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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# Good and Bad, This Body

*In this world, nothing as bad as the body;  
in all of creation, nothing as good as the body.  
Punish it, thinking it bad,  
you lose your chance for the bliss of liberation.  
Revel in it, thinking it good,  
you go under.  
Neither punish nor revel in the body;  
stay in the middle.  
If you use the body for enjoyment alone,  
you multiply attachments  
and drive desires deeper.  
For your own good, use the body  
for the welfare of your soul.  
Whether the body be  
motionless in meditation  
or moving in the thick of life,  
let the mind stay in the middle,  
forever still, pure and free –  
this is a yogi, says Eknath.*

Eknath in *Many Voices, One Song*



# The Ultimate Gifts

As initiates of true living masters, we have been given the ultimate gift, a package which comes to us wrapped in grace. When we open the package, we discover a series of building blocks that are clearly intended to be placed one upon the other, creating a structure that will take our consciousness up to the eye centre and beyond.

The first block is a large solid base labelled ‘human birth’. Without this block, the rest of the blocks cannot be assembled. The second block, ‘meeting a true living master’ is followed by the third block, which is labelled ‘initiation.’ These three crucial blocks are followed by a series of slightly smaller but extremely important blocks. Block number four is ‘meditation’, followed by vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, drugs and tobacco products and ‘leading a good moral life.’

The last two blocks bind the whole structure together and are called *Guru bhakti*, in other words devotion to the Guru, and finally, *Nam bhakti* – listening to the Shabd. Through this practice we become one with the life force of Shabd, ultimately developing divine love. When these last blocks are firmly in place, they give purpose and meaning to the rest of the structure.

This entire package is God-given and comes directly from him with his love. This is an incredibly rare and unique gift, which deserves our profound appreciation.

Nowadays, it seems that there is often little value attached to this gift of human birth. How sad and unappreciative this is. Mystics often refer to man as the top of creation, and yet millions endure lives of abject poverty, misery and pain – seemingly not justifying that exalted title. Yet we are told that even gods and goddesses, living in higher spiritual realms, long for human birth and the extraordinary opportunity and privilege it represents.

So, what is it about human birth that makes it so special? It is only as a human being that we can meet a true living master and receive his gift of initiation. This gift, coupled with our effort, guarantees our soul’s eventual release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth in which it has been trapped for an unbelievably long time. Only a true living master,

a God-realized soul, can grant this gift, and it can only be bestowed upon a human being. In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*Our real Master is the Word, the Logos, Shabd, Nam, the Audible Life Stream, or whatever name one may choose to give it. The Master is that Power manifested in human form.*

The true master is God's emissary or representative on earth. He comes to us as an expression of God's love, and the Lord endows him with the power to take our souls back home to become one with our Creator, by connecting them with the Shabd. This connection is done at the time of initiation.

When we receive this gift of initiation, we are assured by the Master that our seemingly endless sojourn in this creation will come to an end, and we will be allowed to return to our original home. Then, we need never ever come back to this creation, because, incredibly, God actually wants us to return to him. Once we are initiated, nothing can prevent this from happening.

None of the first three building blocks – a human birth, meeting a master and initiation – are achieved through any effort on our part. They are God's gifts. However, the next set of blocks definitely requires our input, our effort, concentration, application and dedication.

When we agree to follow the four vows we take at the time of initiation, we agree to a lifelong commitment to strive tirelessly and cheerfully to obey our Master and fulfil his requests. The main thing he wants and needs from us is our daily attempt at meditation. We are taught his technique of meditation at the time of initiation, and it becomes our responsibility and privilege to do it every day of our lives.

Initiation is not just a spiritual gift, it is an immensely powerful tool at our disposal. Our Master entrusts us with five holy words or names, the repetition of which we call simran. We are asked to repeat these words for the first two hours of our meditation. They have such power imbued in them that they can begin the seemingly impossible task of stilling the mind. This enables us to start to focus our attention at the eye centre, the spiritual centre above and between the physical eyes.

Simran is the vehicle our Master gives us to focus our attention by withdrawing it away from the world and directing it to the eye centre.

If we do not do this repetition we will be unable to concentrate our attention within and take the first little step of our true inner spiritual journey. The more we use our simran, the more powerful it becomes.

The practice of meditation is the cornerstone of our contribution, our attempt to help our Master extricate us from this world and set us on our homeward journey. Our other active contributions include living as strict vegetarians, abstaining from alcohol, mind-altering drugs and tobacco products and following the practice of being good human beings. These assist in helping us minimize the accumulation of karma.

The Lord is the ultimate source of purity, love, compassion and kindness. How can we hope to even approach his court if we are filled with negativity, cruelty, anger, hatred, resentment and dissatisfaction? If we hope for union with the Lord, we must strive for purity in thought, word and deed.

We are not weaponless in this fight against the mind and its worldly, negative tendencies. We have the power of simran. We must just remember to use it.

The last two blocks, namely devotion – Guru bhakti and then, most important, Nam bhakti – reinforce our spiritual structure, enabling our consciousness to soar up to the eye centre and beyond. In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, Soami Ji says:

*Without devotion to the Guru the soul will not rise,  
nor will the sky open, nor will Nam be attained.  
Devotion to the Guru is the root of all other practices,  
which are no more than branches on the tree of devotion.*

For anyone who believes in reincarnation and transmigration of the soul into innumerable species, the thought of eternal release from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth is truly exciting. Surely no one would willingly agree to remain in this cycle? We want to go home; our souls ache to be reunited with the Father, to leave this vale of tears forever and join him in his eternal love.

This seems like an impossible task to undertake on our own, and indeed it is, but we are not alone. We have a method by which a soul may retrace its steps and journey to its home.

Devotion fosters the unique relationship between master and disciple. It is an attitude of heart and mind. It cultivates love and longing, and grows faith, obedience, discipline, patience, surrender and gratitude within us. Devotion compels us to follow our Master's guidance and instruction, and to dedicate ourselves, our time and our attention to living the path.

Simran is our invaluable tool. It's available to us all day – not just during meditation. The more we use it with a loving, thankful heart, the better for us. How very grateful we should be for this gift of simran. Indeed, for the whole meditation practice. Love and devotion grow through meditation. If we enter each meditation session thankful for the opportunity the Master has created for us, then that love and gratitude can remain with us throughout the day.

We know that our efforts are not even a fraction of what is required to extricate us from this world and take us home. His grace does the real work, but what we can offer is gratitude, love, and faith, knowing that he is responsible for our soul and will one day take us home.



*Those on whom the Lord wishes to shower His mercy and grace are given the gift of the human form. Out of these fortunate souls, He draws the attention of the marked ones to Himself. These are the souls whom He, in His supreme bounty, wishes to deliver from doubt and delusion.*

*Die to Live*

# Finding Our True Identity

In 1990 when the NASA spacecraft *Voyager1* was heading into space, it pointed its camera back to Earth and photographed our planet from a distance of approximately six billion kilometers away. This image showed Earth as a tiny blue dot amid the vast blackness of deep space. Astronomers called the photograph the Pale Blue Dot.

If Earth is so tiny compared to the whole known universe, then each of us living on that tiny pale blue dot must be less than the size of a pinprick compared to the indescribable vastness of the universe. In spite of knowing this, we imagine ourselves to be so important.

What makes us think that? Mystics tell us it is our false self, the ego. They also say it is the ego that is blocking us from finding our way back to God, the Creator. This is how Maharaj Charan Singh once described it:

*Ego is a block between us and God. It is a definite block and a very solid block. Without elimination of ego, the question of meeting the Lord doesn't arise at all.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

The soul was once part of the blissful oneness of the Creator. However, because of its association with the mind it became trapped in the creation. Now, after many incarnations, the mind has developed an identity as the ego, through which it has dominated the soul, thereby creating a perception that the soul is a separate being from God.

If we want to escape from this entrapment, we must learn that we are something very different from this mind-created image that we have of ourselves. The Master comes to awaken the soul and make us aware that the soul is our true self and dwells within this physical body, and to teach us a practical method to discover who we really are.

But what do we even know about our souls? Every now and then we may have a small insight that our real being is not this physical body in which we live. Our real being is different – it's the eternal soul. Now and then we may get a flash of realization that our Master is far greater than what he appears to be – a human like us. Maharaj Ji tells us in *Die to Live*:

*Your real self is not this body. Master's real self is also not the body. Your real self is the soul, and the real self of your Master is the Shabd, the Word.... Ultimately the Radiant Form becomes the Shabd and you become pure soul, without form and shape, and the soul just merges into the Shabd.*

But if we are honest, we still function as egotistical individuals who have no real concept of the fact that we are spirit, and capable of becoming one with our Master in his Shabd form. The ego and its vices are blocking us from that knowledge. Maharaj Jagat Singh described ego as “a malignant kind of selfishness”, its fundamental assumption being its own infallibility.

The Masters tell us that the only way to diminish the ego is by meditation. In line with our promise at initiation, every morning we sit and try to still our overactive mind, while striving to focus our attention at the eye centre. We may do this for many years, possibly without any evident degree of success. But that apparent ineffectual meditation is not going to waste. The Master wants our efforts – he values our obedience, and he urges us not to give up the struggle.

Perhaps it's a blessing that our meditation eventually comes down to a simple test of obedience and perseverance. Imagine how our ego would be boosted if we became aware of the success of our meditation every morning. That would be very dangerous – a real ego builder. If we really want to go back to our real home, an inflated ego is the last thing we need.

The fact is, we can't get rid of our ego by our own effort. This can happen only through our meditation, and perhaps, especially, through our perceived 'failed' meditation. As human beings we're very limited. Maharaj Ji has said that everything happens by grace.

The Master is the one who is pulling us back home – we are simply instruments in his hands. If we could understand and accept this, it would make us feel wonderfully light and free. There would be no room for despair or guilt because we would realize that everything belongs to him, and he is directing it all. Acceptance of this would free us from self-blame, self-condemnation and expectations.

Maharaj Ji tells us that the only difference between a realized soul and an unrealized soul is that the realized soul knows he's a puppet – nothing is in his hands. The unrealized soul thinks he is doing everything himself.

There was a time when we were consciously part of the Creator, sharing in his light, love and perfection. Maharaj Sawan Singh explains what man has lost by acquiring his layer of ego:

*Man is much like a covered lantern. There is light in him. There is the spark of pure existence, knowledge, and bliss in him; but the envelopes of mind and matter dim his light and he gropes in darkness. Real existence has degenerated and appears in him as reason, intellect, and instinct. Bliss has degenerated into fleeting experiences of pleasure and pain.*

*Spiritual Gems*

Working towards removing the coverings that have kept us trapped in the creation is the very purpose of this life. Our goal now is to rid ourselves of the limitations that have held us imprisoned in this physical realm for so many lives – it is to realize our limitless, boundless self. This is a very high degree of spiritual awakening that, once achieved, indicates that the battle is won. That's why we were initiated – to realize our true spiritual nature.

We are told that after self-realization it's just a short step to God-realization. This signifies the end of an ages-long journey, so that our soul can return to its source, knowing that the ego has been crushed.

But the ego is a stubborn and persistent thing, and it doesn't want to sign its own death warrant. If it were up to us, we would never be able to eliminate the ego. With the passage of time, coupled with experience, we start to realize this, and increasingly we place ourselves in the hands of our Master. We start to accept his will and desire nothing more. In Maharaj Ji's own words:

*Elimination of ego is submission to the master. As long as the ego is there, we are not submitting at all. The mind is ruling us. But when we are able to eliminate the ego, then we are submitting. Then everything is the master.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

Only love can make us want to submit to someone else and serve them rather than ourselves. In loving the Master, he tells us, all ego-driven qualities will be simply driven out of us. Then automatically there will be obedience and submission.

Love for the Master is another one of those mysteries and miracles of our path. Maharaj Ji has told us that this inexplicably great love is a gift from the Lord and flows from the Master's grace. He said meditation creates and strengthens love, which takes hold of us and pulls us towards our Master.

Until now, the longing of the soul to return to the Father has been suppressed by mind and matter, and our sense of individuality. But now it's rising to the surface. Our soul is crying for the bliss and joy that it once knew. Maharaj Ji inspires us with these words:

*The bliss of merging into the supreme being cannot be expressed in mortal language. There is no thought of individuality, consciousness, or anything else. It is all love, all bliss, for in merging we become the supreme being, and he is all, he is everything.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*



*The Creator is existence, knowledge and bliss – or power, wisdom, and love. An atom or a spark of this essence of existence is the soul which, encased in its coverings of mind and matter, forms the individual man. If the coverings were removed from the individual, the soul would be naked and would be qualified to know its Creator.*

*Spiritual Gems*

# Keeping It Simple

Throughout the ages pioneers in the search for knowledge and understanding of the various facets of the physical creation have amazed us with many new discoveries that we never imagined possible. Yet they would be the first to acknowledge that there is so much more to learn. It's an endless endeavour.

Our continuous search to know more, and the resultant stream of new discoveries, underlines the fact that our understanding and our intellect will always be limited. Think of it this way: we have knowledge today which we didn't have yesterday, and we will have knowledge tomorrow which we do not have today. Even as we expand those boundaries, we remain limited.

For instance, it is incomprehensible for us to think that time does not exist, or that the physical universe does not have an end. These concepts emphasize our limited intellect and understanding.

When it comes to spiritual matters we may imagine we have more questions than there are answers. However, when our spiritual teachers see our confusion, they guide us to the right path by revealing the direction we should take. They tell us to keep it simple. They tell us: "Just be a good human being." What could be simpler than that?

Every person knows the difference between right and wrong. Doing the right thing and being a good human being means attending to our four spiritual vows without compromise. It means following these important rules:

1. Follow a lacto-vegetarian diet
2. Do not use alcohol or habit-forming drugs and tobacco
3. Live a pure and moral life
4. Meditate for the allotted two-and-a-half hours daily.

If we live within these rules, life becomes simple, and it will be easier to become a silent observer. In *Song of Songs* the poet observes: "You are at peace, an inwardly silent observer of a world in a state of continual agitation." It is to become the bee that enjoys the sweetness of the honey on the rim of the jar, without falling in and getting trapped. When we are free of the bondages of this creation, we can fulfil our role in this play of life with love and devotion without becoming attached to it.

When we keep the Master's advice in mind, the possession of knowledge or the lack of it no longer matters. While we are in this creation our basic needs of food, clothing and shelter are essential. We need to work in order to meet these needs and fulfil our family obligations to the best of our ability, but this should not be at the expense of our spiritual responsibilities.

We have been born into the time and place dictated by our karma, and we cannot change that. Whether we exist in poverty or in wealth, in sickness or health – whatever our circumstances – we should still strive to be good human beings as our Master recommends. We can fulfil our duties and simultaneously keep our focus on the teachings. This is guaranteed to keep us happy and content.

There is also no need to worry about the future, since our Master has taken over the administration of our karmic account. In *Spiritual Gems* Maharaj Sawan Singh said:

*Your worries and cares are Master's worries and cares. Leave them to him to deal with. Having become carefree, your business is to cultivate his love.*

The Master has assured us that he will never leave us. Let's cling to this and keep it simple, which is to be a good human being while attending to our duties, both worldly and spiritual.



# Nothing Else Matters

It's a common human failing to become so absorbed in the dramas and crises of life that we neglect what's most important. As seekers of spirituality, what is our true priority? In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh makes it clear:

*We always try to give that time to the Father which is of no use to us at all. When we are rejected by society, by our children, by our friends, then we want to devote our time to the Father. But we have to give the best time of our life to the Father... The main purpose of this human birth is to go back to the Father, so that should always be kept in view. Keeping that view, other things should fall in line.*

We may spend our whole lives waiting for the time to be just right to attend to spirituality. Maybe we believe that at some point in our lives we will have the right conditions to accomplish our spiritual goals. But such an attitude leads only to procrastination.

We spend so much time dealing with the things that are less significant, but which have to be done – such as our duties and obligations – that meditation becomes our last priority. We think we'll enjoy it when we've got everything else out of the way, but our duties, obligations and worldly pleasures have a tendency to consume all our time, so at the end of the day we may realize that we have not found the time to attend to our meditation. But, actually, nothing else matters more than our meditation.

All our Masters have stressed the importance of meditation in the life of a satsangi, above all else. It has to be our top priority. All other considerations have to become secondary. Things that matter most should not be at the mercy of things that matter less. We need to realize that every time we sit for meditation, we are doing the most important thing a human being can do. Without meditation we will remain part of the cycle of birth and death. Once a true living master has initiated us, there is nothing more important than meditation.

We all know that a life of meditation is not easy. There are phases of struggle and dryness. Year after year we trudge on and see no apparent progress. We may even come close to giving up. Yet behind the scenes our

daily effort is not in vain, because the Master constantly showers his grace on us in return for our effort.

We should not let ourselves become unduly distressed by these phases of struggle and dryness. Perceived feelings of spiritual elation may not be indications of spiritual progress. We might even make more progress when our mind is restless, and when, in that distracted mindset, we still sit for meditation. Our best approach is simply to place firm faith in the Master, and in ourselves, that we will be successful. If we couldn't do it, he would not have initiated us.

In any event, we don't know what progress we are making. In *Spiritual Gems*, the Great Master tells a disciple:

*The soul of every true follower is progressing internally even when he is not aware of the progress. Yes, the soul can enter Brahmand when he is unconscious of it.*

The Master tells us to have a positive attitude. What impact does our attitude have on our spiritual lives? After many years of apparently limited success in meditation we may come to believe that it's not possible to succeed in this task. However, we must understand that our attitude to meditation is a determining factor in the way our meditation will unfold. When we sit in meditation we are training ourselves to operate from a perspective of accepting, letting go and being free. It is an attitude of obedience to a power we have accepted as being greater than 'I'.

Meditation transforms us on the inside. Most important, when meditating we should keep focused on the process. Then, whatever happens, we remain balanced and unaffected by the storms that are an inescapable part of the experience of being human. We must never give up trying, because the gradual change on the inside produces a total transformation on the outside.

If we have been initiated and we haven't meditated, or if we started to meditate but stopped doing it, then we must adopt a positive and practical approach, to renew our commitment to sit for our meditation. The important thing is to at least begin with what time we can. Then gradually and persistently we can increase that time, rather than jumping straight into two and a half hours for one or two days, then falling away to ten

minutes or nothing at all. That is not the way. The way is slow and steady and increase the time gradually.

There may be days when it is physically impossible for us to meditate according to our plan. On those days, we should at least try to sit for some time. We shouldn't let a day go by in which we don't meditate. On the next day we should resume our programme as usual. Otherwise, we might find that days, weeks, months or even years slip by without us meditating at all. It is crucial to create the habit.

During our meditation we may not be able to achieve much concentration and our mind may relentlessly distract us, but what is important is that we have incorporated meditation into our lifestyle. Out of quantity quality will come. Maharaj Ji encourages us to do the best we can, even if it is not concentrated and one-pointed. If concentration is not attained and the mind wanders, we should not be discouraged.

In our present level of consciousness, our acknowledgement that our Master is in control of everything is just a concept. When we go within and are in touch with his inner form, then we will know with certainty that he is in control of everything. We will know that this life we are living is not about us. It's about God experiencing himself through us. God is more interested in our potential than in our mistakes. He is more interested in us recognizing our true selves.

Our ego is one of the barriers keeping us from experiencing true love and oneness with God. When we think of ourselves as something separate from him, there is duality. Where there is duality, there is ego, and ego is the ignorance of who we really are. Ours is a case of mistaken identity. Our ego is a mask – a personality of self we have created to cover our true self. We will never become receptive to the truth of our own being until we eliminate the mask of the ego.

We don't lose the sense of who we are by merging with the ocean of consciousness. On the contrary, we discover who we really are: pure consciousness, perfect happiness, limitless love. What is this personality that we are so afraid to lose? What sense does it make that we remain satisfied with this dark world, separated from our true essence, when our possibilities are infinite?

By replacing self-centred thoughts with simran, by offering our ego in meditation to the Master, the wall of duality will one day crumble. The imposter will be unmasked, and we will gain experience of who we truly are. By remembering the Beloved continuously, attachment and love for him are awakened within, and the ego or self is destroyed. Then we will know that he is doing everything.

To lose one's self in another is the fundamental principle of love. All the desires of a lover narrow down to the will of the Beloved. The lover's whole self is dissolved into the Beloved. When there is no self, then where are the desires?

To find our way to the Lord we simply have to make the effort to reach the eye centre. Then, we're told, the Lord will do the rest. He will fill us with such longing and pangs of separation, and he will shower such grace upon us that the soul will have no choice but to be pulled by the Lord. Regarding the importance of meditation – the process of losing our identity to become one with him – let us remember the words of Maharaj Ji:

*Just change your way of life according to the teachings and attend to meditation. That is all that is required. From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come.*

*Die to Live*



# Why Meditate?

When meditation is the most important of the four principles of Sant Mat, it may seem odd to ask the question, “Why meditate?”

There are many forms of meditation, and Sant Mat differs from many of these because it requires a complete substitution of every worldly thought with a single-minded focus of attention on our simran. It is simran that leads us to the Shabd Master within us, the manifestation of the Supreme Lord. This entails losing our self-importance along with everything in this world that is presently dear to us. In return, we gain eternal salvation and bliss when our soul merges with the Lord, and we find ourselves released from the wheel of reincarnation.

A valid reason to meditate is, therefore, to escape the transmigration of our soul, and transcend this creation to become one with the Creator. Maharaj Charan Singh explains how one merges with the Lord:

*When with the help of the spirit the mind goes back to its own source – the second stage, Trikuti – the soul gets released from the mind and then the mind can no longer pull the soul down. Then the soul can rise above all these types of karmas; only then the soul shines, becomes whole and clean; and then alone the soul can merge back into the Father.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

Another reason could be to honour our promise to the Master who initiated us. At the time of initiation we vowed to meditate for two and a half hours daily. To honour that vow we try to repeat the five holy words and listen for the Sound for the required time daily. We should therefore try to follow the advice of Maharaj Ji, who says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II: “The main thing is that we should attend to our meditation and not compromise with the principles of Sant Mat.”

Each seeker’s experience of meditation is different. Some may experience meditation as a mechanical process of mental repetition of the words, and what may seem like a wasted attempt to listen to the Sound. Some of these initiates may complain that meditation is dry and difficult, and they may elect to either cease meditation or only devote a little time

irregularly to it. One unfortunate result of this decision is that these initiates may delay their spiritual progress and drift away from their vows.

At the other end of the scale, some fortunate initiates focus their attention almost immediately and hear the celestial Sound directly after initiation. These disciples perceive the true meaning of love and appreciate the need for discipline, sacrifice, dedication and devotion. It is not because they understand these concepts; rather it is because they experience them, practise them and live by them.

The joy of their experience leads to more and more meditation, which is the source of their happiness. These initiates live in the Lord's will and progress spiritually as they have very little or no interest in the world and what it offers. They experience an unimaginable wealth that is beyond anything in creation. Referring to such fortunate souls, Maharaj Ji says:

*Some people are spiritually inclined, and they do not care much for worldly things. They are only happy to be one with the Lord.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

Then, there are initiates across the spectrum with innumerable varying experiences, making gradual progress at what may appear to be a snail's pace. Provided that they continue honouring their vow to their Master and keep putting in their best effort, their progress will continue – with or without their awareness.

A further reason to meditate could be an expression of gratitude to the Master, for as Maharaj Ji says:

*Our approach to meditation should be of that of gratitude. The Lord has given us the opportunity of this human form and then the environment in which to attend to meditation. So we should always approach meditation with gratitude.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

Initiates who appreciate the great good fortune of the gift of Nam may wish to express their gratitude to the Master for the gifts of awareness and ultimate salvation. If their meditation is regular, punctual and done with the sense of gratitude, they will definitely progress spiritually.

Spiritual progress is often questioned and doubted because we have a high expectation of the outcome of our efforts in meditation. We have the impression that progress is only measurable by experiencing inner light and sound. We assume we have the insight to comprehend our progress, and we assume that we are entitled to be rewarded for our meagre efforts in meditation.

Whatever the reasons for our assessment of our spiritual progress, we forget that we have, over millions of lives, built a colossal barrier of karma and ego that envelops our soul. Removing this barrier takes time, effort and attention.

Fortunately, there are no failures in Sant Mat. Maharaj Ji affirms this. He says:

*As Maharaj Ji [Maharaj Sawan Singh] used to say, in Sant Mat there are no failures, because you are trying to follow it.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

There may be several other reasons to meditate, but the best reason has to be love. It may be impossible to define love, but those who experience love know what it is. Love may be manifested in various forms but is truly expressed only in our actions. At a physical level, love may be expressed as kindness, compassion, forgiveness, selfless service and caring. At a spiritual level love for the Master is expressed through meditation.

There can be no better expression of our love for him than when we sit in meditation with one-pointed focus, dedication and devotion. Maharaj Ji explains:

*When master initiates us, puts us on the path, he tells us to devote time to meditation. If we really love him, we will obey him. We cannot say we love him and, at the same time, not obey his instructions, not live the life he tells us to live. That is not love for the master.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

When viewed as an act of love, meditation takes on a whole new perspective, and can be compared to sitting in the physical presence of the Master. Sitting in his presence is, of course, physical, but the similarity is the focusing of our attention on our Beloved, losing our identity in his

presence and becoming oblivious to everything else – except our Master. If we find it so easy to sit in the physical presence of the Master, why should it be any different to sitting in meditation, where we believe we are in the presence of the Shabd Master?

We may feel that because we don't see anything during meditation that it is not as important as seeing the Master in the physical. But, if we could go beyond the physical – to the Radiant Form – then we would realise who the master really is, and the enormous role he plays in our spiritual life.

Ultimately, it is our love and our simran that counts. In meditation, it is not the fact that we don't see anything that matters. What matters is that we choose to do our simran. Repetition of those five words focuses our attention at the eye centre, where the Shabd Master resides. It is this focused attention that develops and deepens our love for the Master.

Meditation is the ultimate act of love for the Master, which is also manifested in our discipline, obedience and submission to him. If we love the Master, we will reflect it in all our actions, our thoughts, and in our total submission to him.

Why meditate? Our love for the Master makes meditation irresistible.



*You can't fight with your desires without meditation. Meditation is a sword by which we are armed to fight all our worldly desires, which are pulling us back to this creation.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

# The Master's Presence

Maharaj Charan Singh offers us a priceless piece of advice on how to live our days with the Master. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, he says:

*Whatever you do in this world to keep your master within you or keep yourself with the master is meditation, is a part of meditation. Whether you are properly sitting or just sitting quietly, full of love and devotion for the master, or hearing the sound, seeing the light – whatever you are doing, even worldly work – if your master is with you in your mind, in your heart, if all your dealings conform to the teachings, to the commands of the master, then you are with the master.*

Maharaj Ji points out that whatever we do in life can be a part of meditation provided that we have the Master in mind at the time, because when we remember him we are automatically with him. At the time of our initiation we are told that the Master establishes a radiant form of himself within us, which means he never leaves us. But we do not always feel that he is with us because we are not with him.

While sitting in our daily meditation we make a conscious effort to be with our Master. However, when our session ends and we get on with our day, we often forget him until our next meditation session.

The benefit of having a spiritual Master is that we can cultivate a special relationship with him so that he becomes our intimate companion and trusted friend. Being aware that he is always present within causes our mind to stand to attention, and this results in us being more careful about our choices and actions. Gradually we are transformed, becoming more tranquil and increasingly conscious.

In meditation, we attempt to still our minds and become aware of the Master's presence. This is a huge challenge for our mind. It spends the day racing about in every direction and is reluctant to sit quietly for a few minutes, let alone two and a half hours.

We should make every effort to fulfil our daily meditation commitment, but, if we are unable to sit for the whole period, we should remember that every day is an opportunity to try again. There's no question of giving up; we must persist in our efforts with renewed vigour.

The important thing is to embrace our daily meditation as a means of pleasing our Master and as an act of gratitude and thanksgiving for his many gifts. If we live according to his teachings, then, as Maharaj Ji said, whatever we do to include the Master in our lives can become a part of meditation. In other words, our daily meditation period can be extended into our entire day.

Whether we are walking, peeling potatoes, rolling rotis or washing dishes, everything becomes an act of meditation when we remember our Master. In this way our lives are transformed into one continuous act of dedication to the Lord – it becomes a song of devotion. The Master then accepts everything from us as an offering of love. To be mindful of his presence throughout our day is a very beautiful way in which to live.

If we are to consciously practise being in the Master's presence at all times, we have to look at ways in which we can align our thoughts and actions with this objective. We have at our disposal three powerful aids to help us make this happen. These are simran, satsang and seva.

Simran is the easiest of the three to put into practice. When we are involved in other tasks and we repeat the five holy names, we are conditioning the mind to gravitate towards the Master. Our formal meditation sessions then become a pleasure rather than a chore. By engaging in simran whenever possible, we occupy the mind and prevent it from becoming idle, as, according to an old proverb, 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop'.

If we begin our day with meditation and end our day with either meditation or reading spiritual literature, we are moving closer to our goal. There are also other opportunities to do simran or to remember him, and simple habits we can inject into our way of life – such as when we sit down to a meal, when we are out walking, when climbing stairs or exercising. In fact, there are many situations that provide us with an opportunity to turn to our Master.

Attending satsang offers additional benefits as it is a reminder of the promises we have made to our Master. It does not matter whether he is physically present or not. When we gather in his name, he is present in spirit, and we experience an atmosphere of love and devotion. Thus we are inspired to continue on the path.

Seva is another great aid to keeping the Master with us. Seva is all-embracing and it includes any selfless service we provide. When we focus our attention on the seva we are doing, we automatically call him to mind. Mindfulness of being in his presence will help us do only that which is appropriate. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Great Master says:

*The highest service is that of the Guru, and it is also the purest. The Guru is free from all ties and attachments. He is an ocean full of the surging waves of love. By serving him we become free from ties and attachments to the ephemeral world. Then intense love of God is awakened in us.*

As we can see, there are many opportunities to bring our Master into our daily lives. And there are also many good reasons to remember him as often as possible. Most importantly, this has to do with our final departure from this life. In the Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna tells his disciple Arjuna:

*Whosoever at the time of death leaves his body  
and departs, remembering Me alone, he attains  
My Being; there is no doubt about this.  
Whosoever leaves his body thinking  
of any being at the final moment, to that being alone  
does he attain, O Arjuna, because of his  
constant thought of that being.  
Therefore, at all times remember Me and fight.  
With your mind and understanding absorbed in Me,  
you will surely come to Me.*

Remembering the Master constantly helps to detach us from the world and its trappings. By putting him first, worldly relationships decrease in importance. The bonds of spouse, parents, children, friends and pets are weakened so that we are not pulled back into the cycle of reincarnation at the time of our own death. In *The Dawn of Light*, the Great Master tells us:

*Mind is influenced by the company it keeps. By association with the people of the world, a person's worldly tendencies will predominate; and by keeping the company of spiritually illumined souls, one will become spiritually inclined.*

As we go through our day we should therefore be consciously aware of the direction of our thoughts. When our thinking takes us into the world it is up to us to resist the temptation of being lured back into the illusion and to turn our thoughts to the Master. As Maharaj Ji has told us:

*If your master is with you in your mind, in your heart, if all your dealings conform to the teachings, to the commands of the master, then you are with the master.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*



*If you cannot succeed in visualizing that form, then think that you're sitting in the presence of the master and doing simran. You have to feel that you are sitting in his presence and doing simran. That will help you to be there, and to concentrate there.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

# The Gift of Parshad

## An Extract

Parshad is something personal. It should remind us of the teachings, of the master. It should create love and devotion. It's a link between the disciple and the master. If we eat parshad, we always think of the master, of the teachings. From that point of view, it is very beneficial. But if you just take it as a ritual – that perhaps it will have some medicinal effect or some spiritual effect because you are eating it – then you are deceiving yourself. It depends on with what attitude you take the parshad. Your attitude helps.

We often exchange gifts with our friends. You don't value the gifts according to their price. You value them according to the love with which they are given to you because the gift reminds you of the giver, his qualities, his friendship, his love, his concern about your welfare. So that reminder of his love, of his qualities, of his concern about you – that matters, not the gift itself...

Similarly, when we take parshad as a gift from the Father, as a gift from the master, it should remind us of the master, the teachings, love and devotion for the Father, and it should give us the strength to follow the teachings, live in the teachings and devote ourselves to our meditation. Then parshad has advantages.

If you just take it as a candy or a sweet, then it is just a sweet and nothing else. So you have to take it with faith, and that faith helps you to live in the teachings. And if you give it to relatives, it is meaningless to them because they will not have that faith. So it will just be candy for them. Actually, parshad is meant for those to whom it is given. It is not given to be distributed to others. It is a personal treasure which we should always try to cherish as personal property...

Actually, it is personal. It is for the individual to decide what he wants to do with it. Generally, it reminds you of the person who gave it to you. It is between the one who takes it and the one who gives it. Its value is in their contact – the parshad reminds us of that contact. You present a flower to your beloved. What is particular in that flower which is not in the rose garden? The whole garden is full of flowers, but why does that flower become precious for you? Because it is between the giver and the one to whom it is given. That contact is beautiful. The contact is more important than the flowers. You can always get flowers from any garden.



# The Journey of a Thousand Miles

The saying “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” comes from the Tao Te Ching and is attributed to the Chinese sage, Laozi. If we think about it, every endeavour we’ve ever undertaken began with a single step.

For some people a new venture is easy, but for most, success depends on determination and practice. The spiritual path is no different. So, what is this spiritual journey that we have undertaken or are contemplating about? And what are the steps we take? In the book *Be Human – Then Divine* we read:

*The soul once had wings, said Plato, and it flew light and free in the divine realm. Soaring on updrafts of divine love, it gazed on Truth and enjoyed its true nourishment – radiant, eternal Beauty.*

What a beautiful description of our soul’s true home. There can be no earthly journey to compare with this spiritual journey.

The Lord, for reasons known only to him, sent some souls away from their original home to populate the different levels of creation. Many of these souls are now trapped in physical bodies, lost in forgetfulness and illusion, and subject to laws of karma and reincarnation in which every action has a reaction and must be accounted for.

At the end of every life the soul is assigned to the next body where it can most efficiently settle its karmic account allocated for that life. This cycle of birth, death and rebirth continues remorselessly. This apparent hopelessness is not, however, the gloomy end of the story. Since time immemorial philosophers, mystics and saints have maintained that the soul can retrace its steps and return home and once again rise to reunion with its Father.

How do we go about setting out on this journey? Interestingly, our first step is not one that we ourselves actively take. The first step is to meet and be initiated by a true living master. We may think that we find the Master but, in truth, he knows when souls are ready and then he draws them to himself. The mission of the true mystics is to see that the souls of their disciples soar homeward, supported by the Master’s own grace and love.

From Master's vantage point the destination is already in sight. From our limited perspective the journey has only just begun.

The ancient Greek philosophers Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all believed that, metaphorically, we could 'regrow our soul's wings' under the guidance of a true teacher. They believed that the steps of the journey would be guided by the direction of our attention. We need to shift the direction of our attention, desires and love away from the world and towards our Master.

It is our attention that will determine our steps at this stage of the journey. The philosophers advocated an approach based on daily practice. Their students were asked to live according to the highest standards of ethical conduct. They were required to follow the disciplines of contemplation, meditation, silence and training the mind.

These disciplines also apply in part to our journey, which revolves around an additional three core issues – the Master, love and our attention. We will have no clue about who our Master really is until we reach our first major goal, the eye centre. We also have no idea of what he is actually doing for us on this journey. What we can know about – what we can constantly work on – is our attention.

Our steps are practical and they include the following: we must choose to follow the Master's example in everything; we must choose to be good human beings; we must be vegetarians; we must give up alcohol, drugs and tobacco products; we must use our simran with attention at every possible moment; and we must try to meditate with attention every day. In *Be Human – Then Divine* we read:

*Practical philosophy guides towards exercising clear thinking, remaining resilient, and making wise choices – choices that will not lead to further troubles and entanglements, but rather to happiness and inner well-being.*

The Golden Verses of Pythagoras are the basic subject matter of this book, and these emphasize how the application of right living will eventually lead to an *Awareness of the Divine*. The ancient philosophers were also clear about the role of the teacher, namely to explain the teachings and give each student the necessary guidance.

Our Masters have the same goals for us. They want us to practise the path diligently so that we too can realize our potential. What we need to remember, throughout each day, is that this is a slow process. There are no shortcuts.

We need to be realistic about this journey. It's going to be a battleground, probably until the end of our lives. The reason is because our chief opponent – the mind – will be with us until the end of this human life. This mind, with all its cunning, negative, repetitive promptings, can keep us stuck in the quagmire of the world. But it can also, with Master's grace and our ceaseless diligence, start to free us from bondage.

We will only make the correct choices in this battle if we understand the nature of the enemy. Apathy, laziness and negativity will feed the mind and keep us bound here. Every day, we have to go into battle armed with the power of discrimination, our attention and the power of our simran. In the book *Many Voices, One Song* we read:

*The practice of repetition, infused with the power of the guru-disciple relationship, focuses and stills the disciple's mind. Once the soul is free of the limitations of the mind, the disciple becomes receptive to the extraordinary reality of the true, unspoken Name. This Name is the goal and destination of bhakti practice.*

Our attention is the vehicle whereby we can approach our first goal – the eye centre. Our Masters have given us our simran as the fuel that will empower that vehicle. We all have access to the power of simran if we choose to use it. The words come from the Master himself – they are imbued with his power.

The mind expresses itself through thoughts. Sometimes these are good, necessary and positive. Very often, they can be negative, self-indulgent or nasty and lead us away from the goal. There can be no doubt about the Master's grace, but our willingness to commit our attention to the battle with determination is not so assured.

Naturally, our journey to the eye centre is going to be slow. The mind has had its own way since we arrived here in the creation. It enjoys being the boss. However, we must always remember who gave us our words of

simran and why. Through repetition the mind can be tamed and we can become receptive to the sound current, which will draw the soul home.

It is important for us to try to do as much simran as possible throughout the day. Simran turns us towards our Master and helps our love and devotion grow. It also prepares the way for meditation, the most important activity in our lives. Bit by bit, our simran gradually erases bad memories and habits. It puts an end to compulsive negative thinking. Our attention and our vigilance can swing our attention towards the soul. This is our choice.

Every round of simran is a blow to the power of the mind. We don't know where we are on our journey – and we don't need to know. We just need to keep taking those little steps, until one day they'll become an avalanche of love that will take us straight into our Master's arms.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step of simran. Let's keep taking those steps.



*The sweet bell sound exercises its magnetic influence and the soul commences the spiritual journey, the Master giving the necessary help and guidance and, step by step, taking him to the Creator in Sach Khand.*

*Spiritual Gems*

# The Neglected Soul

The following allegory is an abridged version taken from *The Mystic Philosophy of Sant Mat*, in which the author recounts a tale of two brothers: the older, a rich and powerful merchant who lives in a multilevel mansion, and the younger who is a hapless little person, very thin, with two large frightened eyes filled with pain and grief. He constantly sings a haunting song.

Many years earlier, ashamed of his younger sibling in front of his influential friends, the rich merchant had instructed his servants to banish his brother from his mansion. The servants, unwilling to do this, hid him in the mansion.

Eventually the haunting singing of the younger sibling arouses the older brother's curiosity. On investigation he discovers that the source of the soulful singing is his younger brother, who has been kept as a prisoner in the attic.

Distraught at the realization of what he has done to his brother, he runs from the mansion. Weeping and distressed, he rests in a nearby forest where a wandering beggar asks him what is troubling him. He relates the story to the beggar, who advises him to befriend his brother by visiting him every day and feeding him little portions of his love. He gives the merchant his tattered clothes, telling him to wear them when he visits his brother, so that the younger is not overwhelmed by his brother's wealth.

And so the brothers once again unite, and together they leave the mansion for a beautiful country called Sach Khand.

This story is an allegorical representation of the relationship between our mind and our soul. The rich and powerful merchant represents the mind while the younger brother symbolizes the soul. It undergoes cruel imprisonment in the mansion of the body, where it is held captive by the powerful mind, which is heavily influenced by the senses and their insatiable desires. This story portrays the mind's control of the soul.

This mind-soul relationship is the nature of every living creature in creation. Both are tangled together in the body, like the two brothers living in the same house. They are aware of each other's presence but pull in opposite directions – one outwards, the other inwards.

It's like the story of the two wolves: the one that you feed flourishes at the expense of the other. Sadly, we feed the mind and not the soul. Our relationships, worldly desires and pleasure-seeking activities pull our attention outwards, as we focus on their fulfilment. By doing this we neglect the call of our soul.

In all religious and spiritual beliefs, the soul is the immortal essence of every living thing. It is the life-giving force and exists without form. Without the soul the body is like a computer without software or a light bulb without electricity. Introduce the soul, and the body acquires life; the soul brings the entire living organism into being.

Although the soul is a spark of divinity, we often overlook it – we fail to acknowledge it. Yet it is a spark of godliness that imbues every living thing with a sense of existence and significance. As the Scottish author George MacDonald suggested: “You don't have a soul, you *are* a soul – you *have* a body!”

Every soul is the expression of God himself. As such it possesses the same qualities as God: it is immortal and loves unconditionally. It is that part of us that is aware of, and intuitively knows, the spiritual subtleties within us. Our soul is deathless – only our body experiences death.

But, God has played the ultimate hide-and-seek game with us. He has hidden the soul throughout the creation, in myriad forms.

In those who are drawn to unite with him he creates a yearning and longing to seek him that entails discovering our soul. This is no easy task. It's like trying to fit the pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle together to reveal the hidden picture.

What makes the puzzle of detecting our soul so difficult is that we don't relate to our soul. Why? First, because it is so elusive and well concealed we are not familiar with it, and second, because we are so immersed in the noise of the world our perceptions are limited, so the spiritual essence of the soul evades us. Consequently, the task of fitting the puzzle pieces together to realize the soul seems impossible.

The story of the two brothers depicts our soul as a hapless little wimp. But in fact, it is not a passive entity that occupies space in the attic of our body – the forehead. It is a positive, purposeful force at the core of our being. It is pure consciousness, a drop of the essence of God. It is this

power on which we need to focus, directing our attention inwards towards our soul and the radiant form of the Master.

When the world absorbs our attention and we miss our daily simran and bhajan, we neglect our soul. When our focus is on the world we identify totally with the objects of our thinking, becoming worldly. When we focus on our soul we become spiritual.

Simran is the vital process of replacing worldly repetition with spiritual repetition, and its action leaves an indelible imprint deeply engrained in the mind. We can choose to make that imprint either worldly or spiritual. But which impressions do we continually entrench in our mind? Which wolf are we feeding, the mind or the soul? The choice between worldly thinking and simran is a no-brainer, yet it's a choice we don't regularly put into practice.

Everything points to the fact that our simran is an extraordinary spiritual gift imbued with the power of our Master. It is essentially the repetition of God's name with the intention of fostering a closer relationship with him. It leads us to an awareness of the soul and heightens our receptivity to the Master's grace. It is the clue to the Lord's game of concealment.

We follow this spiritual path with the intention of realizing God, but first we have to solve the mystery of our soul. Our intention must therefore be that this life be used to free our soul from the attic of the body. This requires a different relationship with our mind.

Influenced by the mind, our focus is constantly on the physical, particularly the five senses and the ego, so that we don't experience the mystical world within. To progress spiritually it is imperative that we switch our allegiance from the mind to the soul.

The beggar in the story represents a wise sage. To wear his tattered garment is to wear the garment of humility – a concept foreign to an egotistical mind. The sage knew that no reconciliation could take place until the merchant was able to let go of his arrogance and pride. This suggests that we must let go of our ego and associated attitudes before we have any hope of reaching our soul in the attic at the eye centre.

Our meditation is the daily visit whereby we store tiny portions of his love, so that one day we will have enough love to withdraw from the body

mansion into the attic – the mystical realm of the soul. When this occurs, we will once again know our soul and release it from its great sadness.

One of our most challenging tasks is the shift from rest to reflection – from bed to meditation. These few steps we take every morning are crucial to our spiritual progress. Without this regular undertaking, how can we hope to advance spiritually?

It is meditation alone that can bring about the reconciliation between the mind and the soul. Our spiritual evolution requires that we let go of everything that obscures the light of our soul and free it from its bondage to the mind and the body.

It is our intention to complete the puzzle – to free our soul and return home to Sach Khand. By requesting and receiving initiation that intention has been put into motion, and it must come to fruition.



*Baba Ji wrote to the Great Master. The moment a satsangi is initiated, you can take it that he has reached Sach Khand – that is, that he must reach Sach Khand sooner or later.... It is assured that one day the seed will sprout, the soul will reach its destination. But it's a long way that you have to travel.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

# Love in Action

When embarking on a spiritual path, we realize that the purpose of this human birth is to develop a relationship with the Lord. Ultimately, the goal of this relationship is to merge our soul with him. When we elect to follow a spiritual path, it becomes our responsibility to practise the teachings as taught to us. In Sant Mat, we are extremely fortunate to have living masters to guide us to an understanding of the scriptures and mystic teachings and, most important, the practical implementation of these teachings.

On first encountering the path, it is important that we try to satisfy the intellect to gain a level of confidence and conviction, so that we can follow the path steadfastly and progress sufficiently to achieve our goal. The important questions are: can we graduate beyond merely satisfying the intellect and move into the realm of implementation, and can we live and practise the teachings so that we make the desired spiritual progress?

Alternatively, do we, as victims of our mind, remain perpetually in the realm of trying to satisfy the intellect with its millions of questions? A little reflection will leave no doubt that answering each question only results in more questions. Further reflection will also reveal that never-ending questions and answers are futile, unless we apply the answers and adopt the solutions.

This concept is eloquently expressed in the acclaimed quote from the poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred Tennyson:

*Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.*

No army can win a battle if soldiers question the decisions of the army commander. Similarly, spiritual aspirants cannot achieve their goal by indulging in endless questions. If we want to progress spiritually, our only recourse is not to reason why – but just to do it! We must make every effort to follow the Master's requests diligently and leave the results to the spiritual commander – our Master.

By engaging our intellect, it is so easy – and indeed common – to fall prey to mental gymnastics. All debates and discussions on spiritual concepts are an attempt to gain an intellectual understanding of matters that are, in fact, beyond human comprehension. One also cannot rule out the ego's habit of thinking that it knows better. As victims of a 'mind in control', we incessantly

indulge in the practice of trying to understand by analyzing, justifying and rationalizing, without any meaningful result.

Yet, even decades after initiation, we might continue in this pointless endeavour at the command of the mind. This is the mind's cunning method of keeping us away from practising and living the masters' teachings. Fortunately, there is a panacea, and that is to bring the mind under our control. But how do we control our wily mind? Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

*Our mind has become the slave of the senses, and the soul has become a slave of the mind, for through the mind it also is being drawn to the senses. Now we are to reverse the process. When mind wants to go to the senses, it will go there, but if it refuses to be attracted to them, it will leave the senses. When the mind leaves the senses, it becomes our friend.*

We therefore need to reverse the control of the senses over the mind and the control of the mind over the soul. Simple though this may sound, it requires a lifetime of effort in meditation. The process of meditation entails withdrawing our attention from within the body as well as from outside of the body, and then concentrating that attention at the eye centre.

Achieving this breakthrough will give the mind greater inner enjoyment than it experiences from worldly sensual pleasures, which become insipid by comparison. The mind will therefore cease to be attracted by worldly delights, and this is the secret to spiritual progress.

The body has ten doors or apertures. Nine of these doors take our attention outwards, while only one door – the tenth – takes our attention inwards and upwards. The secret to spiritual progress lies in closing the nine doors, which comprise the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, the mouth and the two lower apertures.

We know from personal experience that these nine doors are not only our connection to the material world, but are indeed gaping holes, through which our attention is squandered in the world and its ephemeral attractions. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Ji confirms this:

*The soul and mind are knotted together here, at the eye centre. All our thoughts are spread into the whole world, coming from here and running out through the nine apertures of the body.*

It is our responsibility to gradually close these nine apertures and allow our attention to be channelled towards the tenth door that leads within. Since we believe that liberation awaits us at this door – also known as the eye centre – it is essential that we fulfil our responsibility and close the nine doors, so that our attention can automatically rise to the tenth. This means we must make every effort to be selective in what we expose our mind and senses to, as this has a direct impact on our ability to reach the tenth door.

With the unique gift of our sense of discrimination, we must control what we see, hear, smell, taste and eat. By controlling what we are exposed to, we will find that it becomes much easier to concentrate the attention when we meditate, because during the day it hasn't spread out as much as usual. Simultaneously, by meditating and withdrawing our attention to the eye centre, we gradually redirect it away from the nine doors.

However, no matter how rational, appealing or inspiring words are, they have little or no value unless the message they carry is put into action. In the final analysis, it is only our actions that count. At present, our belief that closing the nine doors will lead us to the tenth door is merely a concept. But implementing the actual practice will eventually lead us inwards to the eternal salvation we seek.

Similarly, when we declare our love for the Master, we are gently reminded to reflect it in our actions. Our actions must always be in keeping with our stated declarations, intentions and desires, for it is our actions that help determine our destination.

So, how do we reflect our love in our actions? What better examples can there be than the living Masters of Beas? They live within the Lord's will, accepting both good and bad equally as gifts from the Lord, as they tirelessly serve humanity. They themselves have been perfect disciples who have shut the nine doors of the body by controlling the mind, and by not feeding its every whim and fancy. If we wish to achieve our spiritual goal of merging our soul with the Lord, we ought to follow the Masters' example.

As seekers, we frequently express our desire for spiritual progress, but do our actions reflect this desire? If we long for spiritual progress, let's express our love and longing through our every action and not through our words. This will constitute living the teachings of our Master, who is the epitome of love in action.



# Book Review

## Hafez: Nightingale of Shiraz (Selections from his Divan)

TRANSLATED BY FARIDA MALEKI

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*Hafez: Nightingale of Shiraz* offers a fresh English translation of 100 poems selected from a modern definitive edition of a manuscript of Hafez's Divan that dates back to 1424 CE, only 35 years after his death. Hafez is acknowledged to be one of the greatest poets of all times. While surpassingly beautiful, his poetry also conveys the deepest of mystical insights.

As the translator of this volume confesses, it is impossible to translate Hafez's poetry from Persian (Farsi) to any other language while still preserving its beauty. As she tells us, "The admiration felt on hearing the beautiful melodious tones, rhythm, and harmony of Hafez's ghazals when read in Farsi is not transferable to any other language." Also, many of Hafez's allusions and similes are opaque to us at our remove from both his language and his culture. The translator offers guidance on these in her Introduction and in short comments on individual poems.

In her Introduction the translator also situates Hafez for us in time and place. Hafez earned his living as a court poet in the city of Shiraz in what is today southwestern Iran, but at the same time conveyed in his poetry the profoundest themes of Sufi mysticism. Though his audience, the Sultan's court, revelled in worldly pleasure, he was able to turn that context to his advantage. For example, while the Sultan and his court liberally indulged in the drinking of wine, though forbidden in Islam, Hafez used wine as a symbol for Divine Love. Because no Muslim would operate a tavern, and a Magian (Zoroastrian) could, Hafez made the Magian tavern master a symbol for the spiritual guide or murshid. Also, the translator reports, "unlike the works of his predecessors like Sanāi, Rumi, or Saadi, only a portion of Hafez's poems are entirely mystical and spiritual."

Also, since in his time religious authorities often persecuted mystics who spoke openly about spirituality, disguising his message with the language of the court helped Hafez evade them. Probably for similar reasons, Hafez never revealed the name of his murshid, though that he had one becomes clear in his poetry. For example, he writes:

*Don't set foot on the lane of Love  
without a guide for the way.  
I have tried to find my way most diligently,  
but it's impossible all alone.*

*Ghazal 168*

The 100 poems included in this volume reveal the full range of mystical themes Hafez presents in his poetry. But Hafez's overriding theme is love. For him, the path of love is higher than any other path. Through love the merits of all religious observances are achieved.

*The advantage of fasting  
and acceptance of hajj [pilgrimage to Mecca] belongs to the one  
who went to the winehouse of love for pilgrimage.*

*Ghazal 132*

*Once a wayfarer comes to know  
the way to the lane of the winehouse,  
how futile to knock at any other door....*

*Ghazal 47*

*Openly do I say,  
and I am happy to say,  
that I am a slave to love  
and free from both the worlds.*

*Ghazal 317*

Given the theme of love, Hafez constantly dwells on the Beloved, by which he means either or both God and the murshid. He describes the Beloved as enticingly beautiful, magnificent, heart-captivating:

*I etched the thought of Your image  
into the workshop of my eyes.  
And an Idol with a beautiful face like Yours,  
never have I seen and never have I heard of.*

*Ghazal 332*

*My beautiful wine-selling Idol  
made such an amorous gesture  
that it saved me from the deceit of time.*

*Ghazal 427*

Hafez often casts the Beloved as a tavernkeeper pouring out cups of love:

*O Saqi [winebearer], You who hold that sweet wine,  
pass 'round a cup to me!*

Ghazal 1

*My ears are completely occupied  
with the melodies of harp and flute.  
My eyes are fixed on those ruby lips  
and the cup being passed around.*

Ghazal 46

Yet the path of love requires spiritual discipline and the cultivation of the highest human qualities. A lover must purify both mind and soul, for the Beloved demands absolute purity.

*Only the pure-sighted  
can see the face of the Beloved;  
one cannot gaze into that mirror  
except with pure eyes.*

Ghazal 136

Hafez warns us not to waste this human life now that we know the secret of love:

*Don't die thirsty,  
with the water of life in your hand.*

Ghazal 430

*O heart, you won't pass  
through the lane of love!  
You possess all the means,  
yet you don't act on them!*

Ghazal 480

Perhaps more than on any other theme, Hafez dwells on the agony of love. The path of love is not an easy way.

*Love seemed so easy at first  
until trouble arose from my unquenched thirst.*

Ghazal 1

*I am dying in this separation  
with no way to enter behind that veil,  
or if there is a way,  
the chamberlain won't show me.*

Ghazal 229

Yet Hafez would endure all suffering, pay any price, for that love:

*Let the arrow of Your flirtation  
pierce my heart,  
so that I might die  
before Your love-laden eyes!*

*Ghazal 322*

And Hafez reveals how the path of love ends in transcendent joy as the lover reunites with the Beloved:

*Now Hafez's home  
has become the court of the King.  
His heart has gone to the Heart-ravisher,  
and his soul to the Beloved.*

*Ghazal 170*



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