

February 2012

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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The Secret to Unity

When the one Lord revealed himself to me,

I lost myself in him.

Now there is neither nearness, nor union.

There is no longer a journey to undertake,

no longer a destination to reach.

Love, attachment, my body and soul,

and even the very limits of time and space,

have all dropped from my consciousness.

My separate self has merged in the whole.

In that, O Bahu, lies the secret

of the unity that is God!

Sultan Bahu



Commitment

Time is an equal opportunity for everyone. We are all allotted the gift of twenty-four hours in a day. But how we make use of time varies with every individual. It is almost like a block of marble. Give a block of marble to someone who cannot see its potential, and you end up with the same block of marble. But put it in the hands of a master sculptor, and that very same block can be transformed into a beautiful masterpiece.

Every sculptor looks at his ‘block of marble’ with an artist’s eye. Committed to the discipline of his craft, slowly and surely, he chisels, shapes and polishes the stone until the lifeless block is transformed into an object of beauty.

There are a few things that can fuel a person’s commitment, and among them is one’s dedication to excellence. The desire for excellence is what carried Michelangelo through to the completion of his work on the Sistine Chapel. That same desire is what drove Thomas Edison to keep persisting until he finally created the light bulb.

The one vital ingredient necessary to maintain this superior level of commitment whilst in pursuit of excellence is discipline. The word itself is a derivative of the word ‘disciple’. It therefore stands to reason that one cannot be a committed disciple without it.

Discipline, which signifies improvement through tribulation, is learned through acceptance; that is, not by hearing, reading or thinking, but by experiencing it.

As quoted in St. Augustine’s Exposition on Psalm 119

On the day of initiation, we all made a commitment to our Master. We made a promise to fulfil the purpose of our human life. In this spiritual marriage between our soul and the Shabd, the Lord promises us salvation. All he asks for in return is that we commit ourselves to following his instructions.

In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, Soami Ji relates the Lord's promise to take the soul back to its true home and also reveals that it is the Master who in fact helps us with our efforts. The soul implores:

*Reveal your own real form to me, Master...
This physical form is also very dear to me,
but let me experience that one through this one –
the hidden through the manifest.*

And the Master offers his commitment to the soul:

*I shall not rest till I show you that form –
why are you in such a hurry?...
Give up your misgivings, be steadfast in your love –
a love tempered with faith.
I shall myself help you put in the effort,
I shall myself take you to your ultimate home.*

Every moment of meditation slowly and surely chisels away the block of stone, as we attempt to produce that masterpiece; attempt to achieve that perfection, attempt to become one with the Radiant Form. As Soami Ji reminds us, it is the Master who helps us with our efforts and our feeble attempts. All he asks is that we remain steadfast in our love and our meditation.

But this is not easy. It requires from us a discipline to hold on to the principles of Sant Mat. As Maharaj Charan Singh explains, it is a constant struggle:

One has to sacrifice a lot in life to achieve the end. You constantly have to be alert with your mind as if you were on a razor's edge. Christ himself has said: it is easy to fall, and the road to destruction is wide, but straight and narrow is the way to everlasting life. Sant Mat teachings are very simple, but to follow them is much more difficult than it looks. It's a constant struggle with the mind, and one has to change one's entire way of life and one's attitude towards life. To follow Sant Mat requires a complete transformation, so it's not easy.

Die to Live

In general, we can approach daily commitments in one of two ways: We can either focus outwards on the world, or we can keep our focus within. Those who focus on the world and its problems allow themselves to compromise and waver; because worldly conditions keep changing, their commitment level also fluctuates like the wind.

In contrast, if we were to focus inward, at the eye centre, we would always remain committed to our path, regardless of our circumstances. Even if we were to be surrounded by a raging storm, meditation would give us the strength to face the battering winds of our karmas.

It's not that the environments change, but you will not be affected by those environments if you attend to meditation. You can't change the environments, you can't change the course of events, you can't change the situations. Your destiny has brought you into a certain atmosphere, into a certain situation,

and you have to face all that. But you are given strength so as not to be affected by all those situations, you won't be bothered by them. Just attend to your meditation.

Die to Live

The Master has given us the opportunity; he has given us the time and his commitment. He has brought us to this path of love. Were it not for his grace, we could have been pulled into a hundred other directions. It is now up to us to make use of his gift and to offer him our commitment.



*For God's sake, remember thy Beloved, for in this is thy true happiness.
Keep before thine eye the promise which thou hast given to him.
O man, faithfulness in keeping the promise is most precious!
Forget this not, get out of the hunter's net and be free.*

Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine

Taking out the Trash

In households across the world, there is a chore that is performed without hesitation and on a regular basis. Since the beginning of civilization, mankind has performed this task intuitively. Come rain or shine, whether we are rich or poor, or live in a mansion or a hut, we all take out the trash. The accumulation of rubbish leads to rotting stench, unwelcome pests and sometimes even the formation of hazardous bacteria. Therefore, the fouler the trash, the quicker we are to get rid of it.

Unfortunately though, there is some trash that often gets left behind week after week, year after year, and sometimes even lifetime after lifetime. It's the trash that we allow to accumulate in our hearts.

What really is the 'trash' in our hearts? Each one of us has a heap full of hurtful memories, feelings of bitterness, anger or regret from the past that we have not been able to let go of. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could just stuff all these negative emotions into a hefty trash bag and leave it at the curb with the rest of the rubbish for the garbage man to collect? How much lighter we would feel!

So how do we unburden our souls? How do we lighten our load? How do we take out the trash that has encumbered our hearts for years?

There are two methods of maintaining a neat and tidy heart. The first is not to allow any new rubbish to pile up and the second is to work hard at scrubbing away any grime that has already accumulated.

As for the first, the solution is quite simple: don't react. The Master has often told us that when we react, we are giving the other person exactly what he or she wants. By reacting, we make a much bigger mess of the situation and allow our emotions to spill out in an uncontrolled manner, soiling our tongues and minds. Once Maharaj Charan Singh humorously explained that one fool under one roof is

enough! On another occasion, he gave similar advice to a wife who questioned how she should react when her husband lost his temper:

I think you should react lovingly. You shouldn't react as he's acting; but you should respond lovingly to whatever he says, and smilingly try to answer his questions; try to satisfy him. And, if even then he's not satisfied, you shouldn't become angry like him. It's sufficient to have one angry person under one roof rather than two under the same roof. So you should always try to handle such situations tactfully, lovingly and smilingly.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Love is the best weapon with which to fight anger. It leaves your opponent dumbfounded and surprised. After all, they were expecting and hoping you would react. If in the heat of the moment we are unable to draw the sword of love, it is still much better to turn to our simran, keep silent, and let the storm pass. We will notice that once all has blown over, there is a much smaller mess to clean up.

As for the second problem, how do we deal with old stains – with previous wounds inflicted upon our heart that we just cannot seem to dust off? The answer is also simple: let go. The truth is that while no doubt the karmic events we faced were definitely hurtful, they are now in the past. The pain we feel in the present is often self-created – we only add to our own misery by feeling sorry for ourselves and replaying certain events in our minds over and over again. By doing this, we keep our pain fresh and alive.

For instance, when we have anger or hatred towards a person, there is less likelihood of it developing to a very intense degree if we leave it unattended. However, if we think about the projected

injustices done to us, the ways in which we have been unfairly treated, and we keep on thinking of them over and over, then that feeds the hatred. It makes the hatred very powerful and intense.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness*

Essentially, instead of cleaning up the mess, we add fuel to the fire. We are all just actors playing our part in this karmic play. Holding on to our bitterness until the end of our days puts us at risk of carrying these karmas over to the next life. The Masters have warned us that we go where our attachments are. If we constantly contemplate upon those whom we feel have wronged us, we will be pulled back to them again and again.

We should not be so involved and obsessed with each other, nor so attached to each other, that we forget this is a part given to us to play on a stage which we have to leave one day. For we become so attached to each other that we forget we are playing a part and this attachment pulls us back to this world again and again.

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

The only way to break this cycle is to let go of our past pain and regrets. How do we let go? The best detergent for the soul is forgiveness. Nothing in this world is as liberating as forgiveness, which helps the forgiver more than anyone else. Once we forgive, we tend to forget; automatically the reruns of our painful memories stop playing in our minds and our hurt gets washed away. Sometimes, it isn't even a particular person that we need to forgive – we feel that destiny itself has wronged us. In such cases, we need to take a deep breath and

forgive our destiny. After all, clearing these karmas here and now is taking us closer to our true home.

When our house is untidy, we clean it. When our body is dirty, we wash it. Even when we get an e-mail that is no longer useful to us, we delete it. It is a basic human instinct to discard waste. Feelings of bitterness, hatred, anger and regret are not only useless, but they are also harmful to us. If left unattended, just like trash, they will rot, turn venomous and become hazardous to our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. After all, that is why they say “cleanliness is next to godliness”! So let’s make it a daily task to take out the trash and keep our hearts clean.



All of us have a keen desire to see God and wish that he may make our hearts the seat of his throne. But where should he sit, when our hearts are so full of worldly desires and impure cravings that practically no room is left for the Deity? Unless the heart, the place which we want him to grace with his presence, is thoroughly cleansed, and all the dirt and filth is absolutely removed from the inside, how can he occupy it?... God's light penetrates only a pure and holy heart.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

The Only Question

A journalist who had read the Vedas and other holy books got into a discussion of the Sant Mat teachings with a satsangi friend of his in Amritsar. Impressed by the teachings, the journalist decided to visit Beas to see Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji. He wrote down fifty or sixty questions he planned to ask the Master, for questioning and arguing were central to his work.

The first satsang answered most of his questions; nevertheless, he wrote down a few more. The second satsang answered all the rest. Not ready to give up, the journalist wrote a few more and asked for an interview with the Master. After putting him at ease with some personal queries, Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji said, “Is there anything you would like to ask?”

The journalist replied, “Well, I did have a few questions...” Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji told him that he was welcome to ask any questions he wanted to. But the satsangs had satisfied his queries; he had forgotten the new questions and was in no mood to ask anything. Observing his silence, Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji said, “Son, do not hesitate, take out the piece of paper from your pocket, and ask whatever questions you have.” Overwhelmed, he tearfully requested initiation.

Heaven on Earth



*I could only wish that you would go in after getting concentration,
and when the Master will begin to talk to you and
reply to all your questions inside, all miseries will be over.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

The Positive Approach

There is an ancient folk story of a wise old man and his grandson having a discussion. The grandfather tells his grandson that he has a battle raging inside of him, which no one else can see. He explains that it is a battle between two wolves. One wolf is bad – he portrays anger, jealousy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, inferiority and ego. The other wolf is good, and he portrays joy, peace, love, humility, kindness, compassion and faith. “It is an ongoing battle between the two wolves,” he tells his grandson. The grandson then asks his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?” The wise old man replies, “The one you feed.”

This story very simply illustrates that our life is what our thoughts make it. Perhaps more than anything else, it is our attitude and our thoughts which determine the quality of our lives.

However, nowadays it is becoming increasingly easy to spiral down the trail of negative thoughts. Looking around us, we hear all about the great injustices humankind faces in the name of religion; switching on a news channel, we mostly hear how harsh situations are in one country or another; conversations amongst friends inevitably lead to topics on poor financial climates as well as the frustrations we face in our daily lives.

Most of the time we may not even realize that we have stepped into the zone of negative thinking. If we were to examine ourselves closely, we would realize that most of us spend the day complaining rather than appreciating. Waking up in the morning to a rainy day, we complain about how the bad weather ruined our plans. Doing our meditation, our mind takes us on an endless journey of our worldly thoughts, and we end up complaining how we just cannot sit. On the way to work, stuck in a traffic jam, we complain about how much precious time is being wasted.

In the life of a disciple, a positive attitude is of utmost importance. If we are able to look at all the situations in our life in a positive manner, we will be able to sit for meditation with a light, happy heart. And the more we are able to meditate, the more positive and happy our outlook becomes.

Looking at Hazur Maharaj Ji for inspiration, we realize how, in every situation, he always looked for the positive.

As we pulled off, Maharaj Ji settled down in his seat and remarked, "Ah, fine weather!" "How can you say that? It's wet," we retorted. "It could be pouring," was the optimistic reply and so typical of him throughout the trip. We weren't allowed to say anything negative; he would immediately find something positive about it, which would always result in a burst of laughter.

Legacy of Love

It is our Master who we always turn to for encouragement, and how much easier life could be if we were to start adopting a policy of always looking for the positive in our lives. As we tread this path to God-realization, we have so much to look forward to. The fact that we have been given this human birth, and have come into contact with a living Master is enough reason to be thankful for each day.

You have been given the passport to go back to your own home where your supreme Father is waiting to receive you. What greater joy, blessing or bliss can one have in this world of misery and suffering? In fact, no other person should be so happy in this world as an initiate who is on the path. He should always keep his final goal in sight – the treasures, the joys and the bliss that await him in his true home.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Did You Know?

There is no harm in dividing the period of meditation in two shifts, that is, morning and evening, instead of sitting for two and a half hours uninterruptedly. It is also good to establish a regular schedule and stick to it. In fact, in the beginning it is more or less necessary. But one should gradually and eventually try to meditate for at least two and a half hours in one sitting.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

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The first part of the journey is the most difficult and takes a comparatively long time. When the consciousness has been completely withdrawn from the body, the limbs and the entire body below the eyes will be the same as dead. It is actually a process of dying while living. One is unconscious only without but completely conscious within, whereas before this, one is conscious without and unconscious within. This condition of the body is only temporary, and when the consciousness returns at the close of the meditation period, you will again be as living and as active as before – even stronger.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

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So long as mind is our master, it will keep us in the wheel of birth and death. When we are its master, it will be our most faithful ally. Therefore, its control is imperative, and the object of human birth is to control it and thereby get off the wheel of life and death.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

To Empower the Soul

If only we could have smooth relationships and perfect circumstances at all times! But the mystics remind us that this creation is itself an imperfection – a characteristic of duality. So, are we seeking the impossible? As human beings travelling on the spiritual path, we are in the process of becoming perfect. As our awareness develops, we develop God-like qualities that enable us to slowly but surely shed the layers of imperfection that encrust our souls.

In the meantime, when we find ourselves in the middle of chaotic and difficult situations, our general tendency is to react, by showing displeasure and frustration through impulsive action or emotionally charged words. And what usually happens is that we end up making matters worse and tension escalates, leading to a whirlpool of negativity.

Although spirituality tells us that it is the unfolding of our karmas that is behind the highs and lows of our lives, we forget this and let our emotions take over, and then we simply react. Reacting, however, is an unconscious habit that does not involve thinking. It is an automatic response fuelled by emotion instead of logical thinking, a fruitless habit that always leads to regret. Calm thinking, on the other hand, takes energy and time.

Satsangis should form the habit of 'thinking' – clear thinking. Clear thinking is ninety percent abhyas (spiritual practice). Clear thinking is a blessing. It can easily be attained by a little practice.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

Responding rather than reacting is the road less travelled but indeed the road we ought to take. It involves stepping out of the heat of the situation and thinking about possible solutions and the right course of action. Responding requires acting with faith that a solution will present itself. It requires us to stay open, trust in our Creator and believe that the solution, in fact, already exists. We only need to be in a state of calm in order to receive his inspiration.

We have to remember that there is a reason why we are advised by the mystics to meditate. The main purpose of following a spiritual path is to understand the importance of making meditation the core of our lives. As we build on our meditation, it gives shape to our being – to the way we think, the way we act and the way we are not supposed to react. Meditation teaches us to surrender our will and accept his will. Surrender leads to acceptance, and acceptance finally eradicates our personal will. It is a natural process of taming our egos and developing self-control.

The effects of meditation are always accruing, albeit very subtly. As we go forward in our evolution, we will come to truly appreciate and value that sacred time spent in his remembrance. We will start to look upon it as the best gift we have ever been given and not simply a task to be accomplished. We start to experience that solace, comfort and peace that energizes us and helps us face our battles and maintain our composure at all times.

The Masters tell us that the battle is inside, and it is inside that it has to be fought. This fight is the real purpose of our life. This is the way of the spiritual warrior, the way to empower the soul, and enable it to shine in its splendour and glory!



What Is It All About?

When circumstances are going well for us, life runs relatively smoothly. Day after day, we carry on with our family duties, work and responsibilities. We attend satsangs, seva activities, social gatherings – but it isn't until something 'happens' to us, when we go through some kind of suffering or adversity, that we are tested on how well we are able to apply the teachings of the spiritual Masters. When life throws challenges our way, such as a major financial loss, a sudden discovery of a terminal illness, or even the death of a loved one, how do we react? Does it take us towards the Lord, or away from him?

When we are faced with these difficulties, we begin to question what life is all about. We start to analyze and look for answers in anything that gives us comfort. People try and reassure us with soothing words, they tell us that it is because of our karmas that we have to go through this difficult phase, we are told that this too shall pass – but when we are going through so much pain, no amount of words or reasoning can soothe the aching heart.

Our ability to bear pain with faith and courage comes down to how attached we are to the spiritual path and the Master. Our regular spiritual practice gradually enables us to withstand worldly adversity. Maharaj Sawan Singh beautifully explains:

When a person is depressed for want of food and resources, when even the last penny has left him, when he is without a job; even then if he gives place to the Lord in his heart, he shall forever be freed from want. When one is torn by cares and anxieties, when his body is diseased, when he is deeply immersed in domestic worries, when he is at the mercy of the

turmoils and sorrows, when he wanders to and fro and finds no home nor hearth where he can rest, even then if he carries out the meditation of the Lord, he shall attain inner calm and peace.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. 1

We all know how soothing it feels to be in the presence of the physical form of the Master, especially when we are facing difficult circumstances in life. Our hearts and minds are at peace; we come to understand that worldly problems are necessary challenges and that they are just a passing phase. And most important, we are reminded that nothing is more important than our meditation. When we are in his presence, we receive so much inner strength and we regain our confidence, which allows us to go out and face the world with courage.

That same feeling of peace, love and strength can be felt, even more potently, when we meditate and enter the sanctuary within. As we progress in our spiritual practice, we realize that none of the worldly afflictions can truly affect us. We learn to accept whatever happens as his will.

Attachment is the cause of our present misery. All unhappiness in life is the result of our attachment to our relations and our possessions. Where there is no attachment, there is no misery. With meditation, we slowly get detached from the world, and attached to the Shabd within.

When we see people suffering towards the end of their lives, we often wish that we will not have to go through the same kind of suffering. We say that the best way is to 'go peacefully' in our sleep. But the fact is, the way we die is not in our hands. What is in our hands is how we live – how we prepare ourselves for that eventuality whilst we still have the time. That process of preparation involves attending to our meditation, and becoming attached to the Shabd

within so that when we finally face death, we will not be filled with fear. At the most painful stage of our life, wouldn't we want to be able to withdraw our attention and direct our thoughts towards the Lord?

So what is this life all about? We have been blessed with this gift of life to attend to our spiritual practice and, if we follow the instructions put forward by the Master, then everything will fall into place. We will learn to live a balanced life with composure and with love; our dealings with our relations, friends and colleagues will become even more meaningful – in fact, we will become better friends, better children, and better spouses; and the hardships of life will not affect us.

If we walk along life's path holding our Master's hand, we will never falter. If we spend our lives attending to both our worldly and spiritual duties with love and commitment, always keeping in view the objective of following our Master's instructions and pleasing him – is that not what life is all about?



*Practise remembrance of the immortal Name,
and the whole purpose of your life will be fulfilled.*

Dariya Sahib, as quoted in
A Treasury of Mystic Terms, Vol. 3

Something to Think About

If someone sincerely endeavours to recognize the will of God, then there is another extremely subtle way in which that person may become conscious of the divine will. It is that particular capacity of the human mind that we call conscience which acts as a channel for receiving impulses of divine guidance. To cultivate receptiveness to inner guidance – to make one's conscience sensitive and obey its hints – is one of the important conditions for progressing on the spiritual path.

Adventure of Faith

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Try whatever method you want, try any technique you can think of – give what you want in charity, go on endless pilgrimages, bathe in all the holy waters, read all the scriptures, pierce your ears, wear your hair matted, smear ash on your body, go on bowing at the tombs of past saints, renounce your family, hide away in some forest or mountain retreat – (but) without the practice of the Word, you will not escape from the prison of the body under any circumstances whatsoever.

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

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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.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*



Maharaj Charan Singh

Karmically Speaking

It is indeed a fair statement to make that one is held accountable for one's own actions. However, the notion that we must even take responsibility for actions that we cannot recollect having committed and whose severity we are not aware of – that is an extremely bitter pill to swallow.

Mystics have spared no effort to enlighten us about our current predicament – that we are here because of our karmic debits and credits. The relationships we are born into, the friends we have grown so fond of, and all others we interact with, have been strategically placed in our lives – and this allows the barter of action and reaction to play itself out.

Society has defined our ethical, moral and legal codes of conduct. Furthermore, a judicial system is also enforced to ensure that order and fairness is maintained throughout.

On a macro level, the fairness principle is what keeps the more visibly obvious actions in check. On a micro level, however, it is this very same law that appears to be the barrier to our freedom. Gross actions, whether of philanthropy or of crime, both lead to logically just results, and we are thus able to conduct ourselves in a manner that will result in the outcome we desire. However, how can we cope with the more subtle, barely noticeable actions, such as stepping on an ant and not even realizing it? Or, by uttering a sharp passing comment that may unintentionally hurt another? Acts committed in ignorance – or even those that may seem too casual for us to think through their consequences – are also not outside this law, and have to be accounted for in kind.

The key to freedom, the saints advise, is to clear oneself entirely of all karmic burden. Sadly, karmic balance sheets are not readily accessible to track historical dues and collections, nor are human beings capable alone of settling their karma. Oblivious to whether we are reacting to an action, or acting on a reaction, we mostly end up further entangling ourselves in this vicious labyrinth, leaving little scope for a way out.

But by heeding the words of the mystics, if one tries in all earnest, it is possible to consciously retard the accrual of karmic debt. For example, adopting a vegetarian diet and leading an ethical life comprising the highest of values would seem to give us the control over our karmas that we are looking for. However, effective as this may seem, it too fails to provide a permanent solution by which we can settle previous accounts or even deal effectively with new karmas. And we are still left helplessly accountable.

Clearly, the creation's architecture has been designed to be a foolproof system, whereby the interdependency between lives is paramount for its functioning. As a result, souls remain trapped, forever indebted to one another.

It is only through the sheer benevolence of the mystics that human beings are able to realize that they are slaves to the consequences of their own doings. Without the mystics' intervention, the crux of this problem would have forever remained a veiled ordeal. Furthermore, not only do the saints awaken us to our current situation, they also hold with them the solution to overcome it.

The saints tell us that the key to freedom lies not in the architecture, but with the architect. He that has designed the creation is in full control of it, and while all karma can never be settled, it can be pardoned – by a perfect mystic.

He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

Bible, John 14:9

With whose grace do we gain admission to the court of the Lord? Surely not by our own efforts. Alone, we can do nothing. We can never, by ourselves, traverse the uncharted terrain of the inner path. We owe everything to the immeasurable grace of the Master. He showers his blessings on us by joining us with the Shabd and Nam, removing all our doubts, and pulling us out of this quagmire of illusion. It is our Master who puts us on the right path and awakens in our mind abiding love and devotion for the Lord. Blessed with his infinite grace, through meditation, we seek the door, we find it, and we knock.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

The perfect mystics are a sea of compassion, and their very essence is forgiveness. The love for their souls knows no limits as they tirelessly shepherd home those under their shelter. However, to come under the shelter of a perfect Master is more than merely coming to see him. It means discipleship and submission of the self, both of which penetrate deep to the core of one's being. Having developed faith and trust in him, the disciple knows that the Master is in full control at all times, and is ready to pardon all that stands between him and the Lord.

However, let it be clear that in submission, we need to work with the Master through our meditation, for the pardon that we seek is not in a settling of scores, but an illumination of the self to a higher state of being – no longer bound by the law of cause and effect.

But first, to understand discipleship we must let go of our arrogance to align ourselves with our plea to the Master. Only then, in humility, can we pray: may his mercy be greater than his justice.



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Does all humanity eventually arrive at the final goal, without any exception?*

A: When he wants to finish the play, ultimately everybody will go back and merge into him. We do not know how long he wants this play to go on. So, if he wants to finish it, and if he wants to save us, he can save us tomorrow. He will just finish what we see in this world. But as long as it is going on, we are a part of the agony and we are trying to escape it.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

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Q: *How does the satsangi know when the Master is pleased with him or displeased with him?*

A: Well, to be very frank, the Master is never displeased with any soul. If he were displeased, why would he put us on the path? It is our own conscience which pricks us. He knows our sincerity, and he's here to help us rise above those weaknesses, to help us go beyond those weaknesses. He's not here to hurt us or to be displeased with us. He's never displeased. It is our own conscience which hurts us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

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Q: *Can you say something about the value of seva?*

Seva comes from the heart. It is not a compulsion for anybody – it is not that you have to do it, but you want to do it. It must come from within, and there must be love in doing seva. There should be no feeling of obligation that we have to do it.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *Maharaj Ji, how did you succeed in creating love for your own Master?*

A: How to create love for your Master? If one honestly thinks about it, I don't think you can succeed in this unless he gives you his love. He gives his love. But we can make ourselves receptive by meditation. By living in the commands, leading our lives the way he wants us to lead them, and by attending to our meditation, we are just being receptive and provoking his love. But otherwise, it is all given as a gift by him.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

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Q: *Master, how can we communicate with the inner Master?*

A: When you are sitting before your beloved, how do you communicate? Is it through language? Does your language rightly express your feelings, what your face, your eyes or other things express? There's no language here at all. The soul doesn't need any language to communicate with the Father. It is a language of understanding and love that you automatically develop spiritually when you go to that level of consciousness. In love there is no language at all.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

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Q: *Maharaj Ji, when several hundred satsangis may be meditating in different parts of the world, can you actually be in touch with them all, whenever they happen to be meditating or needing help?*

A: Well, brother, our Master is not the flesh. Our Master is the Word, the shabd, the logos which is within every one of us, and we are in touch with that. So everybody has his own Master within himself. We have to look to him within for guidance. So the question of my looking at anybody doesn't arise. We each have our own Master within us and he looks after us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Tug of War

How often have we felt that a part of our being wants to be in this world, yet another part wants to be closer to the Master within? There is so much to do, both in our material and spiritual worlds, that there is a constant tug of war going on within ourselves.

It is not as if we do not value the path, the Master or his grace. But when we come face to face with this competitive world, we struggle to stay afloat; to make sure that there is food on the table, to pay for the education of our children and to maintain a roof over our heads.

We are so preoccupied in striving for success in this world, that we awaken each morning to a mind cluttered with problems and daily 'do' lists. We often find ourselves struggling for time, and as a result totally neglect our meditation.

This is where our lives have become a total contradiction. The saints explain to us that just as a needle has a natural pull towards a magnet, our soul has a natural inclination towards its source – the Lord. And because meditation is the only possible path we can traverse to go within and meet our Creator, we will never find true happiness unless we channelize our energy towards our meditation.

So we constantly remind ourselves that whatever we acquire and accumulate during this life – money, property, name and fame – none of it will go with us when we die. And as long as we are in this human body, we should make use of it and search for our real home. As Soami Ji says in *Sar Bachan Prose*:

From this house, go to that house.

Meditation Is Not Difficult

Logically, if the Lord has designed the path leading back to him within us, there cannot be anything more simple and natural than just following it. But perhaps we are too complicated to practise something so simple. Our mind is forever analyzing, raising questions and doubts. How many times have we heard the Master telling us to stop analyzing?

Most of us are looking for quick results in meditation and hence encounter this frustration. Saints explain to us that everything will unfold at the right time. We have to learn to be patient and submit to the Master's will. After all, he is more anxious to see us reach our destination than we are.

Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

I wish that all of you who have received initiation go inside the eye centre, become the dwellers of the beautiful mansions your Creator has made for you, and be masters of there in your own right. In a way it is not difficult. One has only to look inside one's own self instead of looking out. Yet it is difficult in another way, on account of our having so little hold over our mind.

Bring Simplicity in Life

We have to work to bring simplicity into our lives. We have become totally worldly and are forever craving for more: more property, more money, more security.

We are amazed that there are people around us who can live humbly and simply. But we have all read the account of how simple, uneducated hill people who followed the Master's instructions immediately upon initiation, experienced their consciousness leaving

their bodies and their attention rising up to the eye centre. So what is our intellect worth if it cannot help us achieve the main purpose of human birth?

Contentment

Saints explain to us that contentment is an important aid to meditation. A mind that is forever craving for more is a restless one, and hence will not allow the body to sit still in meditation. We cannot have control over the one without the other. If the mind is uneasy and erratic, the actions of the body will be same, so we have to learn to develop an attitude of gratitude towards the Lord for giving us so much abundance.

For most of us, contentment means being satisfied with our financial or social situation. But the saints give a very broad definition of it. In the words of Maharaj Sawan Singh:

If one does not gain any object in spite of efforts, or succeeds to a very small extent only and yet remains calm and collected and does not feel troubled in his mind, he is said to have contentment. When one is surrounded by troubles on all sides, is not honoured by anyone, is talked ill of by everyone and is faced with defeat on all sides, but does not feel aggrieved by the thought that others are happy, then it is a sign of contentment.

Philosophy of the Masters Vol. III

Cutting the Attachments

We are stuck in this whirlpool of birth and death due to our deep-rooted attachments. Our roots stretch back not only through this life but to billions of previous lives. The only way to get out of this is to cut

these roots with the sword of Nam, as given by the Master. As Christ says in the Bible: “I come not to send peace but a sword.”

When we go through worldly suffering, sometimes a feeling of detachment is created within us. These sufferings make our stay in the world so miserable that we automatically look for that peace within, and we feel the need to give more time to meditation.

A Happy Ending

Let us be thankful that, despite our miniscule efforts to become one with the Creator, the story of our life will definitely have a happy ending. We will succeed in our endeavour because the Master is with us, and will be with us, all the way. The end is guaranteed to be happy, but the Master still wants us to put in that miniscule effort of attending to meditation regularly, and living in his will. It is the only way we can thank him for everything that he has blessed us with.



If the precious jewels and treasures of all the seven worlds and seven oceans were taken and placed before a lover, and someone were to ask him whether he would prefer this wealth or the Beloved, the lover would not even consider the treasures. He asks from God for only the nectar of his Name.

Guru Ram Das, as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II*

What We Mean by Love

As human beings, we experience the normal range of human emotions. We are capable of intense feelings of one kind or another, and most people, at some time in their lives, have felt the intensity of being in love with another human being. We have felt a deep sense of attachment to our parents, our spouse, our children, our friends, even our pets.

All religions have had something to say about love; they have laid great stress upon its qualities, and have emphasized that love is the standard for their rules of conduct. Sant Mat itself is known as the path of love.

Yet, from the teachings of this path, we know that there is difficulty in explaining love. Saints of all ages have tried to describe the glory and beauty of this love. But even they have declared it beyond the capacity of any tongue or pen to describe it in any human language. Love, the mystics say, can only be experienced. While we may have theoretical knowledge of it, this can never satisfy us – just as reading the recipe of a delicious dish can never satisfy our hunger, nor can the description of a perfume delight our senses, nor can written music entertain us unless it is played on an instrument or sung. In the same way, theoretical knowledge of love cannot give us the joy and bliss that we seek.

What then do we speak of when we speak of love? What we often speak of is either physical love or divine love. The mystics say that physical love is the love of worldly people who are continually tied to the world and its objects. On the other hand, divine love is that of the devotee of the Lord, and it establishes a permanent connection with God.

What does this mean? The saints tell us that the principle that is at the core of worldly love and spiritual love is the same; the difference between them is only in the direction in which the current of love is flowing. If the current of love is directed outwards toward worldly relations and possessions, it often leads to attachment entangling us further in the birth and death cycle. Attachment is the root cause of sorrow, as everything in this creation is short-lived and perishable. When love is directed towards the sensual pleasures – otherwise known as lust – it is limited and ends in degradation and disappointment. It drags one down to suffer and grieve.

But when this very same current of love forsakes the pleasures of the world and the senses, and is directed inwards to God, it becomes divine love. Divine love is true affection and ennobling; it ends in perfection. Attaining true love means turning around and facing the other direction – inward instead of outward, upward instead of downward. Perfection will never be attained in the outside world.

If we direct our attention towards the Lord who is our real destination and get connected with that Word (the sound current which he has kept within every one of us) we get detached from the senses, from the worldly objects and the physical forms. Then we eventually realize eternal bliss and everlasting peace.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*

The living Master inspires us to focus our attention towards the Lord. When we are in his presence, we experience a love that words fail to describe. His love is unconditional and selfless; he accepts us like a loving father, in spite of our heavy load of sins. He has only one purpose: to teach us how to return to the Lord. And he gives so

much of himself tirelessly and patiently so that we make the effort to fulfil this objective. His love is a unique treasure which surpasses any form of worldly attachment. In fact, longing for the Lord is awakened and gradually we detach ourselves from the world. The love for the physical form of the Master drives us to seek the inner Master, otherwise known as the Shabd or the Word made flesh, which is the true form of the Master. As the Shabd, he is the embodiment of true love. Maharaj Charan Singh further explains:

Real love is engendered and fostered only when you go in, come in contact with Shabd and have a glimpse of the Master inside.

Light on Sant Mat

It is our relationship with the Master that brings us halfway on the road to love. It is this connection, that gives us the strength, power and wisdom to follow the path. This is why it is often said that the bond that is established between Master and disciple is beyond all other relationships in this world because it is born of divine love.

The saints say that there is nothing in this world worth shedding a tear for, and that only the Lord is deserving of our love. And so, while living in this world and performing our duties towards family, friends, relatives, and fellow human beings, let us strive to give our heart to our true Beloved.

We can do that by regularly and consistently attending to our spiritual duties. It is this practice of sitting every day in meditation that will enable us to understand the true meaning of love. And when our hearts are sufficiently pure, the Master will appear within and manifest himself in his Radiant Form, transforming our understanding of love into blissful experience.



Repartee of the Wise

Once, two Brahmin seekers, desirous of listening to Dadu Dayal's discourses and of being initiated, were in search of him. When they approached his hut, they met a bare-headed man coming towards them. To meet a bare-headed person was considered a bad omen by Brahmins, and to neutralize the evil effect of this meeting, they gave a knock on the man's head. They asked him, "Where is Dadu's house?" He indicated a humble cottage close by and went his way.

When the Brahmins reached Dadu's hut, they were informed that Dadu Dayal had gone out. When Dadu returned after some time, they found that he was the same person on whose head they had knocked. Stricken with remorse, they profusely apologized. Dadu smiled and put them at ease by saying, "When a customer goes to buy an ordinary earthen pot, he gives it a tap to see that it is not broken. You have come to take a Master. You are justified in fully testing him before you adopt him."

Dadu, The Compassionate Mystic

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When Maharaj Sawan Singh was posted in Murree, the bungalow of the Commanding Engineer happened to be just above his bungalow. One day the Colonel was coming out with his daughter for a walk. Just then a cart driver passed near them on the road and a wounded ox was pulling the cart. The Colonel and his daughter were very much touched at the pitiable condition of the ox and said, "Why have they over-loaded this poor wounded creature?" Maharaj Ji replied, "That is true. You cannot bear to see the suffering of this poor creature, but have you thought about the pain animals go through when they are slaughtered for the palate of man?"

Extracted and edited from *Spiritual Gems*

The Key

As much as the mind loves to read books and absorb uplifting information, the Masters ceaselessly remind us that it is the application of those teachings that will actually make the difference in our spiritual life. It has been said many times that Sant Mat is a path of transformation, not a path of information; that there is a big difference between knowledge and understanding.

Meditation is the practical expression of the Sant Mat teachings and our greatest endeavour of this life. It is the key to our transformation. The Masters tell us that when we meditate and are in touch with the Shabd, the mind gets slowly detached from its desires, karmas are destroyed, and gradually we start to see little changes in ourselves. We become more positive in the way we think, in our attitude and behaviour and in the way we face our circumstances. We are more relaxed about life in general and more accepting of the events that unfold in our lives. Eventually, we experience the kind of tranquillity that does not depend on outward circumstances.

Just imagine if a pharmaceutical company suddenly developed a drug that could permanently induce these effects of meditation. Surely, the first thing we would do is run to the drugstore and pick some up regardless of how much it costs. Yet what the Master offers us is far beyond anything available in this world, and he lets us have it for nothing more than our sincere and one-pointed devotion at meditation.

But weakness is weakness and we fall prey to the irrational mind. It will prioritize seva, darshan and satsang instead of constant effort at meditation. The Masters explain to us that seva, darshan and satsang

are means of support on the spiritual path. Their purpose is to create an atmosphere that will inspire us to meditate. In a way, they are like the vitamins that we take to supplement our diet. But the point is, we cannot live on vitamins alone: we need real food. Similarly, the mystics explain that the food for the soul is meditation, and there can never be a substitute for that.

Training the mind to let go of attachments and concentrate at the eye centre is a lifelong process. Whenever the mind runs out, we catch it and bring it back to the eye centre. Every time we bring it back, the mind gets a little more used to being there. The Masters promise us that one day it will become our friend and, in time, it will learn to sit at the eye centre.

In the meantime, evidence of progress is clear. Slowly but surely we are changing; we are growing up. If any disciple were to reflect upon the way he conducted himself in days gone by, before he was initiated, he would plainly see how much he has changed.

When we have the devotion of the Lord within us, that devotion, that love, brings all the qualities within us. It just transforms us; our whole outlook is changed. The more we go near to him, the more we find ourselves close to each other and the more we love one another. The more we find peace within, the more we find peace outside. It makes us true humans.

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

Hazur had been telling us all along: From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come. And it is all coming. The Masters have always emphasized the Sant Mat bottom line – meditation is the key. It is the field where

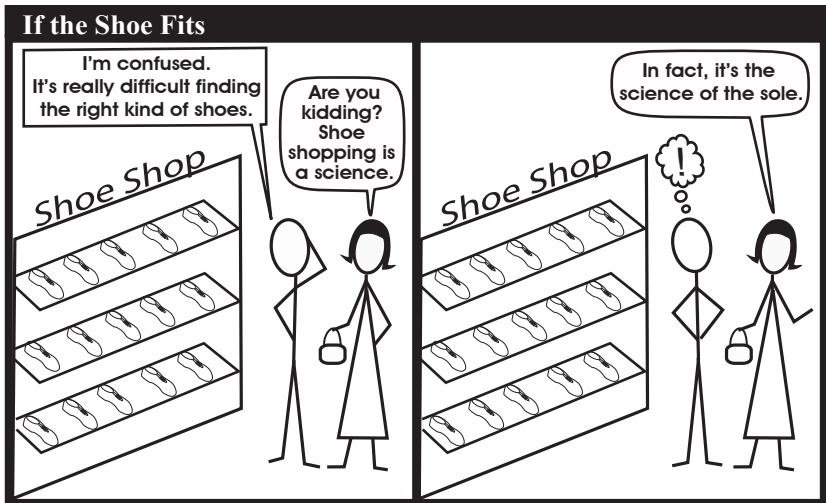
love blossoms. And even if all we had was a tiny spark of that love, we would be entering the world's arena carrying it like a blazing torch. We would think with that love, we would speak with that love, we would act with that love, until one glorious day, we would discover that we are actually no more, and love is all there is.



The attraction of God's love is more intense than any other attraction.

*It is the attraction of the devotee for the Beloved,
and this is also the key that enables one to unlock the secrets of God.*

Jalaludin Rumi, as quoted in, *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II*



Effacing Our Fears

Walking down the corridor of a hospital is not the only thing that demands valour. Every sunrise seems to bring new reasons to be afraid. If it is not an approaching tornado, then it is a letter from our employer telling us that we are being made redundant, the school principal's phone call, or even a robbery in the neighbour's house. Fear seems to have become a natural reaction in this perilous world we live in.

The truth is that aside from these valid and understandable fears, we also entertain, or rather indulge, in fears that are completely illogical and inexplicable. But whether logical or not, fear is definitely not productive; it is in fact debilitating, discouraging and extremely discomforting.

Philosophical writings are full of thought provoking remarks that celebrate a simple life that is better lived with courage over, say a prosperous life that is filled with fear. And we couldn't agree more with them, but it is easier said than done.

To avoid fear, man has concocted many strategies, like insurance policies, wealth management, increased police security and regular medical check ups. But courage does not come from increased funds in our bank accounts or any other material safeguards; it is a result of spiritual maturity.

The Masters explain that spiritual maturity is a result of our efforts at meditation. Gradually, we begin to grow more aware of our true spiritual nature and are able to rise above the weaknesses and fears that result from our false sense of self. With meditation, we begin to appreciate that we are not merely human beings fending for ourselves in an intimidating world, but that we are in fact spiritual beings

fathered, guided and constantly protected by the Lord as we make our way Home through the alleyways of this human existence.

With spiritual maturity, we develop more love for the Father. We all know how love raises people to extreme heights and gives them enormous courage. England was witness to an act of such fearless love: Princess Alice, Queen Victoria's second daughter, had a young son who was quarantined due to a horrible affliction known as black diphtheria. The doctors repeatedly warned the mother to stay away from her son. But one night, while passing by outside his room, she heard her little boy tell the nurse, "I miss my mummy's hugs." Hearing these words, her heart melted and she ran to his room and wrapped him in her arms. A few days later, she was buried. Love for her child defied even the fear of death.

With spiritual maturity also comes more faith, which for all practical purposes could actually be an antidote for fear. Fear, at its centre, is a perceived loss of control. Now, if we believe that we are not in control to begin with, and that the Lord is the one who is orchestrating our entire lives, then wouldn't losing that control be irrelevant? We know that He is the one in charge of our lives. In the Bible we read:

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Matthew 6:25

When the Lord is providing for the entire creation, why do we feel that we need to take control of our lives in order to survive? All we can do is to put in the effort, and remember that the result of our efforts is

thankfully not in our control but in the much more capable and caring hands of our Father.

With spiritual maturity there is a greater awareness of the Lord's presence in our lives. What could be more comforting than being able to rest our troubles upon his shoulders and feel his protection and guidance? With the beloved by our side, where is the room for fear?

When we are overwhelmed with the presence of God, our fear begins to dissolve. All helplessness disappears as he appears.

Vern A. Jensen, *Unlimited Power*

Fear cannot be resolved with pills, money or bodyguards; these things can camouflage the sting of fear for a certain time but they can never strike at its root. It is meditation and the ever-increasing spiritual maturity resulting from it that is the only effective antidote to fear.

For those of us who experience fear, the road to fearlessness may be a process a little too lengthy for our liking. But what we must remember is that during our weakest moments, the Master's pull is strongest. Maharaj Sawan Singh, using illness as an example of such moments, says in *Spiritual Gems*:

In fact, during illness the blessing of the Supreme Father is extraordinary. The sound current becomes clearer.

Thus, it is actually during moments of fear that we are given the opportunity to choose whether to indulge that fear or to gather all our love, and faith and trust in his grace, and confront those fears head-on. Perhaps, at those times, we not only get to face our fears but also efface them once and for all.

Humility

An Explanation

The one thing all of us on the path of Sant Mat have to understand is the value of humility. Meekness and humility are great virtues upon this path and unless we acquire them and do away with our ego and pride, progress is most difficult. Our ego and pride stand in our way and make the mind powerful and strong. It is humility which will rid us of our ego and self-importance. All saints teach us this lesson in their writings. What is our value after all? What is the individual's value in this vast creation that the Lord has created? Billions of universes like ours lie within man, the microcosm in this macrocosm. Our existence, that of the individual, has absolutely no value and we should not attach much importance to ourselves. The path of the saints, which is the path back to the Lord, is for the humble and the meek.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



Humility is not weakness. It is such a powerful thing that all the powers of the world have to bow to it. Man conquers himself with pridelessness. No one can defeat a prideless man, as behind his humility is acting the secret power of the Lord. Humility is an ornament of great men.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. III*

Back to the Present

Have you ever noticed how we get caught up in constantly thinking, brooding over past events, worrying about the future or simply just day-dreaming? We allow our mind to stray and get so absorbed in the details of our thoughts that we miss out on the reality of the present, thereby losing the most valuable gift we have – the present moment.

The present moment is where we are, but instead of focusing on the now, we waste time living in our thoughts. When we are attending a lecture or a discourse, when we are reading or relaxing, the mind interrupts us with distracting thoughts. The mind likes to be distracted, it is accustomed to wandering and naturally inclined to dwell on the negative, stirring up our emotions and causing mental agitation. It traps us in the past and the future, whether through anger over a betrayal, at being treated unfairly, in reliving past struggles, in fear of losing something or through stress about some perceived problem. Just a single thought can keep us in a state of anxiety.

Obedying the dictates of the mind and allowing it to run wild feeds the ego, and the more we feed the ego the harder it is to find the reality that we seek. Ego creates mental agitation and prevents us from stilling our minds. So we need to control the ego in order to still our minds and experience reality. Only when we are present, in the here and now, can we still the mind and discover our higher purpose.

Our essence is spiritual and our greatest need is to discover our true nature. Throughout the ages, saints and mystics have told us that meditation on God's Word helps us discover who we are. They speak from their own experience and lovingly encourage us to discover that truth for ourselves. They say that by following the instructions of a perfect living Master and meditating with a focused mind on

God's Word we will realize the Divine. It all sounds so simple, but it is extremely difficult to do this; how do we stop the mind from bombarding us with so much inner chatter all the time? It does not want to listen. The inner chatter may be about a disagreement we had with a colleague, our finances, shopping lists, health issues, appointments, relatives, children, unfinished work, deadlines and so forth. Even when we sit down for meditation, our mind keeps distracting us with countless thoughts. How do we shut down all that inner dialogue? How can we focus the mind inward and upward when it has been so scattered into the outside world for millions of years?

Saints say that with the help of meditation on God's Word, we have to train the mind in order to conquer it. A one-pointed mind can be cultivated throughout the day by giving our complete attention to whatever we are doing. Most of our problems in life are caused by the mind weaving out of the here and now, and we make our problems even bigger by feeding them with our attention. When we sit, we have to direct our attention back to our meditation. Every time we lose focus, we have to keep bringing it back to the present again and again. Even if the mind wanders sixty times in sixty minutes of our meditation, we have to keep bringing it back to the present to focus on the task at hand. It is a question of training and discipline. To gain mastery at anything, you have to practise till you succeed. Athletes have to undergo strenuous training to succeed at their sport. Inventors have to work very hard to successfully create something original. Learning to play a musical instrument comes with constant daily practice. We have to practise, practise, and keep practising our meditation and not give up. Effort and persistence is the key.

Meditation is very difficult but not impossible. We have to constantly struggle with the mind. Sometimes it gets so difficult that we feel like such failures but as Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Die to*

Live, even our attempts are to our credit because only the man who tries to learn to walk or run will fall. He explains that our failures are part of our ultimate success and we should not feel dejected but go on making attempt after attempt. When the saints ask us to bring our failures to them, they mean that we should at least keep giving our time to meditation, whether we notice any results or not. Every meditation is good. No meditation is bad.

Saints and mystics remind us that we are sailing on an ocean of impermanence. Everything and every experience is transient. We are so caught up in the world of thoughts, feelings and desires that we forget that time is just slipping by. The present moment is the only time we have to fulfil our purpose in life. The eye centre is the place to start. Through constant meditation, we have to train the mind to go inward and upward, and every time it decides to wander off we have to keep bringing it back to the present again and again. When we eventually experience that stillness and listen, really listen to God, we will directly experience the Truth.



Do not pursue the past.

Do not lose yourself in the future. The past no longer is.

The future has not yet come.

*Looking deeply at life as it is in the very here and now,
the practitioner dwells in stability and freedom.*

We must be diligent today.

To wait until tomorrow is too late.

Buddha, Bhuddekaratta Sutta



Maharaj Sawan Singh giving darshan from his house

Heart to Heart

Maharaj Charan Singh reminisces about his days with the Great Master:

“He was always smiling, always laughing – except in his last days, when the partition of India took place and he was taken for treatment to Amritsar. That being on the border, a lot of refugees – mostly satsangis – were coming from Pakistan and they had woeful tales to tell. Similarly, the Muslims from this side, who were also leaving their kith and kin, had woeful tales to tell of what they had to go through before they could leave India.

“That was the first time I saw a tear in Maharaj Ji’s eyes. He was standing on the roof terrace of the satsang ghar in Amritsar, and a lot of refugees were crowding together down on the ground surrounded by their small bundles. Some came with a camel, some with a donkey, some with a bullock – whatever those poor people could get – and the whole place was packed with their small bags and bundles. Maharaj Ji was giving them darshan from the roof of the satsang ghar, and as he was looking at them, his eyes became moist. I looked at him in surprise because I had never seen a tear in his eyes during my whole life.

“When he came back, he sat on the bed, and Bhai Shadi, who was always his attendant, sat by his side and said, ‘Maharaj Ji, you seem to be upset.’

“Maharaj Ji said, ‘I just cannot bear to see the misery of these people. They are so good and loving, but look at what they have to suffer.’ Then he closed his eyes and we were asked to leave the room.”

Spiritual Heritage

Book Review



The Wisdom of Love: Toward a Shared Inner Search

BY JACOB NEEDLEMAN

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ISBN: 1-59675-007-3

In *The Wisdom of Love*, philosopher Jacob Needleman studies the teachings of the world's spiritual traditions to see what they can tell us about divine love and about love as it manifests between people. Although the human relationship he focuses on is marriage, his observations are meaningful for anyone who wants to cultivate a loving approach to all human relationships while striving toward spiritual growth.

Crossing all boundaries of religion, culture, and time, he finds that certain universal spiritual teachings have been handed down through the ages. These he calls by the simple name "wisdom". Needleman says, "Wisdom teaches that what we erroneously seek from the 'world' is to be found only through the process that opens us to another level of life within ourselves. It is that life, we are told, that can give us what we mistakenly seek outside ourselves."

While different spiritual traditions express their wisdom teachings differently, Needleman claims that all agree that a universal force of love and consciousness is at the foundation of the universe. "Love brings opposites together – that is its very definition. In the universe, in nature and between two people and within ourselves, love is the force that brings disparate and separate realities towards each other into fusion and mutuality." He says that the fundamental and genuine obligation of every human being is to:

place oneself at the service of the universal forces of love and consciousness both within the self and at the foundation of the universe.... It is not oversimplifying to characterize all the spiritual traditions as saying that all human misery results from ignorance

of or resistance to this intrinsic obligation, and that all authentic human happiness and well-being, as well as all authentic moral action, result from opening to the higher forces within and above the individual self.

This innate obligation forces human beings to struggle and search for meaning.

Very little of what we already are and already have brings us deeper meaning or happiness. We are born for meaning, not pleasure.... And we are born as well for suffering, not the suffering that leads to madness but the suffering that leads to joy: the struggle with ourselves and our illusions. We are born to overcome ourselves, and through that overcoming to find an inner condition of great harmony and being. We are born for that – we are not yet that. We are searchers; that is the essence of our present humanness.

What, then, does all this tell us about love as it manifests in human relationships? In human relationships, Needleman explains, love gets mixed with self-interest, passion, and possessive attachment. The condition of “being in love” is notorious for its instability and short-lived obsessive passion. But that condition also has great significance in offering “a taste and a promise of a more profound quality of conscious life.”

If lovers themselves tend to overestimate the purity and durability of this taste, then the modern “realistic” view of love, which is aware of all that is mixed in with romantic love, tends to underestimate the contact with higher human possibilities that being in love gives to almost everyone at least once in his or her lifetime.

Needleman says that “what we touch in love is like a sign, evidence that we are meant for quite another destiny than what the world around us can give.” Yet, being merely a taste or sign, this condition is short-lived. We quickly reach what Needleman calls a crossroads where we either start to dislike the one we once loved or long to go back to the

beginning again, to relive the romance. But, Needleman argues, there is a third alternative, which he calls “intentional love”.

Intentional love is not the “automatic love” that just happens to us when we fall in love. Rather, we work at it. Needleman discusses at length “the long work of love.” Drawing on many diverse sources, ranging from the *bhakti* tradition in Hinduism to mystical poets and writers like Rumi, Rilke, Ouspensky and Kierkegaard, Needleman describes “working at love” as a path toward realizing the highest human potentials while dealing with the realities of day-to-day life. When we are “working at love” we are always working to free ourselves “from attachment to the illusions of ‘life,’ while at the same time helping each other to answer to the normal needs of the embodied self.” When working at love in this sense, two people can “help each other remember what is primary and what is secondary in their lives, that is, in all human life in its essential structure.”

Buddhist teachings on compassion offer a clear foundation for working at love. In Buddhism one is taught to “regard all human beings as individuals striving for enlightenment” and to “treat others primarily as yearning, consciously or not, toward the inner freedom of nirvana, and to regard the suffering of all beings as due primarily to their deep ignorance of the nature of the self.” This approach to human relationships finds a parallel in the concept of *caritas* (charity) as discussed by Saint Augustine. “Caritas is the love that desires God, a love which, when directed to another human being, desires God for one’s neighbour.” With this approach to love, two people can “help each other become free of the reactions of life that they inevitably evoke in each other. A relationship is like a little world and can be like a tiny fragment of a ‘spiritual community’ within that world.”

Needleman calls this intentional love the “intermediate love”. It is intermediate because it is a step beyond the self-centred love that rides on a wave of emotion and passion, but it is not yet “the pure, impersonal love spoken of in the spiritual traditions of the world as God’s love for man, or as the love that emanates from the embodiment of God – the Christian saviour, the Hebraic prophet or *zaddik*, the Sufi sheikh,

the Hindu guru, the Buddhist bodhisattva.” Intermediate love means working toward the ideal “in the midst of our actual lives.”

According to Needleman, the wisdom traditions of the world agree that “Love for the other is at root derivative, or, to be precise, a *result* of love for the holy God within and above.” He says the foundation of ethical living, in fact, rests on this point: “that we cannot truly love another without loving, or *seeking to love*, that force or Being that creates us.” Love and devotion for the divine entails the “surrender of one’s multiple personal desires to the single will of the divine. But such conscious surrender cannot take place without a long and difficult struggle against the ego’s tendencies toward either sentimentality, anxiety, sensory distractions, or cold, arrogant logic.” However, as Needleman points out, this is “the struggle that will make us human.”

In the original Greek text of the Bible, the word translated into English as love is *agape* (spiritual love) as opposed to *eros* (passionate love). Needleman explores the subtle meanings of *agape*.

The chief element of agape that distinguishes it from ordinary human love is that it is not automatic. Agape is nothing if not intentional. It is a love that can be commanded... At the same time, it is not something we can will in our usual psychological state. So, the mystery is there; at its deepest reaches, agape is not subject to our will in any way. Yet, it is commanded of us.

In order to obey this command to love, “a man or woman must be able – not directly to love, but to open him – or herself to the transcendent power that draws all conscious beings towards each other through drawing them toward the fundamental source of the universe itself.” The power of *agape*, Needleman says, is a gift, but it “is not given outright. It must be worked for, struggled for. This struggle is another name for what we call the search for meaning.” Ultimately, *agape* in its highest development is divine; it is loving as God loves.



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