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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Truth

*Truth is realized when the heart becomes pure;
the dirt of falsehood vanishes
and the body is washed clean.*

We know the Truth when we love the Truth.

*We discover the door to liberation
only when our heart blossoms by listening to Nam.*

*Only when we know the correct technique
can we realize the Truth.*

*Having prepared the soil of the body,
the Lord sows in it the seed of Nam.*

*Only when an individual receives correct instruction
does he comprehend the Truth.*

*His heart fills with compassion for life,
and he offers his share in charity.*

*Only when a person dwells in the shrine
of his own soul and continues
to dwell there under his Satguru's direction
does he realize the Truth.*

Truth is the cure for all ills; it washes off sin.

*Nanak makes his supplication to those
who have attained the Truth.*

Gurbani Selections 1



The Illusionist

Saint Paltu described life by saying that it has two ends: man is at one end and God at the other, and the distance between the two is infinitesimally small. The reason we follow this path, the reason we became initiated, do simran and meditate, is for the very purpose of closing that gap – of covering that infinitesimally small distance during this life.

So why do we find it so difficult to do? Perhaps we don't really believe there is such a *small* gap to close; perhaps we are really not sure if we believe there is a God to meet within.

There are probably times in all of our lives, when the entire concept of the path and its teachings of expanded consciousness, divine love, inner manifestations and all the wonderful aspects which make up this path, must seem like a total fantasy – like a beautiful fairy story.

Yet mystics such as Paltu tell us that this is no fairy tale; rather it is in fact reality, and what *we* understand to be reality – this world – is the illusion. The Master, the charming prince, will help us open our inner vision, where we will experience the light and sound of the Shabd, and he will deliver us back safely to our Father's home. They tell us that all of this is within our grasp. Yet it all seems so distant from us, and we feel we will never reach the eye center and personally experience all the wonders we are told about.

So what is it that creates this doubt in our minds? It is the illusion that binds us to this world, preventing our closing the gap of which Paltu speaks. In an illusion something is present, but it is mistaken for something else. So an illusion is not what you see – it is what the illusionist wishes you to see.

This world is an illusion and mind is the great illusionist. In *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*, the author writes that we often associate

maya specifically with the physical universe, but maya is essentially a power originating with the universal mind, and existing throughout the worlds of the mind. Therefore, this world and all the regions within the orbit of universal mind, are illusory. In these regions, illusion is all-pervasive and maya is deceptively beautiful, alluring and blissful.

Mystics further tell us that time and space are also illusions, created by the mind – they are the warp on which the entire fabric of the creation is woven. This vast illusion was created to camouflage divine unity. In military terms the five qualities of camouflage and concealment are: shape, shine, shadow, silhouette and spacing. By using these qualities, the illusionist performs the magic of deception. Similarly, the mind divides the one reality into the profusion of different forms in the creation, and the illusion cast by maya over everything is the changing appearance of these vast numbers of forms and shapes, which are made to look and feel real.

Wherever there is mind, illusion is the deceptive force projecting images created by the mind. The great deception is that we live in the illusory world of mind, which we consider to be reality, unaware of the true reality which illusion so subtly disguises. So subtle is the illusion, that the very mind that tries to perceive the illusion, is itself part of the illusion, and it cannot through logic and reason, disentangle itself to understand its own source.

Time is another of the illusionist's deceptive tricks. Everything in this world is conditioned by time. We only have to look at our own lives, to realize the extent to which we are governed by time. We move from one thing to another, from one thought to another. Like a shuttle we move back and forth along an illusory time line, as the mind flits between the past and the future. We don't stop to realize that there is not a moment that has any reality, except the present one – neither the

past nor the expectation of the future can be regarded as real. Time, space, past and future – these are all illusion.

When we look around us, it is impossible to even begin to think that this world, which is so familiar to us, is neither real nor permanent, but rather is a false appearance, a deceptive impression. We know from personal experience that things in this world are not constant, yet we hang on to this life, this world and all our attachments in it, with every fiber of our being.

In the Bible, James 4:14, we read:

For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away.

But that is not our experience. Life in this world is often wonderful and we don't experience the world as an illusion. As we shuttle up and down the time line, we feel as though our lives will never end – that they will go on forever. We seem to be happy here on earth, entwined with all our attachments. But mystics tell us that these transient relationships, and the relentless pursuit of desires, are simply an illusion. Our own experience tells us that most of these are short-lived.

Maya is often portrayed as a temptress, which is indicative of both desire and the powerful attraction between a man and a woman. In *Saint Paltu* the author says that maya also means the tinkle of gold and silver, and the cravings of the flesh.

The temptress, our own desire, lures us into the trap of illusion that binds us to this creation. Our lives and energy are consumed by our relentless desires, and we stray from the path that leads to truth and follow the path that gratifies the senses. The message the Masters constantly give us is that our priorities are wrong. The truth is that surrounding ourselves with expensive cars and homes filled with

beautiful objects pulls us deeper into the illusion of the world – which Saint James warns will ultimately disappear into the mists of time, as the illusion dissipates. But for now we are happy, not realizing that we are wasting a very precious gift – that of a human birth, and the opportunity to lift ourselves out of the quagmire of maya. Once again, illusion has deceived us.

Goswami Tulsidas, drawing a comparison between the love for God and the physical love between a man and a woman, says:

*The sensual love for women in the world
Wears out day by day,
But love for God grows ever anew.*

The Teachings of Goswami Tulsidas

Because we are sincere in our affection for special people or even animals in our lives, we may find that one of the cruelest of all illusions is our misunderstanding of love.

When I put my arms around my dog and feel his warm body, and his tail wags with delight, we share a mutual affection and closeness – we love one another. So it can be hurtful to hear from the saints, that what we perceive as love, is simply a shadow of real love – of divine love.

But what is it I love? Is it his soul I love, or is it the warm body with the wagging tail to which I am so attracted and attached? Is our love simply a karmic attraction to the physical and mental image? From an anonymous source quoted in the book *Shams-e-Tabrizi* we read:

*Beauty, which will perish,
Is impossible to be loved by men.*

Can our love be pure and real if it constantly changes – consumed by jealousy and anger one moment, while at the next it makes us cry with pain or leap with joy? Does this inconsistency not mean it has actually been a deception and an illusion? However wavering it may be, worldly love teaches us about love – it is the forerunner to the gift of divine love. Maharaj Charan Singh, speaking about love, says:

Meditation creates love. ... It grows to such an extent that we become one with the Father. That is love. There's no other love in the world – the rest is all self-deception. Nobody belongs to us and we don't belong to anybody. For some time we live in illusion, but soon we realize where we stand. Real love can only be for the Father. The pity is that what we see, we are not supposed to love, and what we don't see, we are supposed to love. What we see doesn't exist, what we don't see really exists, and that is the whole tragedy of our love.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Like sleepers who have been dreaming, we wake to find that the dream was not reality. Maya has cast such a wide net, that it is almost impossible to escape its deceptions and temptations. In fact, it is the spell of maya that keeps people away from the Creator, and keeps them running after the transitory things in creation. Paltu says these earthly temptations are the greatest hurdles in the way of a seeker.

So if we want to escape the illusion, we must learn to outwit the illusionist. This is where the Master's teachings are invaluable. He teaches us that by reversing the outward tendencies of the mind, we can outsmart the illusionist. As we gather the mind at the third eye, we slowly sever the binding grip of maya. As our concentration increases, we pierce the veil that separates outer illusion from the reality within,

and the mind begins to experience a sense of peace and bliss that it will never find in the outer illusory world.

The place to which the Master draws us within, is constant and unchanging – which means it is free of illusion and deception. We have to find that center within us, because that is the real path we walk, and of which we should increasingly be aware. The code of ethics he asks us to follow may seem extreme, but surely the prize we seek – to escape the illusionist – is worth the inconvenience of adhering to his request? A Sufi mystic tells us:

*Whatever you see in the whirlpool of this world
will disappear from your eyes like a bubble.*

*Bu Ali Shah Qalandar,
as quoted in Sultan Bahu*



*While working in the marketplace of life
and treading worldly paths,
one should not lose sight of one's objective,
nor be allured by another's wealth and spouse.
Without Nam, O Nanak, the mind cannot be held still,
nor are its cravings appeased.
The Guru shows a marketplace and a city within the body
where one deals in Truth with natural ease.*

Gurbani Selections 1

Our Purpose in Life

Inspired by a talk given by Baba Ji at Dera on July 1, 2012

The Master addressed the sangat as he does each year when he is about to leave the Dera for his annual summer tour outside India – seated on a chair on the dais, without a pathi or scriptural text for structure, like a father talking to the family before he leaves to travel far away on work. As a father he reminds his children of what is important – of their hopes, aspirations and values as a family, and of what they stand for. In sweltering heat, heat way beyond anyone's comfort level, several hundred thousand people had gathered for the satsang.

Baba Ji started by asking us to reflect on why we have all come together – what has brought us together? Everyone lives their life with some objective or aim, some wishes or desires that make them act in a particular way. Dependent on their objectives, people identify specific values or principles to live by, principles that shape a journey that leads them where they want to go. Spirituality is our objective. With spirituality as our aim, what principles do we live by?

The first principle we observe is that we try not to hurt anyone. Not only do we not hurt any human being, we seek to live a life where we cause no suffering at all – not only to people but also to all the other life forms: animals, birds, insects, all living beings. We choose to live a life that causes the minimum suffering to any living being in the creation. When the entire creation has come into existence from the one spirit, the one Shabd – when all are parts of the divine One – is it logical to consider that some parts are of no value, some of less value, and some of more value? When living creatures are killed for food, do we really think they don't suffer? When we violently extinguish their spirit just to please our taste buds, how can we imagine that

this uncaring way of living can support our spiritual development? If spirituality is our objective, how can traumatizing the spirit force in another life form be compatible with nurturing our spirit? Imagine that a knife is put to a creature's throat: do we not think the creature experiences terror? Would we choose to be part of the demand for that supply chain? This is why we choose a vegetarian diet. In addition to embracing the ideal of compassion for all living beings through our lifestyle, there is the health consideration as well. Many scientists are now putting forward the concept that a vegetarian diet is a preferable option for health-conscious individuals living responsibly in today's world.

The second value or principle supporting spirituality is clarity of mind. It is the human capacity to reflect and discriminate between right and wrong that enables a person, as compared with all other living creatures, to choose to live by specific principles. We are what Baba Ji calls "karam jooni". We create karma. We have the element of *akash*, the power of discrimination. Thus we are responsible for our actions. This implies that we can make a conscious effort to align our willpower and actions for the purpose of attaining higher consciousness. The human form alone is a karam jooni, the only life form with choice, as compared with "bhog joonian", which describe all other life forms. Life forms that are bhog joonian merely undergo, endure, and live out their karmic allocation for each life. As long as they are in that life form, they have no choice. To exercise our God-given birthright as a karam jooni, and to support the future we have consciously chosen for ourselves, we need a clear mind. Indeed, this unique capacity for discrimination is reflected even in the legal sphere when we wish to make a formal will. A clause is inserted that a person of sound mind has made the will. A document of such importance is not considered

valid if, due to ill health or other circumstances, the author's mind is no longer under his or her control.

To grow in spirituality, we have to walk the straight path in everything we choose to do or not to do. We have to make countless decisions on a daily basis about what will serve our real interests and what will not. For this we need a clear mind at every step of the journey. As Maharaj Charan Singh used to explain, we are now at the topmost step of the ladder and one more step can take us to the roof of our house. If we slip now, who knows how far we might fall? Just one wrong foot, one wrong action, can cause a person to slip all the way down the ladder of life forms and necessitate rebirth at a reduced level of consciousness to square the account. As you sow, you reap. Therefore, a person with spirituality as his or her objective avoids taking any substance that would cloud the mind or affect the power of discrimination. This means not using intoxicants of any kind, in any measure or at any time, to make one feel good, or happy, or high – to drown out suffering and sorrows or soften life's hard edges – because drugs and alcohol change one's perceptions in a manner that is outside one's control. We may say things and do things that otherwise we would choose not to do.

With clear vision, we are in a position to keep our spiritual objective before us at all times. We ourselves are temples of the living God. We are at the top of the creation. We ourselves are the body, the physical form, in which the Lord can be found. The structures we have made over the centuries, our diverse places of worship, enable the lovers of the spirit to come together in remembrance of the One. Were we to truly understand the One, their differences would not be considered significant. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God" gives the message of the One from the perspective of Christianity. "Shabd guru, surat dhun chela" – from the Adi Granth – means the Word is the true teacher

or Guru, and a consciousness attuned to the melodious sound of Shabd is the true disciple.

But do we hear the saints' message about what is true? No, we don't! Instead of working to find the One, we worship those who carry the message. We create rituals and religions around the teachings and personalities of the teachers, in ways suited to our diverse cultures. We limit the limitless; we divide up the universal; we reduce the irreducible to concepts we can grasp.

Saints come again and again to remind us of Spirit, of Nam, Shabd, the Word, the Name. And how do they tell us that this indefinable, limitless, and unchanging spirit may be known? By walking straight in the direction of our objective, by being obedient to the Guru's instructions, living the life of a disciple and joining ourselves to the spirit within us.

We get confused between outer realities and the inner reality. Baba Ji spoke of our body — which is our physical and mental reality — as a rented house given to us for a fixed period of time. If we were to rent a house, how much of our time and resources would we invest in a building that does not belong to us? We spend our lives serving this outer shell, but what of the being that lives in it, the very life of this rented property? How do we serve our consciousness, the reality of soul that is our eternal reality? Do we do anything to meet its needs and empower it? Satsang, Seva and Shabd — each has its parallel in the world of matter and the world of spirit. The outer is a means to the inner, but it is the inner reality that bears fruit.

Our objective is to be consciously in touch with Shabd, to awaken and strengthen our consciousness or surat — till it can actively hear the melody of Shabd, of the spirit. This is our real work. Gathered together to hear the teachings, we are in satsang — but real satsang will be when we are in the presence of the spirit, of Shabd within ourselves.

Who is the true sevadar? The person who serves the Satguru. And what does it mean to serve the Guru? It means “Thy will is sweet, O Lord; “Thy will be done,” as is said in the Christian “Lord’s Prayer”. It means walking in the way of the Satguru, abandoning the ego self – letting go of this me, my, and mine. The Guru’s pleasure lies in our doing our meditation no matter what our circumstances and responsibilities, for they are our karmic allocation for this lifetime and we cannot avoid them. The noise, demands, and other activities of the world will never cease in order to allow us a peaceful environment for meditation – we will never get ideal conditions – so we have to concentrate our attention despite adverse conditions. We can make our lives easier by keeping our spiritual focus, so that life’s hammer blows feel no more than pinpricks – by meditating in spite of our circumstances and responsibilities.

This is the real seva – doing our meditation. Outer service cleans the vessel of the heart so it can hold the Shabd. The Guru’s will is one thing only; the Guru has only one order and his pleasure is one alone. His pleasure is Shabd and Nam; bhajan and simran; awakening the surat and raising the consciousness. Pleasing our Master means sitting in meditation – every day.

The Master was full of praise for all the sevadars who work so lovingly and selflessly to look after his sangat. He said that we give ourselves to seva to become real disciples. But if we do not fulfil the real seva as well, we will never know peace.

Peace and bliss will come when we are in contact with the Shabd, when we reach the fourth stage beyond the three worlds that are driven by action and reaction. It is the Shabd that has the power and purity to carry us across these worlds. And we will only find the Shabd when we enter within. So be the “doers of the Word,” as Christ said, the Master told his sangat, his family. This was his message. This is the way. Keep your spiritual objective before you and engage in spiritual practice. It is the Guru’s one request.

Imagine

Imagine you could live in a state where outer circumstances were irrelevant. That your joy was independent of the weather, wealth, world politics, sickness or health. Imagine having no expectations of the future to deliver your long awaited joy: that one day when I retire, when I eventually have enough money, when my partner starts behaving better, I will find happiness ... Imagine that everything you ever truly wanted and longed for was already contained deep inside of you. And so, in truth, it is.

It is only the illusion cast by mind that prevents us from perceiving this timeless reality. Right now, the very essence of our soul is continuous with the One. As a glass bottle filled with sea water thrown into the sea is already part of the sea; only the covering needs be removed to merge completely. It is not a truth to be revealed in the realm of time and distance, but a truth uncovered moment by moment by a clear and conscious mind.

But alas, the mind is neither conscious nor clear. The very soul lies dormant, hidden behind layers and layers of mental confusion, movement and turbulence. Mind works in the physical creation through the five senses. The tongue tastes, but it is the mind that experiences the taste and becomes addicted to it. This is how the senses connect us outwardly with the creation. Daily the mind is played on the keyboard of the senses, a symphony of sensual stimuli that keeps our soul a deep and distant spectator, powerless to act. The spectacle of the senses is like petroleum burning on water, vividly blue and purple, all distraction and wonder, and all of this is played out on the vast canvas of the soul, so still in the quiet and infinite depths below.

To reveal and know this is the purpose of life – self-knowledge. But the soul must first take back its power and control. The outward flow must be reversed so that the energy of the soul governs the mind which, in turn, recoils from the senses. If we are not in control, then we are being controlled. We can only surrender what is ours. And if the mind possesses us, what possibility is there of surrendering it at the feet of the Master?

While self-discipline and self-control are indispensable prerequisites to make any headway whatsoever on this path, the austerity of the yogis of old is not the way advocated by the great mystics. In the end the senses always win, returning with redoubled force into the realm of pleasure and pain. The mystics advocate a more subtle method: meditation. By this method we slowly work from the inside, from our very core, tuning into the spiritual currents emanating from within our own souls right now.

Put bluntly, without meditation we know and understand nothing. Outside of the meditative state the mind simply dances like a puppet in this theatre of illusion. Everything seems solid and real. Everything matters. Everyday unconsciousness is continuous, lost in madness and maya - endless unconscious action and reaction. Profoundly, the mind cannot think its way out of this entanglement. The more refined the intellectual solution, the more cast-iron the trap.

In contrast stands the meditative consciousness: mind thinks, in meditation we know. In the silence of meditation we connect with the clear and steady stream of reality that flows behind the shimmering screen of illusion, the dancing flames which seem oh so real, yet have no substantive existence.

In this state there is serenity of mind, a flow, a harmony of mind, body and senses. When we have taken hold of the real, the tiny pinpricks of life seem to have little effect. Yes, the karmic thorns still lie strewn in the path of our inevitable destiny, but we now seem

to glide just above them. Thus a joy independent of circumstances arises within us. Daily issues no longer upset us. Rather, they are observed with a calm and impartial eye but no longer register as jarring or 'wrong'.

The Creator is the supreme doer smiling over a vast creation which he has set in perfect motion. We are no longer under the tyranny of expected future happiness: no more bucket lists, no vain hope that our material and emotional destiny will magically cooperate with our superficial desire for happiness. The treasure lies within and daily it is becoming a living reality. His gift, the seed of his love, is welling up within and pulling us homewards, overflowing from our grateful hearts.

And yet, if we try to grasp at this state, try to frame it, explain it, intellectualize it – it just disappears like smoke between our outstretched fingers. The moment we break the daily meditation routine, almost imperceptibly we slip from the real back into illusion, unconsciousness. Once more everything is solid, real, painful. Then the cycle starts all over again: we suffer, we burn, we give up, we surrender our efforts, we come back to meditation. From complexity back to simplicity.

Meditation must be kept simple. Complexity is jet fuel for the mind. Hence the mystics prescribe simran. Just to sit, just to say the words, day after day. Nothing else. Its mysterious power lies in its ability to numb or paralyze the busy thinking mind which so jealously guards the soul. Simran anaesthetizes the guard, and once that dark and steely jailor is lulled, our soft and subtle spiritual form slips between the iron bars of her captivity like a ribbon of golden silk and is carried upwards on the thermals of divine grace.





Maharaj Jagat Singh

No Measuring Scale

A disciple cannot really tell where he is on the mystic path, for there is no measuring scale by which spiritual progress can be gauged. Some souls may even be given mystical experiences because they are weak and need an inducement to generate faith, impetus and spiritual drive. Others may have great faith and conviction but also possess such curiosity that, if they were taken into the higher realms, they would want to explore so much that they would lose contact with the central current of the Word. They are therefore kept in darkness until their degree of purity is sufficient for them to be taken up beyond all potential distractions of the inner journey. Again, a Master knows that some of his disciples are humble enough to receive spiritual treasures, but he withholds inner experiences from others who would just waste what had been given through spiritual pride and a sense of superiority.

Nor can outer conduct always be a sure guide to inner spirituality, for even old and seasoned disciples can still be a prey to some very obvious human weakness owing to the strong mental impressions of such tendencies from past lives. Spiritual advancement does not always entirely preclude human weakness. For as long as a soul remains in this world, there will always be some degree of struggle.

Again, if somebody is in darkness, he cannot know how close he is to finding the inner light. Faced with such ignorance of himself and others, therefore, all that a disciple can do is to work sincerely and devotedly, keeping himself in readiness for the coming of the spiritual form of his Master and the start of the journey through the inner mansions.

The Gospel of Jesus



Striking the Set

Asking for initiation indicates that we have reached a stage of disillusionment with life; that we needed and have found the answers to questions such as: Who am I, why am I here, and why do I have a human body instead of being an animal, a tree or an insect? Blessed with reason, we are aware that we suffer through dishonour, poverty and illness, and because of ignorance, we may have felt it to be unfair. After all, why *should* there be such turmoil and pain?

It is said that when the soul is ready, the Guru will appear. Every one of us needs rescuing. To find salvation, we need the proverbial knight on a white horse to come to the rescue. The path of Sant Mat brings us to the perfect living Master – friend, mentor, a God-realized being – who has the answers to all our questions. Once the intellect is satisfied, we surrender to the Master and ask for initiation. This is the connection of the soul to the Shabd, which allows us to start the slow, arduous, homeward journey. It means this life could be our last. This is the beginning of the end of our final performance.

The Master's official tours provide us with the opportunity for huge amounts of seva. After the last satsang on one such visit, a sevadar asked the lady in charge of the event: "What happens now? What are you doing?"

"I am striking the set", was her matter of fact and practical answer. This lady had worked in theatre all her life, designing sets and costumes for musicals, films and plays. She also managed whole productions. So when Baba Ji came to visit, organizing and managing the venue, the set and production was given into her capable hands. What a wonderful show she pulled off!

When a production finishes, everything has to be dismantled and cleared away. In theatrical terms, this is called 'striking the set' – cleaning up, removing, bringing to a close.

This is what happens when the Master calls a disciple to Sant Mat – the path of liberation. The road show, an evolutionary production, whereby the individual soul goes through 8,400,000 species of life, finally comes to an end. The soul has reached the top of creation, the human body. The Master comes to the rescue with infinite grace and compassion, for he knows that the disciple has had enough of the show of evolution, reincarnation, transmigration, birth, death and rebirth. The Master comes to close the play – to strike the set!

By the time the perfect living Master appears, the disciple is sick and tired of the show. He has been backstage long enough to have learnt that the glamour is mere window dressing – it is all fake, and the show has lost its glow. All that is left is to take off the costume, remove the make-up, close the stage doors and finally head for home.

Leaving the show has its own dynamics. We can drag our feet, looking back over our shoulders, or we can channelize our energy and effort into the homeward journey, to ensure that we do not delay that special homecoming. This process is what we refer to as detachment – where the joy of the journey slowly replaces the pleasures of this world.

The Masters compare our attachments in the show of life to a precious garment which has become entangled on a thorny bush. It cannot be pulled off with force, for that would ruin it. It has to be carefully and patiently disentangled from every thorn. It is a slow and painful process, as the prickly thorns are apt to draw blood or rip the cloth.

Attachments come in various shapes and forms, ingeniously created, installed and meticulously maintained by the mind, with the help of the five senses. These habits, endless desires and dreams, are a self-fulfilling and automatic process. Our progress on the path

may be slow, but the result of our spiritual practice is that detachment will follow. As we lose interest in the world, our relationships and perspectives change. We are less inclined to read newspapers, go to the cinema or concerts, shun restaurants and all the jolly things we used to find interesting. This is the start of dismantling the show of life – the prelude to the striking of the set.

The building and breaking of the set of life is our karma: the sowing and reaping. When the soul was sent into this creation, the evolutionary process of action and reaction started. A child playing in dirt will inevitably get soiled. Similarly, the soul sent down into the creation, will become soiled by the creation. But the parent – the Master – will not be perturbed by the dirt, because it can be removed. The soul beneath is pristine, with a timeless need to merge back into the source – the Shabd, the Creator. Although it may be separated from the source, the soul will, like a drop of water, immediately disappear into the sea when the river or wave, the living Master, takes it back to the source.

Karma is like a gigantic seed pod. It is filled with all the sowing ever done since the soul was sent into this creation. All these seeds must eventually sprout and grow, their roots a spreading entanglement beneath the surface, while above they grow and bear flowers and fruit. Their captivating beauty and delicious flavours entice more and more subtle connections, resulting in ever stronger bonds.

The image of tangled roots amongst the plants in a garden, is a metaphor for the incredible attachments a soul has to contend with. The Masters say that some of these attachments can lead to rebirth as a human being. They are very deep underground roots that we are unaware of. However, most of our attachments can be cleared through our daily meditation.

All these attachments keep the soul captive in this creation – like an old tree in a rather overgrown garden. Like the tree, our soul is also tired of the endless seasons it has had to endure, tired of the constant struggle to fight the undergrowth for existence. But an expert gardener can prune back the entanglement, cut out the menacing undergrowth, remove the alien species and free the old tree from the binding, suffocating mess. The perfect living Master is the gardener. He comes to the rescue of the soul, and teaches us how to prune and cut back the binding attachments of the creation.

Père Lachaise is a famous cemetery in Paris, where some of the world's greatest artists, composers, writers, singers and actors are buried. Some of these graves are rather splendid monuments, although in various stages of neglect and decay. However, they all have one thing in common – their occupants are all very dead. In the end, all the glamour, fame and riches accumulated while they were alive, now amount to nothing. It all ended in dust or smoke. Once the fate of a specific life has played out, the set is struck. As the Shabd leaves the body, it also takes leave of the stage of life. There are no curtain calls, and both body and life are soon forgotten.

In our ignorance and fear of death, we turn to books, books and more books, in an effort to find the truth which we so desperately need and constantly seek. But words are mere containers which each individual fills, according to his limited understanding and background. Discussions and reading remain window dressing. Ultimately, we have to become practical and do the practice – practise what we constantly preach!

Kabir, like all Masters, placed the emphasis firmly on spiritual practice, on silent inner meditation. He says in one of his poems:

*As long as I talked unceasingly about the Lord,
The Lord stayed away, kept at a distance.
But when I silenced my mouth, sat very still
And fixed my mind at the doorway of the Lord,
I soon was linked to the music of the Word,
And all my talking came to an end.*

Kabir, the Great Mystic

Generally, when initiation is granted, there is little left to tie us to the world. This last incarnation is given to us to grow spiritually, to finish the small amount of ‘giving and receiving’ which remains – and this can be cleared through meditation. It is our duty to do this meditation, so that when the final curtain falls on the show of life, the Master can quickly and easily carry us away in his limousine of Shabd. We now begin the greatest show of all – our spiritual performance. Now the Master ‘strikes the set’ of the final worldly show.



*Love flourishes in that heart
in which glows the Name of God.
The love of God is like the fragrance of musk –
even a thousand wrappings cannot hold it in;
or like the sun, which cannot be hid behind one’s fingers,
or like a river that cannot be stopped in its course.
My Friend is in me, in my Friend am I;
there is no distance left between us.*

Sultan Bahu

Death Knows No Distinction

All distinctions of class, race, religion, wealth and learning disappear when one dies. The emperor of a mighty kingdom, an industrial magnate, a politician, a scholar – they are all on the same level as the poorest and the most illiterate:

As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

Bible, Ecclesiastes 5:15

All the pomp and honour to which the great are accustomed on this earth are non-existent after death. Red carpets are not rolled out at the gates of death on arrival of state dignitaries; guards of honour do not wait on army commanders; nor do sirens blow, or cavalcades or motorcades follow their Excellencies. Even the humble office superintendent does not find any clerks and peons there to say, "Yes, Sir; certainly, Sir." Nor is there any friend or relative to say, "How are you? Come over to my place and have some coffee. You are so shaken up." No social pleasantries are there, and no one asks, "How is everyone at home? Is John still mischievous? Has Daisy got married?" Our ego is pounded to pulp.

Owners of Rolls Royces and Cadillacs have to trudge barefooted, as much as the humblest beggar, to reach the 'judgment seat'. Our good and bad deeds and thoughts are separated there, and reward is given for the former and payment required for the latter. This should be an eye-opener to those who indulge in bribery and corruption, bloodthirsty exploitation of labour, or usurious money-lending – and

who hope to get away with it all by building a temple here and an orphanage there and contributing to public funds. No such balancing can be done. Fasting, prayers and austerities that run counter to the conduct of a lifetime are of little avail. In former times, a certain religious leader, on being given payments of cash, used to give notes which were placed in coffins allotting suitable places in heaven for the deceased; and the larger amount the better the place allotted. But no such notes are of any avail. The recognized seal is that a true Master stamped on the forehead of the disciple. Near him not even the messengers of death dare appear.

Prophets and saints warn us to keep the day of death before us in all our thoughts and actions. Sarmad cautions:

*O friend, wake up!
You are asleep, unaware of yourself.
This negligence will bear no fruit but regret.
All your companions have gone
and you too are on your way,
but you won't reflect on your illusory existence.*

Isaac A. Ezekiel, *Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine*

The story is told of a rabbi who once told his students, “Repent the day before your death.” The students said, “No one knows the day of his death.”

“Consider every day your last day,” replied the rabbi.



The Narrative

There is a brilliant story, a classic epic about love and hate, lust, desire, power and control, cruelty and suffering, kindness and happiness. Many years ago, far too many to acknowledge, I was born. As I started to take my first steps and develop and grow, I never realized that I was writing a story – the story of my life.

Each thought and action, every relationship, each crushing disappointment, every magical success relates to me. I play the main character – the hero's role. Everything and everyone in my narrative submit to me – the constant witness.

We may not think of our lives as material for a blockbuster success or a best seller, but the truth is that our lives are often filled with as much intrigue, pain, love, power and control as any gripping novel. If we could view our lives and actions in the light of another's eyes, from someone else's perspective rather than from our own familiar concepts, we may be unpleasantly surprised at the analysis.

Look back at your life, at all the events that make it *your* life and not anybody else's. You are the hero, the central character. At any given moment, any given memory you have means something to you; it belongs to your narrative.

Each of the events that shape the story of our lives, are still clearly in our memory, because of a powerful emotion that was associated with them. They may have been shared with someone else, but our perception of an event is conditioned by the filter of our ego, and the emotion that we felt. An event may have been shared with some else, and their narrative will probably record a very different perspective of the same event, irrespective of how close they are to us.

If we think back to our first day at school, perhaps our narrative reflects fear and trepidation, while that of our parents reflects pride and joy. We don't remember shopping in the supermarket: this is simply a chore, an unemotional, repetitive task. But what about the day we were married, or a child was born, or the day someone close to us died? Momentous events in our lives are recorded through emotion. The closer the event is to our hearts, the greater the emotion, the deeper the memory. On one level our life is a record of events; at another level a rainbow of emotional colours. Fortunately we only recall the events. The emotion, intensity and feelings fade into the memory of time.

We are each the architect of our own lives. Every breath we take, everything we do is ploughed into this timeless epic – this incredible work of fiction. At some stage though, we realize that our narrative is not going to be a best-seller. In fact it is rather uninteresting, for there are millions of similar manuscripts on the market. We finally realize that we have put far too much energy and emotion into it and, to our dismay, we realize that it will in fact amount to little. We need a new script, something different and exciting to write about.

Enter the Master. He has a brilliant idea for a new script: one of truth, love, trust and commitment. We agonize over this opportunity, unsure if we are up to the challenges it poses. After all, it is so very different from what we are accustomed to. Finally, with his encouragement, we start a new narrative, but this time it is not a work of fiction, rather, it's an authentic script, a timeless classic. It's the story of a soul – your soul and mine.

The story now changes as the Master directs our writing. The more we apply his instructions to our narrative, the more successful it will be. This may be our own journey, but it is his hand that guides us. By practising what he teaches, the events in our lives appear less dramatic, and our narrative takes on a different hue – coloured by spirituality. It changes

from best-seller status to what most people might think of as boring, but our new perspective is very different. Touched by the Master's hand, we slowly begin to understand the magnificence of what he offers us.

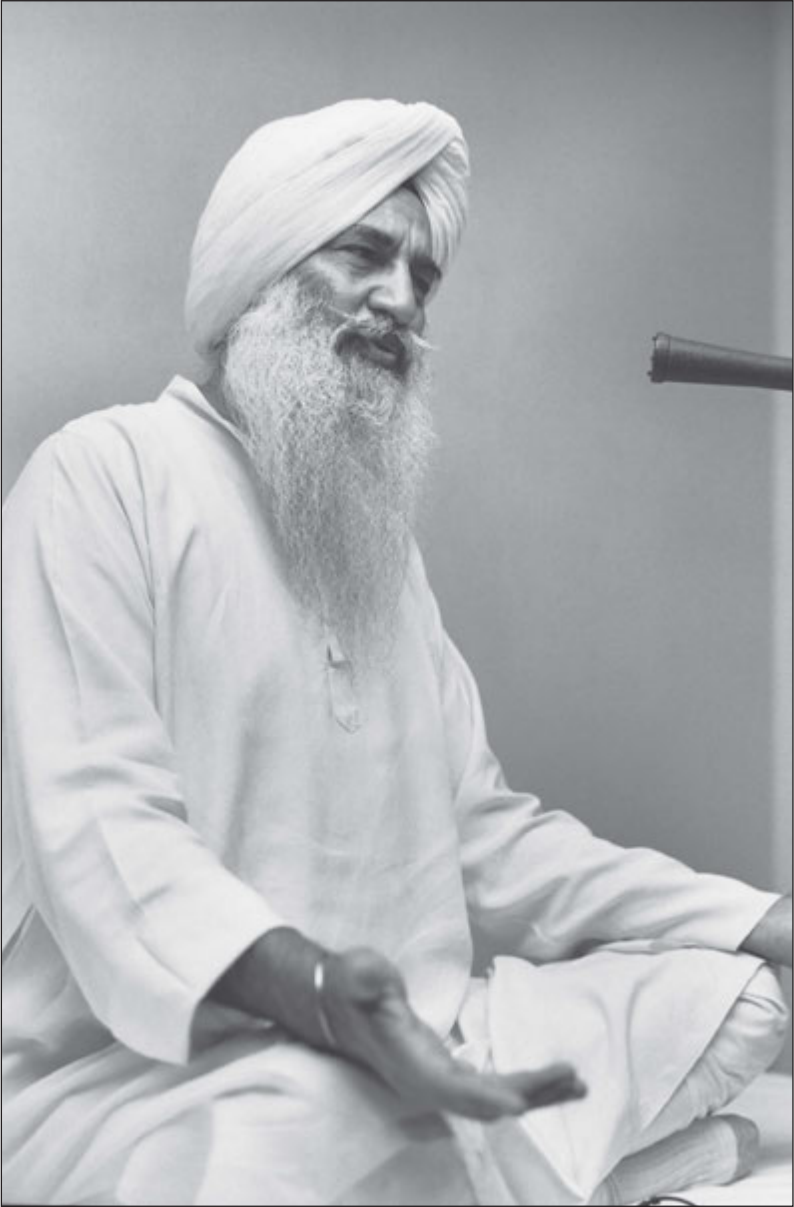
The old manuscript is outdated – it must now be rewritten in the light of change. It is no longer a story about life, a fiction based on effervescent emotions born of controlling karmas, and dancing to the tune of the senses. Change and surrender – letting go – now become integral parts of our narrative, as we learn about letting go of those things that hold us back from our spiritual growth.

When we take our first step on the spiritual path, our lives begin to change, and we may find change difficult at first. It is not easy to let go of the tangible and instant gratification of the world, for the ethereal timelessness of spirituality. Tearing up the old manuscript or wiping the disk is not easy. This is the work of a lifetime. The Master tells us not to be in hurry, to do it slowly – to let go, page by page. Again and again we need to apply the tenets of his teachings to our daily lives, as we examine both ourselves and our life-style, to see how effectively our narrative reflects his spiritual teachings.

It may seem an impossible task, as nothing is as difficult as letting go of the things that have formed the background of our narrative. Letting go of the past – the old patterns of thinking, the old me, the hero of my story, is like dying – we actually kill off our old selves.

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh says that meditation is nothing but a preparation to die. There are many ways in which we have to die before our actual physical death. These all refer to our letting go. But letting go isn't that difficult if we replace the old with the wisdom of our Master – if we occupy our minds with simran.

Through his teachings we develop a new perspective on life. The old manuscript no longer fits; the story has changed – a new edition of the narrative of our life is to be released. It may collect dust on the shelf of time, but in the realm of the spirit, it is a best seller – a *Master-piece*!



Maharaj Charan Singh

Letting Go

Letting go means just what it says. It's an invitation to cease clinging to anything – whether it be an idea, a thing, an event, a particular time, or view, or desire. It is a conscious decision to release with full acceptance into the stream of present moments as they are unfolding. To let go means to give up coercing, resisting, or struggling, in exchange for something more powerful and wholesome which comes out of allowing things to be as they are without getting caught up in your attraction to or rejection of them, in the intrinsic stickiness of wanting, of liking and disliking. It's akin to letting your palm open to unhand something you have been holding on to.

But it's not only the stickiness of our desires concerning outer events which catches us. Nor is it only a holding on with our hands. We hold on with our minds. We catch *ourselves*, get stuck *ourselves*, by holding, often desperately, to narrow views, to self-serving hopes and wishes. Letting go really refers to choosing to become transparent to the strong pull of our own likes and dislikes, and of the unawareness that draws us to cling to them. To be transparent requires that we allow fears and insecurities to play themselves out in the field of full awareness.

Letting go is only possible if we can bring awareness and acceptance to the nitty-gritty of just how stuck we can get, if we allow ourselves to recognize the lenses we slip so unconsciously between observer and observed that then filter and colour, bend and shape our view. ...

Stillness, insight, and wisdom arise only when we can settle into being complete in this moment, without having to seek or hold on to or reject anything. ... See for yourself whether letting go when a part of you really wants to hold on doesn't bring a deeper satisfaction than clinging.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go There You Are*

To Pray or Not to Pray

Irrespective of what religion or belief we followed, most of us grew up with some form of prayer as our means of communication with God. We may not be able to conceptualize God, but we believe in his omniscience and power. It is this belief that moves us to pray, as prayer creates an inner yearning and longing to be in touch with him. Prayer is a great comfort to us.

Actually, there are countless reasons that motivate us to pray. We would like to think that the most obvious would be our longing to be in touch with God, but is this really the reason? Perhaps the most pressing reason is that we find ourselves unable to cope with the daily complexities and emotional strain of life, and we find ourselves compelled to ask for his help and guidance.

Do we feel that the urgency of our prayers somehow mobilizes God into answering them? Like dialing a 'help-line'? The minute we call him, we expect God to spring into action to solve our personal problems. In the *Gospel of Jesus* the author writes that verbal prayers imply that God must be reminded of his duties and of each individual's needs or that perhaps he is about to make a mistake and requires correction. And what do we imagine happens when our prayers are over? Do we think that we can simply dismiss God, relegating him to a state of hibernation until we need to call out to him again?

If indeed we pray, we should carefully consider the nature of our prayers. Are they offered with wisdom and awareness, or do they simply arise from the emergency and emotion of the moment? In which case, are they really worth saying?

The karmic situations we find ourselves in are our destiny, and as Maharaj Charan Singh so often told us, the Lord does not adjust

destiny. If we are earnest and sincere in our meditation, then we will get the inner strength to face that destiny. Even so, we may often feel inadequately equipped to face the challenges destiny throws our way, and we frequently dial the help-line and churn out little prayers, asking God for one thing or another in an attempt to maintain the status quo in our lives.

Kahlil Gibran writes in *The Prophet*:

*You pray in your distress and in your need;
would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy
and in your days of abundance.*

Prayer may often take the form of a repetitive recitation such as when we thank God for the blessings we receive from his abundant store of love and mercy, along with the inevitable request for his protection and help for our family and friends. Yet Saint Matthew, speaking on prayer clearly states that this form of prayer is wrong. In the Bible (*Matthew 6:7-8*) he says:

*But when you pray, use not vain repetitions,
as the heathen do: for they think
that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

Fear is by far one of the greatest motivators to prayer. We may be afraid that if we don't ask for an outcome to a problem or say our prayers, some calamity will disrupt our lives and cause us distress and pain. So, when we find ourselves in a stressful situation, we dial the help-line and call on God to fulfill our requests. However, we not only want to ask for his help; we also want to dictate what the outcome should be. We coast along happily in life, but the moment we run into

any serious difficulty we quickly turn to prayer for help, and common sense is often sacrificed when our fear overrules logic and reason.

In *The Prayer of the Frog* Father Anthony de Mello illustrates this attitude with a few humorous lines:

Grandmother: "Do you say your prayers every night?"

Grandson: "Oh, yes!"

"And every morning?"

"No. I'm not scared in the daytime."

Perhaps this epitomizes most of us. When our need is compelling, our prayers are earnest.

Time and again we have been told that verbal requests to God are futile, yet our anxiousness for a particular resolution to our problems is so great that we cannot help ourselves. The sincerity, earnestness and nature of our prayers is an indication that we trust in the love and mercy of that higher power to help us through difficult situations. The problem is that we want his help and guidance, but on our own terms. From moment to moment in our daily lives we take decisions and we appear to be in control, but when we are racked with emotion or fear, it is almost impossible to surrender that control – to eliminate the 'I' and to submit entirely to his will.

We are moved to pray to him as we continue in our efforts to direct our destiny by requesting his help, in the hope that it will prevent chaos erupting in our lives. This form of desperate prayer is so deeply engrained in us that even after many years of meditation we may still find that we frequently make the Master the recipient of our prayers and requests. The Great Master says:

We have our Master to pray to, and a disciple should ask him for his aid at every step. There should be full faith in his powers, and

full love, confidence and humility. ... There should be no doubt or disbelief. Such a prayer made in humility does not go in vain.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. III

All too often we find that once we feel our prayers have been answered, or the immediate crisis has passed, our feelings of urgency fall away and we forget all about God – our need has been satisfied and we merrily go on our way until our next crisis. But what happens when our prayers do not appear to have been answered? We cannot challenge God. We have no option but to accept the outcome as God's will. Perhaps we simply resign ourselves to the fact that destiny must take its course. Why then, did we find it necessary to pray in the first place?

Millions of people around the world believe in the power of prayer to help them or heal them. Numerous studies have been documented, especially in healing, where prayer has been used to achieve beneficial outcomes.

But the million dollar question is: does prayer work? Mikhail Naimy writes in *The Book of Mirdad*:

You pray in vain when you address yourselves to any other gods but your very selves. For in you is the power to attract, as in you is the power to repel.

And in you are the things you would attract, as in you are the things you would repel.

Is it possible that we pray for what is already in our destiny? Does something deep within us know what is coming our way? Is it that knowledge that drives us to pray for it – either to attract it to us or to repel it – so that when it occurs we believe it was the power of prayer which helped us, when actually it was our karmic destiny that guided

us in the first place? To those who believe in prayer, it works – whether they believe it to be their destiny or not.

In *The Gospel of Jesus*, the author writes:

Verbal prayers, mental or spoken, make no difference to a person's destiny. If something appears to happen as a result of prayer it only means that it was in the destiny of the individual for it to happen in that way. Desires or prayers certainly seem to make things happen, but that is only a part of the outworking of the law of karma.

Maharaj Charan Singh was asked, when we pray for something and receive it, is it God who answers our prayer and satisfies our request? The Master replied:

I think that even otherwise you would have received them. The Lord does not want us to be asking and begging him to fulfil our wishes, nor does he want us to think that our wishes have been fulfilled because we have asked him. ... Our karmas bring us all these things that we are wanting.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

When we learn to set aside our requests and our fears, which is to set aside our mind and our ego; when we simply open our hearts to God, we will learn humility and love – and this should be the reason for our prayers. True prayer creates humility. This is what is acceptable to the Lord – our devotion and humility, and this is the context in which we should use prayer.

Language is the form of human communication, but of what use is language to God? God's language is simply the silent transfer of love

– from heart to heart. Surely this transfer is more powerful and honest than language? The Great Master tells us that no particular language is necessary for praying. He says:

If, while one is praying, he considers himself bound by some formula, the inner flow of love is not continuous. One is thus deprived of full spiritual benefit. Long and learned phrases are not necessary. A prayer should be replete with inner feelings. Although long words and phrases may satisfy our intellect, they lead to one becoming subject to the disease of ostentation. By becoming involved in the structure and recitation of the words, we become far removed from the true feeling of the heart. Our prayers then do not correctly represent the state of our heart and conduct.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. III

True prayer is meditation and the real language of prayer is the language of the heart. As Maharaj Charan Singh so beautifully said: ‘When the heart speaks, he hears, he gives.’



*Pray as though everything depended on God.
Work as though everything depended on you.*

Saint Augustine

Love in Action

Being with the Master is always an extremely positive and uplifting experience. The Master's love pours out constantly and doesn't require a trip to Dera to be experienced. But what the Dera experience does do very well is to demonstrate love in action. There cannot be a more positive, almost tangible proof of love at work than witnessing the sevadars carrying out their selfless seva for their Master at the Dera.

It is no exaggeration to say that every square metre is cared for in every detail by this endless flow of seva. We can all learn so much from the sevadars with their positive attitudes. A positive attitude will get us everywhere – but complaining about our lot will get us nowhere!

Baba Ji has said that it is well known that a disciple's karmic account is administered by the Master – who ensures that the rate at which we pay off our karma is within our capacity to endure. In other words, it is controlled by our Master to suit each individual's level of tolerance.

He reiterates how important it is for us to maintain a positive attitude – even in the face of adversity and grief. When asked if the karma we have to pay off is heavier or accelerated because we are initiated, Baba Ji has indicated that this could be the case. He often explains that when a disciple is not doing his or her meditation, other ways need to be found to enable the disciple to reduce the karmic load.

There are many times when we feel spiritually barren and dry. We all know the situation well. We appear not to be making any progress on the path, and it is at these times that our worldly troubles are heaviest and drag our soul downwards. The mind is quick to capitalize on these spiritual lows and, before we know it, we are compromising our faith in the path and the Master.

Many of the questions put to the Master describe this frequently experienced and rather bleak aspect of meditation. Baba Ji insists that we must avoid sitting with expectations. The golden rule that he is extremely insistent on is to just be there and do our best – and leave the rest to him. He tells us to enjoy our meditation and not to agonize about whether or not we are making progress. Our meditation should be a light and blissful experience, not heavy, dreary and depressing.

The Masters give us a remedy for dealing with the difficult times during meditation. They tell us that our Master is waiting silently within, and we need to turn to him by sitting quietly in his presence. But that alone is not enough, so they have given us a powerful, fool-proof technique for assisting us to focus on him while sitting in silence – and that is simran. This constant repetition enables us to put aside the mind's mischief and be with him.

It's our simran that will eventually bring our minds to stillness – stillness in which we will finally sit in silence and find our way inward. Mother Teresa wrote:

We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence.

Another key aspect of the path is that our progress depends strongly on our ability to develop a personal relationship with the Master within. It is a one-on-one affair. The Master is our guide and only dependable friend, and it is through our relationship with him that our transformation comes about and we develop the faith to cope with the insecurity of the illusionary world of death and rebirth.

When we can successfully still the mind and make him the concentrated focus of our attention, we will be confident to face our karmas and be able to quell our desires. Then he will lift us to

unbelievable spiritual heights. All that is required is to face towards the Father in everything we do. We must conscientiously and meticulously focus on living our lives in his will. This is love in action, and this alone will foster that all-important faith, and grow our love for the Master.

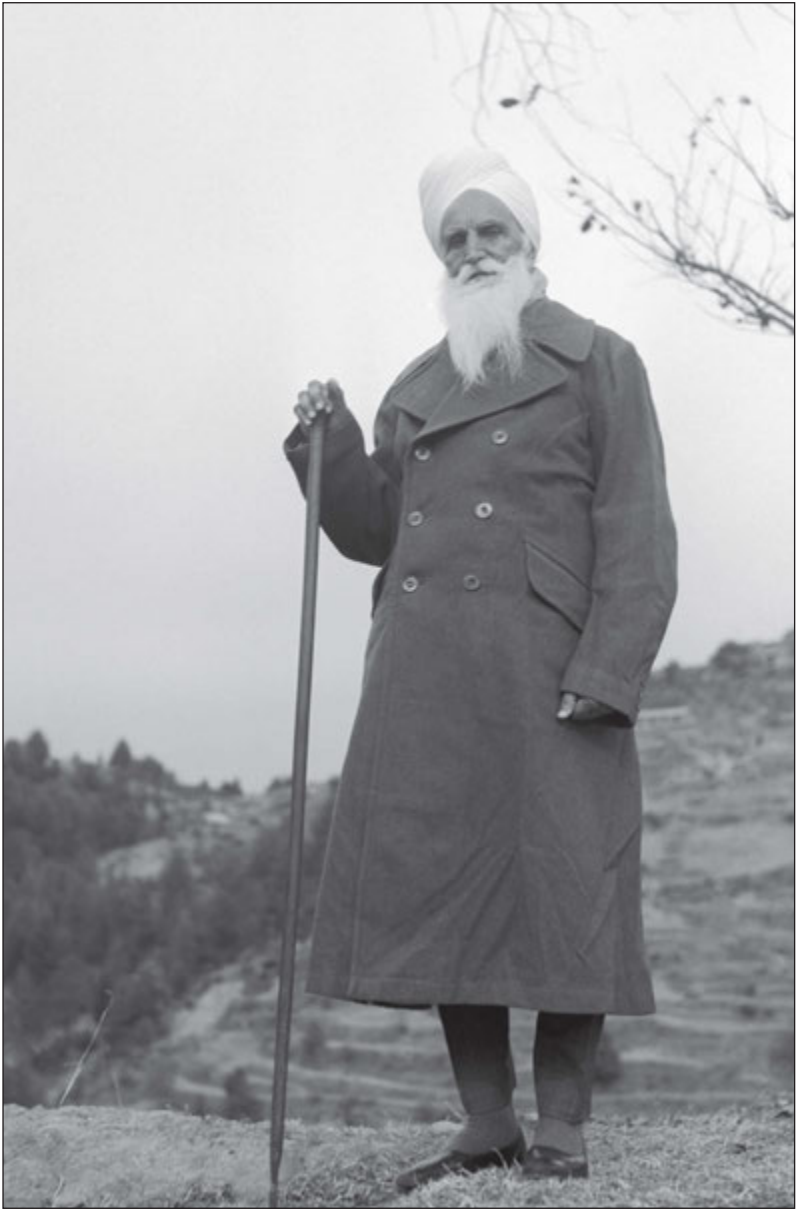
But we cannot develop this love on our own – it is a gift from the Master. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh answers a question on how we get that love, saying:

Brother, practically, it comes when it comes. You do not have the power to develop it. When his grace is there, it just comes.

So love develops naturally – but not without the Master’s grace. We have to be proactive on this path and make ourselves worthy of his grace, by being serious about our spiritual practice. The Masters make it very clear that their frequent reminders to us to do our meditation are not to be confused with suggestions or advice – they are to be regarded as instructions. The sooner we realize that we have no choice but to accept this, the sooner we will take our spiritual practice seriously.

The world is transient and impermanent, and is not worth depending on for our happiness. Lasting happiness and contentment are only attainable in the spiritual realms, and these realms are the destination that we need to set our sights on. We need to turn away from the world by withdrawing our consciousness inside. To do this constantly, with sincerity and purpose, is to practise *love in action*.





Maharaj Sawan Singh

The Union of Love

We are told at the time of initiation that it is not essential to sit in the lotus position when doing our meditation, we simply need to sit in a comfortable chair, and keep our backs as upright as possible. Then while repeating our simran, bring our mind to a state of stillness.

Our mind is often likened to a pool of water – as long as there are ripples and movements on the water there cannot be clear reflections. However, when the water is motionless and still, the reflection is clear. Likewise with the mind – as long as the body moves, the mind cannot become still.

Simran, dhyan and bhajan are what we do when we say we meditate. To all intents and purposes we have won the jackpot and have a ticket to a better life. To a certain extent, it is up to us what we do: but we should act as if we have free will and attempt to do our meditation.

The most important aspect of our meditation is love. Love is not something that can be practised or summoned at will. We cannot make ourselves love the Master, or even more difficult, love God. Love is the unseen force behind our meditation. It is love that helps us to sit in meditation, that brings us to satsang, and that softens our hearts.

None of us, however hard-hearted we may feel ourselves to be, are without love. We would not be following the path if the spark of love had not been lit within us. Meditation nurtures this love and helps it grow. In fact, it is the only way to increase our love for our Master. It is through his grace that we are on the path, it is through his grace that we start to love him, and it is through his grace that we make the effort to meditate, as slowly and slowly our love begins to grow.

On our path of Sant Mat, love and the Master are virtually synonymous. The path cannot exist without the Master. The physical

body of the Master is our physical connection or interface with the Shabd – with God. Without both the Master and the disciple being in the physical form, at the same point in time, no connection can be made with the Shabd, and we cannot start the journey home.

We may be some way away from the perfect love of which the Masters speak, but even so, the Master says that the veil that separates us from his love is very thin and can be pierced. Every morning that we get up and meditate, that love will grow. Just as an ant slowly inches up the wall, so too will this love eventually lead us to the Master's Radiant Form.

The end result of our journey can only be one thing – unity. However, the step before that is self-realization – to know and understand ourselves, to know who we truly are. As the poet (thought to have been the Syrian mystic Bar Dasain), says in *The Robe of Glory*: 'and I remembered that I was the son of kings.' We will look at the Radiant Form and we will experience who we really are. We will be at the end point of our journey. Then nothing can hold us back. The Master says that self-realization is difficult, but God-realization is easy. It is like spending many hours to solve a difficult problem, and then suddenly, you just get it, you see the pattern, you see the solution.

This path that the mystics teach is the path of love and union. We do not need to concern ourselves with complicated explanations of the path. In essence it is very simple. We need to give importance only to its practice – to focus on the meditation, our simran, dhyān and bhajan; and whenever possible do seva and attend satsang. What we need to learn from the path is the lesson of love, and the practice that will lead to one thing – divine union.



A Footpath Up a Hill

Mystics who know these things tell us that this life of ours may be compared to a footpath on the side of a hill. On one side is the high peak where our home is situated, high and dry, far removed from all storms and tempests, beyond the reach of mists and cloud, shining in the charming and clear light of the spiritual sun. On the other side is a deep valley where the furious stream of anxiety rushes headlong to the sea of misery. The banks of the stream are sloping towards the water and are overgrown with prickly but beautiful-looking shrubs.

Now there are two courses before us – either we climb up the hill with the help of an expert, reach our eternal home of peace and bliss and share eternal life, or tempted by the external beauty of the shrubs, we slip ... and finally fall down deep into the ravine.

The winding way that goes up the hill and looks so rugged is the mystic path that seems so difficult and dreary at the start, but which ultimately takes us to our true home in the bosom of God. The apparently beautiful shrubs, which hide prickly thorns, are the worldly attachments and sensual desires that entrap us in their meshes and, although pleasing in the beginning, gradually drag us down into misery and sorrow.

On the footpath with us are a few expert climbers, the mystics, who reach the top in the twinkling of an eye, who invite us to go with them, who look after us all the way and see us safe in our true home at the peak.

As the way to our true home is the upper one, which though steep and zigzagging is still safe with an expert guide, let us come under his shelter and loving care and entrust ourselves to his charge.

Mysticism, the Spiritual Path

The Gift of Simran

Sant Mat is a very individual path – it concerns only a specific soul and the Master. The reason we get initiated is so that we can leave this creation forever and our soul can merge back into the Creator.

Some say it is a lonely path, but how can one be lonely when after initiation you always have your Master with you? Initially it is our perceptions and our own ego that make us feel lonely because they keep us from realising the truth. The way to change our perceptions and control our ego is through meditation. This is the way we develop focus.

Sultan Bahu says:

*The dog of ego must be slain and minced into bits
by the repetition of God's Name—
practised with love, with every breath of one's life.*

Simran is the first step in our meditation. It is the repetition of the five names given to us at the time of initiation. The Masters say that these names are the true names of the rulers of the five inner regions. The names in themselves have no power. Only when they are given by a God-realized soul do they actually become meaningful. The Masters use the example of a bullet fired from a gun. Then it has power, whereas when simply thrown by hand it is ineffectual. We may find these names in a book and recite them until we are blue in the face, but we will get little benefit from this. We may get a little bit of concentration, but it would be dangerous to attempt the inner journey without a guide. Imagine if we tried to climb Mount Everest without a Sherpa guide – we would surely die! The words are powerful because they are given by a perfect Master. They connect us with him.

The reason we do simran is to bring our scattered attention back into the eye focus so that the mind and the tongue become motionless. The mind is so used to running out into the world, darting here and there – it is never still. It is constantly thinking, scheming and dreaming up stories and scenarios – doing what it was made for – creating the interface between the soul and the world. Only through simran can we charm it to sleep, rein it in to a state of stillness, and so achieve one-pointed attention. This is the gift of repeating those magic names given to us by our Master.

Simran is the start of an incredible journey. It will facilitate the withdrawal of our consciousness from the body, then concentrate it at the eye centre until the soul's power of seeing and hearing is steady and firm. By withdrawing the mind and soul from the nine apertures of the body and concentrating it at the eye centre, the tenth door will open. This is our first task and it can only be accomplished by simran.

So it is clear that simran is the first and most critical part of meditation. When the Masters tell us to do our meditation, which they do at every opportunity, they primarily mean: do the simran. There is no escaping simran – we have to do it and then bhajan should follow.

Of course, nowhere does the Master say that we have to be good at our simran or get it right or perfect. He just asks us to do it, and because we want to please him – we do it. We do it because we promised to do it. We don't do it to see the inner sun and moon and stars, we only do it because we want him – and if we want him, we must do our meditation. Again Sultan Bahu tells us:

A lover offers his prayer in an unspoken language.

It is not for everyone—

only the aching heart of a lover can know this prayer....

*Only a rare devotee knows the prayer for which
the tongue does not move, lips do not flutter.*

Why We Are Here

Mulla Nasrudin is an international folk hero of timeless appeal. His character is portrayed in many different guises. Sometimes he is the fool, sometimes the sage; he may be a courtier or a judge, a beggar or a physician. His stories have a timeless quality which may be studied for their hidden wisdom or simply enjoyed for their humour, but they remain a delight to the reader.

The following anecdote, taken from *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin* by Idries Shah suggests a light-hearted explanation of karma.

Walking one evening along a deserted road, Mulla Nasrudin saw a troop of horsemen coming towards him. His imagination started to work; he saw himself captured and sold as a slave, or impressed into the army.

Nasrudin bolted, climbed a wall into a graveyard, and lay down in an open tomb.

Puzzled at his strange behaviour, the men – honest travellers – followed him.

They found him stretched out, tense and quivering.

'What are you doing in that grave? We saw you run away. Can we help you?'

'Just because you can ask a question does not mean that there is a straightforward answer to it,' said the Mulla, who now realized what had happened. 'It all depends upon your viewpoint. If you must know, however: I am here because of you, and you are here because of me.'



Book Review

Forgiveness: The Greatest Healer of All

By G. JAMPOLSKY, M.D.

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Gerald Jampolsky, author of *Forgiveness: The Greatest Healer of All*, has been a practising psychiatrist working with both children and adults for over 40 years. Two events opened his eyes to the effect that attitude has on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. One was reading the book *A Course in Miracles* by Judith Skutch Whitson and Robert Skutch in the early 1970s. The other was meeting and becoming a disciple of Swami Baba Muktananda in 1974.

In 1975 Jampolsky founded the Center for Attitudinal Healing in Tiburon, California, to treat children with catastrophic illnesses. A network of such centers now extends over 30 countries. Jampolsky has given workshops and talks on “Attitudinal Healing” throughout the world and has written half a dozen books on the subject. His first bestseller, *Love is Letting Go of Fear*, came out in 1979. In 2005, Jampolsky received the Pride in Profession Award from the American Medical Association.

In *Forgiveness: The Greatest Healer of All*, Jampolsky shows how entertaining judgmental, unforgiving thoughts rebounds negatively on one’s own self. Negative thoughts cause a stress response that translates into various physical, emotional or psychological symptoms. The unforgiving ego imprisons us by holding on to anger, and yet we are unaware of our self-imposed imprisonment.

To Jampolsky, the essence of our being is love. We need to shift our attitude about life from a perspective dominated by our ego toward an understanding of ourselves as spiritual beings only temporarily living in physical bodies. When we embrace our spiritual essence, we find that it has always been our source of love and happiness. As Jampolsky says:

Why is it so difficult for us to see that our search for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is only hiding the fact that we are both the rainbow and the gold?

We all sometimes experience other persons as treating us badly. While not condoning other individuals' bad actions, Jampolsky says, we can maintain our own peace of mind by empathizing with them as fellow earthbound beings. In fact, forgiveness is the only way we will ever enjoy peaceful relationships. He says,

We will truly have more peaceful relationships when we stop telling others how to live and start practising love and forgiveness.

Usually, when we first try to forgive, obstacles crop up. Most of these obstacles are cherished but unproductive beliefs. Among the examples Jampolsky gives are:

- You are weak if you forgive.
- If you forgive that person, it is the same as making them right and you wrong!
- The best way to keep a distance between yourself and the person who hurt you is to never forgive them.

With these thoughts, the ego feeds itself on “a steady diet of unforgiving thoughts, fear, judgment, blame and guilt.”

In the course of the book Jampolsky relates many stories of individuals whose persistent efforts to develop forgiveness brought about changes in their lives and well-being that seemed almost miraculous. Not all examples concern forgiving another person. Sometimes it is nature, or life itself, that we must forgive. Sometimes “life” seems to have treated us unfairly. For example, one family went through a hurricane that ravaged their property. It took a year of unflagging efforts to rebuild, and then a flood washed away all that they had built. Jampolsky tells how this family worked at maintaining their positive attitude. In essence, they forgave God and the forces of nature, refusing to dwell on their misfortunes. With a resilience springing from this forgiveness, this family found the energy to help people around them.

Jampolsky breaks the process of forgiveness into a preparation stage and

an action stage. In the preparation stage we work at developing the ability to change our underlying beliefs. Negative beliefs, coming from repeated thoughts, block our ability to forgive. For example, we can choose no longer to believe we are victims, and this makes it easier to forgive. Similarly, rather than seeing people as attacking us, we can choose to see them as fearful and “giving us a call of help for love.” A calm and centered frame of mind helps us realize that we have the ability to choose our attitudes. Jampolsky suggests prayer and meditation as tools for calming and centering the mind.

These preparations lead to the action stage: choosing to forgive. Jampolsky believes that “willingness” to forgive is the key word in this process. Willingness gives us the power to move ahead in forgiving. If we can learn to turn our grievances over to the highest truth in ourselves – a Higher Power or God – this strengthens our willingness to forgive and transform anger into love.

Jampolsky illuminates his ideas with unnumbered pages bearing a single quote that invites the reader to linger and ponder. For example, the reader may slow down when he turns to a page that is blank except for the words “We can choose the thoughts we put in our minds” or the words “There is always a choice to be made: We can listen to the voice of love or to the voice of the ego.”

Using concrete examples from daily life, Jampolsky spells out various techniques that may be helpful in achieving “willingness” to forgive. For example, in the workplace, a co-worker or supervisor may offend or insult us. How do we keep ourselves from being bowled over by it?

In our work lives, it can be extremely helpful to have a forgiveness process that is easy to do whenever we feel the need. You simply imagine that someone has given you a medicine that will give you a selective form of amnesia which lasts for ten minutes. It can be helpful if you imagine that this special medicine is a glass of water which you drink. During the ten-minute period that this medicine is in effect, you forget all hurtful memories of the past; you remember only memories of love. By focusing only on this remembered love, most people feel themselves become peaceful and joyful, living very much in the present moment.

Such techniques can help us in the moment, but Jampolsky points out that forgiveness will not become habitual without long, continued effort. He suggests that we have to recommit ourselves daily to a forgiving attitude and way of life. Not only do we have to exert a conscious effort to adopt new attitudes, we also need to remind ourselves of our new concepts frequently. We may even need to write our new ideas on note cards to reread during quiet moments. Prayer, meditation, and relaxation techniques help.

Jampolsky ends his book with a poem he wrote in Bosnia in 1998 while he was on his way to a workshop on reconciliation for religious and spiritual leaders. An excerpt follows:

*Forgiveness means
Not excluding
Your love from anyone.*

*Forgiveness means
Healing the hole in your heart
Caused by unforgiving thoughts.*

*Forgiveness means
Seeing the light of God
In everyone, regardless
Of their behavior.*

*Forgiveness is not just for
The other person – but for ourselves
And the mistakes we have made,
And the guilt and shame we still hold on to.*

*Forgiveness in the deepest sense
Is forgiving ourselves
For separating ourselves from a loving God.*

Jampolsky's other books include: *One Person Can Make a Difference: Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things*; *Out of the Darkness, Into the Light: A Journey of Inner Healing*; *Shortcuts to God*; and *Teach Only Love: The Twelve Principles of Attitudinal Healing*.



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

