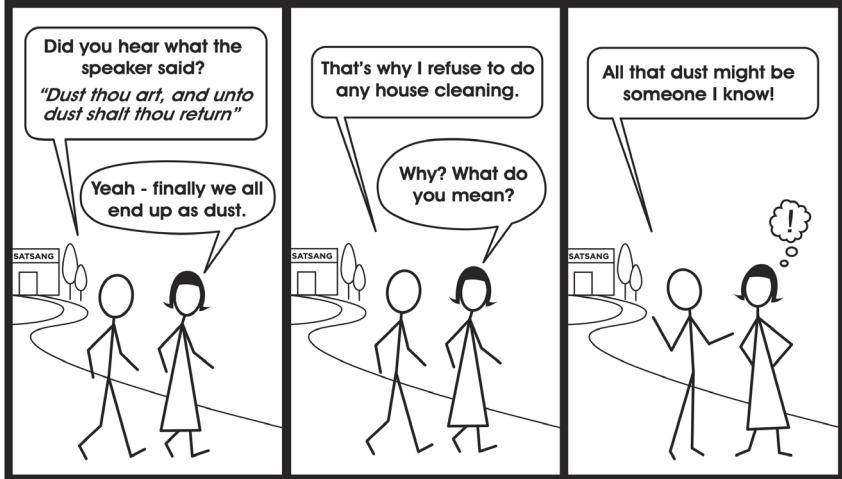
*Be quiet
If you wish to reach
the treasure of consciousness,
for only your heart can reach that,
not your tongue.*

Jalal al Din Rumi



SPIRITUALISTICKS®

The Dust Buster



O Slumbering Soul

*O slumbering soul,
Awake to your true identity,
You are not a piece of coal,
But a diamond shining brightly.*

*The path to enlightenment is not easy,
Many challenges will hinder your path,
It's time to get busy,
Each day of meditation akin to a spiritual bath.*

*It's time to return to your true home,
Too long have you been away,
Encased in this worldly dome,
Under the mind's sway.*

*Cleaning your vessel to be worthy of the Lord,
Roll out the red carpet,
Welcome him onboard,
Rejoice now that you have once again met.*

*Awake from the deep darkness,
Catch hold of the Light,
With focused awareness,
Merge back to the Infinite.*



Concentration

In the 21st century we live our lives in ways that conspire to make it increasingly difficult to concentrate. We may be at work, home, on the road or on a holiday, but our phones will intermittently beep with message notifications that we are often expected to answer immediately. In order to keep up with the fast-moving pace, we overcommit and overbook our schedules, which is the new normal, for we are expected to be able to multitask.

Doing just one thing at a time feels very uncomfortable, and sitting still without doing anything is completely unnatural to us. We keep music turned on as background noise while we are working, we eat our meals while watching different TV shows; and we create and broadcast social media posts while we are supposed to be living some of the most precious moments of our lives. We have become addicted to keeping our mind busy and entertained in the world and have no control over this addiction.

This of course comes at a price – all this relentless activity is fragmenting our attention and seriously interfering with our concentration. What we fail to remember is that success and happiness is not a result of an active mind, but rather a focused one.

Concentration gives you peace and bliss. The more your mind is scattered, the more unhappy and miserable you will be. The more your mind is one-pointed and concentrated, the more happy and relaxed you'll be.

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

Why do we enjoy the feeling of love? Why do we enjoy a beautiful song? It is because these emotions and experiences capture our attention and help it to become concentrated and one pointed. Joy expresses itself under certain conditions but it is not derived from those conditions; it is derived from within us when we are able to focus and still the mind.

As practitioners on this path, our goal is to focus our mind at the eye centre so that we are able to align ourselves to the rhythm of our soul, with that of the Shabd and the Lord, which is the source of all peace and bliss. We have one task and that is to practise concentration through the help of

the five names. There is nothing else in the world that deserves our time and attention as much as this task.

We often cut our meditation short for the day because we feel that we need the time to do all our other chores. However, if we prioritize our meditation before starting our day, it will not only bring us more in touch with our inner selves but the concentration that we achieve from it will in fact help us to navigate through life's daily challenges with composure. Time spent in meditation is time gained – never time lost.

Every day that we are trying to concentrate, we're creating a habit of concentration.... This will also remain with us in our daily activities, throughout our whole day. That concentration is not only for a particular time. It becomes a habit to concentrate in everything, in every little detail in your life.

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

In a world that is forcing our attention outwards and scattering it in a hundred different directions, our job is to go against the negative flow of the current. This is not easy, but our complete concentration and focus on our spiritual destination depends on it.

The main point is to reach the eye focus somehow. You will be dealing with your own attention. If you succeed in holding it inside of the focus, you have won the battle of life.... Poets, painters, and musicians receive inspiration from this point. All great thinkers get their ideas clarified here. Whatever scientific progress the world has made, it has all been derived from this source. This focus, back of the eyes, is the fountain of all inspiration which has produced the world's masterpieces. And whatever further progress is to be made in the future, the source of information and inspiration will still be this point. Here is where Divinity comes down to meet the struggling man.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Satsang Tours

An excerpt from *Heaven on Earth*

If we look at the lives of great Saints like Guru Nanak, Kabir, and Ravidas, we find that in spite of the limited means of transportation, they travelled widely, spreading the teachings of Sant Mat and initiating seekers. We have seen how the Great Master made satsang tours until he was eighty-eight years old, often suffering great inconvenience and discomfort. And in spite of his ill health, Sardar Bahadur Maharaj Ji also undertook many tours to give satsang, darshan, and initiation. Maharaj Charan Singh has not only maintained that tradition in India but has even toured abroad, literally around the world, taking the teachings to many countries that have no record of a perfect Saint ever having visited them before.

Although Maharaj Ji did not make a foreign tour until 1961, he began his tours in India a few months after taking up the responsibilities of mastership. Visiting Dalhousie for a break from the heat of the plains in the summer of 1952, he travelled on to mountainous areas nearby to give satsang. Earlier, Maharaj Ji had given one satsang in Amritsar in March 1952, his first satsang outside the Dera. There was a record gathering of satsangis and seekers, and the open compound of the satsang hall was packed to capacity. Maharaj Ji gave two satsangs in Delhi in November 1953, this being his first satsang tour to Delhi. The satsangs were held in the open grounds under *shamianas* (canopies), and the gathering was over fifteen thousand.

Bakshi Maluk Chand Ji, an old disciple of the Great Master, narrates an interesting incident of Maharaj Ji's first visit to Delhi in early 1950s:

Maharaj Ji sent for me and said, "An old satsangi of Baba Ji Maharaj, Bhai Narayan Das Ji, lives here in Delhi. Please go and tell him I will visit him tomorrow at 4:00 p.m."

I knew Bhai Narayan Das and used to meet him quite often. I went to his house that very day. When I knocked at his door, he called out, "Come in, Bakshi Ji." I was amazed, and after entering I asked how he knew I was the one knocking at his door. He did not answer my question, but instead asked me to deliver the message I had brought. I knew that he was an

advanced soul and spent most of his time now in meditation, so I asked, “Bhai Sahib, tell me, how did you know I was the one at your door and also that I have a message for you?”

At first Bhai Narayan Das tried to avoid answering my question. When I pressed him, he finally said that the day before Baba Ji had appeared inside and said, “Narayan Das, I will come to you in the physical form the day after tomorrow at 4:00 p.m.”

After hearing this I gave him Maharaj Ji’s message. He seemed surprisingly happy and thanked me again and again for bringing him such a happy message. I protested, “Why thank me when you already had the message?” He replied, “When the inner message of the Satguru is confirmed outside, it is natural to feel joyous.”

I was present the next day when Maharaj Ji visited this aged disciple of Baba Ji Maharaj; Maharaj Ji stayed with him for half an hour. The whole time Bhai Narayan Das gazed fixedly at him, obviously beside himself with joy, for the Master had come in the physical body to meet him.



Repartee of the Wise

A story is told about Guru Nanak. The Guru was watching a group of men bathing in the Ganges. He saw them pouring water towards the sun and asked: "What is it that you are doing?"

They answered, "We are sending water to the sun."

Hearing this, Guru Nanak stepped into the Ganges and started pouring water in the opposite direction.

The men were aghast. "What are you doing?"

Guru Nanak replied calmly: "I am sending water to my fields in Kartarpur – they are in this direction."

"How can the water reach your fields in Kartarpur?"

Guru Nanak said innocently: "If your water can reach the sun, then my fields are much closer."

Concepts & Illusions

It is related that in the springtime Rabi'a entered a house and did not come out. Her serving girl said, "O mistress, come outside and see the effects of the creation!" She said, "You come in for once and see the Creator! Witnessing the Creator has preoccupied me from gazing on the creation."

Rabi'a, The Woman Who Must Be Heard

Shibli sought out Junayd as a teacher and said to him, "Many people have informed me that you are a supreme expert on the pearls of awakening and divine wisdom. Either give me one of these pearls or sell one to me." Junayd smiled. "If I sell you one, you won't be able to pay the price; if I give you one, coming by it so easily will drive you to undervalue it. Do like me; dive headfirst into the Sea. If you wait patiently, you will obtain the Pearl."

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. 2



The Light Within

One day, the sun and a cave struck up a conversation. They exchanged pleasantries and discussed their day-to-day lives. The sun could not understand what darkness meant while the cave could not grasp the meaning of light and brightness. They decided to peek into each other's lives for a few moments. When the cave saw the sun's world, he was mesmerized by its light; he could see everything in its bright and clear light. The cave acknowledged that the sun's world was beyond wonderful. However, when the sun went into the cave, it did not see a difference. Both the cave and the sun were surprised at this. The cave observed that there was a notable difference between the sun's brightness and its own dark world. However, the sun was convinced that both their worlds looked the same.

Why didn't the sun notice the difference? When the sun went into the cave, it had taken its light along and even the darkest corners were illuminated. It only knew of light. Similarly, an enlightened soul can never be pushed into darkness, as it carries its light all the time. If one is full of darkness or negativity, fear, or doubt, one inadvertently becomes like a cave. But if one is illuminated like the sun, then none of the darkness one sees is consequential as there will always be light that removes it.

How do we become like the sun in the story? How can we emanate light wherever we go? Where do we find this light? Here the cave and the sun are metaphors for human mindsets, and we can slowly transform ourselves from the cave to the sun once we embark on our spiritual journey. This journey is our quest to search for the divine light that we carry within us – that is our essence.

Saints and mystics are illuminators who help us to realize this light. The Lord sends his messenger in human form to connect with us, just as the sun sends out its rays. The ray is not independent of the sun; it exists because of the sun and has the same qualities as the sun. When the sun sets, the ray merges back with the sun and becomes whole again. The ray is always connected to the sun, and even when it is away, its quality remains constant – it is always a part of the whole. Similarly, the Master comes to us in human form so that he can connect with us at our level of

understanding; he is someone with personal experience who can show us the way. The formless assumes the human form.

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Bible, John 8:12

The Lord's devotee is like the Lord; make no difference because of the human form.

Guru Nanak as quoted in *Quest for Light*

Christ affirms the same truth when he says:

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

Bible, John 14:11

Once we find a true living master who has achieved realization, our journey to search for our inner light begins. Then we can leave our cave behind and be closer to the inner sun as in the story. It is the living Master who shows us the radiant way to our inner light and puts us on the path of Shabd, Nam, or Word.

When by the grace of a true living master one is put in touch with the magnetic Word, one's eyes are opened, and our spiritual blindness is cured. The inner light shines forth and the darkness of ignorance melts away.

Those who see the light of the inner flame and hear the Word become attached to the true Lord.

Guru Nanak, as quoted in *Quest for Light*

Referring to this inner light, Christ says:

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

Bible, Matthew 6:22

At initiation we are given the technique to experience the divine light and sound within. The soul is of that same divine essence, the Shabd or Nam which permeates our every pore. We can realize this spiritual truth

once we merge with the Word or Nam within through our meditation and the grace of our Master.

*In the sky within is an inverted well
wherein burns a lamp;
Wherein burns a lamp
without a wick, without any oil.
Day and night, it burns,
through the six seasons and the twelve months.
One who has found a perfect Master
alone can see it;
To the one without a Master
this flame remains invisible.*

Saint Paltu

Even with a continuous eternal light which is within, we would remain in utter darkness and ignorance without a spiritual master. There is no light, no salvation without a master. The Master is the indispensable link between the disciple and liberation.



Heart to Heart

Once someone asked Maharaj Ji to speak about his family and particularly his father, since not only was he Maharaj Ji's father but also the son of Great Master. Maharaj Ji commented: "What is there to know?" and went on to explain that biological details were relevant only for generals and politicians: the saint's biography, he said, lies in their sangat and in their teachings, reflected through the sangat.

Legacy of Love

Many hundreds of stories are told about the abounding love and spiritual achievement of Baba Sawan Singh. One story concerns a visiting stranger. This man had quietly listened to the Master's teaching at satsang, but after a while he rose and interrupted the discourse, saying that he did not believe that the speaker was a true Guru and implying that he was an impostor.

The astonished disciples became angry and were about to throw him out, whereupon Maharaj Ji quieted them with a gesture of restraint, saying, "Why are you angry with this man? He is entitled to his opinion and I am not angry, so why should you be?"

Thereupon the stranger threw himself at the Master's feet and confessed: "I have been travelling for many years in search of a Satguru. I have tried this harsh trick upon many who claimed to be true saints, and they have always been very angry. Each time I have thought, 'so you have not yet overcome the five enemies, of which anger is one, and are therefore no master of yourself? And I have gone away knowing that I have yet to find a true Master. Only now have I found one who is without anger or bitterness. I have at last found a true saint."

The Mystic Philosophy of Sant Mat



Book Review

Before Buddha Was Buddha: Learning from the Jataka Tales

BY RAFE MARTIN

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The Jataka tales are spiritual parables or teaching stories. The title *Before Buddha Was Buddha* is a play on the word “buddha” which means “enlightened” or “awakened.” It means: “before the person we know as the Buddha was awakened.” According to the Buddhist tradition, the Jataka tales are stories that the Buddha related to his disciples about his own past lives. What did he go through – making errors, learning lessons, struggling and persevering through lifetime after lifetime – before he could become fully enlightened? They reveal the pitfalls and challenges, as well as the hard-earned insights, of anyone seriously following a spiritual path.

In this book Rafe Martin, a Zen teacher in the Harada-Yasutani koan line, examines a selection of the Jataka tales to bring out the essential teachings embedded in them. Martin begins each chapter with a brief summary of one of the tales. He explains: “The Buddha didn’t just sit around talking about his past lives. He only told jatakas in response to situations that arose within his community. They were a way of helping untangle knots and open gates.”

In one tale a forester is hired to lead a 500-wagon caravan through the forest. Attacked by 500 robbers, the forester “dealing blows right and left, puts all 500 thieves to flight, then guides the caravan to safety.” When asked for the secret of his power, he says, “I have no secret. I had a job to do. Having sworn to protect you, I resolved to keep my word. I didn’t cling to life, but used it to fulfill my purpose.”

According to Martin, this swashbuckling tale offers encouragement and positive guidance for meditation: “The forester jataka reminds us that if we shift our focus from the habitual, self-centred self, then, even as countless thoughts arise, we’re like a person who singlehandedly faces and deals with hordes of foes.”

Another story begins with the future Buddha as a virtuous man suffering under extreme poverty. He sees the king of the Nagas (mythical snake-like beings with extravagant wealth and power) and wishes to enjoy the wealth of

the Nagas. He is reborn as the king of the Nagas. In this lavish life he realizes his error: what he really wanted was enlightenment, which is available only in the short-lived human form. The tale then recounts his arduous, humbling struggle to merit another human birth.

As this tale shows, we all make mistakes, even the future Buddha. And who hasn't wished for circumstances that were easier, in some way better? It is sobering to consider how dearly that wish for wealth cost the future Buddha. Martin says, "The central point of the legend is clear: don't waste time, don't waste this precious human life! ... Mysterious and full of tremendous potential as human life is, we all know it can be difficult, full of loss, disappointment, misunderstanding, malice, sorrow, grief, and injustice." Nonetheless, it is only in human form that enlightenment is possible. "The real treasure that we seek is right where we are, and we can find it if we don't let our chance go by. But, will we? There's the rub."

In another story, the forest is on fire and the animals run to the river for safety. But one brave parrot sees that a few animals are caught in the fire, surrounded with no escape. She flies back again and again from the river into the blaze to sprinkle a few drops of water over the trapped animals. While everyone laughs at the absurdity of her efforts, she continues, even as her own wings get singed. Finally, the gods are so moved by her compassion that both the parrot and the trapped animals are miraculously saved.

Commenting on this tale, Martin quotes Seng ts'an, the Third Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, in his *Verses on the Faith Mind*: "When picking and choosing are cast aside, the Way stands clear and undisguised."

There is no ground left for the parrot to pick and choose.... What does the parrot see that makes the Way clear and undisguised? From up high, she sees how all is connected: trees, rivers, mountains.... She sees intimately and knows the forest as herself.... The ancient grit of "me and mine" that stands like a veil between our seeing and doing is "gone, gone, entirely gone" as the Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra says.

The unconditional and generous love of the parrot risking her life in the fire is, thus, the outcome of enlightenment. Martin explains that enlightenment, as understood in Zen Buddhism, means a state in which one sees and knows that all is one. There is no separate self. The entire universe and all beings in it (often called "the ten thousand things") are intimately connected as one being. Martin sometimes refers to this state of oneness, where there is no "other," as "intimacy":

Enlightenment is not a “thing” we “get.” It comes from losing, not gaining, losing the habitual self-centred “stuff” that cuts us off from wind, rain, sun, moon, stars, animals, people. With that wonderful failure, that liberating loss, we find intimacy, which is what we’ve been seeking for who knows how long.... Of course, it’s not that “I” become intimate with everything. Rather, the so-called “ten thousand things” step in and replace me. I’m gone.

The natural result of this realization is loving-kindness and compassion towards all.

Martin also points out, “Zen holds that generous, selfless behaviour is the expression of our True Nature.” He notes that our True Nature gets blocked or obscured, but “even animals can astound us with acts of love, selflessness, and loyalty – the very things that we like to imagine make us human. True Nature means the nature of all beings.” He quotes Zen master Hakuin, “From the beginning all beings are Buddha,” and asks, “Why don’t we know who or what we really are? How are we – just as we are, stuck and limited as we are – buddhas?” Martin explains, “Our path is not one of gaining new Buddhist beliefs, but of seeing more deeply into the nature of what we already are.... We don’t get rid of ourselves, but letting go and losing ourselves, we find ourselves as if for the first time.”

As the Jataka tales vividly illustrate, to reach realization of our own True Nature is not easy. The famous Zen master Dogen called spiritual practice “the path of continued exertion.” Martin summarizes one long, complex Jataka tale called “Two Cousins,” which follows the future Buddha through several past human and animal lives full of difficulties, and then comments, “We find that spiritual practice is not an escape, but a serious commitment to doing the real work. As we practice, our determination will be tested, the depths of our commitment sounded. But isn’t that what we want – a goal worthy of our efforts?”

The Jataka tales also drive home the unavoidable power of the karmic law. Everything we do, say, or think matters. The tales forcefully depict how even small indiscretions can have repercussions over lifetimes. The underlying message is to stay aware, make choices consciously, and keep our ultimate spiritual goal in view. As Martin says, “The consequences of old, even ancient thoughts and deeds will continue to arise, causing difficulties. Freedom from difficulties is not the freedom we are going to find. Freedom to accept our karma fully is.”

Difficulties come not as punishment and not randomly, but as ways of working through what we've created with our own past thoughts and deeds.... As we continue our zazen [seated meditation] we gain the freedom to choose better responses to old problems. Painful situations still arise, but we handle them less egotistically.

Martin offers a hopeful perspective, saying, “If we are the cause of our difficulties, while sobering, it’s good news. We can also be the cause of our own liberation.”

In the midst of difficulties brought on by our old karma, Zen asks us to make an effort, sit up straight, and plumb the question beneath it to the bottom. That question is, “Where is our freedom now?” Not just “How can we one day be free, but how are we free now?”... In the ups, downs, losses, gains, betrayals, disillusionments, miscommunications, misunderstandings, joys, ailments, anxieties, errors, triumphs, and sorrows that are our life, each one of us must and can find our answer – and our freedom.

