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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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A Letter to a Friend

October 24th, 1972

I can well understand how lonely you must be feeling.... But if you look at it from a different angle, you should be happy that you at least get time for yourself and can live with yourself for some time in peace and tranquillity.

To be alone, especially when one is so used to family life, is a very rare privilege and opportunity. One can reflect and look within. Then we see how much we are attached unnecessarily to the people all around and how we just try to deceive ourselves that we belong to someone or someone belongs to us. The realization that we are alone and nothing in this world belongs to us is a great boon and grace of the Father. Then, naturally, one looks to Him for guidance and help to overcome this loneliness, which ultimately is our goal....

Still, I am not lucky enough to be alone, as I am always surrounded by satsang activities or by friends and family members. Anyway, I have to make the best use of the bargain and be happy with myself.... I have given myself entirely to the duty and cause which has been thrust upon my shoulders and, in my own humble way, am doing my best to attend to it. All the same, I am quite grateful to Him for giving me so much strength to go through this routine and face the ups and downs of the administration....

Sometimes, no doubt, I am pulled by my responsibilities of a husband and father towards my wife and children, but then I know that by myself I can do nothing as everything is in the hands of Maharaj ji.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Treasure Beyond Measure* (extracts)



From Fear to Faith

In *Treasure Beyond Measure*, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us, “Separation from the Beloved is essential to know the depth of your love.” Indeed, the Sufi mystic Shams Tabrizi deemed it essential to separate himself from his disciple Rumi in order for Rumi’s devotion to mature.

When it was announced that Baba Ji had appointed as his successor Hazur Jasdeep Singh, we feared the worst; many of us succumbed to our fears even though the announcement clearly stated that Baba Ji was “in good state of health.” But did we believe it? We let our fear overpower our faith. Many of us took the first opportunity we got to travel to India. We had to see Baba Ji, no matter what! Many who couldn’t go were in anguish, feeling helpless and anxious. It wasn’t until Master’s Satsang Program was announced for the following summer that we truly believed that Baba Ji was fine, at least for now.

Ever merciful and generous, Baba Ji quelled our anxiety as he bestowed on us three gifts. First, he gave us time – to accept separation as the inevitable end of our access to his physical form, and to work through our grief and increase our longing and effort while he was still with us in the physical world. The second gift was darshan: he traveled extensively so that many of us could see him in person.

The third gift Baba Ji gave us was the opportunity to prepare for the unavoidable future. He gave us a helping hand in the form of another true living Master, whom we could relate to and develop love for over time.

How do we connect with our Master today? In moments of joy and achievement, we thank him, whether he is Hazur Maharaj Ji, Baba Ji, or Hazur Ji. In moments of adversity and pain, we cry out to him for help. Whether our Master has passed away or is miles away on the other side of the world, we talk to him inside and believe he is hearing us. Once, when Hazur Ji came by himself to one of the Western evening meetings at Dera, somebody asked him why Baba Ji had not come. Hazur Ji emphatically responded that Baba Ji was with them. And Hazur Maharaj Ji also used to tease satsangis that he was there with them even when he wasn’t physically present.

The Master *is* here – even when we don't see him, when we don't feel him. Wherever we are, there he is, for he is inside us, in his Shabd form. And he will remain with us, no matter what, whether we leave the physical frame first or he does. Our link of inner communication with him will always remain. That is the connection we need to focus on and strengthen. As Hazur Maharaj Ji said:

The master never leaves the disciple. For a disciple, the master is always living because the body is not the master. The master is that divine melody which is within every one of us. And the body is not even the disciple. The soul is the disciple, and the shabd is the master. Once the soul is brought in contact with the shabd, the shabd never leaves the soul....

When master initiates us, his duty does not cease until he takes us back to the Father. Even if he leaves his body the next day, he is always within us to guide us back to the Father. We have only to look to him to guide us, and we will always find our own master within ourselves.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

We need to channel our fear of loss into faith that the Master who initiated us will be with us forever in his radiant form. But what if we don't see the Master's radiant form? Saints tell us that the radiant form is in fact formless. There is only light and sound. Shabd projects the physical form of our Master because of our familiarity with it. But eventually that form merges into sound and light. We will be drawn to it, recognize it, be comforted by it, and feel that this is my Master.

Through his formless presence, our Master guides us through all facets of worldly and spiritual life. It is the same even when we no longer walk with him on the surface of this earth. We always have his guiding hand leading us throughout our devotional journey. The only way for us to know this is by taking the journey from fear to faith.

How can we gain the realization that we are always under the Satguru's protective hand? It can only come by establishing a connection with the radiant Master, who is the Shabd itself. By connecting our soul's consciousness with the Shabd, we can rest in our Master's presence. Tulsi Sahib explains:

*The physical form of the Guru is not what saints extol.
The secret of the Satguru is far beyond this physical world.
By ascending within and piercing through the inner skies –
He alone attains the refuge of the Satguru.*

Tulsi Sahib, Saint of Hathras

We cannot comprehend the secret of our Master simply by looking at his physical frame. To cement our inner connection with him, we need to live by our vows. We need to lead a vegetarian, sober, and moral life imbued in our meditation practice as taught to us at the time of initiation.

The body is impermanent. Meditation helps us overcome the fear of death and connect with the true self, which is the deathless reality. Meditation helps us lead a peaceful and contented life, unites us with the inner Master, and merges us with the creative power of Shabd. Meditation is always fruitful, whether we believe it is or not. Through meditation, we enter the inner realms and turn homeward. We've been given the biggest reinforcement imaginable – access to the inner Master. Now we need to put that knowledge into action.

Our Master has given us the limitless treasure of Nam. We need to make use of that treasure in this very life by merging with it. Reminding us of the uncertainty of tomorrow, Soami Ji Maharaj warns us in *Sar Bachan Poetry*: “Keep the fear of death in your heart day and night.”

Soami Ji forcefully states that we need to remember the perishable nature of this body and do what we must to conquer our fear of loss. Only through meditation can our faith in the Master grow, so that we can overcome our fear and rest in our faith. The saints remind us that faith does not come by knowledge but by through our effort, which results in experience. It is personal experience that will provide the basis of our faith. The whole process begins with meditation.

Simran is the key to the door of liberation, leading us to divine union. Simran is the sole language through which we can constantly stay in contact with our Master. We realize his omnipresence not merely by way of the daily two-and-a-half hours we spend in meditation, but in 24 hours of communion with him.

Throughout our struggles to persist, our True Friend is never far, never separate from us. Simran becomes an intrinsic part of our life. Saints tell

us that incessant simran gradually becomes second nature to the point that we are not even conscious that it is ongoing. This endless simran connects us to the Shabd, and the act of seeing and listening becomes ingrained in our consciousness.

We are told that in meditation, all we need to do is sit and start repeating the names, and the Master will take care of the rest. We are the ones who are not letting go. We lack confidence in ourselves that we can overcome our struggles, and we lack faith in the Master's words when he tells us that we can do it.

We have heard over and over that there are no failures in Sant Mat. When we put in due effort, union is guaranteed. When he initiated us, the Master promised us that he would help us merge with the Lord. What are we waiting for? The prophet Mohammad wrote of God's promise:

I [Allah] am with My servant when he thinks of Me. I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I will remember him in Myself. If he remembers Me in company, I will remember him in a company better than his. If he draws nearer to Me by one inch, I will draw nearer to him by one cubic [a hundred-fold]. And when he comes to Me walking, I [will] come to him running.

Rabi'a: The Woman Who Must Be Heard

Our Master is with us now, and he will be with us until he has delivered us to the Lord. We will continue to miss him when we are not in his physical presence, and we will even miss him when he is right in front of our eyes. This sorrow of missing him will stay with us until we become one with him inside and finally be redeemed. As Sheikh Fakhreddin Eraqi wrote in *The Face in Every Rose*: "Happy is the heart which is redeemed by the sorrow of missing You."



A Scientific Attitude

The following contains excerpts from Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh's handwritten letters.

A scientific attitude is one that follows logic. It seeks evidence to form opinions and allows room for analysis, errors, and formulating new hypotheses. In other words, when someone adopts a scientific attitude towards a problem, he studies it carefully, puts that knowledge into practice and draws conclusions from the results rather than from hearsay or common belief.

Sardar Bahadur Ji gave some practical advice on how to implement a scientific attitude in relation to a specific problem related to agriculture. He explains:

At present I would request you to adopt a purely scientific attitude for the solution or attack of the fruit, ... which means, as in other problems, you should study the literature on the subject [and] contact the professors of this subject to know or learn from them as much as is already known. Split the problem into factors, making a hypothesis concerning each factor or one factor at a time, and finally test that hypothesis by experimentation with a view to change the hypothesis into a fact, or discovering if it was not supported by experiment, and framing another hypothesis and testing that again by experiment.

I think this is what people call a scientific attitude. This is the way you grow new (sugar) canes. If I may be permitted to say, however, that the scientific attitude and worry do not go together. When mind worries, it means that it is not attacking the problem in a scientific manner.

When dealing with problems or doubts in life, adopting a scientific attitude can help us to line up a series of measures that will help us find a suitable solution. Moreover, the best part is that this leaves us with very little time and energy for worry.

Even when it comes to the biggest questions of life, like 'Who am I?'; 'What is my purpose in this world?'; or 'What lies ahead?' rather than fogging our perception with concepts, why not adopt the same scientific attitude and derive our conclusions from experience?

There are many different levels of reality, most of which we are completely oblivious to, and through the means of scientific experimentation, we can unravel them layer by layer without all the resistance that we create for ourselves when we dwell on our preconceived notions and unnecessary worries.

Sardar Bahadur Ji continues:

Reality and unreality or permanence and change...go together; wherever there is unreality or change ..., there is also at its back the reality or the changeless. Change does not take place in nothingness. It takes place in something. If the material world is unreal because it changes, then the whole molecular world is real because man is made up of molecules. If [the] molecular world is unreal because molecules break up, then the atomic world is real because atoms make up molecules. If [the] atomic world is unreal because atoms change, then the electronic world is real because atoms are made up of electrons.

So, wherever there is change, at the back of it, there is something real in which that change is taking place. If the ice form of water disappears, it becomes a liquid state, and if that disappears, it is in a gas state. So, if the world is unreal, we have also an unreal fact – our physical body. So long as we are in the physical body, we have a use for this world. If we can detach ourselves from this physical body and go into the astral body, we automatically go from the physical world into the astral world. And if we further detach ourselves from the astral body and go into our still finer stuff, we automatically go from the astral world into the world of finer stuff – step by step we are going from the changeable and unreal into the changeless and real. The reality is within us; we are based in reality.

Our body is the laboratory in which this enquiry is to be made and the reality is to be reached. Please have a scientific attitude, which means we cast off worry, and prepare yourself for the experiment.



Freedom Through Simran

There are two types of imprisonment: one is when we know we are in prison; the other is when we don't. Which type of imprisonment is more binding and hopeless? Clearly, the second, because if we are not even aware we are a prisoner, then we have no reason to even think of leaving. However, when we know we are imprisoned, we'll want to free ourselves, or at least be attentive to any opportunity to break free.

Let us imagine that someone comes to free the prisoners. Which prisoners will respond right away to the call of such a liberator? Would it be the ones who know they are prisoners and long for freedom, or those who are not even aware that they are prisoners? Obviously, the first group. The second will not understand what the liberator is talking about.

This strange prison in which some know they are prisoners and some don't is our prison –one of our own making, comprised of our own deluded, unchecked thinking.

In a recent question-and-answer exchange with Baba Ji, someone complained that they could not focus on their simran at all. But mystics have been telling us for centuries that we have no control over our mind because we have spoiled it. The mind seeks and takes the easiest way out, and we allow it the freedom to do much of what it wants. The mind would do almost anything to avoid simran. So, instead of using our mind to work toward the freedom of our soul and focusing it by means of simran, we tend to let the mind do as it will. Baba Ji implied that we have lost our freedom and handed the control of our life to the treacherous mind. He also implied that our only path to freedom is simran. All else – seeing the Radiant Form of the Master and listening to the Shabd – are results of his grace. So, simran is a lifeline for the soul because the soul does not have a full life when it is intertwined with the mind. It is a prisoner, subject to the ups and downs that the mind experiences in its interactions with the material world.

Even just by trying to do simran, we begin to notice our imprisonment more. We become more aware of the walls that surround us and more attentive to the chance of breaking free of them. We won't miss our opportunity for liberation because we are waiting for it. Our perceived

failures at doing simran have given us first-hand experience of how unable we are to control our thoughts, emotions, and actions that keep us trapped. Every time we try and fail at simran, we are banging our heads against the prison wall; we realize how helpless we are before the power of the mind from which we cannot free ourselves unaided.

Neither of the two types of prisoners can escape their enslavement unaided. They are both trapped. The first type of prisoner's efforts and banging against the prison walls look ridiculous and perhaps even insane to the second type of prisoner, who does not understand what all the commotion and agony are about. It is easy to remain unaware of the prison walls. The prison has corners with many delights and attractions. So why not just stay and enjoy them?

The prisoners who are possessed by a mad desire to escape are not, in fact, insane. On the contrary, they are in love with freedom. This is a divine gift because their agony and their intense longing sharpen their perceptions. They will be able to hear the call to escape, even if the call is barely audible. Every soul, sooner or later, awakens to its entrapment. The Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy (1863-1933) expresses the feelings of a person who has awakened to the fact that he is a prisoner of self-centredness, cut off from the outside world of freedom:

*With no consideration, no pity, no shame,
they've built walls around me, thick and high.
And now I sit here feeling hopeless.
I can't think of anything else: this fate gnaws my mind –
because I had so much to do outside.
When they were building the walls, how could I not have noticed!
But I never heard the builders, not a sound.
Imperceptibly they have closed me off from the outside world.*

We can feel in this poem the plight of the spiritual seeker, especially if we replace the word “outside” with “inside,” because we know that in the way to freedom, the way out is in. The divine lover feels entrapped in the outside world. He is unable to go inside even though there is so much to do, see, and experience inside. He feels that someone has imperceptibly closed him off from the inside world, the eternal reality of inner freedom. Why did he

not hear when the builders were silently at work? Because his own thoughts were the builders. Brick by brick, the untamed mind deprived him of the freedom that comes with innocence and the ability to go within at will.

What can he do now? He is helpless before this self-created imprisonment. There is nowhere to turn but to an experienced guide who knows exactly what ails the soul. Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh said in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

The purpose of the saints is to take us away. We are all prisoners here. The purpose of the saints is to unlock the prison house, to set us free. That is their mission, their purpose, and that is what their teachings tell us.

We were walled off from our inner world's innocence, and we have lost the key. Masters do not just awaken us; they also give us a key to restoring our innocence and freedom. That key is simran. This key does not work like other keys; using it is not as simple as turning it and opening the door.

The key of simran works more like the spade and the brush of the archeologist who removes layers of debris to uncover a hidden treasure that was always there, unnoticed. Our past thoughts and impressions have wrapped themselves around our soul, around our attention. The impressions have imprisoned us, but with simran, we begin to disrupt and erase those layers of impressions and thoughts, the symptoms of our bondage. Maharaj Sawan Singh (the Great Master) explains in *Spiritual Gems* how accumulated impressions bind us: "So long as all the impressions (received ever since the soul entered into the spheres of minds and bodies) have not been removed, the soul is not free, and till then shall remain subject to karma."

Similarly, ancient philosophers known as Neoplatonists, who later influenced Gnosticism, the Jewish Kabbalah, the Western Esoteric traditions, and philosophers like Spinoza and Kant, called accumulated impressions 'the vehicle of the soul.' This vivid image conveys what the Great Master is also saying: It is impressions that carry the soul from one embodied life to the next in an unending process, just like a vehicle transports us from one place to the next. Great Master writes in the same letter quoted above: "the impressions that you brought with you in this life form your fate, and you have to undergo this." Terminating those allotted impressions, he says, will cause immediate

death. However, in our current life, we can avoid accumulating new binding impressions, the building blocks of future lives. This can be done first by performing new actions “not as an independent, but as an agent of the Master. A faithful agent does not misuse the powers and property entrusted to him.” Second, “the saints put us onto the current [the sound current of Shabd]. By these means they free us from the new impressions, and the assigned impressions are worked out during the lifetime.”

Acting as an agent, concentrating on simran, staying in the current requires constant attention. Another group of philosophers known as the Stoics practiced a discipline of erasing false impressions by refusing to identify with them, by refusing to say ‘yes’ to them. They cultivated their attention through vigilance, aware that our prison walls rise in silence. So, they did not let their mind slip into errant thoughts, ruminations acting as a smokescreen blocking clear vision and keeping us enthralled in the illusion of this world. These are our prison walls, whether we are aware of them or not. When the soul leaves the sound current and associates with the mind, Great Master says in *Spiritual Gems*, then we perform actions that land us in a prison of our own making.

The walls of shadows and falsehoods have held us captive for too long. Now we can shake off our false impressions once and for all, so that they don’t keep us entranced and trapped within walls that feel real but aren’t, walls of our own making. So, let us cling to our only experience of freedom right now – simran.

Simran is the beginning of the way to freedom for the soul. When we keep repeating the Names with focused attention within, we will reach the eye centre, where the sound current will break down our prison walls as our karmas are demolished and our mind becomes free to return to its home in Trikuti. Freed from the mind, on the path of the sound current, in the company of the Radiant Form of the Master, by his grace and love, our soul savours its freedom and the return to its origin with the Lord. Then, never again will we have to regret what the poet Cavafy expressed so well: “When they were building the walls, how could I not have noticed!”



What Is Real?

Typing on my laptop, I hear my phone ding with an email notification and then a text. I turn to look at them and then back to my laptop screen. After a while, I need a break, so I log on to my social-media account, and I scroll. Before I know it, half an hour has passed. Pulling myself away from the reels and stories of people I have never met in my life, I slowly look up and realize that my young daughter has been sitting next to me, and I hardly noticed her.

That's a scenario most of us may have found ourselves in at some point. While watching strangers' lives and switching from work to answering messages all on a screen, I barely saw my own daughter. I was so drawn into a virtual version of reality that I forgot to be with this human being, whom I love and who was sitting right next to me.

As our world races toward technological advancement, we find ourselves caught up in versions of reality that are further and further away from the truth. Even while writing this essay, the wonders of AI have dropped in with offers of help. If we relegated all our tasks, our work, our ways of being to technology, what would happen to our creativity; our minds, which need both rest and healthy stimulation; and the social aspects of our being, which crave real human connection?

Of course, the benefits of and necessity for technology and its far-reaching effects are not in question. But amid all this evolution – revolution? – it is necessary to keep asking ourselves: what is real?

Our spiritual seeking also arrives at this question. The masters tell us that we are born in illusion, we live in illusion, and we die in illusion. Even without the extra layers of technology and virtual reality, we are so far away from the truth. But do we really want to sleepwalk through this life, mistaking dreams for reality, unaware of our purpose and the self that is true?

Our yearning for truth is the soul yearning for its origin. And it is only through the meditation process that we can begin to identify with the truth. Saints tell us that everything, everything is an illusion. Only the Shabd is real.

The Master is telling us that our world, our relationships, and this body we adore is only a perception and a reflection of the truth. Reality is Shabd, the governing and sustaining power of God that permeates every particle of this creation. The dilemma, the irony is that even as the Shabd is the very essence of all things, we are so caught up in illusion that we don't realize this.

So, what is illusion? It is something that only resembles the real thing but is not real. It is just an impression or semblance of the truth. It is because of this veil of maya (or illusion) that we experience change and feel separation. We are not the same now as were when we were babies, and we will not be the same as we age and die one day. The world around us changes every moment.

In contrast, truth is permanent, eternal, and complete. That is what we seek.

In the Dao De Jing, we read about this truth, the all-encompassing energy or Word of God, which the ancient Chinese mystics called Dao:

Dao is hidden, nameless.

Dao is the ultimate provider.

Once attained it suffices for all eternity.

Our Master teaches us about reality; in fact, he constantly points us to it. He asks us to be accountable for our lives, our attention, and what we choose to do with the limited breath we have been given. So, will we steep ourselves deeper in this illusion, or will we wake up and reach for the real?

From you, I have learned to serve;

From you, I have learned to meditate;

From you, I have realized the essence of reality.

Guru Arjan Dev, Adi Granth



Rectangles of Sadness

Soami Ji, the founder of the Radha Soami tradition, wrote in a prayer to his own Master:

*Helpless and distraught, I cry out to you,
For my mind is fixed on you, on you alone.
You are the mainspring of my being –*

Sar Bachan Poetry

Soami Ji taught what all masters teach. Our hunger for God-realization must become intense, urgent, and focused. We need to remember who our protector is, who our guide is, who is our true and eternal companion.

No relationship is more important than the one we have with our Master. No activity can have a higher priority than our meditation, which is the time we set aside to be with him. And no promises we make are more binding and more life-giving than the four vows we took when we asked for initiation. We hope that someday we too might be able to say, “My mind is fixed on you, and you alone.”

But a relevant question in today’s world is, “What if our minds are not fixed exclusively on the divine reality within?” For example, suppose far too much of our attention is captured by our smartphones? In a recently published book by the journalist Chris Hayes, *The Sirens’ Call*, the author lays out in painful detail how dangerous digital screens have become to both our mental health and our spiritual well-being. The subtitle of the book is *How Attention Became the World’s Most Endangered Resource*.

In truth, attention has always been our most valuable resource. The 19th-century philosopher William James, writing at about the same time as Soami Ji, defined attention as the “taking possession by the mind . . . of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought.” He wrote that the essence of attention is a concentration of consciousness, implying “withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others.”

This is also a fairly good definition of our meditation practice. We try to focus and concentrate our consciousness (through simran). We try to withdraw from the material world in order to experience something much finer and more wonderful within.

What distracts our attention? So many things. But most recently it could be our cell phones, what the comedian Hasan Minhaj has called “rectangles of sadness.” Why sadness? Because smartphones have been designed to be addictive; to alienate and isolate us, estrange us from substantive and nourishing in-person contact with others, and encourage a restless and racing mind. Hayes tells us that these phones are the equivalent of fast food, providing empty calories but no real nutrition.

Here is how Hayes describes the ongoing development and refinement of our digital devices. “The world’s largest corporations, brightest minds, and most powerful entities expend staggering resources seeking to compel us to look at and listen to what they want us to.”

The author describes smartphones as “little slot machines ... in our pockets.” They are available 24 hours a day, offering an infinite scroll of breaking news and entertainment. They put us on high alert and in a state of constant distraction, promising a wide array of diversions. But “the more diversion we have access to, the more diversion we crave,” Hayes writes. Even worse, our phones encourage us to chase stimulation and attention with “likes,” quick replies, and admiration from others. These rectangles of sadness provide nothing but empty calories for the ego.

Hayes concludes his book by asking us to consider what we say we want and value versus how we act. The masters ask us the same question. Is our attention focused inwardly, in simran and meditation, or are we constantly inviting distraction and diversion from the outer material world? Cell phones are just the latest way that the mind seduces us to go in the opposite direction of what is sustaining and eternal.

Later, in the same shabad quoted above, Soami Ji confirms our predicament. It was true when he wrote it in the late 1800s and it is true now.

*Everyone is drowning
in the tides of this shoreless ocean of existence,
for they have taken as the truth
what is actually an illusion,
a vast expanse of falsehood.*

And then he clearly spells out the solution.

*Without a Master this illusion is never dispelled,
without Shabd the soul must continue
its endless rounds in the creation.
That is why I seek refuge in you.*



*To share my heart's condition with you
is my desire.
To hear back news from my lost heart
is my desire.*

*Look at my fruitless greed,
for to hide a story
already revealed from my rivals
is my desire!*

*To have a priceless,
cherished night,
sleeping with you until dawn,
is my desire.*

*Ah, to pierce
such a fine unique pearl
in the dark of night
is my desire.*

*O Sabā, breeze of dawn,
help me tonight,
for to blossom at dawn
is my desire. ...*

Hafez, Nightingale of Shiraz, Ghazal 42



White Cotton Kurta Pajama

He wore white cotton kurta pajama.
Sunshine fell in love with him
like we did ...
and followed him around
for the sheer delight
of dazzling across his shoulders
and down along his sleeve.
White kurta pajama
ablaze in blinding light
as he walked our way.

Just a simple man
dressed in white cotton
who was an oasis,
the kindness of a cool breeze
in the scorching desert of our world.
He was one with the River of Shabd
that rushes souls home to the Sea.
He was pure essence of Radiance
shining through the dust of our world.
He was the love in the air!

He settles down into his white wicker chair,
beneath the ancient shade tree,
his kurta pajama now bathed
in dapples of golden light and soft violet,
slow dancing in the afternoon breeze.
He gazes out at his sevadars in the field,
then glances at me, sitting nearby.

Quick! Look away!
or you will lose *everything!*
It's already too late!
The brutality of too much beauty

breaks down the door to my being
and steals the only thing in me
that knows how to breathe.

Too soon!

The sun slips down
behind the ancient shade tree.

Too soon!

The simple man
dressed in white cotton
stands, then walks away,
leaving me alone
in his shadow.

Dazzling moments of bliss
dissolve into tears
flowing down ...
into a lifetime
so blessed by love,
so bittersweet
with longing.



The True Purpose of Seva

Imagine this: All our lives we work hard and deposit money in an account so that we can use it when we retire or really need it. That day comes and we go to the bank, and we're told that we deposited our money in the wrong account. We discover that we have nothing – what we deposited now belongs to someone else.

That would be devastating. And that is exactly our situation. Every day, day after day, we work hard taking care of family, house, job, employees, employers, kids, parents, and so on. But the sum total of all that work cannot go with us, and we cannot use it for our ultimate benefit.

On the other hand, if we live our lives dedicated to the Lord and our Master, our whole life becomes seva, and every moment, every bit of our effort is deposited in our account and will uplift us spiritually, emotionally, and in every other way.

We are told that selfless service performed anywhere, anytime is seva. It does not have to be at satsang or a particular institution. The key ingredient is selflessness. When a service is performed without calculation, remuneration, expectation, or even a desire for praise or appreciation, it becomes seva. It is a voluntary form of giving that becomes a way of life.

Kabir Sahib says:

*Give, give, O friend, and then give again
as long as you are alive.*

*You may not get this human body again,
so while in this body give!*

*For who will ask you to give anything
When your body has crumbled to ash?*

Kabir the Great Mystic

Love is in giving not taking, losing not gaining. We hope to lose our ego in the process of doing seva. First, we think seva needs our services, but the more we do it, the more we realize that we are the ones who need the seva. Master is creating so many buildings, publishing so many books, implementing so many projects and opportunities for seva throughout the

world. They are all an excuse for us to be given something to do selflessly to please the Lord.

There are two distinct forms of seva: outer seva, which is the means, and inner seva, which is the end. Saints teach us that the highest form of selfless seva is meditation – the withdrawal of our consciousness to the eye centre and attaching it to the divine light and melody within. That is the real seva, the highest form of service to the Master. All other sevas are just means toward that end.

The purpose of seva is to bend the mind Godward. This requires a complete transformation and shift from the outside to the inside. Seva helps the mind execute that crucial U-turn. It slowly saturates the mind with love for God, cleanses and purifies the mind, and makes it worthy of connecting with the divine Shabd. That is why Kabir Sahib says:

*Give me the gift
of devotion and love,
O master, Lord of all gods;
Nothing else do I ask
but to serve you every day.*

Kabir: The Weaver of God's Name

In the video “Seva of Love” on the RSSB website, several sevadars were asked what seva meant to them. They all expressed variations on the same theme: seva is the cornerstone of their life, an anchor. Seva reminds them that their Master is always with them; it holds them steady through the ups and downs of their lives. Seva connects us to the Master and our true self, if we do it with the right attitude, and it conditions our mind so that it becomes less of an obstacle in the meditation.

Our masters have told us that we are all links in a chain, that we are all equally important. The kitchen worker is as crucial as the project manager. There are no high or low sevadars, no high or low sevas. Each task, each person is an indispensable link in the human chain called seva. While the people participating in the chain can be replaced, the chain itself remains permanent and interconnected. It is said that we do not do seva but that seva gets done through us.

Most of all, seva is an expression of love – ours for the Master and the Master's love for us. When the satsanghar at the Dera was being built in the 1930s, a well-known wealthy contractor in Delhi asked to be given the seva of constructing the entire building. Great Master replied:

I want every satsangi, even the poorest of the poor, to be given an opportunity to offer something in seva, even if it is only a rupee or half a rupee. I would also like every satsangi, rich and poor, young and old, to participate in the construction, even if they carry only a handful of sand or a few bricks. Their smallest effort is precious to me, every drop of perspiration shed by them is valuable. This is seva of love and devotion.

Treasure Beyond Measure

It has been said that a good sevadar is one who can work with everyone. Seva is not mechanically working with hands or minds; it is our intention to please another person, to make that person happy. When we make the other person happy, we make Master happy, and in this positive atmosphere we can sit for our meditation with a relaxed mind, feeling saturated with his presence. As Dadu Dayal says: “He is always with me, sometimes ahead of me and sometimes behind me, and he himself carries my burden.”



Confessions of an Aging Sevdar

Some of us have an ambivalent relationship to seva. We want to do it, but we sometimes don't have the same enthusiasm we had when we were young. Seva is hard on the ego, of course, but it also can be hard on the body if you've reached a certain age. Some of us who have been doing seva for decades start wearing out physically in our 60s or 70s, and we look at younger sevadars with envy (and awe), remembering when we too could stay up all night doing seva and still manage to go to work the next day and function just fine. Love, eagerness, and youth carried us through.

Now we see how sevadars younger than we are haul, hoist, hammer, saw, stir, and generally run around from dawn to dusk (or later), capable of working long hours for days on end. And what about all those old bibis in the seva films on the RSSB website, cooking chapatis over hot griddles in midsummer heat, squatting like 16-year-olds to sweep up leaves on walkways and roads, or breaking bricks with apparent joy and abandon?

Are we oldsters just being lazy? Maybe we don't love the Master, or, God forbid, the path? We remember the older sevadars at the Dera in the 1960s and 70s: to us they were full of a wisdom and love we thought we could never achieve. Some of them had weathered the loss of Maharaj Sawan Singh, who had initiated them, and then they labored for Maharaj Jagat Singh, Maharaj Charan Singh, and even Baba Ji. Imagine doing seva for four satgurus! Hazur Maharaj Ji used to tease Professor Bhatnagar that the only retirement was death. And so it was for Hazur Maharaj Ji and soon after for Professor too.

We who are the elders now remember how eager and energetic we were back then, just like the younger sevadars. Some of us have retained that red-hot energy and gobble up all the seva we can get, juggling seva duties like acrobats swinging from ring to ring. Others of us have struggled with health diagnoses and conditions that prevent us from continuing our seva or have forced us to do much less than we did before. Some of us have been rotated out of certain sevas because of our age or to give others a chance for the privilege we may have enjoyed for decades.

The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas told us: "Do not go gentle into that good night, ... Rage, rage against the dying of the light." But we followers

of Sant Mat are told instead to “die daily” in our meditation, to mould our lives around these teachings with our whole heart and thereby liberate ourselves from illusion and the torturous cycle of birth and death so that we can awaken to the light within. In the presence of that light, there is no rage; there is only love.

As we age on this path, we are in fact going gently into that “good night.” We are gradually letting go of so many illusions: that we will live forever, that we can achieve perfect happiness in this world of duality, that we can fulfill our dreams and desires, that life will unfold according to our expectations rather than our karmas, that we are important, and so on. It has been said that simran erases the books of our lives, and so with every round of simran our big fat life-books are growing sligher and emptier. We are realizing that we are on the exit ramp out of this world. We may not have gotten to where we want to be, spiritually speaking, but we are definitely not where we were. Our general direction seems to be in and up, despite our stumbles, bumbles, and occasional bad attitudes.

Maybe letting go of everything we have ever loved and lived for – as Hazur Maharaj Ji wrote to one initiate – isn’t so bad. We have been told that to fill a glass with tea one must first empty it of the water it now contains. We are indeed being emptied of all our dross – passions, karmas, concepts, illusions – so that we can be filled with love for the Master, the Lord, the Shabd. All the layers of darkness we have been collecting for lifetimes is being scraped out of us so that we can shed our egos and be filled with light – conscious awareness of the Master’s presence within us, in his Shabd form.

Our bodies may be aging – doing the surprising and unfamiliar things that aging bodies do – but our souls are growing forever young. Our physical strength, stamina, and agility may be waning, but a lifetime of seva, satsang, and meditation may, with the grace of our Master, fill us with the spiritual maturity that will help us let go once and for all into the mystery of merging with the light and love that have been chasing us for lifetimes. Now we can appreciate those younger sevadars working so hard and be grateful to them, and to the Master, for ushering us into that good night.



Our Invitation to Love

Shabd is the “ringing radiance,” a confluence of both sound and light, a current of divine energy that is the true form of the Master. The primary duty of a true Master is to connect souls to the Shabd and then to guide these souls back to their original home with the Lord. The very presence of saints in this world is a reassuring sign that the Lord is very much present. They are the fragrance of genuine humility, love, and compassion. Masters are sent by the Lord to awaken us from the dream of this world. Only then can the soul be freed and realize its true purpose.

Our relationship with our Master is central to our spiritual practice. Although we are told that our real Master is the Shabd, the relationship begins with the physical form. We can only fall in love with someone who is at our level in the physical form. Maharaj Charan Singh states very clearly:

We wouldn't need a master at all if we could worship the Lord directly. But if we have not seen him, then we cannot worship the Father directly. So we need a mystic or a saint who is at our level, like us, who can influence us with his love and his devotion, who can lead us on the path which leads back to the Father.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Saints from every place and time have always tried to redirect our attention toward the inner Master. The masters tell us again and again that the happiness we seek can never be found here in this transient world of change. Saints always point us toward the inner path. The relationship between master and disciple is one of love, a love that begins with the physical form and culminates in a spiritual love that transcends all barriers. Great Master expresses it so beautifully:

The Masters become a bridge for us to cross. By loving a perfect Master, our soul eventually comes to love the formless and indescribable one and only God.

Legacy of Love

The physical form of the Master holds the key to our connection to the Lord and the Shabd within. This living, physical form is essential for our soul's journey to its true home. We need a teacher, someone we can see

and hear, someone in whom we can develop faith, and from whom we can learn the love and devotion that will ultimately connect us to the Shabd and lead us back to the Father. We can begin any discussion of the physical form of the Master and before we know it, we are talking about the Shabd.

Love and devotion for the Shabd within may seem wildly beyond our reach. But the Master gives us the method of meditation and the tools of simran and bhajan along with the guardrails of a lacto-vegetarian diet, abstinence from alcohol and drugs, and the high ideals of a moral life, all of which support the fourth vow of our daily meditation. Most important, he gives us the grace to try, to keep meditating to achieve the goal of going home to the Lord. That is the ultimate miracle.

Always, we come back to meditation, the answer to almost any question put to the Master, whether spiritual or worldly. It seems that virtually any human situation, no matter how difficult, can be better addressed when we are drawing on the resources of meditation. While many disciples often struggle in meditation, we are told by the saints it is the only way to focus the attention at the eye centre, wrestling with a mind that is bound and determined not to be tamed. In spite of this inherent struggle, meditation is what the Master has asked us to do. In *Legacy of Love*, Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh emphasizes its importance when he tells us: “The best gift you can give your Master is the gift of meditation. Nothing else matters.”

Through meditation, he is opening our hearts to the grace that is perpetually raining down on us, showering his blessings, and moulding our receptivity. We can only marvel at the range and reach of his grace. It is the Master who plants the seed of love in the heart of the disciple. The Master then nourishes this seed of love, creating the disciple's desire and will to connect with the presence of the divine. Our meditation is essential to create the conduit with which to receive his help and grace.

Among the many gifts that spring from grace is love, the very essence of spirituality. Great Master writes in *Dawn of Light*:

The single most important factor in developing spirituality is the cultivation of love for the true Beloved.... By the currents of love the entire atmosphere is charged with joy, and the spark of God's light is visible in love. Love, indeed, represents the very essence of God.... Love charges the

soul with an inconceivable energy to fly to the Beloved. That is why love is considered the be-all and end-all of true spirituality....

How can we cultivate love? The true Master is the embodiment of love. Love comes as grace from him. The Master may bestow this gift on anyone he likes. Why, when, where, and how to bestow this gift depends solely upon the will of the Master.

The second way of cultivating love is by practising the spiritual discipline of simran, dhyān and bhajan, as enjoined by the Master. The more devotedly we attend to our spiritual practices, the nearer we come to Shabd or Nam, which is another name for love.

The Master has the exclusive power to grant this gift of love at any time, to anyone to whom he wishes to award it. His grace is infinite and can reach across vast oceans. The second way of cultivating love – by accepting the invitation to meditate – is also his gift and grace. It is a standing invitation, available to us at any time, regardless of our starting point. His love is the beginning and end of the journey.

Meditation is the ultimate way to show our love and devotion for the Master. Meditation is the only way out of this vast prison of birth and death. Meditation is the only way for the soul to return to its home. Meditation is the only way to realize the Shabd, which is the entire purpose of life itself. As Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us:

Our real master is shabd, that holy ghost, that spirit, that logos or word which is within every one of us. That is the real master.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



Our Hearts Are Restless

Human beings have a deep, inherent longing that can be fulfilled only by God. This restlessness is not a sign of deficiency, but rather a pointer toward a higher purpose and a connection with the divine. Rest, refuge, and revelation lead us back home. As St. Augustine wrote in his 4th-century autobiography *Confessions*: ““You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

Those seeking God experience a deep yearning that is not easily satisfied or attained. When people acknowledge that feeling of restlessness and the need for deeper meaning in their lives, it indicates they are ready to take a journey into the unknown; a journey that is mysterious, perhaps frightening, certainly difficult – yet compelling. To turn this concept into a reality, seekers must fix their attention on the Lord to use and channel their restlessness toward union with him. This is not easy, since the Lord is a mystery.

The great thing about this mystery, though, is that we know the ending: we are going home. But the process takes time, and we need to participate in the mystery to experience it. We must commit and show up to make ourselves available to meet the Lord, and we can do this only by following his teachings. For most of us, the mystery is not revealed easily or quickly. The human condition is such that we doubt and question the existence of God. We struggle between hope and fear of disappointment. Are we willing to take a chance and believe in the existence of a divine power?

This journey back to the Lord is a solitary quest, based on love, faith, and devotion. It is not a journey taken with a group of friends, or one in which we will be surrounded by comfortable worldly possessions. While this journey may appear to be a lonely one, we discover over time that we are never alone. When one sincerely searches, the Lord reveals himself to us when we are ready. Often people undertake this search because they are dissatisfied, disillusioned, and disoriented in the world. We may have lost heart, shed some tears, but we feel a yearning and a pull that we are helpless to ignore.

Our hearts are restless, yet hopeful that we will find more than we experience in the daily drama of this world. In this state of readiness

and wonder, we start the long journey home by turning inward. Because we have been lost and wandering in this outer world for eons, it soon becomes clear that our inward search is not straightforward. We discover that we need a guide who has made the journey himself, a living master who has the power to lead us back to our spiritual home.

Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. 5:

Spirituality is a difficult path and cannot be trodden without the company of a Master.... To walk on this path is to tread on a razor's edge. There is danger at every step. He who wishes to know the reality or to get true knowledge and to meet the Lord should seek a perfect Master who knows the way.

We need a living master because mystics have solved the riddle of death. They know how to become one with the Lord, to die to the world while living in this body. When we take our last breath, if we have found a true master, we are under his protection. When the time comes for the body to be shed and the soul to be freed, the Master has prepared us to let go so that we are no longer caught in the cycle of birth and death.

Only those marked souls in a human body have the opportunity to realize the Lord and go back home, which is why to be born human is a great blessing. But through our actions in past lives, we have become trapped in a vast karmic web. We can move around within the web, but we cannot escape it without divine help. The web may get bigger and create an illusion that we have some control over our lives. But do we? Or are we just wandering around in illusion creating more and more karma?

We can mitigate the illusion and influence of this world only by turning inward under the guidance of a true master. If we choose to follow him, the Lord helps us slowly surrender and detach ourselves from the karmic web of the world.

The inner journey is a lifetime commitment. When we start out, we often have no idea where we are going or how to get there. We have forgotten the way. Disciples are given the tool of meditation and a roadmap with clues of what we will encounter. The Master is always there to provide love, support, and guidance. While this path requires us to turn inward, we are not alone, and most important, not lonely. Our sacred

bond with the Master protects the solitude we need for the journey. While it may seem as if we travel alone in this struggle to liberate the soul, it is in these moments of solitude in our meditation that we are strengthening our partnership with the Master. Leaning into him, we learn to love without reservation, which opens the portal back to the Lord.

Until union with the divine is achieved, the heart – that is, the soul – remains restless, missing the Lord. The only way to quell those feelings of separation and loss is to surrender and rest in him. The Master is doing everything possible to bring us home, but we must do our part. We must put in effort by doing our meditation and learn to trust the process so we can let go and surrender. We need to do a complete reversal in life – go inward rather than outward.

Along the way, we might ponder: what am I learning? Am I making progress? Hopefully, we learn to trust the Master. Saints enjoin us not to be concerned about our progress. Instead, they tell us to ‘do it now.’ Don’t wait – accept the invitation. Being initiated and practising the life of a disciple is the only thing in life that grows and grows. Everything else in this world dissipates, disappoints and disappears. If we want to get out of this world and the endless cycle of transmigration, we learn that our spiritual practice is the only thing worth doing, the only real and lasting experience. Nothing in this world is sustainable. Without this body we have no identity, we don’t exist here. The only two events that happen to all humans are birth and death. We come into this world and after a relatively short time, we die. What counts is what we do in between birth and death. Do we bumble aimlessly along, or do we work to awaken our inner consciousness, our soul, so that we can become free of this world? During much of our lives, we are unaware of this greater purpose. Yet, for those marked souls the Lord calls back to himself, he sends a living master to shepherd them back home.

This path is known as the science of the soul. When we are called home the experiment begins. The research is conducted in a laboratory of our body. We have a body, mind, and soul. Until the mind is tamed, it controls the soul and works hard to keep it trapped in this world. In the search for the Lord, marked souls are taken on an inner journey, where the soul can soar and regain its freedom once the karmic account is balanced.

While we may struggle to reconcile our spiritual efforts with our worldly commitments, we must do both to finish off our karma. When that release comes, the body and mind are no longer needed.

We *can* experience this spiritual awakening; it is not just theory or idle talk. It is possible through inner transformation, which is beyond our imagination. To realize this inner transformation, we must redirect our energy from outer worldly endeavors – our jobs, our possessions, our relationships – to our inner work. When our attachment to the Lord becomes our priority, everything else becomes unimportant and useless. Nothing goes with us at the time of death. So, the sooner we can let go of all these attachments, the sooner our soul can soar. Saints tell us that only devotion to the Lord is lasting and worthy of our time. According to the Sufi mystic Inayat Khan, quoted in the book *Awakening: A Sufi Experience*: “The fulfillment of the Divine purpose is to be found in the human being who is God conscious.”

Let us become God-conscious. If we want to make that journey home, we have to believe God-consciousness is possible and really want it. We must demonstrate our faith, love, and devotion by making effort to experience the mystery through meditation. Saints want everything from their disciples. They want our hearts and souls, for only they care for us so tenderly. No matter how little, how slowly, how poorly we may feel we are doing, the Master sees and accepts our every effort, and our connection to the Lord grows stronger and stronger through that master-disciple relationship.

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

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Path*

As the soul merges in the Shabd, that sacred bond with the divine has been achieved. Our hearts are no longer restless.



The Truth Beyond the Dream

*Through countless lives,
our souls traverse
karma's law, the universe.
In each new birth, a chance to rise,
to break the chain, to realize.*

*The guru comes, a beacon bright,
to lead us through the darkest night.
With his grace, we start to see,
the path within, where we are free.*

*With simran's call, the mind grows still,
revealing light, divine and real.
The inner sound, a guiding stream,
unfolds the truth beyond the dream.*

*Through love and grace, we reach the shore,
where karma binds us nevermore.
The journey ends, the soul takes flight,
in the guru's love, we find the light.*



We've Known This Love

What is our objective in life? Mystics tell us we are given a human body to connect with the divine. Relationships, achievements, pleasures of the senses – we have experienced these in countless lives and life forms. We are caught in the cycle of eighty-four, attached to the ephemeral objects and pleasures found here, and deluded into thinking that we can find deep and lasting happiness on this physical plane. Continuously searching for fulfillment in the things of the world, we never satisfy the deep desire within. We sense the loss of something, and long for what is missing in our life.

The saints tell us that the yearning we feel is that of our soul for its creator. We search for what we once knew and now have forgotten – lasting love, joy, and peace.

St. Francis of Assisi tells us we are all in mourning for our forgotten essence.

What is there to understand of each other: if a wand turned the sun into a moon would not the moon mourn the ecstatic effulgence it once was? We are all in mourning for the experience of our essence we knew and now miss.

Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West,
translated by Daniel Ladinsky

We do not remember what it was like to be immersed in the Ocean of Love. Yet beneath heavy layers of the mind and karma, our spirit has not forgotten. It longs to reunite with the One who loves us and to whom we belong. As human beings, we are an emanation of God, created in his image, sharing his divine qualities, and containing the entire cosmos within our mortal frame. But we are trapped here, in this dark physical region, caught in the net of worldly concerns, ignorant of our spiritual heritage, unaware of our past actions yet responsible for our misdeeds, including all those we've committed in past lives.

Maharaj Sawan Singh describes the unalterable laws of the universe that keep us imprisoned here:

This universe is a huge prison house which may be called a labyrinth for it contains thousands of doors that are so confusingly indistinguishable that one can never get out of it once one gets inside.... [The maze] in which man is lost is the vast Labyrinth of Eighty-four, in which he keeps moving age after age, from birth to birth and death to death....

In this labyrinth, the forms move up and down the ladder of evolution. No one – not a single creature living in this region of darkness and sorrow, not even a god, – is safe from the cycle of births and deaths....

After wandering for an almost endless length of time in inferior kinds of bodies, the soul incarnates at last as a human being.

Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. I

In our current birth, we find ourselves at the top of the ladder of creation. We need only one more push to become free. We are told that our human life is given to us for the purpose of creating a relationship with the divine. Rather than use it to contact the Lord and escape from this labyrinth, however, we waste it. By remaining caught up in the transient, fleeting pleasures of life on this plane, we will be forced once again to take on a physical form to work out our karmas.

So, how do we build a relationship with one who is beyond our conception, who is unfathomable? To enable us to relate to God and find our way back to him, the Lord sends a messenger to live among us. When the Lord wills it, the seeker is pulled into the company of a true living master, one who is in continuous contact with the divine. At initiation, the master reconnects the initiate's consciousness to the Shabd, the divine energy of the Creator that reverberates within everyone. Although the Shabd enlivens every pore of our body, we have lost awareness of it due to the layers of karma accumulated over innumerable incarnations.

Listening to the cleansing vibrations of the Shabd enables us to become reacquainted with the Lord. By focusing our attention on this sound current, we let go of thoughts of the material world and surrender ourselves to the one who loves and supports us. In the love that grows with our meditation practice, we become aware of the divine presence that resides within us.

Sheikh Fakhreddin Eraki writes that he kept searching for his beloved outside until he learned to take his consciousness inside:

*Why do I keep searching for water
when I float on life-giving waters?*

*When my Darling is always with me
why do I run left and right?*

*I looked within and saw only You –
this is what happens
when one learns to look within.*

The Face in Every Rose

The relationship we establish with God is not new to our souls. We are reestablishing a connection with one who has always been with us, who has been our closest ally and friend and has given us everything. The key to discovering our lost love and escaping from the labyrinth of this world lies in listening to the creative power of the Shabd.

Meister Eckhart, a 14th-century Christian mystic, refers to the Shabd as “the wind.” He tells us that in our present state of ignorance we can refuse to believe in the beauty and wonders of the spiritual worlds. But one day the Shabd will remove the darkness from our vision, and we will see God with perfect clarity.

*A man born blind
can easily deny the magnificence
of a vast landscape.*

*He can easily deny all the wonders
that he cannot touch, smell, taste, or hear.*

*But one day the wind will show its kindness
and remove the tiny patches
that covered your eyes.
and you will see God more clearly
than you have ever seen yourself.*

Love Poems from God

That day is approaching when the celestial sound of the Shabd will lift the veil of ignorance and our search for truth will end. All our effort and struggles in meditation will be rewarded beyond our imagination. From the light within will appear the Radiant Form of the Master. Before us will be the one whom our soul has longed for since its separation. The Shabd, enveloping us in love, will lift us out of our tiny, lonely selves and reunite us with our Creator. The purpose of our life will then be fulfilled.



Being Uprooted from the World

If a tree has many deep roots in the ground, and you want to uproot that tree, you need a very strong wind. You also need to moisten the roots to loosen them so that a strong wind can easily do its work. We have so many roots in this creation, with all our past karmas. We are so engrossed in the pleasures of this world that unless the saints shake us from the roots, we'll never be able to uproot ourselves from this creation. So they sometimes use very drastic steps; their approach is very, very strict I would say, because they want to uproot us from this creation and take us back to the Father. A small tree which hardly has any roots can be blown down by even a little wind. But those trees that have very strong, long roots going deep into the ground need a very special wind, and they need a lot of watering and moistening before they can be uprooted.

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



Book Review

Soul: An Archaeology – Readings from Socrates to Ray Charles

BY PHIL COUSINEAU

PUBLISHER: SAN FRANCISCO: HARPERCOLLINS, 1994. ISBN 0-06-250243-3

Why do we ponder the question, what is soul? The author answers, “Because something undeniable presses in on us: beauty, time, death, the holiness of the world, a nostalgia for the universal.” In this book, Cousineau has collected readings about the soul from a wide variety of cultural contexts and religious beliefs. He finds that the question of the soul engages “the most profound mythic questions that have always intrigued human beings: Where do we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go when we die?”

The book is divided into seven sections. Part 1, entitled “The Fall of the Soul into Time,” offers readings ranging from the Genesis myth in the Bible to the conceptions of the North American Indians, Aristotle, and the African-American musician Ray Charles. Mystics, philosophers, and poets have contemplated the mysterious idea that the origin of life does not “begin with our birth alone.” As William Wordsworth wrote,

*The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And Cometh from afar.*

An old Jewish legend, “The Angel and the Unborn Soul,” describes the soul being sent against its will down from the Seventh Heaven into the womb, where it is taught by an angel that if it will live according to God’s commandments during life it will return to heaven, but that if it disobeys those commandments it will be “doomed to the other place.” After nine months, the soul, again against its will, comes into the world and immediately forgets all it has learned.

Creation myths in many cultures explore the notion that the soul has been created by a higher being and has “fallen into time.” Similarly, William Irwin Thompson, in his book *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light*, likens the soul to Humpty Dumpty, whose fall from the wall is the

fall into time, and neither God's animals nor His angels can put him back into the world beyond time.... [This] fall is the archetype that stands over

our understanding of time. The soul is, like Humpty Dumpty on the wall, above time, seeing past, present, and future at once. From the point of view of the ego, down in time, everything is linear; the past is behind, and the future is up ahead.

Part 2, “The Seat of the Soul,” collects readings offering various metaphors for the soul. Saint Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century Spanish Carmelite nun, says the soul is “as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions. . . . I can find nothing with which to compare the great beauty of a soul and its great capacity.” She says that we don’t understand God and the soul because our interest is in outer things. “All our interest is centred in the rough setting of the diamond and in the outer wall of the castle – that is to say, in these bodies of ours.” Other contemplations of the Seat of the Soul appear from across the ages: from the Roman statesman Cicero (106-43 BCE), the 11th-century German prophet and mystic Hildegard of Bingen, the 13th-century Italian philosopher Thomas Aquinas, the 16th-century French philosopher Rene Descartes, the 19th-century American poet Walt Whitman, and the 20th-century Swiss psychologist Carl Jung.

Part 3 of the book, “Heart and Soul,” explores the relationship between the soul and love. Meister Eckhart, a 14th-century German mystic, wrote:

*God loves the soul so deeply
that were anyone to take away from God
the divine love of the soul,
that person would kill God.*

...

*It is a joy to God
to have poured out
the divine nature and being
completely into us
who are divine images.*

Part 4, “Soul Crisis,” focuses on a condition that shamans have called “soul loss.” In modern terminology we might call it alienation, depression, or loneliness. Or in the author’s words, “pain in the core of our being where

we know there was once something full and vital”; “a hole where once was soul.” Albert Schweitzer, a 20th-century theologian, writes, “You realize that your soul suffers if you live superficially. People need times in which to concentrate, when they can search their inmost selves. It is tragic that most men have not achieved this feeling of self-awareness. And finally when they hear the inner voice, they do not want to listen anymore.”

Part 5, on “Soul Work,” explores the question “How should I actually live my life?” The American poet Robert Bly writes, “When we fight for the soul and its life, we receive as reward not fame, not wages, not friends, but what is already in the soul, a freshness that no one can destroy, that animals and trees share.”

Part 6, “The World Soul,” is about the sacredness of the universal energy that is beyond the individual soul, enlivening the cosmos. The Greeks called it the soul of the universe, *psyche tou kosmou*; the Romans called it the soul of the world, *anima mundi*; Ralph Waldo Emerson called it the Over-Soul; and the Eskimos called it Sila, “an overarching power that asks us not to be afraid, to be respectful of the spirit, the genius, the intangible forces hidden beneath the surface of all things.”

Part 7, “The Soul and Destiny,” asks how we reconcile the unknown aspects of life and death, looking for “patterns in the belief of life after death” and offering readings about life after death from sources as diverse as Sri Ramakrishna and the Haitian zombie tradition. The author describes reincarnation as “worldwide conviction of the long journey of the soul.” The 6th-century Welsh poet Taliesin, who was thought to be the traditional inspiration for the character of Merlin in the King Arthur legends, wrote about the shape-shifting nature of the soul: “I have been in many shapes before I attained a congenial form.... There is nothing in which I have not been.” The 12th-century Sufi poet Jalal-Uddin Rumi wrote:

*I died a mineral, and became a plant.
I died a plant and rose an animal.
I died an animal and I was a man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar
With the blessed angels; but even from angelhood
I must pass on. All except God perishes.
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become that which no mind ever conceived.
O, let me not exist! for Non-Existence proclaims,
“To Him we shall return.”*

In conclusion, by reading about the soul by writers, mystics, philosophers, psychologists, and poets across time, the author says, we see that “myths, images, philosophies of soul remind us of the long story, the eternal aspect of ourselves.” When we listen to these voices, he says,

the hard shell of modern life is ripped off in an impassioned cry for genuine soul searching ... down deep in your soul where infinity is echoing, deep down where the backbeat of Eternity resounds, the deep bass line underneath the melody of all things.



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