

March / April 2020

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Letter from My Brother
- 5 Worry
- 8 Can Forgiveness End Separation?
- 10 Be Natural
- 13 Death
- 16 The Call of Love
- 18 The Living Master
- 19 Truth in a Nutshell
- 20 The Flute Has Suddenly Burst Forth
- 23 The Young Man and the Skull
- 26 Food for Thought
- 27 Free Will
- 31 Detox the Mind!
- 33 The Way Is Within
- 34 Transformation
- 37 His Presence
- 39 Book Review

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
Copyright © 2020 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

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

VOLUME 16 • ISSUE 2 • MARCH / APRIL 2020

Letter from My Brother

The message below was written by a satsangi and discovered with his body after his death

To my beloved sons

To my family

To my friends and colleagues at work

To my dear brothers and sisters of the sangat

I leave these words behind with the body I have just left. Please do not waste your breath lamenting but prepare and be ready for the day that you are called back.

For the past twenty years I have been preparing for this day. I know that my solitude and seclusion has caused concern. Please forgive me and find peace in the knowledge that these have been my most focused and devotional years. I feel honoured, humbled and blessed by God's grace to have been given the great blessing of finding a teacher who inspired and taught me to love the one true God.

We humans have the rare privilege and opportunity to find God within our body, which is truly the temple of the Lord and the top of creation. He is "nearer than the royal vein", just as we are told, yet unfortunately most are looking elsewhere.

No doubt, such is his will and we all follow the path of our destiny. He knows best. He is the Creator supreme. God gives all life. God takes away that very life. Through his Word, Holy Spirit, Shabd, Hukam, Kalma or Name, he is the essence of the entire creation – yet timeless, immortal and detached he remains.

Seek and you will find his door. Knock and it will be opened for you.

The seeking and knocking are what makes us human. God has placed the path to him within our body. The path takes a lifetime of patient sincere knocking, with our ego and hearts in our hands as an offering. These we have to surrender.

May his patience, his compassion, his grace, his love and his wisdom fill your hearts always.



Worry

Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, the medieval Sufi mystic, having experience of the soul's magnificence, wonders why it is that we give ourselves over to worry. He writes: "O soul, you worry too much. You have seen your own strength. You have seen your own beauty. You have seen your own golden wings. Of anything less, why do you worry? You are in truth the soul of the soul of the soul."

Worry stems from the anxious thoughts, images and emotions that arise when we perceive a threat, be it real or imaginary. It often concerns a personal issue such as health or finance, or it may be to do with broader issues like environmental pollution and social or technological change. Most people experience short-lived periods of worry in their lives without much negative impact; indeed, a moderate amount of worrying may even have positive effects if it prompts us to take precautions like fastening car seat belts or buying fire insurance for our home.

However, an endless preoccupation with the anxieties of life will not allow us to grow spiritually. For that, we have to expand our focus so that we are looking towards a loving Creator rather than at the uncertainties of the creation. This will give us the confidence that overcomes worry. In Saint Matthew's gospel in the Bible we read:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Our Master makes the very same point today. And yet we persist in worrying – not just about present circumstances but about the past, our failings, and the mistakes we have made in our lives. Most of all we worry about the future and what it holds for us. There seems to be so much to worry about!

But worry is futile. It's a waste of our energy, a waste of our heavenly Father's gift of consciousness and of our efforts to find God within ourselves. We cannot change the past. What is done is done. We cannot change our future, our destiny. We must live through the life our karma has carved out for us.

For most struggling souls that is a whole lot easier said than done. Putting the case to ourselves intellectually will help to a certain extent. We can tell ourselves that the most significant thing that has happened in our lives was to be chosen by the Master for initiation. It is the greatest gift in all the world. We are truly blessed that he chose to bring us onto the path and to rescue us from the endless cycle of birth and death.

We can tell ourselves that throughout history men and women of all faiths and backgrounds have found the hidden way that led to the same destination, the heartland of the spirit within. The ways varied according to creed and culture, but the journey was the same. So, following this well-trodden path, we too must lay up our treasure in heaven. At the time of death, we leave the world empty-handed. We take absolutely nothing with us. We came into this world naked and that is how we depart this life. It is futile to amass riches and property as we will leave it all behind. Of course, we need to be comfortable in this world if we can be. We need a roof over our heads. We need clothing and we need to eat. Our status in life is however of no importance in the end. Fame and glory are of no consequence. In God's eyes we are all the same.

That is the intellectual argument. But ultimately, we have no option but to put intellect aside and do our very best to meditate with love and devotion. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II Maharaj Charan Singh made it clear that it is acceptance of God's will that eradicates worry and meditation that leads to acceptance.

We worry because we want certain things to happen in the way we want them to. We have certain desires, certain wishes to fulfil. And we are always worried about whether we'll be able to achieve them or not, whether we'll be able to achieve those desires or not. That keeps us worrying. If we leave it to the Father, if we live in his will, he knows best

what to give us. We just prepare to accept what he gives. Then what is there to worry about?

The purpose of meditation is just for that. The purpose of meditation is to train oneself to adopt that attitude. It's not easy; it's a lifelong struggle, no doubt. But that is the purpose of meditation to develop that attitude of accepting things as they come.

This leaves us absolutely no room for doubt. Maharaj Charan Singh says, to overcome our tendency to worry is a lifelong struggle. Achieving our return home to the Lord is also a lifelong struggle with the mind for all of us. But we must not give up. We have been given the method which, as the Masters say, even a child could understand. Although it is the job of the mind to worry and to be ceaselessly active, it is our job to quiet it through meditation.



Can Forgiveness End Separation?

We keenly feel our separation from the Lord but standing between us and the Lord is the seemingly impenetrable barrier of past mistakes. How may we ever be forgiven?

Obtaining forgiveness surely involves learning from our mistakes so that we don't repeat them. However, since we don't know what we have done in past lives, how can we refrain from repeating those actions?

The present Master has tellingly said that he does not offer forgiveness because he does not judge us. The passing of judgment is the function of an appointed judge in the lower spiritual realms. What the Master crucially *does* offer us is the means to clear our karmic account, and this automatically brings divine forgiveness. Eliminating the karmas that stand between us and the Father is forgiveness in action.

In the Bible we read, "And whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." Maharaj Charan Singh comments in *Light on Saint Matthew*:

[Jesus] says, even if you turn against the Master, you can be forgiven because you are in the flesh and I am also in the flesh, like you, in this world. So if you have no faith in me, if you do not realize or even think that I have come from the Father, then your sin against the Master can be pardoned, provided you are giving your time to the light and sound to which your Master has attached you, you are attending to your meditation.... So, he says, do not turn your back on the Holy Ghost, even if you have no faith in me or are sometimes doubtful about me.

When we are sincerely repentant, the first thing we can do then is to take the four vows of Sant Mat very seriously. These are the fundamentals of the spiritual path. Standing firm on the four principles helps us to avoid creating more karma, thereby adding to the already heavy load which has piled up from actions taken in past lives. The idea is that we promise to do our best to avoid committing further foolish actions and we ask for forgiveness through our meditation practice.

We repent through meditation, by attending to spirit.

Whilst working at meditation, genuine grief at separation can also act as a spur. Jesus said, “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.” Those who mourn are feeling the pain of separation from the Father. Because they have real longing to go back to him, they will be driven to action, they will contact the Shabd (the Comforter), and they will return to the Father.

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Master in the line of Guru Nanak, was sent away to Lahore by his Master, Guru Ram Das. For many years he was not allowed to come to see his Master. That physical separation enabled the master-disciple relationship to develop and flourish to such an extent that ultimately the disciple succeeded his Master. Physical separation serves its own purpose as separation sharpens true love.

Jesus further states, “It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”

Maharaj Charan Singh explains Christ’s saying in this way:

Day and night you are running after me. Now you are mad in your love and are not trying to devote your time to the spirit inside. Without attaching yourself to the Comforter or the Holy Ghost you can never go back to the Father; so when I leave you physically you will not find me anywhere outside and you will have no option but to seek me within. Then you will be in touch with the Comforter who will pull you up to my level, to the level of the Father.

Hazur Maharaj Ji goes on to say:

The Master comes to our level to fill us with devotion and to put us on the path. He fills us with so much love that we cannot live without him. Physically we cannot always be with him, so the love he creates in us ultimately leads us within. When we turn within, we are in touch with the Comforter which pulls us up to the level of the Father.

The barrier of our mistakes that cause this feeling of separation from the Lord is slowly eroded as devotion to meditation takes its place. Meditation is nothing but seeking his forgiveness to finally bring an end to our feeling of separation.



Be Natural

There is a well-known phrase, “Beauty comes from within.” It’s a phrase that reminds us of the charismatic warmth of a sincere smile, a kind gesture, a sweet word – all flowing from a beauty within and animating the physical. We are beautiful when we are natural, sincere and loving.

The present Master encourages us to be genuine in this way, to be close to nature, and to be in touch with the natural divine energy flowing within us.

The trouble is that our modern society encourages us to turn away from nature. Ideals of youth and physical perfection are glamorized, and this leads us to feel dissatisfied with nature’s gifts. Nature must be enhanced! So we start to use unnatural methods and products; we may start to paint our body with costly chemical concoctions or even skin-whitening creams, hoping to improve our appearance and, at the extreme, we may even resort to cosmetic surgery. All this to achieve worldly attention and praise.

The Master is not here to impose any particular lifestyle on us. All he really wants is our meditation and our adherence to the principles of Sant Mat. However, he clearly tells us that artificial products may damage our health and will not lead to increased happiness.

There are many reasons today why more and more people are becoming alienated and depressed. Although the catalysts for such feelings are varied, we can name a few as being the social pressure to look a certain way; the supposed need to possess certain status symbols; and the feeling that we need to act in certain ways to impress others. We may envy the whitened toothy smile of a famous film star and this may provoke us to copy their look. We may see someone looking important in the latest model of a big, flashy car and desperately want one too. But let’s check that we are not becoming obsessed with our appearance and the things we possess, because if they take over our life we run the risk of losing sight of who we really are.

The urgency to amass wealth or to change our looks often comes from the desire to gain popularity. This, in its turn, can stem from something much deeper – a cry from the heart, a desperate wish to somehow connect

with others and obtain their acceptance. However, by looking for approval in this way, we become even further entangled in worldly illusion. Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Spiritual Gems*:

You say you feel lonely. The whole creation and the Creator are within you. If you take your attention inside of you and attach it to the sound current, you will be at peace with yourself and the world. The lasting peace lies inside of us. It is not to be had outside, in worldly objects and worldly companions.

From this we understand that however popular we are, or however many objects we own, it will not bring us lasting peace. Spending large amounts of time on gathering possessions and obsessing over our appearance is simply time lost. This precious time could have been spent in meditation, in reaching toward the spirit within, spending time in satsang or in doing seva.

The Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible begins with the words, “Vanity of vanities: all is vanity”, emphasizing how very meaningless so many of our activities are. It is a lucid reminder that most of our work and our activities here in this world revolve around those things that will all pass away.

Kabir Sahib reminds us: “This body, once cosseted with creams and perfumes, will one day burn on the pyre.” In another of his verses, he reminds us that those on the spiritual path need not seek the world’s approval – they have a ‘beloved’ in their Master. It is their Master whose approval they will seek, and their ‘make-up’ will be inner qualities such as love, patience, chastity and faithfulness:

*Put on the sandal of
love, Apply the collyrium
Of patience to your eyes;
Let chastity and faithfulness
Be the adornment on your face
Then you will enjoy the bliss
Of the Beloved’s embrace.*

All the Master really wants is our meditation and our adherence to the principles of Sant Mat. By following his instructions fastidiously,

we naturally progress and mature, and learn a certain obedience and understanding, wishing to please him in every way. It is then that we will automatically forget ourselves, our vanity, and our desires. Even if the whole world were to think we were mad, we would no longer care, understanding that whatever the Master approves of is the truth.

If it is best to gracefully accept the natural changes that come as we get older – those wrinkles, those grey hairs – then let's do so. Taking a more relaxed and accepting approach can not only benefit our health and wellbeing, but ultimately bring some contentment. After all, we don't have to abandon all sense of glamour and romance but simply transmute these to our spiritual efforts. Isn't it romantic to “apply the collyrium of patience” to the eyes as we faithfully rise in the early morning to await our beloved Master in meditation?

Meditation connects us to the Shabd, the true beauty within – beauty without compare. We realize this body is a mere shell housing the Lord's ultimate beauty. To keep polishing, painting and manipulating this shell, whilst we surround it with more and more possessions in the hope that we will achieve love from others, is a useless task. On the contrary, if we put all our efforts and attention into devotion to the Shabd Master within, automatically we will see beauty everywhere, and the whole world will shine with divine radiance. That is why the Masters all advise us to attach ourselves to the Shabd, and automatically we will detach from all else.



Death

Everybody will die one day – rich or poor, healthy or diseased, nobody escapes passing through death's gate. In this article we examine what mystics mean when they say, "Learn to die so that you may begin to live and live forever."

Mystics tell us that everything in this physical realm must change and eventually end – nothing lasts forever. Everything we cling to will be taken away from us. Our body is made of the five elements and must return to its source. The Christian burial rite expresses this as, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

From a worldly perspective, such thoughts are considered gloomy. Why would we want to dwell on the moment when life is extinguished? No one has returned from death to tell us what happens. We may be aware that there are people who have had near death experiences or returned from what the doctors describe as clinical death, but their accounts cannot be verified, and we are left with our fears. By taking a narrow materialistic approach to death and seeing it as a purely physical event – nothing more than the extinction of the physical body – it's no wonder we feel gloomy.

The Masters of Surat Shabd Yoga explain the process of death in different terms. They tell us that we are body, mind and soul, and that the soul is a particle of Shabd. What we call death occurs when the soul that once occupied our body departs to eventually enter another body. A Master who practices Surat Shabd Yoga is one who, in life, can withdraw the soul from mind and body and take it to a reality of the highest order, to the spiritual realm of divine consciousness. Therefore, talk of death is far from gloomy for practising satsangis. Going beyond the physical, or "dying while living" during meditation, is what a practising satsangi aspires to. Death may be humankind's greatest fear, but for the disciples of a true Master it is a joyous occasion, because they have been practising since initiation. Meditation is preparation for perfecting how to die. In the Bible, Saint Paul referred to his meditation practice when he said, "I die daily." Christ described that same mystic death, when he said, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

Mystics tell us that according to one's actions through life, one passes after death into the body of a higher or lower being. If we love the world and the things to be found here, we will return here, being reborn into whichever species our mental inclinations lead us. Equally, if our aim is the higher spheres, that attachment will draw us to those regions. The present Master tells us that what happens at the time of death will be the logical conclusion of what we have done during our life, reiterating those words from the Bible, "As you sow, so shall you reap".

Christ also told us that we go where our treasure is, meaning that we go where our thoughts are. If we are focused on the divine, we go to the Lord. So, if we follow the instructions of a true Master the logical consequence is that our attention will be focused within during that final hour. The idea that a person will go permanently to heaven, after being strongly attached to this world all through life, runs counter to the divine law. We must return to this world, if we are attached to it. So mystics plead with us to "know thyself" – we must attempt to contact the inner reality of Shabd within, whilst living. We must understand that 'I' am soul, and not this body, which will ultimately be discarded.

The mystics experience death as the casting off an old, worn-out garment. They are conscious of the fact that human life is temporary, and they prepare themselves (and teach us) how to be ready for death's inevitable arrival. They describe dying as the end of suffering, the liberation of the soul, a merging into light and love, and a return to ultimate reality.

For the mystics, death is the change from darkness to light. So, when death takes a son, a daughter, a spouse or a parent, they do not question it. The problem the rest of us face is that we are so involved with daily living we find it difficult to accept that, at the physical level, this life is part of an endless chain of events controlled by destiny. Mystics explain that life does not begin with birth or end with death. When we accept reincarnation and karma not as a theory or some mental concept, but as a basic spiritual law, then we understand that death and life are part of nature's cycles, just like summer and winter. However, the saints and mystics caution us that reliance on salvation after death (entailing no effort in life) is the height of self-deception. They say if salvation is not found during life, it will not automatically be ours after death. The karmic web is extremely complex, the general rule being that what goes around comes around. Only by

direct perception through meditation can we understand that from the spiritual perspective, everything is the Lord's will, and all is as it should be. It really is possible for all of us to go through this life joyfully and without fear, but we cannot do so until we reach the point when, through meditation, we realize that this body is an illusion; it is not real but is merely a vehicle to be used for the purpose of spiritual realization. And that was precisely the message of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and indeed all mystics who were physically persecuted.

They showed us through their physical suffering that this body is only a vehicle and we need not be overcome by its hardships. The Masters tell us that we will never find eternal peace and happiness while in this physical body. In the lower species one creature must kill another in order to survive, and even as discriminating humans we cannot avoid a degree of killing. This world was created to be in constant conflict and discord, leaving us highly vulnerable if we rely on material conditions and worldly relationships to give us happiness.

We are all too often let down, disappointed by circumstances, other people, and beliefs in which we put our trust. At the time of death, we experience the total disintegration of all the elements in our body, our whole life dripping away. However, for the disciples of a true Master it is different because they experience his loving care. During the whole process of the physical death of the body, the Shabd Master gives his support.

If our faith is unshakeable and we devote the prescribed time to daily meditation with no worldly desires, then there is no rebirth, no power that can bring us back. For the mystic, rebirth into this world would be the equivalent of death. To be liberated from the cycle of reincarnation is equivalent to life, when the soul is free. Hence it is said that when we contact the Shabd Master within, we will not die when we physically die. Our physical death is the final awakening. Each time we sit in meditation, we can remind ourselves that the Master who initiated us is extending a personal invitation to us to enter the inner sanctum of the court of the Lord, right now in this very lifetime. And that's why initiation by a true Master is the greatest gift of all. Once initiated, we must make the spiritual journey sooner or later. Whether we are initiates or non-initiates, death is the one thing in our lives that is definite.



The Call of Love

Though living in a materialistic world, as souls of divine origin and spiritual essence, we are naturally sensitive to the call of love. Love is a vital ingredient of man's inner nature. It is both our weakness and our greatest strength and asset, and at a subconscious level shapes our thoughts and daily activities. However, worldly love is expressed and experienced more as a survival tool that lends support and comfort to our mundane and troubled lives. Worldly love has a high concentration of selfishness generated by the working of lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego. The true love spoken of by the mystics is of entirely another nature and degree. It is necessary to distinguish between the worldly and the spiritual or divine love. Saints, being the embodiment of true love, present their spiritual teachings as an ultimate expression of divine love. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II, Maharaj Sawan Singh discusses the influence of true love in our lives as follows:

Love itself is the beginning and the end. It is a pure emanation of God's current, which enters the heart of a pure person and spreads its influence all round, thus purifying the entire area. The heart of a lover is pure, and at the same time those who have the opportunity of meeting him cannot escape his purifying influence. If one comes across such pure souls, his heart is so greatly influenced that he feels as if purity had entered into him from head to foot.

Love is not worldly or material. It is divine. If you see two hearts sacrificing their very existence at the altar of love, you should understand that they are vessels filled with divine influence. By their mere touch, even withered hearts become fresh and are renewed. You cannot conceal it. Even if the tongue does not speak, the eyes reveal it by the tears that fill them.

Kabir Sahib says: "Try hard to conceal love. But it cannot be concealed once it has taken hold of a person. Even if one does not talk about it, the eyes disclose it."

The refreshing rainfall comes from the sky, but when the eyes of two lovers meet, they are flooded with the tears of love. It takes time for a

Swanti drop to turn into a pearl, but the water oozing from loving eyes flows like a string of shining pearls. The dryness within is removed and one's entire being is refreshed from head to foot.

Just as milk and water become one when mixed, the two loving hearts blend themselves into divine union with the water of love. It is then difficult for them to be separate entities. Love is true. It contains no deceit and no superficiality. Coming under its influence, two hearts unite into one in such a manner that one cannot detect any difference between them. Then one is not able to find out who is the disciple and who the Master, who is the lover and who the Beloved. The curtain of duality is removed. The lover and the Beloved become one.

When love produces this condition in one's heart, he needs no meditation, prayer or any spiritual effort, because love is the real meditation, is the real prayer, is the real union. A true lover is a real believer in the oneness of God and is a true discerner of the jewel of his non-duality. But this does not convey the correct meaning. Actually, he himself becomes the very embodiment of his attributes. The value of a man's life is greatly enhanced by love, for, the influence of love is unique. It lifts a man from the state of being a mere nothing to the celestial heights.

Maulana Rum says: "With love, even bitter things become sweet, brass is turned into gold, and everything that is soiled becomes clean. With the pain of love in one's heart, love itself becomes the remedy for it. Thorns then give the same pleasure and fragrance, as would beautiful flowers. Under the influence of love even the peevish temperament, which is as sour as vinegar, turns into a sweet intoxicant as that of wine. People become as smooth as oil, as soft as wax, even if they were as hard as iron."

By love, poison becomes nectar, and a tiger is turned into a harmless mouse. Disease turns into a blessing, and tyranny into mercy. The dead are even brought to life, and kings become slaves by means of love.

The Great Master concludes by saying "Love is an intense light which shows us the way of spirituality. A person is blind without love."



The Living Master

We need to be honest with ourselves about the living Master. Baba Ji often reminds us that the Master is merely a concept to us. Around the world, most followers of Sant Mat have been privileged to attend his satsang or perhaps even to meet him in the course of seva. And if we are truthful with ourselves, we would acknowledge that the being we see is not always the figure we have built in our minds through studying the literature available about the sublime Satguru.

A concept is generally a theoretical idea or general notion but, as we may have experienced when we study holiday brochures, ideas may prepare us but cannot give us the true pleasure of our sun-drenched holiday by the sea.

So we have a mental view of what the Master should be but, when we see him, the being we respond to so easily is neither the concept nor the reality. We see an attractive human being – radiant, quick-witted, kind and full of humour. Even the most cynical would have to agree that the warmth he emits creates a yearning inside and a hope that he could be their personal best friend.

But will we ever see the Satguru? Baba Ji helps us by giving the following advice – given also by those glorious Masters around whom many of our great religions were built and who inspired us in our quest for God: “Attach yourself to the Shabd!” Baba Ji tells us to attach ourselves to the Shabd because only then have we a chance of *truly* seeing the Satguru. After initiation we should do simran because it draws the soul currents to the point at which we will draw near him inside; and bhajan so we may practise listening to the Holy Name.

Meditate! And when he sees us trying, that inspirational teacher whose presence makes us really want to see him again, might show us a flash of his real self. Then at last our behaviour could approach that of disciples about whom we read in the books – sitting quietly and adoring the eternal radiant wonder of the Master’s face.



Truth in a Nutshell

Suffering

Suffering is the very best gift he has to give us. He gives it only to his chosen friends...

My God, I choose the whole lot. No point in becoming a saint by halves. I'm not afraid of suffering for your sake; the only thing I'm afraid of is clinging to my own will. Take it, I want the whole lot, everything whatsoever that is your will for me.

Therese of Lisieux, quoted in Hannah Ward, *The Lion Christian Quotation Collection*

Do not let illness dishearten you. Troubles are tokens of the holy Master's grace, and the result of your own past actions. Continue devotion as far as possible, under the circumstances. This is the duty of the disciple who no longer cares for the changing scenes of mind and matter. Pain and pleasure, honour and dishonour, poverty and wealth, none of these can influence the attitude of his mind. He does not pray that troubles shall be removed, but rather that his heart be always filled with love and gratitude. As Guru Nanak said:

If you send me hunger, I shall be filled with thy Name. If you send me miseries, I shall enjoy them as pleasures. If you grant me happiness, I shall bow to thee in gratitude.

Although the above applies to the state of mind of a perfect disciple, you should try your best to attain it.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



The Flute Has Suddenly Burst Forth

*The flute has suddenly burst into melody!
On hearing it I have forgotten all other things.
I am shot with the wondrous shafts of Unstruck Music;
And the world appears fake, false its pursuits.*

Bulleh Shah

Bulleh Shah, the eighteenth century Punjabi mystic, is enthralled by the music that he hears within himself. The Shabd or sound current is our direct link with the Creator, and it is possible for us to make contact with it inside ourselves. Saints and mystics say that once we are able to hear the Shabd, the experience will be so delightful that we will fall in love with it.

If you have ever fallen in love, had a new baby, bought a wonderful new home, or achieved something very important to you, you'll perhaps have had the experience of returning mentally, again and again, to these peak experiences and feeling a thrill of joy each time. Imagine that feeling, but fuller, more complete, eternally enduring, because it will not be a sense of possession, but of complete giving and complete receiving. It will be perfect, reciprocal love.

When our conscious connection with the Shabd becomes established, we will continue to do our duty in the world – if we are an accountant we will be at our computer with our databases and spreadsheets; if we are a factory worker, we will be on the factory floor. But whenever our attention is free, we will run, fascinated, to this source of intense and pure happiness within us. We will be able to hear that Sound, full of meaning, making life beautiful, whenever we are free to listen to it, even during the working day. But in particular, we will make a habit of listening to it every night or early morning when we do our regular meditation, and we will be transported to ever deeper mystic experiences. The mind will become more refined, more noble, more loving.

To reach and know the Shabd, it is essential that we have a guide who is familiar with its course. This is why the saints have always taught the necessity of learning the mystic practice from a living Master. The Master welcomes us into his student group when we are accepted for initiation by

him. He gives us a complete programme which, if followed, will ensure our spiritual development. If we enrolled at university and all we got were the assignments or the final exams without any tutorials, seminars, lectures, reading lists and so on, we would flounder. In the same way, to undertake the complex subject of raising our consciousness without a teacher and the teacher's course of study would be fruitless.

“The saints are the dear sons of the dear Father” said Maharaj Sawan Singh. “He has entrusted them with all that he has.”

At initiation, the living Master establishes himself as the permanent inner guide for the disciple. From then onwards, he will not only give the disciple outer help and advice, he will be present in subtle form within the disciple. At initiation, it is explained to us how we can live so as to bring about the raising of our consciousness. We promise to keep strictly to a lacto-vegetarian diet and to abstain from alcohol, mind affecting drugs and tobacco. We also vow to observe a truthful, moral way of life, restricting sexual activity to the bond of marriage. On this foundation of a sound, clean way of life, we promise to carry out a minimum of two and a half hours meditation each day, consisting of simran (mental repetition of names), dhyan (contemplation on the Master's inner form) and bhajan (listening for or to the sound current).

It is simran which is the key that opens the door to mystic transport, because simran overcomes the mind's habit of constant thinking. Thinking binds us to the earth whereas simran gives us the wings that will carry us above earthbound thought to where “the wondrous shafts of Unstruck Music” (Shabd) can reach us. Reliance on our own willpower is not enough. Reliance on the gifts the Master gives us – repetition of the Holy Names and devotion to the Master – is the only sure way forward.

What happens in the morning when a disciple awakes, thinking of the meditation that he has promised to carry out each day? If he just thinks about it, he is likely to fail to even get out of bed. The mind is so strong that despite its higher intentions, it is likely to find excuses – seemingly good reasons – for missing meditation that day. By thinking, we can never succeed on this path. This is the difficult lesson we must learn. For everything else in life, we rely on reason and thought. But when we talk

about training the mind on the spiritual path, we mean training it to rest completely quietly. We mean training ourselves to be able to leave thought behind temporarily. When we can focus on the Names to such an extent that they are automatically in our mind as we wake to start the new day, then on that flow of positive energy, we will automatically arise to carry out our meditation.

The Granth Sahib mentions the following ways of trying to realize God but concludes that the path of the sound current is the way for us:

This is the essence of the wisdom of the Four Ages.

Celibacy, self-control and pilgrimages were good for Three Ages.

Nam is the only proper means for the Iron Age.

To celibacy, self-control and pilgrimage one could also add the path of good works and self-sacrifice, the path of knowledge – scientific or intellectual – and the path of prayer. These practices were good for the Golden, Silver and Copper ages, but in this Kali Yuga, the Iron Age, they don't take us beyond the physical and mental levels of experience.

In this current age, only the Shabd or Nam is effective in taking us back to our true home in Sach Khand. Soami Ji Maharaj says:

Accept that humility, submission, and devotion to a Master are the way for the present age With a pure and still mind raise the banner of Shabd to the sky.

The Granth Sahib tells us: “The unending music is the hidden treasure. The saints have kept the key with them.” Once initiated, the living true Master connects us to this “wondrous” Sound. Through our effort in meditation and living the Sant Mat principles, he opens the inner gate, our third eye, and the sound bursts forth to transform us forever.



The Young Man and the Skull

The following is a folktale from the Mbundu people who live in south western Africa. Although the story has harsh imagery, perhaps derived from the environment in which the people lived at the time, it also conveys some truths in a powerful way:

One day a young hunter had journeyed far into the bush in search of antelope when he accidentally stumbled upon a human skull lying in the earth. Drawing nearer, he stooped to the ground to examine the object and began muttering to himself, "How did you manage to get here my friend? What can have brought you to this unhappy end?"

To the young man's absolute astonishment, the skull opened its jaws and began speaking: "Talking brought me here, my friend. Talking brought me to this place."

The hunter raced back towards his village to tell the people all about his discovery.

"Friends," he cried excitedly, "I have just come across a human skull in the bush and it has spoken to me. It must be a wonderful sign."

"Nonsense," they replied, "how can you possibly hold a conversation with the head of a dead man?"

"But it really did speak to me," the young man insisted, "you only refuse to believe me because you are jealous."

But still the people continued to jeer at him. "Why not go and tell the chief all about your discovery," one mocked. "I'm sure he will be overjoyed by the news!"

"I will do precisely that!" retorted the young man angrily, and off he marched towards the chief's house to tell him all about the skull. But the chief, who had been taking his afternoon nap, was extremely unhappy that he had been disturbed.

"Why have you come here with your tall stories?" he shouted. "You had better be telling the truth or I will see to it that your own head comes off. Now, take me to this wretched place and let me hear the skull's message for myself."

A small crowd set off from the village, arriving shortly afterwards at the place where the young man had made his discovery. And sure enough, they soon spotted the skull sitting in the earth.

“It looks perfectly ordinary,” complained the people after a time. “When are we going to hear it speak?” The young man crouched to the ground and repeated the words he had first spoken to the skull. But no answer came, and the skull’s jaws remained firmly shut. Again, the man spoke to it, raising his voice loudly, but only silence followed.

Now the crowd began to grow restless and when a third and fourth attempt produced exactly the same result, they leapt on the young man and chopped off his head as the chief had ordered.

The head fell to the ground and rolled alongside the skull. For a long time afterwards, all remained quiet as the villagers disappeared over the hill bearing the body homewards for a funeral. Then the skull opened its jaws and spoke up: “How did you manage to get here my friend? What can have brought you to this unhappy end?”

“Talking brought me here,” replied the head. “Talking brought me to this place.”

The tale contains penetrating insights into aspects of human nature in its portrayal of the talkative hunter, the irritable chief, and the crowd. But some lessons can also be drawn from this story by those of us who strive on the spiritual path. For example, do we talk too much and do too little? Do we really want to go inside to the inner regions, or do we just want to “play the tipster”, as Maharaj Sawan Singh once put it, in order to gain personal fame? Because if we do want to go inside, how do we apply ourselves? As part-timers who prioritize our family affairs, social needs and business demands before meditation? Or do we do what we silently pledged to our Master that we would do on the day of our initiation – regularly complete two and a half hours of meditation each day whilst fulfilling our civic and social duties? As Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Spiritual Gems*:

There may be people who hold that, in spite of their great desire to go within, they do not seem to get the help. Such people have only to search

their hearts a little deeply. They will find that what they call their great desire is very superficial. They do not want to go within and stay within but wish as a matter of curiosity to return and play the tipster. When a soul really wishes to go back, there is nothing to prevent it. It is the law. Has any father given away his hard-earned money to his son to squander away? Or has any father kept away his earnings from his deserving son?

If we have been fortunate enough to go inside but then dissipate our treasure in talk, the outcome might not be as severe as it was for the unfortunate hunter, but the Masters advise that our spiritual experiences can be stopped for our own good. What is the motive for telling others of our experience, or of the times that the Master appears in our dreams, if not to impress others of our spirituality? We surely realize that this motivation is simply ego and not spirituality. In *Divine Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

One should never tell one's spiritual experiences to anyone, not even to one's mate. We ought to be very careful about this. This habit of showing off progress is a great hindrance to one's spiritual progress. This treasure should be kept even more concealed and should be more carefully guarded than any worldly treasure.

On the other hand, those of genuine spirituality say nothing of it but harmonize with the environment their karma has allotted to them. Baba Ji hints at the state of mind of spiritually aware people when he explains that the last thing a self-realized person wants is company – he (or she) loves being on his own, and everything he does, no matter how small (and even if no one else knows about it) is important to him. He quotes a story he had read about a person whose wife had died. All his friends clamoured around the grieving man, gushing out their sympathy, vying for his attention. A lady approached who wanted to help her friend in his hour of need. The time had arrived for everyone to go to the church for the funeral when she noticed a large pile of dirty shoes lying in a cupboard. Instead of going to the funeral ceremony she sat quietly and cleaned all the shoes without anyone else seeing her or

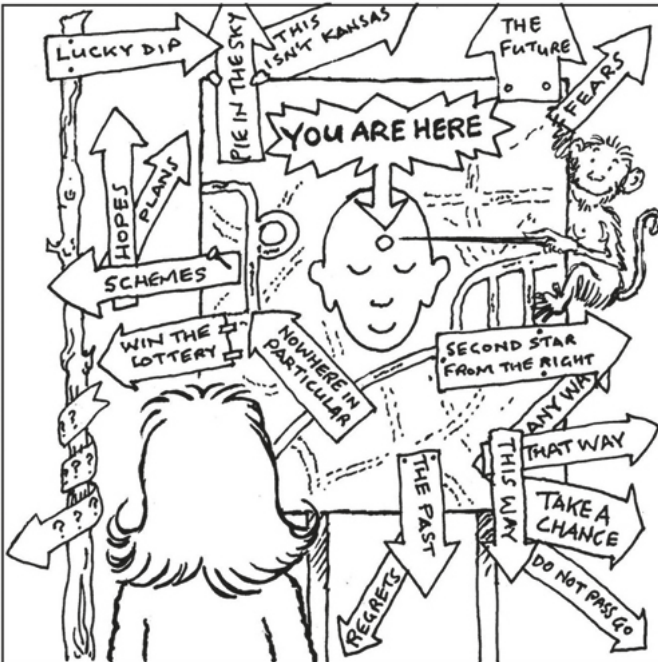
knowing that she was doing it. She cleaned them not for recognition but to be supportive. It is summed up by Maharaj Jagat Singh in *A Spiritual Bouquet* as follows:

Enough has been written and enough has been said. Now what is wanted is silence and work. Speaking distracts and scatters your attention. Silence collects thoughts. It draws your attention inwards and strengthens the spirit. Now set yourself earnestly to practise. Practice makes a man perfect. Be as perfect as your Creator.



Food for Thought

Location location



Free Will

Quite frequently during question and answer sessions, Baba Ji is asked whether we have free will. He often answers that we have only limited free will. In fact, like Maharaj Charan Singh who is quoted below, he sometimes confirms that we have no free will at all. The belief that we have 'free' will arises because we are looking at things only from our human perspective. That perspective changes as we develop spiritually and a wider picture emerges.

Our own perspective tells us that we have free will because every day we are faced with situations that present several options, and we appear to have a free choice in the course we decide on. We have been brought up to believe that we have the freedom to do what we choose, not recognizing that we have been channeled to a certain position like a lamb driven into a particular field. Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. 1:

Mentally we are not prepared to think that we have no free will at all. We have developed this instinct of possession so much that intellectually it is very difficult for us to grasp that we have no free will at all. And that is why we are not willing to lose our idea and concept of free will – because we are so attached to it. Actually, we have no free will at all, from the higher source. But from a limited source we do have free will.

When we look back on our decisions, we forget to consider the extensive influence from the past which has placed us in a particular situation. Whatever we are today is the result of what we thought and did previously. By the same rule of cause and effect, what we are to become in the future will be determined by what we think and do right now. If we make wise choices today, then it will be a lot easier to make positive choices tomorrow. Hazur Maharaj Ji explains the example of chess:

When you start playing chess, the first move is in your hand, but all the other moves are conditioned by the first move. You have done certain karmas in the past life – good karmas and bad karmas. Now you have no free will but must reap the results of those karmas.

In reality, whatever comes to us has been our choice in the past birth, and that limits our choices for the future, just as each move on the chess board limits our next move. So our sense of freedom of choice or free will is just an illusion. Hannah Critchlow, a neuroscientist from Cambridge University, wrote about free will in the *Guardian* newspaper:

There's quite a lot of evidence to show that it (free will) is largely an illusion. There's a huge amount that seems to be hardwired into us and pre-determined. You are born with a particular brain and that shapes your perception, shapes what you are hardwired to find rewarding. You are brought up in a particular environment and that reinforces what you are born with. If your perception of the world is based on prior experiences and hardwiring, then that shapes your reality, which goes on to affect your decision-making.

Baba Ji sometimes explains that our education, environment, parents, friends, school, society and so forth, which are all based on our karmic conditions, have a profound effect on the way we react to the situations in our lives. However, what we do have is the freedom to adopt a positive attitude. In the book *Concepts and Illusions*, the author writes:

We may believe that our acceptance or rejection of a situation will change the course of our lives, but that is wrong thinking. We will head towards a situation as destiny wills, no matter what our attitude or emotion. However, the attitude that we adopt can help us deal with the situation, with either depression or equanimity.

Destiny creates the circumstances for karmas to manifest, enabling the karmas to be paid off. We can't run away from destiny – debts have to be cleared. Destiny deals out the situations in our life and cannot be changed. But we have more freedom with the way we feel and what we think. Our attitude and emotions belong to the mental realms, and we have a freedom to choose how we react to life. We can choose to be happy and positive when we are going through rough patches and we can put trust in our Master, acknowledging that whatever is to happen is the right thing for us, and he will help us through. Alternatively, we can

be sad or negative and increase our stress. We have the freedom to choose our attitude.

As we continue to follow the path sincerely, the grace of the Master shines on our actions, and we begin to mould our lives according to the Master's guidance. Although the change is gradual, the balance of our lives starts to shift towards the good, and over a period of time we realize that we ourselves are more balanced and have a new-found equanimity.

Meditation helps us to accept the ever-changing nature of human life. The practice of meditation and our companionship with a true Master wakes us up from this dream-like existence. Whilst immersed in this changeable creation, the Masters give us a method so that we can experience the changeless and non-perishable part of us – our true self, which is the Shabd. Once we tune in to the Shabd, which is resounding within us all the time, then we become detached. We realize that we are not this ever-changing identity but are the essence of the divine.

Ultimately it is the grace and mercy of the Master that helps us to tread the path so that we can finish our karma and keep travelling on our journey home. The Master is with us every second of our lives and will fulfil his promise, but it is our responsibility to contribute whatever we can to make the journey easier for ourselves. Baba Jaimal Singh points out in *Spiritual Letters*:

Whatever is to be done has already been done, and that is what will happen – man does not do anything by himself... man does nothing – only the means for doing appears to come through him.... Whatever is to happen has already happened.

For us, our spiritual life should define our core, our foundation, our purpose, our identity and our reason for living. It should permeate all that we think, say and do. We must remember that we are one tiny piece of something much larger than ourselves and so we should prioritize making the divine Shabd and our beloved Master the focus of our lives, learning to live in his will. Maharaj Charan Singh sums it up when he advises:

We are just like puppets who are dancing, and the strings are being pulled by him according to our karmas. The realized souls and the unrealized

souls are all dancing in the same way. The only difference is that the realized souls know that he is pulling the strings and the unrealized souls think that they are dancing by their own effort. So we have to act in this world with detachment from our role in life, knowing that he is pulling the strings and whatever is to happen will happen, but all the same doing our best under all circumstances. Thus we make ourselves receptive and become good puppets in his hand.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. 1



Detox the Mind!

Nowadays we often hear about detoxification or 'detox,' which means the removal of toxic substances from the body. We learn about it on TV, in newspapers and in the many books that have been published on the topic. It's not unusual for a health practitioner to advise us to detox. Detox is simply the internal cleansing of our body.

Although God has given us marvellous physical bodies, which work well when life is lived simply, over time we human beings have fallen prey to the indulgences of over eating or of living on an unsuitable diet. And with the addition of modern-day pollution and chemicals in fertilizers, it's no wonder that these combined factors have caused toxicity within us. As a result, our body's natural chemistry is knocked off balance, often bringing weakness or illness. From this, a huge industry has developed offering detox to bring us back to health. However, far more challenging is the mind.

We can take comfort from the fact that, just as there are experts who can help us with our physical health, we can turn to experts who can show us how to detox our wayward minds. Mystics are those who have succeeded in conquering the mind, and a true mystic will give us advice without charging anything. They tell us that the mind has accumulated bad habits – toxic waste – over the many aeons it has spent in various life forms.

The mind was sent into this creation and given the opportunity to purify and evolve higher into the pure spiritual realms, but it has fallen victim to five deadly passions. We cry, we suffer, but still remain here. Lacking peace of mind, we also lack the conducive atmosphere necessary for our most important duty as spiritual seekers, our meditation.

Attachment is one such passion. We are often reminded that whatever we have in this life is *temporary*, and it is our attachment to such that lures us to this creation time and time again. Regarding perpetual suffering in the cycle of birth and death, Maharaj Charan Singh used to caution that we may not necessarily be reborn as a human being to fulfil our desires!

In the grip of another of the passions, egotism or 'Tness, on one hand we advocate that we have faith in our Creator, and that everything comes to us from the divine; but on the other hand, if anything adverse happens to us, we question – why me? Masters point out that nothing happens outside of the divine plan. Perhaps our suffering should be looked on as a blessing. If we are suffering today, it's because we are being cleansed by divine intervention, because the Lord wants us to return to our true home.

Guru Amar Das tells us:

*We are so polluted with Maya that we are blinded and deafened,
Unable to see or hear the Divine Shabd resounding within us.*

It is because we have given in to this wayward mind, which is like a wild, untamed animal, that we lose our happiness and peace of mind. The mind must be tamed if we are to be liberated from our sorrowful state. Naturally the question arises as to whether there is hope for us and whether we can ever be released from our grief and turmoil. Spiritual adepts console us:

*If a garment is soiled it can be washed with soap,
But a soiled mind full of sin can only be detoxified with Nam.*

Guru Amar Das tells us where we may obtain this purifying Nam: The priceless Nam is a free gift that the guru gives us.

This Nam is the most precious gift that the Lord can bestow upon a human. It is the sound current resounding within every human being and can be contacted upon initiation by a true Master. To tread the spiritual path leading to salvation, the Masters give us a principled plan for our day-to-day life. Living within the principles forms a fence around the crop of our spiritual harvest.

Following this spiritual plan means disciplining the mind. For instance, we can easily turn down an offer of non-vegetarian food with a firm 'no thank you,' knowing that departing from our diet would hinder our spiritual development. In the same way, to detox the mind, we need to learn to say 'no thank you' to any thought or situation which goes against our spiritual principles.

We need to be mindful of the daily drama and chaos of the world and protect ourselves with our morning simran and bhajan. Meditation is when the spiritual ambrosia from the inner spiritual realms cleanse, calm and purify the mind.

Maharaj Charan Singh often said, “As we are starting a new fresh day, why not start it with his remembrance so that we carry the peace and tranquility around with us.”

The simran given at the time of initiation will constantly aid us so that the mind is gradually but surely cleansed, making way for divine love to pour in and give us a permanent detox.



The Way Is Within

*Where do you go to seek Him?
He is refulgent within the home.
I have left all pilgrimages, fasts and charities.
Giving up the worship of water and stone,
I have risen and merged within my Self.
Having turned my back on lust and anger,
I have attained everlasting bliss.
Setting fire to avarice and attachment,
I have sundered the bonds of karma.
Having triumphed after hunger and thirst,
I have renounced all worldly desire.
Having immersed in the Melody within,
I have threaded the needle of Shabd with soul.
Keep to the path firmly,
O Paltu, do not leave the company of saints.
Where do you go to seek Him?
He is refulgent within the home.*

Isaac Ezekiel, *Saint Paltu*



Transformation

Change can be frightening for us human beings, locked as we are into our physical bodies. On the other hand, on the spiritual level, change brings wonder and transcendence. Change is what we are actually here for. Our lives seem quite fixed and permanent to us, not appearing to change from one day to another or even from one year to the next. But actually, everything physical is in a state of constant flux, including the state of our own bodies. We probably wouldn't wish to be shown the extent of the physical changes we can expect in the course of our life, but the human body is clearly subject to dramatic change during a relatively short period of time. It is a sobering thought that, if we remain alive long enough, we will all have to face inevitable physical deterioration during just a few decades.

Of course we live with the sense of the finite. When we consider our happiest periods, like being on holiday with the family or perhaps staying at the Dera for a couple of weeks, in the background there is always a sense of the beginning and end of the allotted period; it's something we can never avoid and so we accept it as part of life. After all, how long could you stay on holiday before the concept of it as a mere vacation began to wear thin? Change is the order of the day on this plane and as we are often keen to proclaim, when life begins to become dull and repetitive, "A change is as good as a rest!" This brings into sharp focus the small amount of time there is to make best use of our lives – and perhaps, worse than that, the uncertainty of what that 'best' might be.

As we approach the true living Master, it's through His grace we undergo a change in our understanding. Our former notions about what human life truly means undergo a complete transformation when he gives us the method to contact his subtle form within the third eye, from which point this unfathomable grace emanates. The method or path into which we are initiated by the Master is one of meditation, along which he guides us, and which is paved with his grace, lifting us at every step, reorienting our attention inwards and upwards, changing our focus from without to within.

The journey to the abode of the soul, Sach Khand, is made by the attention itself, which is detached from this world by means of our meditation. First, the attention is concentrated by means of simran, or repetition of the five Holy Names, and then it rises through more and more subtle regions. With the help of bhajan – listening to the sound current or the Shabd – the soul connects with the audible source through which it eventually reaches the level of the Creator, returning to its own home in Sach Khand.

In other words, through meditation, our focus is being shifted – uprooted from here in the material world, where our attention almost exclusively lies, and replanted in the domain of the spirit, wherein the Lord resides. Too often, our attention is at play, running out into the world and attaching itself to physical entities, creating the endless karmas or actions that keep the soul bound to the physical body. Even though the mind is animated by the current of the soul, equally it is dissipated in worldly pursuits, acting for good or for bad, and ultimately creating a prison for the soul.

The purpose of meditation is to turn our attention within the eye focus and, in so doing, withdraw our consciousness from the world, effectively closing the doors of our body – eyes, ears, nose, mouth and the two lower apertures – that lead the attention outward and away from its natural focus in the eye centre. This is necessarily a gradual process, as we have to grow into our real selves as spiritual beings slowly.

We have to find a means by which to discharge our worldly duty and yet withdraw from the world in a gracious, loving manner. The vital link is the Shabd, the true form of the Master, which brings about the entire change and provides the necessary inspiration of grace which eases our way along the path. This transformation is beautifully described by Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

A child is born to become a man, but he is yet to become a man. So, when the soul is initiated, it has to become God, to go to that level. Every soul potentially is God, but due to the overpowering of the mind, it is helpless. Yet, with spiritual practice, with meditation, our mind becomes refined, matured and we can know anything. When spirituality – that is,

devotion to Shabd, Nam or the Word – grows within us, all the other good qualities of a human being come in us like cream on milk. These qualities come automatically within us when we have the devotion of the Lord to transform us from within. In such a way we undergo genuine change and our whole outlook is changed the nearer we go to him and, the more we find peace within, the more we find peace outside. It makes us true humans.



His Presence

The Creator is said to be omnipresent, found in every atom and molecule of the creation, yet he is not perceivable to the eye, nor detectable by any of the other senses, no matter how much we may search for him without. He has created the universe but, to the unredeemed human being, he cannot actually be found within it, much as we might look for him in the deepest forests or the highest mountaintops. Deep within us, we know he exists; instinctively, profoundly, innately we know he is somehow the source of all, and yet he does not appear to us or make himself known and so he remains a mystery – beyond our comprehension, our knowledge, our experience.

Or is this really the case? Can we attain actual knowledge of God, while in the flesh, at the human level? As Saint Matthew claims in the Bible, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” But whom should we ask; where should we look and on whose door should we knock?

All the scriptures and holy books give us clues that help us in our search, and invariably they point to one vital truth, one crucial aspect that is often missing from our search. To the truth seeker, this missing component in his or her quest gradually becomes clear and unmistakable – it is that special *one*, that *dispenser* of truth who must be sought.

As a child, I remember reading stories from the illustrated Bible and, on asking where Jesus lived, feeling quite forsaken that Jesus was, in fact, no longer on earth; how then could he help those who, like me, had come after him? How could that be right and just? When my mother offered to take me to Sunday school to learn more about the Bible, I asked her if Jesus would be there, in the church. “He’ll be there in spirit” she replied, to which I apparently said, “If he isn’t there in person, I’m not interested!” This does not say very much about my own application, but it speaks volumes about the importance to us of the living teacher. We are all like that small boy in that we need the connection with a true Master – here on earth when we are on earth. There must be a living Christ, the Lord in human form, who comes to collect his ‘marked sheep’; those ordained by the Lord to return to him. The call of the Lord,

in anyone's life, occurs apparently spontaneously, but actually when he wills it, and this calling makes the soul responsive to its Master when he finally does appear.

A thoughtful disciple, given a little introspection, can sometimes see how the Master prepares the ground and brings us closer to him: he can perhaps feel the presence of the Master's hand behind certain events, actions and decisions that have come to pass. In those moments of reflection, we recognize a part of our life through which we had to pass in order to move on and for certain karmic chains to be undone. We may perceive the ways in which our lives have developed and how our thoughts evolved from the tiresome process of sense-gratification and self-justification. These are important moments in which the mind takes stock of where one stands in the scheme of things. The mind has the opportunity to consider its actions and decide on how it might improve its own performance. Yet we come undone: we cannot truly live in the moment until we learn to meditate, till the Lord has given us the means to know him. It is when we find him within ourselves that we then see him outside, in the creation, as well. Then we begin to dwell at the eye centre and whatever we do in this physical world, we are anchored there at that point. Otherwise, life is but a succession of moments which quickly pass by, leaving us eventually realizing how little has been learned or lived. Meditation, under the loving guidance of a true Master, is the key that awakes us to both life and spiritual enlightenment.



BOOK REVIEW

Ramcharitmanas: Love and Devotion

By AVM (RTD) V.P. MISRA AND VIBHA LAVANIA

PUBLISHER: BEAS, INDIA: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, 2019.

ISBN: 978-93-88733-59-5

Ramcharitmanas, by the sixteenth-century Indian mystic Tulsidas, tells the epic story of the battle between Lord Ram and the demon Ravan over the kidnapping of Ram's wife Sita. The tale serves as a profound analogy for the plight of the soul in the human body and the spiritual path that leads the soul to God. It particularly dwells on the wondrous truth that God himself manifests in human form to lead souls to their salvation.

According to the book, Lord Shiva, one of the three gods in the Hindu triumvirate, relates the tale of Ram and Sita to his wife Parvati in answer to questions she asks about Ram:

If Ram is the son of a king, then how can he be the Absolute Lord? And if he is the Absolute, then why was he roaming about in the forest, lamenting the loss of his wife like an ordinary human being? When I see his actions on one hand, and on the other I hear his praises being sung, my mind is completely confused.

Throughout the narrative, Parvati's questions are returned to again and again, not only in her dialogue with Lord Shiva, but also in exchanges between other characters in the tale. Characters express confusion about who Ram really is, as they struggle to "fathom the mystery of the incarnated Lord, who is at the same time both the pure and unlimited Absolute and completely human."

The title *Ramcharitmanas* is comprised of three words: *Ram*, *charit*, and *manas*. *Ram* is a name for the Lord and *charit* means action or play; thus *Ramcharit* means the Lord's play. The word *manas* refers to the inner eye, and can also mean a sacred body of water. It specifically refers to Mansarovar, a celestial lake encountered in subtle regions that, when bathed in, removes all impurities from the soul. Tulsidas says that Ram's story is a "hidden inner lake shining with splendour."

Tulsidas wrote *Ramcharitmanas* in a dialect of Hindi, the language of the common person, rather than in Sanskrit, the language of the elite classes.

Not only that, but he chose to convey profound spiritual teachings through a popular and engrossing story that would appeal to ordinary people. In part his method is that of allegory – thus Ram is symbolic of the Lord who comes to this earth to rescue the soul; Sita is symbolic of the soul; and various characters represent different positive and negative human traits. The battle between the demon's army and Ram's forces is symbolic of the struggle we wage within our minds. Commentaries are interspersed throughout the book so that the modern reader can better grasp the deeper meaning of the story.

Tulsidas holds out Ram's positive and compassionate actions as a model for how all humans should live. Ram faces the same challenges all humans do. He remains patient when confronting angry people, extreme loss, and family members going through shock and pain. He is compassionate toward his enemies, even to the point of giving them a place in the heavens after their death.

In *Ramcharitmanas* we also gain insights into true discipleship. Some lessons are conveyed through dialogue, such as when the eagle Garud, the king of the birds, asks the wise crow Kakbhushundi about the struggles faced by disciples trapped in the powerful grip of maya or illusion. The crow advises him that the most effective means for disciples to extricate themselves from maya is the path of unwavering devotion to Ram. Other lessons in discipleship shine through in examples. Although Ram's wife, Sita, could have stayed in the comfort of the palace, she cannot bear to be separated from Ram and accompanies him into the dangers of exile. Both of Ram's brothers display deep devotion to him: Lakshman, also unable to bear the separation, follows him into exile, and Bharat, who becomes heir in place of Ram, humbly gives up the throne when Ram returns home. Hanuman, the valiant monkey warrior, and Jambavan, the king of the bears, are utterly devoted to helping Ram find Sita and conquer the demon Ravan.

The story of Vibhishan is particularly inspiring, because, though he is a demon and the younger brother of Ravan, he is unwavering in his devotion to Ram and plays a part in bringing about the death of Ravan. Ram later installs him as king in place of Ravan because of his nobility and devotion. In the character of Vibhishan we see the love that Ram had even for a demon, giving great hope to the common disciple: in the darkest moments the Lord can love, forgive, and accept us into his fold.

As a perfect disciple, Ram's younger brother Lakshman describes how a disciple comes to see the world as unreal:

*Union and separation, the experience of happiness
and pain, people who are for us or against us,
and those who are indifferent to us
are all but snares of delusion.*

*They are not real – even birth and death,
the entire network of the world, prosperity
and adversity, destiny and time, lands, home,
wealth, town, family, heaven and hell.*

*Reflect that all the phenomena of the world,
all that is seen, heard or thought of with the mind –
all are rooted in delusion; nothing exists in reality.*

Throughout *Ramcharitmanas* Tulsidas emphasizes *Nam bhakti*, devotion to the Lord's name. He uses the word *katha* or tale to describe the story he is telling, the *Ram katha*. He says that “the *katha* of Ram brings forth blessings and wipes away the impurities of Kaliyug, the present age,” and that “wisdom develops in the minds of those who listen to the *katha* of Ram.” The *Ram katha* itself is a metaphor for Nam, the *akath katha*, “the story that cannot be uttered”: it is not just the story of the heroic deeds of the human being named Ram who lived in India, but also the ancient and eternal story of the Lord's Name that reverberates through all time.

Tulsidas points out the true meaning and power of Nam when recounting several incidents in the story:

Ram broke the bow of Shiva with his valour, but the glory of Nam shatters the fear of the cycle of birth and rebirth. Ram purified the Dandak Forest and by his presence freed it from its curse, whereas Nam has purified the minds of countless devotees. Ram destroyed a group of demons, but Nam destroys all the sins of Kaliyug... Ram gathered the monkeys and bears and laboured hard to build the bridge connecting Lanka to the mainland. But, Tulsi says, O wise one, reflect on the fact that Nam dries up the entire ocean of transmigration itself....

Nam is greater than both the Absolute (Brahm) and Ram because it showers its blessings on those who confer boons on others... It is with the grace of Nam alone that Shiva is immortal.... It is only by remembrance of the holy Name that Hanuman has won over Ram... I have no words to sing the praises of Nam. Even the incarnate Ram cannot sing its praises adequately.

It is through devotion to the transcendent Nam that the disciple bathes in the inner sacred body of water, the *manas*, and comes to understand who the human form of God really is. Tulsidas explains that Nam is the link between the formless Reality and the human form of the Lord:

*Both forms are, however, inaccessible by themselves –
it is only through the power of Nam
that they are easily attainable.
Thus I declare that Nam is even more powerful
than either the Absolute or the incarnate Ram.*

Tulsidas describes the relationship between Nam and God:

*Nam and the Named are actually one and the same –
both are lovingly entwined with each other.
Wherever Nam is manifest, God invariably follows.*



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