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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# The Self and God

Unless the finite self is transcended, God cannot be realized. The two cannot coexist. This truth cannot be known except through the grace of the master.

When we have the good fortune to meet a perfect master, he teaches us the technique to rise above the empirical and finite self. When the self dies, doubt and fear also die, as also the pain of transmigration.

The highest wisdom comes from the master, since he is able to show and take us to our Liberator.

Guru Nanak ends this short hymn by disclosing that he has merged into the Lord and the two have become one.

*Haumai karee taa too naahee*

*Where self exists, God is not;*

*Where God exists, there is no self.*

*Sage, probe this mystery.*

*Of the immanence of the Lord in all that is,*

*Without the grace of the guru*

*We could not know this essence of truth.*

*When we encounter the true teacher,*

*And when the little self dies,*

*Doubt and fear die with it,*

*As also the pains of birth, death and rebirth.*

*The guru's teaching is the highest wisdom*

*Since it shows us where our Liberator is.*

*Nanak repeats: "I am that. That is I."...*

*Guru Nanak: His Mystic Teachings*



# Do You Feel Lucky?

In a letter to an overseas disciple reproduced in *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

*The mere fact that God, in his mercy, has selected us to be put on the path should make us very happy. If it does not, it is due to the fact that we do not realize the great blessing and privilege involved in it. Please think calmly, just for a moment. Are you not one of the luckiest persons living in your country to be chosen by him for the path?... Do you think that you have searched for and found the path by your own efforts? Then why did you not come to the Master earlier instead of just now?*

Maharaj Ji's rhetorical question prompts us to reflect on the immensity of our good fortune. Who knows how many lifetimes our soul has been wandering before receiving the gift of Nam, or how many other hearts yearn for what has been freely given to us? We are, without doubt, the luckiest people on Earth. Feeling fortunate should evoke gratitude and happiness within us. Yet few of us can claim that this is the attitude through which we experience life. Most of the time, we wrestle with worry, sadness, listlessness, or some other feeling under the broad umbrella of what Buddhism would classify as suffering.

The gap between our good luck and our attitude stems from our failure to appreciate our circumstances. Once we consider the teachings of mystics and recognize the role providence has played in arranging for us to be the disciples of a true living master, our perspective shifts significantly. After countless aeons spent in the creation, the Supreme Lord has entrusted the care of our soul to a true living master so that he may guide us back to his abode. There are at least three reasons that make this an extraordinary blessing.

Spiritual literature tells us that human birth, the desire for liberation, and the guidance of a living master are three key milestones in a soul's evolution that cannot occur together without divine intervention. In other words, their combination is exceedingly rare. For example, someone might be born human but deny that a non-material reality exists, or they might seek liberation but never meet an enlightened spiritual guide. Being recipients of such grace is

extraordinary in itself, but what makes it even more remarkable is that we have done nothing to deserve it. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh states:

*What we need is his [the Lord's] grace. When his grace is there, circumstances combine in such a way that we want to get out of the creation. We come to the path, we get the opportunity to meditate. We get the facilities, the atmosphere. We feel his love, his devotion, and we turn our back to the world and look to him. All these things come just by his grace. It's not that we have done something to deserve all that. We have done nothing.... We can never do anything to deserve his love. He just gives it and gives it. We are too small-fry to even invoke his grace, because we are so helpless as humans in this creation. It's all his grace.*

The third reason why becoming a disciple of a true living master is an extraordinary blessing – and one that is of immediate relevance to us – is that it provides an opportunity to free our soul from its imprisonment in the cycle of birth and death. However, there is no room for complacency. Initiation is simply the starting point of our journey towards liberation. While success is assured under the Master's guidance, our actions can either hasten or delay our progress.

So, let's work with the Master by doing everything he asks. Excuses are pointless. To claim we cannot meditate is self-deception. If we genuinely love and trust the Master, surely, we want to please him. Given that the Lord, the Creator of all, has marked us for Nam amongst countless souls, we should ask ourselves again, "Do I feel lucky?"



# The Promise of Spring

*A nine days' wonder is the springtime;  
It's your chance to play Holi, my mind.*

*Without cymbals, without drums,  
The unstruck music comes resounding.  
Without any tune, without any sound,  
With no pause the Melody resounds,  
Filling every pore of my body.*

*I fill love's spray with the hue  
Of virtue and contentment,  
And blissfully I sprinkle this colour around.  
The colour scatters, the sky glows red,  
And without a stop it rains  
In vivid and varied tints.*

*I have flung away the veil of my body;  
I have shed all reserve and fear  
Of what people may say.  
Such a Holi I play in this springtime.*

*Mira adores her beloved Lord;  
She sacrifices her all at His lotus feet.*

*Mira: The Divine Lover*

Throughout the ages, mystics have associated springtime with spiritual joy. In the poetry of Persian mystics such as Rumi and Hafiz, we find descriptions of flowers in the garden that find a voice and call out to one another. Their joyous exchanges hint at what it must feel like as mind and soul experience inner bliss. In the verses quoted above, Mirabai draws a parallel with the Hindu festival of Holi, when family and friends toss coloured powders at each other in a light-hearted manner to celebrate the season.

Spring is a good metaphor for spiritual awakening as it's a time of glad transformation – the emergence from the darkness of winter to the energy of new life. Think baby animals gambolling in the sunshine, tender buds on the trees and green shoots pushing through the earth.

We understand that these birth pains are an essential part of the whole journey, reminding us that growth and renewal often require overcoming challenges. However, the excitement of new beginnings naturally comes with the darker days of winter, the time when life first begins to emerge. In his poem ‘The Wasteland,’ the 20th-century poet T.S. Eliot wrote, “April is the cruellest month, breeding lilacs out of a dead land.”

Why should April be cast as cruel? Perhaps it is due to the inherent pain of all transformations and change. The seasonal cycle begins with a descent into the decay of winter. Plants shed their leaves, lose their ability to retain life-giving elements, and shrivel into the ground. This process is painful in itself. Similarly, when we commit to a spiritual way of life, we must eventually confront a life of mental sacrifice. In this regard, Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Die to Live*:

*It is not easy to follow this Path. One has to sacrifice a lot in life to achieve the end. You constantly have to be alert with your mind as if you were on a razor's edge.... To follow Sant Mat requires a complete transformation, so it's not easy.*

First comes the transformation from an ego-centred sensual being to the renunciation of physical attachments. Saints have told us we need to ‘cleanse the heart's chamber,’ meaning we must empty our hearts to make room for the love of the guru, God's light-bringer. That clearing out, possibly experienced like winter when withering, is a painful process. But so too is the awakening to spiritual love, the stirrings before spring has truly taken hold. To recognize that we want something better than the old humdrum life – that we have seen and felt something better, yet have temporarily lost it again – those pangs of love are painful. In the same passage in *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh says: “And then to be filled with love and devotion and to yearn to become one with the Being is not a very pleasant feeling.”

Maharaj Charan Singh advises the seeker that, through all this, “We should be bold enough to struggle.” This means we should bravely accept our winter of the senses and the challenging recognition of a greater destiny. The happiness and fulfilment we seek will be realized once we gain control of our minds, and to achieve this, we must struggle to get

our minds to attend to meditation. Meeting a true master and receiving initiation from him are crucial turning points in our lives. He can provide us with a method so simple that even a child of eight or an elderly person of eighty can follow it, and the Master will also offer inspiration and guidance. Maharaj Charan Singh says, “We have to create in our mind the habit of concentrating, and slowly and slowly we will succeed.” Success comes when we begin to enjoy meditation. At this moment, it is as if spring is on the horizon.

## **Repetition**

The habit of concentration that Maharaj Charan Singh refers to is cultivated through repetition. This happens in two ways: at the time of initiation, we promised to build up to two and a half hours of meditation each day, so living a disciplined life means that part of our day will consistently include that meditation session. Secondly, the process of meditation itself is built on repetition. During the first two hours, we constantly repeat the five holy names (simran) to quiet our wandering thoughts and bring our mental focus to the eye centre. Whilst gazing into the darkness, we try to visualize the Master’s form (dhyān). The masters advise us to approach this with love and devotion. Repetition is the engine, but love and devoted application are the fuel. This fuel is not always easy to find – meditation can seem dull and unproductive, and the mind is rebellious. So, simran during the day, as we go about our business, is the key to reining in the mind; eventually, concentration grows. We then begin to take pleasure in the practice.

After simran, where we focus our mind at the eye centre, we listen to the sound current (bhajan). In Mirabai’s verse, she says, “Without cymbals, without drums, the unstruck music comes resounding.” This is her way of describing the experience of hearing the Shabd, the vital life current that is audible as sound and visible as light. The effect of becoming Shabd-conscious is so profound that those who tune in to its wonderful harmonies are automatically liberated from the tyranny of the mind and its negative tendencies, allowing all positive qualities or virtues to manifest in the disciple spontaneously. Mirabai imagines these qualities sprinkled

on the currents of her love, just like coloured powders are carried through the air during Holi.

*I fill love's spray with the hue  
Of virtue and contentment,  
And blissfully I sprinkle this colour around.*

Maharaj Charan Singh also assured his disciples of the inevitability of the transformative power of spiritual progress (becoming attached to the Shabd) by stating that virtues will manifest in a diligent disciple “like cream upon milk.” This assurance often came in response to initiates expressing their struggles to find humility, contentment, or any of the virtues we are encouraged to cultivate. The Master’s message was that, although we should do our best at the mental level, the mind is truly tamed only when it becomes attached to the divine power of Shabd. In fact, even before we hear it resonating at the eye centre, if we are faithfully practising meditation as instructed at the time of initiation, Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us that:

*You may not have experiences within, but definitely you will feel the effect of meditation. You will enjoy that bliss and happiness and contentment within yourself, and your whole attitude towards life will change.*

For those of us with feet of clay, still mired in the mud of the physical world and struggling to fulfil our daily duty of two and a half hours, these words are an inspiration. If we dedicate our time and give our best effort, eventually we will see the sky lightening and feel the soft breeze of spring.



# The Indifferent Murshid

It may be natural for disciples to focus on the greatness of their murshid [spiritual teacher]. Drawn by the murshid's beauty, awed by his unique combination of power and humility, overwhelmed by his generosity in the face of their unworthiness, they easily can fall into worshipping the murshid. But as Rumi says, "The true teacher knocks down the idol that the student makes of him." That is, the murshid turns the disciple's attention toward the truth which is to be found inside himself. As Bahauddin Naqshband (1318–1389), the founder of the [Sufi] Naqshbandi Order, says: "We are the means of reaching the goal. It is necessary that seekers should cut themselves away from us and think only of the goal."

The vital necessity of turning the disciple's attention away from the teacher at the crucial time, forcing him to focus on the reality within himself, may explain what seems like strange and harsh behaviour on the part of the murshid. One wealthy young man became a disciple of Abu-Saeed Abil-Kheir. He gave away all his property to the poor and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the path. For three years, without a murmur of complaint, the young man served the congregation of disciples, doing all manner of menial chores.

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

On the fourth night, there was a gathering with lots of delicious food served to all, but even then the youth was ignored and left standing near the door all night, without a crumb of food. Finally, Abu-Saeed looked around and, seemingly noticing him for the first time, scolded him and told him how disgusted he was with him. He ordered the youth to be thrown out and told him not to return. Utterly distraught the young man left. Collapsing at an old mosque, he wept all through the night and

prayed, “O Lord, now I have no one to turn to but you.” Suddenly, he was flooded with a great peace.

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

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

Abu-Saeed’s message, like that of all true murshids, was consistent throughout his life. At his death, Abu-Saeed’s last words of advice to his disciples were: “Do not forget God, not even for a moment. Know that during my time, I did not invite you to myself. I declared that in reality we do not exist. I say that he exists, and that is sufficient.”

*The Spiritual Guide, Vol. II*



# The Oscars

The annual awards ceremony for the Hollywood film industry takes place in early March in Los Angeles, USA. Known as 'The Oscars', it recognizes outstanding achievements in various categories such as Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Actress. Stepping from the red carpet to a more timeless stage, mystics often describe the material realm as the Lord's play. If we extend the analogy and imagine the world unfolding like an epic film, how might we be awarded a celestial Oscar?

The divine producer assigns roles based on both the karma we must resolve and the roles we auditioned for in past lives. These auditions – rooted in unfulfilled desires – manifest as scenes of love, joy, or pain in our current life-story. Therefore, it is useless to covet the parts played by fellow actors, for the divine producer is infinitely generous and will give us the chance to play all the roles we desire. As we can only enact one role at a time, this means completing one film and starting another in an endless cycle of life and rebirth.

Regardless of the role we are assigned, we should accept it gladly. What difference does it make if we play the millionaire or the beggar? True insight comes from recognizing the screenplay of our life-story as merely an illusion. This means performing our assigned roles sincerely but not mistaking the script for ultimate reality. To reach this maturity, we must resist the temptation to identify with the roles we play which binds us to our characters, and extend compassion, generosity, and kindness to our fellow actors. By anchoring our devotion in the divine producer rather than fleeting characters in our life's play, we shall step into the eternal light and claim our everlasting reward when the final credits roll.

Just as an actor needs a masterful director to win awards, we also require the guidance of a Shabd director, a rare spiritual mentor attuned to the sound current emanating from the divine producer himself. Only under the Shabd director's guidance can we train ourselves to become detached from the illusory screenplay of life and attain the highest honour bestowed by the divine Awards Academy: union with the divine producer. To receive this celestial Oscar, we must honour the contract with the Shabd director with utmost seriousness. The contract outlines the

expectations placed upon us for the duration of the role we are currently enacting. These are:

1. Trust the Shabd director's vision even when we don't like how the plot is unfolding.
2. Avoid clinging to co-actors, whether they portray parents, spouses, or friends. They are merely players in the divine drama.
3. Refrain from lamenting the departure of the actors closest to us. Death is an integral part of life's drama, and we should not let it overshadow our experience. Filming always goes on.
4. Whenever off-camera, meditate on Nam using the Shabd director's five-word mantra: simran.

By fulfilling our contractual expectations, we free ourselves from future roles and the endless cycle of completing one film only to start another. No matter how poor our acting may be, the Shabd director encourages us never to lose hope, feel alone, or become broken-hearted, for every scene brings us closer to the divine producer. Therefore, when death ends our role, nothing from this creation remains, not even our body. Only meditation, our bridge to Sach Khand, stays with us. To escape the chaos of this worldly stage and the egos of fellow actors – as well as our own – we must meet our obligations. By following the Shabd director's guidance and honouring our duty, our celestial Oscar is assured.

Unlike in the awards ceremony in Hollywood, when we receive our celestial Oscar, we will not return to the auditorium to sit with fellow actors, industry professionals and celebrities. We will step offstage and follow the Shabd director, who will steer us to our true home, where nothing is fake, where there is no film set and no actors, just the ultimate reality of our Satguru.



# Seva Motivations and Attitude

Seva is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘selfless service’ or ‘selfless action.’ As seekers on the path of Sant Mat, our primary seva is to serve the soul through our daily meditation practice. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh explains why meditation is regarded as seva both to one’s soul and the Lord:

*Seva means to serve someone. So we are serving ourselves. It’s a service of the soul.... You see, now we do not realize that our real self is the soul. We think our real self is the ego, the body, the mind. To begin to realize that the reality is the soul, not the body or the ego, is also service.... Actually, it is a service to the soul. We are taking pity on ourselves, so to say – taking pity on the soul.*

*Since the soul ultimately has to become the Father, this service is known as service to the Father.*

Just as serving the sangat through external seva is to serve the Master, serving our soul through meditation is to serve the Lord. When initiated, we promised to dedicate two and a half hours to meditation each day. This is a sacred vow the Master expects us to honour. If we are truly committed to the spiritual journey and to achieving eternal liberation from the cycle of birth and death, fulfilling this promise becomes non-negotiable. In fact, mystics have said that there is no greater expression of love for one’s master than daily meditation.

Even though meditation is the highest form of seva to the Master, mystics advise us not to go to extremes by attempting to meditate for long periods of the day. Instead, we can use our free time for physical seva, which, as noted in the following quotation, has the dual benefit of strengthening our love for the Master and improving the quality of our meditation:

*The practical fact is that we can’t meditate all day, and even with our daily responsibilities we still have spare time. Seva, then, becomes an additional way for us to nurture that love, to remain in an atmosphere of love throughout the day. And this supports the next day’s meditation.*

Seva

Our love for the Master and a desire to serve him inspire us to look for opportunities to perform physical seva. We might help prepare our local centre for weekly satsang by washing the floors, organising transport for the sangat so they can attend the Master's annual satsang programme, or directing traffic. While love may motivate us to do seva, we should be careful not to develop a sense of pride in our role. For example, we may start to think that the sangat is benefiting because of our personal dedication and ability to do seva. An anecdote recounted in the book *Seva* aptly illustrates our insignificance. During the Master's satsang programme, a sevadar was asked to leave his stewarding role and attend to another matter. He did so:

*...all the while concerned that he was needed at his seva post. When he was finally done, he rushed back to the spot he had been asked to abandon. He found that a potted plant had been placed where he had been standing.... That's when he realized his own importance: master could get his work done by a potted plant!*

From such humbling incidents, we learn to surrender our sense of self-importance, recognizing that true seva flows from the Master's will alone. In *The Dawn of Light*, Maharaj Sawan Singh encourages us to adopt the mindset that we are merely instruments of the Lord and that it is he – not us – who is accomplishing seva:

*The more you help others, the better; but be on your guard that in doing this work there is an idea of service to the Master only, and not a shadow of pride crosses your mind. Think that whatever is being done, he is doing it and not we.*

As Maharaj Sawan Singh suggests, seva is not about us, but about what the Master does. Yet while the purpose of seva is to eradicate one's ego, ironically, it may have the opposite effect if we start believing that our seva is more important than someone else's. The Master insists that all seva is of equal value; one type of seva is not more valuable than another. Therefore, one way of performing seva with humility is to remember the Master constantly, either by visualizing him or repeating simran.

Alongside the gradual dissolution of one's ego, seva cultivates in us qualities that can only be developed through working with others: kindness, compassion, patience, and love. As the Persian poet Rumi reflects in the Masnavi, if every difficulty rubs us the wrong way with frustration, how will we ever polish our mirror? Likewise, we may approach seva with the misguided belief that the outcome is of utmost importance. Fixation on tasks can grow so intense that when things don't go as we planned, we may become frustrated with other sevadars. However, no one should suffer in the name of our seva; if we cause hurt to others through words or actions, we fail to understand what seva truly is. By working alongside others, we slowly smooth out the rough edges of our ego – vanity, pride, and attachment – letting the mirror of our heart shine with love and compassion.

We began this article by stating that seva means 'selfless service' or 'selfless action,' and that in Sant Mat, our primary seva is to serve the soul through our daily meditation practice. While the sangat may benefit from our contributions through various forms of external seva, we are the main beneficiary. Seva gradually diminishes our sense of self as we learn to work alongside others without the need to be the best, to lead, or to impose our will on how to complete a task. This marks a complete 180-degree shift from our daily life in the world. As we engage in more seva with like-minded companions, we increasingly turn away from the material world. This captures our soul's attention and helps us forget about our 'self'. The more we perform seva without any expectations, the more we begin to truly enjoy it.

All types of motivations influence why we engage in physical seva. However, if we trace them back to their origin, there is one common reason that ultimately surpasses all obstacles and challenges: our love for the Master and a desire to serve him. To love the Master is to want to be with him and to surrender oneself to him. Therefore, in the words of Guru Amar Das in the Adi Granth (the Sikh scriptures):

*Surrender body, mind, wealth,  
and everything to the guru;  
Obey his will, and you will find him.*



# The (Rabbi's) Lesson

Rabbi Joshua was a likeable man, always happy, with a kind word for everyone. The Jewish community of his small town appreciated his compassionate and gentle nature. However, there was one thing that Rabbi Joshua was not casual about, and that was when he spoke about religion and God. For him, this was his most important duty – to teach and serve God – and he took it very seriously. His sermons were the highlight of the Sabbath service. In time, his reputation as an outstanding orator spread to surrounding villages and towns.

Having heard about Rabbi Joshua's reputation, the elders of a synagogue in a nearby town invited him to speak one evening. He accepted the invitation. On reaching the synagogue, he was warmly greeted and shown to the pulpit. He observed that there was a large crowd, but they were all talking and gossiping and had not even noticed his presence. The atmosphere was not very conducive for a speech on such a serious subject. In a loud voice he said, "I am Rabbi Joshua. Do you know what I am going to say?" People stopped talking, and someone replied: "No, we do not know." Hearing this the rabbi said: "I have no desire to speak to people who do not even know what I will be talking about," and he turned around and left.

Everyone present was very embarrassed. The elders met the next day and decided to apologize to Rabbi Joshua and invite him back again to give a sermon. The rabbi accepted and the following week returned to the synagogue. This time the audience was better behaved and patiently waiting. Rabbi Joshua walked up to the pulpit and again asked the congregation, "Do you know what I am going to say?" They replied, "Yes, we know." Rabbi Joshua replied: "Well, since you already know what I am going to say, I won't waste any more of your time," and he left.

Everyone was now very confused. They discussed the situation and decided on what would be the appropriate reply to his question. So they invited him back again, confident that they knew what to say if he asked the same question.

Once again Rabbi Joshua returned, walked up to the pulpit, and again asked the same question: "Do you know what I am going to say?" Half the

congregation replied, “Yes, we know,” and the other half replied, “No, we do not know.” Rabbi Joshua replied: “The half who know what I am going to say can tell the other half.” Then he left again.

Now the people were completely perplexed. Not wanting to give up, they pleaded with Rabbi Joshua to come back one last time, hoping that this time they would get it right. Rabbi Joshua agreed. When he arrived and walked to the pulpit, he again asked the congregation, “Do you know what I am going to say?” This time the audience did not utter a word but sat in total silence, their eyes fixed on the rabbi. A slight smile appeared on the rabbi’s face, and he began to give his sermon.

*This is a well-known story found in many spiritual traditions, including Sufi, Hindu, and Buddhist. Most of the versions give only the first three exchanges and leave off the last exchange, when the audience sits in silence. This is unfortunate, because the last exchange communicates the reason for the rabbi’s behaviour. He saw the congregation’s state of mind and attempted to make the people receptive to what he was going to say – by emptying themselves of preconceived ideas, of what they thought they knew, and what they thought he was going to say. He wanted them to become like empty vessels, fully receptive. Once the rabbi saw that the audience had become quiet and attentive, having realized that they were confused and did not understand anything, only then did the rabbi begin his sermon.*

*Stories From the Heart*



# Actions Speak Louder Than Words

We are drawn to individuals who possess the rare ability to walk their talk. Their strength and honesty inspire us, prompting us to reflect on whether our words and actions align. The importance of matching words with actions is especially important in spirituality, where practice is paramount.

## **The dangers of empty spiritual talk**

In *A Spiritual Primer*, the author observes that modern culture promotes the illusion that genuine happiness and fulfilment arise from amassing “more money, more power, more recognition, more possessions, more everything.” Embracing a way of life that seeks peace and contentment from within defies this prevailing norm. Against such a backdrop, it is only natural that when we encounter fellow seekers of the truth, our conversations gravitate toward spirituality. These exchanges not only reflect our shared interest in Sant Mat but also serve as a vital means to inspire, uplift, and support one another. Indeed, many of us can recall conversations about spirituality that have encouraged, guided, or comforted us through life’s trials.

However, conversations about spirituality lose their value if we participate in them solely to display our knowledge while neglecting our spiritual discipline. When we confine spirituality to words, we fail to grasp the essence of Sant Mat and risk deceiving ourselves about the sincerity of our commitment to its teachings. In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh warns against channelling our enthusiasm for Sant Mat outwardly, as it distracts us from quieting the mind:

*Sant Mat enthusiasm is not to be expressed outwardly. In fact, outward enthusiasm makes the mind more active whereas, in Sant Mat, all our efforts are directed towards stilling the mind and making it motionless. Sant Mat enthusiasm is to be digested within and it has to take the form of deeper humility, of greater love and devotion for the Lord and the Master. Sant Mat does not want lip service or devotion merely to be expressed in words and emotions. It is the heart that must speak. Our genuine enthusiasm is gauged by the humility and gentleness that is produced in us.*

In this response, Maharaj Charan Singh highlights the importance of internalizing Sant Mat teachings, suggesting that it is a path of action,

a way of life to be practised. Merely speaking words of love and devotion amounts to little more than fleeting emotions that fade over time. In stark contrast, there is no purer expression of love and devotion to the Master than a steadfast commitment to meditation, day after day, especially on the occasions when one does not feel like doing it. When we ignore the mind's excuses or pleas and choose instead to persevere in our meditation, this becomes the true voice of the heart. Even if we struggle to complete a single round of simran, the very act of battling the mind and refusing to forsake our practice exemplifies love for the Master in its most authentic form. Over time, such heartfelt dedication nurtures a humility and gentleness within us, which, as Maharaj Charan Singh indicates, are more reliable signs of our enthusiasm for Sant Mat than mere words.

### **Spirituality beyond the page**

The tendency to externalize spirituality does not end with speech. Just as words can become hollow without practice, so too can over-engagement with spiritual literature risk descending into another form of superficiality, one that prioritizes knowledge over application. Therefore, in much the same way that we must guard against empty talk distracting us from spiritual practice, we must also guard against allowing our enthusiasm for spirituality to become solely focused on reading for knowledge. Indeed, this impulse often reveals itself in our eagerness to acquire spiritual texts. For example, whenever a new *Science of the Soul* book is released, we rush to buy it. Similarly, when teachings from other beliefs resonate with us, we are quick to share their insights with others. This rush indicates that we are at risk of treating spirituality like something to be consumed, highlighting our eagerness to acquire and display our knowledge to appear wise. Yet, whether we read a dozen books or a hundred, the core message remains the same: the importance of connecting the soul with the Shabd through a spiritual practice taught by a true living master.

Reading about spirituality may expand our knowledge, but it fails to deepen true understanding or reveal the truths we are seeking. In *The Path*, Maharaj Charan Singh shares a verse by Tulsi Sahib that highlights the risk of reading scriptures without spiritual practice:

*If one read the nine, the eighteen,  
The four and then the six,  
He would lose the essence of Truth;  
Unless the soul merges with Shabd,  
He is a mere parrot,  
However much may be his learning.*

Tulsi Sahib cautions against confusing knowledge of scriptures with true inner transformation. Even mastering Hinduism's core texts – the nine Vyakaranas (Sanskrit grammatical treatises), the eighteen Puranas (ancient Hindu mythological texts), the four Vedas (the foundational scriptures of Hinduism), and the six Darshanas (Hindu philosophical systems) – does not lead to enlightenment. Scriptures are meant to guide, not replace, direct spiritual experience. Unless the soul merges with the Shabd, spirituality based solely on information drawn from books is akin to a parrot that repeats words without understanding their meaning.

Although Tulsi Sahib's verse specifically mentions Hindu texts, it applies to all scriptures. His insistence that texts are tools, not the ultimate goal, echoes teachings in other traditions, such as Zen Buddhism, which advises against mistaking the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. In our information age, this serves as a helpful reminder that while consuming spiritual content such as books, satsangs, and Q&A's, it should not distract from meditation. As Tulsi Sahib emphasizes, the essence of Truth is not to be found in external sources, but through attentive listening to the inner sound current.

### **Embracing the practice of spirituality**

Since there is little benefit in expressing our enthusiasm for Sant Mat through speech or reading, the following quotes reaffirm what we already understand: the importance of meditation.

*One does not become a satsangi simply by being initiated. One must mould his life in accordance with the principles of satsang. Every thought, speech and action must conform to them. Actions speak louder than words.*

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Science of the Soul*

*Sant Mat is a path of practice and not of words. Only that time which you give to your simran and bhajan stands to your credit. All the love and affection which you express in words should take the form of meditation. Then only will it bear fruit. It will then grow manifold, bringing the grace of the Lord in abundance.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

By emphasizing action rather than words, both quotes suggest that the spiritual journey is not about superficial displays of love. As Maharaj Jagat Singh states in the following quotation, we need to meditate, meditate, and meditate even more. On that note, shouldn't we honour Sant Mat and the Master by turning our intentions into action?

*The secret of success in the path is 'bhajan, more bhajan, and still more bhajan' (practice, more practice and still more practice).*

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Science of the Soul*



*In reality, we are beings of light. Inside there is nothing but light; yet the unconcentrated mind is unaware of this, and sees only darkness. By developing an interest in the darkness and learning to enjoy it, the darkness will turn to light. The intention behind contemplation on the darkness is to develop the faculty of inner sight, so that the light may appear.*

*Awareness of the Divine*

# Truth in a Nutshell

You have to clear your own karma. When one goes to a forest, if he has a gun or a sword in his hand he becomes fearless to meet any wild animal. But that doesn't mean that the person who gave him the gun or sword has to come and help him get rid of the wild animals. You have been given a technique of meditation. You have to help yourself. You have to make your own willpower strong to go through all your fate karma. Master also helps you to some extent, but you have to mainly help yourself by meditation.

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

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Daoists believe that our future is in our own hands. Destiny is the result of cause and effect from the past life. This cannot be changed, but we can change our future.

*Introduction to the Dao*

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To acknowledge and affirm our spiritual nature, the first practical step we are to take once we are committed to the spiritual path is to embrace responsibility for our every thought and action....

Whatever we are today, it is the result of what we thought and did in the past. By the same rule of cause and effect, what we are to become in the future will be determined by what we think and do right now, today. Through our consciousness, our sense of discrimination, we can choose at every moment to make a difference now, in this life, not only for the rest of our lifetime but for all eternity....

Why do we wait to make meditation our first priority? If we are not going to make this effort now, when are we going to do it? We need to ask ourselves these questions. If it is not for me to do it, who do I think will do this work for me?

*Living Meditation*



# Breaking Free from the Karma Trap

Reincarnation and the principle of cause and effect – commonly referred to as karma – are two spiritual laws that operate in unison. The soul’s journey from one body to another does not occur randomly; rather, it is dictated by the precise workings of karmic law. This law is interwoven into the fabric of the universe, meaning that the soul experiences the consequences of each action with unerring precision, much like placing one’s hand in a fire inevitably leads to burns. However, while consequences such as burns from a fire illustrate the immediacy of karmic law in action, how does this explain the soul’s journey across lifetimes? In short, why does the soul accumulate karmic debt?

Mystics explain that karmic law is complex and nuanced. Its mechanisms are so subtle and intricate that, as Maharaj Jagat Singh stated in the *Science of the Soul*, “Not even a single grain that inadvertently enters your granary from a neighbour’s field can go unaccounted.” While the repercussions of certain actions are immediate, others yield results later, and this is why the soul becomes trapped in the cycle of transmigration.

Our present existence is the vehicle through which one’s soul is paying off a portion of its *pralabdh* karma – the karma from our past that is playing out in our present life. The circumstances of our lives and the events that unfold are the result of decisions we made in numerous previous lives. As stated in the New Testament of the Bible (*Luke: 12:7-8*), “even the very hairs on your head are all numbered.” Yet even though much of our life is predestined, we exercise a modicum of free will. Consequently, when settling outstanding debts, we can create new karma, known as *kriyaman*. As we cannot reap their consequences within our current lifetime, *kriyaman* karma is added to our already colossal storehouse of *sinchit* karma, the balance of unpaid karmas from previous lives. Our soul is therefore ensnared in a vicious cycle.

This presents a paradox: if karmic justice is absolute, why does humanity remain unaware of how it functions? Mystics say that the inability to remember past lives perpetuates the illusion of free will. We perceive ourselves as autonomous actors, unaware that our present choices are shaped by karmic debts stretching across lifetimes. The Greek term

κρίμα (*krima*), signifying judgement or acts violating divine order, mirrors this truth: we cannot sow thorns and expect roses. Yet, our error lies in confining karma to a single lifetime. Saints teach that every action carries consequences, but a human lifespan is too brief to reconcile all karmic threads.

Life, mystics explain, is an invisible prison. We play roles on a cosmic stage, with scripts authored by our accumulated karma. Death concludes an act, not the play itself, casting us into a new role in the next act. In the following verse, the 16th-century mystic Mirabai laments her burden of accumulated karma and beseeches the Lord to liberate her from the cycle of transmigration:

*I am distressed by the fetters of my own karmas –  
free me from them, O Lord.  
The whole world is drifting  
in the currents of eighty-four.  
Prays Mira: O supreme Lord,  
deliver me from the cycle of transmigration.*

*Voice of the Heart*

In this verse, “eighty-four” refers to the cycle of 8,400,000 life forms into which beings keep reincarnating. Is liberation from this cycle of birth and death possible? Saints affirm it is, but only through disciplined adherence to four principles. The first three principles minimize the accumulation of further karma and include eating a lacto-vegetarian diet, abstaining from mind-altering substances, and leading a morally upright life. However, adherence to these alone cannot erase our vast storehouse of *sinchit* karma, or free the soul from the endless cycle of birth and death. Even virtuous deeds perpetuate entanglement in karmic bonds. True liberation is dependent on observing a fourth principle: dedicated, daily spiritual practice (meditation) as taught by a true living master.

During meditation, the soul connects with the Shabd, and it is this power that severs karmic bonds. While moral conduct forms the foundation of one’s spiritual practice, only Shabd can eliminate the storehouse of karmic burdens and break the cycle of actions, reactions, and their consequences. Guru Nanak makes this clear in the following

verse, stating that only Nam can wash away karma, along with the new seeds of impressions and desires that take root in the mind:

*When the hands and the feet and the body are dirty,  
water can wash away the dirt.*

*When the clothes are soiled and stained,  
soap can wash them clean.*

*But when the mind is stained and polluted by sin,  
it can only be cleansed by the love of Nam.*

*Nam: Essence of Spirituality*

Though meditation is essential for liberating the soul, Mirabai's verse reveals a more profound spiritual truth: human effort, no matter how devoted, remains insufficient without divine grace. While spiritual practice purifies the mind and weakens karmic bonds, Mirabai's plea "Free me from them, O Lord," emphasizes the futility of human effort without divine intervention. The soul's journey, therefore, embodies a dual truth. While it is both the architect of its bondage (through karma) and the seeker of its freedom (through meditation), liberation hinges on a union of devotion and grace.

Spiritual practice intensifies the soul's yearning for liberation, and divine grace fulfills this. The soul attains eternal liberation from its karma not by mere wishful thinking or morality, but by engaging in spiritual practice and realizing the source of divine grace. Mirabai's supplication reflects this synthesis: her devotion fuels her yearning, yet her liberation rests in the hands of the Supreme Lord. In this union of effort and grace, the wheel of eighty-four ceases to turn, and the soul finally ascends beyond the chains of karma into eternal freedom.



# Cut the Noose of Worry

“Don’t worry.” These simple words of reassurance are repeated throughout our lives, beginning with our earliest anxieties. As children, we worry about getting into trouble, being bullied, or making friends. As teenagers, our concerns shift to fitting in with peers, the fear of failing exams, and our physical appearance. In adulthood, these worries evolve into anxieties about our careers, financial security, buying a house, raising children, caring for our parents, and our health; the list of concerns is endless. Sometimes it feels as if we spend our entire lives worrying about one thing or another.

When spiritual masters advise “Don’t worry,” we cannot help but question the practicality of this advice, given the challenges we face. Is it realistic to set aside our anxieties? The answer to this question does not lie in ignoring our worries, but in understanding their cause and the adverse effects they have on us. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh attributes the root of our worrying to our desires. He encourages us to learn to accept our destiny and live in the will of the Lord.

*We worry because we want certain things to happen in the way we want them to. We have certain desires, certain wishes to fulfil, certain ambitions to fulfil. And we are always worried about whether we’ll be able to achieve them or not, whether we’ll be able to satisfy those desires or not. That keeps us worrying. If we leave it to the Father, if we live in his will, he knows best what to give us. We just prepare ourselves to accept what he gives. Then what is there to worry about?*

Maharaj Charan Singh’s call to learn acceptance becomes especially persuasive when we trace the history of the English word worry back to its root in the Old English term – *wyrgan*, meaning to strangle. This etymology vividly illustrates the impact of worrying. Worry does not simply unsettle us; it constricts. It suffocates rational thought, chokes joy, and leaves us gasping for clarity. Therefore, when spiritual masters say, “Don’t worry,” they are not dismissing our struggles but offering a lifeline to cut the noose of our anxieties: meditation.

As Maharaj Charan Singh further explains, the very purpose of meditation is, “to train ourselves...to develop [the] attitude of accepting

things as they come.” When we worry, we focus entirely on ‘me’ and ‘I’: what I imagine will happen; how things will affect me; how I feel. This self-centred mindset traps us in false attachments to our physical form, personality traits, relationships, and preferences. However, meditation teaches us to surrender to a power greater than ‘me’ and ‘my problems,’ and frees us from identifying with the human experience we are going through.

There are other ways meditation counteracts the effects of worrying, including restoring our perspective. When we worry, problems often seem larger than they are, and we doubt our ability to handle them. Our minds fixate on imagined catastrophes that may never occur. Even when difficult situations do occur, the reality is usually less overwhelming than the disasters we create in our minds. Meditation counters this habit by raising our consciousness beyond our thoughts. As the repetition of simran stills the multitude of thoughts our mind produces, the practise of bhajan attunes us to the Shabd, the primordial vibration underlying creation. When our awareness of the sound current increases, we become more detached from the things that used to trouble us. Ultimately, meditation transforms our attitude towards life. We realize that all adversities, no matter how challenging, are transient and that with the inner master’s guidance, we will overcome them.

In the following quote from *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us that the Master is the ‘helmsman’ of our lives, meaning he is always ready to help us the moment we turn to him. However, when we worry, we demonstrate a lack of faith in him and choose not to accept his support. If we decide to worry or rely on others, he will not stop us, but the moment we turn to him and surrender completely, he promises to give us everything. Then, we will be infinitely happy, and there will be no more worry. As Maharaj Charan Singh explains, worry has no place in a disciple’s heart:

*You can't change the course of events dictated by your destiny. But by obedience to the Master and by attending to meditation you remain happy and relaxed as you go through it. You accept whatever comes your way as the grace of the Master. He is the helmsman of your life now, and he has only your happiness and best interest at heart. By his mercy, he is bringing you to Him as swiftly as possible to give you all He has. So worry has no place in a disciple's heart.*

*Die to Live*

# A New Awareness

*O Beloved! I have heard many a tale  
About your wondrous beauty:  
But now that I have beheld you within,  
I see that you are really  
A thousand times more wonderful  
Than the tales depict you.*

*Hafiz*

When the Master initiated us, he made it clear that the Radiant Form is always with us. This is not wishful thinking or a figment of our imagination; it is something that can be known once we have worked within ourselves to realize this truth. Layers upon layers of fears, attachments, passions, desires, cravings and illusions cover our inner eye and prevent us from realizing that this is so... Simran brings our attention to the eye centre and dhyān helps us to keep it there. If we are swimming in a river against the current, we need to grasp on to a rock to rest ourselves, so we have the strength to continue swimming against the current to our destination. In like manner, simran helps us to swim against the downward tendencies of the mind and dhyān is the rock that allows us to rest so that we can make further progress.

Even if we close our eyes and see only darkness... that darkness is where our meditation begins. As soon as our attention is fully in that darkness, we are at the threshold of the door to our home. This is the doorway to eternity. From then on, it is just a question of holding our attention in the darkness with simran, of developing progressively deeper concentration, until we are so absorbed in inner perception that we don't feel our bodies at all. We will then experience, instead, a new level of awareness.

The dark sky that we are aware of immediately upon closing our eyes is like a screen in a movie theatre. It is the very same sky in which the inner stars, sun, moon and Radiant Form will make their appearance when concentration deepens. So, there is great significance in that darkness and we shouldn't be afraid of it; rather, it should be appreciated and loved. When we have gained more concentration in simran, the seeing faculty will naturally develop and the darkness will be replaced by light within.

*Living Meditation*

# Food for Thought Let's Talk



# The Journey from Worldly to Spiritual Love

Human love, as we commonly experience it, is deeply rooted in attachment, needs, and expectations. A mother's love for her children, for instance, intertwines with her hopes for their future. Romantic love blossoms from mutual affection, while our love for hobbies or possessions is sustained by the joy they bring. Although conditional, these experiences reflect our inherent yearning for a connection that transcends circumstances.

When we love someone, we see something extraordinary in them – a quality we mistakenly believe is exclusive to that individual. “He or she is not like anyone else,” we think. This perception arises because our love often centres on their outward traits, such as appearance or personality. However, such a focus overlooks a fundamental truth: the true essence of the person we love is not confined to them, but exists in everyone.

Despite being a dim reflection of a deeper reality, earthly love invites us to look beyond the surface. It is a call to action, encouraging us to cleanse our hearts and purify our minds in preparation for a higher form of love: that for the divine. Unlike worldly love, which is driven by our needs and expectations, divine love is selfless and unconditional. Free from ego and desire, divine love leads to everlasting bliss and peace. In this state, lover and beloved become one, dissolving the illusion of separation. As the Sufi poet Rumi writes (as quoted in *The Essential Rumi*), “Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along.” This union represents the soul's homecoming – a return to the wholeness we mistakenly believe earthly love provides. By recognizing the potential for divine love within ourselves and striving towards it, we can transform our understanding of, and approach to, love.

## **The role of a true spiritual master**

At the heart of the spiritual love story is the true living Master who teaches us to embrace love. A key message from all true masters is that love should be all-encompassing rather than limited to our small circle of family and friends. This implies loving everyone we encounter, including those we

might not like. While our minds may question its feasibility, the masters are living proof that universal love can be realized. To the casual observer, a master may appear ordinary, merely a figure with a name, a face, and a family. Yet their true essence transcends form. They speak of the divine melody, sometimes called the ‘Word’ or ‘Voice of God,’ it is the source from which all creation emerges and returns.

A true living master accepts seekers without judgement and looks beyond their imperfections; his purpose is to guide them toward realizing divine love. The bond that develops between a master and a disciple defies worldly logic. While human love often demands reciprocity, a master’s love is boundless and unconditional. His grace transcends time and space, nurturing the seeker through inner and outer guidance. Like a mother who teaches her child to walk, who patiently supports progress despite stumbles, a master directs spiritual aspirants with unwavering compassion, never focusing on their flaws or setbacks.

Central to the master-disciple relationship is darshan. Initially, we may be content to behold the Master’s physical form. However, as the relationship deepens, we listen more intently to the Master’s primary message: our true self is not the body but the soul seeking reunion with its source, the Shabd. Loving the Master’s physical form is a means to an end; it acts as a stepping stone toward loving the divine sound current, the Master within.

### **The price of spiritual love**

To progress from loving the Master’s physical form to loving his radiant form requires action: sitting quietly, repeating simran to draw our focus away from the world and concentrating it at the eye centre. Like a farmer tilling the soil, daily repetition prepares the mind for the Master’s grace. Over time, meditation becomes the language of love, growing proportionately to one’s inner focus. The more concentrated the inner focus becomes during meditation, the greater the awareness of our connection to the divine. The stronger the awareness of our connection to the divine, the more our love expands, mirroring the limitless compassion of the Shabd.

Cultivating spiritual love exacts its costs. Kabir’s allegory of love’s marketplace, where the price is one’s head, illustrates this stark truth:

*Love is not grown in the garden  
Nor can it be bought in the market-place.  
Whether you are sovereign or subject  
Remember this: Only those who offer their heads  
Can purchase love.*

*Kabir: The Great Mystic*

Offering one's head symbolizes the annihilation of one's ego through meditation. Annihilating the ego involves relinquishing pride and identity and, perhaps most challenging of all, surrendering to divine will. Complete surrender is neither passive nor effortless; it demands letting go of desires, judgements, and the illusion of control. It also requires confronting the subtlest traps of the ego, such as the desire for mystical experiences or pride in one's spiritual progress. Saints warn against blurring mechanical meditation with genuine, heartfelt longing. As Baba Jaimal Singh noted, "A hundred years of bhajan cannot match the purity born of one tear shed in true longing."

The culmination of spiritual love is not ecstasy but stillness, a quiet fusion where lover and beloved share a single breath. The illusion of duality, of 'I' and 'you,' dissolves. The 15th-century mystic Kabir described this state thus:

*'You, you' I repeated,  
And you I became;  
No trace of 'I'  
Is left in me.  
Through this barter  
I have lost my 'I' –  
Wherever I look  
Only you I see.*

*Kabir: The Weaver of God's Name*

Kabir's words reveal a love so complete that the seeker vanishes, leaving only the sought. Such a union transcends emotional peaks; one no longer practises love but becomes love. This transformation ripples outward. Relationships that were once strained by expectation soften into vehicles of compassion. Yet the journey is not without trials. When old habits of

judgement resurface and the ego clings to identity, the Master's guidance proves vital. His teachings remind us that setbacks are not failures, but rather invitations to deepen our surrender. Eventually, all forms of resistance give way to humility.

## **Conclusion**

Spiritual love is not an abstract ideal but a pilgrimage into the realization of the self, a reckoning with all we have clung to for security in this world. Awareness brought about through meditation disentangles us from conditional bonds. Through surrender, we exchange fleeting pleasures for enduring peace. What remains is not a void but the soul, stripped of illusion, recognizing itself as a drop in the ocean of the Infinite. In this transformation, we uncover love's ultimate purpose: to guide us back to our source.

The beloved's face, the Master's gaze, the Shabd's melody – all pull us so we may rest in the Light. When we cease chasing reflections, we appreciate what earthly love always hinted at: we were never lost, only momentarily forgetful. We were never separate, but always one.



*The soul is love. The goal is love. And the path to the goal is also love.  
Although at times it may seem difficult to believe, a true living master has  
taken us by the hand and is teaching us how to love.*

*Seva*

# The Sweetness of Stillness

Our days often unfold like a well-worn script. We find ourselves repeating the same mundane routines and fulfilling our obligations as if on autopilot. Responsibilities and distractions surround us, drawing us into an endless cycle of to-do lists, social media, and the relentless pursuit of success and material gain. We mistakenly believe these pursuits will lead to joy and contentment – on the contrary, they only contribute to our emptiness.

Yet beneath this restless striving lies a quiet truth: fulfilment is not found out there in the world, but within us, waiting to be discovered. Imagine life as a cup of tea, with the sugar added but not stirred, so its sweetness remains at the bottom. We gulp down the steam of haste and deadlines, never taking a moment to taste the sweetness settled at the bottom of the cup. Left with the bitterness of the tea, we wonder why the world feels hollow and remain oblivious to the remedy in our hands.

Just as the spoon stirs sweetness into the tea, meditation is the instrument that gently reveals the sweetness within, offering clarity, peace, and a sense of purpose. Without meditation, we continue to navigate life on autopilot, overlooking the sweetness and deep joy that arise from knowing our true self.

Yet too often, lured by society's parade of shiny objects, we chase trends, notifications, and artificial validation, mistaking them for nourishment. In reality, these distractions are thieves, stealing focus from our primary obligation: self-realization. Their deception convinces us that we need more, to be more, and do more. By countering this with actions that support our meditation, we can begin to maintain balance in life; only then can we start to absorb this sweetness into our lives.

But how can we firmly establish this change in our lives, and truly taste its sweetness? The answer is simple: discipline. Discipline is not a burden; it is the greatest act of self-love. It involves choosing to sit in the stillness of meditation when the world screams for attention. It means prioritizing meditation over fleeting distractions and having the courage to say 'no' to the trivial so that we may say 'yes' to the transcendent. Discipline in meditation isn't about giving everything up; it's about giving ourselves to love. While the world constantly strives to pull us into its orbit, discipline

helps align our highest purpose with action, so that we can exchange temporary thrills for lasting peace.

To become disciplined, one must recognize the importance of embracing the present moment. However, the art of being present no longer comes naturally. We have become so accustomed to multitasking that we have diminished our ability to concentrate on a single activity. The world will always pull us with its demands, but finding a balance between our worldly duties and spiritual pursuits is not only possible, but necessary. It is through discipline that we align our actions with our highest purpose.

The most valuable wealth we carry on our spiritual journey is neither knowledge nor intention, but rather consistent and heartfelt spiritual practice. Possessions fade, and time slips away. Only devotion roots us in the eternal. Meditation is our anchor; it's how we untangle ourselves from the web of what-ifs and realize that we are not the chatter of the mind but the stillness beyond it. Like a calm pond reflecting the sky, the soul reveals its most profound truth when our mind is tranquil. In this stillness, we discover a sweetness far beyond fleeting pleasures – the kind that nurtures our soul and aligns us with our highest purpose of God-realization. Through meditation, we develop a deeper connection with the divine, gaining the insight and guidance needed to navigate life with greater clarity and purpose.

All our Master asks is that we show up for meditation practice and do our best. We may not achieve enlightenment today, but we must light the candle of attention every day to bring the sweetness of meditation to the surface. By trusting the process, we honour our promise to our Master and remain aligned with the divine. We learn that the universe does not keep score but celebrates our every stumble. The ego demands grand gestures, yet the soul thrives on small acts of faith: meditation before dawn, a silent prayer while fulfilling worldly duties, and pausing before reacting.

Over time, something shifts. The sweetness once buried begins to rise. At last, we recognize that the joy we sought in some distant future was with us all along, hidden beneath the noise we mistook for living. So let us begin where we are. Let us stir the cup and take a sip. In this simple act, we reclaim our birthright: not to endure life but to savour it, not to chase the joy of sweetness but to become it.



# The Final Word

## Spiritual Inheritance

Every mystic tries to impress upon us the need for going back to the Father. The soul is a part of the Lord, and unless it merges back into him it can never get salvation. Christ, Guru Nanak, Kabir, Paltu, Soami Ji and other saints have come to show us the way back to the Lord – the path of Shabd or the Word.

Through the ages, Shabd or Nam has been the heritage of the saints and has come down to us as a practical method of God-realization. It is the same now as it has always been, and it will be the same in the future also. It is a path of realization through inner experience under the guidance of a spiritual adept. It is a path of love, of light. But we can only get in touch with the Shabd, the divine sound and divine light within ourself, when we go to a Master. And going to a Master means getting initiation from him....

Mystics say that nobody can ever convey in words the glory of true devotion and love for the Lord. No human tongue can sing its praise, no hand can write it. All men of the world are devoted to something or someone. Some love family and children, some love caste and country, some love wealth and position. But saints tell us that these objects are not worthy of our love. There is only one thing that is worthy of our love and devotion, and that is the Lord. Devotion to the world brings us back to the world; devotion to the Lord will take us back to him.

The soul has a natural attraction and inclination towards the Lord. It is a drop of that ocean and has an inborn longing to merge back into its source. It is only by adopting the path of meditation under a Perfect Master's direction that the soul becomes fit to realize the Lord, to go back and to merge in him.

*Spiritual Heritage*



# Book Review

## Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life

BY: MARTIN E.P. SELIGMAN

PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: VINTAGE BOOKS, 2006.

ISBN: 140-007-8393

The 1990 publication of *Learned Optimism* marked the beginning of a new movement in psychology, now known as positive psychology. Before this, psychological research had primarily focused on mental disorders and illness. The idea that researchers should investigate thought patterns capable of enhancing happiness was, therefore, innovative. Since then, research in positive psychology has provided substantial evidence that traits such as gratitude, compassion, focus, and purposeful living contribute significantly to overall well-being. A key discovery by Martin Seligman was that these beneficial traits can be learned and cultivated through practice, regardless of a person's age. This foundational insight is why he is widely regarded as the father of positive psychology.

Seligman's work on optimism developed out of his earlier work on "learned helplessness," a condition that "was caused by experience in which subjects learned that nothing they did mattered and that their responses didn't work to bring them what they wanted. This experience taught them to expect that, in the future and in new situations, their actions would once again be futile." Once this "learned helplessness" is ingrained, subjects stop trying altogether. Even in situations where they could easily effect the change they desired, they simply did not act. They expected no results from their actions, and "Once they formed this expectation, they would no longer engage in action."

His studies initially involved animals and later extended to humans. A breakthrough occurred in experiments with dogs. Seligman and his colleagues taught helpless dogs how to overcome their passivity, and the dogs "came to see that their own actions worked. Once they did, the cure was one hundred percent reliable and permanent." This marked a crucial milestone in understanding behaviour. Subsequently, research studies were conducted to examine learned helplessness in humans with similar results.

However, the researchers also observed that some individuals bounced

back better than others. They showed resilience despite setbacks, persevering and making efforts even when circumstances might have suggested giving up. The researchers wondered, “Who gives up easily and who never gives up? Who survives when his work comes to nothing or when he is rejected by someone he has loved long and deeply? And why?” This questioning led to the study of optimism: What is it? Is it innate or can it be learned?

Researchers found that our “explanatory style” – how we think and interpret our experiences – is the central factor that determines if we are an optimist or a pessimist. This explanatory style can influence our success in life, our resilience, our sense of hope, and our ability to overcome adversity. “Changing the destructive things you say to yourself when you experience the setbacks that life deals all of us is the central skill of optimism.”

Explanatory style consists of three dimensions: permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. Permanence refers to whether an individual believes the effects of an adverse event will be long-lasting or temporary. While anyone can feel helpless after a failure, pessimists perceive its impact as permanent, whereas optimists see it as transient. This pattern also applies to positive events: optimists tend to view them as enduring, while pessimists consider them brief.

The second dimension, pervasiveness, describes whether an individual views a setback as a universal problem that affects their entire life or as a specific, isolated issue. When faced with difficulty, optimists tend to compartmentalize the challenge, which allows them to continue functioning effectively in other areas of life. Pessimists, by contrast, often allow a single problem to permeate and negatively impact their overall outlook. “People who make universal explanations for their failures give up on everything when a failure strikes in one area. People who make specific explanations may become helpless in that one part of their lives yet march stalwartly on in the others.” Similarly, for positive events, optimists tend to see a single good occurrence as enhancing other areas of their life, while pessimists view positive events as isolated and limited in their influence.

*Finding temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope: temporary causes limit helplessness in time, and specific causes limit helplessness to the original situation.... Finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune is the practice of despair.... People who make permanent and universal explanations for their troubles tend to collapse under pressure, both for a long time and across situations. No other single*

*score is as important as your hope score.*

The third dimension is personalization, which concerns where an individual assigns blame for adversity or credit for success. Pessimists display a harmful pattern: they internalize blame for problems and failures, but externalize credit, attributing successes to luck or others. Optimists show the opposite and healthier pattern. They externalize setbacks, viewing negative events within a broader situational context rather than blaming personal flaws alone. Conversely, they internalize success, acknowledging their own role in achieving positive results. This balanced attributional style encourages a sense of personal agency and confidence in their capacity to influence future events. As a result, optimists generally maintain higher self-esteem than pessimists.

To help individuals shift from a pessimistic to an optimistic explanatory style, Seligman developed a structured method known as the ABCDE model. The process begins by learning to recognize and record one's automatic thoughts in response to adversity.

- **A** stands for **Adversity**: the specific event or trigger that elicits a negative response.
- **B** signifies **Belief**: the automatic thoughts and interpretations about the adversity.
- **C** represents the **Consequence**: the resulting emotions and behaviours stemming from those beliefs.

The first step is to become aware of the ABC sequence, including any self-sabotaging patterns. The next steps focus on active intervention:

- **D** is for **Disputation**: It is the key to transforming our pessimistic thoughts into optimism. It involves arguing with oneself using evidence, considering alternatives, understanding the implications of our beliefs, and examining the effectiveness of our thinking habits. This must be done with intention and self-awareness.
- **E** is for **Energization**: This is the positive outcome, the feeling of motivation and liberation that results from successfully disputing a negative belief.

The disciplined practice of disputation is essential for transforming thought patterns. This requires intentional effort and self-awareness. A central aim of Seligman's work is to demonstrate that through such practice,

individuals develop the ability to change long-standing habits of thought.

Although optimism is a positive character trait that can be cultivated, it is not a panacea for all our problems. In fact, there are times when pessimism is appropriate. Seligman and his research team found that pessimists often have a more realistic view of the world than optimists. Some situations require us to see them with “merciless clarity,” and in those moments, we may not want to challenge our pessimistic thoughts.

*Optimism's benefits are not unbounded. Pessimism has a role to play, both in society at large and in our own lives; we must have the courage to endure pessimism when its perspective is valuable. What we want is not blind optimism but flexible optimism – optimism with its eyes open. We must be able to use pessimism's keen sense of reality when we need it, but without having to dwell in its dark shadows. The benefits of this kind of optimism are, I believe, without limit.*

Seligman notes that although optimism is a useful tool, it does not provide meaning in and of itself. Optimism can help a person reach their goals, but “it is in the choice of the goals themselves where meaning – or emptiness – resides.”

*Learned Optimism* was a groundbreaking work that initiated a major shift in psychological research. Building on its foundation, Seligman and other researchers systematically studied the impact of a wide range of character strengths and virtues on human well-being, including wisdom, courage, temperance, and transcendence. This research has evolved into a robust science of well-being, focused not on fixing weaknesses but on identifying the qualities that make life meaningful and fulfilling. Within this field, a central finding is that pursuing a purpose greater than oneself is a principal way to achieve deep and lasting happiness.

For readers interested in exploring Seligman's evolving research, his subsequent books offer a more in-depth examination of well-being. *Authentic Happiness* (2002) further develops the role of positive emotion and strengths, while *Flourish* (2011) introduces his updated theory of well-being, PERMA. His autobiographical memoir, *The Hope Circuit* (2018), offers a personal narrative of his journey from studying helplessness to pioneering the field of positive psychology.



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