

January 2012

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 2 His Presence
- 5 Our Identity Is Nam
- 7 Attitude Adjustment
- 11 Encouragement
- 13 Clear Thinking
- 18 One Day He Will Fulfil Your Heart's Desire
- 24 God's Classroom
- 30 Stillness
- 33 Acts of Grace and Mercy
- 37 Loneliness
- 40 Ninefold Devotion
- 48 Book Review

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
Copyright © 2012 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

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

VOLUME 8 • ISSUE ONE • JANUARY 2012

His Presence

Often while travelling on the spiritual path, there are times when we are challenged with the onslaught of karmas that come our way. These karmas may be with family, friends, work or even with our meditation. At those times we may ask ourselves, “Does he really know what I am going through, does he know how difficult life is?”

Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*, says:

Your Master is always within you. He is not anywhere outside at all. We should try to reach him, seek him who is our constant companion. He never leaves us, though we may leave him.... We are never alone – our Master is always with us.

What an incredible concept this is! The thought that wherever we are, whatever we are doing, whatever karmas come our way, he is “always with us” and guiding, supporting and encouraging us from within. He is our nearest and dearest friend. He is nearer to us than the hairs on our head.

Hazur continues in the same volume of *Spiritual Perspectives*:

We can shut everybody out, but we can't shut him out. The Lord is everywhere. We can't deceive him. We can't shut him out. He is always watching us, whether we are conscious of it or not. If we could realize this spiritual truth – that there is one Lord; he is within everyone of us and the path leading back to him also is within; and whatever we do, we are being watched and have to account for that to him – I think everybody's life would change in a second.



Whatever you do in this world to keep your Master within you or keep yourself with the Master is meditation, is a part of meditation. Whether you are sitting or just sitting quietly, full of love and devotion for the Master ... if your Master is with you in your mind, in your heart, if all your dealings conform to the teachings, to the commands of the Master, then you are with the Master. That is why we say that Sant Mat is not only meditation; it is a way of life. We have to mould ourselves to that way of life so that we are always with our Master, in all activities of life, so that we don't forget him anytime, anywhere.

Ultimately, the gift he has given us is initiation; and the method is our meditation. It is the solution to all our challenges. Hazur says: "Nearness you will only feel from within if you are attending your meditation."

So we should always try to find him within and then, wherever we are living, whatever karmas we are going through, we can try to be at that level of consciousness where we can be with the Master and realize that he *does* know what we are going through, that he does care what we are going through and that he is helping us along the way. There will be no separation at all. As Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*, "Is there any place the Lord doesn't walk?"

Your real Master is Shabd and Nam within – the spirit within – and the soul is the real disciple. So the soul should try to search for its Master within this temple of the living God. And that will give him the constant company of the Master, where there's no separation at all.



Our Identity Is Nam

The Masters tell us that our identity is Nam. With this simple comment, they give us profound relief and, at the same time, challenge one of our deepest beliefs. We are relieved because our identity usually ties us to this topsy-turvy world with its attendant thrills and spills, deep anguish and passing pleasures. We are challenged because they are saying we aren't who we think we are.

Usually when we introduce ourselves, we give our personal name. That identifies our body and our family. If we are writing to a stranger, we might add that we are a man or a woman, are of a certain age and have certain facial features. Going into more detail, we might add our nationality, ethnicity and what work we do. We could say, "I'm a father or mother; someone's son or daughter; a college graduate; a cab driver; an immigrant; a neighbor."

We want to pursue our physical, family and social goals and attach positive qualities to our name. Why not? Isn't everyone else doing that? We want our name to shine. We want our family, friends and community to look at us, and say our name and add, "He or she is somebody special."

Even if we achieve rare fame or glory, our worldly identities excel only for a moment. When that moment is over, our identity becomes ordinary again. Someone else is having the fame and glory. The Masters tell us not to treat this identity as real. No actor believes his character's name is his own real name.

The Masters say we are ignoring our true identity, Nam, which is "the Name of God ... and a name for the creative power of God" (*Treasury of Mystic Terms*). First and deepest of all, they say, we are expressions of the divine current of life. But we would never say to someone else, "I am Nam" or "I am the Lord's Name." That would be

meaningless to anyone but a mystic. Such a statement is so deeply personal and profound, it can only be acknowledged within ourselves.

In comparison, all our other identities are superficial and transient. Our age and social and financial status are always changing. Even our physical description changes with age. At marriage or upon immigration, some of us change our first or last name. When we consider what our worldly name actually refers to, it gets confusing right away. But Nam never changes and is never confusing.

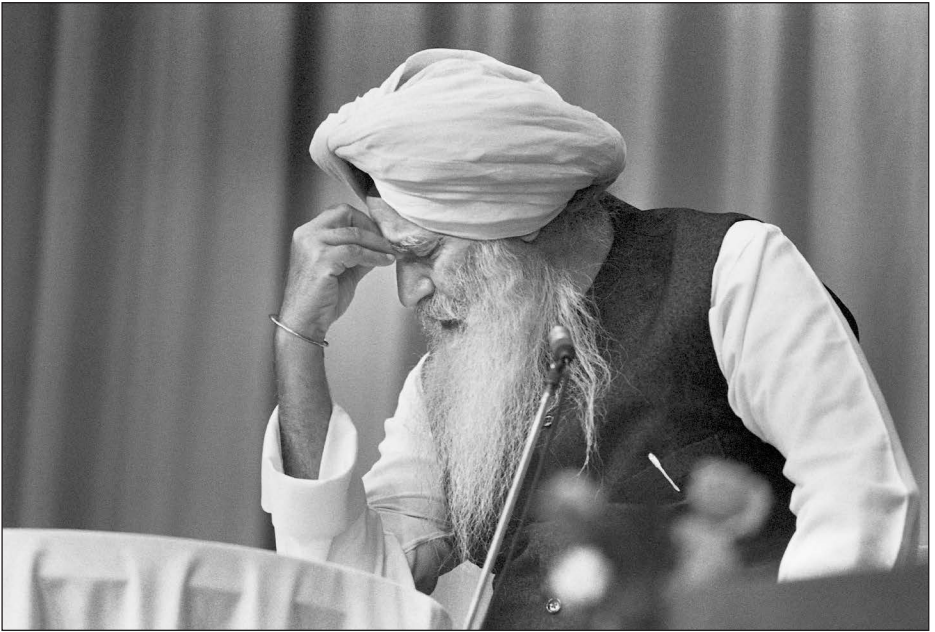
God is one and has no real division. How can that be? How can God be one and we be that one also, and yet at the same time, we feel we are different and separate from God? Kabir provides a clue when he says: “Is there anyone who can tell me of the Lord’s Name (Nam)? ... Only he receives joy and peace who sings of having seen and experienced it.”

If our separation from God is an illusion, and we are one with him, what is our name? To truly know the answer to that question, we need to experience Nam. To have that experience, we meditate. So, in one way, meditation is a search for our real identity.

Nam is permanent and indescribably beautiful, so to invest ourselves completely in worldly identities is foolish. We must become aware of who we really are. If we understand deeply that our true identity is spiritual, we do not get so shaken if someone mocks our body, our job or our community. We don’t get upset if someone maligns our name. We know those identities pertain only to our time in this strange world, and they do not really matter.

Sincere and devoted daily meditation attunes us to the vibration of Nam; and, as we focus our attention in simran and bhajan, we come to experience personally why the Masters remind us that our true identity is Nam.





Attitude Adjustment

When one is reborn in the house of the Master, that is, when one takes shelter with him, it is the disciple's duty to follow the path taught by the Master. The disciple should obey him in word, deed and spirit. To take shelter means to have full confidence in the Master and to be guided by him. But taking shelter in the Master is not easy; it requires that the disciple make some attitude adjustments.

One of those adjustments is that we must stop calculating. As soon as we are initiated, we start having expectations. We get stuck in this effort-and-reward paradigm. We forget all about our initial ideas of submission and the fact that our Master knows what is best for us, and when to give it.

We understand our spiritual maturity is limited. But the question remains: Are we able to judge our spiritual progress? Unfortunately, most of us would not recognize our own spiritual progress if it hit us over the head.

In one Buddhist tradition, there are said to be eight winds. They are gain and loss, praise and ridicule, credit and blame, and suffering and joy. It is said that if you aren't aware of them, they will blow you away like dry leaves in an autumn breeze. For example, when someone praises you, and those compliments taste sweet like candy in your mouth, you are being blown away by the wind of praise.

There is a story that one day in ancient China, a young man thought he had become enlightened. He wrote a poem to his Master about how he was no longer blown about by the eight winds. Then he sent it to his Master, who lived three hundred miles up the Yangtze River. When his Master read the poem, he wrote, "puff puff" on the bottom of the paper and sent it back to the disciple.

Upon receiving the returned poem, the young man saw the words of his Master. The more the young man read those words, the more upset he got. At last he decided to visit his Master. In those days a three-hundred-mile trip up the Yangtze River was a very difficult journey.

As soon as he arrived, the young man went straight to his Master's temple. "Why did you write this?" he asked, bowing. "Doesn't this poem show that I am no longer blown about by the eight winds?"

"You say that you are no longer blown by the eight winds," replied the Master, "but two little puffs blew you all the way up here."

The question is: What winds are blowing us? This story is interesting because it not only highlights the need to stop calculating, it also underscores the importance of another attitude adjustment we must make – the need to stop reacting. The man's reaction, while necessary in order to teach him a lesson, was actually unnecessary on a practical level.

Reacting without understanding the larger picture also often plays into our relationship with our Master.

Once a satsangi was complaining about how she used to be chosen for seva that allowed her to work closely with the Master, but, lately, she had been passed over. She was lamenting that Master no longer loved her. The Masters love is unbounded and unrestricted, in a way that she had never imagined.

In reality, she was and is one in a million, or, put metaphorically, one moth in a million. A moth loves the flame unflinchingly; the flame does not love the moth. A moth is absolutely oblivious to anything other than the flame. A moth does not compare its lot to that of other moths. Master loves our souls, not our egos, his love does not change. Whatever the Master directs us to do is for our good, although at the time it may not appear to us to be proper or beneficial.

Maharaj Sawan Singh speaks to this point when he says in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. V*:

The Master is responsible for his disciple in all matters. The disciple should therefore lovingly carry out the orders of the Master, and not let his own whims interfere with them, even though the Master's orders may sometimes appear a trifle strange at first glance.

As we know, the Lord's will prevails in all circumstances. As Baba Jaimal Singh informs us in *Spiritual Letters*, "Whatever is written on the forehead, that alone will happen." So if whatever is to happen is already written, why react?

Instead, we should make up our minds to be cheerful about our lot. We do seem to have that choice. We should set before ourselves the goal of being cheerful. In fact, this would make our lives much

smoother, for who would not want to be around someone cheerful? Just as a tennis club does not attract golfers, a club of angry people does not attract the cheerful. Every day we must decide which club we want to belong to. It is not difficult to understand this theoretically.

The next step is to practice our meditation so that we can begin living in this way. Maharaj Jagat Singh tells us in *The Science of the Soul*, “He [the disciple] has to reach a stage of equanimity where neither honour should elate him nor dishonour or disgrace depress him.” Soami Ji continues in this vein, when he writes in *Sar Bachan Poetry*:

*Be not overjoyed in moments of happiness,
accept your pains without bitterness.
Do not forget him even for a moment,
in happiness or pain rely only on him for support.
The Master and Shabd – these are your friends.
Hold them in your heart – nothing else matters.*

Through meditation, we can slowly learn how to stop calculating and how to eliminate our short-sighted reactions. By taking these steps towards submission to the Master’s will, perhaps we can adjust our attitudes and be a member of the club of the cheerful.



Encouragement

There is no doubt we are weak and have neither faith nor love, but there is also one hope to sustain us – that he may take pity on us and forgive our sins. We have taken refuge at his holy feet and, deservedly or undeservedly, we are his children.

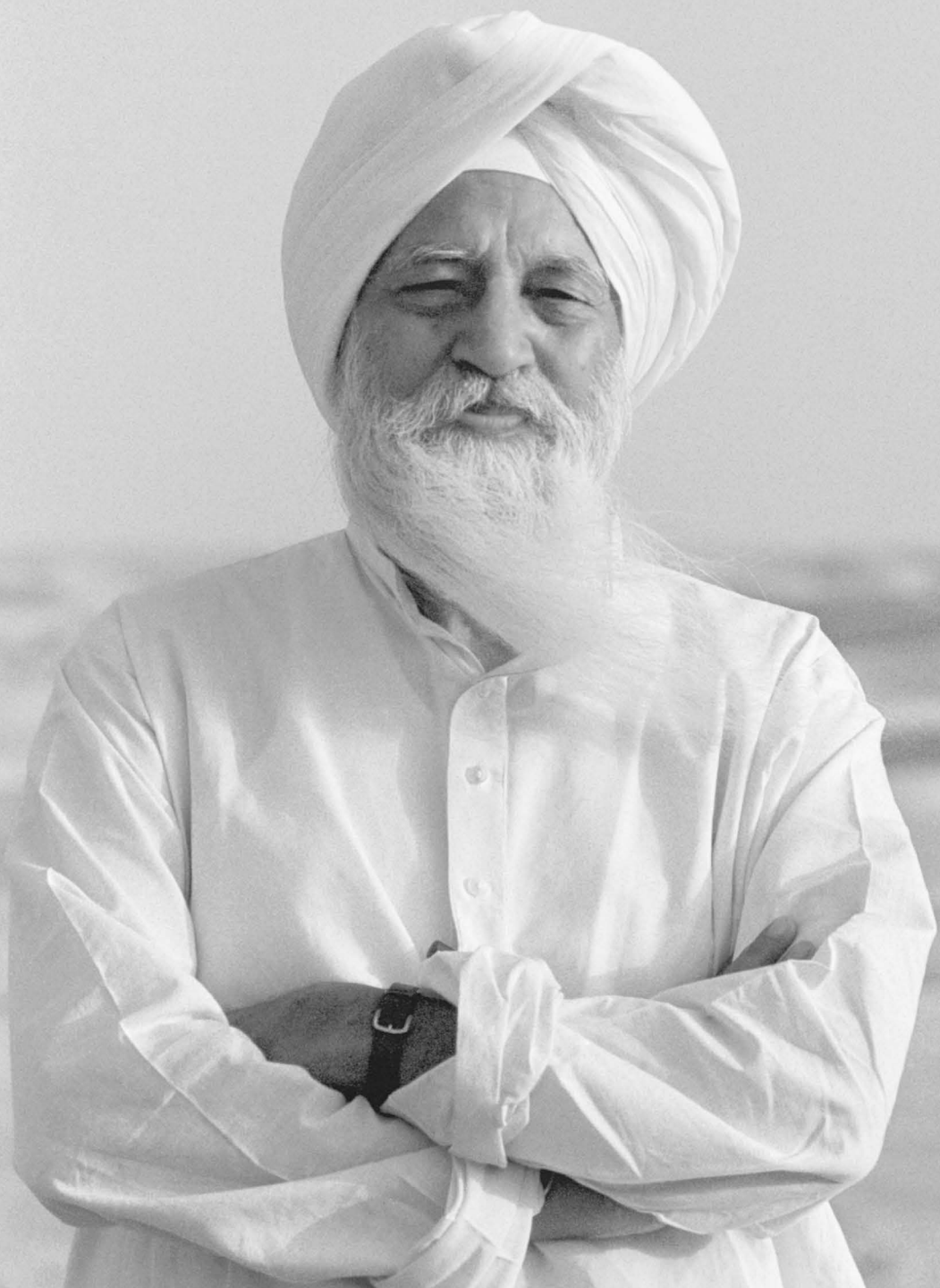
Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

When an overwhelming adversity besets your path, when there is no other help, when foes hotly pursue you, when close relations desert you, when all hopes are dashed and when all avenues are closed, if you still remember God, no harm shall ever touch you.

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

Our Lord, in order to console me, once told me not to be distressed by the fact that the life of the spirit does not continue on an even path. At one time I am fervent, at another I am not. At one moment I am disquieted, a moment later I am at peace. At still another I am tempted. But I must, God reminded me, hope and not fear.

Teresa of Avila, in *Let Nothing Disturb You*



Clear Thinking

*Think about this for a second:
God (being God), having Infinite Knowledge,
Not only knew your every thought and action
Your life would ever experience*

(Even before you were born)

*But He also, being the Divine Creator,
Has etched every moment of your existence
With His own hand*

*With the precision and care
No artist ever could.*

Hafiz, *The Gift*, as rendered by Daniel Ladinsky

First of all, Hafiz asks us to think. We human beings are the top of the creation. We have the power of discrimination; we can distinguish between right and wrong. Being at the top of creation, we have the capacity to go higher and reach our Creator, or we can slip down back to the creation, maybe back to lower species. So Hafiz asks us to think.

What do we do with this precious gift – our capacity to choose? The Masters tell us that we use it to divide; we use it to strengthen our ego; we use it for personal gratification. Instead of expanding, we limit ourselves. Instead of freeing ourselves, we chain ourselves. Instead of thinking clearly, we are confused. Instead of finding answers, we only create more questions.

Hafiz tells us in another poem in the same book: “Through the stairway of existence we have come to God’s Door ... because Love is the soul’s life, Love is simply creation’s greatest joy.”

We have come to God’s door! Aren’t we desperate for love, his love? Love is the only thing worth possessing and so it could be at the root of everything we do, of our every action and our every thought.

We must think clearly about the question of taking refuge in God. Hafiz says that God is all-knowing, so he knows what is bothering us. He knows the grooves on our minds, our problems, our mental blocks, our likes and dislikes. If we want to take refuge in God, then we need to accept cheerfully whatever happens to us in this lifetime, because it is his will.

But the present Master keeps telling us that “God”, “Master”, “divinity” and so on are just concepts. Until we have had experience, they will remain concepts for us. We want desperately to believe in them, but we are far from knowing their reality. We may have intellectual knowledge, but we lack the real understanding which comes from experience. Such understanding comes from within; it is a natural outcome of higher consciousness.

We all know life is not perfect and that we ourselves are not perfect. We all know there are ups and downs in life. Do we have any control over these events? We like to think so; we like to be in the driver’s seat. A good decision to us may mean one that leads to gratification of the senses; a bad decision may mean one that leads to suffering and pain. We may even try to grab hold of pleasures for ourselves at the expense of others.

Let’s go a little deeper into this phenomenon of clear thinking. Maharaj Jagat Singh tells us in *The Science of the Soul*:

*Satsangis should form the habit of ‘thinking’ – clear thinking.
Very few people ‘think’. Why do we lose our temper? Because*

we do not reflect. Why do people fall prey to the attack of lust? Because they do not think. Why does a mother weep at the death of her son? Why do people commit suicide at the loss of property or wealth? Because they do not think. 'Vichar' (clear thinking) is ninety percent 'Abhyas' (spiritual exercise). Clear thinking is a blessing. It can easily be attained by a little practice.

So, according to the Master, whenever we are in turmoil, whenever we make poor choices, it is because we are not thinking clearly. The only solution to this problem is meditation.

Maharaj Charan Singh in *Divine Light* adds:

Nothing is bad in this world. It is our own attachment to the world and its objects that is the cause of trouble. It is just as easy to be happy and smiling as it is to fret and frown. Only a little clear thinking is needed.

This is a wonderful creation in which, the Masters tell us, everything has its beauty, everything has its place. Troubles, pain and problems can protect our spiritual endeavours, just as the thorn protects the rose.

We all have our thorns: slander, unhappy relationships, power struggles, impossible children or parents, sickness, depression, lack of self-esteem or self-acceptance; we may have very deep mental grooves. We all experience desires and pleadings: if only we were rich, or young, or successful, or had another wife or husband. We all want to eliminate our particular thorn, forgetting that another thorn might appear, even bigger and nastier.

There must be something wrong with our clear thinking. We are too focused on the thorn, we have a limited perspective, and we do not

see the global picture. For example, if there are three hundred people in a room there will probably be three hundred different sets of priorities or viewpoints. Most of us act with the best of intentions, wanting to do the right thing, but sometimes we get it wrong because we forget that our viewpoint is distorted due to our own interpretations. We try to behave as good satsangis, even quoting the Master to prove us right, but we may behave differently from the way he asks us to. Maharaj Charan Singh writes in a letter: "I do not doubt your sincerity and good intentions, but such a notion is merely the outcome of confused reasoning instead of clear thinking." Good intentions are no guarantee of clear thinking.

In another letter in *Divine Light* he says:

Doing everything in the Master's Name, implies that we should take our self out of everything. Our ego and selfishness should not control our actions.

When one is perplexed and wonders just which is the right and which is the wrong thing to do, he already has the answer within himself, if he will be quiet and reflect on the matter. We are endowed with a conscience which enables us to determine right from wrong.

Real clarity is achieved when the thoughts settle, when one has actually met the Master within. But in the meantime, let us remember the words of Hafiz: "He has etched every moment of your existence with His own hands." Maybe this will help us to accept our destiny. Hafiz continues:

*Think about this for a moment....
There seems to be a great reward*

For clear thinking:

All existence is a pawn in the Friend's hands.

Look, one gets wings and gifts to the world ...

*When one can surrender the illusion, the crutch,
of Free will.*

Here again Hafiz points out that all is God's doing, so there is no point in feeling guilty for who we are, or for what we may have done in the past. We are all part of this divine play: some are serious and others full of laughter; some intelligent and others not; some strong and others weak; some good and others bad. There is no point in taking sides. The world is what it is, and the results of our actions in the world are what they are. Our Master knows what he is doing, and if we could realize that, we would experience music and light every morning: we would be mad with love.

We have no say in this game. Our Master has made things very easy for us; we cannot help acting even though the results are always in his hands. All existence is a pawn in his hands. Why worry? Is he not our divine Father; is he not divine love?

How can we make these words a reality? Hafiz tells us to let go of the illusion, the crutch of identifying ourselves with our ego, which means living in illusion. If we can just take our little 'self' out of everything, we will find that the whole universe radiates love and everything is beautiful. Thinking clearly helps!

Our spiritual heritage is there for the taking. The more we focus our attention at the eye centre, the more we will intuitively know what is right and what is wrong for our spiritual uplift. We will become more and more sensitive to the needs of our soul until, one day, we will see only him. On that day, we will clearly see this world for the illusion that it is. Then we will clearly see that it was only a dream.

One Day He Will Fulfil Your Heart's Desire

In *Sar Bachan Poetry* we find a poem for every mood, for every spiritual dilemma. Soami Ji Maharaj addresses the frustration of the seeker once he learns the extent of his entrapment in the creation.

*Every moment the fear of death overshadows my heart,
every minute I am tormented by my dread of Kal.
I try my best, O brother,
to raise my soul and mind to the inner sky,
but they do not stay there even for a moment....*

We can take comfort knowing that these are the words of a saint. In this stanza, Soami Ji gives us a clue into the origin of our problem. He reminds us that it is the ego, the 'I-ness', which keeps us entrapped in the body. To raise the soul and mind to the inner sky requires us to subjugate the mind in the service of the soul. It is not enough, along this path to the eye centre, to simply have a strong will and to exhibit discipline, because ours is not only a path of self-improvement – ours is a path of ego-annihilation.

*The Master is always advising me
how to overcome this great hardship,
but my mind and soul are not at all stilled.
What can I do – how can I find my way home?
I pleaded with the Master
and told him that I had not succeeded
in merging with the Shabd.*

Isn't this plea to the Master similar to other ones we have made to him – a lament, followed by admission of failure? We say to the Master, “I know you have taught me the methods of simran and bhajan, of repeating and listening, but they're not working. I'm feeling defeated. Surely there must be another way. Surely you can tell me something that will ease my pain and prevent me from feeling like such a failure.” And in answer to each question the Master gives the same explanation – our sadness is the result of lack of bhajan. It is not the result of our lame approach or because there is a quicker way that we have not yet found. It is simply that changing the direction of the mind requires a lot of effort, a lot of falling on our faces, a lot of practice. So we need more, not less, of it.

*Life is so uncertain, brother,
and I still haven't unraveled its secrets.
What am I to do? No formula has worked for me,
I have now decided to seek refuge in the Master...*

Soami Ji is reminding us that life is truly uncertain. The more we attempt to control our present and future, the clearer it becomes that the direction of the play of our life is not in our hands. We may struggle to do our part, but in the end the arrows of fate land where they will. Our friends and family members are taken from us in surprising ways, usually before we are ready; each war, each economic woe seems untimely for us.

We aren't even aware that the One we seek has been hidden, in fact, within us. At a loss for finding the formula to uncover the hidden One, our tidy view of the world and of ourselves is turned on its head. And so we seek instruction from the Master.

*But my love is so feeble
that I cannot submit myself to him.
Since I can muster neither love nor submission,
what can I hope for now, except death?*

Meeting with the Master, it turns out, is not the end of the struggle. Rather it is only a beginning. As humans, we learn to love by attaching ourselves to the world and the things of the world. When we attempt to transfer that love from the person or object outside of ourselves to the divine within, it doesn't occur automatically. What occurs instead is that we encounter a period of dryness – a time when the world has no hold on us and yet our attention is not firmly attached within. We live for a time feeling like desert nomads – adrift, lost, and empty – and death appears to be the portal through which we will be released.

*The Master then uttered his words of wisdom:
Have patience, O thoughtless one, why seek death?
Repeat the name incessantly with your mind
and hold the form of the Master in your heart....*

To the body, death is the ultimate, the end of the interminable imprisonment of the world. So we think that death must magically bring about reunion with the Father. Yet for us who seek release from the cycle of birth and rebirth, our spiritual work and achievement must occur while we are within the human body. Death will not magically confer upon us the relationship with the Beloved that we could not attain during our lifetime. So Soami Ji turns the disciple back within himself and assures him that the method of uninterrupted repetition at the eye centre and dhyān of the Master will be effective. He implies when he says, “O thoughtless one, why seek death?” that

death may not be the solution to the disciple's problem. Rather, the real problem is one of consciousness – where the attention is focused.

*If you do this punctually every day,
the evil tendencies of your mind will be quelled.
If you control the monster of the mind
using the proper technique,
you will get attuned to the melody of Shabd....*

Here Soami Ji reminds us that the meditation practice requires discipline, regularity and punctuality. We can't wait for inspiration, for our lives to be in order or for achievement of material success. We have to begin as soon as our mind has been satisfied that this is the path for us, and we have to stick with it even on those days when the mind resists. Soami Ji calls the mind a monster – it really is the only monster that prevents us from becoming attuned to the melody of Shabd.

*Carry on this practice daily, without a break;
attend the Master's satsang and keep his company.*

The company and satsang of saints keeps us away from the dross of the world, in the same way that a stone lying in water is protected against the heat of the sun. But if we carry out the discipline of meditation regularly and punctually and attach our consciousness to the life force descending from the home of the Lord, then we obtain real, demonstrable benefit. To be able to accomplish this, requires constantly supervising the mind and watching its movements. We can no longer afford the luxury of allowing the mind freedom to run out after fleeting and short-lived pleasures.

*Your attachment to the world will disappear
and you will begin to enjoy inner communion.
Be detached and give up indulgence in passion –
your soul will then rest in the inner sky.
Every moment you will enjoy the nectar of Shabd
and live forever in the Lord's palace....*

One of the illusions that we harbour is that contentment lies just beyond the satisfaction of the next one or two desires. But Soami Ji and the saints before and after him say that our desires are endless. The mind is literally an incubator for growth of desire. The way of peace and freedom of the saints lies in giving up indulgence in passion and allowing the soul to ascend and find rest in the inner sky. Since our desires are rooted in attachment to the world, the saints play upon our expectations for something more, something greater than what we see. They propose to us a choice that can make a difference in both this world and the world beyond. If we can cut this thread, we can begin, as Soami Ji says, to enjoy inner communion. And how do the saints teach us to cut that thread? Master says that the thread of desire is cut by attachment to Nam, the Shabd, the Sound. The transition from the manufacture of desire to attachment to Nam is by way of simran, the repetition of names at the eye centre.

The pay-off for this relatively brief period of holding the mind at bay is that the mind begins to detach from the outer world. We will at last enjoy this inner rest, this “inner communion”. If we can remain patient for a time, walking along the razor’s edge between the inner and the outer, we are promised that the soul will find rest and peace.

In the final lines of this poem, Soami Ji reveals the secret to success on the path. The desire that brought us to this point, he reminds us, will require faith and trust in a power beyond the self to be sustained over time. He says:

*Put your faith in the Lord's will –
not in your labour, not in your effort.
Submit yourself to Radha Soami now,
one day he will fulfil your heart's desire.*

So this road home is traversed via faith in the will of the Lord. Soami Ji reminds us here that we must place our faith in the Lord's will, not in our own labour or our own effort. He calls upon us to relinquish our illusion of control over our destiny and to submit to our fate – to become the silent observers of our destiny. In this phase of our spiritual growth we suspend all doubt and rely on faith. If the path is true, then our suspension of doubt is temporary because our ultimate goal is direct perception of the truth.

Our lives from now until that day when he “fulfils our heart's desire” consist simply of peeling back each layer of maya or illusion so there no longer exists a barrier between the soul and its source.



God's Classroom

When we ask for initiation, some part of us recognizes that only the Master's company will ultimately satisfy us. Only the kind of love, peace, joy and compassion that radiates from his presence will be enough for us.

And so, we seek initiation. We long to meditate. We want to be with the Master. We want to go within, where we can truly meet him and stay in his company forever.

Our desire can be understood using this analogy. We have signed up for the most important class at the university, taught by the finest teacher on the faculty. We have anticipated taking this course our whole lives. We have waited in long lines to register for this class. We consider ourselves to be the luckiest of the luckiest to have been accepted into this course in meditation. But sometimes, even though we are initiated, our actions don't reflect our original enthusiasm.

Picture the classroom: there are ten students, all in the front row. The master teacher is standing before them, giving them their assignments, explaining the subject, telling them what they are there to learn. His clarity is breathtaking.

Now look at the ten students, each of whom begged to be in this class.

Two are fast asleep, snoring, their heads back, their mouths open; one is drooling a little. (We see these students in pairs because, as each one looks at the other, they are able to say, "See! I am not the only one.")

Two are sending e-mails on their handheld computers. They are very busy. They are making lists of what they plan to do later that day. They are checking the weather, their social network page, and the current, breaking news.

Two have their heads down on the desk. They are crying softly. They believe that they are too weak to lift up their heads and pay attention to the teacher. Their burdens and misfortunes are so great that they do not think that they have the strength or fortitude to sit upright in this class.

Then we observe the two rebels. The rebels say to their teacher what a three-year old might say to his parents, “You are not the boss of me!” They add, “I’ll do what I want to do, not what you tell me to do! You can say that I have to work hard at meditation, but I would prefer to rely on grace; so I won’t be putting in much effort in this course.”

The last two students are the talkers, or as they like to refer to themselves, the intellectuals. They initially listen quite attentively to the instructions of the teacher. But rather than *do* the assignment that he has asked them to complete, they would rather discuss the assignment, analyze the assignment, compare this assignment to other classes they have taken. The talkers are especially fond of their concepts, abstractions and thoughtful expositions. But when it comes to actually doing the assignment – ceaseless simran at the eye centre – they don’t put in the same effort.

Some of us may have played all five of these types of student at some time. Which one has gotten us into the most trouble: falling asleep, getting lost in the activities of the world, believing that we are inherently weak or defective, fighting with the Master instead of our mind, or wanting to limit our involvement in the path by just talking and thinking about it rather than doing the work? These are all attempts to avoid meditation.

Fortunately, a loving and infinitely patient teacher has initiated us. He knows that we *can* do the work, that we *must* do the work, and that we *will* do the work. Just as we cannot avoid the pull of gravity, or the rotation of the earth, neither can we avoid God’s love and compassion.

The wayward mind will be brought to the eye centre. He is making us into students worthy of the gifts he has to bestow.

Under the influence of the master teacher, some new learning occurs. The hard work has to begin in every disciple, but we have different learning styles. Discipleship can look quite different in different initiates. Some of the positive learning styles might include the following:

The Enthusiastic Learners: They have properly understood that this work of meditation is the highest priority. Every activity of the day takes into account its effect on meditation. The enthusiastic learners grasp that they are either turning in the direction of the Master or in the direction away from the Master and toward the ephemeral world. They understand that they are either doing the simran given to them by their teacher or doing the simran of the mind. The enthusiastic learners greet every moment as another priceless opportunity to serve the Master.

The Pluggers: They show up. They sit down to meditate. They might not be achieving any concentration in meditation or any apparent spiritual progress, but they are hoping that simply by persevering, one day at a time, they will get through. They are counting heavily on the mercy of the Master to allow them to complete the course. They have no confidence in their own meagre efforts. Nevertheless, they keep plugging away.

The Grateful Ones: They are not only working hard at meditation and the Sant Mat way of life, but they are also developing the practice of gratitude. They are thankful for being an initiate and grateful for being given the circumstances for meditation, including food, shelter, seva and satsang. They are grateful for every round of simran and for every time the Master allows them to remember his presence and his promise to them. They are conscious and aware that every time they

meditate it is a miracle. They acknowledge the Giver. They are not only grateful when things in their lives appear to be going smoothly and pleasantly, but also grateful when things are complicated and stressful. The grateful ones are trying to remember that, when life is challenging, difficult and upsetting, they are also being given what is essential for their spiritual progress. This cultivation of gratitude has everything to do with intent. As Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*, “We should ask [God] to give us a heart which is full of gratitude.”

The Dependent Ones: These disciples are learning to lean on their Master, to depend on him for everything. They turn to their teacher when they discover that they have no strength of their own. They are cultivating faith and trust that the Master knows what he is doing. They believe that they have been given everything they need to do the work of meditation. There is less worry in the eyes of these disciples. They know that even if they get lost, the Master will find them. Even when they fail to be the disciple they want to be, the Master will forgive them. Even when they don't have a clue as to how the future will unfold, the Master has them firmly in his grip.

The Let-Goers: They are attempting to surrender and cultivate unconditional obedience. The Great Master describes this option in *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. I*:

Spiritual wealth may be accumulated in two ways. First, by toiling hard at meditation; second, by a complete and unconditional surrender to the Master. The first is the easier way. It is not hard to lie awake at night, to limit oneself to frugal repasts and to work ceaselessly at one's salvation. The second method is, however, hard to practise, though it is much more efficacious. If the disciple lies in absolute surrender at the feet of

his Master, he has really completed the course of meditation. It means that he has given up the ego.

Philip Simmons, in his book *Learning to Fall*, gives a powerful description of what giving up of the ego looks like and feels like. The author, who was dying of Lou Gerig's disease (ALS) when he wrote this book, observed: "Nothing that happens to us is foreign." Even in the face of a terrible and fatal illness, Simmons knew that everything that transpires in our life is a gift from God. The great reality is always at work on us. He wrote that life is an endless opportunity to let go.

We let go of ambition, of pride, of ego. We let go of relationships, of perfect health, of loved ones who go before us to their own deaths. We let go of insisting that the world be a certain way. Letting go of these things can seem to be the failure of every design, the loss of every cherished hope....

The author concludes that we want to:

Return to where we began, to follow love to its source, to rest in that ground of our being that has no beginning and no ending.

It is a beautiful invitation: to let go of what is ultimately a prison and a delusion; to let go of a mind that tortures us; to let go of the habits of a mind that argues with reality and always loses. We are letting go of our attempts to be in control when we clearly are not in control. We are learning to let go of this small, restrictive, blind and deaf self, and to fall into God's embrace. Perhaps meditation allows us to simply, slowly, become capable of receiving the love that the Master wants to give to us.

The Catholic theologian Henri Nowen is quoted in *The Haunt of Grace* that, “the most difficult thing of all is to be loved.” The book’s author, Ted Loder, then clarifies:

Love is always a gift. It’s nothing we earn, nothing we deserve, nothing we can force, control, win.... The only way to have it, is to accept it.

In this spiritual classroom, graduation is guaranteed. Our teacher will show us how to be good students, to do the required work, and to make our way back to our source. As Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. I*:

In the end, the disciple reaches the abode of the Lord and attains a very high spiritual status – all because of the Master’s grace. The soul, after having been entangled in the labyrinth of the physical universe for millions of years, is ultimately liberated and reaches home. Every hair on the disciple’s body then blesses [praises] the Satguru who showered such wonderful treasures on him.





Stillness

Still your inner vision

*and fix your attention on the door of the inner eye
that opens to the path leading within.*

*Break through the inner barrier, defeat Kal's plans,
liquidate your karmas and soar to higher regions.*

*Radha Soami says this for you to hear, friend,
so that you can tread this path with understanding.*

Soami Ji, Sar Bachan Poetry

So many times we have heard the Master speak about stillness. Stillness is not only of the mind but also of the body. The image that comes to mind is that of a lake of water where, if there is wind or if we are wading in the water, it becomes impossible to see the clear reflection of the trees, the clouds and the sky on the lake. The Master emphasizes the need for stillness to occur before we are able to fix our attention on the door of the inner eye. Physical stillness is a prerequisite to our mental stillness, and both are necessary to our treading this path and to our meditation.

Meditation is an activity of both mind and body, so it is important to think about attaining a posture that we can be comfortable in and which supports the process of meditation. Actually, stillness of the body helps the stillness of the mind. By assuming an upright posture in meditation, we inspire alertness in the mind. Realizing that we will react to any physical discomfort, the mind will convince us that we need to move. But we need to put in our best effort not to move because after a while the mind will give in. Even slight movements of the body cause 'ripples' or movements in the mind. Stillness of the body will increase the likelihood that the mind will become still and concentration will occur.

Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*, says:

Concentration is stilling your mind at the eye centre. The real concentration is to be here at the eye centre because this is the seat of the soul and mind knotted together. From here our consciousness spreads into the whole world through the nine apertures. To withdraw the attention to the eye centre, to still the mind, that is concentration.... Be still, still your mind and be with God. Only then can we be with the Father.

The stillness that brings about concentration enables us to become absolutely unconscious of our body and to become conscious of the Master and the Shabd within. It is a great thing. Without the stillness within, the soul will not be able to rise up to the Father. Maharaj Charan Singh is quoted in the same volume of *Spiritual Perspectives*: “I’m saying that the body will be at peace when the soul is able to withdraw from it and be one with the spirit.”

Our meditation is a gradual realization. We are uncovering something that is already within us. We must lift our consciousness to the level where we can see the Master within – the Radiant Form of the Master – who will not leave us until he has guided us home. And stilling both mind and body is a beginning.

Silently put up with your defeat, my heart, and think it your good fortune to sit perfectly still where you are placed.

These my lamps are blown out at every little puff of wind, and trying to light them I forget all else again and again.

But I shall be wise this time and wait in the dark, spreading my mat on the floor; and whenever it is thy pleasure, my lord, come silently and take thy seat here.

Rabindranath Tagore, as quoted in S.K. Paul,
The Complete Poems of Rabindranath Tagore’s Gitanjali



Acts of Grace and Mercy

In Sant Mat literature, we read about God's grace and mercy and his manifestation in human form, the living Master. Grace means unmerited favour, free or undeserved kindness shown by him, regardless of what we have or have not done. Mercy means forgiveness or compassion given to us by him for something we have done. We need grace because we cannot achieve anything worldly or spiritually on our own due to our human limitations. We also need mercy because we frequently indulge in wrong actions because of our vices, desires and ego. Grace and mercy are so intertwined that in Punjabi one word is used for both of them combined: *dayaa-mehar*. It is within the will or discretion of the Lord if he gives this to us or not.

We often pray for grace and mercy for both worldly and spiritual gains. There is nothing unusual about this; praying is our privilege. However, our experience shows that our prayers are not always answered in a way that we expect, and consequently, at times our faith can be shaken. In *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

God's grace is always there, but brother, we have to become receptive to his grace.... There is no limit to his grace, which is everywhere, but we have to be receptive.

We can be receptive to grace and mercy only if we learn to recognize them, and this can happen when the signs of grace and mercy are comprehensible to the human intellect. Maharaj Sawan Singh, in *Spiritual Gems*, has simplified this issue and enumerated four signs to guide us:

The number one sign of his being merciful to anyone is that he creates in him dissatisfaction with the worldly routine and a longing to seek the truth. The second sign is that he brings him in touch with a Master. The third sign is that the Master imparts to him the secret of the sound current. The fourth sign is that the initiate works diligently and faithfully on the sound current and starts his spiritual journey. In the presence of these signs, where is the room for feeling self-disgusted?

In these signs of grace and mercy, there is no mention of direct worldly gains. So we shall have to work diligently and faithfully on the sound current and start our spiritual journey.

These four signs describe four stages of our spiritual development. In the first stage, Master starts detaching us from this world by making us realize its true nature. He applies different methods for each of us. We cannot know when this process starts, but it definitely starts much earlier than we are aware. Maharaj Charan Singh in *Quest for Light* clarifies:

Those who are destined to come to the path are guided by the Master from the very beginning. Slowly and slowly they are drawn towards the teachings without their being aware of it. All the time the strings are in the hands of the Master who is bringing them nearer and nearer to their initiation.

To those destined to come to the path of Sant Mat, dissatisfaction with their worldly routine along with a longing for the truth is created within. This period of dissatisfaction is bestowed on us as an act of grace and mercy. We realize that our previous knowledge about spirituality was superficial, based merely on reading, rituals,

ceremonies and formalities – at times even on hypocrisy, sectarianism and animosity.

The second stage that the Great Master outlines for us is coming into the presence of a living Master. But this does not happen automatically to all people longing for truth. It is again an act of grace and mercy to be brought into the company of a living Master.

While we learn about the principles of Sant Mat through reading books, attending satsang and having our questions answered, the main emphasis is on action and practice of meditation. Our intellect is fully satisfied if the teachings stand up to the scrutiny of reason, common sense and sound judgment. We learn about the truth that forms the basis or essence of all religions. We learn about the will of the Lord and the acts of grace or mercy that he bestows upon us. We learn about the law of karma and how that law governs the lives of all creatures on earth. We learn that the principles of Sant Mat pertain both to our spiritual as well as to our worldly life; they teach us to live peacefully, gracefully, boldly and with dignity. We learn that Sant Mat has no dress code, sacred book, sacred days, sacred buildings or paid clergy.

In the third stage, the Master initiates the seeker and tells him the correct method of meditation and requires that he abstain completely from taking meat, fish or eggs of any kind; give up the use of alcohol and mind-altering drugs; develop a sound moral personality; and give full-time daily to meditation.

The Master, however, doesn't make the elimination of our vices – namely, lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego – preconditions for initiation. He adopts a practical approach, knowing that we cannot suddenly do this on our own. He has confidence in us that we will give all these up in due course while doing our meditation. Adopting us as his disciples, as we are, is another act of grace and mercy.

The importance of initiation is discussed in *Treasure Beyond Measure*:

It is the most significant event in the history of a soul since it left the Lord at the time of creation. The moment of initiation is destined, and the Masters know exactly when that moment will come.

It is only at this final stage, that of initiation, that the Master instructs the disciple to make an effort by attending to meditation daily and faithfully, while he himself showers his grace and mercy upon us for that effort. To start with, he does not bind us rigorously with the discipline of meditation. He asks us to select a time of sitting that is suitable to us and to remain punctual about this time.

Again the Master's grace and mercy are manifest when he tells the disciple that he should not worry about the mind even if it does not sit still. He sees our efforts. He is untiring in reminding us that the Master is standing by our side, that he has taken upon himself the responsibility of ensuring that we reach our goal, that there are no failures on the path of the Masters, and that every minute of meditation counts.

In our over-obsession with the higher objectives of spirituality, we don't recognize, and hence tend to undervalue, the grace and mercy being bestowed upon us always, everywhere and without limit. Having recognized the constant presence of his grace, our duty is to become receptive. How? Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*, tells us:

We have to be receptive to that grace, and by receptive I mean that we have to withdraw our consciousness to that point where his grace is coming day and night.



Loneliness

We are born alone and leave this world alone. None go with us. Even this body has to be left behind. It is the Master and the sound current that keep us company at death and after.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

How do we deal with the loneliness that Great Master is referring to in this quote?

Everyone, whether single or married, satsangi or non satsangi, experiences loneliness. Whether we live alone or with others, it is natural to feel lonely at times.

Master tells us that loneliness is natural because it is an expression of our soul's longing to meet the Lord. As satsangis, we feel a deep void as the world loses its charm, especially if, at the same time, we cannot be with our Master on the inside or the outside. This feeling of emptiness and disenchantment has great value if properly understood and acted upon.

In *Divine Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh explains, "It is natural for a satsangi to seek loneliness, as his plane of action is within." Our plane is within because we are seeking eventual liberation from this world. Therefore, we meditate and try to go within and get out of this worldly level of consciousness.

The feeling of loneliness provides us with an excellent opportunity to reflect upon the realities of life and to think more clearly. We realize that no one belongs to us and Master is our only eternal friend. We see that everyone is involved with their own struggles. We realize that we do not belong to this world and that our true home is not

here. Loneliness provides us with the opportunity to get our priorities straight and to discriminate between the real and the unreal.

Loneliness can be a curse or a blessing depending on how we deal with it. Because of loneliness, people become workaholics, alcoholics and playaholics, to name just a few addictions. Some people attempt to escape the pain of loneliness by accumulating and spending large sums of money, by travelling all over the world, or by indulging in various sense pleasures. But all of these outer activities fail to fill the void and the feeling of emptiness deep inside. Even if we attain fame, fortune, and all that money can buy, we will still feel as if something is missing. Only when we become one with our Master and Lord will we feel fulfilled.

So [loneliness] is the Lord's way of pulling us towards him. If we didn't feel that feeling of loneliness within ourselves, then perhaps nobody would think about the Father. If these outside faces and objects could hold our attention and make us happy permanently, forever, nobody would think about the Father. We react back, we rebound back from all this, and then we turn to the Father to seek that bliss and peace and happiness within.

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

Loneliness can be a blessing if *we allow* it to drive us within and bring us closer to our beloved Master. Loneliness drives some people to destruction and others to sainthood. We must choose how we will handle it.

Although the time for reflection and self-analysis is beneficial, it can be overdone. For example, it is valuable to become aware of our weaknesses, but it is detrimental to dwell on them to a great extent. It is much better to dwell on Master's merciful and forgiving nature.

In response to a question about surviving in the swirl of daily living, Maharaj Charan Singh replies:

We have to do both things. We have to live in the world, but we have to meditate also. We have to keep the balance, because a certain load of karma can be cleared only by facing life, not just by attending to meditation. When we become too absorbed in meditation, sometimes the master withdraws the grace so that we work in the world also. You are not to leave your worldly work. Rather you may even be pushed to the world, to face the world.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

We need to strike a balance between meaningful relationships with others and time alone for our spiritual development. We need friends, and we also need time for meditation and reflection. This balance will help us in dealing with loneliness.

A satsangi once said that all of our pain is the result of our not being filled with the Master. This is a profound and beautiful statement. When Master permeates our consciousness, we realize we are not alone. A satsangi is never alone! It is for us, however, through our meditation and Master's grace to become receptive to his overflowing and ever present love.

Please give up all depression and turn to the Lord for help and solace. All peace, bliss and happiness flow from bhajan and simran. This is the only cure for the feeling of loneliness.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*



Ninefold Devotion

The following allegory, “Ninefold Devotion,” is about the relationship between the soul and the Lord, and the type of devotion that leads to liberation. It is Goswami Tulsidas’s version of the great Indian epic *Ramayan*.

“How can I offer my prayer to you?” This is the question that a young woman named Shabari asks on behalf of all of us as she stands before Ram, an incarnation of the Lord, as she gazes at him, filled with love and awe. She asks this question for those of us who want to please the One. “How can I, in this pitiful human state, possibly be capable of loving and offering my devotion to you?”

Shabari, this story tells us, ran away from her father’s house the night before she was to be married, when she saw all of the animals that were to be slaughtered in celebration of her wedding day. She ran to a hermitage, but she was met with opposition from the establishment. She was not offered shelter or allowed to do seva. Shabari had at least three strikes against her: she was poor, of low caste, and a woman. So, she lived in a small mud hut nearby and, under the cover of night, she went into the forest and cleaned the path leading to a nearby ashram. She collected the pebbles, stones, briars and thorns that might harm the Lord’s feet should he walk on those trails. She did anonymous seva. She was compelled to serve; she could not help herself.

Much earlier, on his deathbed, Shabari’s Guru told her that one day the Lord would visit her home.

While in exile, Ram used the opportunity to visit the hermitages of sages and devotees. During the course of one of these visits, he indeed did visit Shabari. Even though her Guru had told her to expect

Ram's visit, Shabari was still overwhelmed to see him at her mud hut. Goswami Tulsidas tells this tale:

*Shabari stood with folded hands before Ram
And, as she gazed upon the Lord,
her love welled up even more.
“How can I offer my prayer to you?
I belong to the lowest caste and I am of dullest intellect.
Among the lowest of the low,
I am the most lowly one, a woman;
And even among women, I am the most dull-headed,
O Destroyer of sins.”
Ram said, “Listen to my words, O good lady,
I recognize no relationship except that of devotion.
One’s caste, community, lineage, piety, reputation,
Wealth, power, strength of kinsmen, skill
and shrewdness are of no avail.
A person lacking in devotion vainly displays glamour,
Like a cloud which merely appears
but does not produce rain.”*

Ram tells her that the Lord does not discriminate; he sees us only as soul. He knows that we can walk on this spiritual path, for we have the capability and the capacity, and he wants our action. He tells Shabari that people without devotion are all talk and no action. Devotion, or bhakti, is our practice. It is something we do. Tulsidas then explains the nine steps of devotion:

*Now I explain to you the ninefold devotion.
Listen attentively and preserve it well in your mind.*

*The first step in devotion is the company of Saints,
And the second is fondness for spiritual discourses
relating to me.*

Finding a saint, guru or teacher who knows the subject and speaks our language is the foundation of our spiritual devotion. We need someone who has experienced Truth – a realized soul who can relate to us on a human level, knows our pain, and has experienced what we are experiencing. The saints’ writings, languages, and literary devices may be different due to the circumstances of the time, but the message is the same. We can only realize the one God through his grace.

The indescribable Guru is the first and most essential ingredient. Satsang – being in the company of the Master or listening to discourses – is the second step. Goswami Tulsidas doesn’t say that we just need to hear what the Guru has to say; he says that we must develop a *fondness* for and begin to incorporate the message of the Guru into our life. Master has repeatedly referred to satsang as our life-support system. Goswami Tulsidas explains how important satsang is as he continues:

*In one side of the scale, my friend,
Put all the joys of heaven
and the happiness of liberation;
But all of them combined together
Will be outweighed by a moment’s bliss of satsang.*

Here he is speaking of satsang that enables us to hear the “true glory of God, removes all delusions, reveals true knowledge, strengthens devotion to God and leads to God-realization”. Saints remind us that

the purpose of our life is to remember God, to realize God. They tell us that God is within and, if we can be still, if we can create a quiet atmosphere, he appears to us. Our Master talks often about the small shift in realization that must occur within. We are already there, so we must simply shift our awareness. Satsang helps us, and so does seva:

*Selfless service to the lotus feet of the Guru
Is the third step in devotion,
And the fourth consists in singing my glory
with a sincere heart.*

Seva, or selfless service, is a notion common to many religions and philosophies. We can do seva with our body, mind, wealth and, best of all, as the Master has said, by devoting time to meditation. Seva isn't something to be proud of; it's just something one does out of love and devotion for the Master. Our Master has said that bringing an attitude of seva to everything we do is as important as the seva itself. Seva is not about getting the work done; it is about how well we get along with one another. So our worldly work can be seva, if done with the right attitude.

Seva can be a form of devotion, as Goswami Tulsidas tells us. And the outer seva – working with our body or mind for the benefit of others – can also develop the humility that we can bring to our meditation, so that we can sit in meditation with the right attitude and sincere heart, which is the fourth form of devotion.

*The repetition of the holy names
with unwavering faith in me,
Followed by listening to the inner Sound [bhajan],
is the fifth step, as the Vedas reveal.*

Meditate with an honest heart. Have the attitude that this is what we need to do – for ourself and for our Master – because he has asked us to do it. Meditation is the core of our practice.

Shabari had a positive attitude, a sincere heart, and was driven by a strong sense of purpose – she had her objective in mind and did not waver. One of the messages we hear repeatedly is: don't give up.

Are we approaching our meditation as if it's a negotiation? Do we do it out of duty because we are afraid of not doing it? Or do we understand its value and approach him with a grateful heart? How do we devote ourselves to the Lord? In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh describes the benefits and transformative nature of meditation:

Through meditation we fulfil the very purpose of human life. Meditation is the only worship that pleases the Father... We build and grow the love and devotion which he gives us to carry us speedily towards our goal. So attending to meditation is submitting to the Will of the Father; it is being obedient to our Lord and Master. It is through meditation ... that we develop an intense longing to return to our Source.... We turn from the world, and with the same intensity that we once ran towards it, we now run towards the Father. We experience that bliss and joy of real love and real devotion, as we ultimately merge with our Master to be transformed from the drop into the Divine Ocean itself.

Automatically, meditation will help us control the mind, cultivate virtues, become good human beings, take care of our responsibilities, and follow the instructions of our Master, which Goswami Tulsidas says is the sixth step:

*And the sixth consists of self-control, chastity,
abstinence from manifold rituals,
And in ever pursuing the course of conduct
prescribed by the Saints.
In the seventh, one sees me equally present
everywhere in the world,
And reckons the Saint as even greater than myself.*

The ability to see God in everyone and everywhere in the world; to see God in every particle and being; to see the unity of creation, to understand who the Guru *really* is, becomes a gift of our meditation. If one sees God in everyone and everything, how can one see faults? One knows that all is as it should be.

*In the eighth, one is contented with whatever he gets,
And never sees faults in others, even in dreams.*

Isn't contentment the ultimate in faith and surrender? Happiness has been described as wanting what you have. How many of us are fault-finders, fault-seekers? The mind finds faults, loopholes, rationalizations, and justifications. "Even in dreams", Goswami Tulsidas says, we "will never see faults in others". Our subconscious mind will also be rid of these mental habits that plague us.

*In the ninth, one lives with a guileless simplicity towards all,
Depending at heart only on me,
without any elation or depression whatsoever.*

The ninth step of devotion is understanding that the Guru has our best interest at heart. Our Master has said that it is only when

we have experience and attend to our meditation that we can create and maintain balance in our lives. As we meditate more, balance is a natural outcome, and we learn to live in the will of the Lord. Possessing even one of these elements of devotion makes the devotee dear to the Lord. Goswami Tulsidas then says to Shabari:

*Whoever possesses any one of these
nine elements of devotion,
Regardless of being man or woman, rational or irrational,
Is most dear to me, O good lady.
In you, of course, devotion in all respects
is deeply ingrained.
Hence the blessed state which is hard for the yogis to attain
Is within your easy reach today.*

Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Discourses, Vol. I*, tells us:

Only the Satguru is deserving of our love. Let us give it to him unstintingly and in full measure.... When we win his favour, he merges us in him; the drop joins its source and becomes the ocean. There is then an end to our wanderings, and the pangs of separation are ended in the embrace of our beloved Lord.

And once devotion is ingrained in us, as it is in Shabari, we can develop stillness and silence, and in that space the Satguru reveals himself to us. In seeing his Radiant Form we get something rare, as Goswami Tulsidas tells us:

*The most incomparable fruit of having a sight of me
Is that the soul is led to realize her own true nature.*

The result of the incredible experience of seeing the true Master, the inner Master, is recognizing who we really are. We then understand our true essence. Goswami Tulsidas is describing inner darshan. That inner darshan is a gift; it is the fruit of our labour of love; and we can express our gratitude through our meditation. Goswami Tulsidas tells us what all saints have said: find a Satguru; do as instructed; and you will know your true self.

The Lord will visit our inner home one day. Our Master has told us this. Are we ready? Have we made the necessary preparations? Have we cleaned our hearts well?

We need to climb the figurative stairway within. Then, he will open the tenth door – the gateway to salvation, the door to liberation. That takes action. That takes effort. We must meditate. There is no other way.



Book Review

Peace Is Every Step

By Thich Nhat Hanh

PUBLISHER: New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

ISBN: 0-553-35139-7

In *Peace Is Every Step*, Thich Nhat Hanh offers practical instructions for attaining peace within oneself and explains how others also will benefit from that inner peace. The peace within one person, he tells us, can affect those around him or her, indeed the whole world. As the Dalai Lama says in the Foreword, “Although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way.” He aptly describes this book as a “guidebook for a journey in exactly this direction.”

Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the best-known and most beloved Zen masters alive today. Born in 1926 in Vietnam, he became a Buddhist monk at the age of 16. During the war in Vietnam, he led one of the great nonviolent peace movements of the twentieth century based on the principles espoused by Gandhi. He and his fellow monks came out of the meditation hall to practice what he calls “engaged Buddhism”. He writes, “During the war, we could not just sit in the meditation hall. We had to practice mindfulness everywhere, especially where the worst suffering was going on.” Alleviating suffering – rebuilding bombed villages, setting up medical centres and schools – became an integral part of this “engaged Buddhism”. He also travelled to the United States to urge an end to the war. However, when he pleaded for reconciliation between the governments of North and South Vietnam to end the suffering of its people, he was banned by both governments from returning to his homeland. Living in exile in France, he has taught Buddhist meditation and the principles of mindfulness, nonduality and compassion to people of many different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Peace Is Every Step is both practical and profound. Nhat Hanh's explanations are lucid, and his language is so simple that much of the book could easily be understood by a child. He expresses the central message of the book in the opening chapter: "Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it." He describes his book as "an invitation to come back to the present moment and find peace and joy, offering some of my experiences and a number of techniques that may be of help."

Nhat Hanh describes several techniques for practicing mindfulness, which might be defined as being aware in the present moment. His techniques are simple, such as breathing deeply, relaxing and being conscious of the in-breath and the out-breath. He often calls this kind of mindfulness practice "coming back to yourself". Too often we are divided, our bodies doing one thing and our minds somewhere else, thinking of the past, future, or of something else. As he puts it, "Our appointment with life is in the present moment." And he suggests that whenever we are mindful in the present moment, automatically peace is there. Joy comes naturally, and with it a profound appreciation of all that is beautiful in that moment. "The foundation of happiness is mindfulness. The basic condition for being happy is our consciousness of being happy. If we are not aware that we are happy, we are not really happy.... There are so many things that are enjoyable, but when we don't practice mindfulness, we don't appreciate them."

When we rush through an activity, thinking of getting to what's next, we miss life itself. Even when doing a mundane activity like washing dishes, he says, "If I hurry in order to eat dessert sooner, the time of washing dishes will be unpleasant and not worth living. That would be a pity, for each minute, each second of life is a miracle. The dishes themselves and the fact that I am here washing them are miracles!" Moreover, he says that even the dessert will not be fully enjoyed because the mind will be in the habit of racing ahead to what's next. Most of us walk along from one thing to the next, our minds full of thoughts, plans, worries and regrets. "When we walk like that, we print anxiety and sorrow on the Earth. We have to walk in a way that we only print peace

and serenity on the Earth. We can all do this, provided that we want it very much. Any child can do it.”

Although Nhat Hanh says that peace and joy are always available to us, he recognizes that we are assailed sometimes by negative emotions that, if allowed to take over, can block us from perceiving reality accurately. He spells out a process for transforming these negative emotions. The most fundamental aspect of this process is the practice of mindfulness: “Our mindfulness will take care of everything, as the sunshine takes care of the vegetation. The sunshine does not seem to do much, it just shines on the vegetation, but it transforms everything.”

Sitting meditation is a practice that can help us see deeply into the true nature of ourselves and of all things. For this we need to adopt a stable position, be still and remain in our own centre. The deep peace we seek is within us, within the present moment. “Enlightenment, peace, and joy will not be granted by someone else. The well is within us, and if we dig deeply in the present moment, the water will spring forth. We must go back to the present moment in order to be really alive.”

Nhat Hanh also speaks of meditation as a practice to be lived throughout the day. He says, “We need to practice meditation gently, but steadily, throughout daily life, not wasting a single opportunity or event to see deeply into the true nature of life, including our everyday problems. Practising in this way, we dwell in profound communion with life.” In looking deeply into the true nature of things, he says, we will discover the truth of what he calls “inter-being”. That is, we come to understand that we are a part of every other being, and every other being is a part of us. As he puts it, we “inter-are”. When we realize that every other being is, in fact, our own self, the “mind of compassion” is born in us:

When we come into contact with the other person, our thoughts and actions should express our mind of compassion, even if that person says and does things that are not easy to accept. We practice in this way until we see clearly that our love is not contingent upon

the other person being lovable. Then we can know that our mind of compassion is firm and authentic.

According to Nhat Hanh, we should not close our eyes to the suffering that is all around us in this world. Those who are suffering from hunger, disease, war and every cruelty humans can inflict on each other are a part of us. But so are the perpetrators who kill, maim and starve others. It is easy to blame the perpetrators, to take sides. When we can realize the suffering of both the victims and the perpetrators, recognizing both as our own self, Nhat Hanh says, “Then we will have realized non-discrimination, real love. Then we can look at all beings with the eyes of compassion, and we can do the real work to help alleviate suffering.” When this real love is born in us, it also radiates from us:

Sound and light have the ability to penetrate everywhere, and love and compassion can do the same. But if our love is only a kind of imagination, then it is not likely to have any real effect. It is in the midst of our daily life and in our actual contact with others that we can know whether our mind of love is really present and how stable it is. If love is real, it will be evident in our daily life, in the way we related with people and the world.

He succinctly says, “The roots of war are in the way we live our daily lives.... Practicing nonviolence is first of all to become nonviolence.”



