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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# The Bestower of Bliss

*With the Lord's grace,  
I have met the Satguru;  
Possessor of divine talent,  
Bestower of supreme bliss,  
He is the conferrer of true knowledge.*

*I was burning in the flames of desire,  
He poured the elixir of devotion  
And quenched the fire;  
I became placid and cool.*

*He shattered the doors  
Of pretence and delusion  
That blocked my way;  
He told the tale of my true home  
And all my fears faded away.*

*Deep and dreadful is the world's ocean;  
Who could have dared take me across?  
In the boat of Nam, Kabir's Master, the adept oarsman,  
Ferried him to the eternal shore.*

*Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name*



# Edit

The mystics remind us that although we have taken a vow during initiation and have committed to practise a minimum of two and a half hours of meditation each day, this is in fact just the beginning – simply the appetizer! For most of us, this may sound like an impossible feat. However, if we ponder deeply upon the spiritual path, and see how intricately it shapes our lives, we would obtain a better picture of what the saints and mystics are trying to convey to us and how it is possible for us to turn our lives around and make spirituality the dominant factor.

We are living through one of the most dramatic eras of change in human history. New technologies have changed not only the amount of information we are exposed to, but also the manner in which we build relationships and interact with the world. There is just so much more to learn, know and do. It is no surprise, therefore, that we find our plates overflowing. We are barely able to finish all that we would like to accomplish in twenty-four hours. We are constantly rushing about, guilty of multitasking when we know this is quite the opposite of what we are taught to do in meditation. In fact, we are scattering the mind even more. How then are we ever going to move on from the appetizer to the main course under such circumstances?

The answer lies in one simple word – ‘edit’. Just as passionate designers carefully select the pieces of their final collection, checking and discarding those that are not up to the mark or of little use in building the essence of the collection; and just as they scrutinize each and every model before she takes her first stride on the catwalk, ensuring that each look is impeccable and simply perfect; or just as

a writer constantly edits his manuscript to achieve the best possible work he can produce for his readers, we too have to discriminate and edit our lives to ensure that it is taking us to our ultimate spiritual goal.

The process of editing our lives involves a lot of ‘cleaning house’ and decluttering. A simple definition of editing states: ‘correcting, shortening or improving material so as to make it ready for publication.’ Likewise, we will have to examine our lives to see if we have structured it with a view of keeping our spiritual goal as the topmost priority.

We would start first by examining our thoughts as they become the precursor of our actions. It is said that the mother of every action is, in fact, a thought. Are we constantly being bombarded by regrets of the past or worries of the future? Are we wasting time, thinking negatively about our circumstances and focusing on what it is we don’t like, don’t have or aren’t happy about? All these thought inputs bear great influence on the quality of the output – our actions. If, instead, we adopted an attitude of gratitude, and focused on everything we have been blessed with and all that is good in our lives, our positivity would greatly inspire our actions.

How are we spending our days? Are we correctly prioritizing our tasks in their order of importance? What are we exposing ourselves to each day?

Are we deriving inspiration to become better human beings and disciples? Are we devoting enough time to meditation, satsang and seva – the cornerstones of the spiritual path? The answers to these questions give us an opportunity to evaluate whether or not our time is spent in the most efficient and balanced way possible, giving due regard to our widespread responsibilities. We would then have to take the appropriate steps to clear and remove debris that we have cluttered

ourselves with and make changes, or as they say in technical jargon, press our personal ‘reset button’.

This process of editing our lives both in terms of thought and action is one that is going to be ever evolving as we move closer towards our spiritual goal. It, however, requires constant vigilance to prevent us from steering off-course. In order for spirituality to seamlessly take shape in our lives, our thoughts, actions, activities and relationships must be fully reflective of our commitment to the path. And as we move on from the appetizer to the main course, we will realize that it is all a natural progression and it is His grace that makes it all possible.



*Most high, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart  
and give me, Lord, a correct faith, a certain hope, a perfect charity,  
sense and knowledge, so that I may carry out your holy and true command.*

Saint Francis of Assisi, as quoted in *Falling Asleep with the Saints*

# Something to Think About

Take courage! God often allows us to go through the difficulties to purify our souls and to teach us to rely on Him more. So offer Him your problems unceasingly, and ask Him for the strength to overcome them. Talk to Him often. Forget Him as seldom as possible. Praise Him. When the difficulties are at their worst, go to Him humbly and lovingly – as a child goes to a loving father – and ask for the help you need from His grace.

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

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Just let me watch my own mind for a minute. It drifts about, hungrily manipulating its own actions and those of others to feed one worldly obsession or another; with little panic crises of running wild, like a mad thing when my ego is roughly touched. It behaves like this because it is untrained to stand still for a minute to look through the bars of my cage and see the One who waits to allay this hunger with heavenly food. Really, at best, I am no better than a glorified animal, caged in my mind, without the sense to take advantage of the celestial banquet He is offering.

Flora Wood, *In Search of the Way*

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The inner world is far more attractive, and when one gets even a glimpse of it, it is like the man who has been climbing a mountain in the hot sun and is thirsty, and comes across a shady place with a spring – he irresistibly slackens and stays, and forgets his goal for some time.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



# To Do List

We are all familiar with the term ‘to do list’ – a list of things or tasks that we feel need to be accomplished during the day or even during our lifetime. But have we ever thought of creating a ‘not to do list’ – a list of things that we should not waste our energy and time pursuing? This does not have to be a physical list on a piece of paper, but more of a mental note that would help us focus on what is truly important in our lives.

Our lives are filled to the brim with various thoughts, duties, responsibilities and other assorted activities. In today’s world, we are all faced with a technology overload where we are bombarded by excessive emails, phone calls, text messages, facebook and chat messages – all of which end up creating a loss of focus and extreme stress in our day-to-day living.

Most of us go through the day in a multitasking frenzy, deluding ourselves into believing that juggling several tasks will lead us to accomplish more than we usually would. We confuse activity with productivity. We fill every nook and corner of our time with activities that we have convinced ourselves we cannot do without, leaving no space or time for us to breathe. Little do we realize, until it is too late, that we have wasted our time in fruitless pursuits, giving importance to almost everything, except the objective of our human birth. In the words of William Henry Davies, “What is this life, if full of care, we have no time to stop and stare?”

In *Treasure Beyond Measure*, Maharaj Charan Singh advises us to put our priorities in perspective:

*Ask anybody and you will find that he has no time. The labourer has no time; the engineer has no time; the doctor has no time; the industrialist has no time ... What then have we gained from all this progress, from all these developments? ... This is not entirely the fault of development. We have become prisoners of the things that development and progress have given us. These things were meant for our benefit, for our use; we were not meant for their benefit, for their use ... I am not against modern developments and the present civilization. But at no cost should we compromise with the basic values of human life.*

We have been given the gift of human life to realize our true potential, to take the steps necessary to return to our true home. In the words of Maharaj Jagat Singh:

*This life is but a link in an infinite chain of existence. The body perishes but the soul lives on – immortal, treading the path back from its painful separation and prodigality to its blissful return to the mansions of the Lord.*

*The Science of the Soul*

The Masters explain that we are essentially pure beings of a spiritual nature, whose purity has been obscured by the mind and senses. And we can only rise above these trappings of the body and the mind when we are able to concentrate on that ocean of pure love that is the core of our being.

*Concentrate on keeping your mind in the presence of the Lord; if it sometimes wanders and withdraws itself from Him, do not let*

*it upset you; confusion serves rather to distract the mind than to recollect it; the will must bring it back calmly.*

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

We struggle with everything going on around us because our attention is not concentrated on the Lord. From the time we were born, the mind has been wandering around outside, swayed by the senses. We fill our days with the to do lists of activities and we keep the mind so preoccupied, we are unable to focus on our priorities. This outward tendency of the mind has become a very deep-rooted habit. In order to bring our attention back at the eye centre, we need to reverse this process. And the only way to do this is by meditation.

*The third eye is the seat of the mind and the soul. This is the pivotal point that holds the mystery of life. It is from here that our attention continually descends and spreads into the world through the nine outlets of the body ... From here every minute the mind wanders out. It does not sit still at this spot even for a moment. Its activities are legion. The ageless secret, the ancient wisdom, the path of the saints lies in drawing the attention back to this point.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Discourses, Vol 1*

Meditation should be the first item on our to do list because it cleanses all the coverings which have accumulated on the soul. It helps us cope with stress and gives us strong mental resilience to deal with the events around us. It keeps us from being derailed by external events and helps us realize that this world is but a passing shadow.

Instead of focusing on our problems, which are a natural result of our own karmas, we should be looking at solutions and moving

forward. We should not waste our energies in worrying about things we cannot change, and should remain focused on the positive aspects of the path before us.

Our lives can be as simple or as complicated as we choose to make them. We all know that we need to do our meditation, that it should be the number one priority in our list of things to do. In fact, all the four vows that we took at the time of initiation form the forefront of our to do list.

But we also need to weed out all the worrying and distractions that can sway the mind away from its focus. We need to veer away from any activity that takes us away from our objective – these form the things that we should not do. How often do we walk away from an argument? How often do we criticize our fellow human beings? The five passions of anger, pride, attachment, greed and lust are all energy drainers that are designed to lure us away from the path of truth. How much stress would we eliminate if we were guided by such a philosophy, if we decided to devote each day to only that which is worthy of our attention?



*We have certain responsibilities and duties which we must do in this world. At the same time we should not get so much involved in these things that we forget the real purpose for which we want these things. These are just a means to a certain end. We should not be so much involved in the means that we forget the end. The end should always be kept in view, and what we should do is to try to achieve that end.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

# The Priority



*Maharaj Charan Singh*

Every so often, disciples on the spiritual path feel the need to ask themselves the question: what matters more, this material world of phenomenon or the inner world of universal spirit? The mystics say that this reflection is an invaluable part of the spiritual life because it is our priorities that determine the success we achieve in our spiritual evolution – the importance we place upon our career and business compared with the priority we place on our meditation; the importance we place on satsang and seva compared with improving our social standing in the community. The mystics remind us that it is our actions that reveal what matters most to us.

On the path of Sant Mat, it is not uncommon to hear disciples contend that meditation is difficult. The mystics' response, however, is always the same. They advise their disciples to approach it from a logical point of view – can sitting in one place, repeating some words be difficult? They explain that the difficulty is not in the act of meditation itself, rather, it is the obedience and the imposed discipline that the mind objects to. The real hardship, therefore, is the mental anguish that the disciple goes through when he has to choose between his spiritual life and desires of the mind and body.

But the mystics make it clear that this only happens when the disciple's lifestyle does not revolve around meditation, and instead, meditation is forced to fit into his lifestyle. And it is easily proven. If meditation is done first thing in the morning, the disciple feels happy and everything is effortless during the day. But if for some reason he has compromised his meditation for something else, then throughout the day he is distressed. By the time evening comes, the mind is tired, the body is exhausted and he is saddled with guilt because he does not feel like meditating. And that is when the struggle begins and meditation becomes difficult.

To overcome this, the mystics offer a simple and practical solution. They tell us to make meditation the priority. When one starts the day with meditation, the chances of struggling with the mind are less. Both mind and body are refreshed from a good night's sleep, and one's thoughts are generally more subdued. Also, when the disciple begins his day remembering the Lord, he builds a positive atmosphere around himself. He enjoys its effects throughout the day and it helps him cope with whatever challenges come his way.

The Sant Mat Masters explain that only when a disciple pursues this routine regularly can the mind gradually be trained. As the habit

develops, the struggles come to an end and the mind begins to enjoy the solitude of meditation.

*Gradually, gradually, devotion will bring its own sweetness.*

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

The perfect mystics assure us that to be one with the Truth even for a single moment is worth more than the world and life itself. It is for this reason they urge their disciples to experience it for themselves. It is why they inspire them to not only persevere with meditation but to make it the most important part of their life.

For the true disciple, it is a simple proposition. He has made his choice. And when one chooses the Beloved, love becomes his ultimate power source. It lightens every burden and bears every hardship. It attempts things beyond its strength and sees nothing as impossible. Fortified with such deep devotion, his only aspiration is to seek the pleasure of his Beloved. For him, there is no doubt. It is the only priority.



*Most loving God, I beg You so to preserve that  
I am not overborne by the cares of this life.  
Give me strength to resist, patience to endure,  
and constancy to persevere.  
Give me the rich graces of Your spirit  
rather than all the pleasures of the world  
And supplant all worldly love by the love of Your Name.*

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

# The First Encounter

The first encounter of the Great Master was indeed memorable. Baba Jaimal Singh was taking a walk on a road in Murree, when the Great Master happened to cross his path. Baba Ji said to Bibi Rukko, who was accompanying him, “I have come to Murree for this person,” pointing to the Great Master after he had passed Baba Ji.

“What sort of a man is he? He has not even cared to greet you!” retorted Bibi Rukko.

“What does the creature know?” answered Baba Ji, and added, “He will come to attend the satsang in three days hence.”

As predicted, the Great Master came to attend the satsang in three days, after hearing about the spiritual eminence of Baba Ji. And Baba Ji’s very first discourse answered all the questions and removed all the doubts that the Great Master had been carrying in his mind for years. He soon made a request for initiation, which was readily granted. Baba Ji remarked at that time that he had been holding something for the Great Master as a trust from the Lord, which he had discharged that day. This was the turning point in the life of the Great Master. Henceforth, meditation became his prime occupation and Baba Ji’s darshan his sole passion in life. It was a unique relationship of mutual love and affection between the Master and disciple.

*Glimpses of the Great Master*





# Mystic Mind

Mystics, throughout time, have continuously given of themselves to their disciples, tirelessly working to save every soul that has been entrusted unto them. While most of their efforts to transform man into God take place in the inner realms, or 'behind the scenes' if one may call it that, a great deal of work is also put in at this physical level. Outwardly, the Masters guide their disciples by adopting several methods – the most direct of them being satsang, where grace and love flow unconditionally from the source. Amidst these waves of love, one will also find hidden a number of priceless pearls. These pearls of wisdom are revealed only to those who are willing to deeply inquire and investigate into the Master's verbal message, where one will then discover pointers that aid in one's transformation. One such tip often given is concealed in the word 'balance'.

A pendulum bob that is elevated by a certain degree, and then let go, swings to the opposite side to an equivalent height, at which point it then assumes a momentary pause, and is then followed by a swing back again, only this time to a slightly lower position. This arc-like motion of to and fro continues until the pendulum reverts back to being motionless at the centre. One might be able to derive from this that with each movement in one direction, there is another of comparable magnitude in the opposite direction, which would imply that they cancel out each other, with the net effect being zero ... and there is balance.

However, what is critical to note here is that whether on one side or the other, stability is only achieved when the pendulum restores itself to its natural position, at the centre.

The mind is often likened to a pendulum as it too swings from end to end, or to put it more practically, from one extreme to another. Just like the pendulum's motion in one direction is cancelled out by its motion in the opposite direction, going to both extremes of the mind may appear that the person is in balance, but this is not the case.

“Being in the world, but not of it.” “The middle path.” “Anything in extreme is not good.” “React and rebound.” These are some of the common terms used by the saints that caution the spiritual practitioner to adopt a balanced approach to life while treading this fine line of a two-edged sword. But if one were to go deeper into this word ‘balance’, what does it really mean and why is it so important?

When saints use this word, they are not referring to a choice of lifestyle or behavioural pattern such as work and play. Instead, they skim the surface of something so profound that in its uncovering and understanding lies one of the greatest secrets of mysticism. This balance that is often talked about, in actuality, refers to a condition of mind that allows it to function in such a manner that it is continually in its natural state of being – remaining completely uninfluenced by thought and external activities.

J. Krishnamurti, a twentieth-century philosopher, aptly prompts students of spirituality by asking the question whether or not such a mind can exist which when occupied, will focus on the activity at hand, and once the task has been completed it will resume its natural state, unaffected by its previous engagement.

What is the mind's natural state of being? Mystics have described the natural state of the mind as the meditative state, free from all thought while it remains absolutely still in total awareness. It is a serene mind that observes and acts, unsullied by any sensual or

emotional conditioning or by any prejudice. Such a mind is a mystic or divine mind.

Thought, by nature, is divisive. With a single thought, the mind instantly creates a division within itself. And so it follows that with the multiple thoughts that man generates, he is creating innumerable fragments, where each one is trying to dominate the other, with the result that he finds himself in constant conflict. Chaos and disorder become prevalent, and every decision made is born of utter confusion.

As each part battles with the other, energy is continuously dissipated, keeping one away from having any experience with the Truth. What is in reality a clear screen, in no time turns opaque, and finally black. Clear thinking is then no longer possible, as objects are perceived the way one would like to see them rather than for what they really are.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to regroup and dissolve the millions of thoughts that drain and waste man's invaluable spiritual energy. This is no ordinary task, and is perhaps impossible if attempted on one's own merit. Fortunately, the perfect saints, in all mercy and compassion, have given their disciples the tool of simran, which can be repeated throughout the day to minimize the scattering of the mind. Furthermore, it is also advised to live a simple life whereby the unnecessary stimulations of excitement that arise from the senses and desires are kept at bay.

With simran and correct living, the mind eventually returns to its natural state of being – in balance. And with more practice, it learns to maintain this state for extended periods of time. That is meditation. It is no surprise that the mystics often state that meditation encompasses one's daily living, and is not merely an interval of time spent locked in a room in solitude.

From this balance and stillness of mind, one then lives and acts, and one really experiences what it is to be truly human.

*When the mind itself becomes sacred, then it opens the door to something that is immeasurably sacred.*

J. Krishnamurti, *A Wholly Different Way of Living*

The cessation of thought in this state of stillness brings about a deep-rooted and sacred silence that pervades the entire being. Energy that was previously dissipated is then gathered to summation and the mind itself is sanctified. It is in this very state of intense silence that one is ready to meet the Radiant Form of the Master within.



*My mind withdrew its thoughts from experience,  
extracting itself from the contradictory throng of sensuous images,  
that it might find out what that Light was.  
Herein it was bathed,  
And thus, with the flash of one hurried glance,  
it attained to the vision of that which is.*

Saint Augustine, as quoted in *Living Thoughts of Great People*

# The Magnificent Creation

## An Explanation by Maharaj Sawan Singh

This magnificent creation – the sun, moon, milliards (billions) of stars, land, mountains, oceans, and all this universe – has not come into existence by itself. In this world of cause and effect, there is no effect without a cause. There is a doer for every act done. Look at this wonderful workshop of the universe. With what regularity and exactitude millions of machines in it are working. Everything seems to move precisely according to the rules and laws laid down by its wise manager. There is never any infringement of any rule. Orders are carried out strictly in accordance with the divine Word that activates the world. Every morning the sun rises in the east at its proper time and, illuminating the world during the day, sets in the west, handing over charge to the queen of night. Then lesser lights shine forth, as if to decorate the night sky with millions of small electric bulbs. See how the earth revolves around its axis so that the light of the sun may reach all its parts. Look at the milliards of stars and planets moving in their orbits, never straying an inch from their appointed tracks or colliding with each other. You often hear of your railways and steamers, so carefully and ably directed by your wise engineers, coming into collisions. But did any star ever dash against another?

See how the heaven sends water from above to make the lands fertile. How the clouds bring water from distant seas, and seasonal winds carry them over long distances! How lands are watered by rivers and streams! How vegetables and delicious fruit grow! How the earth brings forth beautifully coloured and sweet-scented flowers from its bosom! All this baffles human intelligence. How beautiful and magnificent this grand factory of the universe is, and with what

precision and accuracy does all its machinery work! Do you mean to suggest that it is working without any Engineer? No, my son, it is not so. There is an Engineer. But you will see the guiding hand of this Master Engineer only when you take a proper guide, and with a proper gate-pass, enter the office where He works.

*Call of the Great Master*



## SPIRITUALISTICKS®

### Going with the Flow



# Silence, Solitude and Simplicity

In our pursuit of happiness, we sometimes experience the feeling of going backward. How many times have we found ourselves thinking, “I never thought life would be this busy!” We may even blame ourselves or be blamed by others for overdoing things. We fill up our social calendar to the brim and comfort ourselves by thinking we are leading a ‘balanced’ life. We all seem to be over-stretching ourselves. Is this frenzied lifestyle preventing us from achieving eternal bliss and fulfilment?

The Master always stresses on the importance of having a goal or objective in life. What is our goal? Financial well-being? Successful relationships? Looking good?

In order to tread the path of Sant Mat and not lose sight of our objective in life, there are three major requirements that the disciple must embrace. In addition to controlling his mind through meditation, the basic requirements are: silence, solitude and simplicity.

The value of silence cannot be over-stressed. Mystics and saints have laid great importance on silence. Almost every faith advocates silence, but modern man seems to be afraid of it. We are so accustomed to outer noise that we feel awkward if we are enveloped in silence. We see people walk in the streets with earphones in their ears, talking on their mobile phones or playing games while waiting for the bus or train. Even exercise classes today take place to the beat of the loudest music.

We are stimulated by the western philosophy of being on the move all the time – being busy bees! People often have the misconceived notion that being silent and still means ‘doing nothing’, and hurrying, bustling, frantic activity, and continuous talking is ‘getting things

done' and 'living'. We are brain-washed into believing that we are not achieving anything unless we are constantly on the move.

Our day starts with the loud shrill of the alarm clock. Our eyes open, on goes the television or the CD player. We are bombarded with noise at the workplace. When we arrive home at the end of the day, we are welcomed by the sound of the television and chatting. There is no break in this cycle.

The voice of the Master can only be heard through silence. Sant Mat is a silent path. Mother Teresa puts it beautifully when she says:

*God is the friend of silence. Trees, flowers, grass grow in silence.  
See the stars, moon and sun, how they move in silence.*

*The Quotable Spirit*

The second requirement is solitude. Solitude does not mean being alone all the time. It is imperative that we stay connected with people and meet our needs.

*All the misfortunes of men derive from one single thing, which is their inability to be at ease in a room [alone].*

*Pascal, Pensées*

It is imperative to strike a balance between worldly life and spiritual life. It is not necessary to live like a recluse. Our family, jobs, relatives are all very important to us. But we should not be bogged down and over-powered by our attachments. Our goal is to rise above these and learn to appreciate and enjoy our own company. The ideal is to communicate with people, yet remain inwardly aloof and concentrated.



Solitude is very important for a spiritual seeker. It is, therefore, necessary to change our thinking patterns and alter our lifestyles, so that at least a part of the day is spent in tranquillity and calm.

Mystics have often advised that we should learn the art of doing nothing. It is only in the depths of silence and solitude that a disciple can meditate, fully concentrated at the eye centre.

The third requirement is simplicity. Mystics tell us that all we need are two square meals, a roof over our head and two or three sets of clothes. Instead we want seven-course meals, mansions to live in and designer clothes. In *Legacy of Love*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

*Simplicity doesn't mean to live in misery and poverty. You have what you need, and you don't want to have what you don't need.*

The truly wise will always seek to simplify his life. The media-frenzied world drives us to think that we need the best of everything available. We need to filter our minds and carefully decide what we want in our life. Satisfaction of our basic needs is a necessity. Satisfaction of our wants and desires is a luxury.

The path of Sant Mat teaches us that whatever we are destined for, we will get only that – nothing more, nothing less. Once we believe this concept, it will make life much more simple. And if our lives are simple, we would have more time to devote to meditation in silence and solitude.



# Did You Know?

There is no seniority on the path. Progress is not related to the number of years one has been initiated. Everybody has an individual type of load to shed, an individual type of karma to clear. After being initiated, some are able to clear it in one birth, some in two, some in three, some clear all that burden in the inner regions.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Saint Matthew*

\* \* \*

From the time of initiation, when the Master takes over the charge of a soul, he is more anxious than the soul to see it installed on the throne of bliss and peace. Even if the devotee, through some chance, leaves the Master or loses faith in him, he, on his part, never leaves. He will someday bring the devotee on the path again. His mission is to take souls up, and a soul once initiated is never deserted. This is the law.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

\* \* \*

When we strive for spiritual development, this initiates a process of transformation of our thinking, feeling and acting; but we will experience our true nature only when, during meditation, we have crossed the threshold towards a higher level of consciousness. That is the moment when we will awaken from the dream condition of our earthly existence to a new, much more comprehensive consciousness, one that is frequently described in Sant Mat literature.

*Adventure of Faith*

# The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

**Q:** *Master, why is Sant Mat and the experiences of the initiate so esoteric, so secretive? Why cannot the initiate compare notes with another initiate? It is my understanding of Sant Mat that it is a science of the soul; and any scientist, to test the validity of his findings, would like to compare notes with somebody else.*

**A:** Brother, there is always danger of ego coming in. When you share your internal experiences with anybody, you are inclined to give yourself airs, and you lose what you have. Also, when people know that you are spiritually advanced, they may try to take advantage of you, of your powers. Then you may be tempted and thus lose what you had gained.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol II*

\* \* \*

**Q:** *If we're faced with temptations and we do our simran, how does that help?*

**A:** Well, sister, what is simran? Simran is a means to concentrate at the eye centre, and we are tempted by the senses only when our mind is scattered. When the mind comes from the eye centre downward to the senses, only then are we tempted by these senses. When it is not scattered, when it is collected at the eye centre, automatically you will save yourself from all those temptations. In that way simran helps. It keeps you concentrated at the eye centre; it keeps your thoughts at the eye centre.

*Die to Live*

**Q:** *Master, do the children of satsangi parents receive your protection, and are they marked for initiation in their present lives?*

**A:** Everybody has their individual karmas. So even if they are the children of satsangis, it doesn't mean they must be initiated. Those who are marked by the Father automatically come to the path, whether or not they are the children of satsangis. But if parents become a living example to their children, naturally the children are influenced and may become interested in the teachings and spirituality.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol III*

\* \* \*

**Q:** *What is the name of the supreme being?*

**A:** Give him any name. Call him God if you like. After all, the Lord who is remembered by so many names really has no name. He is also called the nameless one, and his abode is also known as the nameless region. The relationship of mother and child is that of love, and the mother expresses her love by using different names. But it is the love and not the names which form the link between the mother and the child. All these words are just expressions of the mother's love. She may call him by any name or by a hundred names. The link is love; it's the common blood they share. Similarly, you may call the Lord by any name. We have so many countries, and every country has so many languages. In one language alone we remember him by different names. Every name is good. Out of love and devotion you may call him by any name. It is the love and devotion that count, not the name. You can give him any name, it makes no difference.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol I*

# The Arrow

The silence was deafening. Even as the warm breeze blew its jasmine across the distressed mind, it did nothing to tame the piercing pain that consumed everyone. There was no respite, only tears – for just as suddenly as he had arrived earlier that week on his visit, the Master had now departed a few moments earlier, leaving us to treasure those events for a lifetime. Beautiful memories of seva, satsang, of questions, answers and discussions, and above all of course, the priceless time he spent with his disciples during his stay. Wonderful treasures that inspire happiness and joy. But at that precise moment, so very painful. What was that bittersweet feeling of agony mixed with happiness, that intensity of pain wrapped around the pleasure of tasting the sweetest honey? Something had happened – it was an arrow that pierced the heart that day. He had cut through the stone walls of our apathy and indifference, of lethargy and carelessness, with his arrow of love and compassion. And now, even as the rays of the sun danced a beautiful ballet with the leaves and branches all around us, all that could be felt was only that piercing sweet pain.

The strange thing, and perhaps the greatest hint towards trying to understand that anguish, was the fact that it had appeared almost immediately after the Master submitted his thanks with folded hands, and slowly left the venue. As those first pangs invariably dig deeper into the consciousness, it becomes clear that beneath the surface, the pain is already there – hiding from view, soothed by the balm that is the Master. The arrow simply opens the surface to reveal the wound, and release the pain within. And it is no ordinary pain. This is a pain of a different nature, one that the mystics have called the royal highway

to spirituality. It is the pain of yearning – the agony of not being able to be with the one we love.

At the very moment of the Master's departure after any period of time spent with him, there exists an opportunity to be struck with that special arrow of love, that leads to this bleeding of our soul. The pain of yearning goes deeper into the very core of a being than any other experience in life, because it consumes the victim continuously until the desire is fulfilled. And its sheer intensity is nature's subtle yet powerful way of impelling us to strive harder, to apply more effort, in the only practice that can bring us back together with the Beloved.

The Master's motive is transparent. We have always been told that physically, he can only take us as far as the grave, and it is his spiritual identity that truly matters, for that is eternal, while the physical is ephemeral. One day the physical Master will leave us, and the pain we feel at these temporary departures today will be nothing in comparison to the pain that we will endure at that epic moment in our lives. No matter how intense we feel now, the yearning that we experience today with each interim goodbye is in fact mild and short-lived, but let there be no mistake – it is a gift.

Each time we are temporarily separated physically from the Beloved, and every moment we feel that piercing pain, there is an opportunity for our love to be purified in the fire of yearning. The desire to be with the Lord strengthens, and consequently our resolve increases to meditate more diligently. And this is the Master's gift to us, just as Jesus explained that it was expedient for his disciples that he leave them.

It begins with the relationship. The Master befriended us, and from that moment, he has nurtured the bond between our soul and his. And it is that relationship, fostered by his loving care, that pulls

us to where he goes – our source. Thus, as the longing to be with the Master blisters our heart with agony, it translates into something of unimaginable depth.

The silence was deafening. The arrow had found its target that day, and sitting in the aching stillness, the Master's departure became his gift for each and every disciple. Pain was exceeded only by abundant sweetness, and amidst the haze of emotions, one thing was absolutely clear – that out of his love, the Master had gifted us the holy grail of spirituality – yearning for the Beloved.



*The arrow of God's love  
Has smitten my heart, sayeth Ravidas,  
I can be cured of this pain  
Only when God, the elixir of life, is obtained.*

*Guru Ravidas - Life and Teachings*

# Remain Happy in the Lord's Will

There is a story of a king who became a disciple of a dervish. The king, showing love and humility, requested the dervish to stay with him for a while. The pious man accepted his request.

The king would offer food to the holy man first, then eat afterwards himself. One day the king sliced a beautiful watermelon and offered the slices one by one to the holy man. He kept the last slice for himself to eat later. When he started eating the watermelon, he found it to be extremely bitter. He felt very distressed at this and asked the dervish, "Sir, why did you not tell me? You kept eating the extremely bitter watermelon quietly." The dervish answered, "O king! Why could I not eat a bitter thing for one day from the hand that has been offering me such delicious food everyday? O king! If that Lord, who showers on us such beautiful gifts everyday, gives something that feels bitter to us, we must smilingly accept it because of the love and faith we have for him. I have been staying with you just to explain this. Now that I have done so, I will be on my way."

The king requested the dervish to stay, as his company would help him act upon this principle. The dervish said that he would teach him the technique to worship the Lord. He explained that as the king practised the technique, he would slowly learn how to remain happy in the Lord's will. The acceptance of the Lord's will with love and faith is born from worship of and meditation on his Name.

*Traditional Sufi story*





# The Gift of Giving

*The advantage of coming into this body is that you can give.  
Go on giving as long you have the body.  
When the body is reduced to dust no one will ask you to give.  
O Kabir, give as long as you have this body.  
Do good to others, this is the fruit of this life.*

Kabir, as quoted in *The Labour of Love*

Once we visited an orphanage, and there we saw a little girl beaming with joy. Her eyes shined with happiness as she danced to the music that was playing. Looking at her and the other six-year olds playing, we wondered what sort of life they must have had, and what they had done not to deserve the love of a parent. Yet, not one of them expressed any kind of sadness – love and cheerfulness poured out of their eyes. We would never have believed they were orphans. With simple innocence, they hugged us, laughed and danced with us. The happiness that we got by spending time with them was beyond expression. We went there to give our time to play with them but we ended up receiving a greater gift – the gift of love. It was then that we truly understood the saying, “The more you give, the more you receive.”

The saints have taught us to always extend our hand to give – whether it is for seva, family, friends or even strangers. Our Master is the perfect example of a true giver. His unconditional love is the greatest gift we will ever have in this life. He gives his life to us for the simple reason that he loves us – he does not look at our sins; he accepts us for who we are. He awakens us from our deep slumber and

tirelessly teaches how we can become one with our Creator. He is constantly giving us his time, his teachings and his love.

There is a well-known saying: “God’s gift to us is life – what we do with this life is our gift to Him.” The saints constantly tell us that the precious human form has been bestowed upon us purely by the Lord’s grace. They remind us not to waste our time, for it is only in this form that we can realize God and return to our true home. None of the other 8,400,000 forms of life have this capacity; we alone have this privilege. The essential question for us then is: Is what we are doing with our lives a gift to Him?

It is very easy to become self-absorbed, especially when we are inundated with things to do. We are so engrossed in our busy schedules that we often forget the simplest virtues of life. The virtue of giving consists of giving a little part of ourselves, which may require effort, time and attention. We have seen in life how deeply satisfying it is when we have made an effort to bring joy into someone else’s life – imagine what a great gift it would be if we could do the same for the Lord.

Offering our life to the Lord as a gift begins with the little things that we might come across every day: taking a little time out from our busy schedule to help someone in need, like an aged family member who might be going through a major illness or a friend who may need a listening ear. In one of the organ donation documentaries which is played frequently at Dera, the narrator makes a powerful statement, “If all can give selflessly, we will feel more complete as human beings and surely closer to God. We are all His children. Let us give God, our Father, a reason to smile.”

When we give a little of ourselves to someone in need, we are given the opportunity to express the love the Master is constantly nurturing in us. Moreover, the saints explain the importance of our attitude

when we give – we should give not just as a duty but because it is a privilege to do so and to always give with humility.

*Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.*

Bible, Matthew 6:3

*It is not what we do or how much we do, but how much love we put into the action because that action is our love for God in action.*

Mother Teresa, *Everything Starts from Prayer*

As we journey on the spiritual path, we gradually realize that every moment is a gift from the Lord. But the greatest gift that we have received is the love of our Master, his encouragement and his patience.

As disciples, we have a great responsibility to our Master. Are we happy with everything that He has given us or do we complain to Him when things do not go our way? How do we treat one another – do we truly believe that the Lord resides in everyone's heart? How do we show our gratitude to the Master for the gift of initiation? The greatest gift we can give to the Lord is sincerely obeying our Master's instructions. He has given us the circumstances to attend to our duty; he has given us all we need. The Master has told us on many occasions that the best gift that we can ever give him is our meditation. By doing so, we please our Master – what greater gift can there be than that? If we give him our effort, despite our struggles, if we give him our time, despite our busy schedules, if we do our very best as his disciples, then our entire lives would be our gift to him.



# Repartee of the Wise

One day, Alexander the Great visited the studio of an Athenian sculptor renowned for his wisdom and art. He found it full of little chiselled figures. He looked at them with keen interest and finally his attention was arrested by a figure with a covered face and winged feet.

“And what have you named this little statue?” he questioned.

“Opportunity,” came the smug reply.

“But why have you covered its face?” he asked.

“Because men live so foolishly that they rarely notice it, as it passes them by.”

“Well then, why does it have wings on its feet?”

“Because once it flies away, opportunity has flown by, never to return again.”

\* \* \*

A man was going on a pilgrimage to a holy place in Rajasthan. His friend asked him why he was going there. The man replied: “By bathing in the holy waters one gets a human birth.” Astonished at the man’s reply, the friend asked: “Well, brother, are you not in a human form now? Why not accomplish in this life what you hope to do in the next one?”



# Waking Up to Reality

The human mind is conditioned from birth by the external influences of geography, race, gender, parents and family, and later by the educational system, society and media. It is through this constant interaction that the mind comes to accept life as reality. Contrast this with the teachings of perfect mystics who explain that life is not real, while providing proof and giving the technique to clear the mind of its conditioning, thereby awakening the mind from the dream state humanity calls 'life'.

From a spiritual perspective, it is reasonable to say humanity is blind. Man is born blind, and goes through life blindly, getting married, having children, growing old, and reaches the grave still blind. Our degree of blindness is proportional to how independent our thinking is of our conditioning. The poet, William Blake, eloquently put it this way:

*If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would  
appear to man as it is, infinite.*

*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Simply put, if you ask a child who has never left the confines of his village how big the world is, the answer would be very different from one given by a seasoned traveller.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word 'perception' is from the Latin root *perceptio*: the act of observation, a mental image or concept. The awareness of the environment through physical sensation, or physical sensation interpreted in the light of experience.

Using this definition as a basis, we can assume that what we know to be real is the sum total of our experience. What is our experience? Albert Einstein declared “Reality is an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.” We define our experiences by our conditioning.

From a mystical standpoint, disciples are quick to realize that we are spiritual beings going through a human experience, without translating words into action. Talking about meditation does not bring the results of sitting in meditation. We need to get past our conditioning, beyond our comfort level, to the point of inconvenience, if we truly want to attain reality. A disciple’s only worry in life should be when he is negligent in his spiritual duties; everything else is just a part of the karmic accounts he has to pay.

However, until we meet a perfect Master who explains our condition and enlightens us with the absolute truth, we have an excuse. We have an excuse because we believe that heaven on earth is possible, by changing the world with our idealism. We live our lives by the saying, “Where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to be wise” – but at what price?

We need to distinguish between ignorance and foolishness. Simply, ignorance is not being able to fix a computer when it breaks down, while being foolish is thinking you are an IT expert when you are not. An ignorant person can admit being foolish and improve, while a fool remains content in darkness.

For a seeker, this parody of life ends when a perfect Master makes himself known, provides the teachings, and adopts him as a disciple, through initiation. Then things get interesting and the real adventure of life begins! The truth is we have no excuse because we have not chosen the Master, but rather Master has chosen us.

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great Light;  
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,  
Upon them a Light has shined.*

Bible, Isaiah 9:1

It is clear we no longer have room for ignorance or disobedience, for we have been duly enlightened. Further, we have our Master's pledge to see us through to the end. Maharaj Charan Singh profoundly states:

*Once a Master has accepted a disciple, he never leaves him but is ever ready to guide him on the path. He does much more for us than the human mind can comprehend.*

*Light on Sant Mat*

*There is hope for every disciple on this path. When the Lord has arranged for our initiation into this science, it means He wants us to come back to Him one day. And if that is the Lord's wish, what power can keep us back here for long? It is only a question of time until our burdens are lightened and we are pure enough to stand in His presence. This is the greatest blessing the Lord can shower on any human being.*

*Quest for Light*

It doesn't get any better than this. What more can we desire? What more can we wish for, having been gifted with the greatest blessing the Lord can give any human being – dare we ask for more?

The only thing worth asking for is perfect understanding of the teachings, so we can practise our spiritual duties to perfection; to help us absorb and digest the teachings, and put them to proper use. We

need to know how things work on the path. Maharaj Charan Singh has called it a science, which means it is a system of gathering knowledge and organizing and condensing that knowledge into testable laws and theories.

Master tells us not to believe anything at face value, He has given the teachings and the method to test and prove beyond any doubt that what he has taught us can be put into practice and is true. Add to this Master's guarantee that stipulates with regular and consistent practice you will get the desired result, what greater blessing could anyone ask for? A disciple has to appreciate what he has in hand and learn to use that blessing to his ultimate advantage.

After thoroughly understanding the path and its principles, including the law of karma and how it works, our undivided focus and attention should be on our spiritual practice and the importance of achieving the ultimate. All the rest are details in the Masters capable hands. Einstein once said, "I want to know God's thoughts, the rest are details." Getting to know God's thoughts requires one to first merge into the Lord. Upon merging into the Lord, it would be safe to surmise that details will become insignificant. As the Masters have said, it is a science; guesswork is not an option.



*When you perceive His hidden secrets,  
give your life to God's affairs and truly live –  
At last, made perfect in Reality,  
you will be gone, and only God will be.*

*Attar, The Conference of the Birds*



# Why Marriage?

One evening meeting at the Dera, a man asked Baba Ji whether it was all right for him and his girlfriend to live together without marrying. Since marriage has been devalued to such an extent, what, the man asked, was the point of getting married? The vow that was solemnized between two people as a commitment for life, that was considered sacred within the context of one's religion, in these days seems hardly worth the paper on which it is written. Where then, he said, was the need for a formal ceremony?

The Master was clear in his reply. He said that by not getting married, the gentleman was simply avoiding his responsibilities. Baba Ji quickly put before us a vivid picture of the chaos that would ensue when none are clear about their responsibilities. We saw a world of confused and distressed people – adults and children – in which no norms could be established; a world in which everyone was going in different directions – each in the way he or she wanted – and no one was ready to compromise his or her desires. We saw a world in which everyone's priority was maintaining his or her individual rights and personal freedom. But without a commitment to something beyond oneself, who would decide what was right? How quickly would such a world become a lonely nightmare of disappointment, anger, bitterness and frustration?

Marriage is one of the key institutions of civilisation. If we are to understand why it is important, we need to remind ourselves of two things in particular. First, no one can function as an island. Without cooperation and compromise, without mutually respected rules of conduct, who would decide what gets done? If I am going to pursue what I want at all costs, it may well be that what I want does not suit or

appeal to you. Second, we have to remind ourselves of the simple and self-evident truth that nothing can be achieved without commitment. We have to put our roots down deep if we are to draw sustenance from life's depths – and this cannot happen if we keep changing focus. We need to think through these issues. In a world where values are not shared, on whom would we be able to depend? How could we raise children? Don't children absorb their values from within the family during their early years? If our early environment is stable and positive, it nurtures positive values within us. Has the science of human behaviour shown us a better way to learn the important lessons of life other than in the context of a loving family? And in a world where the family unit does not exist, how would we transmit positive values from one generation to the next? Where there is no emotional and social stability, not only is life traumatic for the children, but it affects us too.

Our code of conduct creates order and stability out of potential chaos. It reflects our fragile spiritual understanding and provides a refuge from the confusion at the surface of life. By representing more than our immediate interests, it helps us contain our actions so that we can experience the deeper truths of life. The institution of marriage is a significant element in our moral code for it provides a structure within which to grow and meet our responsibilities. Our destiny has already been written – as Jesus says in Saint Matthew, we “shall not escape from here” as long as even one “jot” remains to be paid.

When we come into a physical relationship with a person of the opposite sex, when we act in accordance with one of the deepest forces of the creation and give birth to children, whose responsibility are they if not ours? If the union does not produce children, do we think this means that no responsibilities ensue? If we devalue the physical act of creation by treating it as a means of pleasure alone, then it can

only point to our blindness: even if we do not have children, our involvement with each other runs deep through this union, so the consequences and responsibilities are commensurate and will surely have to be met one day. When we have relationships outside marriage, we are looking for the pleasures of a partnership without the responsibilities. We do not even give ourselves a chance to experience the responsibilities, for without a supportive framework it is easy to think they are not there. No sooner do we feel trouble brewing, than we are on our way – looking for happiness elsewhere.

It is a myth of our present times that happiness comes with the right partner. This suits the mind – it is always looking for variety. But we need to remind ourselves constantly that it is our mind that is our problem. It is the mind that prevents us from going beyond the physical. It alone keeps us from experiencing the inner music of the Shabd. Our mind is rooted in the layers of impressions from our previous actions and thoughts that sit like thick sound-proofing around our soul.

How far are we going to let it take us? And if we are not ready to make the commitment needed for marriage, how can we imagine we will remain committed to the journey of our soul that lies ahead? How, without commitment, can we ever experience the depths of life? We will spend our entire lives skating about on the surface. In our relationships, we may not even get to know our partner before we get disappointed or frustrated and look to change. Our problems may well manifest themselves in our relationships, but they do not originate there. We do not see that we have got things back to front, that it is for us to find happiness first within ourselves, and only then can we *build* a partnership of two happy people learning to live together in tolerance and love.

Marriage is a public statement of a commitment. By making our partnership public, we cement it. By institutionalizing it, we further cement it. No partnership is easy, and marriage is no different – so we need all the help we can get. Marriage provides a framework to hold two people together, so that in times of trouble they don't split or drift apart. It gives a reference point beyond two minds, and creates space within which their differences can exist.

Some people may argue that a private commitment to each other is sufficient. In many countries this is acceptable by law, for taxation or other purposes, so who needs a piece of paper? But if we reflect a little, we will discover this is a way of avoiding commitment. Whatever the intellect may say, who would deny that legal marriage is a significant step, even if it is no more than the simplest of ceremonies? That is maybe why the proponents of this argument wish to avoid it: legal marriage *is* binding.

If we look just a little beneath the surface, we will see that in spite of modern attitudes, most people are not really happy with what is known as a common-law marriage. The parents of the couple are often disappointed or unhappy with the situation, one or other of the partners may feel insecure, and the children are shy or embarrassed among their peers, insecure and fearful of ridicule. Like the separation or divorce of parents, it can be a private agony children harbour in their hearts, and they are powerless to do anything about it. Generally speaking, parents hold the key to the happiness of their children, and every society on earth recognizes this by having its own ways to establish a couple as a unit, the basis and backbone of the family.

Commitment, responsibility, steadiness, a concern for the well-being of others, all are aspects of love. Love, we are guided, is a *verb* – something we *do*, not just something that happens by chance. How many times does the Master point out in the meetings that we do not even

understand what love is. He explains how our difficulties arise because we confuse love with the physical. Love is beyond the physical, he keeps telling us; true love is constant and unconditional, true love does not alter with change.

We call ourselves *satsangis*. *Sat-sang*, ‘truth’ and ‘association’. It has been our good fortune to be brought into association with truth. In our essence we are the truth, the reality, for which we yearn. Call it God, call it truth, call it love, call it the Word; it is the essence of life and it is the life-force of you and me. By initiation into the practice of the Word, we are given the key to find this treasure within ourselves. It is for us to use the key. For this, too, we need commitment. We need commitment, steadfastness and courage – not every day is a sunny day on the spiritual path. We need to be clear about our priorities – but we keep forgetting them. We start to think our interests lie in our relationships, in emotional happiness right now. So easily we lose sight of the bigger picture.

By committing ourselves to live with one person, we give ourselves the opportunity to be constant and learn how to love. Marriage is “till death do us part, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health”. As we live through the years in one relationship, we learn that human love can be transformed from the excitement of romantic love and the passion of youthful lust into a deeper sort of love marked by the selflessness, compassion and generosity that come with time. When things are difficult, there is only one practical option and that is to *work on ourselves*. To achieve harmony through the ups and downs of life, we have to keep on developing. Within a marriage we can nurture friendship, so aptly and beautifully described by Hazur as a relationship “where you have a clean and clear understanding with someone – he accepts you for what you are and you accept him for what he is. He wants to help you. You want to help him. That is

friendship. It is very rare.” For a good marriage, we need big hearts filled with positive qualities – tolerance, trust, patience, compassion and forgiveness; our commitment leads us to develop these qualities within ourselves.

Marriage is a purpose-designed vessel to hold, protect and nourish earthly love. This earthly love is precious and sacred, not because it has been sanctioned by a religious organisation, but because it reflects the yearning of the soul for union with its source. It can shape the order of our world and, as it expresses itself through the love of parent and child or husband and wife, it is one of the best ways we have of making the world a better place. Rightly directed, it is the same love that will take us home. In the *Mathnawi*, Rumi says:

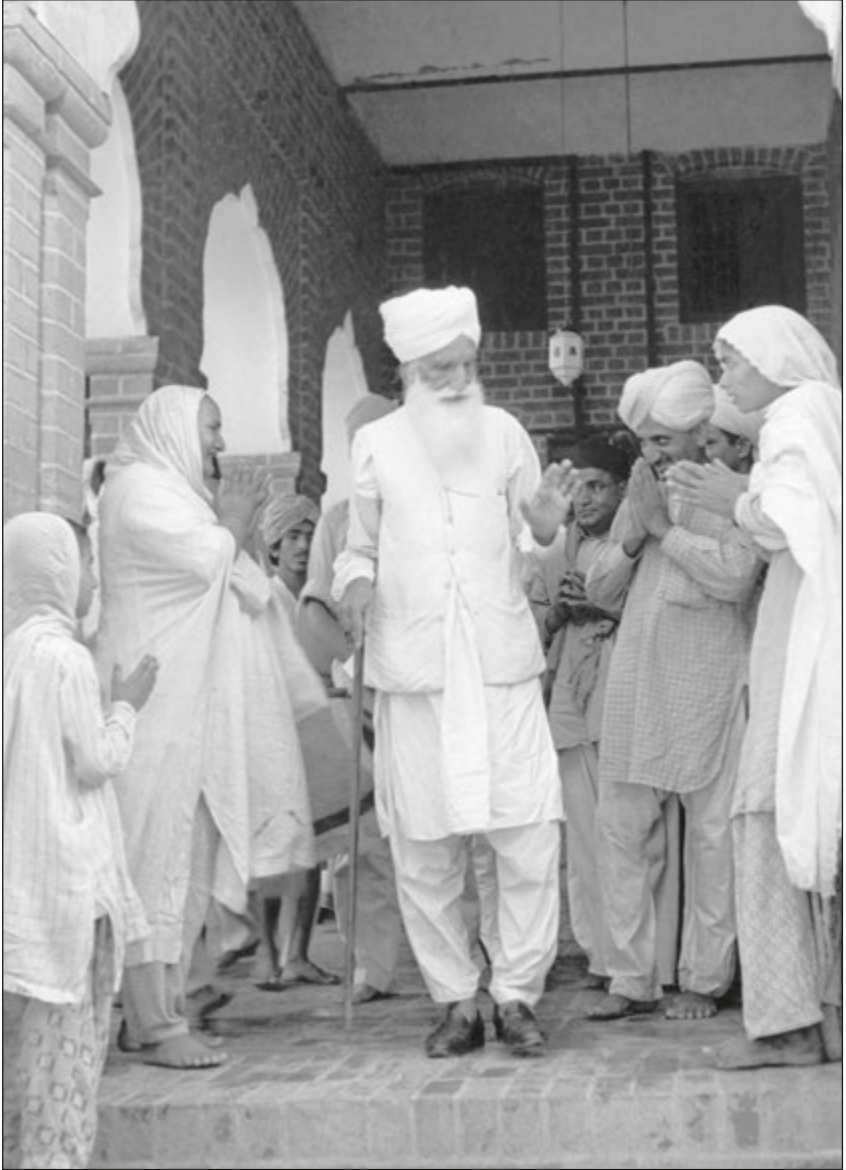
*Love is the astrolabe of the mysteries of God. Whether love be from this earthly side or from that heavenly side, in the end it leads us yonder.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, after explaining at length the protective function of marriage for those with spiritual values, ended by giving us a simple metaphor: If we want the shoe to stay on, we have to tie the lace.



*If Sant Mat is followed with love and devotion, it helps one to become patient, tolerant, kind and in every way improves our nature so that we become better life partners and can render better service. We are taught to do our duty first and always as a loving service, and that also applies to husband and wife.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



*Maharaj Sawan Singh*

# Heart to Heart

It is said that Maharaj Sawan Singh never forgot a face. In the winter of 1933, he was on his way to seva when an old woman came and bowed at his feet. He said, “Sister, why have you been so long in coming? When I initiated you in the village of Ghoda Bhaka near Khanspur fourteen years ago, you asked permission to come to Dera. Where have you been all these fourteen years? I am glad you have come and hope you are well.” At the Master’s recognition after so long a time, the lady was in tears and almost speechless. Finally, she told him how domestic and economic problems had kept her away. Those standing around remarked that they had not even heard the name of her village!

*Heaven on Earth*

\* \* \*

A group of satsangis from the mountainous Kulu region were given a group darshan during their visit to Dera. As it was raining outside, the Guest House dining room was cleared and rugs were put down for them. When Maharaj Charan Singh came into the room, everyone spontaneously started crying – it was one of those charged atmospheres which made your hair stand on end, so intense was their love and devotion. Some of them were permitted to approach Maharaj Ji to speak to him, but they could not say anything; they just cried and cried and cried.

*Legacy of Love*



# Book Review



## **Nizam ad-din Awliya: Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizam ad-din Awliya**

RECORDED BY AMIR HASAN SIJZI

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY BRUCE B. LAWRENCE

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*Morals for the Heart* was compiled by a disciple from notes taken during informal conversations between Shaykh Nizam ad-din Awliya and his disciples. It sheds much light on Sufi spiritual teachings, and gives a wonderful glimpse of how a great Sufi shaykh interacted with his disciples.

An extensive introduction by Khaliq Ahmed Nizami provides essential background about Nizam ad-din, who lived in Delhi from 1238 to 1325. During this early Mughal period, the power and opulence of the empire contrasted strongly with the poverty and suffering of the masses. Nizam ad-din himself had grown up in abject poverty, often enduring near starvation. At the age of twenty, he went to meet Shaykh Farid, then aged ninety. Reportedly, the young Nizam ad-din was so overcome by awe that he trembled and was unable to speak. Shaykh Farid looked at him and said:

*The fire of your separation has burnt our hearts. The storm of desire to meet you has ravaged our lives.*

Only three years later, at the age of twenty-three, Nizam ad-din became Shaykh Farid's successor. For the next fifty years, the khanqah (residence and meeting hall) of Nizam ad-din was a sanctuary not only for spiritual seekers, but also for the poor and downtrodden. Its free kitchen operated round the clock serving thousands of meals a day. As the *Insan-i-kamil* (Perfect Man), Nizam ad-din was a model of the balance between the outer and the inner. "He used to say that what the `ulama [scholars] proclaim through speech, the Sufis express through

their behaviour.” The sultan punished drunkards, prostitutes, and thieves with draconian brutality, but if they came to the khanqah Nizam ad-din treated them kindly, often giving them subsistence money to help them change their ways. He said, “If we ignore the sinner and the miscreant, who will look after them?”

Just as Nizam ad-din was generous with the destitute who came to his gate, so he was unstinting with the spiritual seekers:

*Though the shaykh followed his schedule meticulously, he was always available to visitors who came to him at odd hours. One day he told Amir Hasan Sijzi ... “It is customary among shaykhs that no one goes to them except between sun-rise (ishraq) and mid-day (zuhr) prayers. But it is not so with me. Anybody can come at any time:*

*In the lanes of taverns and inns of vagabonds there is no restriction – come, sit and be at home.”*

Amir Hasan Sijzi began taking notes of each ‘assembly’ he was able to attend. When Nizam ad-din noticed that Sijzi was taking notes, he asked to see them. The shaykh then went over the notes, correcting them and filling in missing parts. The resulting book *Fawa'id al-fu'ad* (*Morals for the Heart*) quickly became popular reading in many Sufi orders. Perhaps Sijzi had no idea he would be credited with creating an entirely new genre of spiritual literature, that of notes taken during meetings with the shaykh, which became an important channel for spiritual teachings.

*Morals for the Heart* follows the meandering conversations of 118 assemblies, each one dated, over a fifteen-year period. In these conversations, we see something of the shaykh’s teaching style. While making a point, he often interspersed a line of verse spoken from memory.

*The master began to speak about the discourse that one hears from saintly and grace-filled persons, and how such discourse evokes a pleasure that none other can match. For when you hear the same discourse from someone else, it does not evoke the taste for God. Who can match the person who speaks from a station in which he*

*has been touched by the light of divine intuition? ... And then some verses from Shaykh Sa`di graced his blessed lips:*

*Who else but I can try to talk of loving You?*

*Since others have no basis, their words do not ring true.*

Frequently, he used stories to illustrate teachings that were subtle and capable of many interpretations. For example, he told a story in which God sent a prophet to scold an ascetic:

*Go tell that ascetic: "What do you gain from those discomforts caused by your strict observance? I have not created you but for chastisement!" As soon as the prophet had given this message to the ascetic, the ascetic got up and began to twirl around. "Why," asked the prophet, "did this disclosure make you so happy that you've started dancing?" "At least He has remembered me," replied the ascetic, "He has taken me into account. I have experienced His reckoning, for:*

*Even though He says He'll kill me.*

*That He says it can't but thrill me."*

Nizam ad-din used colourful language. He called initiation 'grasping the hand of the shaykh', an evocative expression carrying a sense both of forging a bond of allegiance and of relying on the strength of the master, taking his refuge.

*"Whoever grasps the hand of a shaykh and pledges loyalty to him," observed the master, "has made a pact with God! He must remain firm in his commitment, for if he becomes distracted from his resolve, in such circumstances on whom or what can he depend?"*

Anecdotes were continually woven into the conversation, often about Shaykh Farid, revealing the deep affection between master and disciple. Other stories relate to various Sufis familiar to his listeners. Take, for example, the following account about Baha ad-din Zakariya, who later became a well-known shaykh in the Suhrawardi order:

*He had been with Shaykh Shihab ad-din but seventeen days when, on the seventeenth day, Shaykh Shihab ad-din conferred on him his blessings ... So rapid was his success that some of the older disciples took offense, complaining, "We have spent so many years in the saint's presence and yet we had no such favours conferred on us." Their murmurings reached the ears of Shaykh Shihab ad-din. He made this reply to them: "You brought wet wood. How can wet wood catch fire? But Zakariya brought dry wood. With one puff, he went up in flames!"*

The normal etiquette on entering the shaykh's presence was to kiss his hand. In fact, each session in the notes begins something like: "*on such-and-such a day I was privileged to kiss the hand of the emperor of all the worlds.*" Nizam ad-din understood the human psychology behind the formal gesture: "*In every case,*" remarked the master, "*those who kiss the hands of shaykhs and dervishes hope that thereby the hand of forgiveness will be extended to them.*" Disciples apparently worried about their priority or rank to sit near to the shaykh:

*Conversation turned to proper conduct in the saint's assembly, that is, how to enter the presence of the pir (saint) and locate the right place to sit down. "Proper conduct," observed the master, "is that a person who enters the saint's assembly should sit down in whatever empty place he espies. It is not fitting, at the moment that one comes to visit the pir, to be thinking: 'Whom should I sit ahead of or behind?' Wherever a person sees an opening, he should sit down, since every visitor is on the same footing."*

Though its use of Sufi terminology and unfamiliar names may make this book challenging reading, it offers us the invaluable opportunity of listening in on the conversations of a great shaykh and his disciples from many centuries ago.



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