

September / October 2026

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
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VOLUME 22 • ISSUE 5 • SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2026

Yours Affectionately

You say in eight weeks since your initiation you have made no progress. Sant Mat does not fix any time limit. Let us appreciate the situation. Ever since our birth, at which time we left the eye focus and came out of it and established our connections with this world, we have not gone inside of it. Sometimes, when we have a deep, intricate problem to solve, we close our eyes and try to think by holding all our attention in the eye centre. We do it for a short time, but soon run out again because we have acquired the bad habit of always remaining away from the focus.

Poets, painters, and musicians receive inspiration from this point. All great thinkers get their ideas clarified here. Whatever scientific progress the world has made, it has all been derived from this source. This focus, back of the eyes, is the fountain of all inspiration which has produced the world's masterpieces. And whatever further progress is to be made in the future, the source of information and inspiration will still be this point. Here is where Divinity comes down to meet the struggling man.

And what holds us outside this focus? Why does not everybody in the world rush, with his utmost ability, to enter this magic fountain of inspiration and wisdom? Because our attention has always been, and is yet, attached to our bodies, to our near relations, to our homes, to our countries, and to our pleasures – sometimes to our pains and sorrows. We have so much identified ourselves with these things that we have lost our identity. Unless now we start detaching ourselves from these outside connections, begin to develop the capacity to switch our attention on and off at will, we can make but little progress on the path.

We are to re-establish our identity, to assert our supremacy over our minds and bodies. The mind must be made to work when we wish it to, and to remain motionless when we wish it to do so. We must become able to enter this body when we wish, to function in this world when necessary, and then to go out of it at will, when we wish to function in another world. It is the attention which is to go inside and see, and so long as it is running outside, who is to see inside? If the owner of a house sits always outside of his house and complains that he cannot see what is going on inside, his complaint is not justified.

This detaching the attention from the external connections is a slow affair. Habits become second nature. It takes time to form new habits. But slow and steady wins the race, and practice makes perfect. Follow your mind for a minute and see what keeps it away from its headquarters. Avoid whatever interferes, and accept what helps in reaching your objective. I have already given you the saints' method, based on long, long experience.

If anyone is sure that he is on the right path, then if he takes but one step a day, he is still approaching his destination and is sure to get there some day, no matter how distant his destination may be. You will perhaps say, "How am I to know that I am on the right path?" I give you the means of proving it for yourself. Until you have proved it for yourself, you must, of necessity, accept something on faith.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Even in the face of seeming failure, one should continue the practice with faith and devotion. The mind has been going out for countless ages, and each time it has become more scattered. The object is to collect the mind at the point of concentration, contact Shabd and begin our homeward journey. The first step is the most difficult of all and takes a long time, the length of time depending on the results of our own previous actions plus the sincerity and amount of steady effort we put forth in following his instructions. Effort and grace go hand in hand. The more effort we make, the more grace we receive to make more effort until the goal is reached.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Shaped by His Love

The foundation of our emotional strength and positive self-image is laid with the help of those who take care of us early on in our lives. It is a well-studied fact that if we are loved and cared for in a non-judgemental and supportive way during our childhood, we grow up to be resilient and confident people. Whereas if we are not shown that love and support, then we turn out to become insecure, fearful and yielding.

While treading on the spiritual path, we are shaped, supported and driven by the Master's love. Today, if we are willing to make sacrifices and work hard, if we are confident to step out of our comfort zones to explore new worlds, it is only because the Master's love is urging us to.

We have all experienced his love in a multitude of ways; his helping hand during a difficult time, his patient answers to our nagging questions, a soothing smile directed at us, or an endearing glance. A disciple thrives on these experiences.

The Master's love makes us happy, it gives us hope and it inspires passion within us until before we know it, in spite of our weaknesses and our flaws, we are ready to dream, fight and do whatever it takes to find that love in its totality.

Rumi refers to the Master as the Saqi or the cupbearer, because he pours the intoxicating bliss of divine love from the jug of his own heart into the cup of the disciple's heart. Once we experience his love, it is hard to settle for anything else.

Don't let us stay sober with a Saqi like you.

Jalal al-Din Rumi

This does not mean that we do not experience bouts of helplessness and hopelessness in our journey, but the Master's love inspires us to keep fighting. Whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, our hearts are being strengthened, and we are training to become true lovers; lovers that do not give up or lose heart at the slightest sign of difficulty.

Jesus, O Jesus, if the desire of loving You is so delightful, what will it be to possess and enjoy this Love? How can a soul as imperfect as mine aspire

to the possession of the plenitude of Love?... I am not an eagle, but I have only an eagle's eyes and heart. In spite of my extreme littleness I still dare to gaze upon the Divine Sun, the Sun of Love, and my heart feels within it all the aspirations of an Eagle.... What then will become of it? Will it die of sorrow at seeing itself so weak? Oh no! The little bird will not even be troubled. With bold surrender, it wishes to remain gazing upon its Divine Sun. Nothing will frighten it, neither wind nor rain, and if dark clouds come and hide the Star of Love, the little bird will not change its place because it knows that beyond the clouds its bright Sun still shines on.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*

All things become effortless in the presence of love. A person under the influence of love performs the most difficult tasks with comparative ease. Through love, even impossible things become possible. Love throws fear out the window.

*The companions of the Prophet
who went to war without armour
were dead drunk from Muhammad's love.*

Jalal al-Din Rumi

We are at constant war with our mind; it continuously drags us towards the senses, it makes us question our commitment to the path, it instils fear in us, it makes us feel disillusioned and restless. On the other hand, with experiences we have had with our Master – his companionship, his tender care and his spiritual might – let's face it, the odds are very much in our favour!

I have seen many restless, yet motionless, in the fire of your tireless love.

Jalal al-Din Rumi

Despite the mind distracting us from the eye focus, we make the effort to sit still and put in the required time in our meditation. Is this not because we want to earn our Master's pleasure? Is this not because his love is our motivating factor?

The Master's love inspires us to meditate. And every round of meditation, every feeble effort, goes a long way in shaping our hearts for success which will lead us to be courageous, cheerful and determined.

Every moment the beloved brings gifts to lovers who work. He is the soul who enlivens the heart of love.

Jalal al-Din Rumi

Sometimes, we may be mentally separated from the Beloved and sometimes physically, but we will always continue to have his love. The Master's love is eternal and selfless.

O Shams-e Tabriz, no words describe you except – O God, what a friend, what a beloved you are!

Jalal al-Din Rumi

If we ever feel disheartened or overwhelmed by life's ups and downs, let us just remember his love – which is showered on us so graciously despite the fact that we may not be deserving of it.

Yes, my Beloved, this is how my life will be consumed. I have no other means of proving my love for you other than that of strewing flowers, that is, not allowing one little sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by all the smallest things and doing them through love.... I shall sing even when I must gather my flowers in the midst of thorns, and my song will be all the more melodious in proportion to the length and sharpness of the thorns.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul



Something to Think About

A satsangi should face all situations with faith and courage and never lose heart, and above all never be lax in bhajan and simran. If there has been any laxity, the sooner it is made up the better. Regularity in meditation gives confidence and strength that are difficult to acquire in any other way. Then you would also realize how the Master is helping you and, in fact, molding you.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

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Through his grace and mercy, the Lord himself has shown you the way to his real home. You have found the Anami Radha Soami's home, which is beyond everything. So now work to achieve it and remain firm in your love and devotion. Have firm faith that one day, in this very body, he will take you to the real home. Listen to the sound of the Shabd-dhun with love and devotion, and with the pull of the higher mind focus the surat and nirat into it. Discarding the desires of the gross mind, listen to the Shabd-dhun every day, even if you do so only for a short while. Everyone there is urged to do his bhajan and simran every day.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

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To be helpful and selfless is certainly good, but we should not identify ourselves with such work. We should help in a detached spirit and to the extent that it does not constitute a burden on our minds. Perform your social duties and discharge your obligations, but do not neglect your own proper work which is that of going in. In other words, do not get entangled. The one unfailing test in all such matters is, "Does it interfere with my bhajan?" If it does, discard it unhesitatingly.

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



Reset

We all remember playing video games at some point in our lives. Choosing a game, starting out with a goal, frantically pressing the buttons on the controller to reach the end. But what would happen when we messed up or came across a hurdle we could not possibly overcome? More often than not, we'd hit the reset button and start over, sometimes realizing that the game became easier the second or third time around.

Life is much like a video game – a multi-player video game. We have a starting point and we have an end goal. In between, we gather power-ups – people, things, and situations that propel us towards our end goal. We also meet hurdles – people, things, and situations that deter us as well. Just like a video game, life too presents us with a reset button. This reset button may not erase what has already transpired, but it allows us to start over. So, how do we go about hitting the reset button in life?

The first step to starting over is to *realize* the purpose of our life. In the daily hustle and bustle of the world, it is easy to lose sight of our real purpose.

The main purpose of life is to realize God. This privilege the Lord has bestowed only on human beings. The human body is the top rung of the ladder of creation. From here we can either drop down to lower species or we can go back to the Father and escape from the cycle of birth and death. Everything else we have been getting every time we have come into this world, in any form, in any species.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. 1

Next, we need to *exercise* our spirituality. We need to put into practice what we have learned. We need to remember that our spiritual practice is not something that is limited to a few hours every day. It is something that should be reflected in everything that we do.

We must not forget our meditation when we start our worldly activities during the day. Its effect should remain with us. It fills us with certain noble ideas, noble thoughts, noble principles, and we shouldn't start compromising with them during our daily activities. Our meditation must reflect in all our activities in life.

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

The third step is to *sustain* our efforts. It can be discouraging when we try to seek progress but do not see it. However, this should not deter us from putting in the effort. Eventually, our relentless efforts will form a habit. In an answer to a disciple, Maharaj Charan Singh Ji says:

Habits are easily formed and soon become a part of our daily routine, and then if we neglect them, we start missing those things. Similarly, by giving the same time every day, this meditation should become a part of our daily routine. For instance, whether we are hungry or not, at one o'clock we are at the dining table; or the moment it is eleven o'clock, you rush for your coffee break. It becomes a habit and a routine of life. So, meditation should also become a habit and a daily routine. And if you give it secondary importance – "I'll attend to it whenever I feel like it, I'll do it whenever I get time" – then you'll never attend to it at all. So one should make it compulsory.

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

Next, we need to *eliminate* our negativity. Life will always throw curve balls at us – and at times, it will be when we least expect it. When this happens, we can either choose to sulk because things do not go our way or we can hold our heads up high and take a positive approach. From our limited perspective, we may not be able to see progress, but the Master assures us that provided we put in our best efforts without fail, there is always progress, no matter how small.

Lastly, if we find ourselves still struggling, then we can always *try* again. We are given the opportunity for a fresh start every moment, every day. It can be very easy to hold on to past shortcomings and weaknesses, but we need to let go of what we can no longer change or control. We need to keep trying – that is all we are expected to do.

So let's take a moment to reset our lives – realize, exercise, sustain, eliminate and try again.



Did You Know?

Man is endowed with the power of detaching himself from body and mind; hence it is incumbent upon him to develop this power and be free from the ills of body and mind. The easiest way to do this is to associate himself with something which is beyond the body and mind, and that is the sound current. The greater the association with the current, the greater the detachment from the body and the mind.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

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As a rule, concentration becomes difficult when we have cares and worries, for then the attention sticks to the heart centre instead of rising up to the eye centre. We should take the right steps to meet the situation, so far as it lies in our power, and then worry no more. We should leave the rest to be worked out as the Master thinks fit.

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

* * *

Disciples of Saints feel no pain at the time of death. Rather, they face it bravely because they have already kept death in mind and have taken part in the affairs of the world only as much as was absolutely necessary. They have already struck at the roots of the world in them. The worldly life of the satsangis of a Saint is like the short-lived greenness of a tree which has been cut down.

Soami Ji Maharaj, *Sar Bachan*



From Illusive Complexity to Simple Reality

We have spent aeons and various lifetimes in this world – an illusionary realm. Even though we are aware that the environment we live in influences and conditions us, we have developed a remarkable ability to create concepts to suit our desires. Being part of this fantasy, we tend to weave our own web of fallacies.

*Caught in the talons of delusion
The world continues to come and go.
You are blessed with the human birth,
O man, why deceive yourself?*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Unfortunately, this also overlaps into our spiritual lives, making it difficult for us to comprehend the simplicity of the Sant Mat teachings, entangling us further in maya or illusion.

Truth is simple, illusion makes it infinitely intricate.

Meher Baba, as quoted in Concepts & Illusions: A Perspective

In a story recounted in *The Book of Mirdad*, a saint ended his sermon and looked at his disciples to see if they had any questions to ask or doubts to clarify. One of the disciples arose from the gathering and courageously said, “Master, whatever you say always puzzles us because you speak to us like no other person or book.” The other disciples added to this saying, “At least, give us some proof of what you say, so it’s easy for us to believe and practise.”

In response the saint lovingly answered, “Well said, friend! You have too many ears; therefore, you cannot hear. If you had but one to hear and understand, you would need no proof.”

Confucius wisely said:

Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.

as quoted in Life's Too Short to Fold Fitted Sheets

If life is simple, then shouldn't unlocking the mystery of the spiritual life also be simple?

Here are the principles of spirituality, the path to the ultimate reality:

- Divine grace, which leads one to the Master;
- Master, who leads one to Nam;
- Nam, the word of God, the Shabd.

*Devotion to true Nam brings true honour –
without the Name no one can find salvation.
Without the true Guru no one can find the Name,
the Lord has so planned it.*

Guru Amar Das, as quoted in *Jap Ji*

A true master helps us unlock the mystery of Nam. He shows us the way, the door to liberation from this illusive world and the simple technique to unlock it.

*Closing the nine doors and restraining the wandering mind,
in the tenth, one finds one's true abode.
There the unending music of the Word plays day and night.
Through the Guru's guidance, the celestial Word is heard.*

Adi Granth, M3

The Master teaches us that truth and real bliss can be attained at the tenth door – the eye centre. No lasting happiness can ever be attained below the eyes unless we withdraw our attention within at the eye centre, where we can access the divine sound and light. With concentration, we (the soul) begin to hear the divine melody (Nam, the Word), which leads us to our true home (through the hearing power of the soul – *surat*). Gradually, we begin to see the light that further illuminates the path (with the seeing power of the soul – *nirat*). And once we reach our destination, uniting with the divine, we are in the realm of ineffable peace and everlasting happiness. Then, there is no coming back to this realm of illusion since now the soul has been liberated from death and rebirth. The following quote by Guru Nanak Dev conveys the essence of the teachings:

*Except Nam, you have no friend or companion. You will attain salvation
only through the practice of Nam.*

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. II

Masters repeatedly advise us to meditate regularly, yet we interpret this guidance as being about enlightenment. We then assume that our inability to attain instant enlightenment is equivalent to failing in meditation.

Once a master asked his devotee to push a boulder. As a dedicated disciple, he quickly took up the task. He tried pushing the boulder, but it didn't move. He tried harder and harder for hours – but he failed to move the boulder by even an inch.

He went back to his master and shared his disappointment of failing to move the boulder. However, the master, pleased with his disciple's devoted effort said, "My child! I didn't ask you to move the boulder but simply to push it!"

The masters always emphasize first that there are no failures on this path, and second, that attaining divine union involves obedience to the Master's instructions and purification of the mind through our spiritual practice. They say that meditation is an essential step in our spiritual journey. We have to simply sit for our meditative practice and keep our vessel (mind) clean. Our responsibility is the effort and appreciating wherever we are in our journey, which invariably means being receptive to his will.

The masters assure us that regular practice with love and devotion will invoke the Lord's grace and lead us to our ultimate goal. Maharaj Charan Singh always encouraged us to take that first step by saying:

Our roots have gone so deep into this creation that it is not so easy to uproot them. So even our one step is a great step.... Our one step is sufficient for him to pull us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

The spiritual path is a path of action and not just mere words. A Chinese proverb encapsulates this aptly: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand."

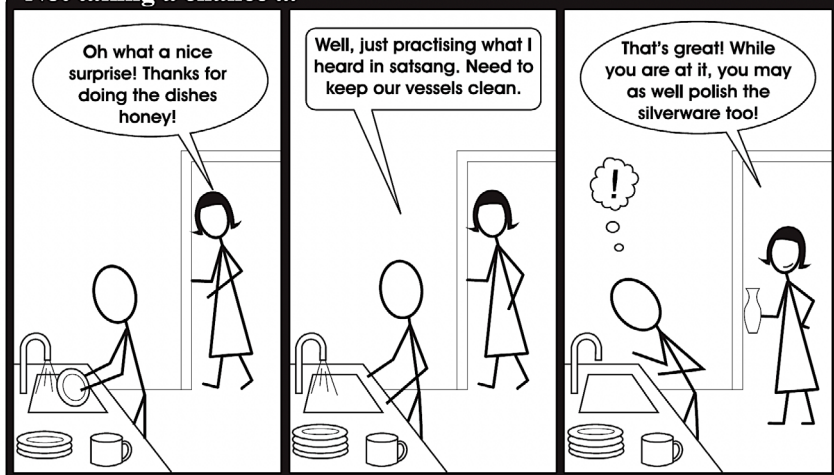
Truth will be attained when we break down the walls of ignorance and illusion with implicit faith and love. Diligent and relentless effort in our meditation will eventually lift us from the complex illusion to the simple

realization of the truth, as the following Zen story from the book *Concepts & Illusions: A Perspective* explains. A disciple asked his master: “Isn’t the end-point of man’s journey his union with God?” The master replied: “The end-point of man’s journey is not union with God because there has never been a separation. All that is needed is the flash of insight that makes one see it.”



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Depression

An explanation by Maharaj Sawan Singh

It was learned on inquiry that you are feeling depressed. The cause of this depression is sadness and lack of concentration. You know that one comes to the satsang so that, attaining the wealth of *paramarth*, he should consider the world and worldly things of no value but should make use of them according to his needs. He should bear with contentment and gratitude all worldly shocks, sorrows and joys, health, sickness and trouble, and whatever comes his way. Rather, a satsangi should so behave that he should not be overjoyed if he is granted the kingdom of the whole world, nor should he be the least bit concerned if it is taken away from him.

The *abhyasi* (devotee who performs his spiritual practice) has to navigate the whirlpools of pain and pleasure, honour and contempt, grief and joy – in the ocean of existence. If he is lily-livered, he will not succeed. He should fortify his heart (by spiritual practice) and face the vicissitudes of life with grit and patience. Recognizing the Supreme Being as the prime mover in all affairs, he should acquiesce in his will. So do not be weak-hearted. Hold patience and contentment in your heart, and perform your worldly duties. Forget all worries and do your job according to routine.

Whatever comes to man from the Lord is the result of his own actions, and the Lord makes him go through them for his own betterment. On such occasions, although it is sometimes a bitter pill, he should acquiesce in the will of the Lord. If, on the impact of worldly events, he loses concentration and becomes conscious of joys and sorrows, then it is apparent that satsang has had no effect on him so far. Take courage and strengthen and elevate your mind, and perform your duties faithfully.

Spiritual Gems



The Formula of Balance

Seek ye first the kingdom of God...

And all these things shall be added unto you.

Bible, Matthew 6:33

We often hear our elders tell us, “Live a life that is well balanced.” What is balance? Simply defined, balance is to put something in a steady position so it does not fall. Many of us know how to balance objects in our daily routine, like balancing a glass of water while carrying it on a tray or balancing our body while riding a bicycle. Even if these sound simple, they might be difficult at first but slowly with practice they become easy to achieve.

A well-balanced life is quite subjective. We waste our lives distracted by the world and its objects. As life goes on and years pass by, we confuse our priorities as we get more and more consumed by the affairs of the world. Holistically, keeping a balance in life means to achieve worldly as well as spiritual goals.

Master has given us the spiritual formula of two-and-a-half hours of daily meditation. It awakens us to the reality of our being. But again, this is easier said than done. At every question-and-answer session we often hear disciples say the same thing to the Master, that we are not able to sit for the time which has been advised. The question is often the same, and so is the answer.

Let us take the example of a kite which is tied to a string and held firmly secure in our hand. Now if we untie this string slightly, it starts rising upwards a little. The more we loosen the string, the more upwards it will rise and fly. The soul acts in the same manner; the more meditation and focus we engage in, it slowly starts rising upwards to the Lord. Similarly, Master often says that we must learn to let go; the more we keep our thread tied down to the world, the more our soul will be trapped here. The soul is securely tied to the Lord; we need to allow it to slowly keep rising towards him by means of simran and bhajan.

The relationship of the disciple and the Master is the same as a child and its mother. A mother's duty is to carry the child until he learns to walk. Then the child starts taking baby steps and learns to walk properly

and grow. In the same manner, the disciple learns through practice to focus with the Master's guidance. The more time the disciple dedicates to that practice, the more he strengthens his balance between the worldly and spiritual.

Attitude and positivity also play a big part in achieving a balance, as illustrated in this well-known story:

A businessman was on vacation relaxing and enjoying the mountain ranges when he noticed a farmer coming downhill with his cart. He complimented the farmer on his cart full of fresh vegetables and asked him how long it took him to harvest so much. "Not long," the farmer replied. "Then why didn't you stay out longer?" asked the tourist. "Because this is enough for me and my family," explained the farmer. "So what do you do with the rest of your time?" asked the businessman. "I sleep late, plough for a while, play with my children, do my prayers and spend time with my wife. In the evening, I go into the village to visit friends, have a nice meal, and play music. I have a full life." Hearing this the businessman was surprised. "I have an MBA and I can help you. You should spend more time on farming, then you can sell the extra produce, make more money and buy a bigger farm." "And after that?" asked the farmer.

"With the extra money from the bigger farm, you can buy more farms and eventually hire more people to operate them. Instead of selling your produce to a middleman, you can start to negotiate directly with the supermarkets. After a while you would be able to open your own flagship store. Then you could leave this village for the city and eventually operate the whole enterprise." "How long would that take?" asked the farmer.

"Twenty to twenty-five years." "And after that?" "Well, my friend, that is when the fun starts. When the business gets really big, you can list your company in the stock exchange and make millions!"

"Wow, millions. What happens after that?" asked the farmer. "After that you will be able to retire in the countryside, sleep in every day, do some farming, play with your grandkids, meditate and spend time with your wife. In the evenings you will be able to go out for dinners and sing with your friends." To this, the farmer replied, "That sounds just like my life right now!" And he walked away.

From the farmer's story we realize that it is a person's state of equilibrium and attitude to life that matters more than the amount of wealth and success they achieve. The Lord has gifted us with a human birth. No doubt, we should be grateful for this invaluable gift of life. Moreover, to achieve our goal of a balanced life, the Lord provides us with enough time in the day for attending to not only our personal duties and responsibilities but also what we owe to the Lord – our meditation.

To know that enough is enough is to have always enough.

Tao Te Ching, as quoted in *Living Meditation*



To keep a balance in the world, you should hold your attention at the eye centre. If you do this and if you're attached to the spirit within, you will be able to keep your balance in this world; you will be able to discharge your worldly duties and achieve that goal for which you have taken this human form. That is keeping your balance.

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

Turning Inwards

One of the hardest things is to break free from our tendency to commit bad deeds. Every thought, word and action needs to be kept in check because of our commitment to leading an honest, moral life. But it is easy to falter and difficult to remain righteous, particularly when good intentions are not reciprocated, or we are tested under pressure. As a result, given the law of karma, we find ourselves returning again and again to this cycle of transmigration to account for our mix of good and bad deeds. We are wary that the balance is often tipped toward a negative rather than a noble record. We find ourselves overwhelmed by the consequences of our actions that we must face. But there is hope in where or to whom we can turn to for help.

If a child commits any mischief, does not behave properly, even breaks the law, the father never hands him over to the police. A father never likes his son to go to jail, but all the same the father wants to put him on the right path, so he punishes him, though he may not hand him over to the police or to the jail. That does not mean that if we do not practice, even then we will be accepted and taken back. We have to get punishment – sometimes perhaps the father's punishment is more severe than that of the police – but all the same, there is love coupled with the idea of discipline behind this punishment; there is no revenge in the father's heart. His object is to improve the son, to make him a better human being; but he will not hand him over to the police or the district jail.

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

Taking refuge in a true, living master is an opportunity to surrender to his dispensation of our karmic account. The glossary of *Jap Ji* provides us an insight to the Master's approach in settling our scroll of deeds:

A soul initiated by a perfect master is not under the jurisdiction of Dharamrai (the Lord of Judgment) because the Master himself administers the karma of his disciples, tempering justice with mercy.

*The deed of our karmas
Has been torn up
In the court of the Dharam Rai,
The lord of justice;
O Nanak, the Guru has settled
The account forever.*

Guru Ram Das, as quoted in *The Path*

This does not mean the Master simply erases our account. He dispenses our karmic account with fairness and wisdom, all the while cushioning or counterbalancing it with mercy. We have often heard that the Master is like a potter who pounds and slaps the clay he is trying to mould. The pounding is on the outside, while at the same time, his other hand firmly provides support from the inside to guide its shape.

Interestingly, tempering has another meaning referring to the heat technique applied to alloys, such as steel or cast iron, to achieve greater toughness by decreasing the hardness of the alloy. By tempering, the alloy becomes more pliable by decreasing the brittleness of the metal but without it losing its toughness.

That is what happens for us when the Master takes charge of our karmas after initiation. He takes the responsibility to help us return to our eternal home. He gives his love, support, and grace to go through our karmas with fortitude and equanimity. To become receptive to his tempering, to achieve greater strength, toughness and fortitude, we meditate to attune our consciousness to Nam or Shabd, the divine sound current resounding within.

Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh illustrates the power of meditation in many ways:

One little portion of nam or shabd, an atom of it, burns thousands and millions of our karmas. We actually burn or destroy and rise above them, and do not make new ones in the process.... When, with the help of nam or shabd, our mind goes back to its origin, these karmas just drop down. However rusty a knife may be, if you hold it against a revolving grindstone, all the rust is removed. The knife again shines like new. It becomes pure.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

The masters often emphasize that meditation gives us the strength to face our destiny without losing our balance. Meditation allows us to develop that attitude of accepting things as they come. There are many questions, many problems in life for which there seems to be no solution, but we can rise above them with the help of meditation.

By turning our attention inwards with meditation, we repent for our transgressions and surrender ourselves unconditionally to the Master, having faith in his divine dispensation. We then feel a sense of relief that our journey home is of his design and on his terms. Moreover, we become grateful that he accepted us as is, and did not turn us away.

There can be no holiness, Lord, if You withdraw Yourself. No wisdom can avail, if You cease to guide. No courage can uphold, if You cease to defend. No purity is secure, if You are not guard. No watchfulness of our own can save us, unless Your holy care protects us; for if You abandon us, we sink and perish. But if You visit us, we are raised up and live once more.

Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with

Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Do you know your disciples personally or impersonally? For example, when you see me, do you know everything about me – my troubles, my doubts, my past, my future? I am asking this because I doubt, I don't know how to discriminate when people say master knows everything. Could you please explain?*

A: You see, master is a medium between the soul and the Lord, and he is concerned with the soul – to help it to develop, to reach to the level of the Father. The soul, being in the body, and being a slave of the mind, is ensnared in karmas. So it has to go through certain types of karmas – otherwise nobody stays in the body. That is known as destiny.

Whether master knows, whether master doesn't know, it makes absolutely no difference. Master definitely helps the soul to develop spiritually, not from the material point of view. Our concept of grace and help is all material – worldly ambitions, worldly achievements, worldly fulfilments – but that is not the purpose of the master. That is already destined – we have to go through our destiny. Master is concerned with what way the soul spiritually develops. He gives the source of strength to the soul to spiritually develop within so that it is transported to the level of the Father and gets released from the mind and thus from birth and death. That is his duty. Our real master is shabd, which is within every one of us, and there is nothing which is hidden from the shabd. If he is the Creator, he is also all-pervading and all-knowing.

That word which has created the whole creation is our own master and that is within every one of us. So he is the Creator; he is all-knowing, all-pervading; nothing is hidden from him. In the flesh, master has realized that word within, and we are connected through him to that word.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Q: *Master, if you feel in meditation that you're not making any progress but yet in life you feel that there is a higher power helping you, can you look forward to that, or must you just ignore it?*

A: Well, brother, Master's protecting hand is always there, whether you ignore it or accept it. By attending to meditation, even if we don't feel any progress within, we will definitely feel the effect of meditation in our life. Progress we may not see within, but we will feel the effect of meditation in our nature, in our dealings with people, in the way our whole attitude towards life changes. We should not feel much concerned about progress, because progress is always there. The effect of meditation can never be removed, and nobody can escape that effect.

Die to Live

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

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

Light on Saint Matthew



Happily Ever After

The famous Sphinx in Egypt has a human head and a lion's body. It is said that many come from all over the world to pray to it, as it is believed that the Sphinx can grant wishes. The interesting thing about the Sphinx is that it has a half-smile carved on its face as if mocking those who come begging for happiness at its feet. But many do not notice it as they are so blinded by their desires.

One man comes to the Sphinx and prays to marry a beautiful woman. His prayer is granted and he marries an attractive woman who turns out to be vain and self-centered. She is fair of face, but her mind is stubborn and her heart is not generous. Slowly, the light of love goes out of him. He then realizes that the look on the Sphinx was telling him that a beautiful body does not bestow happiness.

Yet another one comes to the Sphinx asking for wealth, and the Sphinx grants his desire. The man becomes rich, but his heart slowly turns hard as stone. What he gains in gold and diamonds, he loses in compassion and true friendship. His heart is buried beneath a burden of worries and the constant fear that his wealth will be stolen or lost. He too then realizes why the Sphinx gave him that 'think again what you are asking for' look when he prayed for wealth.

A third man goes to the Sphinx to pray that he might become someone great and important. He also somehow notices the sarcastic expression of the Sphinx, but he dismisses it from his mind. As fate would have it, he does become a distinguished man. But in his fame, he has little time for his family. He neglects his wife and children, and eventually they leave him. In his loneliness, he realizes that fame does not bring happiness.

Happiness is within. It is not in sensual pleasures or anywhere outside. You will never be able to achieve happiness outside at all. No matter how much job satisfaction you may get, how much social work you may do, whatever professional work you may do, you will never get happiness in these things because the soul has a yearning for its own source. Unless you let the soul go to its own source, it will never be happy.

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

We often confuse pleasure, comfort, and a life free of worry with true happiness. Realistically, no one lives happily ever after here in this world of maya, except heroes and heroines in fairy tales. Some realize it earlier, some later. The definition of maya is illusion – anything that comes and goes.

My definition of real is that it never changes. That which is true, only that is real. All else is illusion. Only the Lord is real. The soul is real. All other things change.

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

A time comes when we start questioning the happiness the world offers. It gives with one hand and snatches away with the other. Sooner or later we realize that the satisfaction of one's desire becomes burdensome. Hazur Maharaj Ji used to say in his satsangs that we pray for five years for something and then for another 10 years to remove it from our life.

A very painful question arises, to which we all know the answer, but hope against hope that it's not true. What really belongs to us that is here to stay with us?

Absolutely nothing of this world!

Hazur Maharaj Ji gave the perfect example of the boy with his father by his side who is captivated by the glamour of the fair – the carousels, the colourful blinking lights, the exciting rides and attractive stalls selling all kinds of sweets and toys. But when he gets lost and is no longer holding his father's hand, he starts to cry. He cannot bear to see the fascinating things of the fair any longer and only wants his father. He then realizes the happiness from the fair was only possible as long as he was holding his father's hand.

This is the breaking point of illusion where the moment of truth awakens us to reality.

When we hold the Lord's hand, when our attention is towards him, we can go through this life without losing much of our balance. If we have absolutely forgotten him, then we live miserably in this creation.

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

Have we ever wondered about our soul's desire? It wants its nourishment. When the mind quiets down, that is when the soul can experience the bliss of Shabd, that celestial power within.

This is what we are all actually searching for unconsciously, but instead we chase earthly satisfaction that is impermanent.

Endless quotes of the saints tell us that happiness lies within, and that this is not our true home. This is the home of temporary pleasures. After all, how can a place where big animals eat small animals to survive, where disasters like typhoons and earthquakes wipe out homes and families in a second, a place filled with sickness and death, be a place of joy?

That is why saints say that this world is not worth living in for you; this place has not much worth for you at all. Leave this creation. We should go back to the Father.

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

As disciples on the spiritual path, we forget that our soul is more powerful than our tormented mind. The Master, with his gift of Nam, has given us the way to empower ourselves daily with our meditation.

For the sake of our soul, it behooves us to do those actions which take us towards the Lord. We have to care for the body as well, but in such a way that care for it translates into service to our soul. Only then can we strive to live happily ever after.

We can be happy only when the purpose of our coming into this body has been achieved. And the purpose of our coming into this body can be achieved only when we invert our attention within this body and try to search for him there. Unless we meet him, we can never be happy and we can never be saved from birth and death.

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



On Being Obedient

In modern times, the world is constantly challenged by the word obedience, and its use and relevance centres primarily on the young during their formative years. Once the age of thinking and maturity comes, the trend for independent thought and expression predominates most cultures and the society we live in. Almost everyone is inclined towards bringing their egos to centre stage, even if it is out of the norm.

Despite the trends and attention, obedience and submission are very relevant to the spiritually inclined. All spiritual paths highlight the existence of the divine and guide us towards a path where the ego is not at the centre. Instead, we attain enlightenment and holiness by doing the exact opposite, which is to shed our egos in favour of the Lord and his teachings.

On the Sant Mat path, obedience is a highlighted virtue, as it is the key to helping us manage our proud egos and uncover the meaning of divine love.

Obedience is another word for submission. And submission is another word for driving out our ego. When we are proud or full of ego, we do not like to submit to anybody, we do not like to be obedient to anybody. In other words, obedience means merging your will to the will of the other person. Driving your “self” out of yourself and merging your will with the will of another, that is obedience.

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

The spiritual path is a path of discovering and understanding divine love, so it can be relevant and expressed in our daily lives. All spiritual paths teach us about this love that leads us to the Lord. The experience is a journey of discovery, as most of us relate to love on worldly terms, as this is what is familiar.

Upon meeting the Master, accepting the Sant Mat teachings and embracing the vows and the lifestyle, one gets a taste of that love. There is a pull from within that makes us want to be close to the Master, and to emulate his inspiring example. Eventually, we find ourselves compliant and obedient.

When God wants you to love him, he will give you that love; but it comes by meditation, as instructed by the living master.

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

The real game changer is the practice of meditation. Sitting still so that the mind is concentrated through the repetition of the holy names keeps our minds from scattering outward. Our spiritual practice helps redirect it inward and upward towards the spirit within. This process tames the mind and diverts our attention from the world towards the Master. Our focus on him evolves into love, which ultimately detaches us from the ego – or our love of the self – and allows us to access the sweetest and highest form of love.

When that love for the master, for the Lord, comes within us, all other qualities just come automatically within us.

When that love takes its place within us, all other things are driven out. Then there is obedience, there is submission, there is understanding. All good qualities automatically take shape.

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

Indeed, when that love blooms, we are transformed into better versions of ourselves and live our lives aligned with the teachings, emulating the Master in attitude and action as much as we can. We develop contentment and obedience, happy in whatever situation we are in, whether good or bad. That love is what makes us rise above worldly challenges with grace and equanimity, confident that whatever comes our way is best for us. Obedience then becomes the hallmark of our love for the Lord.



Spirit of Love

An excerpt from Treasure Beyond Measure

In response to a question put during an evening meeting, concerning seva and its reward, the Master said, “A lover never asks, a lover never calculates.”

In a reminiscent mood, he continued, “I have gone through many experiences. It is more than thirty-five years since I came to the Dera, and the attitude of the sangat, the sangat's love, is something which I cannot describe.” Maharaj Ji's voice was filled with love and appreciation.

“In 1955, the langar was very small with only one small gate, yet two lakhs of people would come on the bhandara of the Great Master's birthday. So many would come that they were still feeding them at 2:00 in the morning.” Maharaj Ji continued, “I used to be in my bedroom, restless, wondering what should be done to take care of these satsangis who come in the memory of the Great Master.

“This problem was therefore discussed at the annual meeting of the Trust. Mr. Ahluwalia, who was the Secretary at that time, suggested that all the bhandaras should be discontinued to avoid so much rush at one time. ‘Let the sangat come at any time they want,’ he said. ‘This will solve the problem, for then there would be no bhandara rush.’ This discussion was going on, and I was just sitting there quietly.”

“The news that such a suggestion had been put forward by the Secretary, leaked out to the sangat. The next day, many satsangis crowded around Mr. Ahluwalia at his house. ‘Did we ever complain about anything? Have we ever complained about not getting food in time? About not finding a place to sleep? We are happy. Since we have no complaints, why should you propose to discontinue the bhandaras? Why do you want to deprive us of darshan and satsang?’

“The next day Mr. Ahluwalia came to me and said, ‘I am sorry for giving that suggestion in the meeting. I withdraw it.’

“I just said, ‘I am glad you realized.’”

After a short pause, Maharaj Ji continued, “The sangat does not mind any inconvenience. People will sleep on muddy ground, they will sleep in the open under rain, but will never cease coming here. Baba Ji has laid

the foundation of this Dera on love and seva. I have seen this love grow increasingly, ever more and more.

“Look at the ‘Mund’ (the old river-bed) area. It was full of reeds and tall elephant grass. It was all mud and uneven ground. The sangat used to cut the tall reeds and grass for use as fuel in the langar. Today, the sangat has turned it into level ground, with farms, roads, and tree plantations.

“Where the present langar is today, there were once deep ravines. The sangat has filled and levelled it. The large langar shed and the area where the big trees are growing was all a deep gully. The place where the multipurpose shed has been erected was once a waterway or rill. The sangat has filled it with five or six feet of earth, to make it level. That is seva. You would have to have seen the Dera before, to realize this.

“The sangat does not do all this seva with the expectation that they will be rewarded. They do it out of love. Seva is love; they never ask for anything in return. And whatever the inconvenience, they never complain. They are always contented, always happy to do the seva.”

The power of love, elicited by the Masters and nurtured by the sangat, is without parallel.



Remain watchful for his command; keep in mind the Guru's words and act accordingly. He may order you to cut grass – for you that is the highest honour. Welcome it wholeheartedly as sweetness itself. Test your mind in this manner; only then is the work complete.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

Keep It Simple

There is a Chinese fable about an official who offered his men a drink in a jar. Unfortunately, there was only enough for one person, so his men agreed to compete to see who could draw a picture of a snake in the shortest time. The quickest person to finish would be the winner.

The competition started and in a matter of seconds one man was done. Seeing that others were still drawing, he decided to add a few strokes to his drawing to improve it, instead of just saying that he won.

When he looked around again, he realized that someone else had already submitted his drawing and was declared the winner. At the same time, another comrade burst out in laughter and held up his paper shouting, “Look at his drawing! A snake with feet!”

The moral of the story is: sometimes doing all that is required for the task is all that is necessary. In other words, keep it simple. The man only needed to draw a snake and win the jar with the drink. But perhaps he became distracted, or overconfident and overeager, and played around a little more with his drawing thinking he could make it better. Ultimately, he drew a snake with feet. So he lost the drink and became the subject of ridicule.

Keeping tasks simple is harder than we think. A simple activity like drinking water may be delayed by looking for a particular glass or bottle or jug we prefer. This does not mean that some tasks do not require greater attention, thought or effort for improvement. It is just that we seem to have developed a habit of overthinking and overanalyzing everything we do, to the point that we make small, simple tasks more complicated than they need to be. Another example is how, while working on the computer, we find ourselves reaching for our phone to check for messages and notifications. These subconscious habits distract us from our real work.

On the spiritual path, one simple task assigned to us by the Master is to do our simran – simply repeat the five holy names of the Lord sincerely and continuously. The Maharashtrian saint Chokha Mela explains this task:

*Sitting in stillness, O God,
I'll meditate with body and mind.
Remembering the Name –
this alone is the essence,
so easy, karmas come to a halt.
Repeat the Name continuously,
no other method.
So easy this mantra, the saviour of souls
who sail it across the ocean of existence.
I was told a simple secret, says Chokha:
call upon God continuously.*

Many Voices, One Song

However, this is when our thoughts keep straying, our eyes keep flickering, our noses keep itching, our legs start tingling, and our sense of hearing becomes so acute that we can hear the minutest sounds from across the street. Or we strain to keep our concentration at the eye centre and become discouraged when we are not able to see lights or hear the sound within. This is when, due to distractions or overthinking we, like the man in the Chinese fable, add 'feet to the snake'. Maybe we change the time and place of our meditation, keep changing positions, ask about other techniques to help with repetition, and constantly worry about how far we have reached on the path within.

Our duty is simple. Close our eyes and lovingly do our simran. The author of *Living Meditation* wrote: "There is beauty in simran – in just doing it. Concentrating in simran produces a beautiful, simple joy. We must first learn to settle the mind in simran, and stay there, enjoying the practice with gratefulness and humility." Everything else will fall in place on its own.

So let us just keep it simple. Inspired by the poem of Saint Chokha Mela, let us focus only on the task of remembering and being with the Lord and master by repeating the five holy names in peace and quiet. This simple act of obedience is in itself a spiritual accomplishment.



Memorable Quotes

The Master never leaves his disciple and is ever bestowing his grace and mercy, even though the disciple may not be aware of it.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

One should, after separating the true from the false and temporal, adopt truth as an integral part of one's being and use one's material resources wisely to live in the world. Every action should be performed with thought and consideration, and nothing should be undertaken that could ultimately lead to sorrow and regret.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *My Submission*

*Those who walk the talk are calm.
They have knowledge but are always humble.
Criticize them or worship them –
they are not offended, nor are they pained.*

Sant Eknath

A wound inflicted on the body with a sharp weapon heals up in time, but not so the wound that the tongue inflicts on the heart of a man. Beware of hurting the feelings of any living being. This should be given as much importance as the vows of abstinence from meat, etc., that we take at the time of initiation.

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



Discipline

Meditation practice is the slow, disciplined work of digging trenches, of working in the vineyards, of bucketing out a pond. It is the work of moments and the work of a lifetime, all wrapped into one.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*

The achievement of every lofty goal requires hard work and there is a great benefit in training to do the things that can help us to achieve those goals. Carrying out such tasks might seem dull, boring and even painful, but as we keep training to do them, they become a habit and the difficulty then subsides. This training is called discipline, and it is the only way to bring out the excellence that is inherent in us, to enjoy the journey and reach our destination.

We all know that we would be at least 15 pounds lighter, a few notches brighter and perhaps even wealthier if we were disciplined in our eating, studying, and working habits. It is difficult to be disciplined though, because discipline requires us to resist distractions and temptations and to leave our comfort zone. Most of all it demands hard work.

There are two separate dispositions within our character: one is the person that we are and the other one is the person we would like to become. Unless we feel that we are working towards becoming the person who we want to be, and progressing steadily towards that goal, we will always end up feeling frustrated with ourselves.

Most of us are well aware that we would also be much happier and more successful on this path if we were more disciplined in our meditation and in the lifestyle that surrounds that meditation. It is not that we have never had it together; we have definitely enjoyed times where we were right on top of our game – we ate lightly, went to bed early, woke up early, meditated, went to work and even threw in exercise, family time and seva, all in one day.

Do we remember how empowered we felt when we worked against the gravitational pull of laziness and complacency, and didn't give in to the "I don't feel like it" syndrome, honouring the commitment that we made to our Master and ourselves?

It is difficult to start afresh when we lose the momentum of having a disciplined routine, but it might help us to remember that once we get over the hump of taking that renewed first step, the rest follows easily.

Discipline is something we can grow accustomed to. It is like a muscle that we exercise; at first it hurts but eventually it strengthens and makes all our other tasks easier. If we compromise with our exercise for some time, the muscles would definitely weaken somewhat, but if we are consistent in our efforts, we will never have to start from scratch; we will always be in a better position to catch up from where we left off and move forward the next time around.

Discipline is a very valuable asset to every practitioner on this path. Our conscience constantly tugs at us to do what we are supposed to do: sit for meditation, stop the gossip, go to bed early, read ingredient labels carefully. Discipline means listening to our conscience and acting on it. As we keep heeding its advice and getting down to doing what we are supposed to, the journey will not only grow easier but it will also become delightful.

As the masters have always told us, there is no question of giving up, it is all about not giving in. We need to keep trying; we need to discipline ourselves so that we can unravel our true potential and attain freedom from all our struggles once and for all.



Heart to Heart

Once, Soami Ji had decided to sit in meditation in a small room for two or three days and had told his disciples not to disturb him until he came out. He bolted the door from the inside and sat in meditation. The very next day Baba Ji arrived in Agra on three days' leave. Whenever he came to Agra it was his practice first to meet Soami Ji, bow to him, and then to attend to other things. Upon reaching Panni Gali he was informed of Soami Ji's orders. Baba Ji said nothing but sat in meditation for two days without eating or drinking anything. A few satsangis urged him to have the Master's darshan by climbing to the ventilator with the help of a ladder, as his leave was to end that day. But Baba Ji refused, saying that one should never disobey his Master's orders. After only a short while Soami Ji Maharaj came out of his room, and when he heard of Baba Ji's devotion and implicit obedience, he embraced him warmly. Then he gave him parshad and sent him off in time to catch his train back to Jhansi.

Heaven on Earth

Once Maharaj Ji mentioned that when the Satsang Ghar in the Dera was being constructed. S. Narain Singh, a very rich and well-known contractor of Delhi and a devoted satsangi, requested the Great Master that he might be given the seva of building the whole Satsang Ghar. The Great Master replied, "No, 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



Book Review

Saints of South India: Part I – Karnataka

BY: DR. N. SUBRAHMANYAM, P. ARAVINDA RAO, K.G. RAMAPRAKASH
PUBLISHER: DELHI, INDIA: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, 2024. ISBN:
978-81-19078-73-8

This book discusses the lives and teachings of three saints from Karnataka state in southern India: Sant Purandaradasa, Sant Kanakadasa, and Shishunala Sharif Sahib. These saints were part of the Bhakti Movement in India, which originated in Tamil Nadu in the seventh century CE and spread across India by the sixteenth century. The characteristic features of this movement included seeking oneness with God through deep devotion, rejecting ritual worship, and promoting equality for all people disregarding caste. Many famous saints were part of the Bhakti Movement – among them Namadeva, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, Eknath, and Tulsi Das.

Sant Purandaradasa (1484-1564), named Srinivasa by his parents, grew up to follow his father's trade as a pawnbroker and jeweller and was very miserly. One day an old Brahmin came to his shop seeking money for his grandson's ceremony, but Srinivasa refused. The Brahmin kept coming for six months, and in the end Srinivasa opened a pouch of counterfeit coins and asked him to pick one. The Brahmin left without taking anything, but went to Srinivasa's wife, who was charitable and gave him her diamond-studded nose ring.

The Brahmin then returned to Srinivasa to exchange the ring for money. Recognizing the ring, Srinivasa replied that it would take time to determine its value, and locked it in his safe. Enraged, he then went to confront his wife, demanding that she produce the ring. Terrified, she went to the kitchen intending to consume poison, but she suddenly heard the clink of a nose ring falling into her bowl. Thanking God, she brought the ring to her husband.

Srinivasa rushed back to the shop, but the Brahmin had vanished. Srinivasa realized that the Lord Himself must have come to his door. That very day, he renounced his home, belongings, and wealth, distributed everything to the needy, and set out with his wife and children in search of God. In his later compositions, he credited his wife for turning him toward the love of God. After twelve years of wandering, he finally found his Guru, Sri Vyasarayam, who was also the Royal Guru (spiritual advisor) of the kingdom of the Vijayanagar empire.

Srinivasa refers to God as Purandara Vitthala. He signed his poems Purandara Vitthala to express his own total surrender to Vitthala (a name for Krishna/Vishnu). In his many stories, poems, and passages, Sant Purandaradasa emphasizes remembering the name of the Lord:

*Human birth is precious, ceaselessly chant the Lord's Name,
Live not like the foolish one, do not fritter it away.
Eyes, hands, ears, tongue, feet were all given by God....
Why is it that you live in forgetfulness of the Lord?
Will wealth and possessions, kith and kin, protect?
Focus forthwith, meditate upon the Lord,
For salvation, worship the Name of Shri Purandara Vitthala.*

Only by taking shelter with the guru, relying on his mercy, is salvation possible:

*Difficult it is to attain Guru's grace,
Futile it is to observe customary rituals,
Without the mercy of the Guru, is there any shelter?
Family, friends, and wife all related to this body,
Never can they help attain salvation.
With a pure mind, if you worship the feet of the Guru,
With wisdom contemplating upon him, all your sins are destroyed, O Brother,
Verily, O Brother, is Purandara Vitthala our sustainer.*

He speaks out boldly against the caste system:

*Cows may be of varied colours,
Will their milk of many colours be?
Stop engaging in inferior deeds to realize the essence.
Go not by caste, O man, caste there is none for learned men,
Being absorbed in the feet of Purandara Vitthala one gets liberation.*

The second saint discussed in this book, Sant Kanakadasa (1508-1606), was a contemporary of Purandaradasa. He was highly intelligent and began writing poetry from an early age. His many compositions made great contributions to Kannada-language literature and music. He was called Thimmappa at birth but was renamed Kanaka Nayaka (meaning Lord of Gold) after he discovered buried treasure which he used for the welfare of the people and to construct a temple.

Kanakadasa served as the chieftain to King Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagar empire. He got wounded on the battlefield and, as he lay among the corpses, he had a vision of God (Lord Adikeshava), who gently caressed him, asking him, “Are you ready to serve me?” He had visions of his previous lifetimes, as well as a vision of his guru who would release him from the cycle of birth and death. This was Vyasaraya (Purandaradasa’s guru). After recovering from his injuries, he renounced the world and set out to meet his guru.

Vyasaraya took a bold step by initiating him since Kanakadasa was born into the shepherd caste. Vyasaraya endured years of criticism for allowing a shepherd to mingle with his high-caste disciples. Kanakadasa also had to face humiliating treatment by his fellow disciples.

Kanakadasa’s poems are filled with vivid imagery. In a poem encouraging trust in the protection of the Lord, he writes:

*Be it bird or an animal that inhabits the forest,
Who is the one who feeds them all on time?...
Who has painted the peacock in brilliant colours?
Who has coloured the fans of coral red?
Who has painted green the sweet-tongued parrot?
He is the protector of all, no doubt about it remains.*

He stresses the practice of remembrance: “O Mind! If you truly want to be happy, keep chanting the Name Divine!” Again and again he encourages us to turn the attention inward:

*To see the Lord within, close external eyes,
Your inner eyes will then open,
Behold the vision of the supreme Lord....
Ears are the gateway for all karmic actions,
Through ears, listen to the gist of liberation,
These ears too are the axe that slays all karmas,
Listen through inner ears the roots of inner sound,
It becomes the means of salvation.*

The third of the saints described in the book, Shishunala Sharif Sahib (1819-1889), was born into a Muslim family. Shishunala was married, but when his daughter passed away at a young age, and then his wife also died from grief, he left the householder’s life and sought his guru. His guru’s name was Guru Govind Bhatt, a Hindu Shakta Brahmin who faced ridicule and anger from his community for initiating a Muslim.

Shishunala was called the Kabir of Karnataka since, as the authors explain, he, like Kabir, “rejected allegiance to any particular religion or ritualistic practice. Till today Muslims revere him as a Sufi saint and Hindus bow down to him as Sharif Bhagwan.” Shishunala’s poems celebrate the unity of saints’ teachings, far transcending any divisions among religions:

*Teaching of the guru is the same,
The celestial sound is the same.
The discipline to follow the path is the same,
The Primal Word is the same.
The centre (between the eyes) is the same,
The blissful truth the seeker experiences is the same,
The father, Satguru Govinda, is the same....
Flaws of the mind are the same,
Flawlessness of the Lord is the same,
Language of Shishunaladheesha is the same,
Cessation of rebirths is the same.*



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