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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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A Master's Message

Maharaj Sawan Singh wrote the following letter to Daryai Lal Kapur, author of Heaven on Earth. Its message, though personal, is of value and relevance to all spiritual aspirants.

Radha Soami. May grace from the Satguru be showered on you. I received your affectionate letter and I am glad to learn that you have a good and comfortable job. Now that the Lord has given you material ease and comfort, it is incumbent on you to do your meditation; for without meditation the soul will find neither peace nor a resting place. In worldly matters a satsangi tries to be punctual, industrious, and attentive. But when it comes to meditation, I get letters asking me to take care of bhajan for them. No, this is not the right attitude. This is not true discipleship. Just as a satsangi is not slack in his worldly pursuits, he should not be slack in meditation.

What a pity that meditation, which is a satsangi's prime duty, is neglected. Deeply concerned with succeeding in worldly jobs, earnest prayers are addressed to God; but concern for meditation is missing. It is because the worldly jobs are taken as important and the real duty – meditation – is taken casually. Just as you attend to worldly matters with zeal and determination, so too pursue meditation with love and regularity.

Start today. Fix a time for your daily meditation and hold to it. Meditation can only be done if you are punctual. If you miss meditation, consider your food unearned for that day. This is the way to control the mind; this is the prescription to tame its waywardness. Put this into practice, dear son. Keep your mind in meditation throughout the day, even while walking about and working.

Radha Soami from the sangat,
Sawan Singh, 3.11.1920



Compunction

Are you familiar with the word ‘compunction’? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, compunction means a “pricking or stinging of the conscience or heart; regret or uneasiness of mind consequent on sin or wrongdoing; remorse, contrition.” Compunction is not, then, a particularly welcome feeling. However, in much the same way as the Radha Soami masters have taught us to view loneliness as a gift from God, the eleventh-century mystic Nikitas Stithatus encourages us to view compunction as a blessing from God. In *The Philokalia*, an anthology of selected works of Christian mysticism – a spiritual tradition emphasising inner prayer, silence and listening to God – Stithatus states:

Nothing inspires the soul with longing for God and love for one’s fellow beings as humility, compunction and pure prayer. ... Humility engenders compunction and compunction engenders humility ... it is as if these were strung together by a single grace, linked by the unbreakable bond of the Spirit.

Compunction, as Stithatus states, begins with God’s grace. Without grace it is impossible for us to break free of our self-satisfied, defensive attitudes, and to see ourselves as we really are. It’s his grace that pricks our conscience and forces us to acknowledge that we could do better; the remorse and regret that ensues becomes a fuel, powering action in the right direction. Seen from this angle, compunction is multilayered, constituting three distinct dimensions: the realization of a wrong, regret, and a desire to remedy the wrong. So, instead of ignoring or burying compunction, such a feeling is to be welcomed for it reminds us of the need to fulfil our duty to the Master.

How compunction engenders humility

Compunction prevents remorse over wrongdoing from turning into guilt. This is significant because, unlike compunction, guilt is useless. Although it is an acknowledgment of wrongful action, guilt is self-absorbing and debilitating, precipitating feelings of shame and self-hatred. Compunction, on the other hand, uses remorse to change direction: “Ah, I’ve taken a wrong turn. Let me do the right thing and get back on track again.” Whereas guilt encourages self-pity because the cause of wrongdoing is attributed to one’s

weakness and limitations, compunction compels us to get up, dust ourselves off, and to focus on the opportunity afforded to rise above our human frailties. Put differently, guilt encourages self-loathing and overemphasizes the ways in which we're deficient, whereas compunction directs attention at our Master, reinvigorating our determination to please him. This, in a nutshell, is the compunction-engendering humility Stithatus describes.

How humility engenders compunction

Rick Warren, a Christian pastor, asserted, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." It's an insightful subtlety, and particularly suited to illuminating how humility engenders compunction. The practice of meditating heightens our sensitivity to the perfect One, which in turn, begins to engender a natural humility from within. If we're attentive to this, we'll acknowledge that we are not so great, important, or knowledgeable as we'd like to think. Instead of viewing ourselves as superior in some way, and therefore justified in criticizing or dominating others, humility helps us to see the best in others. This triggers a more profound realization still: of how spiritually bereft we are and how much we need the Master. Given the stranglehold of the ego, we could not, by our thinking alone, arrive at this insight. Compunction and humility are, as Stithatus noted, inextricably linked, wrought together by "a single grace" from the divine. Maharaj Sawan Singh makes a similar point in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, noting that humility is powerful specifically because it is a manifestation of the power of Shabd:

Humility is not weakness. It is such a powerful thing that all the powers of the world have to bow to it.... No one can defeat a prideless man; as behind his humility is acting the secret power of the Lord.

Invoking grace to engender the type of humility described by the Great Master requires an initial level of humility from us first. As he explains:

He alone can derive full benefit from a saint who goes to him in humility. He who is full of pride of his wisdom seldom reaches him, and if he does so by mistake, what will he gain? If you want to be admitted to the court of saints, go with the cup of humility without any pride, as it is only when the cup is

empty that the flagon bends towards it. If the cup is full to the brim, how can it contain anything more? Respectful humility is accordingly very necessary.

The necessity of going to a mystic with an open heart and a desire to learn about spirituality for its own end is illustrated by an incident recounted in *Tales of the Mystic East*. The tale is from the Mahabharata – an ancient Sanskrit epic about a long, bloody war between two opposing groups of cousins. After their victory, Lord Krishna advised the Pandava brothers to atone for their violence by performing a religious ceremony called the yagya. Success, however, depended on the Pandavas hearing a bell ringing in the heavens.

Despite inviting holy men from the length and breadth of the country, the bell in heaven failed to ring. Coming to the Pandavas' aid once more, Lord Krishna informed them that they'd forgotten to invite a holy man of low caste to the yagya. Keen to rectify the wrong, Queen Draupadi cast her pride aside, walking barefoot all way to the sage's hermitage to persuade him to attend the yagya. The sage finally agreed to accompany Draupadi. When food was served to him, Draupadi thought that being of a low caste he could not appreciate the delicious dishes she had prepared with her own hands. When the bell still did not ring, everyone was perplexed. The Pandavas begged Lord Krishna to tell them what was standing in the way. Lord Krishna replied "Ask Draupadi. It is her mind and it's arrogant thoughts that are responsible." The moment Draupadi realized her mistake, she humbled her mind and prayed to be forgiven for her pride and egotism. And in that very instant, the bells in heaven rang out.

True compunction and genuine humility lead to what Nikitas Stithatus calls "pure prayer," which in turn leads to selflessness. That is the state we reach when we challenge the ego by facing reality, adjust our behaviour accordingly, and beseech our merciful Master to help us. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, Maharaj Sawan Singh puts it like this:

Ceaseless effort to make our life pure and truthful is true prayer. This draws us to the mercy of the Lord, and his grace and limitless blessings then fulfil the sincere and pure desires of our heart.



I Never Have a Bad Day

*Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The Bible, *Matthew 5:3*

Evelyn Underhill was a twentieth-century English poet, novelist and author of *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. In this book she explains that, whilst the end-goal of mysticism is not “goodness” in itself, union with the divine “entails the acquirement of goodness.” Of course, the question that Underhill naturally poses next is, what type of goodness will “best serve the self in its journey towards union with the Absolute?”

Underhill examined nearly a thousand sources looking for virtues essential to the mystical quest. Given the volume of material consulted and its wide-ranging scope, encompassing the work of mystics from different ages and continents, it’s reasonable to assume a definitive response wasn’t discernible. Yet surprisingly, Underhill states, “The mystics of all ages and all faiths agree in their answer.” Virtues that are of highest order, which individuals seeking union with God should cultivate, are detachment, humility, and obedience.

In fact, there is no choice in the matter; the three virtues are a prerequisite to entering into the “kingdom of heaven.” Here, as the writer of *The Gospel of Jesus* explains, admittance is granted exclusively to the “poor in spirit”; those who, eliminating the ego from within themselves, are humble and devoid of pride.

Spiritual seekers perturbed by the thought of cultivating three core virtues when experience has shown that establishing or eradicating even one mundane habit has proven difficult, should be comforted by the irrevocable link between them. The “three aspects of perfection are really one”, Underhill explains.

Their common characteristic is this: they tend to make the subject regard itself, not as an isolated and interesting individual, possessing desires and rights, but as a scrap of the Cosmos, an ordinary bit of the Universal Life, only important as a part of the All, an expression of the Will Divine.

Together, detachment and humility lead to obedience of the highest kind: surrendering to the will of the Lord. Reaching this level of maturity does not require (as the concept of detachment implies) destitution or a complete renunciation of material goods. Neither should self-contempt or a sense of unworthiness be indulged following a misguided interpretation of what is meant by humility. Rather, what's expected from spiritual aspirants is a shift in *mental attitude*. If they focus on giving up those things enchainning the spirit and blocking their union with the divine (be it desires, interests, riches, or habits), humility will follow. No longer will the practitioner feel compelled to react to a perceived injustice, for example. An individual's *sustained* effort to facilitate detachment and humility will eventually culminate in: “[o]bedience, that abnegation of selfhood, that mortification of the will ... [which indifferent] to the accidents of life ... results in a complete self-abandonment.”

Originating with the mystic Meister Eckhart, the following story illustrates the mental shift in attitude necessary to kill our instinct towards sensual gratification and surrender our individuality to the divine. It is taken from Underhill's *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*.

I never have a bad day

A learned man prays that he may be shown the truth. One day, a voice from God came to him and said, “Go to the church and there you will find somebody to guide you.”

Arriving at the church, the learned man finds a poor, bedraggled man in rags and calls out to him: “God give you good day!”

The poor man responded, “I never have a bad day.”

The learned man, observing the tattered look of the man in the church and wishing to be kind, then said: “God give you good luck.”

“I don't have bad luck,” replied the other. “May you be happy!” said the learned man.

“Thank you for your kind wishes, but I'm never unhappy.”

The learned man, flummoxed by the positivity of the man, asked, “I don't understand your cheery attitude and outlook on life – please explain.”

And the man in the church responded, “You wished me good day, but I don’t have a bad day because, if I’m hungry, I praise God; if the weather is fair or foul, I still praise God; and if I’m despised, I praise God. So, I’m fortunate not to know a horrible day.”

He continued, “You wished God would send me luck. But I don’t have bad luck because I’ve learnt to live with God and know what he does is for the best. Whatever God gives me or ordains for me, I take it cheerfully as best it can be.”

“You wished God would make me happy but I’m never unhappy. I’ve yielded my will to God and my only desire is to live in his will.”

The scholar asked: “What sort of man are you?” And the bedraggled man in rags said, “I am a king.” The scholar asked, “So, where is your kingdom?”

“My soul is my kingdom, which is infinitely greater than a kingdom on earth. I’m the ruler of my senses and I control all desires.”

“What brought you to this perfection?”

“My silence, my high thoughts, and my union with God. Before he found me, I was lost and restless. In God, I have found eternal rest and peace.”



Any day when you fail to keep the sacred pledge of giving two and a half hours to your meditation, please try to remind your mind that this most valuable human body was given to you by the Lord simply to afford you an opportunity to return to your original eternal home of peace and bliss. So make a renewed effort to utilize this rare opportunity of having the human form. One should never fail to render unto the Lord what is his due. Also give some time daily to the study of Sant Mat literature besides attending the group meetings that are held near you.

Quest for Light



Acceptance – Staying in His Will

What does acceptance mean? According to an online dictionary, acceptance is taking or welcoming something given to us. In human psychology, acceptance refers to resigning oneself to a given situation without protest or attempting to change it. When plans or people behave in accordance with our wishes, acceptance is easy. But plans don't always work out in the way we would like. Family, friends, and people in general don't behave according to our expectations. Many of us are dissatisfied with our bodies, few of us are in perfect health, and we'd like more money, more possessions or something else!

Accepting life's turn of events when they don't match our desires, hopes and aspirations is difficult. We complain, grumble, and become miserable. In fact, we find it virtually impossible to come to terms with even the most superficial of changes. Most of us (I imagine) find it difficult to accept that we're aging. Looking in the mirror, we think, "I look dreadful, I need to put some makeup on," or "Ah! My grey hair is really coming through, I must make an appointment at the hairdressers." As if the dissatisfaction with our looks wasn't enough, we're disappointed when a friend cancels a dinner engagement at the last minute. Or we're upset and annoyed when our diligence is overlooked and a colleague is promoted instead of us.

Our wants, desires, and indeed our entire perspective is limited by time and space.

Our awareness of, and knowledge about, the material world is narrow, confined to that which is perceptible through our senses and intellect. Can we see the future? No. Is it possible to control the future? No. It stands to reason that we can't influence something of which we know nothing. What, then, is in our hands?

We can make as many plans as we like, but at the same time we must accept that not all will work out. As Baba Ji reminds us, not everything can happen our way. Some things will, and some won't. Our experiences and the events in our life – from the family in which we're born, how affluent we are, how many children we have and, ultimately, how long we live – is based on our destiny. This, of course, is determined by the divine law of karma in which our past actions account for our current existence.

This law of the universe is aptly captured by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians in the New Testament of the Bible:

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked:
for whatsoever a man soweth,
that shall he also reap.*

Since we are governed by cosmic karmic law, and are the architects of our own destiny, there's nobody to blame other than ourselves.

And what can our wants and wishes achieve against God's will? We are a single individual in a global population of more than eight billion. Our personal circle is tiny, both in terms of the number of people we know and the local area in which we live. On occasion, we may be able to influence family members, our closest friends, and possibly colleagues, but that's as far as our so-called 'will' reaches. Since we believe the One who created the whole universe is omnipresent and all-knowing, why then would we try to assert our will over his? There's no logic to this way of thinking.

One may well ask, "What is God's will?" Our intellect is far too limited to comprehend what it is, but, in short, it is whatever he wishes. This foundational principle of spirituality is called *hukam* in Punjabi; it acknowledges that the way in which everything is unfolding and the governance of the entire universe is occurring in accordance with his pleasure. If we were to live with this profound truth, it would be logical for us to avoid taking actions unacceptable to him and to focus, instead, on doing what pleases him.

So how can we know what the Lord finds unacceptable, and what things please him? We haven't seen him, we don't know him, so we can't ask him. Aware of our predicament, the Lord sends his messenger – a true master, a Satguru. "My Master is indeed the gateway to God's mercy" says Sultan Bahu. Shedding further light on this in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh states:

Surrendering to the will of the master means helping ourselves to rise above the realm of mind and maya, helping our soul to leave the mind. When we make the soul whole and pure, then we are surrendering to the will of the Father, the will of the master.

How do we fulfil the will of the master? What is it that he singles out as his primary command? It is Nam. It is meditation. Whenever Baba Ji is asked what it is that pleases the master, his answer is always the same: meditation. Yet, whenever we ask him this, we hold our breath, keenly waiting for an answer we've not previously heard. Something new, some substitute for getting up early every day and sitting in meditation for two and a half hours. But no, the answer doesn't change because, as Hazur Maharaj Ji explains, acceptance – living in the will of the master – and surrender are only possible through meditation:

We have to surrender ourselves to the master. It means that we have to take our ego out of us and blend our whole heart with his heart. He is already merged into the Lord, and by merging ourselves into him we are automatically merged into the Lord. That can be done only by meditation. The more we meditate, the more we are driving out ego. By doing so, we will be drawn towards the master, and we are automatically surrendering to him; and through him, we are surrendering to the Lord himself.

Surrender is only possible through meditation because this is what drives out our ego. The more we meditate, the more time we spend in his company, the more we start feeling his presence everywhere. We start getting an inkling of why things are happening to us, and our horizon starts expanding. Representing our gradual spiritual evolution, realizations such as this make acceptance easier. Put differently, we begin resigning ourselves to our current situation without protest or any attempt to change it. Eventually, our resignation evolves into the self-abandonment described by Hazur Maharaj Ji in the previous quotation.

To engender greater acceptance, we can establish two habits in addition to practising meditation assiduously. First, we can train our mind not to label everything as good or bad. Developing a positive attitude by, for example, looking for the good in everything would also benefit us. Undoubtedly, this is easier said than done, but if we also got into the habit of thinking that disappointments or the cross words from someone are coming with the permission of our master, this will drive us to persist in reconciling our emotions with the rationality of our higher mind.

Asking ourselves what we have learned from a particular situation is a second habit we may wish to develop. Instead of getting offended when someone is critical of us, examining ourselves honestly to check if the criticism is warranted may sometimes lead to self-improvement. The effect of these changes to the way we think, however, will only be realized if they are underpinned by strictly adhering to the four Sant Mat vows.

Accepting his will is not easy. But while we shouldn't underestimate the determination it will take to, bit by bit, lose our ego, neither should we feel disheartened. Upon succeeding Maharaj Jagat Singh, Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh struggled to accept his new role at first. In a letter to a friend reproduced in *Treasure Beyond Measure*, Hazur Maharaj Ji wrote of the internal "war" being waged within himself:

Facing people with folded hands ... my mind ceases to think and I am living as if I have no other alternative ... I have been surrounded, captured and imprisoned.

... All my patience and tolerance seem to have been exhausted. I am at war within myself and can hardly decide anything ... yet destiny had made me face all that. I wish I could be cruel and quite ignorant of others' wishes. Then I would not have been cruel to myself.

This is so reassuring! Maharaj Ji had to work at acceding to his new position; his acceptance wasn't automatic. However, despite being daunted by the seva bestowed upon him, Maharaj Ji consented and assumed his responsibility for the simple reason that his master desired it so.

As many of us can recall, Maharaj Ji performed his seva with love, compassion and the kindest smile imaginable. We cannot help but be inspired to try and follow his example and, indeed, the ideal set before us by Baba Ji.



Truth in a Nutshell

Bravery

To lead a good, pure, moral life in youth one needs the courage, bravery and resolve of a prophet.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

From the moment of initiation the real fight has begun. Fight manfully and bravely. Do not despair or desert your post. Steadfastly devote yourself – body, mind and soul – to get release from the cycle of birth and death. The fight is fierce, but the reward also is great, as victory is certain.... The Master is always with you to guide and protect you, so let not despair or despondency come near you. Ward them off with the weapons of Faith and Trust.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*

“We become brave by doing brave acts,” observed Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.... Standing ground against threatening things is not to be confused with fearlessness, however. Courage is a ‘settled disposition’ to stand one’s ground. And that means practice, which in turn means facing fears and taking stands in advance of any ‘settled disposition’ to do so: acting bravely when we don’t really feel brave.

William J Bennet, *The Book of Virtues*



Ready to Take the Shabd Challenge?

The Master explains fully:

Attach yourself to the unstruck music of Shabd.

*There is no way, other than through Shabd,
to break free from the vessel of the body.*

Soami Ji Maharaj, *Sar Bachan Poetry*

The meaning of the opening lines of Soami Ji's shabd is crystal clear: attaching oneself to the Shabd is the only way to liberate ourselves from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Baba Ji has repeated the same message in his satsangs: there is no way other than the Shabd. But what exactly is it? There is no better description of its power and dynamism than that found in the following passages of *One Being One*:

This creative Word or Music is the dynamic, active power of the One. This is what brings things into being, and sustains their existence. The Word is the One Himself. It is also the essence of our own being or consciousness. And it is musical? It can be heard? Yes.

The creative Word is light and sound, which can be experienced within ourselves, not with material eyes and ears, of course, but with their spiritual counterparts. The divine light of the Word can be seen within ourselves, and the vibrations of the Word can be heard as the sweetest and most compelling music.

Sant Mat is not alone in sharing knowledge of the Shabd. As indicated by the numerous names to which it is referred – the sound current, the unstruck music, the Word – the music of creation has been known and experienced since time began.

The scriptures of all the world's great religions refer directly and indirectly to the music of the spheres. However, it is not uncommon to find them misinterpreting or downplaying the significance of Shabd. In no way is this observation intended as a criticism. Many such texts were slowly and painstakingly translated (by hand) from a little-known language to one accessible to many. Nonetheless, without the support of a knowledgeable teacher, the translators of historical religious texts were forced to imagine the meaning of the original.

From our perspective, the difficulty the translators experienced in trying to make sense of a phenomenon beyond language reminds us of how fortunate we are to have a true master as a guide. Like Soami Ji's verse, Baba Ji's satsangs and responses to our questions leave no room for ambiguity – there is no alternative to the Shabd; nothing will deliver us to our true home except the Shabd; there is ultimately nothing but the Shabd. So, when discussing the wonderful phenomena of the sound current, we should approach it with humility, recognizing the great gift we have received. Our Master, without expecting anything in return, disregarding his own comfort, always with the benefit and convenience of seekers in mind, travels the globe to teach anyone interested about the Shabd and the teachings of the Saints.

The significance of the Shabd is explained further in *One Being One*:

This cosmic music is the Axis of Being, the Axis of Love, the creative centre of the universe. It never stops. If it did, the universe would cease to be. It is the natural link between the One Being and the little beings who feel themselves to be separated...

Just as birdsong is present in the garden, even when our minds are too absorbed in cares and concerns to hear it, so too does the creative Music play on eternally in the centre of our beings, even if we are too distracted to be aware of it. We only have to listen. To become truly still and silent. Then we realize that it has always been resounding.

“Truly still and silent” – that is how we need to be to contact the Shabd and why ‘meditation’ is the answer to every question we ask Baba Ji. Because isn't this the purpose of meditating – to be still, silent, and realize the Shabd?

At initiation we promise to give two and a half hours of every day to meditation, attending for three quarters of the time to simran, and one quarter to bhajan. Simran, the repetition of the five holy names, gives us the concentration needed for bhajan. Then, in absolute oblivion to the outer world, we listen to or for the sound current resounding within and, accompanied by the Shabd Master, are pulled to the higher regions. We might wonder how much simran we need to do before we reach this stage. Maharaj Charan Singh responds to our query in *Die to Live*:

There is no fixed timing as to how much time is to be given to simran and how much time to Shabd.... But when, with the help of simran, the Sound becomes very distinct and clear and pulls you upward, you may switch from simran to the Shabd. You yourself will be able to decide when to lessen your time in simran and when to increase your time in Shabd.

However, Hazur Maharaj Ji cautions us not to stop simran as soon as we start to hear the Shabd, but to continue repeating the names until we are more spiritually advanced:

Simran should be continued until a very late stage. You can't say that since you've started hearing the Sound, you should stop simran. Even then, simran should be continued. It may be only for half an hour or one hour, but it should be continued until a very late stage, until the second stage, simran should not be ignored. Simran should be kept, because you never know when the mind may slip out. Concentration is essential for hearing the sound, so simran should be carried on.

Conversely, Hazur Maharaj Ji reminds those of us who neglect bhajan at the expense of simran not to do this either. This would be like labouring, with love, over the preparation of an exquisite meal with all the finest ingredients and, once it is ready, chucking it in the bin without tasting a single morsel. If we believe the Shabd is the only means of reaching our original home, surely it is pointless to undertake all the necessary preparations to travel along the path but fail to walk it? Attending to simran and bhajan is therefore of utmost importance. In fact, according to *One Being One*:

There is no higher kind of meditation than listening to this celestial symphony. It leads beyond all bodies, minds, birth, death, and everything else in created form.

The Creator has determined that listening to the Shabd is the only form of worship that will yield significant results. That is not to say that other supplications have no effect. If we seek the love of the Creator in its full glory and if our objective is to travel to the highest region from where

we came, then intimate contact with the Shabd is the only way. Listening to the Shabd is the highest service to the Master; no other is required.

In summary, there is no way to the Supreme Lord except through accessing the Shabd, and there is no way to contact the Shabd except by the grace of a true Master. The gift he freely shares transports us from the land of gloom to the transcendent reality of Sat Lok, our true home. That is why we are fortunate beyond our wildest imagination. However, the power of the Shabd and our longed-for destination will remain only a concept in our mind unless we live by the four vows, put in the work, and turn them into reality. In case we are tempted to look for a shortcut, in *Die to Live*, Hazur Maharaj Ji states: “There’s no short cut at all.”

There is no other way than the Shabd. Are you ready?



The problems of the world will never end and have never ended. No man in this world can say that he has no problems in life. Our duty is to make our willpower so strong, through meditation, that we are able to rise above the difficulties of life. Our duty is to make efforts to solve the problems when they arise and, whatever the results of our efforts may be, try to live in the will of the Lord. Meditation indirectly solves all our problems by making us forget this world and its objects. Therefore attend to it with love and faith, without wondering about what life brings to you.

Quest for Light



The Windows of Gold

There was once a boy who lived in the snow-covered mountains. Every day, at sunrise, he would look down into the valley below and see beautiful windows of gold far away. He yearned to go down into the valley to see these beautiful windows more clearly, but he knew it would be a long and difficult trek.

Each day he planned the journey, and each night he dreamed of it. Then, one golden morning, when dawn broke through and the valley was sparkling with dew, he started to climb down the mountainside. The journey was hard and long. He travelled all day until, at last, with bleeding feet and torn clothes, worn and weary, he entered the peaceful valley town. The sun was just setting, and the boy was hungry, tired, lonely and cold. He frantically looked around for the windows of gold, but they were nowhere to be seen.

The boy was devastated. He had come so far on this long and dangerous journey to find the windows of gold, but where were they? In desperation, he rushed up to a passing villager, crying, "Please tell me, where are the beautiful windows of gold?"

The villager smiled and pointed up to the top of the mountain, "There!" he explained, "the sun is setting and burnishing the windows on the top of the mountain."

The boy looked in amazement. There was his own cabin at the very peak with gleaming windows of gold. He had come all this way to experience what he already had at home.

So it is with the Kingdom of God. We search for it everywhere outside, until we finally realize that it is not in some far distant place but is within our very selves.

Adapted from *The Windows of Gold*



Our Relationship with the Master

Our relationship with the Master is the greatest gift that the Lord has bestowed upon us. Although we have not earned it, we have it. There are no words to describe what an honour and a privilege it is to forge a relationship with a true living mystic. Irrespective of our doubts and worries, the Master, looking at our potential, still gives us the gift of Nam so that we too may experience the divine. Initiation changes our direction. After lifetimes of coming and going, we now stand on the threshold of eternal freedom, ready to merge in the ocean of Shabd. Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Light on Sant Mat* just how rare our human birth is:

I cannot send you a better message than to remind you of what the Master told you at the time of initiation: Life is precious and it is only after thousands of years that you got your turn to be born as a human being. This opportunity should not be lost, and every minute that you can spare from your duties should be devoted to simran and bhajan so that you may soon go in and thus finish your round of births and deaths.

We're so conditioned to experience life through the vehicle of our individuality that we find it hard to understand the essential nature of the Shabd. It is inseparable from our essential selves. It's the power of Shabd which is working intelligently through the organs of the body: the conversion of oxygen and food into energy, the heartbeat and circulation of the blood, the immune system that protects the body from invaders, the sensory impulses that are translated by the brain to form a picture of our outer reality.

So effective is the creative power in synchronizing the thousands of simultaneously occurring processes keeping us alive, that we take it all for granted, mistakenly believing that the body functions of its own accord, independently, almost as if by magic. If we care to look, we can see the creative power at work everywhere, across all life forms. The Shabd that brought the plant into physical form manifests itself as the flower that grows on the plant, and it's Shabd that opens the petals of the flower in the morning to receive the sun's rays and which closes them at night. Ancient Greeks called the complex living being that is planet Earth – and the

galaxies and stars surrounding it – Gaia. But Shabd is far more than just the manifestation of physical phenomena.

In the following verse from Sar Bachan Poetry, Soami Ji implores us to experience the Shabd and get a new insight into the world through rising to the spiritual planes within us:

*Understand the mystery of Shabd, O ignorant one –
why wander around, beguiled by the mind?
Raise your consciousness and find
the opening at the third eye
and the current of Shabd flowing on the right side.*

Soami Ji suggests we experience genuine reality, not the one we understand through the prism of our mind. If we let the mind wander, we live in a constant flux of action and reaction since the undisciplined mind reacts to whatever is happening. Each time the mind reacts, new karma is created, and the chain of action, reaction, and suffering continues.

The mind has limited capacity to experience divinity because it is full of the noise of desires, worries, expectations and disappointments. Our every thought is centred on some form of longing. Our mind is so crowded that there's no room for the Lord. The more we identify ourselves with thinking, the farther away we are from the Shabd within. We have become so used to the world and so comfortable in our suffering that the truths which the mystics describe seem fantastical.

We are constantly reflecting on our thoughts, desires, and goals. If we can create a space between ourselves and our thoughts, we will experience stillness. In this stillness, we will realize that we are not our thoughts. Achieving stillness in meditation will reveal the reality behind our illusionary world. Realization of the self lies behind the veil of the mind; only when the mind has been made still can we be aware of what lies behind the veil. The saints advise us to empty our minds to reach this state. Baba Ji says that at the core of our being is a spiritual dimension, which we should strive to reach through meditation and the stillness that follows. The practice will make us more content, more serene, more efficient, and more giving in everything that we do.

In *from self to Shabd*, the author writes, “Our transformation begins when we become aware of where we keep our attention.” It’s a good habit to constantly ask ourselves, “What’s going on inside me at this moment?” Questioning ourselves in this way redirects our focus to simran – as simran is, after all, the hook by which we catch the Shabd. When there are no thoughts, our attention can feel the energy of the Shabd. Even brief moments of stillness are helpful, not least because brief moments grow longer. The more stillness we experience, the more peace we feel. This is the beginning of our natural state of experiencing oneness with the Shabd. With practice of simran and bhajan, the sense of stillness develops and the peace deepens. In fact, there is no end to its depth.

Baba Ji was once asked how it feels when the soul traverses the higher stages. Does one feel ecstatic, full of love for everyone? Baba Ji replied that it is indescribable and needs to be experienced, but that being at peace with oneself is probably the closest descriptor. He went on to talk about the importance of keeping the vessel clean, as this will lead to focus, which in turn will lead to experience.

To achieve the type of focus Baba Ji mentions requires us to consciously direct our mind to simran. Simran changes our perception and allows us to be more positive. All efforts to do simran are worth the effort. The script of our life is not going to change, but if we can develop the habit of keeping our attention at the eye centre and carry on with simran at every opportunity, then the difficult phases in our life will resolve themselves and things will work out of their own accord.

When we are present at the eye centre, we become free of the ego, free of the self. We will be present in the world, doing our work, but our consciousness will be more aware.

Simran disrupts our connection to our attachments, anxieties, and dilemmas, thereby slowly helping us to detach from the world. The character we are playing in the script of our life gets a break and the external world, the physical body, the emotions, the thinking become relatively insignificant.

The Master assures us there are no failures in Sant Mat. No matter what our circumstances, he asks that we do our best to follow his teachings and

live the Sant Mat way of life. His loving presence is always near, and his guidance close at hand. In *Quest for Light*, Hazur Maharaj Ji inspires us with the following counsel:

Give up all feeling of depression and live a joyous life, fully relaxed and thanking the Lord for the great gift he has conferred on you. Keep your thoughts in simran and bhajan and see what happiness you will find within yourself. Do not worry about anything in this life, which is all an unpleasant dream. The real life lies beyond, where your Master awaits you.



The mind is a very powerful opponent and its attempt every moment is to keep us away from the Lord. In its present state it does not want to turn its face inwards and likes to stay in the unclean and filthy sense pleasures. It is therefore going to be a great struggle between us and the mind, and we always have to be on our guard.

Unless the mind starts taking interest in the melody within, the soul is helpless, as the two are tied up in an inextricable knot. All effort is to be directed to forcing this mind to take interest in the sound within. Perseverance will ultimately bring its reward. For obvious reasons the progress has to be slow and we should never feel disheartened on this path. The burden we have collected during millions of lives will take time to clear off. Simran and bhajan with love and devotion will do this. One day you will ultimately reach your home if you continue to do your best. The more effort you put in, the more grace will the Lord shower on you.

Quest for Light



How to Become a Spiritual Warrior

Tulsi Sahib asserts that all true saints and mystics teach the same truths, including the necessity of a living Master. His compositions frequently mention that his knowledge of divine laws and spiritual truths are based on personal experience, and that his experience is attributable entirely to the guidance given by his master:

*I was inert iron, heavily laden with rust
but in the company of my Guru,
the philosopher's stone, I was transformed into gold....
For ages I was known as gold,
but no more,
for I am now the philosopher's stone.*

Tulsi Sahib is informing us that although the philosopher's stone may turn iron into gold, his master transformed him into the philosopher's stone itself. His guru, in other words, transformed Tulsi Sahib spiritually into his own form. Based on his personal experience, Tulsi Sahib extols the need for a true guru from whom one can attain the means to eternal salvation. Addressing Sheikh Taqi, the following ghazal illustrates this:

*O Taqi, fix your gaze on the Master
who has offered you his hand.
Do not be neglectful or give up if you wish to behold
the splendour of your Beloved.
His mercy will protect you till you arrive at his court;
there is no need for worry or fear.
Go straight and reach there, for this is the Master's decree.
Mansur, Sarmad, Bu-Ali, Shams and Maulana –
they all followed this same path with firm resolve
in their hearts and reached their destination.
Love is the destination of this path,
and reaching there is not difficult,
for the one who removes all difficulty
stands before you and has given you his hand.*

*Tulsi says: Listen, O Taqi, the inner secret is beyond
all you can imagine.*

Keep it safe – it points to the Most High.

Tulsi Sahib, Saint of Hathras

Metaphorically, Tulsi Sahib is asking us to hold on tight to the master's hand – the gift of Nam – and take full advantage of the priceless opportunity of being with the Beloved within. To give us confidence, he names other Sufi mystics, stating that with determined hearts, they followed their masters' instructions completely and reached their destination. In the same way as we might vigilantly guard gold, diamonds, and other forms of outer wealth, Tulsi Sahib stresses that we should be protective over our inner wealth too. Now that we have found a true master, Tulsi Sahib begs us to have faith in him, follow his instructions, and begin our real spiritual journey inside.

He reassures us of the master's protection; telling us not to be scared or worry because until we reach our destination, the master will forever remain at our side, holding our hand. Baba Ji gives us the same reassurance, explaining that we are never without the Lord's grace. We don't need to ask for it. Without his grace, we wouldn't even be reading this text! It's not the absence of grace which is the issue but our inability to recognize it. Imagine, for instance, the following scenario: You wake up late one day and rush to get to work. Yet, no matter how hard you try to drive fast, you keep coming to red lights, forcing you to slow down. We can either view this as an inconvenience or we can see it as the Lord looking after us, slowing us down to keep us safe. We spend most of our lives worrying about the future or being perturbed by the past, forgetting to live in the present moment. However, our meditation, when practised daily, will strengthen us to such an extent we will be able to go through life with confidence.

Mystics advise us to lead a stress-free and relaxed life. Yet, given our entanglement in the world of mind and maya (illusion), how is it possible? Encouraging us to go directly to our destination, Tulsi Sahib urges us not to become distracted by trying to gratify worldly desires. The master has given us the key to God-realization. Our daily efforts will lead to the riches

of our own mystic experience, and that experience will deepen our faith, supporting us until the end of our spiritual journey.

Elsewhere, Tulsi Sahib refers to a spiritual practitioner as a ‘warrior’. A warrior’s goal is victory. By taking refuge in the Satguru, we are learning how to battle with our mind and, eventually, bring it under our control. So, how can we become the type of warrior Tulsi Sahib refers to and engage in a daily battle with the mind? This is done by inverting the force of habit, so that it works for us, not against us. It means practising meditation day after day, persevering even on the days when we don’t feel like it, until one day, we’ll find we can’t help but want to meditate.

During the Master’s question-and-answer sessions, many of us share our anxieties about not being able to dedicate time to meditation, whether we are making any ‘progress’, and how difficult we find it to follow the path. The master replies by posing a rhetorical question to us: Is anything easy in life? At work, for example, we are ready to take on difficult tasks and spend countless hours, days, weeks, months and even years fulfilling them. Why not apply the same commitment and dedication to our spiritual journey? Tulsi Sahib’s ghazal is heartening, for he says that reaching our destination isn’t difficult because the Master has given us his hand.

So, let us ask ourselves, have we made the concerted effort our master expects? Did we dedicate two and a half hours of our time to meditation today? If not, let’s start now – with firm determination to keep the promise we made to our master when he initiated us – and become the spiritual warrior he wants us to be.



Use It or Lose It

‘Use it or lose it’ is a popular adage which describes something that must be used by a particular date, or you will lose the opportunity offered. These four little words hold much meaning for spiritual seekers. In Sant Mat it can be applied to a human birth – we have been granted a fixed number of breaths in and out.

One of the greatest gifts the Lord has given us is the human body; only in this form are souls able to go to their final resting place, their home with the Father. The book of Corinthians in the Bible reminds us of this by asking a rhetorical question: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

The value of a human birth also comes up a lot in satsang. Maybe it’s because we’ve heard about this so many times that we’re beginning to overlook the significance of what we’re told. When, for example, did you think about being given a human body? Have you reminded yourself that you have an expiry date that is yours alone? And have you cheered yourself up with the thoughts of the ultimate gift – the one without the expiry date?

We now have the opportunity to end our homesickness and reunite with our Father.

Let this put you straight if you think he’s forgotten about you or is not missing you. He wants his children home, all of them, including you, dear reader.

Mobile phones include a function that monitors battery levels, which gives a breakdown of how much power is being used by each application. No doubt you’ve been in a situation when your phone needs charging but you find you’ve left your charger at home. At that time, the first thing you would do is conserve the battery by closing the unnecessary applications.

Our life is in the same emergency situation; we are short of charge, and to make the most of this lifetime we need to shut down all unnecessary applications – unhelpful thoughts, wasting time, gossiping and so forth – so that we can make it to our true home. I bet you feel the frustration or annoyance caused by phone crises. Imagine, then, how annoyed you’d feel with yourself if your life’s expiry date were earlier than you thought

it would be, and you hadn't gotten around to preparing for this earnestly. How can we be sure that we will get a human birth next time around?

Just as a phone needs charging daily, our soul needs to be powered daily by two and a half hours of meditation. Running out of phone battery is not serious, but our life is at a critical juncture, with each second drawing us closer to the inevitable 'battery dead' point.

When, in the future, our soul leaves the body, we can either go off fully charged or face the realization that we are drained of power. Since I get really annoyed when my phone battery runs out, I'm tuning into the Shabd to ensure that my soul is fully charged. I hope you are too – I'd hate for you to think, "I forgot to do that."



Whatever you do in life, always remember that meditation should never be sacrificed for anything in this world. The wealth of meditation is permanent and lasting and is yours, whereas everything of this world is perishable and transitory.

Quest for Light



You should not have feelings of frustration. Life should be faced as it is, with courage and the Master's grace. One day everything will be all right. The more you devote yourself to meditation, the more peace you will have inside. Do not worry unnecessarily about your failings. Forget the past, live and meditate in the present, and do not worry about the future.

Quest for Light



Sound and Light Within

Mystics tell us that when we begin the inner journey we will experience the various lights and sounds that mark the way. These lights and sounds are not physical. They exist in the inner regions and are manifestations of the light and music that issue from our own soul. Since the soul is of the same essence as the Lord, whose expression is at once the primal divine light and the holy Name or Word, the soul also expresses itself as light and sound on the inner planes. While our attention is trapped by the mind and senses, we cannot perceive this sound and light; but once we begin the inner journey, we shed the limitations of body and mind and experience the soul in its true state.

The Jewish mystic, Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, describes experiences of light and sound during his own practice of meditation. He says that light seemed to be issuing from a source within himself, and that after seeing the inner light he heard “the divine speech.” And Obadyah Maimonides, a Jewish Egyptian mystic, wrote:

When thou remainest alone with thy soul after having subdued thy passions, a Gate will open before thee through which thou wilt contemplate wonders. When thy five external senses come to rest, thine internal senses will awaken and thou wilt behold a resplendent light emanating from the splendour of Reason. Thou wilt perceive mighty and awesome voices which leave a man bewildered.

The lights and sounds we experience within help us on our spiritual journey. Like a magnet, the Word, or Shabd, pulls our soul upward toward the Lord. The sound emanating from the Word helps us find the direction to our true home; its light helps us stay on course and complete the journey. The soul’s power of seeing is called nirat by the Indian mystics, and its power of hearing is called surat. Nirat sees the radiance of the Shabd and surat hears its sound. God has put the sound and light within us to help us find his inner holy of holies, as the Bible calls the highest region.

The Holy Name



Why Do We Need a Guru?

What is it about the notion of following the instructions of a guru that seems difficult to accept? This article addresses the question by employing the analogy of crossing an ocean. It's the ocean of existence or consciousness, and 'crossing the ocean' denotes discovering what lies at the other side of our more familiar world.

Imagine a great ocean lapping against the shoreline of a land mass. Hundreds of years ago, before the days of mass communication, those born far from this shoreline would never conceive of an ocean or contemplate crossing it. In our analogy, souls who are oblivious to the possibility of an ocean are the non-human species, the plants, insects, and animals who lack the faculty of discrimination bestowed upon humans. Having spent many lives in these forms, we are born as humans, allowing us to arrive at the coast, see the view, and consider whether the sea can be crossed. Yet, human birth does not in itself come with a desire to know the ocean.

Scattered around the beach, millions of people are playing on the shoreline, but some of them are hardly aware of the ocean. Concentrating on looking inland, they wonder at the scenery, the process by which the cliffs were formed, the uses that can be made of these natural resources, the commercial opportunities and so forth. These people believe that we work, love, die, and that's it; there is nothing else. One could liken them to the people long ago who thought the world was flat and that we would fall off the edge upon reaching the horizon. Such folk are bound by physical parameters. From their perspective, since we can't see beyond the horizon, we can't determine if anything beyond it exists. And if we can't determine that, there's no point in leaving the beach.

Based on the stories of their ancestors, other people at the water's edge concede that something exists beyond the horizon. However, they believe the ocean can only be crossed at the time of death, at which point a greater power will transport them. Another group believes the sea is to be crossed, but a navigator is unnecessary. They set sail in a boat they build themselves, even though they cannot plot the coordinates of their destination. Lacking even the basic knowledge of longitude and latitude

and oblivious to the inadequacy of their tiny vessel to weather sea storms, such people find themselves shipwrecked.

However, amidst the millions of people on the beach, a few regularly cross the vast sea. And, with those prepared to listen, they willingly share their knowledge of how to journey back and forth without becoming shipwrecked. These are the master mariners.

According to Wikipedia, “A master mariner is a licensed mariner who holds the highest grade of seafarer qualification.... The term ... has been in use at least since the thirteenth century reflecting ... that such a person was a master craftsman in this specific profession.” Master mariners have charted the routes across the ocean, carefully avoiding its currents and eddies. They know the preparations that must be made, and the skills required to make the journey. They tell us that at first it is necessary to be guided across this ocean, but that once you gain experience, you can come and go as you please. In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh advised, “Without the help and assistance of a guide we cannot sail these uncharted seas.” For some on the shore, these words provide welcome encouragement, helping to ease their trepidation at venturing into the unknown; they are exhilarated at the prospect of finding a master mariner.

The master mariners tell us that the vessel we will need to cross the ocean is our mind (the mind’s attribute of discrimination separates us from the animals and allows it to transport us). First, we must recondition it to make it seaworthy. This means we can no longer ignore it and leave it grounded on the beach. Nor can we merely use it for fun, larking about on the seafront. If we are ready to commit to the journey, the master mariner lays down four conditions to make our vessel seaworthy: adopting a lacto-vegetarian diet, refraining from alcohol and mind-altering substances, leading a moral life, and practising the exercises necessary to cross the ocean.

So, here we are, at the water’s edge. We prepared our boat, and the master charted the course for us to follow and advised us on navigation. Success doesn’t necessarily follow! We are enthusiastic and determined to achieve our goal as quickly as possible, freeing ourselves from the chains of illusion and wanting to live eternally in bliss. But after a while, most of us realize that we can only travel a few meters from the shore’s edge despite all the equipment at our disposal. Why is this, we ask ourselves?

The answer is ego. While clothed in the guise of enthusiasm and commitment, we mistakenly believe, “I am going to do this, and I’m going to do it now, quickly.” While preparing our vessel, we strapped an outboard motor onto it (the ego) to make it into a speedboat that we believed we could control. Unfortunately, we forgot that the master mariner said we should cross with him first. He must be in the boat to guide it across the choppy waters. Instead of heeding this, we have increased the power of our mind, letting it run wild with all sorts of fanciful ideas. The problem is that the faster our boat goes, the more we steer ourselves off-course, and before we know it, we’re lost, disoriented and in despair. Eventually, we realize that we need the master’s help. As the author of a traditional Irish folksong from the 18th century “The Water Is Wide” wrote:

*The water is wide I cannot cross over.
And neither have I wings to fly.*

Having exhausted ourselves trying to drive our speedboat, we finally accept that we do not have the power to cross this ocean with just our own wits. In the first verse, the folksong continues:

*Give me a boat that will carry two.
And both shall row my love and I.*

This is better. At first glance, the song’s sentiment would seem to suggest submission and love akin to that needed to comply with the master mariner’s original instructions.

However, looking more closely, we see it is still infused with ego. We insist, “I can do it, but I realize I need the master’s help.” We ask the master to join our boat, to sail with us to help us cross that great ocean. If you’ve tried rowing a boat with someone stronger and more experienced than you, you’ll know that the ship goes off course, sometimes even going around in circles. We possess neither the knowledge nor the power of the master and cannot lead the journey ourselves. So, how are we to get across the ocean? We can draw some insights from other lines from the song:

*There is a ship that sails the sea.
It’s loaded deep as deep can be.*

This vessel sailing the sea is our mind. It's loaded with heavy cargo; in other words, it's weighed down with our karmas. This explains our existence in the creation and why crossing the ocean is difficult. Simply put, the cargo is too heavy for our boat to set sail, or if it does set sail, we might experience our vessel capsizing in strong winds. The following lines of the song inform us how we need to shift our mindset when embarking upon our epic journey:

*But not so deep as my love for him.
I know not whether I sink or swim.*

We must cultivate a love so deep for the master mariner that we follow his instructions completely and trust his route without doubting whether he is going the right way. In short, we must submit to a journey of obedience, leaving our ego on the beach. In his poem, *The Malady of Ego*, Kabir Sahib reaches the same conclusion:

*Only he will cross the ocean, O friend.
Who banishes ego from his mind.*

There is no room for 'I' when giving yourself wholeheartedly to another. One must offer oneself unreservedly to the master – not because he wants this, but because we need him. An adequately prepared vessel is not a speed or rowing boat but a beautiful sailing ship. The mast is the path that we must tie ourselves to so that we're not washed overboard by the tempests we will encounter.

Why should our sailboat succeed where others have failed? Whereas others tried crossing the ocean with the force of the wind, our sailboat is propelled by the Shabd.

Moreover, the power of the Shabd is such that, aside from the master mariner, no one else can harness the currents and steer us across the ocean; this makes our sailboat distinctive.

The following lines from a shabd written by the fourteenth-century Indian mystic Sant Namdev aptly describe our condition:

*Ferry me, O God, across the ocean of this world
Save me from its dread, supreme Father!*

*The gale is strong and I cannot row the boat,
I cannot reach your shore, my Lord
Have mercy and let me meet a true master
So he may take me across, my Lord.*

*Says Nama, I don't even know how to swim –
Give me your arm, give me your arm, O Lord!*



Have all the problems of life ever been solved by anyone? If we go on creating them and then continue worrying about them, then where is the time left for meditation? The mind will never be stilled and become motionless if this continues. It has the evil habit of first creating problems and then when it cannot solve them it starts worrying. This, it goes on doing the whole lifetime. We have to stop the mind from this vicious habit and tell it to live within the will of the Lord.

Our destiny is all marked out and we have to reap what we have sown, then why worry? Face life cheerfully, doing the best you can under the circumstances and then leaving the rest to the Lord. Our conscience should be clear and then there is absolutely nothing to worry about.

Life will always go on like this in this world. This life is made up of both good and bad karmas, hence these ups and downs. Try to rise above them by keeping your thoughts in him and his meditation. This will give you that happiness you are looking for and will develop into still greater bliss.

Quest for Light



From Lost Focus to Concentration

Walk into any bookstore today and on prominent display in the nonfiction section, you'll find titles featuring 'focus.' Indeed, my own bookshelf includes the following:

- *Fast Focus: A Quick-Start Guide to Mastering Your Attention*
- *Master Your Focus: A Practical Guide to... Focus on What Matters Until It's Done*
- *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention*

As these titles suggest, there is a sense in which we've lost the art of focusing and are grappling with how to get it back. The numerous scientific studies cited in these texts bear this out. To give two examples, one study found that an American university student maintains concentration on a single task for a mere nineteen seconds, while a separate study reported that the commensurate time for an office worker is three minutes. The problem is not confined to those of us who are naturally a bit more disorganized or get bored easily. Even the experts whom one assumes would have no trouble concentrating are struggling. Professor Roy Baumeister, an authority on willpower, is one such example. During an interview with the author of *Stolen Focus*, the professor revealed:

I'm feeling like my control over my attention is weaker than it used to be ... it seems like my mind jumps around a lot more.... I can see that I am not sustaining concentration in perhaps the way I used to ... I'm just sort of giving in to it [lost focus] and will start to feel bad.

Reflecting on this, the author wondered if the person who has studied willpower "more than anyone else alive ... is losing some of his ability to focus, who isn't it happening to?" In fact, a growing body of scientific research provides evidence of a reduction in people's attention span and the factors driving such a trend becoming greater and more powerful. It is easy to see why some commentators believe we have reached a crisis.

In a 1962 essay published in *The New York Times Book Review*, the author James Baldwin wrote, "Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced." The crisis of lost focus is of

our making, but in the following letter in *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh explains how we can face it and unmake it too:

Collection and holding of the attention at the eye focus is to switch it off from the physical world and the physical body...

You may have observed that this attention is not permanently attached to any material object in this world. From childhood onward it has had its likes and dislikes. At one time it is attached to friends, at another to family, and so on. It has not stuck to one thing. Herein lies the remedy: the attention is detachable...

The five names thus give us the main features of the path within, and when we remember these, we are, in a way, bringing our attention onto the inner path. It is only a matter of effort, longing, determination, and persistence in the face of failure, when this switching of the attention from the external, material world onto the inner worlds will become easy and a matter of routine. Sticking to the eye focus is essential.

The mind will often run away, and when you find it has run away, bring it back into the focus. Sometimes sleep intervenes. Sleep only means that the mind was withdrawn from the external world, but we did not stick to the focus, and instead the attention sank down to the lower focus – the throat or navel. So, bring it up again to the eye focus.

If one sticks to the focus, then the mind, which runs wild in the beginning, slowly and slowly quiets down and it begins to feel as if sticking to the eye focus is not an unnatural thing...

Any act, therefore, that will make the attention stick to matter tenaciously, should be avoided. Discarding the sensual desires from the mind and being good, pure-minded, and honest in dealings with others, loosens the connection of the attention from the world. Concentration is the goal. Any act that assists in the achievement of this goal is right, and all those that keep the attention away from the focus are wrong. The nearer we are to concentration or the focus, the nearer we are to the light. Light, like Sound, is already within us. It never goes out. Only we do not reach the place where light is. The light is inside the focus and we are outside the focus. Says Guru Nanak, "The cure of all ills is the Word." Let us, therefore, go within the focus to catch the Word.



The Final Word

Only the Master Is Truly Yours

*None of your companions are truly your well-wishers,
you are surrounded by thieves and you are fast asleep.*

*Wake up to love in the company of the Saints,
then let the Master dye you
in a colour beyond all colours –
that of the purity of Nam.*

*Wealth and property will not help you,
at one stroke you will have to leave it all behind.*

*Ahead lies deep, dark night
so strive to reach your goal while it is still day.*

*Once lost, this body is hard to come by again,
you will be lost in the wilderness of transmigration.*

*Serve the Master, please him with your service;
come on, my friend, adopt this way of life.*

*Only the Master is truly yours,
hold this thought firmly in your mind.*

*Do not get entangled
in the web of this world, my friend,
but stay absorbed in meditation day and night.*

*Follow the advice of the Sadh Guru
and live in the world with a sense of detachment.*

*Abandon your devious ways and your cleverness,
why let yourself sink so low?*

*Keep your mind in simran, serve your Master
and rise today to the sky.*

*Tomorrow you may fall into Kal's hands
and burn in the fires of hell.*

*Heed my words now, do not delay,
for who knows what might happen next?*

*Radha Soami explains this so you understand;
accept his message and let it be the last word.*

Sar Bachan Poetry



BOOK REVIEW

The Beauty of Life: Krishnamurti's Journal

BY JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

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Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was “discovered” on a beach by the Adyar River in India when he was 14 years old by the Theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater. Leadbeater observed that the young boy had the “most wonderful aura he had ever seen, without a particle of selfishness in it.” He believed that the boy was destined to become a great spiritual teacher and that he was already an advanced spiritual entity. Krishnamurti was then introduced to Annie Besant, the Theosophical Society’s international president, and came under her guardianship.

In 1929, however, Krishnamurti ended his association with the Theosophical Society and renounced any claims to being a World Teacher. Instead, he advocated cultivating self-awareness and freedom from reliance on spiritual teachers. He continued to write and to teach, and later established the Krishnamurti Foundations in the United States, Britain, India, Spain, and Canada.

Krishnamurti’s Journal was published from a notebook that he kept in his later years.

With acute observations uncoloured by a personal “self” he offers vignettes of intense natural beauty interwoven with spiritual truths. We are given a glimpse of a wide-open perspective, of a calm and clear mind, and of the oneness of all that is. We see with him the beauty and truth that are revealed everywhere and in everything.

The western sky had lost its colour and just over the horizon was the new moon, young, shy, and tender. On the road everything seemed to be passing, marriage, death, the laughter of children and someone sobbing. Near the moon was a single star.

Pupul Jayakar (1915-1997), author of Krishnamurti: A Biography, observed that Krishnamurti’s “relationship with nature, trees, rocks, and the earth has special significance; he has the ability to enter into spaces within nature, to feel life move. Lately he has started to speak of the sound that reverberates within a tree, when all other sound ends.” Krishnamurti

says of himself, “He always had this strange lack of distance between himself and the trees, rivers, and mountains.” On 20th October 1973 he shared this experience:

Among other redwood trees, which were also very old, this one was towering over them all; other trees had been touched by fire but this one had no marks on it. It had lived through all the ugly things of history, through all the wars of the world, through all the mischief and sorrow of man, through fire and lightning, through all the storms of time, untouched, majestic, and utterly alone with immense dignity.... It soared up to the heavens as you sat under it, vast and timeless, its very years gave it the dignity of silence and the aloofness of great age. It was as silent as your mind was, as still as your heart, and living without the burden of time. You were aware of compassion that time had never touched and of innocence that had never known hurt and sorrow. You sat there and time passed you by and it would never come back. There was immortality, for death had never been. Nothing existed except that immense tree, the clouds, and the earth.... There was unfathomable sacredness which would never again leave you, for it was not yours.

In this journal Krishnamurti offers us an intimate glimpse of his innate ability to “be alone without word and thought but only watching and listening.” Speaking of himself in the third person, he writes: “Ever since he was a boy...no thought entered his mind. He was watching and listening and nothing else.” He observes that,

He was not withdrawn, aloof, but like the waters of a river. He had so few thoughts; no thoughts at all when he was alone. His brain was active when talking or writing but otherwise it was quiet and active without movement.

He explains that this quietening of the mind, this state of no-thought, allows us to experience the oneness of all.

Krishnamurti urges us to understand the operation of our own minds so that we can be free of the conditioning that obscures the truth. He explains that the thoughts that we have are a response to the “memories, experience, and knowledge stored up in the brain.” They have “divided existence as the outer and the inner and from this separation conflict and control arise ... and this also brings about untold wars, violence, and sorrow.” These thoughts have “divided the world into nationalities, ideologies and into religious sects.”

Meditation, he says, allows us to see the movement of thought. He goes further: “Meditation is the complete transformation of thought and its activities.” Then there is no division of the inner and the outer. With meditation, he says, “[t]he consciousness of the world is your consciousness; you are the world and the world is you.” However, only a quiet and spacious mind can attain this oneness of being.

At the time when he wrote the journal, he was living in Brockwood Park, Hampshire, U.K., later in Rome, and then in California. However, the entries were often written from his memory of earlier times and other places. On 22nd October 1973 he recalled being in a small boat on a river:

On the quiet slow current of the river all the horizon from north to south, east to west was visible; there wasn't a tree or house that broke the horizon; there was not a cloud floating by.... The sky and the earth met and there was vast space. In this measureless space the earth and all things had their existence, even this small boat carried along by the strong current.... There must be this space for beauty and compassion.... Where there is no space, outwardly and inwardly, every form of mischief and degeneration is inevitable. The condition of the mind through so-called education, religion, tradition, culture, gives little space to the flowering of the mind and heart.

If we are to find this “space for beauty and compassion,” he says, we need to let go of both the known and the unknown, and cease from inventing imaginary “facts” to fill the void of the unknown. That space is already there, latent within us.

The gods don't give you space, for theirs is yours. This vast, measureless space lies outside the measure of thought, and thought is the known. Meditation is the emptying of consciousness of its content, the known, the “me.”

He explains that this letting go of the “me” is essential as “[t]here's no meditator in meditation. If there is, it is not meditation.” There is no separation between the individual and the divine; meditation enables us to realize the truth of this oneness. He expresses his own experience of the continual presence and timeless nature of meditation: “You are not even aware that meditation is going on, this meditation that began ages ago and would go on endlessly.”

He writes of freedom:

Freedom is to be a light to oneself; then it is not an abstraction, a thing conjured by thought.... Freedom from the very structure of thought is to be a light to oneself.... This light, this law, is neither yours nor that of another. There is only light. This is love.

Physical death is, he says, simple and natural; it is pervasive, unavoidable, and necessary. As long as we don't see that "the observer is the observed, the experiencer is the experienced," however, "[d]eath is everywhere and we never seem to live with it. It is a dark, frightening thing to be avoided, never to be talked of." He explained: "When the observer leaves everything which he is, then the observer is not. This is not death. It is the timeless.... When time is not then death is not. Love is." And when love is, separation is not.

Toward the end of his life Krishnamurti suffered from pancreatic cancer. When a close friend said she was afraid that she might not see him again and that all she would have left would be a memory of him, he replied, "No, ... if you make me a memory... you cut yourself away from that eternity, with all its compassion." Then he explains that what is essential is to put the teacher's teachings into practice. He imagines a person who meets the Buddha:

I meet the Buddha. I have listened to him very deeply. In me the whole truth of what he says is abiding, and he goes away. He has told me very carefully, "Be a light to yourself." The seed is flowering. I may miss him. He was a friend, somebody whom I really loved. But what is really important is that seed of truth which he has planted – by my alertness, awareness, intense listening, that seed will flower. Otherwise, what is the point of somebody having it?



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