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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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My Joy Is The Lord

As the sun is the joy of them that wait for daybreak,

so my joy is the Lord.

For He is my sun,

and His rays have roused me.

His light has dispelled

all darkness from my face:

Through Him have I obtained eyes

and have seen His holy day.

Ears have become mine,

And I have heard His Truth.

I have received the Thought of Knowledge,

and, through it, I have lived fully.

The way of error I have discarded,

and I have walked towards Him,

and I have received salvation from Him, ungrudgingly.

The Odes of Solomon, Ode 15



Our Best Friend

Let's cast our minds back to the time of our search for the path. And let's ask ourselves the question we were probably asking then: Why are we here?

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Volume I, Maharaj Charan Singh defines the purpose of life:

The main purpose of life is to realize God.... The privilege of going back to the Father can be achieved only in the human life. So we should always be mindful of our destination and try following the spiritual path which leads us back to him.

We should never forget our real purpose: to realize God – and work to achieve that goal. That means that while in this world, we have to prepare ourselves to leave it.

And if we've been trying our best to live according to our principles right from the time of our initiation, we *have* been slowly turning away from the world. Many of us have begun to feel we are strangers here. We can see how our worldly attachments and our desires have started leaving us. Simply by living the Sant Mat way of life, our minds are no longer so entangled in the attractions of the world. Of course, the greatest help here is our meditation.

Over time we've become more conscious of the role that the mind plays in our lives. The mind is something we have to deal with. And maybe we even need to change the way we think about the mind.

So often we've heard that it is a powerful enemy and that we have to fight it. In a very real sense that's true – and seeing the mind as an enemy, at this stage more powerful than the soul, means that we've

probably lost every single battle that we've tried to fight against it. But Maharaj Charan Singh has told us the mind can be our best friend. So let's think how we can make it our friend. We *need* to do that, because without its help we'll never be able to return home.

Maharaj Ji reminded us repeatedly that the mind and soul are knotted together at the eye centre. This knot will be untied only when the mind reaches its own home in Trikuti. So the mind has to work with the soul during meditation so that it too can become attached to the Shabd and rise up to reach *its* own home. And while doing so, it will bring the soul along with it as far as Trikuti, after which the soul can travel further. Unless the mind goes inward and upward, the soul can't go inward and upward. We have this explanation from Maharaj Ji in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Volume I:

The mind is an enemy as long as it pulls you downward towards the senses. And it is your best friend when it is at the eye centre and is in touch with the shabd and is being pulled towards the second stage. Without winning the friendship of the mind, the soul can never go back to the Father.

We've been told that the nature of the mind is to seek pleasure, and that it does this through the senses. But in this regard Maharaj Ji tells us that in time it realizes that lasting happiness does not lie there. And the mind also becomes unhappy and frustrated by its enslavement by the senses.

This is priceless knowledge for us – we have to take advantage of this. We have to try to give the mind a higher pleasure and point it towards real happiness – which can come, of course, only through our meditation. We need to learn to *enjoy* our meditation, so that the mind can enjoy it with us. All too often we are negative and we focus too

much on the struggle aspect of it and our failure to get it right. But we can't afford to be negative about our meditation. It must be satisfying for us. It must make us happy.

Certainly there are times that our meditation fills us with great joy. Even at other times when we sit for meditation, even though we're far from hearing the Shabd in its full glory, still we might hear something – a vague echo of the Shabd, which can hardly be described as beautiful or magnificent. But still, it's a little something. And even if it can't pull us up, it still gives us some satisfaction, some happiness.

When this happens, what we need to realize is that it's the *mind* that's feeling that happiness, that satisfaction. So, let's meditate to give the mind as much of that happiness as possible, so that it can look inward for its happiness. This is training the mind to turn inward and upward. This is making the mind the soul's friend.

We read in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Volume II:

The mind doesn't want to live in misery; the mind also wants peace. When we are happy, it is our mind which is happy. When we are miserable, it is our mind which is miserable. The mind is seeking happiness. That is a characteristic of the mind.... In seeking happiness it has become a slave of the senses. But when it becomes frustrated by the senses and finds another channel through which it can seek some internal happiness, naturally its tendency becomes inward.

Let's ask ourselves this question: Why do we meditate? Well, we might say we do it because it's our duty, or because we love our Master and want to please him. But there's more to it than this. The more we meditate, the more our attachments and desires for worldly things are being diminished by a slow shift of our attachment and desire away

from the world. And at the same time the tendency of the mind is being reversed from outward to inward.

On the face of it, meditation is not difficult. Even going within is not difficult. The way Maharaj Ji explains it, it sounds quite simple:

*When you close your eyes, you are automatically within....
When you close your eyes you see darkness. Mentally, keep your attention in this darkness and do your simran with the attention of the mind.... Mentally keep concentrating in the darkness and do not try to pursue anything. You are only to keep your attention mentally in the darkness and do simran.*

Spiritual Perspectives, Volume II

But of course, this is the difficult part – *keeping* the attention in the darkness, and holding on to the simran. So how can we improve this?

The Masters tell us that the mind has two faculties that need to be occupied if we're to achieve concentration: the faculty to think and the faculty to visualize. And we should bear this in mind when we do the simran part of our meditation. The actual words of our simran stop our mind from constantly thinking of other things – provided that we give attention to each word and don't just let them roll on mechanically. And then the visualizing faculty needs to be occupied by looking into the darkness while we do our simran.

We can enjoy the darkness; we can be comfortable in the darkness. The darkness can become our shelter, our refuge, our place of peace. If we can do that, the mind will become less inclined to look for diversion in a thousand thoughts. And if we stay in that darkness, saying our words, that is being within. And the Shabd will start making us aware of its presence. Maharaj Ji tells us:

The purpose of simran is only to eliminate thoughts. The moment you are there, that you have been able to eliminate worldly thoughts, light and Shabd will absolutely pull you, it will catch you there. It will not let you remain in a vacuum.

Spiritual Perspectives, Volume II

All of this sounds fairly simple. But of course we know that meditation is never consistently simple. One day it may be a bit easier, and the next day we can't even sit comfortably, let alone focus.

But even those difficult meditation sessions are valuable. In *Spiritual Perspectives, Volume II*, someone says something we can relate to very well: "Maharaj Ji, my meditation is so poor that I feel that it doesn't even count as meditation." And he replies:

Well, you can count all twenty-four hours in your meditation. If you build around you an atmosphere for meditation, every breath you breathe is meditation for you.... If the Lord is always in your heart in one way or another, then every breath is meditation.

And perhaps this can be enough for us – that we try our utmost to keep our awareness on the path. There's not much more that we can do – because anything more is not in our hands. Our Master, or the Lord, is doing it all.

As we read in *Spiritual Perspectives, Volume II*:

Everything is done by the grace of the Father in this world. A seeker can achieve nothing without his grace. Without his grace a seeker would not even know about the Father, what to say of reaching the Father.... Unless he wishes, nobody can reach him.

We are all blind, groping in the dark. He is the only one who can show us the light out of this darkness.

This is very comforting. We see our failings and our weakness, and it often feels that we can do so little. So it's good to hear that he is doing everything. Surely then he will make the mind become our friend, since this is the only way we can start the inner journey back to him.

But we still have a part to play and we still have work to do. We're told we have this much choice: we can hasten the process or we can retard it. And so we meditate because we want to hasten it. But still there are days when we want reassurance that our efforts are achieving something.

Well, there is something that could be a clue, even if we never see or hear anything inside. We can judge for ourselves what pleasure we get from our meditation. We can feel to what extent it quietyens our minds and gives us a sense of peace.

This sense of peace is important. It's an indication that the mind is becoming our friend. In another answer in Volume I, the Master tells a questioner:

“Many times you may not see anything, but you will feel so happy, so contented, so much at peace within yourself”.

And then the person he is speaking to wants to know: “And is that enough at the time of death to take us up?”

“That is *more* than enough,” Maharaj Ji says, “because your tendency is not towards the creation now.”



Perfect Simran

Maharaj Sawan Singh was once quoted as saying:

Go on steadily on the path, and once your simran becomes perfect you will find yourself endowed with the power of stopping a speeding train. There is so much power in simran.

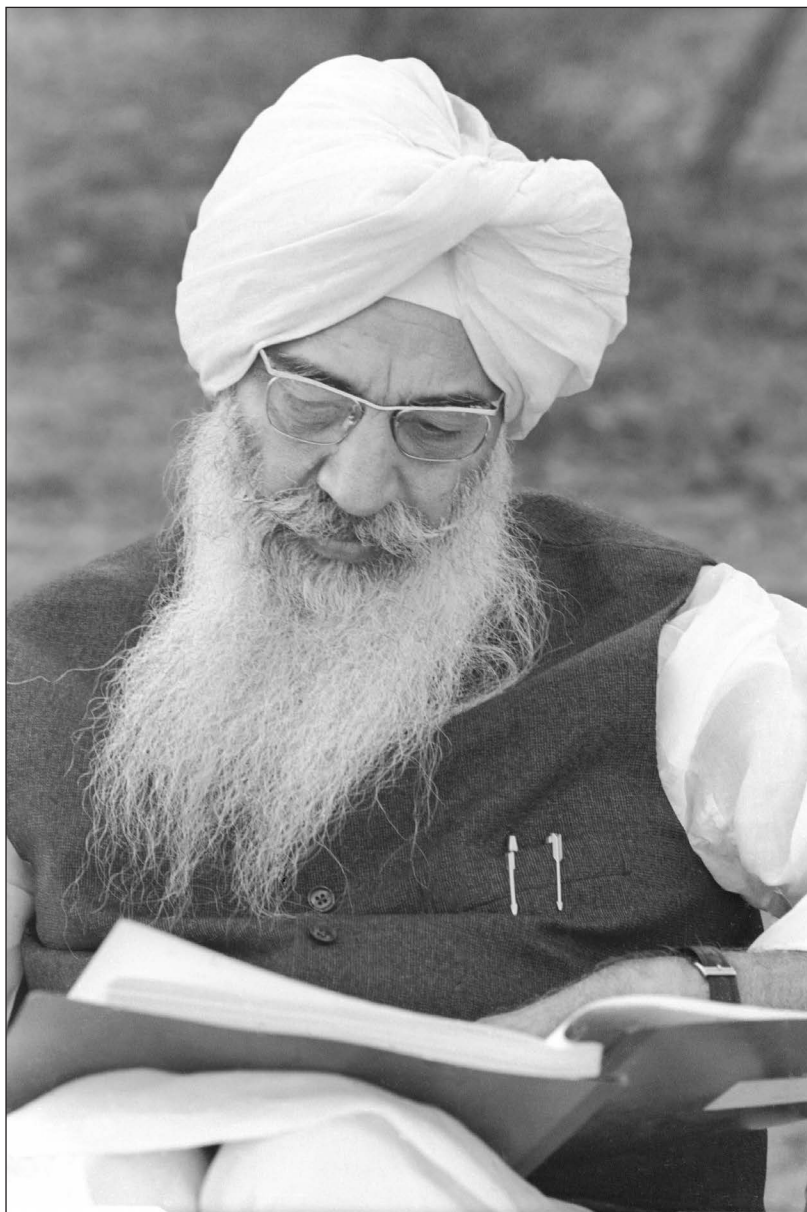
With the Three Masters, Volume I

So let's ask ourselves: What is perfect simran? How must our simran be to have the power to stop a moving train? The answer would probably be that we must have simran, and *only* simran, turning over in our mind at the eye focus.

When we sit in meditation and start the simran, is our mind quiet? If we're honest, most of us would have to admit, "Of course not!" Even when we manage to achieve some quite intensive concentration, there still seem to be – somewhere in the background – the soft, almost imperceptible, whisperings of the mind. And slowly, as the attention gets drawn to these whisperings, they become louder, and before we know it the mind's whisperings have become our dominant thoughts, with simran being relegated to a whispering in the background.

The aim to attain perfect simran must become of overwhelming importance to us. Our goal must be that even the softest whispering of the mind should be thrown out and what remains must be only the sacred names, being repeated over and over, lovingly and with complete absorption, leaving no space for anything else.

And once we attain that – and along with it the power to stop a speeding train – we will not be in the least interested in any such power because we will be on our way home, in our Master's company.



Maharaj Charan Singh

Why Linger in This Alien Land?

The soul is weeping. Deep inside us our core being is inconsolable; it is filled with a yearning that cannot be satisfied by anything in this world. It longs for that which it lost so long ago, and is miserable in this state of separation from its source.

As Maharaj Charan Singh was fond of saying, “Everyone is miserable in separation from the Father.” This is our reality. Whenever we receive a shock through our karmas and the events of life, this is what we get back to. When we are reminded of the short-lived nature of the pleasures of this world, when our attachments are torn from us and we are left alone and bleeding, this is where we come to: this silent place of weeping, where we raise our arms in supplication to him, our Friend who has bestowed on us the grace of initiation.

Knowing our condition, what does the Master say to us? In the words of Soami Ji’s well-known poem:

*Let us turn thou homeward, friend,
Why linger in this alien land?*

This is our situation in a nutshell. This world is not our home. We do not belong here. So the Guru tells us: ‘Turn your back on all this. You need to focus on that which will end the misery, not prolong it!’ But we keep trying to find solutions in this world, and fail to achieve anything.

So what is the Master telling us? He’s saying: You’ve been looking in the wrong place all the time. All these long ages you’ve been running around in the material world and have achieved nothing. It is not possible to find solutions there, because there are none.

The Master tells us to turn within. This is the fundamental shift in our focus that is required for success to be possible.

From time immemorial the great Masters who have walked this earth have taught the inner path. We are to turn within to find the truth, the light, the ringing radiance of the path that leads back to our true home. All other ways lead back to this world. Isn't it time we tried something different?

*Get busy with your own real work,
Do not get caught up with others people's affairs.*

If we take a good look, then we will see that everyone else is benefiting from our efforts, and we are paying the price. We work all day, and what do we have to show for it? We make our bosses rich, we make the shop owners rich, we make the taxman very happy – everyone is smiling and rubbing their hands and taking their slice of our pie. Isn't it time that we did our own work?

Yes, we say, but what is that? What can we do that will actually be of use to us in our quest for truth and lasting happiness? The Masters have the answers to these questions. First they tell us to focus on the task for which we have been sent here. Our mission on planet Earth is not to produce offspring or solve world hunger or invent another electronic whizz-bang gadget that peels potatoes while it surfs the Internet and downloads our email. Our mission is to turn within, to find that secret pathway that will lead us to our true home and ultimate happiness and bliss.

The Master tells us: Do your own work, do not get side-tracked by the glitz and glamour of this world. Go beyond all that by going within and contacting that power that will ultimately take you home.

*Hold on to Guru's Nam,
As Nam is the only currency
For your journey beyond.*

Here Soami Ji comes to the point: Nam. This is the Shabd, the central power in the universe. This is God in action. Without this, there is nothing. The Masters tell us that by turning our attention within and stilling the mind by means of our spiritual practice, we can come into contact with this power and ascend through levels of higher and higher consciousness, until we are face to face with the Lord. All other efforts are futile. So the Master exhorts us to spend some time every day in the pursuit of that which will be to our eternal credit.

*The colours of this world are soiled,
Take my advice – have them washed clean.
The pleasures of this world are short-lived,
Discard them one by one, entering the stage of sahaj.*

Soami Ji is emphasizing that our involvement with the world, regardless of the nature of that involvement, has the effect of redirecting our attention to the places, faces and things of the world that have held us in thrall for countless ages.

The Master understands that we are not likely to be able to make an overnight change from our state of complete involvement in the world to one whereby we have totally refocused our attention within. He realizes that these attachments and habits are powerful and grip us tightly. So he says: Do your meditation, do your spiritual practice every day, and remember your Master as often as possible throughout the rest of your day. And slowly and slowly our attachments will be loosened, and our values will shift.

Realistically, we must understand that even with the best intentions in the world, such a transformation is going to take time, so we need to adopt an attitude of patient application. However, success is inevitable if we persevere with this simple practice.

*Take refuge in the Master with all your heart
And with a determined will.
Still the surat and mind within yourself,
Then catch the melody of Shabd
And keep your attention in the inner sky.*

One thing we should realize is that by our own efforts we can meditate for years on end and get nowhere. Our meditation is an act on our part to try to please our Master. It is not within our power at all to get ourselves out of this mess. This is one of the major reasons that we need a Master. So the reality is that we do what he asks us to do, and he does what he knows best how to do. He has asked us to do the simple task of following the four principles, and he will do the rest.

Now we need to adjust our attitude to reflect this situation. When we feel that pull from within, the one that makes us feel so strongly that we do not belong here, when we feel that longing, that pain of separation, let's just turn to him within and direct all that longing towards him, knowing that he is both the Beloved and the path leading to the Beloved.

*Without this method you will never get out
Of the intricate web that entangles you.
In his grace and mercy the Master now asks you
To accept his advice and take it to heart.
Why waste your life straying off the path –
You will never reach the destination.*

Again Soami Ji stresses that we need to take the Master's advice and put our best effort into internalizing our whole value system, and entrenching this with simran. After all, simran is remembrance, and who or what is constantly on our minds shapes us and draws us to itself. Simran draws us ever closer to the Master, and shapes us increasingly in his image.

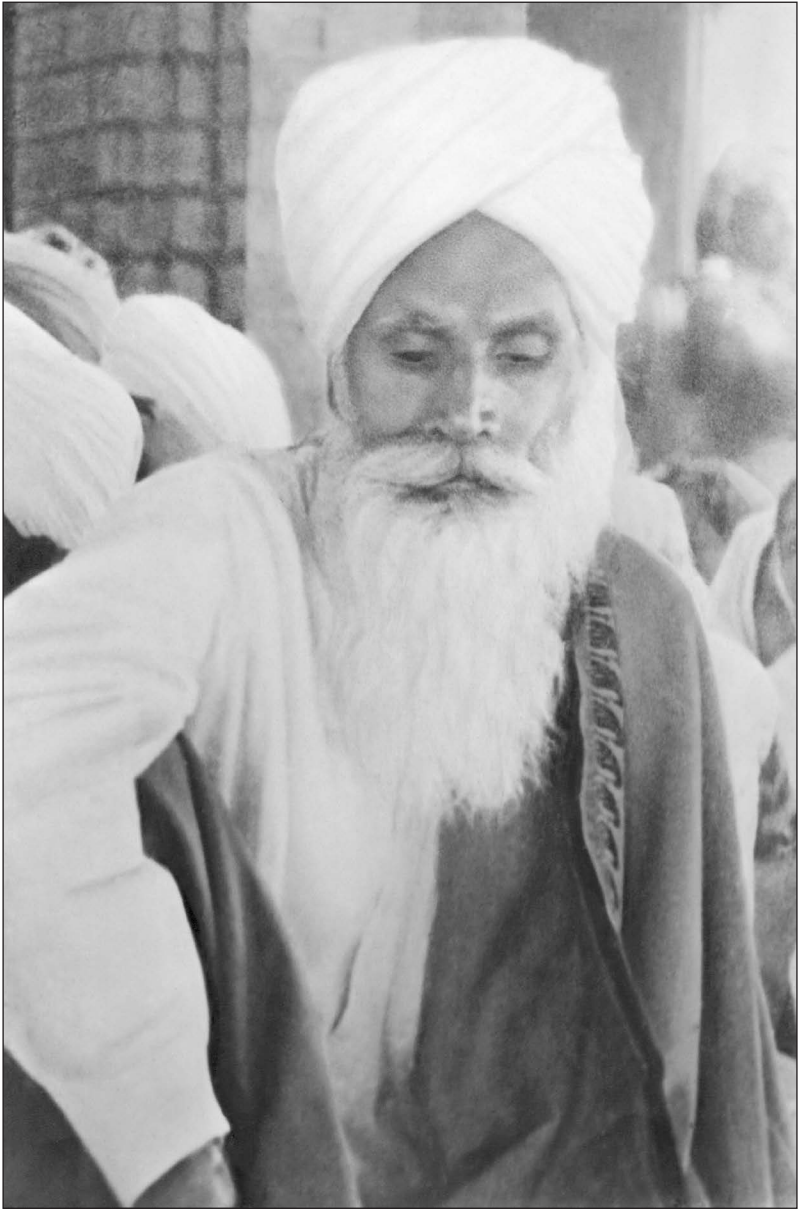
This is the slow and steady process that is going to take us home. The first steps are the most difficult. Even the Masters agree on this. But once we have overcome that first hurdle of focusing our attention fully at the eye centre, and have gone beyond to cross the starry sky and the sun and moon regions, we will encounter the Master's Radiant Form, which is stunningly beautiful beyond all description. Once this stage has been reached, the long ages of our loneliness are over, and within us the soul begins to dance.

Soami Ji's poem is a long one and space does not allow a discussion of every stanza. However, he goes on to describe the journey of the soul, now in contact with the Shabd and the Master's Radiant Form. This journey ends when, at long last, the soul enters Sach Khand and the court of the Lord. Finally the weary soul, which has suffered so long in separation from the Father, returns home, there to be received with much joy and love. Home again! What bliss, what amazing grace!



As the river flows on forever, regardless of the ways of men, so flows the love of God. Be as constant in your devotion to the Master as the river is in its course, and his love will carry you to that Supreme Ocean as surely as the river flows to the open sea.

Glimpses of the Great Master



Maharaj Jagat Singh

Shabd

Shabd alone takes us to the innermost recesses of pure spirituality; it alone casts off from our eyes the veil of ignorance and delusion and shows us truth in its divine glory and celestial splendour. In a moment of eternal consciousness of Shabd, the soul embraces the whole of the cosmos and comprehends the totality of being; in a rapture of spiritual ecstasy it beholds the light of transcendent truth and bathes in the radiance of divine glory.

We are ignorant of that glory and have forgotten our true home with God, and therefore we suffer a perpetual round of misery and trouble. Our ignorance, however, is not intellectual; this forgetting is not mental. It goes deep into our being; it is stuck firmly to the root of our existence. If we are anxious to shake off this chronic lethargy and come out of this universal oblivion, we should try to find the Shabd.

Shabd is a superconscious transcendent power. It can neither be heard with the ears nor uttered by the tongue. Pen cannot write it and language cannot describe it. It passes all human perception and conception; it transcends all limitation and dependence; it goes beyond all duality and relativity. For its transmission it does not depend on any material element; it penetrates all things and all beings.

Shabd is the essence of all reality and existence – the divine Word, the heavenly Harmony, the celestial Music. It is the light and life of all creation; it is the very being of the ultimate absolute; it is the supreme current of spirituality, a wave or tide in the ocean of Godhead. It permeates all creation; it pervades the whole cosmos.

Mysticism, The Spiritual Path



Life and Love

Imagine you are sitting in a lovely garden. It's summer, in the late afternoon. You are relaxing in a comfortable chair. Gentle sunlight, clear blue sky, a refreshing breeze. It's quiet – everything is perfect.

Well, almost perfect. Your mind is still restless, as always. It won't stop uselessly arguing a point to someone who is only in your head. The voice in your head is justifying something and trying to make you right and someone else wrong. The beauty of the moment is lost by your attention being somewhere else. You pause in a rare moment when there is a ceasefire between the thoughts. If only my mind would be still and give me some peace, you think.

In the turbulence of your mind and the beauty of your garden, your end suddenly comes. In an unexpected moment you are dead – gone!

Your body is disposed off. The chair remains – empty, covered with fallen leaves. Someone carelessly roars off in your car that you never let anyone else drive. They did it without even asking! Your Dylan and Moody Blues CDs are dropped off at the charity shop, replaced by some strident hip hop, blasting the speakers to shreds.

The reading of your will was better attended than your funeral. What you put in the bank by stress, sacrifice and hard work has been shared out. The beneficiaries had hoped to get more. In less than a week your erstwhile colleagues gather in your office, congratulating the person sitting at your desk on his promotion. Your name plate is in the waste paper basket. Now that the Grim Reaper has done his job, his assistant the taxman, like a vulture, picks at the remains. His claim on all your lifetime's hard work has caused a For Sale sign to be put up outside the house you sweated blood for, for twenty years. Somebody helps themselves to your garden chair too.

So what was really worthwhile in your life? Now that it is all over, what did you do that has benefited you? What would you do differently if you could rewind?

Fortunately, there is no need to rewind. You are still alive. With 20–20 hindsight you have an opportunity to live life more profitably. But not for long.

In the past hour, close on sixteen thousand people on the planet will have gone through the experience of death. By the end of today the number may have risen to three hundred thousand. When will they have this rare human birth again? And will they use it properly?

When the Masters say a human birth is rare, they mean it is rare beyond comprehension. Rare beyond our ability to grasp. And how many of those rare human births are used for their true purpose?

What a piece of good fortune for us to be here now. We are still alive in this precious human form. We have 20–20 hindsight. And we still have the garden chair in which to sit and consider our options. What is important now? What is this span of time in the human form really about?

Human life has a practical purpose. It is not a sensual holiday to be indulged in between birth and death. It is an opportunity. And the opportunity that is grasped with both hands has changeless true love and bliss as its reward. Let it slip – and then what?

With the fog of mindless inner talk obscuring our journey – and time relentlessly gaining on us – we should ask ourselves: What is the prime essential of our life? The answer is love. L-O-V-E. Without it there is nothing. Love is the purpose of our life. It is the life stream and also the source.

God is love, we are told. If that is so, the best way to become one with God is to *become* love. Love is the great mystery and goal of life.

How can the mystery of life be grasped without love? All our practices must be for the purpose of awakening this love.

If we are graced with clear insight into this truth, then spiritual practice easily becomes our focus. But in the absence of clarity we stumble in darkness, trying to get worldly fame, power, wealth, and esteem from our fellow man. To expend our precious energy in such pursuits is to throw our precious opportunity away.

We are on a journey, and all journeys have a starting point. Our starting point on this journey is a point of confusion and blindness. This journey we are on is a process of resolving the confusion and regaining our sight. This is done by gradually removing the layers of ignorance that cover the core of our being.

Most people are trying to modify the outer layer of ignorance to make life comfortable. They try to decorate it with power, prestige, fame and wealth, and spice it up with sensual pleasure. In that state they pass their days and waste the precious human form. How can we let go of all of this and gain a different focus?

When one's mind is free from all desires and longs to meet the Master, this gives rise to detachment. Detachment is a wonderful state. A detached person is indifferent to every non-essential object of this world. Detachment means accepting the material comforts as well as the necessities of life insofar as they are useful – realizing they are only a means to an end. They are used for living in the world. They are not the goal.

A detached person is not entangled in the world. He enters its activities in name only and keeps his attention on Nam, on the Master, on God. It is a wonderfully uncomplicated state. His love for the world fades away as his love for God grows.

It is attachment that holds us here. As Marahaj Charan Singh used to say, pain comes from attachment. Attachment is the conduit for pain.

Detachment, on the other hand, is a state of being. It is not an act of will or of deprivation, like renunciation. It is a state of being in the world but not of it.

But how do we develop this vital detachment, so absolutely necessary to achieve spirituality? By grace! We become eligible for this by meeting a true Master and becoming devoted to him.

Devotion is a magnetic power by which the attention is drawn away from everything else and becomes focused on the beloved. Devotion, along with intense longing, is the route to love. When we love someone, we absorb his qualities and become like him. Real devotion is to be prepared to sacrifice all for the object of our devotion. In other words, we don't consider ourselves; we are not even aware of ourselves. Our separate identity, the biggest obstacle on the path, is not there. For the devotee, devotion is love in practice.

Anyone who has experienced love knows longing. It is both painful and sweet. It focuses your attention. It ripens your love. A lover always wishes to go to the place of his beloved. Nothing else occupies his mind. All other thoughts are washed away by the longing that's part of love. Things you had longed for in the past have no attraction. Things you once valued become worthless. It is only the beloved you want. You are restless. Nothing can comfort you. It is agony, yet at the same time it is sweet. It is a kind of madness. Only someone who has experienced it can know what it is.

Love is not easy to understand, because its nature is beyond words. With love there is everything. Without it there is nothing. It is a current that keeps the world going. Love is the essence of life. God in the form of love is within each of us. Love gives and demands nothing

in return. Love inspires generosity. It obliterates selfishness. Love will triumph where reason fails.

How is this love awakened? How do we receive this wonderful gift? By following the instructions of the Master. The Master instructs us to follow a vegetarian diet and to avoid intoxicants like alcohol and drugs, which weaken our judgement and will. Closely related to sobriety is morality – don't lose your moral compass. Following these basic instructions, taking these most basic steps, creates a state conducive to reversing the flow of our attention and starting the inward journey.

To start the inward journey, the Master instructs us to do simran. Simran is remembrance – a natural function of the mind. Take advantage of that. When the mind is not doing some legitimate practical function, fetter it with simran. It is in the silence of the still mind that the Radiant Form of the Master appears and the sound current is heard. With remembrance and contemplation we have a great aid on our journey, for we become what we contemplate.

Contemplate on the Master. This is his instruction. By following the instructions of the Master we will become love – we will become him.



How is it that Shabd draws us up? In essence, Shabd is the same thing as our soul; there is a mutual attraction between the two. Both are made of the same material, if we may call it so, the same stuff. Birds of a feather flock together; like attracts like. Everything has a natural affinity and attraction for its fountainhead or source.... Our soul is a drop of Shabd, which draws it up as a magnet attracts a needle.

Mysticism, The Spiritual Path

On Giving

*You give but little when you give of your possessions.
It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.
For what are your possessions but things to keep and guard
for fear that you may need them tomorrow?
And tomorrow, what shall tomorrow bring to the over-prudent dog
burying bones in the trackless sand
as he follows pilgrims to the holy city?
And what is fear of need but need itself?
It is not dread of thirst when your well is full,
the thirst that is unquenchable?
There are those who give little of the much which they have,
And they give it for recognition,
and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome.
And there are those who have little but give it all.
These are the believers in life and the bounty of life
and their coffer is never empty.
There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward.
And there are those who give with pain
and that pain is their baptism.
And there are those who give and know not pain in giving,
nor do they seek joy, nor give with mindfulness of virtue.
It is well to give when asked,
but it is better to give unasked, through understanding.
Therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours
and not your inheritors'.*

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*



Maharaj Charan Singh

Where Are You?

Are there any of us who've not wanted to cry out at some stage, "Where are you, Master? Have you abandoned me?"

Probably every single disciple who's ever lived has known deep loneliness and despair at times, when he or she feels no contact with his Master – when it seems he's been left to struggle on alone. We all have these stretches of desolation on the long road we have to walk, when the one we are seeking seems forever beyond our reach.

We have these haunting words in the Bible in one of the psalms of David:

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take council in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?

Psalm 13

So if we too sometimes have that same sense of desolation, we are certainly not alone in that. And whatever the reason for it – whether we are aching for a Master whom we feel we have lost, or whether we feel frustrated after years of effort on the path and no apparent progress – it may well be that our cry of loneliness is a sign of great grace, great good fortune. Sadness, loneliness, frustration and struggle are part of the journey to God. We should be embracing them with love and gratitude.

Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Gems* that "genuine grief (over separation from the Lord) gives impetus to further progress." He also writes:

The soul gains strength slowly. Rising and falling and struggling against mind and matter, it makes headway up with the help of the Saints. The rise and fall are natural and so is the struggle. For that which is achieved after struggle, gives strength, self-reliance and incentive to go ahead. Achievement thus obtained is lasting and can be reproduced at will.

We are expected to struggle on the path, and we can expect to feel the emotions that accompany our struggle. The real question is: What is our response to those emotions?

We have two avenues for response. One is an attitude response and one is an action response. We can heed what Great Master has been telling us and accept – even be grateful for – the pain of longing he allows us to feel. And we can act to take the next step, or the next million – what does it matter? Every round of simran in meditation or during the day is one of those next steps we must take to reach the eye centre, a step we take by choosing a positive, grateful action: simran and meditation.

Both responses are equally vital for the further progress that Great Master speaks of. At that point of desolation it's very easy for the disciple to sit back and wail – moan and groan with genuine grief, desperation and frustration. It's very easy to become negative and lose heart, sinking into useless, self-indulgent apathy, self-pity or laziness – none of which will contribute to further progress.

The Masters themselves understand these emotions, having experienced them themselves. Mystic literature is full of love, longing, despair and frustration. It is also full of positive response and advice. Firstly the Masters tell us unequivocally that they are always with their disciples – always!

We are not alone. We may be separated physically from the Master, for whatever reason, but we are not alone. From the time of initiation the Master, in his Shabd form, takes up residence in every disciple at the third eye. Nothing can dislodge or remove him. He doesn't change his mind, or get bored or go away on holiday! Not even the physical death of his body takes that Shabd form away from the disciple. He never leaves us. We may move away from him, lose sight of him, allow our minds to separate us from him, but he never leaves us.

Master Sawan Singh understands a disciple's longing, loneliness and fear. In several letters in *Spiritual Gems* he makes this very clear:

Although you are separated from my physical body, yet you are not away from my mind. The Satguru in his Sound form is taking proper care of you and is within you.

As far as the Master is concerned, time and space make no difference to him, for the Master is not confined to physical form.

The Master is within you, in the Sound form. When your heart is with me, you are not far away.

That's the key: when our heart is with him, we are with him. And that's the answer to the original question, "Where are you, Master?"

He is in our hearts, where he always has been and always will be. Embrace the pain. It is his love duet with the soul.



The Sanctuary of His Love

Human perceptions are all awry and very limited. When we think we have been abandoned, He may be protecting us. When we wonder where His help has gone, He may be supporting our every step. When we think we are unloved, He may be cradling us in His arms. When we think we can never be forgiven, He has already forgiven us, and is only waiting for us to forget ourselves and our guilt. When we think we have doubts, He may be deepening our faith.

Such is the magic of the love with which He tends us, and which He weaves around us. But since He Himself has given us the illusion of freedom and separateness, He plays the game of letting us slowly discover things for ourselves. Time is no problem for the Being who has created time. And in the end we discover that we never had a separate existence, but have always dwelt within the sanctuary of His love.

So we evolve spiritually. And as our consciousness expands, as our little being merges increasingly into the One Being, so we come nearer and nearer to what folks have called nirvana, enlightenment, God-realization, union with God, merging with the Ocean of Love. And when we experience Him within, we find Him everywhere.

Then we come to understand that every thing and every place is sacred and holy.

One Being One



Practical Mysticism

Sant Mat is a path of practical mysticism – something very different from other belief systems and religions in that it does not involve theories or prayers or various forms of worship. Mysticism is the science of actually experiencing other levels of consciousness.

Scriptures, prayers, rituals, devotional songs and special buildings – all outer forms of worship – are non-essential to a mystic. Some of these may be helpful in that they may help create an atmosphere for mystic practice, but that is all.

Mystic practice is something unfamiliar to most of us, and we need to be willing to do everything necessary in order to succeed. Success requires focus – our attention has to be focused on our goal. We also need to refrain from thoughts, actions and activities that stand in the way of our success.

Thoughts are a key aspect of living life as a human being, and they become doubly important when we embark on a mystic path. When we spend a great deal of time and energy thinking about something or someone, we create invisible but very real bonds between us and the object of our attention. This creates attachment. We can be attached to people, places, things, situations and outcomes. It makes no difference whether we view them in a positive or a negative light – the attachment is still there. Attachment is such a normal part of everyday human life that we mostly take it for granted.

The way we perceive life is determined by our thoughts. Two people can live under the same roof, in the same circumstances, yet view their lives quite differently. It is all in what they each choose to focus on. As a simple example, one may feel quite well-off and be grateful for all the blessings received, while the other may continually feel deprived. Is this to do with their different personalities? No, it's to do with the way

that each one thinks and the level of attachment they consequently have to people or things.

So, if attachment is such a normal part of life as a human being, what is so bad about it? For an answer, let us turn to the venerable Buddha. He tells us that attachment is the cause of all suffering. It is our attachment to particular people, objects or outcomes that causes us pain when we don't have them. Furthermore, the Masters tell us that in addition to being the cause of suffering, attachment is the cause of rebirth. The corollary of this is: if we are detached, we will not suffer, and we can also avoid being reborn.

In fact, there is actually nothing particularly wrong with attachment per se. Attachment is a part of the human experience. The real issue revolves around precisely who and what we choose to focus it on. Used in a positive way, it is our greatest gift; used in a negative way, it is a curse.

We need to focus on the positive. We see that the strongest forms of positive attachment that are natural to human beings are longing, love and worship. These are the very tools we can use to facilitate our inward journey to realize God. Longing and love are powerful aids to us on the spiritual path; in truth we won't get far without them. Unfortunately there is no switch we can throw to turn them on – these qualities are not within our control. We can safely say these are gifts with which we are blessed if God decides to bless us with them.

Of these forms of attachment, the only one we can consciously use is worship. Most people are taught to worship one divine incarnation or concept of God. But this worship serves a useful purpose only if it helps us to realize our own divinity. But it can be a subtle trap, and a very easy one to fall into, if we idolize the divinity in another without trying to realize it within. In order for our consciousness to ascend

within, we need to take our devotion for the outer Guru to the next level – the inner master, the Shabd - through meditation.

The Masters tell us this very thing over and over and over, but maybe we think they are just being humble or modest. True Masters don't play at being humble; they do not put on a modest front for our benefit. When a Master speaks, he speaks from *his* truth. We need to listen carefully to what he is saying and not try to interpret his words in the light of our theoretical knowledge of the path. A true Master's words carry deep meaning and should be considered carefully.

If we want to know the truth, we have to be willing to question everything we have been taught. There are no sacred cows in mysticism, because mysticism is not a path of knowledge or belief; it is a path of experience. In spite of our saying that we believe God is omnipresent, we may feel distant, cut off and frustrated in our efforts to find him. The reason is simple. We don't yet believe the truth that God is everywhere at all times.

So, if God is everywhere, yet still remains invisible to us, what can we do about it? Is it a case of looking at the world or life differently? Well, it is a case of looking differently, but not at the world or at life. We have to learn to look within our own selves. When we learn to do this, we will understand the illusory play of life in this world for what it really is. More than that, we will perceive higher truths directly for ourselves.

But it is no simple matter to reverse the direction of our perception. What we need is help from someone who has done it and can teach us how to do it. On this path we accept the help of the living Master.

The purpose of turning the attention within is to make contact with the primordial energy stream, which is the creator and sustainer of everything. This is God in action. When we see this light and hear this sound, we are seeing and listening to God's dynamic energy. This is true worship – worshipping in spirit.

Of course, it stands to reason that we need to give our full and undivided attention to this practice whenever we do it – and therein lies the rub! We are not used to holding our attention on any one thing for any length of time. When we sit down and try to accomplish this, we discover just how out of control our minds are. We may also discover what it is that keeps us entangled in life and creates difficulties in our meditation practice.

If we are familiar with the Master's teachings, we will know what we should avoid and what we should embrace in order to facilitate our practice. If we accept and remain within his guidelines, our lives will be more tranquil and our meditation will be easier. If we choose to step outside of them, we will soon discover precisely why they were given to us by the Master.

The primary purpose of the Master is to teach the method of contacting the sound current within ourselves. Once we know how to do that, he has to wait for us to take that step before he can give us further assistance. If you want to climb a mountain and you employ an experienced guide, he can tell you how to get to the mountain, but then he has to wait for you to actually reach the mountain and meet him at the base camp before he can guide you further. It is the same on the mystic path.

The path begins from the eye centre. The Master's instructions are for us to reach this point and step on to the path from there. Only when we have completed this part of the journey will we be able to consciously meet him and travel under his guidance. This is our part of the bargain. His part is to take us from there all the way back to God. We get to do the boring bit on our own and he gets to do the interesting bit with us – that's the way it works.

The method we use to get to this point of departure is the way of simran. By the assiduous practice of simran, we can withdraw our

attention from the world and even from our entire body and concentrate it at the eye centre. When this process is complete, we can break through the veil into the worlds beyond. How long does this stage last? There is no way to know. Suffice it to say that there are no shortcuts.

Kabir tells us that it's simran that will bring us to the gateway of liberation and to the divine realms within. There's no avoiding it. Do that simran, because without it you will not find true freedom.



*The ship of your life is sinking;
invoke now the Name of the Lord!
Invoke now the Name of the Lord,
for your life is fast slipping from your hands.
Your boat is sinking midstream,
yet you are clutching your measly possessions;
Only the foolish waste their lives on a treasure they will lose.
You are taking your last breath;
even now you are bound by your attachments.
Though the breath is leaving your body,
even now you don't remember his Name.
The human frame is a priceless treasure, O Paltu!
You have traded it for empty shells.
The ship of your life is sinking;
invoke now the Name of the Lord!*

Saint Paltu

The Master's Words

Who of us is qualified to unveil divine truth? The fact is that truth in its highest sense is beyond words, beyond the intellect. No matter how sincere we may be, ordinary human beings lack the words or the wisdom to explain it. Even the Masters are sometimes unable to reduce their sublime experiences into words. But because they have travelled to the highest regions and have experienced this truth for themselves, at least they are better able to tell us something about it.

Let's remind ourselves about the simplicity of the divine truth as taught by a Master *in his own words*. Let us look at some of the words of Baba Jaimal Singh who explained this truth to his disciple and eventual successor, Babu Sawan Singh, in a series of letters, translated and published in the book *Spiritual Letters*. The letters of Baba Ji Maharaj, which have recently been translated into English, reflect the simplicity of the truth as taught directly by a Master.

The opening words of the introduction to *Spiritual Letters* are from a letter by Maharaj Sawan Singh (also in English translation), who succeeded Baba Ji as Master:

Radha Soami is not the name of a religion. It is the name of the Creator of the universe.

In the same introduction the Great Master refers to contact with the creative power or Shabd, and quotes Guru Nanak's words in the Adi Granth: "It is seeing without eyes, hearing without ears, walking without feet, working without hands and dying a living death after recognizing the sound current." He further explains:

This means that this reality cannot be seen with these material eyes. It cannot be heard with these material ears. It cannot be explained with this physical tongue. It cannot be described.

If we sincerely believe these words of a Master, we understand that everything said, written or explained about this path cannot be fully grasped with our human faculties. It has to be experienced.

Truth, by definition, is something that is unchanging. What is true today will be true tomorrow and always. Something that changes cannot be described as absolute truth. Therefore, because all things we perceive on this material plane are constantly changing, they cannot be truth. Truth is more than what we perceive; and it is not dependent on whether we believe it or not.

In Letter 24 in *Spiritual Letters*, Baba Jaimal Singh has this to say about Shabd, the divine creative power, and about the Satguru:

Try to listen to the Shabd-dhun every day, because whatever is happening is being done by the current of the Shabd. Satguru is the creator of all: he will give that which he thinks to be good. If our benefit lies in pleasure, he will send us pleasure; if it lies in pain, he will send us pain. So look upon pain and pleasure as the same.

The Master says that one should not be perturbed by the happenings of each day; we should not be affected by life. One should never become disheartened, because everything is God's work. Whether one has money or lives in poverty, experiences health or sickness, happiness or sadness, it is not of oneself – it is of God.

So how can we live here on earth and not be affected by everything that happens to us or around us? We can do this only if

we leave it all to God. That means to contemplate on him and listen for his Sound and keep our attention on him.

In Letter 108 Baba Jaimal Singh writes:

Do your bhajan and simran every day. Day and night, the surat and nirat [the hearing and seeing faculties of the soul] and the higher mind should keep yearning to hear the Shabd-dhun within. By all means, carry on with your worldly work, my son, but your inner longing should always be for the Shabd-dhun.

Repeatedly, almost in every letter, Master Baba Jaimal Singh urges his disciple to search for the Sound of God inside continuously. He says we have to do our worldly duties, but they should not take priority over this one essence, to keep the Shabd-dhun in our minds at all times.

We as human beings have a tendency to form groups with other individuals who think as we do. We form religions and movements, we build mosques, churches and synagogues, sometimes creating duality by thinking in terms of 'us' and 'them'. The Master tells us that essentially we are all the same, that God is the Truth within us, and that we must look for him there, not in outward practices. Masters give us a method which they say guarantees success in our endeavours to go back to God. We have to still the mind, in order to make us purer in our efforts to merge into the Creator. And the Masters say we should not just believe it; if we follow their teachings, we can prove it for ourselves as the real truth. We have to meditate by using the method of repetition and contemplation, simran and bhajan.

In other letters Baba Jaimal Singh writes to his disciple and reassures him on worldly matters. He writes about building plans and wells, his employment, his travels, his state of mind, his health and

many other matters that occur in life. He sends regards from family and dear acquaintances. But in almost every letter he addresses the central thread that runs through the whole book – do your meditation every day.

To conclude, in Letter 144 Baba Ji writes these reassuring words:

So have no fear. Remain dauntless in your heart – nothing can happen without his command. Whatever has to happen has already happened. We are going to do only that which has already been done – the true Lord, Radha Soami Ji, is doing it. Continue to work fearlessly; the compassionate Guru is always your protector. Since we have been granted the true wealth, why should we care about the false one? Rather, the mind is not to be attached to the unreal. Whenever you are free, listen to the Shabd-dhun by fixing the mind and soul in it.

Is there really very much more that needs to be said?



The greatest miracle of the mystics is that they change the very attitude of our life, the way of our life. They turn everything upside down in our life. That is the greatest miracle the saints come to perform in our lives.

Legacy of Love

A Call To Come Home

We all know, or have known, a sense of dissatisfaction with everything life could offer us – a hunger for something better. So let's ask ourselves: What is it that we really want?

The answer may well lie in the sense of longing that sometimes makes us wish that we could be elsewhere, where we really belong. Perhaps by now we've learnt to recognize this for what it is: the cry of the soul – that's the underlying cause of all our seeking.

So, how to satisfy that longing? Great Master tells us in *Spiritual Gems* that if a disciple remains worldly, he will come back to the world. But if he chooses to follow the Master, he will go where the Master goes. We need to live the way our Master asks us to live, and we need to accept our circumstances and be happy with what we've got.

In *Living Meditation* we read:

As disciples on the spiritual path, we need to bring ourselves to the point where we accept that what the Shabd has given us, and the circumstances in which we have been placed, are the sum total of what we need to achieve as our life's goal. The secret to a happy and contented life is to learn to accept rather than expect.

There's a lot to be said for just being satisfied and contented with what we've got. How many hours of our meditation time do we spend thinking about something we want instead of focusing on our simran and bhajan? By dwelling on things that we want and worrying about things we don't like, not only do we wreck our meditation, but we also spoil our own peace of mind and enjoyment of life.

In time we learn that our happiness depends largely on the regularity of our meditation – on our efforts to bring the mind to stillness. In the book *One Being One* we read:

The further we stray from our still centre, the more distracted and the more miserable we become, however clever we may be. The closer we are to our still centre, the more peace and happiness we will find within ourselves; the more we will find spontaneous happiness, even bliss, flooding our inner being, drawing us closer to the Sacred One. And with it comes wisdom and understanding. Once you've tasted that kind of bliss and known that kind of knowledge, you realize that it's worth more than the sum total of all human knowledge.

This is something that we learn in time. We're not happy when we're lax with our meditation. Life just doesn't feel right for us. In fact we're not meditating because of what we might gain from it. We're not meditating for knowledge or for sound or light or inner experience. We're not meditating as a favour to our Master. We meditate because we *need* it. It's our lifeline. Meditation gives us the perspective to accept – and be happy with – what's been given to us.

Accepting our circumstances gracefully is submission to the Master's will. We *need* to learn the lessons of submission and obedience to our Master, because this is our only hope of escaping from this world. Let's face up to our situation here. We are like lost, bewildered children in a dark jungle. We long to get out into the light, but there's no chance of this unless we obey his instructions, without question. Let's face up to the fact that we are helpless to find our way without his support, help and guidance.

What is the reality of our situation? We live here in utter ignorance. What do we know about anything? We talk about God-realization, but what do we understand about God? We read and we talk about the Shabd, but how many of us know what the Shabd is? We talk about the Master being a projection of the Shabd and about his Radiant Form. What does this mean to us? We don't even comprehend what the Master is when he is sitting right in front of us in his physical form. We don't even understand ourselves, or what it means when we're told that we're spiritual beings having a human experience. We understand nothing and we know nothing.

All that we know is that there's a mysterious hunger inside us crying out to be satisfied. But how can we do anything without the help of our Master? Therefore, since we're so utterly dependent on him, let's do what he tells us to do.

If we were driving in a totally strange city and somebody in the car knew his way, we wouldn't question him if he tells us to turn right or go straight or switch to another lane. We would simply obey him because he knows the way and we don't. That's just plain common sense!

The Masters tell us: This world is not your home. Get out of here and return to your own place. In the words of Soami Ji: "Let us turn homewards, friend – why linger in this alien land?" (*Sar Bachan Poetry*)

Soami Ji calls this world an 'alien land' – a hostile and unpleasant place. But in *One Being One* the author puts a different slant on it. He calls it the Creator's masterpiece! He talks about the different planes of creation higher than ours where souls live in awareness of the Creator and everything is beauty, harmony and blissful happiness. And then there's our physical world, where souls have lost touch with the Creator and they suffer in separation from him. And this is where the search begins that will eventually bring us home.

Far away, on the outskirts of his creation (so to speak), the One Being has created a different scenario. His masterpiece, perhaps. Here the separation from Himself is intensified by the soul's association with a deeply individualistic mind and the coverings of a material body. So dense are these coverings that the souls are no longer aware of the divine and loving presence that dwells within them, supporting, surrounding and sustaining their existence. They feel that they are on their own, fighting a losing battle for temporary survival of their bodies and identities. And here the One Being has devised his highest purpose.

His highest purpose is that souls, suffering and desperate to get back to the Creator, start to cry out to him for rescue. They seek an avenue of escape.

Very simplistically, this is how it works: When the Creator wants us to return to him, he calls us by planting a longing in our hearts. This longing is his call to us to come home. And then we feel driven to look for our way back. If we are accepted by a Master, we then feel *impelled* to work, to meditate, to free ourselves from our shackles here. He will *make* us do it.

In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh tells a questioner:

[The]Master, of course, will give you the advice to do bhajan and simran, but you will not follow that advice unless there is something within you that is forcing you to follow that advice. You will take credit that you have followed Master's advice and you are sitting in meditation, but there's something in you which is forcing you to follow the advice and is making you sit in meditation.... You'll feel miserable if you won't give your time to meditation. You will not feel that you are true to yourself if you

don't devote time to meditation. There is something within you which you are not conscious of which is forcing you to follow that advice.

Whatever meditation he makes us do, let's be grateful for it, because it means that he is pulling us towards him. Without that grace we ourselves could do nothing! In another reply in *Die to Live*, Maharaj Ji says:

So you can say, "I am doing the meditation", provided that you are doing it. But when you really do it, then you won't say, "I am doing it." "I" comes only when we don't do it. When we truly meditate, then "I" just disappears. Then we just realize his grace, that but for Him, how could we ever think or even attend to it. Then there is no "I," there is nothing but gratefulness – everything in gratitude. Then we know our insignificance. The more we attend to our meditation, the nearer we are to the goal, the more we realize our insignificance.

Everything is being done by the Lord himself. There is no question of our going back to him by our own effort. Every bit of work we do is no credit to us. It's thanks to him. Our every effort is a result of his love for us and the fact that he is calling us back to him.



Perspective

The population of the world is approaching seven billion people. If a survey could be undertaken, we would probably find that there are seven billion different perspectives on life on this planet. Every person views life through numerous filters: our upbringing, the environment we live in, our education, our social status, our financial situation and the traditions and customs of our country. There are countless factors that influence our outlook on life.

Let's take an extreme example. A rich man living in a mansion, with all the trappings that go with an affluent lifestyle would have a totally different outlook on life than a beggar who doesn't know where his next meal is coming from. A soldier who has seen the horrors of war would have a different outlook compared to an office worker.

We perceive the world through the five senses. What we see, feel, touch, smell and hear is received by the sense organs. That data is captured by the brain, processed, analyzed and evaluated, and then we formulate our finding or opinion. But because of our limitations, whatever opinion we come up with is likely to be flawed.

Then the mystics tell us that there are numerous realms of existence and consciousness much higher than the human level. So how do we raise our consciousness to penetrate these higher realms of existence?

Even with our limitations, mankind has made many wonderful advances in the medical, scientific and engineering fields. A hundred years ago it would have been inconceivable that you could talk into a small instrument and communicate with someone on the other side of the world.

What would we regard as mankind's greatest achievement so far? One achievement stands out: landing a man on the moon. But is it really such an outstanding achievement? It depends on your

perspective. Mankind thought it was marvellous. But how would an alien from another planet view it? He would probably say: “My, but you earthlings are really backward! We can travel from galaxy to galaxy any time we want to.”

When we look at our position in the cosmos, we see that we are as insignificant as a grain of sand. So putting this event in its proper context, landing a man on the moon could be about as important as an ant crossing the road.

On this physical plane with its myriad life forms, man alone has the potential to access higher levels of consciousness for the purpose of self-realization and God-realization. And if we do not avail ourselves of this opportunity, this human birth has been wasted.

If we look at our lives, what are we striving for? The saints tell us that our souls are hungering to return to our source – to return to God. But because we don't know that we are actually seeking God, we look for substitutes: in worldly attractions, relationships, people and objects. But these substitutes never seem to satisfy us. The novelty soon wears off and we are left with our longing. There is a persistent desire for something more lasting.

What's more, it's virtually impossible for ordinary mortals to understand God and how he operates. Over the past decade we have seen untold suffering in many parts of the earth. As a result of wars and other conflicts, many people have had to leave their homeland to live in refugee camps in the most appalling conditions. We have had tsunamis, floods, earthquakes and ongoing wars, and hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost. Wives have been widowed and children have been orphaned. Many people have had their entire livelihood wiped out in seconds. Seeing all these events might make us ask: How can God allow this?

We tend to judge God by the events on this earth plane alone, without considering the bigger picture. So let's put this into perspective. Let's look at the situation from a practical and realistic point of view.

At our level of consciousness it is impossible to understand the reasons for the misery that is prevalent on earth. It can only be understood in the context of the soul, which is deathless, timeless and limitless. When we experience a paradigm shift to a higher level of consciousness, a higher level of understanding, then we will realize that there is a divine plan – that the Creator knows what He is doing; that everything is unfolding perfectly according to the divine cosmic dance.

Let's digress for a moment and talk about ants. If an ant had to understand how human beings lived and behaved, it would somehow have to raise its consciousness to the level of man. For the ant to do that would involve a quantum leap, for there is no mechanism whereby an ant can reach that level of consciousness.

Similarly, there is a massive difference between human consciousness and the level of consciousness necessary for self-realization and God-realization. But we do have the potential to attain that consciousness. How can we do that?

When we received the gift of initiation we made a commitment. We agreed to begin our spiritual life in earnest. We agreed to change our lifestyle and behaviour. Initiation calls for a complete transformation of our thoughts, words and deeds.

In Sant Mat our code of conduct must be based on the first three vows we took at the time of initiation, which provide a foundation for our meditation. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Discourses*, Volume 1, "There is a secret concerning seeing God in meditation: If

you keep your heart pure, you will see God.” So what level of purity is required before we can see God?

In 1993 the Hubble space telescope went into orbit – the most powerful astronomical observatory ever built. Its task was to transmit photographs of outer space back to earth. A problem soon became apparent: the transmitted photographs were blurry. The eight-foot mirror inside the telescope was unable to focus precisely enough because the outer edge of the mirror had been ground too flat by one-fiftieth of the width of a human hair. Similarly, for us to have visions of the inner realms, the mirror of our consciousness must be exactly ground. There can be no flaws. And there must be perfect concentration. By means of concentration we have the ability to access the astral and higher spiritual regions. Our task is to concentrate our attention at the third eye. We can do this under the guidance of a perfect Master.

When we are given initiation we are given a method of meditation whereby we can enter a higher level of consciousness, to make contact with the Shabd, the audible life stream. That will take us back home. The Masters give us specific details about what the inner journey entails. First we have to get to the eye focus. That is achieved by concentrated, ceaseless simran. This will bring us into contact with the Shabd, the stream of divine power that will draw the soul upwards until it reaches the end of its journey.

When you connect your consciousness to the sound current, it will carry you back to your source. There the soul regains supreme consciousness and merges back into its source.



Book Review



Love's Alchemy: Poems from the Sufi Tradition

TRANSLATED BY DAVID AND SABRINEH FIDELER

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David and Sabrineh Fideler, translators and editors of this book, note in the introduction that most English-speaking readers are familiar with Rumi, since he is widely acclaimed as “the best-selling poet in the English language” today. But, the editors observe, Rumi is not a “lone figure,” rather an “extraordinary representative of a much larger tradition of Persian mystical poetry, which reflects the same themes, the same beauties, the same insights.” Their purpose in assembling verses from some eighty Sufi poets spanning a thousand years is to introduce English-speaking readers to this rich mystical and literary tradition.

In spite of the vast cultural, geographical, and temporal breadth of Sufism, the poems in this volume clearly show the essential unity of its mystical message. Observing that a central theme in their selection of poems, and in the Sufi tradition as a whole, is the transformative power of divine love, the editors chose the title *Love's Alchemy* for their volume.

A poem by Khaqani Shirwani explains this alchemy – its origin, its method and its purposes – in just a few words:

*The bird that sings
Pain's song
Is love.*

*The messenger skilled
In the language
Of the unseen world
Is love.*

It is love that speaks to you,

*Calling you beyond the limits
Of this created realm.*

*That which frees you
From your tiny self
Is also love.*

Why is love necessary? For the Sufi, true love, however difficult, is life itself. As Awhad al-Din Kirmani writes:

Love is a source of a great many troubles.

*But lacking love
Is a disgrace
For travelers on this path.*

*Love is the life force of the entire universe—
Those who lack love
Are already dead.*

Sufi mystics urge us to live in this love now, not waiting for the life to come. Fakhr al-Din `Iraqi writes:

*Seeking life without the Friend's presence,
You didn't spend a moment waiting at love's door.*

My God! Sit down and mourn your loss!

That time is gone when you could have been living.

We may not see it, but this love is all around us. We may not know it, but many have already followed it back to its source. In the words of Muhammad Shirin Maghribi:

*Love's concert is calling,
But the flute can't be seen.*

*The drunks are in sight,
But the wine can't be seen.*

*Hundreds
Of caravans
Have passed
This very way—*

*Don't be surprised
If their trace can't be seen.*

To find the treasure of love, poets urge the seeker to look within himself, beyond the barrier of ego. Sana'i writes:

Topple the ego to find yourself.

*Why worry about the stars
When you are your sky?*

*The world is full of obvious things,
But you—
You're a hidden treasure.*

Remember with joy, you are your world.

The mystery of love is beyond thought or imagination, and yet closer than we think. Sadr al-Din Qunawi writes:

*The way of union
Is not what we thought.*

*The world of soul
Is not what we imagined.*

*The Fountain of Eternal Life
Is closer than you think.*

*The Water of Life
Is in this very house—
But still, we need to drink it.*

In the end, love leads to the annihilation of the self in God. `Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, addressing the divine beloved, writes:

*With your irresistible glance,
You captured my heart and soul.*

*Having robbed me of those,
Take away my name and accomplishments too.*

*If any trace of me remains in this world,
Please, don't delay – take that too.*

Decrying the tendency today to generate “renderings” of Sufi poetry sourced only in earlier translations into English, the editors offer fresh translations from the original Persian sources, providing citations to those sources on their website www.sufipoetry.com. In an appendix, they explain the forms of Persian poetry and give examples of the original (phonetically rendered in English letters) and the translation, so that the reader may see the rhyming scheme and hear the melodic sound of the original. They invite the reader to visit their website to hear recordings of Persian poems and their English translations.



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