

# HONEST LIVING

**RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS**

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A MEANS TO AN END

M. F. SINGH

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
The spiritual perspective	2
The law of cause and effect: the imperative for moral living	5
<b>THE INVISIBLE PRISON</b>	<b>7</b>
Who is in charge?	9
Empowering the mind and freeing the soul	11
Ignorance: the prison of our soul	13
Our thoughts and actions—the prison walls	17
We alone have to account for our actions	19
Living dishonestly—cementing our prison walls	21
Material or spiritual: a question of priorities	24
Hypocrisy—the dishonourable companion of greed	27
A disturbed mind: we are the wardens of our own prison	31
The extreme subtleties of the law	34
A rare and precious opportunity missed	36
What is right action?	37

<b>THE WAY FORWARD</b>	<b>39</b>
The transforming power of right action	41
Facing in the right direction: the positive way	41
An honest livelihood	44
Sailing with the winds of contentment and detachment	48
Charity supports detachment	49
Contentment, self-surrender and joy	52
The saints: the mirrors of truth	54
The battle of life	55
The saints live among us	56
The transformation	58
Conclusion	61
<b>ENDNOTES</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>BOOKS AND AUTHORS CITED</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>BOOKS ON SPIRITUALITY</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>CONTACT AND GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	<b>77</b>

# Introduction

Morality, in our present days, is a delicate subject. Possibly at no other time in history has there been so much uncertainty worldwide as to what the concept of morality means. Why, many people might ask, should one struggle to live honestly? On whose authority does the state or our religion tell us what to do? In this scientific age, with the erosion of religious and social values, many people are left wondering whether an acceptable basis for a moral code even exists. Faced with so much contradiction and uncertainty, they prefer to live their lives just as it pleases them, or for immediate short-term goals.

If we choose to follow the way of the saints, it means that we want to use our life to realize our divine potential and that we have said to ourselves that there is more to life than short-term goals. The gift of initiation provides us with a practical method to realize our objective, and to support our spiritual practice we make a commitment to live by specific values. These, we must remember, are not values imposed on us from any outside authority; we make the commitment to ourselves, within ourselves, to help us on our way.

By examining our values rationally, we can refresh and deepen our understanding of them. No code of conduct can give one all the answers, but if one understands the principles that underpin it, it becomes easier to find the answers within oneself. It is the purpose of this small book, therefore, to try to understand the principles that support moral living and their far-reaching implications for daily life.

Before the invention of steamships, the success of a voyage was dependent on several factors: understanding the sea; understanding the tides, currents and winds so as to use them to one's advantage; and maintaining the seaworthiness of the ship. Even if one owned the finest sailing vessel in the world and knew everything about one's ship, without knowledge of the sea and the forces moving and driving the vessel, one's journey might prove disastrous. In a similar way we are setting out on a journey of self-realization. To complete it successfully we need to understand life and the forces that drive us. Only then, and keeping in view our objective, can we formulate our code of conduct—can we understand how to keep ourselves seaworthy.

Our understanding is based upon a spiritual and moral perspective that is common to all scriptures and wisdom writings of the world. This perspective is not the property of any religion. It belongs to everyone. It arises from the pool of our common humanity and flowers naturally when a person reunites him or herself with our common spiritual source. The people who embody it most clearly are the mystics—saints and God-realized souls—of all religions.

To demonstrate the universality of this understanding, we have included quotations from as wide a variety of sources as possible, but it is on the mystics' knowledge of life that we primarily rest our case.

### ***The spiritual perspective***

In essence, the entire mystic perspective may be expressed in three simple points: There is only one supreme power which is the foundation and support of everything. We have all come from this power—we are all drops from the same one divine ocean. And each one of us is accountable for everything we do.

However it is described in different cultures, all mystics agree that the fundamental reality of life is spirit. Our essence is spirit—

not the physical or mental. Soul or spirit is the real nature of what we think of as ‘me’. Mystics highlight our common confusion by pointing out that we are spiritual beings having a human experience, not (as we more frequently think of ourselves) human beings looking for a spiritual experience. Anyone who gets in touch with his or her spiritual essence, the life-giving Word or Shabd within them, will be naturally led by it to its source, beyond the limitations of time and space.

This, then, is the object of our journey. But we are handicapped because we experience life through our senses and usually fail to recognize what we are. Just as a child has difficulty accepting that the atmosphere is vibrant with radio waves, so our spiritual immaturity hides from us our divine potential. Saints tell us that as long as we remain busy with the world around us, we will continue to be limited—seduced and fooled into thinking that only the physical world is real. We start to think we can know everything with the intellect. Like Job in the *Bible*,<sup>1</sup> we presume we are in control when we are simply understanding words and concepts. It was to shake this viewpoint that God addressed Job from “out of the whirlwind”, demanding that he reflect upon his arrogance:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ... Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

*BOOK OF JOB*<sup>2</sup>

The great physicist, Albert Einstein, spoke of the way in which our “understanding” is distorted:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe’, a part limited in time and space. He experiences his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind

of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

ALBERT EINSTEIN<sup>3</sup>

To “free ourselves” we need to “widen our circle of compassion”, to recognize that we are spiritual beings—drops of that one ocean that is God. For this the saints give us specific guidance. They teach us a technique that ultimately will enable us to embrace not just “nature”, but the creation *and* the Creator. We are guided how to withdraw our attention from the world and concentrate it so that ultimately we can detach ourselves from the distortions of body and mind. But the saints also tell us that it is not simple: there is a catch, and that is the law of karma or cause and effect. This law is the force that runs the creation. Because of it, we can never know pure spirit apart from matter—or separate our soul from the world—until we have settled our life’s account.

What is this account? It is the record of everything we have ever thought or done since our soul left its source and became encased in a mind and body. This record binds us to the creation, because we have to remain in the creation moving from life to life to account for all we have done. Freedom lies in settling this account from the past and in not incurring new debts. Once we understand that what we do *now* binds us in the future, then we have a practical basis for a moral code that will guide us as to what we should, and should not, do to become free.

Applying our understanding of the law of cause and effect to our daily lives, living consciously so that we are always aware of the consequences of what we do, is therefore our way of making ourselves seaworthy for our voyage to God.

***The law of cause and effect:  
the imperative for moral living***

The inescapable principle of compensation, or karma, is recognized by all the great religions and wisdom literature throughout the world. Though the scope of the law is vast, its application is very simple: Whatever we give, we have to take; whatever we take, we have to give.

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:  
 Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned:  
 Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.  
 Give, and it shall be given unto you....  
 For with the same measure that you mete  
 Withal it shall be measured to you again.

*GOSPEL OF LUKE<sup>4</sup>*

Since nothing in the creation exists without some degree of action, so all life is eternally caught in the web of its ever-adjusting account. Across the vast span of creation, the law maintains a perfect record of giving and taking. No account is ever settled. However far the pendulum swings in one direction, it swings to the same degree in the other. In this way we are all captive—limited to the realms of mind and matter. And as long as we are victims of this duality, we cannot know the perfection and bliss of spiritual unity. As stated in the Jewish teachings:

Everything is a loan given against a pledge, and the net is cast over all living so that none may forfeit paying by escaping. The shop is open; the shopkeeper extends credit; the ledger is spread out and the hand makes entries. Whoever wishes to borrow may come and borrow, but the collectors make their rounds daily, and exact payment whether or not one is aware

of it. They go by an unfailing record, and the judgement is a judgement of truth.

*ETHICS OF THE FATHERS*<sup>5</sup>

Fundamentally, it is this one law that drives the creation. Through the principle of opposites, actions and reactions, this universal law generates the force that produces the multitude of natural laws governing the visible physical universe—the laws of physics, genetics, environmental balance and much more—by which modern science explains life. It also governs all activity at the more subtle levels of mind which cannot be known or quantified by the intellect. The simple principle of cause and effect creates all diversity. It marks the formidable dividing line between the oneness of spirit and the complexity of mind and matter.

The law of compensation, of giving and taking, is inescapable. Unlike our secular laws, we cannot bypass it or manipulate it. If we choose to ignore it, saying “This is not how life works. There is no justice, no need to think of right and wrong”—still the forces of action and reaction will drive us. If on the other hand we become sensitive to their workings, then we can work with this principle so that it takes us where we want to go.

# THE INVISIBLE PRISON





### ***Who is in charge?***

From earliest childhood we are encouraged to think of ourselves as unique individuals and to develop our individuality. From the spiritual perspective this is an illusion. It is strengthened by the present worldview which emphasizes individual rights and personal freedom. We fail to see that when we think of ourselves this way we are simply seeing our separate reality of mind and body and ignoring our common spiritual reality. By emphasizing our differences and separateness and ignoring our commonality, we are assuming that we are physical, rather than spiritual beings.

We talk about freedom and personal fulfilment, but because our understanding is limited to the material, we cannot see that in the light of the law of karma, we have no free will at all. From a higher perspective we are simply undergoing the reactions of our earlier actions, repaying debts that have to be repaid. Who we are, or rather who we *think* we are, is shaped by debits and credits incurred in earlier lives. We would do well to reflect on how many key aspects there are to our life over which we have had no control. Our parents, when and where we were born, our particular genetic patterning and our early education—all are part of the conditioning that has made us what we are today. When so much of what we are now has happened beyond our control, is it not foolish to think we are free?

As we come to understand the karmic principle, we begin to realize how little freedom we really have. It is our mind, conditioned by earlier impressions, that is in charge. Our task therefore is to extricate ourselves from this pattern of living as slaves to the mind. To do this we have to start by remembering that each action, each

thought, imprints itself on our consciousness. Each one will remain with us and influence us until it finds full compensation at some future time. Over many lifetimes these impressions have built walls around our souls so thick that we cannot hear the life-giving music of the Word or Shabd—and it is our conscious experience of the Shabd that will put us in touch with who we are. As long as we are not present to the spirit within us, we will remain trapped by ignorance. The images that are used frequently in the scriptures to convey our helplessness are prison, snare, net, trap. In the *Bible* we read:

The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,  
and he is caught in the toils of his sin.

*PROVERBS*<sup>6</sup>

Since this burden of “sin” cannot be settled in one life, we carry it across the threshold of physical death from one life to another. If we are not careful, while we are settling our present destiny we will be creating fresh debts for future lives. Dadu Sahib, a sixteenth-century Indian mystic of Rajasthan, says:

Be in fear, O be in fear of the Lord!  
Though He gives in abundance,  
He seeks an account,  
therefore guard yourself against evil.  
Let all your dealings be true,  
believe in truth alone.  
Falsehood you must not entertain,  
if you would avoid poison.

DADU SAHIB<sup>7</sup>

By the very nature of the creation, our captivity is self-perpetuating, for we ourselves keep building our prison walls. Being ignorant

of their real consequences, we make little attempt to control our thoughts and actions. And if we are dishonest, we compound our problem by incurring heavier debts.

To extricate ourselves from this trap, not only must we “guard ourselves against evil”, we must also work to cultivate positive qualities. Positive qualities enable us to think positively; they strengthen our mind to act in our long-term interest. They remind us that we are not just separate personalities but part of the positive reality that is God. Meditation is our one certain way to escape, but as long as the mind takes its messages only from the outside world, we keep undoing the benefit of any spiritual practice by incurring new debts.

### ***Empowering the mind and freeing the soul***

There are two steps we can take to help the power of the Word within us become the dominant force in our lives. Each step depends upon the other for success. First, living honest, pure lives helps prevent our debts from increasing so that we can cease rebuilding our prison. Second, meditation, built upon the firm foundation of a disciplined life, concentrates the mind and focuses it away from the material creation. It frees us so our spiritual faculties can start functioning. Once these different faculties are fine-tuned, we will experience the Word reverberating within us, and our contact with the Word or the Shabd will bring the real freedom and inner harmony we seek.

These two steps are interdependent because concentrating the mind necessitates a high degree of mastery over oneself and an atmosphere of tranquillity and peace. If, through meditation, we are to expand our consciousness beyond the physical, then our entire attention has to be concentrated towards the non-material realm. The mind is one and it is for us to choose: it can either be directed outwards, to the creation, or inwards where we can experience the spirit.

How many times do we say, or hear others say, “I would like to, but I just don’t have the will power”? Who are these two ‘I’s that are contradicting each other? We want to do something, but we cannot do what we want! The upstart *I* is the mind driven by its constant hunger for satisfaction, taking control and leading us where it wants. We are creatures of habit, and our mind, bullied by the senses, has the habit of running in whatever direction is easiest. Out in the creation and looking for pleasure, we get caught up in our obsessions. Since the material world is constantly changing, so our mind, too, keeps changing its focus and we find ourselves fragmented, restless and out of control.

To go where we want to go, we have to transform the mind. We have to create new habits that marginalize the *I* who leads us out into the world. By striving to live honestly, we develop qualities that strengthen our will power and our ability to stand up to our weaknesses. We develop the positive qualities of contentment, compassion, purity, detachment and humility, and these in turn further support our efforts to choose the inner life.

Remembering that we are accountable for everything we do helps us empower the spiritual *I*. If we do wrong, thinking we can get away with it, then we are supporting the upstart *I*. No matter how much we then try to meditate, we will not attain our objective. If we attempt to realize the Word, the Shabd, without curbing our negative tendencies, we are trying to achieve the impossible—to move in two opposing directions at once:

No man can serve two masters:

For either he will hate the one,  
and love the other;

Or else he will hold to the one,  
and despise the other.

Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW<sup>8</sup>

We must be clear about our priorities. From the saints and spiritual masters we know that only when we hear the Word within us will the impressions of actions lying beyond our present destiny be settled. Only through the Word can our account with life be erased. If we are clear that spiritual realization is our goal, then the first thing to do is to support our spiritual self.

***Ignorance: the prison of our soul***

As long as our senses dominate our thinking, we remain ignorant of the real order of the creation. Until we are in conscious contact with the Word, we are limited by our physical perspective and our understanding remains distorted. As Jesus said:

O ye of little faith!  
 Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,  
 and all these things shall be added unto you.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW<sup>9</sup>

Lacking spiritual knowledge, we identify ourselves with the physical and give priority to tangible, material goals. If we had real faith in what we profess—that our reality is eternal and that in this life we simply are going through our destiny—we would surrender ourselves to the divine will. But our faith is half-baked, our knowledge fractional, because we are not yet in touch with who we are. In the Buddhist scriptures it says:

The fool is tormented, thinking,  
 “These sons belong to me”,  
 “This wealth belongs to me”.  
 He himself does not belong to himself.  
 How then can sons be his?  
 How can wealth be his?

DHAMMAPADA<sup>10</sup>

We do not 'belong' to ourselves because we have not yet *experienced* ourselves. From moment to moment we struggle to shape our destiny on the basis of intellectual or sensual whims. Our reference points are our social, religious and cultural context and the thinking of our times. To complicate things further, we recognize no limits to our actions, driven as we are by prejudices and passions that arise from our conditioning. We remain oblivious of the fact that our destiny for this life is already fixed so that we must settle a specific portion of our account. We fail to remember, as it is written in the *Bible*, that our every hair, our every breath, is numbered.<sup>11</sup> This ignorance can then lead to the unfortunate situation described by Baba Jaimal Singh in one of his letters to Master Sawan Singh:

The individual who, instead of his own rightful earnings, considers it better to fraudulently live off another's just labour, has not realized that what the Lord has given is specific to his needs.... As he acquires name and fame, he increasingly uses force or fraud in order to usurp the rights of those lesser or lower than him, while hoarding his own wealth, or spending it uselessly, or doing other bad deeds. Such a being subsequently has to pay those from whom he has taken, and pays it by taking birth repeatedly—by becoming an animal, cow, or donkey, again and again. So understand, my son, that apart from your rightful earnings, you are never to use what belongs to others. This is the first step on the spiritual ladder. Even if you are the king of the whole world, you are still to eat only the rightful fruit of your own labour.

BABA JAIMAL SINGH<sup>12</sup>

We may reflect that of all the creatures, it is only humans that take from life what they do not need. All other creatures function

by instinct and take only what they need to sustain their existence. It is only human beings—using the unique discriminating faculty of the human mind to the wrong ends—who experience passions which know no bounds. How few of us are content with what we *need* in life, rather than what we *want*. Two spiritual guides, one speaking in the context of Greek Christianity more than five hundred years ago, and one speaking from present-day India, advise the disciple in almost identical terms:

We should remain, then, within the limits imposed by our basic needs and strive with all our power not to exceed them. For once we are carried a little beyond these limits in our desire for the pleasures of this life, there is then no criterion by which to check the onward movement, since no bounds can be set to that which exceeds the necessary.

*PHILOKALIA*<sup>13</sup>

One ought always to live within one's means. Try to adjust your budget and reduce your wants. There can be no end to a person's desires. One can increase one's wants as much as one likes, and one may also reduce them to the minimum. The richest person is one who has no desires.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>14</sup>

Easily fooled by the surface of life, we get over-involved and caught up by our actions while remaining blind to their inevitable effects. Influenced by others and by the scintillating appearance of what we see, we start to covet what others have. The twelfth-century mystic, Sheikh Farid, warns against covetousness. In fact, it is in our real interests to guard against desiring anything that belongs to someone else. Our interests lie in cultivating the opposite virtue—that of contentment—so that we are not tempted to try and acquire something that is not ours:

Relish your food, dry and simple...  
be not enticed by another's bread.

SHEIKH FARID<sup>15</sup>

And Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, warns:

You clutch at things that belong to another,  
but the Lord within knows and hears all.  
Lost in greed for worldly things,  
you fall into the pit of hell,  
unaware of what lies in store for you in the beyond.

GURU ARJAN DEV<sup>16</sup>

If only we were able to see the long-term consequences of our desires as we go about fulfilling them, we would almost certainly change our tune. But this, it seems, is part of creation's play—that we should have no way of seeing how both soul and mind will have to return again and again to the creation, “the pit of hell”, to reap the harvest of the seeds we are sowing now. Even within the scope of one lifetime, how many times do we witness the way in which worldly activities and the quest for success imprison people in the chains of their own dreams! Because of our ignorance, the saints advise us to keep watch over our desires and ambitions and try to anticipate where they might lead. In this context, we have the wise advice of the moralist, Baltasar Gracian, speaking in the seventeenth century:

Men driven by ambition often succeed outwardly and fail inwardly. Their outer resources multiply at the cost of their spiritual energy. Yet they go blindly forward with small consideration that happy leisure is worth more than drive; for nothing belongs to us except time. Precious existence is squandered in stupid drudgery. Overwork is the mother

of greed and the substitute for boredom. Once entrapped, escape comes only with the slow collapse of body functions. So be not crushed under success, and be not crushed under envy! To be so is to trample upon life and to suffocate the spirit. Enjoy a little more, strive a little less.

BALTASAR GRACIAN<sup>17</sup>

Because we are limited in our understanding, we let greed, ambition or insecurity determine the pattern of our days. If we are to address the negative effects of our ignorance, we must at least ensure that today's actions reflect our long-term aims. To gather a sweet harvest, we have to sow the seeds of sweet, not bitter, fruits now.

### ***Our thoughts and actions—the prison walls***

As we look deeper into the workings of the law of karma, we begin to see that one reason we go on doing what we do is because we do not experience the repercussions of our deeds straightaway. It is precisely because of our ignorance that we end up in such a trap. If we could see the results of our thoughts and actions, would we ever allow them to lead us to suffering? If we put our hand into a fire, we immediately experience pain, so we do not repeat the action. But just imagine what would happen if our nerves were not functioning! We might leave our hand in the fire—we might even go on doing so until our hand burned away. This is the physical plane, but it is the same at the spiritual level. Our spiritual nerves have been deadened to such an extent that we fail to understand where our thoughts and deeds are taking us. We forget that while the wheels of the law may grind slowly, they grind exceedingly fine. In the Buddhist scriptures we read:

So long as an evil deed does not bear fruit,  
the fool thinks that it is like honey;

But when it bears fruit, then the fool suffers grief.  
 An evil deed, like newly drawn milk, does not sour;  
 Smouldering, like fire covered by ashes,  
 it follows the fool.

DHAMMAPADA<sup>18</sup>

There is a story told in India of Dhritarashtra, a wise king who had been blind from birth. He was blessed with spiritual powers whereby he could see into his past lives. One day he asked Lord Krishna the reason for his blindness, explaining that he had looked back over one hundred lives and seen no action that could justify this cruel fate. Lord Krishna instructed him to look further, beyond one hundred lives, and there he saw himself as a young child tormenting a small creature by poking thorns into its eyes.

All our actions, like fruit, have their own time of ripening. It is easy for us, with our limited vision, to excuse or ignore things we do. It is particularly easy to dismiss small dishonesties as being of no significance. But mystics tell us that no action, however small, is insignificant. One day, on the vast panorama of time, it will have its reckoning. Master Jagat Singh says:

Not even a single grain that inadvertently enters your granary  
 from a neighbour's field can go unaccounted.

MASTER JAGAT SINGH<sup>19</sup>

This law does not apply just at the physical level; it is true of all interaction. Whatever the nature of the interaction—physical, financial, emotional, or sexual—a bond is created between those involved. Whatever the give and take of the situation, any resulting imbalances will have to be redressed. Here we have quotations from the fourteenth-century mystic, Rumi, and a letter of the disciple James in the *New Testament*:

Turn away from living on the public  
 So that you may not be affected by their blood.  
 Consider this food to be their blood,  
 Because it is obtained by force.

JALALUDDIN RUMI<sup>20</sup>

Behold the wages of labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

LETTER OF JAMES<sup>21</sup>

Whatever the circumstances, whatever the nature of the interaction, in the end every thought and deed binds itself to an equivalent reaction in order to balance the account.

***We alone have to account for our actions***

Whatever we think and do, it is we, and we alone, who are responsible. We delude ourselves if we think otherwise, if we think that others—our employer, family members, or those close to us—will share the crop we have sown even if it was for their sake.

There is a story told of a person who went to a holy man requesting initiation into the secrets of spiritual enlightenment. The mystic asked him how he earned his living.

“By stealing,” he said.

The mystic then questioned, “Why do you do that?”

The man replied, “Because I am not trained to do anything else and I have to support myself and my family.”

“Will they help you by sharing your punishment if you are caught?” said the holy man.

“Of course,” replied the man. But the holy man told him to go home and ask them.

So he went home and asked his family: “If the king arrests me and I’m punished, will you share my fate?”

“Not at all!” they all responded. “That is your outlook. If you choose to support us in this way, it’s your fault, not ours.”

Is it not ironical that we sacrifice our integrity to create wealth or power for others, and they, when the day of reckoning comes, share no part of our fate?

The following words of Emerson bring us once again to the dangers of our partial vision. How easy it is to lose sight of, or simply ignore, our responsibility when we act on behalf of a group, an organization, our community or our country! We may have a conscience that makes us uneasy, but we side-step it, shifting the responsibility to others or onto the impersonal and amorphous ‘group’. Either we do not care to listen to what our conscience tells us or we fail to recognize the truth.

The ways of trade are grown selfish to the borders of theft,  
and supple to the borders ... of fraud.... Everybody partakes,  
everybody confesses ... *yet none feels himself accountable....*  
That is the vice, that no one feels himself called to act for  
man, but only as a fraction of man.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON<sup>22</sup>

This lack of accountability, the lack of understanding of personal responsibility for all we do, accounts among other things for the rapid collapse of the institution of marriage in the last few decades. How far will we let today’s culture of self-interest take us? We are so keen to secure our personal rights, yet do we understand our personal responsibilities? Marriage provides a framework in which one of the deepest forces of the creation can express itself and we can meet the responsibilities that ensue. It safeguards the family unit so that children may grow up secure and two people

may work together to meet the needs of all involved. Has the study of human behaviour shown us a better way to transmit and develop positive values than in the context of a secure and loving family? Marriage is a life-long commitment made between two people, and as such it provides a structure within which we can mature emotionally and better understand our responsibilities to one another, to our family and to the society in which we live. By taking us beyond our personal wants and needs, it establishes order on the potential chaos of our emotional and sexual desires. Being faithful to one's partner and honouring one's commitment through thick and thin goes beyond mere social convention. It reinforces and supports one's spiritual priorities. By honouring our commitment, we are acknowledging that real happiness comes through spiritual fulfilment, that chasing happiness at the cost of our responsibilities is a delusion that leads us the wrong way.

### ***Living dishonestly—cementing our prison walls***

The human passions are the servants of Maya, the seductive face of material existence that makes us believe that nothing else is real. The passions of lust and greed create this illusion by getting us addicted to the sense pleasures. Then to satisfy our desires, we are dishonest with ourselves and one another; to justify our actions we indulge in self-deception; we end by having identified ourselves with the most limited aspect of what we are.

Honest living necessitates self-control. It requires that we exercise restraint in all our dealings, that we use our sense of judgement, our God-given gift of discrimination, to shape our lives. Honesty implies being faithful to our spouse, or, if we are not married, being faithful to a chaste life. It implies fairness and justice, openness and transparency, the absence of deceit—in contrast to wealth, power and passion, which lead to oppression, extortion, deception and pain.

Whether it is through greed for money or power, the pleasures of the senses, lust—the routes the passions take are limitless. *The*

*Cloud of Unknowing*, written in the Middle Ages by an anonymous British author as a practical guide to the spiritual seeker, speaks of what can happen if we give the senses free rein:

Sensuality ... is the one and the same faculty that will grumble when the body is lacking essential requirements, yet when the need is met, will move it to take more than it requires ... and unless it will control both its strong desires when it has its wonted pleasures, and its greedy delight when the improving irritations are gone, it will wallow, like some pig in the mire, so wretchedly and wildly in all the wealth of the world ... that the whole of its life will be animal and physical rather than human and spiritual.

*THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING*<sup>23</sup>

Failing to understand their consequences, we allow our passions to carry us deeper into the creation. We need to remember that if, by letting our senses drive our will, we behave more like animals, we may well be born as animals in the future so we can settle today's account.

Guru Arjan speaks of how greed can be so powerful that it makes us compromise the relationships we have with those we love most:

O greed, you have enveloped  
 even the best of people in your tides:  
 Their minds ramble, shake and wander in all directions.  
 You have regard neither for friendship, nor gods,  
 neither for father, mother, nor relations....  
 To escape from its influence,  
 I seek shelter with a prayer:  
 O Lord, come to my rescue!  
 Save me, almighty Father.

GURU ARJAN DEV<sup>24</sup>

How many times are families torn apart, friendships severed, and basic human principles compromised for the sake of possessing what is not ours. God forbid that we should so deceive ourselves that as we die, we see we have wasted our time:

Renouncing fear of God, we are shorn of restraint;  
 We do not enthrone the Lord, who is ever with us,  
     but raise armies and collect plunder.  
 Yet with our death, everything turns to dust.

GURU ARJAN DEV<sup>25</sup>

Guru Arjan's example of the ruthless conqueror, apt for those days of warring states and petty kingdoms, might be substituted today with the image of the totalitarian and expansive regimes of modern times and the profit-hungry entrepreneurs and companies of the business world. So often the pursuit of profit and power takes place at the expense of the common man. Whether on a large or small scale, the issues are the same: What is our objective? Are we fair in our dealings with everyone?

The scriptures of all world religions contain strong injunctions against dishonesty. In the *Qur'an* it says:

Whenever you weigh, do it properly and use a precise scale.  
 Do not steal money from others and do not give bribes.

QUR'AN<sup>26</sup>

In the *Bible*, we read:

You shall not steal.  
 You shall not covet ... anything that is your neighbour's.

EXODUS<sup>27</sup>

And in the Buddhist scriptures, it says:

As a merchant without guards, and carrying much wealth,  
 shuns a dangerous road,  
 As a man who loves his life avoids poison,  
 so should a wise man avoid evil actions.

DHAMMAPADA<sup>28</sup>

Master Sawan Singh speaks of the serious repercussions of dishonesty for a person who wishes to walk the path of spirituality:

Even if a disciple does not spend much time in meditation, he should certainly abstain from dishonesty, because deficiency in meditation can be compensated for by the Master's grace, but trickery, treachery, fraud and deception undermine the very foundation of spirituality. To settle such accounts one has to take birth again.

MASTER SAWAN SINGH<sup>29</sup>

Even when we have accepted intellectually the truth of this law, we may fail to change our actions out of sheer complacency—we choose to simply ignore its implications. We need to remind ourselves that the unwary mind, when it is regularly exposed to anything, quickly loses its natural sensitivity and becomes coarse in its responses. This is a fact with which we are very familiar as technology exposes us to all sorts of unwanted influences right inside our home. How many of us sit and watch the most terrible images on television without reacting! Just as familiarity breeds contempt, so, if we do not remove ourselves from negative influences, familiarity may breed moral complacency so that our natural moral instinct for self-preservation—our conscience—becomes dull.

***Material or spiritual: a question of priorities***

Since it is a natural tendency of all human beings to strive for happiness and to improve their situation in life, the success of our

spiritual journey depends on what we put first, our spiritual or material goals. Master Jagat Singh guides us to give our best to whatever we do but not get attached to the results:

For your part make all necessary efforts to improve your circumstances; but leave the results of your efforts to the Satguru's will. He is not unaware of your problems.

MASTER JAGAT SINGH<sup>30</sup>

The danger lies in making material goals our priority. We are then equating riches with happiness and we immediately become vulnerable to compromising those very principles established to safeguard us. As the Buddhist scriptures put it:

Riches destroy the foolish,  
     not those who seek beyond the other shore.  
 By a craving for riches,  
     the foolish person destroys himself as he destroys others.

*DHAMMAPADA*<sup>31</sup>

The fact is that in this cut-throat, consumer-oriented world, most of us are likely to face frequent temptations to compromise our principles. Once we make anything in the outside world our priority, we can be easily tempted to ignore our scruples. Once we have enjoyed a measure of 'the good life', the life of sensual indulgence, we may get attached to it and not be prepared to let it go. The second-century Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, advises us on how to deal with material comforts but, at the same time, to remember our divine link with our spiritual inheritance:

Receive wealth or prosperity without arrogance; and be ready to let it go cheerfully. If you ever saw a hand cut off, or a foot, or a head lying anywhere apart from the rest of the body—

this is what a man does with himself who is not content with what happens, and separates himself from others, or does anything unsocial.... But consider the benevolence by which God has distinguished man, for he has put it in his power not to be separated at all from the universal; and when he has been separated, he has allowed him to return and to be united and to resume his place as a part.

MARCUS AURELIUS<sup>32</sup>

The more we are preoccupied with the material world, the more we lose our spiritual perspective. This is why saints warn us that the world is a place of great danger. From their point of view, we are walking along the edge of a precipice and if we let our attention wander, we may hurtle to our death. That is why our daily routine of meditation is so important, as is regular satsang and reading spiritual literature. Frail humans that we are, it is all too easy to be seduced by life at the surface and look to the material world for our well-being and security. Then, as Jesus pointed out:

How hard it is for them that trust in riches  
to enter into the kingdom of God!

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,  
than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

*GOSPEL OF MARK*<sup>33</sup>

One of the practical measures we can take to help ourselves is to keep supportive company. Since we are naturally influenced by the people we spend time with, we should avoid wrong company. In every discourse he gave, Master Charan Singh spoke of the power of association:

We are always influenced by the company we keep. If we start mixing with criminals, with bad people, we will start thinking

along these lines. If we mix with good people, with noble people, with devotees, we will start thinking in their way.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>34</sup>

Sarmad, a Jewish mystic who lived in India in the seventeenth century, also warns against bad company:

In this world of avarice and envy ...  
 have no fear of snakes and scorpions;  
 Keep far away from greedy people—  
 they bite like snakes and scratch like thorns.

SARMAD SHAHEED<sup>35</sup>

We have to remember that the moment we lose sight of our spiritual goal, however exciting our lives or successful we may be by the yardstick of the world, we are likely to get lost in the fog of our own logic. The next step on this route is hypocrisy.

***Hypocrisy—the dishonourable companion of greed***

Hypocrisy is another form of dishonesty—being dishonest in the way we project ourselves to the world, saying one thing and doing another. Having good intentions and speaking lofty words about spiritual values and moral principles is not enough. The details of our daily lives—both at home and at work—have to reflect our goal. This is a late eighteenth-century warning from Thomas Paine:

It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief ... that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime.

THOMAS PAINE<sup>36</sup>

Sometimes, for various reasons, we are ready to do things in our professions that we would never subscribe to in our personal lives. It is as though we hang our consciences up with our coats as we enter the office door. We compromise for money, for fear of losing our jobs, or sometimes because we genuinely see our actions as fulfilling some other responsibility. The point Thomas Paine is making is that once we allow ourselves to practise two sets of values, who is to set the limits on how far we are prepared to go?

Even in relation to our spiritual effort, we need to be aware of the dangers of hypocrisy. Many of us would like to appear virtuous and spiritual in the eyes of others. We adopt the external trappings of spirituality, appearing to be righteous and devoted, yet in our daily activities we are negative and uncharitable. We may genuinely want to experience the spirit but are not prepared to change the way we are. We are not ready to make the sacrifices required.

Hypocrisy is one of the prisms through which we distort the teachings of the saints. Because we are not prepared to mould ourselves to the teachings, we adjust them to suit us, to fit in with what we desire. This leads to division and confusion within ourselves. We try to behave in one way but are actually motivated in another, and end up simply putting on a show of spirituality.

Bulleh Shah, the hard-hitting Punjabi Sufi poet, questions the hypocritical behaviour of people who piously ask for God's forgiveness while continuing to cheat others and behave immorally:

You go on reading, "Forgive me, O Lord"—  
 what repentance is this, O friend?  
 You give one measure and take back one and a quarter—  
 you have wagered to make illicit profit.  
 When did Islam give you such a teaching?  
 Such are your doings! What repentance is this?  
 You go to places where you should not go.

You relish things which belong to others.  
 You falsely swear by holy books.  
 Such is your trust! What repentance is this?

SAA'IN BULLEH SHAH<sup>37</sup>

Taken to an extreme, hypocrisy may lead a person to set him- or herself up before others as a spiritual leader, professing to lead them to truth.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!  
 For ye make clean the outside  
     of the cup and of the platter,  
     but within they are full of extortion and excess.  
 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first  
     that which is within the cup and platter,  
     that the outside of them may be clean also....  
 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men,  
     but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW<sup>38</sup>

The scholar is proud of his learning,  
     the *hafiz* thrives on self-promotion.  
 With books under their arms,  
     they roam around, selling their honour.  
 Wherever they find a promising household,  
     they read the scripture in loud, fervent strains  
     for a lucrative commission.  
 O Bahu! They have put God's name on sale  
     just to make a living.  
 In this world they live spiritually bankrupt;  
     robbed of all honour, they go to the one beyond.

HAZRAT SULTAN BAHU<sup>39</sup>

It is hypocrisy when people ‘sell’ spirituality. Making a person pay for spiritual guidance is a contradiction in itself. Spirit is the free and abundant life force present within every living being. Each person has simply to be awakened to that power within him- or herself. True spiritual masters impart their wisdom and share their experience with their fellow human beings out of love and compassion, never for money. They never do it to support themselves. Kabir Sahib and Guru Nanak Dev speak here of the hypocrisy of those who turn spirituality into a business, who charge for the initiation they give, and indulge their greed and desire for power and fame in the name of the spirit:

Without a perfect master,  
 one cannot become a true disciple.  
 When the master is greedy and the disciple covetous,  
 nothing but greed multiplies.  
 Cheap are such masters,  
 a dime a dozen.  
 By selling God’s name,  
 they hope to increase their following.

KABIR SAHIB<sup>40</sup>

Damned are they who sell the Lord’s Name!  
 Just as those who ruin their crops  
 are left with nothing,  
 through falsehood no one receives true glory.

GURU NANAK<sup>41</sup>

Mystics warn against such so-called spiritual leaders. By taking material support from their followers, they only increase their own karmic debts. As Paltu Sahib says, true spiritual masters never take anything from their disciples:

Never does a saint seek alms,  
 never holds out his hand before others:  
 The swan stoops not to pick up shellfish,  
 the lion scorns to browse on grass.

PALTU SAHIB<sup>42</sup>

Guru Nanak describes this as the one certain way by which false masters can be distinguished from the true:

If a saint or a seer goes begging,  
 bow not at his feet;  
 He who earns his own living  
 and gives part of it in charity—  
 he alone knows the way.

GURU NANAK<sup>43</sup>

***A disturbed mind:  
 we are the wardens of our own prison***

Our difficulties do not lie so much in the things of the world as in our attitude to life. When our desires and actions distract us and disturb our equilibrium, it is as though we are standing guard at our own prison door. The Buddhist scriptures point out the extent of the harm we do to ourselves when our mind is misdirected:

Whatever an enemy can do to an enemy,  
 whatever a hater can do to a hater—  
 A wrongly directed mind can do us greater harm.

DHAMMAPADA<sup>44</sup>

The passions scatter the mind and dissipate our positive energy, making it impossible for us to concentrate. Just as water does not reflect anything when it is murky and disturbed, so a disturbed, worried and restless mind can never hear the Shabd. As long as

the mind is agitated by desires or actions, it remains distracted and we cannot focus our attention. And so long as our attention is not one-pointed, we cannot enter the subtle spiritual realms.

The mind and soul are knotted together, and only when the mind is clear of karmic impressions can the soul be free of its association. Just as currents in the ocean can gradually pull a boat off-course, so do disturbances in the mind interfere with the soul's return to its spiritual home.

Jesus relates the parable of the sower to explain this very point. He describes how a farmer goes to his field to sow seed. But some fall by the wayside, some on stony or rocky ground, some among weeds and some on fertile ground. He then continues:

Now the parable is this:  
 The seed is the word of God.  
 Those by the way side are they that hear;  
     then cometh the devil,  
     and taketh away the word out of their hearts,  
     lest they should believe and be saved.  
 They on the rock are they,  
     which, when they hear, receive the word with joy;  
     and these have no root, which for a while believe,  
     and in time of temptation fall away.  
 And that which fell among thorns are they,  
     which, when they have heard, go forth,  
     and are choked with cares  
     and riches and pleasures of this life,  
     and bring no fruit to perfection.  
 But that on the good ground are they,  
     which in an honest and good heart,  
     having heard the word, keep it,  
     and bring forth fruit with patience.

In this parable, Jesus says that although God's dynamic power, the Word, has germinated in our hearts, as long as the heart remains choked with cares, the Word cannot flourish and bear fruit. Some people quickly forget its reality after it has been revealed to them; for others, their faith is too shallow to withstand times of trouble; but those who are concerned about wealth and material comfort inhibit their own progress because they are preoccupied with worldly desires.

In these times of mass consumerism and advertising, it is a rare person who can remain content with his or her lot. In every sphere of life today we are bombarded with suggestions to improve our lives by acquiring more. It is a dangerous game. Our possessions and activities in the world have a way of complicating and taking over our lives. Already we are 'possessed' by the impressions of our previous deeds. New obsessions further complicate our lives. And as we know from experience and a little introspection, our desires are never-ending: if we satisfy one, a thousand more take its place. It is sometimes said that the wealth of the entire world cannot satisfy the desires of a discontented, greedy person.

When we indulge greed—whether in the form of property, possessions, money or anything else—we do not quell desire. A fire is not extinguished by feeding it fuel. Kabir Sahib says:

You cannot put out the fire of greed by feeding it—  
day by day it will only continue to increase.

KABIR SAHIB<sup>46</sup>

Again, in the Buddhist scriptures we read:

Men driven on by craving run about like hunted hares.  
Fast bound by fetters,  
they undergo suffering for a long time,  
again and again.

DHAMMAPADA<sup>47</sup>

The craving of a thoughtless man grows like a creeper.  
 Like a monkey seeking fruit in the forest,  
 he leaps about hither and thither.

DHAMMAPADA<sup>48</sup>

In the Sikh tradition, one of the most frequently recited prayers observes:

One's hunger is not satisfied  
 even by the pleasures of all three worlds.

GURU NANAK<sup>49</sup>

The “three worlds” is a way of referring to the many dimensions of consciousness that exist below the purely spiritual realm. Our attachments are so tenacious that dissatisfaction—this disturbance of the mind that is caused by constant reawakening of desire—goes on troubling us even at the more subtle levels. And it will continue to trouble us until we are absolutely free of the last vestiges of the mind and pass to the ‘fourth world’, the dimension of pure spirit.

### ***The extreme subtleties of the law***

The law of karma is inexorable and subtle beyond our imagination. For example, even if we are party to someone else’s dishonourable actions, we too are culpable as an accessory to the suffering caused.

There is a story that indicates the subtleties of the law: A holy man took lodgings for the night in the hut of a poor elderly woman. Since she had no extra food to feed him in the morning, she sat up all night spinning cotton, then sold the yarn in the market to purchase food for him. But when the holy man next sat in meditation, he found he could not raise his attention. He looked around him so he might understand why. Knowing that the old lady had bought the food from her own earnings—having worked

overnight—he noted that there was no oil lamp or any other source of light in the house. He therefore asked her how it was that she had worked in the dark. “You see,” she said, “there is a prostitute living opposite. All night there was a lamp burning in her house so I sat outside and used her light.”

Such stories put before us an ideal of honesty that would seem totally impossible to maintain in the complex and fast-moving world of today. That borrowing light from someone engaged in immoral or dishonest work could affect food and damage our chances of improving ourselves—how can we possibly guard ourselves against errors of such a subtle nature! The modern food industry confronts us with this sort of dilemma. The introduction of animal genes into vegetables and of minute quantities of animal derivatives into a wide range of vegetarian foodstuffs are just two of a multitude of such issues we have to face. We find ourselves saying: How can we pursue our objective of spiritual realization in such circumstances? If we have to be so careful in our judgement of what is right and wrong, how can we survive?

Once again, it is a question of cultivating the right attitude. It is impossible to live in the world without doing some wrong. The world itself revolves on duality, the interaction of positive and negative, of right deeds and wrong. We have to understand the principles that support our spiritual orientation, and then do our best. It is for each of us, looking to our particular circumstances, to decide at a practical level where to draw the line. We have to guard ourselves against being fanatical or getting so involved with the details that we lose sight of the bigger issues.

Because the links of karma are subtle and far-reaching, it is important that we understand how they work. Understanding the principles and being well-informed on the issues gives us the opportunity to choose to avoid their negative effects. But first we have to take care of the major issues—being penny wise and pound foolish will also keep us from our goal.

***A rare and precious opportunity missed***

If we are sailing to a specific destination and alter our course by only one or two degrees, with the passage of time and distance we will sail far wide of our mark. This is the human tragedy—that we so readily miss the unique opportunity we now have to realize God. What may appear to us as only a small deviation from the ideal can, over time, cost us the opportunity of a lifetime. Our emotions, attachments and passions blind us to our birthright, the real treasure that is within us. When we fail to recognize our unique potential, we forfeit a level of happiness beyond imagination. This, then, is the cry of all who have experienced the spirit—crying out to their fellow human beings to wake up to what life is, to take advantage of the present moment so we do not slip back once again into the vast and painful cycle of birth and death:

Born again and again, you die to be born again;  
 Thus, on a never-ending journey,  
     you suffer ceaselessly from misery and pain.  
 You have not realized the Creator Lord  
     and so you suffer, poor blind soul!

GURU ARJAN DEV<sup>50</sup>

The Muslim mystic Bulleh Shah speaks of it as gambling away this precious opportunity by staking our lives on worldly goods:

The rights of others you do not understand;  
 Burdened with a load of ill-gotten wealth,  
     you will have to return to the creation.  
 Robbed of a priceless opportunity,  
     in the gambling den of the world,  
     you are going to lose a winning hand.

SAA'IN BULLEH SHAH<sup>51</sup>

The saints remind us that the human form is the only one in which the soul can become aware of itself. It is the only form in which we can become conscious of what we are. It is the top rung of the long ladder of creation and, if we miss it, our soul will fall back into the great cycle of creation to travel endlessly through the myriad species which have neither the capacity for spiritual awareness nor the power of discrimination to lead them out.

A metaphor is used in Eastern mysticism in which human life is likened to a golden sword. We have received it as a gift, but instead of using it to blaze a trail of glory by immobilizing our inner opponents, we completely misunderstand its function and use it in the kitchen of the physical world to chop onions and tomatoes.

As we look back on our life when we pass through death's door, how will we assess it? Will we feel at peace with ourselves and secure? This is what we need to consider when faced with Jesus' question in the well-known lines from St Matthew's gospel:

For what is a man profited,  
if he shall gain the whole world,  
and lose his own soul?  
Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

*GOSPEL OF MATTHEW*<sup>52</sup>

### ***What is right action?***

Right action or living by spiritual principles is our way of transforming or spiritualizing our mind while protecting ourselves from the many negative influences of the creation that can tug us off course. Our growing sensitivity to the spiritual perspective enables us to see how even the smallest negative impulses create negative effects. We begin to understand why wrong action can never be justified. Living by our principles, we appreciate more and more the value of a clear moral structure to limit our potential for going astray. We

find we are able to make practical, well-informed choices so that we can meet our responsibilities. Gradually we learn from experience that living well is a question of never losing sight of our objective, of being moderate in all things, and of knowing where to draw the line between our needs and our desires.

Having looked at the complex and far-reaching effects of the law of karma, we are now in a position to define what honest living really means. By placing ourselves firmly in a spiritual context and understanding that all action comes from the simple law of give and take, we can define for ourselves a practical code of conduct that applies this understanding.

We create a moral structure, a code of values and principles, to put limits on our actions and to safeguard us in spite of our blindness. We have to be protected from our own mind. The mind is powerful, and it is the mind, preoccupied with the creation through life after life, that has kept us from enjoying the liberating power of Shabd. Negative habits have become so deeply entrenched and the tentacles of the passions are so fine and far-reaching that, in spite of our best efforts, we are likely to go astray again and again.

Without the redeeming power of the Shabd, no one can reach the final goal or destination. But to help ourselves we have to fulfil our part of the plan. We have to cultivate qualities that keep the mind turned towards the soul and hold it steadfast when the going is tough. We need positive qualities that are in harmony with the underlying spiritual reality of which our soul is a part. Our saving grace is that we have come in contact with a spiritual master, a lover of God, who knows where to go. The masters are examples for us of how to live in the world, and until we ourselves have attained their vision, we follow the path they have already trod.

# THE WAY FORWARD





### ***The transforming power of right action***

Ultimately it is grace and mercy—the mystery of love, the Shabd—that brings a person to the spiritual path. It is our responsibility, however, to contribute whatever we can to make the journey easier. The Lord’s grace is abundant, and when he wills, he will wipe clean our debts. But our contribution to this great journey, however small, is highly significant, for it is our effort to move towards him that brings his grace. As we begin to understand how life and karma work, it becomes very clear that the structure of our daily life must be sound. This is rebuilding our ship. This is making it seaworthy. A life built on another living creature’s suffering, whether human or animal, can never be a source of long-term happiness, just as a life built on a lie cannot lead to truth.

### ***Facing in the right direction: the positive way***

The moral ideal put forward by all cultures and traditions is one of simplicity and frugality—living lightly in the world, engaged in honest work.

Be industrious and frugal, and you will be rich. Be sober and temperate, and you will be healthy. Be in general virtuous and you will be happy.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN<sup>53</sup>

Most important, however, is our focus—that it be turned always towards the positive, towards the highest good. So important is our orientation in life that in the Sikh spiritual tradition, the word often

used for the spiritual adept, the master, is *gurmukh*, meaning simply 'one whose face is turned to the guru'. The guru is the window, at the human level, to the formless reality of God. As Meister Eckhart observes:

A man should orient his will and all his works to God and having only God in view go forth unafraid, not thinking, am I right or am I wrong? One who worked out all the chances ere starting his first fight would never fight at all. And if, going to some place, we must think how to set the front foot down we shall never get there. It is our duty to do the next thing: go straight on, that is the right way.

MEISTER ECKHART<sup>54</sup>

We have to turn towards our destination—and not waver in our choice. That which takes us towards God, to our spiritual goal, is right; we are to face in that direction and go forward. Worldly riches are of little consequence. In the final analysis, all sages agree that the riches of the world can never bring lasting happiness, peace of mind or joy. Master Charan Singh says:

Worldly achievements can never give you permanent happiness. You may be a king, you may be a ruler, you may do good to the world; but your good deeds alone will never take you back to the Lord. However, you will definitely get the fruit or reward. From 'C' class prisoner you will become an 'A' class prisoner. Instead of iron chains you will be bound with golden chains. From small huts you will be taken to palaces.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>55</sup>

So why do we keep looking for fulfilment in the things of the world? Sarmad gives us a vivid image of the sterility of such goals:

O Sarmad, why do you wander from place to place?  
 Where will you find love in this world?  
 A dead and dry tree provides no shade.  
 Greed invites only disgrace.  
 Without contentment there is no peace.  
 So, leave the world of greed with grace.

SARMAD SHAHEED<sup>56</sup>

Material rewards are loveless, and without love, which is the soul's nature, we will be always restless for something more. But in today's world, where success is almost always measured in terms of material riches, we are persuaded to give them importance. Our consumer culture encourages us to believe that we will not survive if we are not rich. It seduces us with images of the lifestyle it wants us to lead and tempts us to compromise ourselves to achieve the positions, promotions and jobs it persuades us we cannot do without. Thus it takes courage to actually walk the spiritual path as opposed to just talking about it:

Evil deeds, deeds which are harmful to oneself,  
 are easy to perform.  
 What is beneficial and good,  
 that is very difficult to do.

*DHAMMAPADA*<sup>57</sup>

To re-orient ourselves to the spirit demands constant and serious effort. We have to develop different, 'subtle' faculties, for the Word is subtle and can only be known with a different consciousness. The reality of spirit exists beyond the reach of intellect and senses, beyond our present grasp of the dimensions of space and time. To experience the Word or Shabd so that our faith becomes unshakeable, we have to forego our preoccupation with everything we are attached to. We have to make time for spiritual work. We have to

turn within ourselves to the quiet and sometimes lonely solitude of the inner world—we have to work in, and on, ourselves. Thomas à Kempis, the fifteenth-century Christian mystic philosopher, says:

Many are found that desire contemplation, but they have no mind to practise the things that are required thereunto....  
Men rest in signs and sensible things, and take little care about the perfect mortification of themselves.

THOMAS À KEMPIS<sup>58</sup>

To ensure that we go where we want, we must put up the sails of positive action—even though the majority of the world may drift in the opposite direction, pulled by the currents and tides of physical existence. We have to act, knowing where we are going and keeping our destination in view, and not caring what others say, think or do about our choice:

Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, fast as a deer and determined as a lion in doing the will of your Heavenly Father.

ETHICS OF THE FATHERS<sup>59</sup>

Then said Jesus unto his disciples,  
“If any man will come after me,  
let him deny himself,  
and take up his cross, and follow me.”

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW<sup>60</sup>

### ***An honest livelihood***

Central to the ideal of honest living is earning our own livelihood. Wherever possible, we should support ourselves from our own earnings and not live off the income of others. There are obvious exceptions, of course, such as a spouse who looks after the family

while the other spouse earns the income, or those who, because of sickness or age, cannot support themselves. But the general principle always holds true. And while we may rightfully live off an inheritance, we should bear in mind that inherited wealth amassed by dishonest means will one day have to be paid for.

Whatever we do in life should not go against the laws of country, society or humanity, nor should we cause harm or suffering to others. We should not lie, cheat, steal or deceive, and this applies to both material and emotional interactions with others. We should be fair in all our dealings, both with our equals and with those in lesser or superior positions to ourselves. We should share profits fairly, not depriving anyone of their rightful due. We should also meet the legitimate demands of our government. Master Charan Singh gives specific guidelines on this latter issue:

In our dealings with the Government (tax department) we should always do the right thing, not caring what the government does or does not do.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>61</sup>

He also advises that as far as is practical and possible we should ensure that our means of livelihood does not involve us even indirectly in negative consequences—such as businesses that at some stage lead to the suffering of people or animals. We have already discussed how being part of a chain of suffering, not just the main perpetrator, also implicates us in the resulting pain:

To handle meat items does involve a load of karmas, so followers of the Sant Mat path should always try to avoid this. Everyone is answerable for his own actions and the price has to be paid for all that we do or think. Try to avoid dealing in meat products if possible.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>62</sup>

In the time of Master Sawan Singh, a seeker, Saa'in Sharif-ud-din, came to him requesting initiation. Saa'in Sharif-ud-din was a Muslim ascetic who wore the ascetic's *kafanee*, a cloth wrapped round his neck for collecting alms. When he asked the master to initiate him, Master Sawan Singh refused to do so, saying, "For meditation, it is essential to earn one's own living. What is the use of giving the Name to a person who does not earn his own bread?" The next day, the ascetic took off his *kafanee* and his ascetic's robes, put on simple clothes, picked up an axe and started working as a woodcutter. The master then gave him initiation.

There are many instances of Master Charan Singh addressing the same point:

The Master can help in the spiritual progress of people, but they all have to earn their livelihood honestly to live in the world independently. Sant Mat expects everyone to live on his own honest earnings and not depend upon others. He must find some work and earn his own living. This is his duty.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>63</sup>

We ought to stand on our own legs and should not depend upon the charity of others for our livelihood. Every single penny that we receive from anybody shall have to be repaid somehow in this life or in a future one.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>64</sup>

We all have to have some respectable occupation in order to earn an honest livelihood and for that we have to prepare ourselves during youth. Without a stable job in hand, the mind will not have that freedom from worry and anxiety that is so essential for meditation.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>65</sup>

You should try to stick to one job and not change over from one to the other so quickly. Stability can come only when we stick to a job and make a place for ourself in the organization. In service we have to be patient, loyal and faithful to the management and the organization.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>66</sup>

These are very specific directives to help us achieve our goal. It is clear that if we do not have an honest livelihood, our spiritual practice will take us nowhere. The ideal the saints put forward is devotion to the Lord combined with dedication to work. Honesty will always bear fruit in time, even though its results may not be immediately apparent:

As far as you can, eat the bread of your own labour:  
 a living earned honestly never goes to waste.  
 Endowed with devotion to God and dedication to work,  
 our purpose in life is fulfilled.

GURU RAVIDAS<sup>67</sup>

The saint Namdev gives us a simple, three-point guideline:

With your tongue repeat the Name of God, O Trilochan.  
 Engage your hands and feet in work,  
 But give your mind to God, says Namdev.

BABA NAMDEV<sup>68</sup>

Work we do sincerely and honestly channels the mind's restless nature and makes us less susceptible to negative tendencies— "an idle mind is the devil's workshop" being a well-known proverb. Not only does such work direct the mind positively, it also makes us more appreciative of life's gifts.

***Sailing with the winds of contentment and detachment***

As we build around us the atmosphere we need to support our meditation, we will find that the ups and downs of fortune do not disturb us so much.

If a man does what is good,  
 let him do it again and again.  
 Let him set his heart on it.  
 Happiness is the outcome of good conduct.

DHAMMAPADA<sup>69</sup>

As we become happier, contentment and detachment fill the sails of our ship and carry us effortlessly in the direction we want to go. In the words of Emerson and Aristotle:

That which we persist in doing becomes easier—not that the nature of the task has changed, but our ability to do has increased.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON<sup>70</sup>

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

ARISTOTLE<sup>71</sup>

We cling to the things of the world only because we are frightened to let go. Once we let go and let our destiny take its course, we find that life immediately becomes easier and more pleasant. Since what we are to receive is already written in our destiny and we will receive neither more nor less—irrespective of what we do—the question we need to keep asking ourselves is: *What is the need to compromise our principles?*

True detachment from the world can only arise from attraction and attachment to something higher. Once we contact the Word

within us and experience its sweetness, we will become detached without any effort and automatically will let go of what we cling to now. Then our mind will reflect the tranquil and positive qualities of the soul rather than the fickle and negative nature of the senses. It will become our constant and supportive ally, propelling us on our journey, as it wants only to be associated with its new companion, the soul, so that it can experience more bliss.

### ***Charity supports detachment***

To foster detachment from the world and encourage love for the Creator, most spiritual traditions encourage us to give away a part of our earnings. Charity expresses the love that is the Creator by providing for others whose material circumstances make life difficult for them. Charity is not about the quantity given; it is about the love with which we give. In the *Bible*, this point is illustrated in a well-known story:

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, "Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

GOSPEL OF MARK<sup>72</sup>

What we find in practice is that even though we may want to give in charity, we find it difficult to do so because we are attached to whatever we possess.

We, who claim to be seeking eternal life, do not look with detachment on even the most insignificant object.... Let us

strip ourselves of everything, since our adversary stands before us stripped. Do athletes compete with their clothes on? No... Now we too claim to be athletes, and we are struggling against opponents far more skilful than any that are visible. Yet, instead of stripping ourselves, we try to engage in the contest while carrying countless burdens on our shoulders, thus giving our opponents many chances of getting a grip on us.

*THE PHILOKALIA*<sup>73</sup>

We do not see that charity brings with it its own rewards. When we give to others without any desire or expectation, when we let go of our attachments, we find ourselves relieved of the complications that worldly possessions often bring with them. In the words of the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger:

Renunciation does not take away. It gives. It gives the inexhaustible power of simple things.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER<sup>74</sup>

And the words of the wise servant-teacher, Mirdad:

More possessing — more possessed.

Less possessing — less possessed.

MIKHAIL NAIMY<sup>75</sup>

Giving away part of our hard-earned income inculcates in us an awareness that of everything we have, we actually own nothing. At moments when we find ourselves over-involved with the things of the world, when we find ourselves stressed or distressed on their account, it might be helpful to reflect: If I was told I had just one day to live, where would I put my energy? What would I do with my time?

It is so easy to forget that we are custodians, not owners, of our material wealth, and that death will separate us from it all one day. Everything we think of as ours, whether it is family, friends, possessions or other forms of wealth, is a gift that has been placed in our keeping. If we understand this, we will develop in our hearts a spirit of charity towards all life. We can then enjoy whatever we have without becoming possessed.

Our only real possession is our spiritual wealth, which we earn through worshipping the Creator. Giving away some of our material wealth is a way of reminding ourselves of this fact, and of expressing our reverence and gratitude to the Creator.

Sharing a portion of our income with those who will not use our charity for any immoral purpose supports our spiritual work—but we must always guard ourselves against pride. It is to protect us against this that Jesus, in the *New Testament*, advises that even the right hand should not know what the left hand is doing when we are giving something away.<sup>76</sup>

Money is dangerous for the seeker of spiritual wealth. Who of us has not seen how wealth confuses and corrupts? It is sometimes said that if one wants to ruin a person, just give him or her easy money. This is why people who are wise give away their wealth liberally. Kabir Sahib warns:

When wealth in the house increases,  
 When water fills a boat,  
 Throw them out with both hands.  
 This is the wise thing to do.

KABIR SAHIB<sup>77</sup>

True charity is liberating and strengthening. It frees the mind and reinforces our decision to cast in our lot with a power that promises infinitely more than all the wealth of the world can bring.

### ***Contentment, self-surrender and joy***

Contentment is the antidote to greed. Contentment can never be gained through the things of the world because nothing in the physical world lasts. Real contentment comes through surrendering ourselves to the spirit, to the ocean of love that is the source of all life and that is constant and limitless. By surrendering ourselves we surrender our responsibilities—the minute drop which on its own was clouded becomes pure once its dirt is taken up by the vast ocean.

Faith and love is the very foundation of Sant Mat—faith and love in Shabd and Satguru. Then comes surrender to the will of the Satguru—not a slavish but a loving surrender. The mainspring of action then changes, and the will of the Lord or the Satguru replaces the mind as the motive power. Then the soul is in perfect harmony with the Lord, mind is dethroned, and God is enthroned. It naturally involves a struggle, even a bitter fight to the last; but think of the crowning achievement too.... It is the Shabd that will eventually lift you above matter and maya.

MASTER CHARAN SINGH<sup>78</sup>

When we put our spiritual goal first, we find that our happiness and contentment increase. When our lives are clear, harmonious and balanced, we sleep well at night because we are at peace with ourselves. We discover for ourselves, through our own experience, that it is through the natural order of the Lord's creation and not through our efforts that we receive whatever we have:

In giving thyself over with all thy heart to the divine Will,  
not seeking thine own things ... so shalt thou keep one even  
countenance ... weighing all things with an equal balance.

THOMAS À KEMPIS<sup>79</sup>

It is again a matter of shifting to the spiritual perspective. In the *New Testament*, Jesus gives us a beautiful image of the attitude we need in order to live well:

Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you?

*GOSPEL OF MATTHEW*<sup>80</sup>

When we abandon our will to the will of the Creator; when we give our life into the hands of the Supreme Being knowing that we will get our exact due, not a whit less and not a whit more; when we remember that whatever comes our way, good or bad, comes because we have earned it; then we will become carefree as in childhood. Listen to the advice from two far-apart cultures, the Judeo-Christian and the Indian:

Give to God what is His, for you and all you possess are His. And thus did David express it: All things are from Thee, and we have given Thee only that which is Thine.

*ETHICS OF THE FATHERS*<sup>81</sup>

By surrendering to you that which is yours, what can I possibly lose?

KABIR SAHIB<sup>82</sup>

***The saints: the mirrors of truth***

Mystic adepts or saints stand before us as examples of how to live correctly in the world. Rumi says:

Know that from head to foot the *shaykh* [perfect mystic]  
 is nothing but God's Attributes,  
 even if you see him in human form.  
 In your eyes he is like foam,  
 but he describes himself as the Ocean;  
 In the eyes of men he is standing still,  
 but every instant he is travelling.  
 You still find it difficult to grasp the *shaykh*'s state,  
 even though he displays a thousand  
 of God's greatest signs—  
 how dull you are!

JALALUDDIN RUMI<sup>83</sup>

Because the saints are self-realized and God-realized beings, because in everything they look only to the Shabd, to the positive creative power that is God, they embody all that is positive. Their every action stands witness to that positive power.

By following their example, by moulding our lives on theirs, we too come to know ourselves. Again, Rumi expresses it beautifully:

The reflection cast from goodly Friends  
 is necessary until you become,  
 without the aid of any reflection,  
 a drawer of water from the Sea.

Know that the reflection first cast is only imitation,  
 but when it has become continually recurrent,  
 it turns into direct realization of the truth.  
 Until it has become realization,  
 do not part from the Friend by whom you are guided;  
 do not break away from the shell:  
 The raindrop has not yet become a pearl.

JALALUDDIN RUMI<sup>84</sup>

Until we become pearls, that is, until we become realized beings, there is always the danger that our blindness will confuse us as to what is right and wrong. That is why we need the saints to emulate. They are living examples of how to live. Saints are the finest examples throughout history of the full flowering of the most excellent human qualities. Whether of royal or humble birth, they live lives of simplicity and nobility, living in the world but not letting its negative aspects impinge on who they are.

### ***The battle of life***

Our goal is the treasure of the spirit. Whether we call it God, the Word, Truth, Shabd, Wisdom or Love does not matter. We are not to be distracted from our goal. Jesus taught:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,  
 where moth and rust doth corrupt,  
 and where thieves break through and steal.  
 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,  
 where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt,  
 and where thieves do not break through nor steal;  
 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW<sup>85</sup>

The way is never easy. This is the most difficult journey of our lives. The saint, the true human being, is our mentor, and by looking to him we understand the qualities we need to imbibe. We realize, too, that we have joined battle with our mind—we are to subjugate it, win it and transform it—and it is the most powerful adversary in the creation:

If you vanquish your mind,  
you have vanquished the world.

GURU NANAK<sup>86</sup>

If a man were to conquer in battle  
a thousand times a thousand men,  
and another conquer one, himself,  
he indeed would be the greatest of conquerors.

DHAMMAPADA<sup>87</sup>

The prophets and saints do not avoid spiritual combat.  
The first spiritual combat they undertake in their quest  
is the killing of the ego, and the abandonment of  
personal wishes and sensual desires.  
This is the Greater Holy War...

JALALUDDIN RUMI<sup>88</sup>

All eyes and ears are shut,  
except for the eyes and ears of those  
who have escaped from themselves.

JALALUDDIN RUMI<sup>89</sup>

### ***The saints live among us***

Throughout history, we find evidence of many highly evolved souls whose lives stand witness to the principle of honest living. The thirteenth-century saint Namdev earned his living as a dyer and

printer. In the fifteenth century, the world-renowned mystic Kabir Sahib worked as a weaver and carried his loom on his wide-ranging journeys to meet disciples and seekers. Guru Ravidas earned his living as a cobbler, despite having disciples of royal blood who would have gladly supported him. Kabir Sahib's contemporary, Guru Nanak, supported himself and his family by farming. The sixteenth-century mystic, Dadu Dayal, worked as a cotton carder. Paltu Sahib, an eighteenth-century saint, earned his livelihood as a shopkeeper.

In recent times, we have the example of the line of the Radha Soami masters. Baba Jaimal Singh served as a soldier in the army for thirty-two years and then lived on his pension for the rest of his life. Baba Ji's disciple and successor, Master Sawan Singh, supported himself and his family as an army engineer, later purchasing farmland to provide an income for his sons and their descendants. In 1947, shortly before he died, he announced to the large crowd of his disciples gathered together for satsang:

All my life I have lived on my own income. I have never taken a single paisa of the sangat for my personal use, nor have I ever borrowed money from the satsang funds. For going out on satsang tours I have no doubt used the Dera car, and it is likely that sometimes Bibi Ralli may have taken and cooked vegetables from the Dera garden. For these two lapses I ask the sangat's forgiveness. If anyone owes me money, I absolve him of the loan. If I owe anything to anybody, I request him to let me know and take payment from me. If I have spoken harsh words to anyone, I request him to please forgive me.

MASTER SAWAN SINGH<sup>90</sup>

Master Jagat Singh, the next master, was a chemistry professor who lived simply and abstemiously, giving the greater portion

of his income to poor students who could not afford to pay for their education. His successor, Master Charan Singh, worked as a lawyer, and when he became the master he supported himself from his family farm. While meeting his private responsibilities, he also gave generous financial assistance to people in need and regularly donated produce from his farm to the rapidly growing sangat. His successor, the present living master, Baba Gurinder Singh, worked as a business executive and, through his farm and properties, continues the saints' tradition of supporting himself and his family, accepting neither money nor gifts for his personal use.

In 1957, Master Charan Singh formed the Radha Soami Satsang Beas Trust and transferred to it the entire sangat assets, worth millions of rupees, which until then had traditionally been in the master's name. As a result of this change, all money and property received by the Dera in donation are now credited to this Trust. The Trust administers all the funds and properties of the community and keeps accurate accounts, which the master makes available to anybody wishing to see them.

We have only to read a little about these saints to see how they led exemplary lives and spread their message of truth while supporting themselves meticulously from their own sweat and toil.

### ***The transformation***

On our journey through life, if we weigh ourselves down with a cargo of stones, we will be unable to reach our destination. If, like the mystics, we accumulate no cargo, then the winds of God's love in the form of the Shabd will power our ship. To make the journey, we need enthusiasm, fortitude and stamina. There will be many occasions when we will fail. The Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, advises us to think positively, to rejoice that we are on a healing, restorative path of positive action, rather than get caught up in our failings. He says:

Do not feel qualms or despondency or discomfiture if thou dost not invariably succeed in acting from right principles; but when thou art foiled, come back to them, and rejoice if on the whole thy conduct is worthy of a man, and love the course to which thou returnest.

MARCUS AURELIUS<sup>91</sup>

He also advises us to cultivate an approach to life where we see everything afresh every day, as a new opportunity to be true to ourselves:

A new life lies within your grasp. You have only to see things once more in the light of your first and earlier vision, and life begins anew.

MARCUS AURELIUS<sup>92</sup>

It is because we carry around with us the baggage of our negative mental habits that we lose heart, lose courage and judge ourselves. We won't let go of them and we even seem to enjoy the misery they bring. Such emotions will take us nowhere. Jesus advised his disciples to be as little children;<sup>93</sup> when we are young we see life with open hearts and minds. Baltasar Gracian warns us against a tendency towards sadness and self-pity, pointing out that such tendencies may ultimately prove to be our downfall:

Search for the good in everything. There is nothing that does not hold some good if we but seek it. But the minds of some men are burdened with such unhappiness that, out of a thousand good points, they manage to strike upon a lone defect, and this they toss about like scavengers of men's minds and purposes. There is in it a perverse joy so that they can feel superior. Avoid such grave diggers, for in time it is they

who fall into the hollow opening. Be the man who, among a thousand evils, strikes upon the single good. Good finds good, but good that comes too late is as good as nothing.

BALTAZAR GRACIAN<sup>94</sup>

While it is good to be self-aware, judging ourselves too harshly is dangerous and counter-productive. With the same generosity of spirit and tolerance that we show to others, we need to be compassionate and charitable towards ourselves, too.

So that we never lose sight of the law of the universe, we are advised by all cultures to remember the golden rule “do as you would be done by”—to treat others as we would wish to be treated by them:

What you do not want others to do unto you,  
do not do to others.

CONFUCIUS<sup>95</sup>

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would  
that men should do to you,  
do ye even so to them:  
For this is the law and the prophets.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW<sup>96</sup>

As we understand the importance of living by principles that are rooted in a spiritual perspective, we begin to appreciate what ‘honest living’ means. As long as our vision is limited to physical existence, there will never appear to be justice in the world. Once we realize that life is more than the physical—that we keep coming back to this same theatre of action to face the consequences of our actions—and once we accept that people can be reborn in forms below the human simply to repay the suffering they cause to others, then we begin to understand the necessity of right action today.

Our task is to bring our lives in harmony with our spiritual goal, but for this, we have to be patient. A child matures from infancy through childhood and adolescence into adulthood; likewise, for our long-term good, we need to be balanced and permit our development to take place naturally. If we strive to reach our goal by simply suppressing habitual negative tendencies, there will certainly be a reaction at some future date. Suppression and repression are not the answer. The process of putting our lives in order and transforming ourselves spiritually has to be seen as a lifelong, steady evolution towards our goal.

Life can be as simple or as complicated as we make it. Marcus Aurelius gives us a guideline of utter simplicity:

If it is not right, do not do it. If it is not true, do not say it.

MARCUS AURELIUS<sup>97</sup>

While we are travelling along on our journey, we need to remind ourselves constantly—through meditation, satsang, and reading and listening to the words of the saints—of who we are and where we are going.

The wisdom teachings of the world put an ideal before us to guide us in this process of spiritual transformation. They encourage us to go step by step in the direction we want, to be practical and to reason with ourselves. We are living as part of the creation and we all have our own destiny which manifests itself as responsibilities we have to fulfil.

### ***Conclusion***

When, before our initiation, we undertook to live by spiritual principles, we effectively committed ourselves to change our orientation away from material goals. Through this commitment we guard ourselves against wasting the precious gift we have been given. As we live by our principles, we discover that this is a two-way

process: living honestly supports our growth as true and joyous human beings; this growth then further strengthens our resolve and ability to do what we know is right. Living honestly makes it easier for us to recognize and resist the negative path of the mind; as we draw nearer to the source of the Word, we find increasing delight in the spiritual way.

By applying our principles, we grow to see life in its true perspective. We compromise our values only when we cannot see the spiritual order of the creation. Master Charan Singh used to say that we would not even steal a pencil in the presence of a five-year-old child; the child's innocence would mirror to us the dishonesty of our action and would make us feel ashamed. Saints guide us to remember that the Shabd, that power which enlivens, sustains and governs the entire creation, is present within us twenty-four hours a day, and that we are accountable for all we do. They guide us to clothe our every action with this awareness. Then we will certainly reach our goal.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The reader may note that all books, scriptures and parts of scriptures, irrespective of religion, are italicized.
- <sup>2</sup> *Bible*, Revised Standard Version (hereafter cited as RSV), *Job* 38:2, 4.
- <sup>3</sup> Albert Einstein as cited in *Einstein, A Life* by Denis Brian (John Wiley & Sons, 1996), p. 388.
- <sup>4</sup> *Bible*, King James Version (hereafter cited as KJV), *Luke* 6:37–38.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ethics of the Fathers*, in *The Prayer Book: Weekday, Sabbath and Festival*, trans. and arranged Ben Zion Bokser (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1957), p. 241.
- <sup>6</sup> *Bible* (RSV), *Proverbs* 5:22.
- <sup>7</sup> *Sri Daduvani*, (Jaipur: Sri Daduvani Prakashan Smiti), p. 728.
- <sup>8</sup> *Bible* (KJV), *Matthew* 6:24.
- <sup>9</sup> *Bible* (KJV), *Matthew* 6:30, 33.
- <sup>10</sup> *Dhammapada* V:3 (62).
- <sup>11</sup> *Bible*, *Matthew* 10:30.
- <sup>12</sup> Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*, complete translation (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas), letter 75.
- <sup>13</sup> *Philokalia*, trans. and ed. G. E. H. Palmer, Phillip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 246.
- <sup>14</sup> Master Charan Singh, *Divine Light* (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1996), letter 175.
- <sup>15</sup> *Adi Granth*, Farid, p. 1379.
- <sup>16</sup> *Adi Granth*, Guru Arjan, p. 102.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Wisdom of Baltasar Gracian*, ed. and adap. J. L. Kaye (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), p. 72.
- <sup>18</sup> *Dhammapada* V:10 (69), 12 (71).
- <sup>19</sup> Master Jagat Singh, *Science of the Soul*, 9th ed. (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1994), IV:8, p. 183.

- <sup>20</sup> Jalaluddin Rumi, cited in *Philosophy of the Masters* vol. 3, by Master Sawan Singh, 1st ed. (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1996), p. 227.
- <sup>21</sup> *Bible* (RSV), *James* 5:4.
- <sup>22</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, cited in *Wisdom of the Ages*, ed. Mark Gilbert (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1934), p. 42. Italics added.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), chapter 66, p. 139.
- <sup>24</sup> *Adi Granth*, Guru Arjan, p. 1358.
- <sup>25</sup> *Adi Granth*, Guru Arjan, p. 391.
- <sup>26</sup> *Qur'an* 17:35, 2:188.
- <sup>27</sup> *Bible* (RSV), *Exodus* 20:15,17.
- <sup>28</sup> *Dhammapada* IX:8 (123).
- <sup>29</sup> Master Sawan Singh, *Gurmat Sidhant* (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas).
- <sup>30</sup> Master Jagat Singh, *In the Footsteps of the Master* (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas), letter dated 18 April, 1949, p. 77.
- <sup>31</sup> *Dhammapada* XXIV:22 (355).
- <sup>32</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, VIII:33–34, trans. George Long, revised by Classics Club editors, in *Marcus Aurelius and his Times*, (Roslyn, New York: Walter J. Black, 1945), p. 85.
- <sup>33</sup> *Bible* (KJV), *Mark* 10:24–25.
- <sup>34</sup> Master Charan Singh, *Die to Live* (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1995), answer to question 17.
- <sup>35</sup> *Rubaiyat-e-Sarmad*.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, part 1, “The Author’s Profession of Faith” (1794).
- <sup>37</sup> *Kafian Bulleh Shah*, Punjabi ed. (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1994), p. 39.
- <sup>38</sup> *Bible* (KJV), *Matthew* 23:25–26, 28.
- <sup>39</sup> *Sultan Bahu*, by J. R. Puri and K. S. Khak, English ed. (Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1997). *Bait* 31.
- <sup>40</sup> *Kabir Sakhi Sangreh*, Part 1 (1980).
- <sup>41</sup> *Adi Granth*, Guru Nanak, p. 1245.
- <sup>42</sup> *Paltu Sahib ki Bani*, I:240.
- <sup>43</sup> *Adi Granth*, Guru Nanak, p. 1245.
- <sup>44</sup> *Dhammapada* III:10 (42).
- <sup>45</sup> *Bible* (KJV), *Luke* 8:11–15.
- <sup>46</sup> *Kabir Granthavali*.
- <sup>47</sup> *Dhammapada* XXIV:9 (342).

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## Books and Authors Cited

**Adi Granth** The scripture held sacred by the Sikhs, containing writings by various saints of the Indian subcontinent, who lived between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. The 1430-page book was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev at the end of the sixteenth century and includes the teachings of Guru Nanak and five of the nine Gurus who succeeded him. The common thread throughout the *Adi Granth* is the importance of the Word or Name and the need for a master on the spiritual path.

**Aristotle** (384 BC–322 BC) Born in northern Greece, he was a philosopher, logician, and scientist whose works greatly influenced Western culture.

**Aurelius, Marcus** (121 AD–180 AD) Born in Rome, he was both Roman emperor and an exemplar of Stoic philosophy.

**Bahu** (1629–1691) Hazrat Sultan Bahu was one of the best known poet saints of the Punjab. A contemporary of Saa'in Bulleh Shah, he wrote a great number of books in Arabic and Persian as well as one in Punjabi expounding mystic philosophy.

**Bhagvad Gita** Literally, 'The Song of the Lord', it embodies the teachings of Lord Krishna, given in the dialogue between Krishna and Arjun on the battlefield of Mahabharat, and is one of the most popular books of Hindu philosophy.

**Bible** The sacred scripture of Judaism and Christianity, written over the period of c.1000 BC to c.100 AD. Consisting of the Old and New Testaments (according to the Christian designation), only the Old Testament is recognized by Judaism. The Roman Catholic *Bible* also contains the books of the 'official'

*Apocrypha* (e.g., *Ecclesiasticus* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*) which are absent from the Protestant *Bible* and not included in the Hebrew canon.

**Bu Ali Qalandar** (d. 1324) Hazrat Bu Ali Qalandar was born in Iraq. His family later settled in Panipat, India. He wrote mystical poetry in both Persian and Punjabi.

**Bulleh Shah** (1680–1758) Saa'in Bulleh Shah, a disciple of Inayat Shah, lived and taught chiefly at Lahore. He composed numerous songs of mystical love and longing in Punjabi.

**Charan Singh** (1916–1990) Master Charan Singh was the Master at Dera, Beas, from 1951 to 1990. A lawyer by profession, he travelled widely and carried the universal teachings of the saints, Sant Mat, throughout the world.

**Cloud of Unknowing** Devotional classic of the Protestant tradition, it sprang from an age when English mysticism was in full flower (1200–1300). The author is unknown but is thought to be an English priest who lived during the latter half of the fourteenth century.

**Confucius** (551 BC–479 BC) Born in China, he was China's most famous teacher, philosopher, and political theorist.

**Dadu or Dadu Dayal** (1544–1603) Dadu Sahib, a saint of Rajasthan, was well known for his boldness in defying the orthodox priests and teaching the path of the Word. He was born in Ahmedabad in Gujarat, and taught chiefly in Jaipur and other centres in Rajasthan. It is said that Akbar, the Mughal emperor, invited him to Fatehpur Sikri in 1584 and listened to his discourses. He was often called Dadu Dayal, the compassionate one.

**Dhammapada** The primary book of Buddhist scripture, it includes 423 verses attributed to the Buddha regarding the "Way of Righteousness".

**Einstein, Albert** (1879–1955) An American physicist born in Germany, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1921. He believed that religious experience is the driving force behind scientific research.

**Emerson, Ralph Waldo** (1803–1882) American essayist, poet and philosopher.

***Ethics of the Fathers*** Part of the *Mishnah*, it was composed by rabbis who lived during the first century BC through the second century AD. It is a collection of comments about life, submitted in the name of the great teachers of Judaism as fatherly advice to the people they sought to educate.

**Farid** (1181–1265) Sheikh Farid, a Muslim saint whose verses are preserved in the *Adi Granth*, was the earliest-known poet of the Punjabi language. Born near Multan (now in Pakistan), Farid undertook rigorous self-discipline and physically punishing methods to achieve his goal of God-realization. Eventually, he was advised to go to Qutub-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki of Delhi, who revealed to him the path of the Word. He spent the later part of his life in Pakpattan, Punjab (now Pakistan).

**Franklin, Benjamin** (1706–1790) American statesman, writer and noteworthy inventor. He published many works on the subjects of economics, religion, philosophy and science.

**Gracian, Baltasar** (1601–1658) A Spanish mystic and clergyman, he authored many books, including *El Comulgatario* (On Holy Communion), his only religious work.

**Guru Arjan** (1563–1606) Fifth in the line of Guru Nanak Dev, his teachings are recorded in the *Adi Granth*. Through great effort Guru Arjan Dev collected, classified and compiled the writings of the *Adi Granth*, including saints of like minds to emphasize the oneness of God, the equality of all people and the pursuit of truth. He was supported by Emperor Akbar to help establish the unity of God and the brotherhood of men. Jahangir, Akbar's successor, thought Arjan Dev a heretic and had him tortured to death.

**Guru Nanak** (1469-1539) Born at Talwandi, near Lahore, Guru Nanak Dev spent a large part of his life travelling to spread the teachings of the Word or Name. He was the first in the line of the ten Gurus whose teachings are recorded in the *Adi Granth*.

**Heidegger, Martin** (1889–1976) Born at Mess Kirch, Black Forest, Germany, his works gave rise to the modern philosophical movement called Existentialism.

**Jagat Singh** (1884–1951) Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh was a devoted disciple of Master Sawan Singh, who appointed him his successor in 1948. He was Master of the Radha Soami Satsang Beas from 1948 until his death in 1951.

**Jaimal Singh** (1839–1903) Baba Jaimal Singh was the founder of the Radha Soami colony near Beas in the Punjab. He was a disciple of Soami Ji Maharaj of Agra and was appointed by him to propagate the Sant Mat teachings in the Punjab. He appointed Master Sawan Singh as his successor.

**Kabir** (1398-1518) Born in Kashi (Banaras or Varanasi), Kabir Sahib travelled throughout India, teaching the practice of the Word. In Kashi, one of the main centres of Hindu orthodoxy, he earned a meagre living as a weaver and faced unrelenting opposition from the priestly class for teaching people of all castes how to worship God. He attracted a large following of disciples, Hindus as well as Muslims, and was outspoken in condemning ritualistic observances. The versatility and power of his poetry is still widely acknowledged and enjoyed.

**Kempis, Thomas à** (1379/8–1471) Born in Germany, he is renowned as the probable author of *The Imitation of Christ*, an important Christian inspirational work.

**Krishna** Much loved throughout India, he is believed by Hindus to be the incarnation of Vishnu, the preserver. The *Bhagvad Gita* (Song of the Lord) is a philosophical dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjun, held on the battlefield of the Mahabharat.

**Mathnavi/Masnavi** Form of Persian and Urdu poetry consisting of couplets corresponding in measure, each rhyming independently, interspersed with explanatory headings in prose. A *masnavi* is a narrative verse written in a specified metre running through the entire work, and would generally describe love stories or the deeds and exploits of kings and heroes. *The Masnavi* usually refers to the *masnavi* written by Jalaluddin Rumi, known also as

Maulana Rum (1207–1277). It was a landmark epic of mystical poetry regarded by his followers as a veritable treasure house of esoteric knowledge.

**Meister Eckhart (also Eckehart)** (1260–1327/8) Born in Germany, he was a philosopher and mystic.

**Naimy, Mikhail** (1889–1970s) Born in Lebanon, he was educated as a professor of science in Palestine, a theologian in Russia and a lawyer in the United States. *The Book of Mirdad*, published in 1948, is a weave of legend, mysticism, philosophy and poetry, addressing the deep meaning of human existence.

**Namdev** (1270–1350) Born in Maharashtra, Baba Namdev was a tailor and calico printer by profession, and was initiated into the path of the Word by Visoba Khechar. Baba Namdev's songs, known as *abhangs* or 'songs eternal', are preserved in the *Gatha*. He spent the later part of his life in Punjab and died in the village of Ghuman, the birthplace of Baba Jaimal Singh some five hundred years later.

**Paine, Thomas** (1737–1809) English-born American political philosopher and author best known for his pamphlet *Common Sense* in which he urged the North American colonies to declare their independence from Britain.

**Paltu** (1710–1780) Paltu Sahib, a grocer by profession, was a saint who preached the path of the Word and lived most of his life in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, the birthplace of Lord Ramchandra and a centre of Hindu orthodoxy. Disciple and successor of Govind Sahib, Paltu Sahib asserted that people of any caste can worship God and strongly denounced ritualistic observances; ultimately he was burnt alive by the local priests.

**Philokalia** A collection of texts written between the fourth and fifteenth centuries by spiritual masters of the Orthodox Christian tradition.

**Qur'an (Koran)** The Islamic sacred book, believed to be the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Mohammad who was born approximately 570 AD. All memorized and written material that was available was gathered and compiled in the present

authoritative version approximately twenty-five years after his death in 632 AD.

**Ravidas** Guru Ravidas was a well-known saint who lived in Kashi and travelled across Rajasthan and other parts of India. He was a contemporary of Kabir and is believed to be a disciple of Swami Ramanand. Born into a low-caste Hindu community, he supported himself by making and repairing shoes. In spite of this social handicap, he had a great impact on the many people who came to him for spiritual guidance, including Princess Mira Bai and Raja Pipa. Some of his writings are preserved in the *Adi Granth*.

**Rumi** (1207–1273) Jalal al-Din (Jalaluddin) Mohammad Rumi, the most famous of the Sufi saints, known also as Maulana Rum (our lord from Rum). He was born at Balkh (then Persia, now Afghanistan); from there the family migrated to Konya in Turkey, which was known as ‘Little Rome’ (Rum) at that time. Rumi was a renowned religious scholar. When he met his master, Shams Tabrizi, he achieved mystic realization.

**Sarmad** (1618–1661) Hazrat Sarmad was born in a Jewish family in Kashan, Persia. He lived in north India and taught the practice of the Word. As his name indicates, he remained in a state of God-intoxication (*sar-mad*). He was beheaded for heresy by Emperor Aurangzeb, and was thus known as Sarmad Shaheed (Sarmad, the martyr).

**Sawan Singh** (1858–1948) Known affectionately to his disciples as the ‘Great Master’, Master Sawan Singh was the successor of Baba Jaimal Singh and the Master of the Radha Soami Satsang Beas from 1903 to 1948.

## Books on Spirituality

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