

February 2014

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Yours Affectionately
- 6 Humour and Spirituality
- 9 Something to Think About
- 11 The Value of Seva
- 13 Spiritualisticks
- 14 On Practical Spirituality
- 15 Being Quiet
- 18 Loving Oneself
- 21 Did You Know?
- 22 It's About Time
- 24 Lighter Side of Wisdom
- 25 What If?
- 28 The Master Answers
- 31 The Depth of Love
- 34 Top of Creation
- 36 A Joyful Privilege
- 40 The Great Master Explains ...
- 42 Clean Our Windows
- 45 Speechless
- 49 Heart to Heart
- 50 Book Review

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
Copyright © 2014 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

Articles and poems that appear without sources have been written by the contributors to this magazine.

VOLUME 10 • ISSUE TWO • FEBRUARY 2014

Yours Affectionately

Your letter of June 27 has been duly received. It was a pleasure to read it. It shows that you have very hard work to do, but still you are eager to devote whatever time you can to your daily spiritual practice.

As for your visit to India, you are in the right, because spiritual progress has nothing to do with any particular locality; it depends rather on the attitude of mind. People in India find the spiritual practice as difficult as you do and their progress is not more rapid than yours. It is necessarily a slow process. The holy Master keeps each one of us in the place best calculated for our spiritual good. A person who has begun his journey on the right path will reach his destination one day, sooner or later. He is far better than one who journeys on the wrong path. You should remain confident that both of you will one day see and know what you so long for, when your spirit currents completely focus in the centre behind the eyes. There is no time limit. You should fulfil your duty of doing the spiritual practice with love and faith, leaving the rest to the Master, who knows your time.

The wavering and faintness in the faith, which you say at times overtake you, will cease when you have seen the Master in his glory in the focus of the eyes, that is, when the spiritual currents concentrate behind the eyes, where the Master in his resplendent form is waiting to receive you. Strive to reach that point.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



Humour and Spirituality

A disciple once asked Maharaj Charan Singh: “Master, what is the role of humour in Sant Mat?” His response is worth reflecting upon:

Sant Mat should make us better humans rather than pull us down to the level of animals. You see, except for humans, nobody laughs. I don't think you have seen any bird laughing or any dog laughing or any animal laughing. They may smile, but the privilege of laughter is given only to humans. So if we want to remain human, humour has to be there, just to help us relax.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Laughter is universal. Everybody laughs in the same language – the language of joy and happiness is a bond common to all humans. Regardless of race, despite pluralities of culture, smiles and laughter are the same the world over. As Maharaj Ji said, it makes one more human – relaxed, softer and kinder; predisposed towards a positive attitude. Perhaps it also makes us less inclined towards our baser tendencies which make us primitive and harsh, leaving no room for levity and kindness of heart. But one has to ask, is it just laughter that makes for happiness? Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

Everyone wants to be happy in this world. When you have happiness within, you want to share it with others. And that is humour, nothing else. Humour doesn't mean taunting anybody or making a fool of yourself. You see, enjoying a joke means that you enjoy it and the other person also enjoys it. You can't enjoy a joke at the cost of another person; that is no humour

at all. That is taunting or ridiculing the other person, which is wrong. Humour means the other person enjoys as much as you enjoy. And when you are happy within, you can't help radiating happiness and sharing it with others. You go to a miserable person, he'll make you miserable. You go to a happy person, he will automatically make you happy. He will relax you in two minutes.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

The Masters qualify that the type of humour that is most desirable is born out of an intrinsic happiness that comes from within. Untainted by ridicule or mockery towards others or even oneself, it is a solid type of happiness, wholesome and pure.

This innate sense of happiness is a mere spillover of a deeper sense of joy; a sense of contentment that comes with embracing the Sant Mat way of life – of having a Master, being initiated and living within the four vows, especially the vow of meditation.

Through meditation, we are able to tame our mind and its passions – which are the primary source of our misery. Furthermore, meditation makes us rise above our physical existence and makes us realize our spiritual nature, the source of true happiness.

It is when meditation becomes our focus – the single most important task in our life – that we realize that this world is an illusion, as are all the joys and sorrows it brings. All are temporary, passing and perishable.

Then we acquire a light-hearted and cheerful attitude towards life, and its ups and downs. Having realized that whatever we go through is just karmic drama, we understand that all is temporary and that everything gets resolved eventually.

We can then undergo a shift in attitude, a change in priorities, whereby reality takes precedence over that which is illusory. We are dutiful to the world, but our deep, inner joy comes from our spiritual life – sitting in meditation, attending satsang, doing seva and the occasional highlight of seeing the Master and having his darshan. This way, we gradually awaken to the meaning of our existence – to realize the truth, and work towards returning to our true home. This is what gives us happiness and contentment.

As it is often said, laughter is the best medicine, a cure for worldly burdens. But the real antidote to this world is the Master, and his most precious gift of Shabd. Through meditation we can obtain this gift which will bring us unparalleled joy and laughter.



God is always with you to help, guide and protect.

*Go through your life with laughter
and always have a happy approach towards it.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, Quest for Light

Something to Think About

Our birthdays serve only to remind us that time is passing and so much precious valuable time has gone. If it has been devoted to simran and bhajan, then it has been properly utilized; otherwise it has just been wasted. Therefore, a birthday is a good time to take stock of oneself and make a renewed and determined effort to devote more time to simran and bhajan, thus utilizing the time to best advantage. Unless we do this, the whole life is wasted because the very purpose of life in the human form is to attain God-realization. This cannot be done without love and devotion coupled with his grace, which in turn is the result of regular simran and bhajan.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



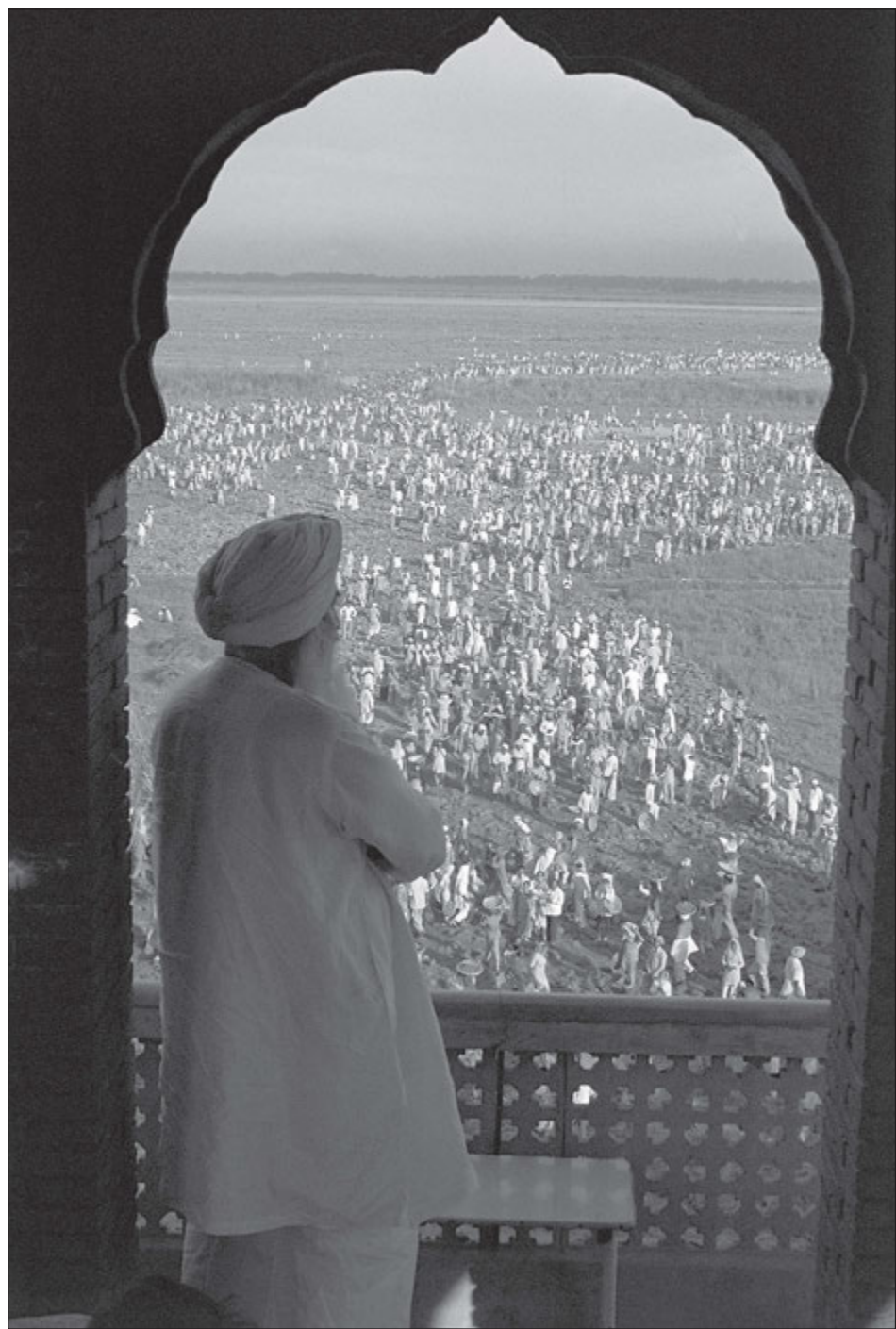
You can't be sluggish and do this work. Rather, you have to make the body work in a systematic way. If you think the body belongs to you, it won't work; use it as though it's been hired and it belongs to somebody else.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II



Attend to all your worldly duties but keep your love and faith in the Satguru's lotus feet, because our breaths and morsels of food are all numbered. Worldly work is for our livelihood, meditation for salvation – attend to both. As for the rest, tell your mind that you will not obey its behests – keep the Satguru's teachings always alive in the mind.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*



The Value of Seva

Seva is a precious opportunity that we have been given to develop humility, diminish our self-importance, improve our character and grow in love. All this is crucial to our spiritual life.

If we would only realize what a limited amount of time we have in this world, how deluded we are about everything we consider to be our own, how weak we are before the tendencies of the mind and how deeply buried we are under the weight of our own karmas, we would cherish every opportunity to get out of this mess.

And if we knew how much the Master helps us during meditation and how much he wants to see us happy, we would do everything in our power to contribute to our own welfare and improve our focus during meditation.

It is entirely by his grace that we get an opportunity to do seva and that we are capable. Everybody doesn't get the opportunity. Many people may be wanting it, may be anxious to do it, but they never get an opportunity. Their circumstances don't permit them, their environment doesn't permit them, their family commitments don't permit them. It's by his grace that we get this opportunity.

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

The question then is, why is it that we sometimes take our seva for granted?

When we are faced with difficulties during seva, if it is too time consuming, if we encounter some opposition, or if we find ourselves seeking praise for our seva but don't get it, then we tend to think,

“Well, why don’t I just give up that seva? After all, the real seva is meditation, this outer seva is just a means. If this seva is actually becoming a hindrance in my meditation, then I should let go of it.”

In a question and answer session, a disciple asked Maharaj Charan Singh: “If we are trying to do seva for our sangat, and we notice that we are so full of pride that even our attempt at seva has a lot of ego attached to the result ... should we give up that seva until we can be more detached?” He replied:

We should give up that ego rather than the seva. Seva will help you to create humility sooner or later.... By running away from the situation, we don't solve any problem. We have to tackle the situation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

When we do seva, we work with different personalities and mind-sets. It is not necessary that we should always agree, and in fact sometimes we do disagree; we bang our heads and we even argue. But that is precisely the point of seva – to help us rise above our prejudices, ideas and expectations. It is an opportunity to overcome our grand yet truly limited sense of self.

We are too poor to be choosy, too needy to deny help; and if seva is done with the right attitude, then it is a priceless gift. We may feel that through our seva we are helping others or even helping our Master, but in fact, we are only helping ourselves.

In his benevolence, our Master allows us to serve him. It is his grace that provides us with various ways and means to rise above our limitations; it is his greatness that makes our smallest effort an excuse for him to smother us with his love.

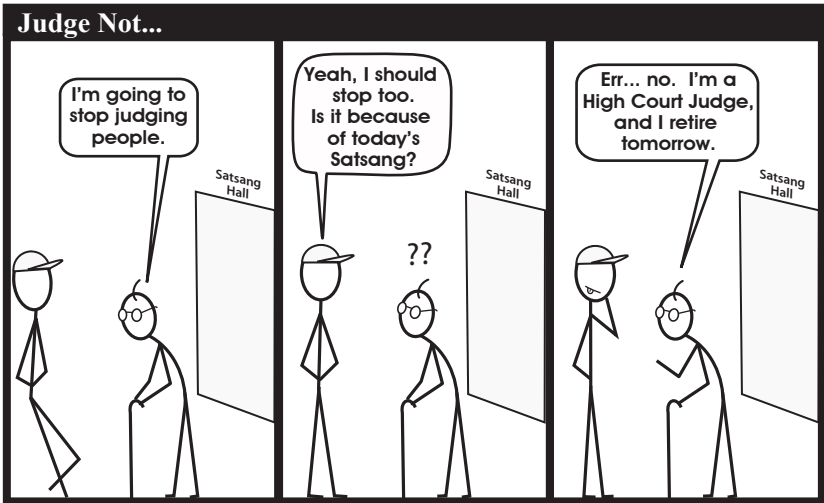


Every satsangi should do some seva. Seva is of four types: with the body, with the mind, with wealth and with the soul. They are all seva. The first three sevas are the means to the real seva, which is seva of the soul, or connecting your soul with the Sound within. That is the real seva. Seva means that service which is done to please the Master, and what pleases the Master most is when we attend to our meditation. Withdrawing our consciousness to the eye centre and connecting it with the Sound is the real seva, which is impressed upon us by every mystic or saint.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*



SPIRITUALISTICKS®



On Practical Spirituality

Material rewards are loveless, and without love, which is the soul's nature, we will always be 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.

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.

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 we are going and keeping our destination in view, and not caring what others say, think or do about our choice.

Honest Living



Being Quiet

If there is one thing guaranteed to disrupt any hard-earned inner peace we may have obtained from following the spiritual path, it is the reckless use of words. Many of us have experienced this for ourselves at some point or another – when we have deeply regretted hurting someone with our thoughtless remarks or been terribly disrespectful by saying something that would have been better left unsaid. How often have we reprimanded ourselves for getting into embarrassing situations simply because we could not resist the impulse to say something, only to look back and exclaim in frustration, as a Persian poet once said:

What value is sense, if it does not come up to my rescue before I utter a word!

Sādi, as quoted in *The Sufi Message*

It is interesting to note that in the teachings of Jainism, where the principle of harmlessness is strongly advocated, one of the things many followers do is tie a little piece of cloth over their lips as a reminder to talk as little as possible. It is their belief that the predominant cause of disharmony is excessive talk. Perhaps this is also why all spiritual Masters, since the beginning of time, have emphasized the virtue of silence as a cardinal rule in the spiritual life.

As spiritual beings, the words we speak have the power to both hurt and heal the human heart. So, when we do speak, the mystics advise us to thoughtfully consider every word and evaluate whatever we want to say by asking three important questions: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? And if one were to earnestly apply this filter, he will have taken leaps and bounds in his quest for quietude because one very

quickly discovers that most of what is said in everyday life is actually unnecessary.

Out of a thousand words uttered there may be one, and one only, that need in truth be uttered. The rest but cloud the mind, and stuff the ear, and irk the tongue and blind the heart as well.

The Book of Mirdad

So what exactly is behind this inexplicable need and automatic impulse to talk? What can we do to subdue it?

The mystics explain that excessive speech is actually a symptom of the ego's need to assert itself. It is a symptom of its desire for recognition and attention; an expression of self-importance. On the spiritual path, humility is the foundation upon which we must build the inner life. Therefore, restraining the ego by being quiet is an indispensable and valuable exercise. By practising this kind of silence, we achieve a certain kind of poise and balance. It prepares us for the practice of the real silence – a deeper quietening of the mind through simran.

Meaningless talk feeds the already hyperactive mind and clogs it up. When we speak less, we carry with us an atmosphere of quiet contemplation, which allows our sense of awareness and discrimination to grow. One is able to absorb and reflect upon the lessons of daily life, learn, and gradually evolve on the spiritual path.

There is so much activity going on in the world today not only on the outside, but on the inside too. The overactive mind has become so restless and overwhelmed by all the inner chatter that we find more and more people having nervous breakdowns and anxiety disorders. In the absence of silence, our connection to our interior energy is lost. And without this support, it becomes very difficult to cope.

The perfect Masters also explain that we expend a lot of energy by talking. Instead of exhausting our precious strength on useless chatter,

when we conserve it and direct it inward, we calm the turbulent waves of the mind. We are then able to gather our attention and concentrate better at the eye centre. Excessive speech is, therefore, an extravagance that a serious spiritual aspirant cannot afford. If one is pleading for the grace of spiritual enlightenment, then one has to prepare himself to receive it.

Ultimately, the cure for the restless mind – the soothing balm of the Shabd – can only be heard in perfect silence. Just as troubled waters of a pool hinder us from seeing our own image reflected in the water, so too does the inner and outer chatter hinder us from hearing the voice of God. The whole point of our meditation practice is to become so united with this Sound in the silence that it can pull our soul up to higher levels of consciousness.

The Masters assure us we will get there eventually. The first step is to practise being quiet. The rest one develops as one matures on the spiritual path. Through the persistent practice of meditation, when we experience first-hand the Lord's indescribable greatness; when we witness his immense grace and immeasurable kindness, we finally grasp our own insignificance. Thereafter, the intensity of love and gratitude surging from our humbled hearts automatically renders us speechless. From then on, nothing else matters. All we want is to savour every moment of that mystical silence, tune in to his celestial voice, and embrace eternal bliss.

The silence I would usher you into is that interminable expanse wherein non-being passes into being, and being into non-being. It is that awesome void where every sound is born and hushed and every form is shaped and crushed; where every self is writ and unwrit; where nothing is but It.

The Book of Mirdad



Loving Oneself

As children, one of the first lessons we were taught was how to share. Our parents and teachers impressed upon us that it was not good to be selfish; not to think only of ourselves, as the world does not revolve around us alone. Getting along with others and building friendships required us to be considerate and thoughtful of others.

As we grew older, we became aware of the less fortunate and underprivileged in society. We were encouraged to share not only our possessions but also our time. When Christmas came around, we would participate in charity drives, collect toys, clothing and food items. We would visit children in orphanages and the elderly in retirement homes to distribute these items. It was such a joy to see the gratitude in their eyes; how one small act of kindness could make such a big difference. During times of calamity and natural disasters, we would also do the same – collect the basic necessities and distribute them to the distraught victims. As the circle of life continued, we had families of our own and we too encouraged our children to do the same.

When we embarked upon the spiritual path, we were introduced to the concept of loving ‘oneself’. It seemed paradoxical because all along we were taught to love others more than ourselves. And then, all of a sudden so much emphasis was laid on loving the ‘self’. But the paradox unfolds when we answer the question of which ‘self’ we are referring to.

*Your true self is concealed in falsehood,
like the taste of butter is concealed in buttermilk.
Your falsehood is this perishable body;
your truth is the Spirit of the Lord.*

Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine

Time and time again we are reminded by the teachings that we are not this human frame that we are so attached to and obsessed with. Nonetheless, we seem to think we are and, consequently, we have built our identity around it. Our real nature, our true self is our soul – pure in nature, pristine and perfect in every way. Our soul is the true, real and higher self that we are meant to love.

Under tremendous pressure from worldly attachments and desires, our senses have completely overpowered the mind, leading to the covering of several impenetrable layers over the soul. The result – a veil of ignorance blocking the pure and perfect self from the expression of its true nature and virtues.

Seeing our soul's miserable plight, the perfect Masters initiate us on to the spiritual path, and reveal to us the process of meditation. It is this process of meditation that teaches us to focus upon our highest self – our soul, the God-self in us. The Master impresses upon us the importance of raising our consciousness to the eye centre, the seat of the soul, so that we can once again re-establish contact with our soul and gradually remove the numerous layers that have blocked its radiant light, allowing it once again to shine in all its glory. It is this process of meditation that allows us to love our God-self or our divine self. It is in this respect, that we say it is all right to 'love oneself' – when we are loving our divine, true God-self.

This type of love contrasts sharply with typical human selfishness, in which we are preoccupied with our human personality and focused only on fulfilling our endless desires without giving much thought to other aspects of our being.

*Being selfish means looking to your own personal interest.
When this human birth is given to us to go back to the Father,
and it is a rare opportunity which we don't get so easily, we*

should also have that selfish instinct to realize that goal during this span of life.

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

A good way to differentiate between the two types of love would be to examine the motive behind each. As we begin to discover, understand, and build a relationship with our higher self, we will learn about love, because love is the essence of our source. Therefore, as we learn how to love our higher self, we will then be able to give and receive this love from another. The extent to which we learn to love our divine self allows more and more love to develop and grow in us. On the other hand, human selfishness is motivated by fear and deprives us of love. It thrives on the plane of the material and the physical.

As we continue to build and grow our love for our God-self through the daily practice of meditation, we will find that it is this love that is, in fact, the cure for our own human selfishness. We will come to realize that we are all drops from that one great ocean of love. We will begin to see our fellow human beings as part of our source, and it will motivate us to show love, kindness and compassion to all.



*When I sought within my body
I realized my true self;
By contemplating within
I realized the Lord's true identity.
By knowing my self, I became lost
In the bliss of divine love,
And then of its own accord
My self merged into Him.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Did You Know?

The essential difference between ordinary death and dying while living is that the soul's link with the body is not broken. The organs of the body continue to function, and the soul returns to the body at the end of the meditation time. An adept who has perfected the art of dying while living can leave the body and return to it at will. Hence, Saint Paul says, "I die daily."

After vacating the body and coming to the eye centre, the soul's real journey homeward begins. When the entire life consciousness leaves the lower body and we go through the third eye, we are out of the physical body and we enter the astral world. Without thus dying while living, we cannot go within, get attached to the Holy Spirit and return to the Lord.

Die to Live



If you are always thinking about the world, then by spending only one or two hours a day in simran, you cannot possibly concentrate or withdraw your thoughts to the eye centre, because it needs a similar amount of time to withdraw it, as the time it has taken to scatter out. So, saints always advise that when we are mentally free, when we are walking about, when we have nothing to do, we can keep our attention in simran. We should get into the habit of simran to such an extent that even if we are talking to someone, it should automatically go on within us. The advantage is that we will be able to detach ourselves easily from the worldly things or the nine apertures of the body and come back to the eye centre, and can then easily attach ourselves to the Shabd.

The Master Answers

It's About Time

What do we see when we look into the mirror of our mind? Fragmented memories of a youth long gone? Or perhaps, the glimmer of hope and expectations for a better tomorrow?

The intricate mosaic that looks back at us is a face which most certainly reveals the memories of life's many past years – the pleasures and the regrets. And perhaps it also exposes the anticipation – the impatience for harvests that we desire, yet to be fulfilled. It is a face that embodies the two elements that impede us from true freedom – our past and our future.

Look more carefully and that face invariably will reveal both sadness and joy. It will likely render courage yet despair, confusion yet understanding, and maybe even anger yet composure – all the bipolar symptoms of that abstract thing called duality. It is a mixture of precisely opposing emotions and states of mind, which mystics explain is brought about because this is our condition – we are trapped in the grip of duality.

So what is duality? It is a realm of existence governed by opposing forces. A sphere or world within which every thought, word and action is counterbalanced by an equal and opposite thought, word or deed. And our entire universe is in that sphere. The bubble of our existence, encapsulated by the concept of the equal and opposite, processing in an infinite loop – the unending actions and reactions trying to attain the perfect balance which in turn keep the universe in existence.

And the fabric of duality? It is those four dimensions we think we are restricted to live within. The three dimensions of space, which are the foundation of the physical world, and the fourth dimension – that which enables the physical world to be animated: time.

Sant Mat explains that karma is the construct of duality. It is how karma works, and why it exists. It tells us the mechanics of the trap, and the nuances of the perfect system of justice. Then, having explained everything in lucid detail, the mystic adept presents us with one more thing: the most profound, penetrating element of the teachings – the gift of freedom.

It is duality that is the problem, but Sant Mat reveals that there is something beyond this: an existence outside the limited sphere of space and time. These ancient teachings that have been handed down from mystic to mystic through the aeons tell us of another world – the real universe, within which our world of duality exists simply as a speck of dust. And in that real universe, there is no sorrow or happiness, no rich or poor, no despair or contentment. No opposites – just unity. No duality, just oneness. To enable us to transcend to that existence of oneness, Sant Mat teaches a specific method of meditation. It is the key to freedom from this prison of duality.

What is the nature of oneness? It is the state of perfect spirituality, beyond the limitations of physical dimensions, and more importantly, beyond the realm of time itself – it is a state of timelessness. This is one of the outcomes of meditation, as taught by the perfect mystic; to be released from the clutches of the past and the pulling gravity of the future, and to exist only in that instant called ‘now’.

It is said that the search for the true self begins by looking into the mirror of our own mind. With grace and perseverance, perhaps one day soon when we look within, we will manage to see ourselves without baggage of the past, and without expectations of the future. It is only with diligence and devotion that this is attained. And in one instance of timelessness, that perfect focus and stillness in meditation is finally achieved, and the true self is observed – just in the now. Sant Mat teaches us the exact method, and the mystic assures us that it is not only achievable – it’s about time!

Lighter Side of Wisdom

Following a discourse in Bangkok, a gentleman asked Maharaj Charan Singh: “Maharaj Ji, for centuries we have been trying to find the Lord in the same old way. Yet science has made rapid progress and has opened new horizons to man. We have even reached the moon. Then why is it that we are following the same outdated ways to realize God? Can the path not be changed? Can some concessions not be made so that one can realize God without having to give up eating meat and drinking alcohol?”

Maharaj Ji smiled gently and replied, “You are right, brother, much has changed; human intellect and science have made enormous progress. But please do not forget that in spite of all the changes, birth and death are changeless realities. In this ever-changing world, the law of karma is irrevocable. As we sow, have we to reap. God is the same, was the same, and will always be the same. He is beyond all changes, and so is the path leading to him. It cannot be changed. There is no favouritism at his door, no bribe is accepted, and no concessions given. There can be no relaxation in the mode of living for those who tread the path, nor are special favours available, as the path is the same for all.” Then the Master laughed softly and said, “But if you change the old God into a new one, you will surely be able to change the way to meet him.”

Heaven on Earth



What If?

Have you ever paused to reflect upon the course of events that have brought you to this point in time? How your life might have been different had you chosen another direction?

It is part of our human fabric to dwell on the past and think ‘what if?’ There have been numerous books and films made on the subject. From the classic *The Time Machine* to *Back to the Future*, humanity has toyed with the subject of changing the course of events by going back and forth in time. Many sci-fi fans believe in the possibility of time travel and many books have been written on the subject.

We sometimes dwell on the past and often believe that we would be happier if only certain past events could be undone. This feeling is especially true where the illness or death of a loved one is concerned.

But the fact of the matter is that no matter how many twists and turns our lives may take, our destiny can only follow one course. It may sound like a cliché, but whatever is meant to happen will happen. And we can either lament over the situation, or make the most of it.

Man proposes, but God disposes, and man's destiny is not in his own hands.

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

We are so embroiled in day to day happenings that our minds trick us into believing that we are in control. We fret and worry, we keep imagining ‘what if’ scenarios because we believe that somehow by doing so, we can influence the outcome of events. We do not realise that we came into this world with our destiny already written.

Our souls are like tender flowers at the mercy of the winds of destiny. They tremble in the morning breeze, and bend their heads under the falling dews of heaven.

Kahlil Gibran, *Voice of the Master*

We cannot change the course of events, but we can trust that the Lord has our best interest at heart, just as a parent will do whatever it takes to keep his child safe and happy.

Yet the Masters explain that even though our destiny is preordained according to our past karmas, we do have limited free will. We can choose to take the path that leads us closer to God or away from him. Imagine life as a game of cards: the hand that is dealt to us represents our past karmas; how we choose to play the game is our limited free will.

But the Masters do not leave us to play this hand alone. They offer us encouragement and advice on how to carry on, keeping our true objective in view. They shower us with their mercy, so that we do not need to feel the weight of our heavy load.

This is an age when we look back and start counting his blessings and look around at others and thank the Lord as to how gracious he has been to us, and this leaves us with no regrets in life at all. I am glad destiny is in his hands, and he manoeuvres as it suits him. Otherwise, left to ourselves, I wonder what a mess we would have made of our lives.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Treasure Beyond Measure*

Despite our limited perspective and short-term view, we think we know what is best for us. But chances are that, left to our own devices,

we would very likely make a mess of our lives. If a parent were to satisfy his child's every desire, the child would probably become ill from too much candy and spoiled with too many toys. Like that child, we have no concept of what is best for us. We tend to focus on the negative and forget the most positive 'what if' scenario one can imagine. For if everything is preordained and even our coming to the path is part of his grand design, then imagine, what if ...?



*Far more than my destiny allows
From your gracious hands I receive;
Yet even my destiny
Is but a gift from you to me.*

Anonymous Urdu couplets,
as quoted in *Legacy of Love*

The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Does time count falling asleep in meditation?*

A: We should not try to devote our time to meditation at the cost of our sleep. The body must have sufficient hours of rest, then we should try to attend to our meditation. We generally sit in meditation at the cost of our relaxation, at the cost of our sleep. We do not try to adjust our other engagements in life. We always try to sit in meditation at the cost of sleep and naturally we go to sleep. Only the time you devote to meditation is to your credit, and not when you are snoring and sleeping.

Thus Saith the Master

* * *

Q: *Does the atmosphere of satsang help us?*

A: The atmosphere helps us a lot. There should be absolute harmony in satsang. If there are differences, then you will never be able to build an atmosphere for meditation at all. There should be absolute harmony in satsang. If you are always maligning one another and bossing one another, then you can't build that atmosphere, you can't even think about the Master during that time. Even if you sit on the roadside and have that harmony and atmosphere of love and devotion, it's much better than sitting in a very luxurious, very decorated hall where there is no harmony, where you are quarrelling and fighting with one another. And there should be no discussion of politics in satsang. Satsang should be just pure satsang.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *In many of the Sant Mat books, we hear of the pain of death. Is the pain of death a physical pain, or is it mental anguish?*

A: You see, what is this meditation? It's nothing but a rehearsal to die every day. When you have rehearsed yourself so much on that path, then you won't bother about death at all. When people are putting on a play, they rehearse so much that on the actual day, it's very easy for them to go through that whole play; but without rehearsal, we forget at every step. So meditation is nothing but a lifelong rehearsal to die, a rehearsal to learn to withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre and then leave the body. But it depends on so many other factors also. Sometimes many types of karmas have to be gone through in the body. So that a little leftover karma may not bring you back to the creation again, sometimes it is better to go through those karmas and get rid of them while in the body. Master knows best – we can't make any hard and fast rule about it. The Lord knows best about this.

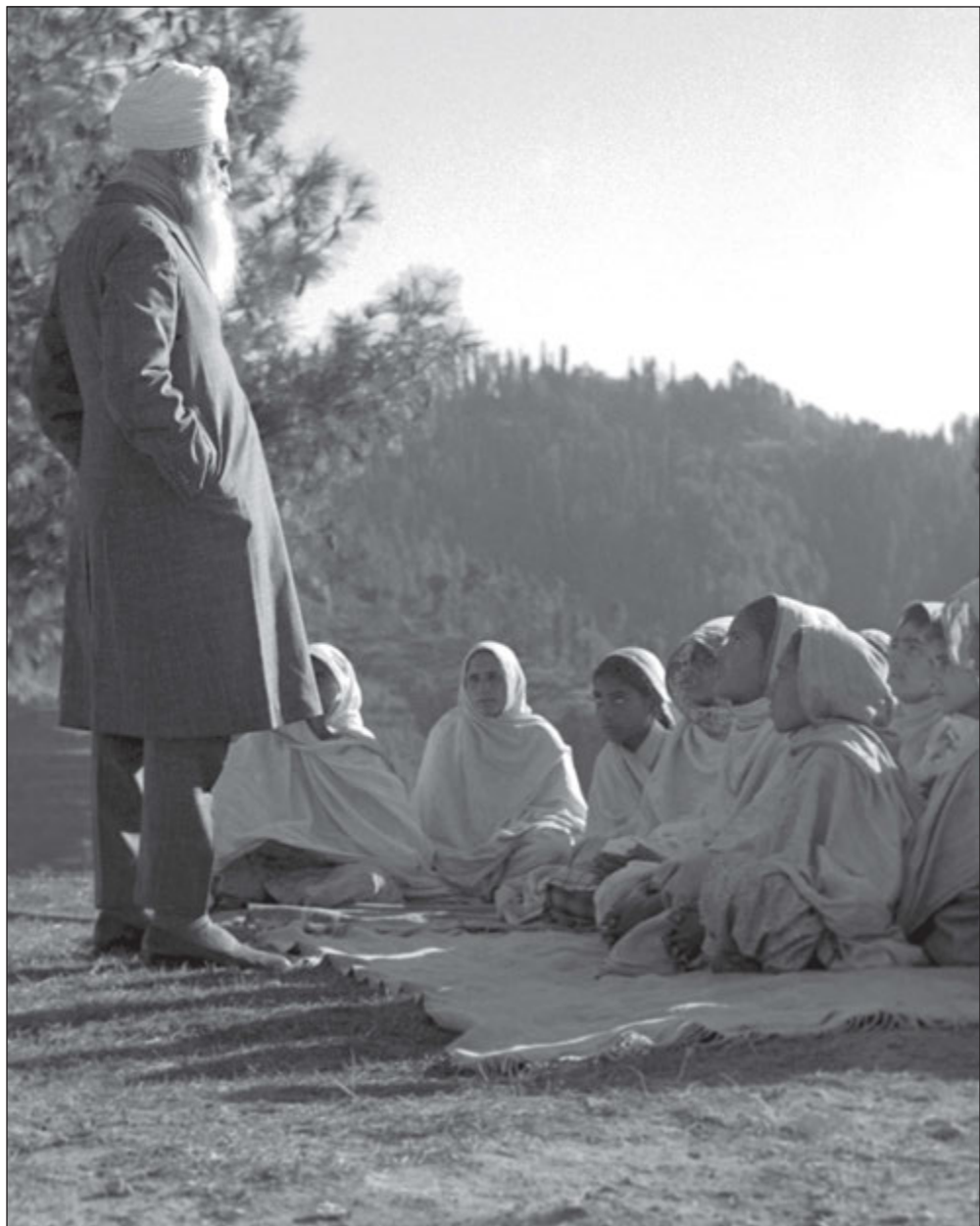
Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

* * *

Q: *How much capacity do we have to plan our future, Master? Is it set for us when we're born?*

A: We have only one future: to go back to the Father. There's no other future.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III



Maharaj Sawan Singh initiating children, Kalabagh

The Depth of Love

Love is a strange thing. We learn about it so easily and yet, we often distance ourselves from it – from loving and being loved. Either time makes us forget, we change our minds, or we simply move on. Where does that love go? Why does its intensity change and flicker on and off like a light bulb? When we read what the mystics say about the degree and depth of love they felt for their Beloved, it leaves most of us speechless.

Don't hold back, there's more where that came from

How do we develop the love spiritual Masters talk about? First of all, we must realize that this reservoir of love lies deep within the core of our being. It is the reason for our existence and our permanent link with the divine. We were born with this wonderful gift, and it is always with us independent of our circumstances. It is not something we acquire along the way as we attempt to satisfy our never-ending desires. Being ignorant, we are unaware of this treasure within.

As human beings, there seems to be a restlessness and a feeling of emptiness within us that makes us constantly search outside, as though one day we will miraculously stumble upon what we are looking for. We are so confident of our judgment in handling worldly matters, but in spite of our maturity, education and social standing, we are all children on this path. In the process of growing up, we have grown apart from that state of happiness within us. We can spend an eternity pursuing it, but our search will never cease until we strike upon the simple truth: that true happiness can only be found when we take refuge within in the Lord's love. Nothing can fill that void within us except when we merge with the Beloved. We know that love is the

one resource that grows exponentially the more we give. It is with divine grace from the Lord, that we gain the knowledge of how and where to tap into this love.

Longing for love ... love for union

A devoted disciple once wrote to her Master that in spite of having an intense longing to see him, she saw only her vain attempts and got frustrated time and again. Why would the Master keep a disciple away when the need to see him was so intense, she pleaded? His answer was ever so simple: “Sister, longing is the foundation of spirituality.” Longing to belong. To be one with the Beloved. To experience a love so pure and unsullied that all our worldly cravings and sensual desires just fall by the wayside. To feel that type of love means to go beyond words, to contact the Shabd and drink unceasingly from that ocean of nectar within.

This is what we must strive to achieve through our meditation. It is the only thing that makes sense in our lives because it is the one thing that can be truly ours and that we can present to the Lord. When we earnestly cry out to our heavenly Father, we create our treasure in heaven. All else, the mystics point out to us, will be left behind. It is so simple: love, love and more love. That intense longing to merge with the Beloved helps true love to shine forth in our lives.

Saint Kabir proclaimed that love is the state of giving away one's heart. At some point in the journey of our lives, we begin to understand that meditation teaches us the most important of all lessons: how to love and be loved. We can best show our love through more meditation – simran and bhajan. When we contemplate on our Beloved in the silent hours of our meditation, we will eventually

experience what Kabir, and for that matter what all spiritual Masters talk about: union with the divine.

*Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.*

Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*

As Maharaj Charan Singh commented in *Light on Saint John*:

When you come to me inside, I will show you things that you have never dreamed of and that are beyond the comprehension of the mind. Your happiness will know no bounds when you meet me within yourself.

We then experience for ourselves the full power of the Creator, the celestial music resounding within us, loud and clear, marking the royal road ahead of us. Life begins to have a different meaning, and at every step of the way we move forward with confidence and courage, accompanied at all times by the guiding and loving force of our inner Master, the Shabd, the true Word, the Logos.



Top of Creation

An Original Tale

The angels once gathered together and rebelled against their Creator, for they objected to man being bestowed with the honour of being recognized as ‘top of creation’.

They reasoned: “Why should man be graded as the highest creature? After all, he has animal attributes of eating, drinking and procreating. We have no such drives, therefore we deserve the title of being ‘top of the creation.’”

The Lord said, “You yourself can take the decision after one of you volunteers to go and spend some time on earth and experience the life of a human-being.”

Many eager angels came forth, but only one was chosen to fly down.

As soon as the angel flew down, he was enchanted by the earth and its bounties, its natural beauty and alluring fragrances. He alighted on a tree and began to partake of its sweet and delicious fruit. The taste of it was so exhilarating, that he wondered how he could have ever lived without it. Life was pretty dull without satisfying the palate.

After a while, he heard piteous cries; a young girl was sobbing her heart out. Kindness and compassion led him to befriend the girl. Soon enough they became good friends; friendship led to love which paved the way for a happy union.

For the first few years, the angel was deliriously happy. But gradually the freshness, the novelty and the charm of life began to wear off. He had to face many difficulties and hardships to provide for his ever-growing family; he realized that people were deceitful and selfish; friendships were only a farce; relationships were short-lived. As the burdens of life fell upon him, he felt oppressed and suffocated.

Unhappiness led to constant complaints and then suffering. In pain, he cried out to the Lord who sent another angel to search for the brother who had not yet returned.

The next angel too was enchanted by the sounds, sights and smells of the earth. He too was 'going astray' when he met up with his brother-angel, who gave him an account of his experiences. The strength of awareness helped them to break through the worldly-web of human life and soar into the skies, heading homewards.

When the angels once again appeared before the Lord, he asked the experienced ones, "Now you tell us, why is man honoured with the title of 'top of creation'?"

Tongue-tied, they could only hang their heads in shame.

The Lord said, "Even the angels cannot resist the temptations of the earth. The lure of the world is so strong that even they tend to go astray and forget me. Should I not then be proud of man, who in spite of going through temptations, burdens and the difficulties of life, remembers me and thinks of me sometimes? Does he not deserve the honour of being the 'top of creation'?"



We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.

We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

A Joyful Privilege

In our demanding and busy world, there is one place where each of us can take refuge – a place where we can be serene, peaceful and filled with love. The most precious time for a sincere seeker of the Lord is that silent moment when he goes within in prayer.

As children, we were taught the importance of prayer. It may have been just a simple verse we recited daily in the morning or before going to bed at night. This way, we learned how to call out for help to a higher Being, and to whom we could show our gratitude.

As we grew up and learned more about the world around us, sadly, the reason for our prayers changed. We began to see our loving Father as a Provider – someone who could satisfy our material needs. We complained to him about all the things we did not have and asked him for things we wanted. In doing so, we ignored all the gifts that he had blessed us with, and kept asking for more.

Simple logic tells us, that if the Lord to whom we put all our various requests has the power to give, then he must also have the power to know. And if he has the power to know, then why do we need to ask at all?

You are a temple of God, and the Lord is living in that temple day and night. Does he not know what his temple needs? The One who has created you is more anxious about you and takes much more care of you, is more concerned about you, than you are about yourself.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Saint Matthew*

From this it becomes natural to wonder whether we should ask for anything at all from the Lord. At times, life throws us some very difficult challenges. And we only have his door to knock on. Who else can we turn to in our helplessness? The mystics explain to us that it is only natural that we turn to him for help, and ask for strength to bear our troubles. He is after all our loving Father, who only wants what is best for us. But how can we ask him to change our circumstances when whatever we are going through is the result of our own past actions? Prayer will not change our destiny or our karmas, but it will give us the strength to face these difficulties without losing our balance, and without losing faith. Saint Thérèse de Lisieux puts it this way:

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart, a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.

Collected Poems of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

Prayer, therefore, should not be something we resort to on a part-time basis. It should be a way of life that allows us to feel connected to the Lord throughout the day. For one who has established that precious connection with the divine, prayer becomes indispensable. Like a life support system, it becomes a part of one's being. Without it, life is empty. Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

There's no question of devoting half an hour or an hour praying to the Lord – our whole day should be passed in prayer, in devotion and love for the Father. Prayer means just to live in love and devotion for the Father. That is constant prayer. No

particular words are required; no set prayers are required to be repeated.

Prayer is a language of love from the heart to the Father, and nobody exists then between you and the Father. You're not conscious of the world when you pray to him. He exists and you exist. That is the real prayer; and that is only possible at the time of meditation when we try to forget all that we are and where we are.

Die to Live

Prayer should come from the heart, and the heart speaks without language, without words. No set prayers move him, but the prayer from the heart moves him. We should be in tune with the Lord, with our heart; that is the right prayer – to be always in constant communion with him.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

The Masters teach us that meditation is the best prayer that we can offer to the Lord; for it opens our hearts to receive his love and grace. We gain strength that helps us face our destiny. Meditation is the way we demonstrate our willingness to live in the will of the Lord. It is how we become closer to God and build a true relationship with him.

Through meditation, we express our gratitude to the Father; we silently communicate from the depths of our being how anxious we are to become one with him. Through this form of prayer, we invoke the Father's grace to forgive us for whatever we have done in the past.

The opportunity to pray is a gift from God. Life keeps us occupied in so many ways – yet, however busy we may be and whatever demands are made of us, it is through prayer, through our meditation,

that we make time for our Beloved, and in doing so we obey him and please him. If we look upon our time in meditation as a ‘joyful privilege’, then it becomes the most important part of our day. After all, meditation is that special time when we are alone with our inner Master, when he is there, just for us – one on one. It is the time when we receive his greatest gifts – his presence and his love. Can anything in this world give us greater joy than this?



In order to pray correctly, it is necessary that we should go inside and shut the outer doors, withdraw our attention from the body, and direct it to the feet of the Beloved. In this sacred place, pray to the Master, the incarnation of the Lord. He will appear and will lend a helping hand. Such a prayer will be accepted. To lose oneself in the remembrance of the Lord, with inner purity and sincere feelings, is true prayer. This should not be merely for show or ostentation. It should be with sincere feelings and not mere verbal effusion. If a prayer is made with true inner feelings, then the all-powerful Lord listens and invaluable benefits accrue from His mercy.

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

The Great Master Explains ...

During a discussion session with the Great Master, a disciple humbly requested, “Sir, I need your mercy and grace. Without that nothing is possible.”

“Saints are the embodiment of mercy,” said the Great Master in reply. “Few can realize their unbounded compassion and mercy. What brings them down here to this world of misery, pain and sorrow from their abode of peace and bliss? Would a person living in the happy valley of Kashmir like to come down to a burning desert in the summer months of the searing hot simoom (a violent dust storm)? This would be as nothing compared to what the saints take upon themselves in leaving their palace of purity and bliss and descending to this prison-house of falsehood, filth and gross uncleanness. They come down to this lowest material region and place themselves under the hardships of human life simply for our sake. Their only purpose in putting on this dirty covering of flesh and blood is to take us up and out of this darkness and death back to our original home where eternal bliss rules supreme. They not only show us the way to our home, but in addition they take the heavy load of our karmas off our shoulders and lift us up to the pure spiritual regions. Who is there born of woman who can, by his own efforts, break the chains of mind and maya and reach Sach Khand without the help of the Satguru? Saints are one with God, and by their transcendent divine powers, they elevate our souls and make us fit for the upward flight.”

“The Guru’s relationship with his disciple is one of great love,” the Great Master continued. “No worldly relationship can stand comparison with it. All our relatives leave us sooner or later, but not so the Satguru. He does not leave us even after our death. How

beautifully Guru Ram Das describes this relationship! He says that just as a mother tends her child with loving care – always keeping an eye on him both indoors and outdoors, feeding him at the proper times and constantly cuddling him – in the same manner the Satguru keeps his disciple in the love of the Lord.”

Another disciple asked: “Sir, how long does it take a satsangi to reach Sach Khand?”

“There is no general rule for that. It depends on one’s love, faith and devotion, one’s zeal, and the effort one makes,” the Great Master replied. “The Lord’s grace also plays an important part, and so does one’s karma. I have known cases where at the very time of initiation people have conversed with the Master within. There are also cases where after ten years the attention is still wandering out. It is entirely a path of love. If a person has love for the Master, even though he has not been able to give much time to meditation, the Master’s grace will take him very high up provided he has not been piling up bad karmas. But one thing is certain: After initiation there is no going down below the human stage, and it takes no more than four births for an initiate to reach Sach Khand. The principal difficulty is that few people realize the great value of human life. As a consequence, most people waste their lives in useless pursuits.”

Call of the Great Master



*The words of the Master bear fruit in accordance with
the extent to which you act upon them.*

To obey the Master is to give devotion to him.

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

Clean Our Windows

There is an interesting story about a young couple who had recently moved into a new neighbourhood.

One morning, while the couple was having their breakfast, the young woman saw her neighbour hang her laundry out to dry. She commented to her husband, “That laundry is not very clean. She doesn’t know how to wash properly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap.”

This became a daily occurrence. Every time the neighbour would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. Her husband would look up to peek, but always remained silent. About one month later, the young woman was surprised to see nice and clean laundry on the line. She said to her husband, “Look! She finally learned how to wash properly. I wonder who taught her?”

The real surprise came when her husband replied that no one did. He said to his wife, “I simply got up early this morning and cleaned our windows!”

This story highlights how our ego makes its presence felt even in the most ordinary situations, and the amazing part is that we are not even aware of it.

Ordinarily, we never consider ourselves to be egotistical. The average person thinks he or she to be logical, objective and even humble. However, the words “I”, “me” and “mine” are direct expressions of the ego, and we use them countless times during a single day. We are also possessive and jealous, judgmental and critical of others – these weaknesses too are born from ego. Ego is associated with the desire for self-aggrandizement, honour and prestige. Undeniably,

all these traits and expressions are strongly intertwined with human nature, and we see them in people from all walks of life.

Egotism distorts our ability to understand people, situations and even ourselves for what we really are. Egotism is like 'dirt' on our mind and soul, and it becomes denser whenever we are praised, or when we judge and criticize others. All saints affirm that our ego is the greatest barrier between us and the Lord. As long as a particle of it exists in our mind, we cannot connect with the Creator.

Our dilemma is that if ego is such an immense and intricate part of our thoughts and actions, and virtually impossible to eliminate, then what chance do we have of meeting the Lord?

Herein lies the appeal of the window metaphor. Through a single action of the young man, a profound message was conveyed – clean the windows through which you see the world, and you will see what is real.

Connect this moral with the teachings of the saints and we have our answer. According to Guru Angad Dev, the second Sikh Guru:

*This ego is a long-standing disease,
But its cure is also within;
If God in Heaven sends his grace,
Then through the Guru's Shabd
The disciple does the self efface.*

Adi Granth

Guru Angad assures us that if the disease of ego is part of us then so is the cure. The Guru's Shabd is the sound current which originates from the Lord. It is the life essence, root and the quintessence of every created thing. It is the string which connects everyone and everything to the Almighty. By perceiving the Shabd, all doubts and

misconceptions about being higher than others or separate from the Lord are completely washed away. As Guru Angad writes: “The disciple does the self efface.” In other words, we see ourselves as we truly are – a drop of the Lord himself – and thus, any individuality or ego is completely erased.

We can only perceive the brilliance of the Shabd with the grace of the Lord. His grace initiates us into the method of focusing our attention inwards, so we may connect with the Shabd within. All we have to do is practise that method of meditation.

Just as the solution to the wife’s egotistical misconception was to clean the windows through which she looked at her neighbour’s laundry, similarly the solution for the removal of our ego is the practice of meditation according to the instructions of our Guru. Simran is how we cleanse the mind from the dirt of ego which separates our soul from the Lord. The more simran we do, the more dirt is washed away. This will ultimately cleanse the windows of our mind, allowing us to experience the Shabd within.



With meditation, our positive qualities begin to show. Tranquillity replaces anger, contentment replaces greed, devotion replaces lust, humility replaces ego, and detached loving kindness to all replaces attachment and self-centeredness.

Living Meditation

Speechless

It hardly takes much time after listening to the Master's satsang for us to recall and share with others what the Master spoken about. We are quick to recollect the key points, teachings, and sometimes even dispense reminders to those around us. We easily catch what the Master says, but how many of us pay attention to what the Master doesn't say?

Being physically present, we see the Master addressing the sangat. But the mystics caution us about the limitations of the physical shell which we identify with. The body is a coarse form that exists purely for operating on this plane of existence under the discretionary guidance of the mind. Functioning at this level requires the establishing of a proxy identity, which comes about from the parenting and social patterning we receive right from our infancy. Within a few years from the time of our birth, we have associated the self with this temporal vehicle – and we are no longer able to remember who we really are.

Saints have often explained that just as with our schooling, we need to begin with the fundamentals of spirituality, but this is just the starting point. If God-realization is what we seek, we need to move ahead and get past the basics. Sant Mat principles and teachings are critical in shaping the seeker's lifestyle, giving it structure and direction. But this is only the beginning. The entire spiritual path lies ahead of us. We need to embrace it and live it day in and day out, through our thoughts and actions. The leap from simply knowing and quoting Sant Mat philosophy to actually living it is no small task. Hence the immense stress all mystics place on meditation.

*Whoever believes he can reach God
by his own efforts toils in vain;
whoever believes he can reach God without effort
is merely a traveller on the road of intent.*

Abu Sa'id al-Kharra, *Travelling the Path of Love*

Our excuses and baseless justifications often get in the way of even the most earnest of intentions, making it sometimes impossible to meditate. Perfect Masters explain to us that it is our fear of the unknown that creates many of the obstacles in our way. The more we meditate, the more we come to realize that this fear of the unknown keeps us from entering into the abyss of our own emptiness.

Saints explain that this emptiness, or nothingness, is actually a highly potent and energized space; an extremely fluid and dynamic state of being in the non-physical – something that the mind is unable to understand. Only a shift in consciousness allows us to understand this. Meditation allows us to experience this finer reality.

*He travels with whoever looks for Him,
and having taken the seeker by the hand,
He arouses him to go in search of himself.*

Al-Ansari, *Travelling the Path of Love*

At the same time, the Master also assures us that he is constantly guiding and protecting us when we sit in meditation. But in order to experience this non-physical state, we must first start with the physical. The effort to sit and still the mind is ours and ours alone. We try so hard to detect signs of progress. Even as we try to think of God, we have contaminated its true essence because we approach him

with calculation. Perhaps that is why mystics tell us that if we want to mature spiritually, we need to first forget about progress.

The only way to overcome this mental hurdle is to do more meditation. The grace that is continually showered on us at all times will never be understood, and cannot be put into words. It has only to be experienced, for it originates from the infinite nothingness, the Source, even before manifestation. We are indeed blessed to have come into the company of a perfect Master – someone garbed like us in the physical, and yet one with the Source. Under his guidance, success in meditation is the only outcome we face, as long as we persevere.

We have all become experts at grasping the verbal through the physical. What we need is to experience the non-verbal and the non-physical. Could we ever imagine ourselves sitting in a silent satsang with the Master, with no movement of lips and no words spoken, fully conscious of him addressing us individually? Enveloped in a sacred and love-filled space, could we imagine our state then, if we could catch what Master didn't say?



*All this talk and turmoil and noise and movement is outside of the veil.
Inside the veil is silence and calm and peace.*

Bayazeed Bustami, as quoted in *In the Company of Friends*



Maharaj Charan Singh inspecting the construction of the Beas Hospital

Heart to Heart

Some sevadars reminisced about Maharaj Ji's great love for the sevadars and how much attention he gave to their simplest desires and wishes.

One morning, Maharaj Ji came to the main bhojan bhandar (canteen), where the staff members were eating. Maharaj Ji walked amongst the diners, then took food and sat with them. He paid Rs. 2.50. He asked the staff members about the quality of the food. It was good, they said, but they wanted *achar* (pickle). He arranged for *achar*. The sevadars were common, humble men. The Master was tender and gave attention to their needs. He is pleased with simple people.

In the canteen for sevadars, tea was given at breakfast, at 1:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. The canteen was running at a loss, so the administration stopped the 1:00 p.m. tea. Maharaj Ji came and saw this. He told the sevar in-charge to reduce the price of tea from 20 paise to 10 paise and reinstate the 1:00 p.m. tea. "This is all for the sevadars," he said. He told them that if there was a loss, he was happy; if there was a profit, he was unhappy. His only concern was for the sevadars.

Labour of Love



In a question and answer session, a disciple asked Hazur, "Don't the Masters feel some pain on our behalf?"

Hazur replied, "Don't worry about the suffering of the Master; the body may suffer, but the soul never suffers at all. The body belongs to Kal, the prince of this world. Masters don't bother about that at all. Their soul never suffers. The soul is always at peace and happy.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Book Review

The Drop That Became the Sea: Lyric Poems of Yunus Emre

BY YUNUS EMRE.

TRANSLATED BY KABIR HELMINSKI AND REFIK ALGAN

PUBLISHER: PUTNEY, VT: THRESHOLD BOOKS, 1989.

ISBN: 0-939660-30-X

Little is known with certainty about the Turkish Sufi poet Yunus Emre (c. 1238 – 1320 CE). According to legend, he was an illiterate peasant from the Konya region. It is said that during a famine, he went to a Sufi Master only to ask for some wheat. The Master replied, “Do you want wheat or divine blessing?” Yunus insisted that he wanted wheat. The Master repeated the question; Yunus repeated his answer. Only after three repetitions did Yunus awake to the idea that this divine blessing might be what he really wanted.

It is said that Yunus served his Master Taptuk Emre for many years, doing menial chores like carrying wood, before the Master “opened his lock,” at which point he began to compose and sing the vibrant, ecstatic poetry and sacred hymns for which he is known today. Unlike the well-educated Sufis of his day, who wrote in Persian or Arabic, he composed in his own local language, Turkish, and his poems have a raw, unrefined simplicity, almost conversational in tone. A contemporary of Jelaluddin Rumi, Yunus is said to have met with Rumi at least once. One oft-repeated story of such a meeting is:

Yunus had become acquainted with the six books of Rumi’s masterpiece, the Mathnawi, and he was asked what he thought of it. “It’s a little long. I would have written it differently.” “Oh? How so?” Jelaluddin asked. “I would have written: I came from eternity, clothed myself in skin and bones, and called myself ‘Yunus.’”

The Drop That Became the Sea offers a particularly accessible introduction to the poetry of Yunus Emre. Translators Refik Algan and Kabir Helminski have selected some of Yunus's most lyrical verses and organized these selections into five sections: The Dervish Way, The Way of Love, Necessary Lessons, Presence and Unity, and Life and Death. As the translators note, "Yunus's songs are a natural outpouring of his state of being, that which he could not hold back from us." In keeping with the feeling of this spontaneous outpouring, their English translations are in a free verse form, using simple and informal language. Each poem is cited to the place it appears in the Golpınarlı text, which is credited as the most authentic collection of Yunus Emre's poems.

Yunus often structures a poem around the repetition of a simple phrase, as in the following poem where the repeated "glory be to God" echoes through a song of praise and gratitude to Yunus's teacher Taptuk Emre:

*The drink sent down from Truth,
We drank it, glory be to God.
And we sailed over the Ocean of Power,
glory be to God ...
We became servants at Taptuk's door.
Poor Yunus, raw and tasteless,
Finally got cooked, glory be to God.*

Emre's awe of and gratitude to his teacher is a constant theme. He uses many vivid images to capture it.

*I was a dead tree fallen onto the path,
when a master threw me a glance
and brought me to life.*

He describes himself as a nightingale in the garden of his teacher:

*I'm a little drunk from the Friendship...
He is my teacher. I am His servant.
I am a nightingale in His garden.*

*I've come to the Teacher's garden
to be happy and die singing...
I've come to know a Teacher
and to show myself as I am.*

Many of his poems centre on the intensity of love:

*Oh Friend, when I began to love You,
my intellect went and left me.
I gazed at the rivers. I dove into the seas.
But a spark of Love's fire
can make the seas boil.
I fell in, caught fire, and burned.*

He sings of the power of love to baffle – and thus humble – even the most arrogant:

*How strange I feel under the hand of this love.
I can't see my way, under the hand of this love.
Once I was the crown of the universe.
Now I'm dirt to walk on, under the hand of this love...
What can I do when I'm so far from Union?
My back is bent, under the hand of this love.*

Now, nearly seven centuries after Yunus's death, his poetry remains popular and influential in Turkish culture. As Helminski points out, "His songs are quoted by peasants and scholars, shaijhs and diplomats, the old and the young." Today, Yunus is generally recognized as "both the beginning and the highest achievement" of the Turkish poetic tradition.

Readers who want to see a more literal, line-by-line translation of Yunus's poems might read Grace Martin Smith's translations in *The Poetry of Yunus Emre, A Turkish Sufi Poet* (University of California Press, 1993; ISBN 0-520-09781-5). Smith's extensive introduction provides useful historical background, as well as an analysis of the principal themes in Yunus's poetry. Her translations try to adhere closely to the original text.

For example, she marks any word she inserts to clarify meaning:

If I were to start out without You, I could not take a step. You are the strength in my body [that allows me] to raise my head and walk.

Where she is unsure of the meaning, she inserts a question mark. For example:

The door of God's bridal chamber (?) is open for His friends. If you want to be His friend, read a lesson from the friends.

Whether in Smith's literal translations or in Helminski's and Algan's more lyrical ones, Yunus Emre's message rings out clearly: the essence of the spiritual path is love. In Smith's translation,

*Love for You took me from myself; it is You I need, You.
I burn for You both night and day; it is You I need, You ...
If they should kill me and fling my ashes to the sky,
my dust would cry there, "It is You I need, You."
Yunus Emre is my name; my fire increases day by day.
In the two worlds my goal is this: it is You I need, You.*



Book reviews express the opinions of the reviewers and not of the publisher.

