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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Drenched by Clouds Laden With Love

*I was trailing the shadows of rituals,
Of customs and holy books;
But my Master came
And placed a lamp in my hand.*

*A lamp brimming
With the oil of love he gave,
With a wick that will never run short;
In its light I have finished all transactions,
I will never again visit this marketplace.*

*When Kabir met the Master
The light of knowledge illuminated his heart;
Let me never forget him! In him I found a saviour –
Through the grace of the Lord.*

*When the perfect Master I met
All my worries were driven away;
He made my soul immaculate –
Now he is ever at my side.*

*I took the dice of love;
I made my body the pawn;
As taught by my Master, I threw the dice –
Thus played Kabir and won the game.*

*The Master became pleased with me,
He whispered one word of grace;
The cloud of love poured forth
And drenched my entire being.*

*Kabir, clouds laden with love
In abundance poured down on me;
Within, my soul was drenched,
And around me even the desert turned green.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name



Seeker of Lost Souls

Recently I watched a film called *The Water Diviner*, starring Russell Crowe. Set in the immediate aftermath of World War I, the film centres on the character he plays – an Australian farmer and water diviner called Joshua Connor – and follows his journey across Turkey in search of his three missing sons who were reported missing in action and are presumed dead. As I watched the drama unfold, I was struck by the similarities between Connor’s story and what we are told of the mission of the Masters.

The soul diviner

The hero’s journey to the other side of the world reminded me of how the Master comes in human form to awaken us. The gulf between the region of pure spirit – Shabd – and this physical world is difficult to imagine but I gained a flicker of insight as I watched Connor leave outback Australia, a vast, remote wilderness, impervious to time, for the blood-soaked battle fields of Gallipoli that historians describe as “one of the worst fronts of the First World War.”

Connor’s journey is prompted by a promise to his dying wife that, whatever happens, he will bring his sons’ bodies back to Australia and bury them beside her. Like Connor, the mystics leave their abode only under direct orders from the Lord. Guru Gobind Singh, for instance, states: “I had no desire to come into this world, but the Lord so willed it and sent me here.”

Why does a mystic obey this call and, leaving the region of pure spirit, travel to its polar opposite? The answer is love. Just as it is love that compels Connor to honour his vow, the Master seeks us out of love for the Lord. The ‘us’, however, is not the outer, transitory self, but the soul. The Master relentlessly travels the length and breadth of the world in search of those under his charge. Connor is an expert water diviner (someone who is able to locate sources of water). The Master is something more – he is able to locate thirsty souls.

It’s important to remember that the Master looks not only for his own ‘flock’ but for those entrusted to him by his Master. In *Philosophy of*

the Masters, Vol. V, Maharaj Sawan Singh informs us that, just before their demise, mystics “hand over the office of the Guru to another... so that the work of connecting the souls with the Lord and redeeming them should continue.” The present Master once reminded a group of satsangis that Maharaj Charan Singh had loved roses, telling the group that they were all his roses and he had been given the seva of gardener to look after them.

Living water

Water is an essential sustenance for all forms of life, down to the tiniest organism. Connor’s ability to find water in the Australian outback (semi-arid bush where temperatures can reach more than fifty degrees centigrade and rain is infrequent) ensures the survival of his community. Since water is so critical to life, perhaps it’s unsurprising that ‘living water’ is one of the oldest and most commonly used metaphors to describe God’s creative power (the Shabd or Word), and also the gift of initiation. The earliest evidence of this metaphor is in scriptures found in the Middle East, dating as far back as 4,000 BCE. For a largely dry, agrarian society, the presence of water is paramount. As noted in *A Treasury of Mystic Terms*, Vol. III:

Without water, there is no physical life. Without the Living Water, there is no creation. Without conscious contact with the Living Water there is no salvation for a soul caught in the entanglements of physical existence.

As the quotation indicates, the soul is entangled in the inertness of illusion. To attain freedom, it must drink the Living Water to awaken that which is inert. The Master alone is able to locate this. As the Great Master explains:

All true devotees get the Shabd, which is real life, from the perfect Guru. He is life in himself, and since he is free from the ego, the Shabd speaks through him. He has transcended the valley of death. He has realized the life of the Lord, which works through the Sound, and he himself can give that life or spiritual awakening to his disciples.

As spiritual seekers, we often think that the Master's only role is to mend our broken souls and unite them with the divine. But as the Great Master reminds us, "The duties of the Guru are infinite," including, for instance, looking after the entire universe. That a mystic's care and protection is not confined to his 'sheep', but is all-encompassing is illustrated by the actions of the present Master during the coronavirus pandemic, by providing food and shelter to thousands of stranded migrants, donating funds to the Indian government's Relief Fund, and distributing packed lunches to those in need.

Diviners' magnetism

A water diviner, (meaning 'to foresee, foretell, predict or to prophesy'), is deemed to be endowed with an innate ability to locate water beneath the ground's surface by using different types of instruments, including electro-magnetic rods. Divination remains a controversial topic, but it reminds me how the mystics find the souls for whom they are responsible. Relevant here are the Great Master's observations about the "rays of purity" mystics constantly radiate and their "magnetic attraction." He states: "Whenever a Master appears in the world, seekers for the real truth are attracted to him like moths, and like bees they hover round that living flower of spirituality and enjoy its taste."

Before we commit to Sant Mat, we are encouraged to read widely about the philosophy, to reflect upon the teachings, and to reach a decision based on our assessment. Although this is an essential step and cannot be bypassed, ultimately it is not the words on the page which support our decision but how we feel in the presence of the Master. As explained in *The Spiritual Guide*, Vol. I:

[An] *individual knows when he has found his guru. It is not just an intellectual belief, but deep down, in the inner recesses of the soul, there is a sense of acceptance, contentment, and peace because one has come to one's teacher. Vivekananda says: "When the sun rises, we ultimately become aware of the fact, and when a teacher of men comes to help us, the soul will instinctively know that truth has already begun to shine upon it."*

Special opportunities

You might think it strange that these thoughts came into my mind as I watched the film. It seemed a miracle that the Master came to mind when I was doing something mundane. There are so many opportunities in our daily life to think of him that we're often not even conscious of them. Whenever we see or hear anything that reminds us of the Master, we could think of it as a personal message from him; it's one of the ways in which he reminds us of his presence. The Master is a part of our lives. He is always with us, whether we're sitting in meditation or engaged in the world, and we should not for one moment think we're separate from him. Even in our moments of deepest sorrow, he is with us. All we need is to be grateful for the moments when we feel his presence and try to extend this as much as we can. To me, this is the miracle and magic of our life: the constant opportunity to remember and, thus, be with him.



Truth in a Nutshell Perspective

The English painter, Constable, once told a lady who was surprised that he was painting a building she thought unattractive: “No, Madam, there is nothing ugly; *I never saw an ugly thing in my life*: for let the form of an object be what it may, light, shade and perspective will always make it beautiful.”

Merlin Waterson quoted in *Simple Pleasures*

As an artist, what Constable meant by perspective was the physical viewpoint from which an object is seen. Likewise, we also use the word “perspective” to refer to a viewpoint. If we live by simple, honest and loving values, it gives us a mental perspective in which plain things become beautiful. Maharaj Sawan Singh said:

A palace will appear as dreadful as a graveyard to a person who is bereft of love. But even the ill-furnished and dilapidated huts are beautiful if they are brightened with the spark of love. Through love, even jungles become filled with happy life, and without love, populated cities may appear bleak. Love is the richest of all treasures. Without it there is nothing and with it there is everything.

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



The Quotient Question

There is no pause in the miracles being played out every second in God's creation – the creation we live in. Floating in the vast nothingness, countless celestial bodies move around each other in a faultless and unending dance, untethered to anything. Life on our planet – including nearly eight and a half million species – miraculously propagates itself, without pause, to perfection. A tiny seed contains a whole tree. Two living beings give birth to life in their own image, complete with faculties of sight, sound, smell, taste, instinct and emotion to live out their own existence. And we take all this for granted, almost as a right owed to us.

The wondrous nature of God's universe doesn't stop here. The miracle of diversity in his creation is spellbinding. No two living things are alike, be they human, animal, or plant life. The scale is beyond calculation. Unique in itself, each individual living particle is different from the others, just as no two fingerprints of the nearly seven and a half billion humans match, or no two blades of grass are the same.

If all forms of life were uniform in their appearance, character and aptitude, it would be impossible to differentiate one from the other. It is diversity that lends each individual its distinct and separate identity.

The human species has engaged itself in not only recognizing these differences, but also grading them according to assumed levels of importance. Placing the intelligence quotient centre stage, and the emotional and creative quotients in the flanks, those of adversity, jobs and everything else, including spirituality, have been consigned to backstage.

The quotient parameters were designed to identify the talent best able to catapult us to a better, brighter future. That happened, but not in a balanced way. The current condition of our planet is witness to that. The world we have nurtured is one of division, competition, inequality, distrust, and hatred. We have damaged the very environment that sustains us. We seem to have erred somewhere, perhaps in granting undue importance to the intelligence quotient at the expense of all the rest.

When it comes to love and marriage, matchmaking is a challenging task in which we don't give weight to just one or two qualities such as wealth and fame. We also weigh aspects of goodness, respect, compassion,

generosity, and background to achieve a balanced view of the intended liaison, ensuring that a relationship will survive the test of time.

Where the rest of life is concerned, we falter in giving far too much weight to the quotient of intelligence. Individually, attributes of intelligence can tip us either way, towards the positive or the negative. It's the same for anything we view in isolation. It's only when we view all attributes collectively that we get a balanced and favourable outcome.

The quotient question explores the need to identify the one quotient which balances all others – a sieve of deeper understanding, of soul-searching, not just mind-searching; one that looks inward, not only outward; one that applies to all equally, not singularly. This is the spiritual quotient, the one that has never received the importance it deserves.

Spirituality is at the core of all life. It is the base without which nothing can exist, animate or inanimate. As we move away from our core into the mind's arena, we weaken the association with our spiritual reality. The mind, a formidable foe of spirituality, is a wanderer by nature. Never constant, it is always restless and on the move, jumping from one thing to another, never fulfilled.

Had the mind been an agreeable companion of the soul, and if it had placed the spirituality quotient at the forefront, the world would have witnessed progress in peace, equality, trust and unity. Just a single quotient would put everything in balance, giving respect to all life, irrespective of its level.

The spiritual quotient is well represented in the theory of *dharm* (responsibility) and *adharm* (lawlessness), as well as *maryada* (decorum or decency). Keeper of our conscience, principles, morals and values, it educates us on our responsibilities and duties towards God's creation. It presents us with a guide for how to live life in a grateful and balanced way, with restraint and respect towards all that has come into existence. It offers a boundary drawn to ensure decorum, decency and equilibrium in our relationship with the creation.

We live in an ever-changing world where nothing is constant. Such is the nature of life. Social and cultural landscapes are struggling to adapt to the frantic pace of change the world is going through; in just a century, our experience has spanned from travel in bullock carts to space flights and

artificial intelligence. The world may become very different in the next half century. Probabilities on that horizon may present us with robots as an integral part of family life, sharing our emotions and giving us advice. Artificial wombs to nurture life in labs might become commonplace along with genetic modifications to produce life with predetermined attributes.

The quotient parameters, as we see them now, will be beyond recognition by then – unless we wake up and start applying our spiritual quotient to the future, in every action and every thought. Unlike other quotients, spirituality is plural; it applies to all equally. It is not selfish, it does not place anyone at a disadvantage, it does not harm anyone. It is a blessing, without which we won't be human.

Let us keep the balance in all that we pursue. Let us not make ourselves less human. Let us not lose our spiritual core.



Surrender

If one were to ask what is the most challenging thing about following a spiritual path, most of us would probably reply, “Meditation.” But perhaps something else is even more difficult: surrender. This requires us to view all of life’s events dispassionately and not through the prism of ‘good’ or ‘bad’. In fact, during a recent question-and-answer session, Baba Ji said that practising meditation is easier than unconditionally surrendering to the Master. So what is surrender?

Shelter, obedience and bhana

The Sanskrit term for ‘surrender’ is *sharan*, meaning ‘to take refuge,’ which, in the context of spirituality, means to take the shelter of a Master. As mystics explain, the irrevocable law created by the Lord is that no one can meet the Lord without a Master. By taking the Master’s shelter, we commit to changing our lifestyle to one that is suited to the attainment of spiritual liberation. We may need to give up previous habits (such as eating meat or taking intoxicants) as well as any competing spiritual practices. As the Great Master writes in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, “When one is reborn in the house of the Master, that is, when one takes shelter with him, one should give up all previous spiritual or other practices and ask him what to do. It is the duty of the disciple to follow the path taught to him by the Master.” The Great Master is not asserting the superiority of one form of spirituality over another; rather, he is stressing the importance of finding a path we can commit ourselves to. It is much more difficult to realize our spiritual goals if we keep changing direction.

A second aspect of surrender is obedience or, as the mystics put it, subordination of one’s will to that of the Master. By relying on him entirely, we are to give ourselves up to him in much the same way as, for instance, putting our life in the hands of a surgeon. Surrender means being confident that whatever the Master directs us to do is for our benefit, especially when his suggestions seem puzzling. The Great Master states: “When one takes shelter with the Master, one must be like a child. He must give up his own will and conform to the will of the Master. He must surrender himself to the Master in word, deed and spirit.”

Aside from the four vows we take during our initiation into the path of Sant Mat, how else might we obey our Master? Once we begin to see the Master as the helmsman of our life, we must perform every deed with a view to pleasing him, and minimize the chatter of our mind by repeating simran. Given the sheer scale of information, technologies, and activities vying for our attention, turning away from them to remember the Master demonstrates our sincerity.

A third aspect of surrender means learning to live in the will of the Lord – accepting everything unfolding before us with neither too much joy nor sadness. This idea is captured in the Punjabi word, *bhana*. In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh gives the following explanation of why spiritual liberation is dependent on submission to the will of the Lord:

If we can learn to be indifferent to pleasure and pain, so that they do not take us away from our path, it would not only lessen the weight of our karmas, but they would also be paid off in much less time. If you can take what comes to you through him, then, whatever it is, it becomes divine in itself; shame becomes honour, bitterness becomes sweet, and gross darkness becomes clear light.

If we view all that is happening to us as a result of our Master's wishes, our love for him transforms how we respond. Maybe we could view our life experience like a garden in which we can grow our love for the Lord. Since all plants need sunshine and rain to grow, we can use pleasure and pain as opportunities to deepen our love for him. When, for instance, pleasure is in our destiny, we could show our gratitude by extending our meditation by even fifteen to thirty minutes. And when pain is in our destiny, we could mould our mindset to be even more grateful. We could train our mind to be glad that our karma is being paid off and, like rocket fuel, is turbo-boosting our journey home.

To surrender, we must accept. Although living in Master's will can be difficult, if we can train ourselves to live with fewer desires and to be content with whatever he provides, then we are getting closer to what it means to surrender unconditionally. This is aptly described in *The Path of the Masters*:

What is really meant by complete surrender to a Master is this: Out of perfect confidence and great love, the disciple gladly follows where the Master Leads. That is the sum of it all... By perfect surrender to a Master, in this sense, one gains everything, ending in the most perfect liberty. This is well expressed by one great Sufi, who said: "Give us all you have and we will give you all we possess!" By surrendering all to the Master, you gain everything.



The Fragrance of Love

Tulsi Sahib was the epitome of love and was pleased to see true love in the behaviour of his disciples and devotees. He once went to Agra and visited the home of Soami Ji Maharaj in Panni Lane. When the women of the neighbourhood came to know of the Satguru's (Tulsi Sahib's) presence, they ran to receive his darshan. Though some of them were busy with housework, they ran to him without bothering to clean and tidy themselves. After reaching Soami Ji's house, they bowed down at the Satguru's feet and sat down around him. Seeing their dirty, untidy, and smelly clothes, a disciple of Tulsi Sahib asked them to sit at some distance and told them that their clothes reeked of sweat. Tulsi Sahib stopped him and lovingly said, "No, no! Let them be seated in a manner they like; you are not aware of the fragrance of their love. You cannot comprehend the intensity of their love – you may get a foul smell from them, but I do not."

Tulsi Sahib, Saint of Hathras



The Seva of 2020

*2020 started with the coronavirus furor
Instilling fear across the world,
We were filled with anxiety to the core,
And then came the lockdown only to add more.*

*My Master as usual had planned it all out for me,
As he came to my rescue, my anxiety fled.
He opened the doors of seva for me
How blessed am I when I have no reason to be.*

*It all started with helping the needy,
But even here I was selfish and greedy.
Front face I was doing the seva for the unfortunate,
But back of mind it was my Master I wanted to please.*

*It was the best experience of my life,
During a phase when I could have been crying.
In the name of seva, he was doing it all
And giving us the credit, we did not deserve at all.*

*Now I understood why he created this digital world –
To bless us with his darshan which we were craving,
One look at him, we were at ease and relieved
From the insecurity of when we would see him!*

*With his grace, food preparation and packing seva
Were smoothly and safely executed.
He bestowed upon us the energy to do it,
Which normally was impossible!*

*We all became like sheep
And he the shepherd guided us all the way through.
The days spent here will always be cherished;
These overwhelming memories will remain embedded.*

*The lockdown period just flew by,
He kept me busy with no time to fret or cry,
I will always be grateful, for I was one of the chosen few.
Master, bless me, so I can live up to your expectation.*

*I am not going to call this my covid-19 seva,
I don't want such negativity to destroy my memories.
It will remain in my heart as a bounty –
This spectacular seva of 2020!*



An Arranged Marriage

In response to questions put to him, we often hear Baba Ji say that every day is not a sunny day. Just as weather is variable, it is natural to encounter various phases during our spiritual journey. There are periods during which complying with the Master's instructions seems fairly straightforward but, at other times, our struggle intensifies. We may, for instance, feel devoid of love for the Master, or become so preoccupied by our flaws that we find ourselves unworthy of following the Sant Mat path. As we work through these stormy periods, it's not uncommon for us to succumb to what is commonly known as the 'imposter syndrome'.

Described first by American clinical psychologists in the late 1970s, the imposter syndrome refers to high-achieving individuals attributing their success not to hard work but to luck, timing, the support of a mentor, or some other situational factor. Typically, such individuals view themselves as undeserving of the professional accolades bestowed upon them. Applied to spirituality, we may – when suffering from the imposter syndrome – feel like frauds who will be found out any moment. We feel that everyone else in the sangat belongs but we are impostors, and our supposed spiritual failings make us despondent. This is quite wrong. We may be different from others but that is exactly what the Lord likes. We can clearly see one characteristic of the Lord by studying his creation: the endless variety of creatures in the oceans, in the insect world, and among birds and beasts – the Lord loves variety! Therefore, we should just be ourselves. There is no correct formula for a disciple.

The imposter syndrome is a problem because it fails to recognize that our quest to attain eternal liberation is not the result of *our* volition but is, instead, attributable to the grace of the Lord. As the Jesuit mystic Anthony de Mello wrote: "It is not that God is a big dancer and you are a little dancer. You are not a dancer at all. You are *being* danced." Maharaj Charan Singh elaborates on this idea in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, by emphasizing that, when it comes to initiation, "Neither the disciple has any choice, nor the Master has any choice." Under instruction from the Lord,

the Master does not have the right to refuse initiation to any soul allotted to him but, equally, neither is his flock able to resist his call. Or, as Maharaj Charan Singh puts it, those souls assigned to a Master have no option but to go to him whenever he beckons.

The Master is therefore stuck with us. He did not pick his sangat, nor can he exchange it for a more pleasing group. Our agency is even more circumscribed. Before being born, our life had already been arranged in such a way to automatically draw us to the Master. The master-disciple relationship is therefore a match made in heaven and implemented on earth and, like the individuals in an arranged marriage, both must learn to love one another.

You can check out, but you can never leave

Once the Lord has marked us for initiation, our destiny is comparable to a line from the song “Hotel California,” by the American rock band The Eagles: “You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave”. We may decide to exercise our very limited choice by ‘checking out’ and ignore our meditation. However, there is no escaping divine law. Destined to become one with the divine, not only is it impossible for us to resign from Sant Mat but, eventually, our spiritual work will need to be completed – by us. Try as we might, this is not something we can off-load to the Master.

Unlike us, the Master epitomizes the perfect sevadar. Fulfilling his duty to the Lord, somehow or other he ensures that we reach Sach Khand, even if there are periods during which we stray from Sant Mat altogether. Maharaj Charan Singh elaborates on this by citing the analogy from the Gospel of Saint John about the shepherd and his flock of sheep. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

The shepherd has been entrusted with a hundred sheep. One sheep goes astray out of the fold. The shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep and runs after that one particular sheep and even physically lifts that sheep on his shoulder to bring it back to the fold because he’s responsible for all hundred sheep....

The success of the shepherd's mission is not dependent on his flock, irrespective of how hard they thwart his efforts. Even if only one or two go astray, the shepherd does not return to the farmer until every single one of his flock is safely enclosed within its pen.

There is no time to indulge in the imposter syndrome in spirituality. We have embarked on a spiritual adventure because the Lord has chosen us to return home. By expressing an earnest desire to be with him over the course of many lifetimes, we have finally earned our place in his flock. If we did not belong in his sangat, no power would enable us to force our way in. So instead of focusing on our unworthiness, it behooves us to focus on fulfilling our spiritual commitment.

Renewing our spiritual vows

Nowadays, it has become popular for old married couples to renew their marriage vows. Since many of us have been initiated for a long time, perhaps the initial excitement has worn off. If this is the case, why not renew our vows to the Master as follows?

“Do you take the Master to be your lawful wedded guru, to have and to hold, to honour and obey, in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth, for better or for worse, from this day forward until death you do join?”

And we say, “I do.”



Going Within

We often come across the term “going within” or “going inside” either in satsang or when reading the Sant Mat literature. But what does this actually mean? Drawing on examples from the physical world might help us obtain a better insight into this spiritual concept.

Accessing documents stored on a computer, for instance, requires us to start on the “outside” by logging on with the right credentials. Then we identify the relevant file and, clicking one sub-folder after another, we eventually reach the file we want.

Alternatively, we could turn to our history lessons for an example. During the Middle Ages, the king would give a private audience in the inner sanctum of his chamber. Those granted a royal interview would enter by passing through a series of antechambers until they reached his presence.

The point illustrated by these two examples is that “going in” involves traversing outer layers to reach a special, inner point. Similarly, in Sant Mat, “going within” means redirecting our outwardly focused attention inwards; we transcend our surface-level thoughts and reach a level of (super consciousness to experience the higher power which created us and is our life- force. As Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Light on Sant Mat*:

Life has a meaning and a purpose. The grand aim of human life is to foster, develop and guide those spiritual homing instincts and try to return to the spiritual home whence we came... This is the aim of evolving and perfecting that wonderful instrument, the brain, which has spiritual centres. These centres can be developed by proper means. All realizations come from within. The kingdom of God is also within. We must therefore go in, that is, turn all our attention and thoughts to the proper inner centre so that we might realize ourselves and then realize God.

This is why we meditate. Meditation is about getting hold of our wayward attention, concentrating and focusing it. Generally, our attention is engaged in the outside world, where it gathers information through the senses. Though we may have experienced spiritual longing – the desire to

re-discover our Creator – any search is likely to have taken us *outside*, to the doctrines and ceremonies of organized religion, whether in temple, gurdwara or church. Though sincere prayer and loving devotion will undoubtedly help us to realize our goal, it is essential we connect with the power of God’s holy spirit within us. The Shabd, Nam, Word or Logos – known by so many different names is mentioned by mystics of all ages and geographical locations, and if we come in touch with that inner spirit, it will carry us back to our source. However, we can find it only *inside* us, nowhere outside. Sultan Bahu writes:

This body is the temple of the true Lord, in which fragrant gardens abound with eternally fresh blossoms. Inside are the prayer mats, the places for prostration and the means for ritual ablution. Inside is the Ka’ba and the Qibla.

“Inside” is neither far away nor difficult to reach. In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh assures us that:

When you close your eyes, you are there where you should be. Being there, do simran, concentrate. When you close your eyes you are nowhere outside ... the idea is that your attention shouldn’t scatter outside, it should be here at the eye centre.

Closing our eyes and focusing gently on the darkness at the eye-centre, we repeat the five holy names given to us during initiation and, ignoring distracting thoughts, gradually we deepen our experience of “within”. Maharaj Jagat Singh gave an idea of how carefully and lovingly we should repeat simran when he likened this process to the way a jeweller handles precious stones. Each holy name is like a precious gem being gently placed in position. And the present Master has likened meditating to someone swimming upstream; it is slow, vigorous work, but every effort strengthens the limbs. Similarly daily practice, coupled with our determination to focus the mind, results in deeper concentration.

Whether we see internal visions, become immersed in the light of the inner stages, or hear the Shabd is entirely up to the Master. He oversees our progress and ensures we receive what we need when he thinks fit. But definitely, the deeper the focus and concentration, the greater our sense

of peace and stability. This is the garden of concentration, fragrant with blossoms, referred to in Sultan Bahu's verse. Eventually, the Radiant Form of the Master himself will be manifested within us. The inner Master is a never-failing friend who will be with us forever. In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh explains to a seeker what "within" means, using a very matter-of-fact example:

Q: *Master, you tell us that the purpose of meditation is to seek the Lord within, to follow the path within back to the Father, but I can't seem to fully comprehend the idea that meditation takes us within, that the Lord, the Creator is within me.*

A: *When at night you sleep and you have a dream, where are you? Is the dream within yourself or is the dream outside your body?... No doubt it is the reproduction of outside associations, but what you see, how you behave, and how you act in a dream – is all that drama within yourself or somewhere outside? It's purely within. So if a dream can be within the body, why can't the Radiant Form of the Master or spiritual experience be within the body?*



Zenlightenment

Zen is a practice of awareness based on meditation, focusing on the present moment. Whilst easy to like, it is difficult to understand, and even harder to practise because Zen centres on experiencing the present moment with an empty mind, which in her book entitled *Eastern Wisdom*, Priya Hemenway describes like this:

[The] empty mind is not an irresponsible mind, nor is it a vacant or a hollow mind; it is a mind that has relinquished the need to reconceptualize and has thus become free to respond spontaneously. With an empty mind, the practitioner of Zen experiences the richness of life one moment at a time without any fear of the past or concern about the future.

Like Zen, Sant Mat philosophy also stresses the importance of living in the moment. As explained in *Living Meditation*, “Outside the moment, life is suffering.” By dwelling on the past we’re liable to focus on disappointments while in thinking about the future, we are creating new desires and sowing the seeds for future karma. This is why both Zen and Sant Mat emphasize focusing on the present moment by repeating simran and practicing meditation. When our attention is in the now, it is difficult for us to be trapped by our own mind; we eliminate the ego’s need to inflate its importance by living constantly off memories of the past or fears for the future. The present moment is the most valuable thing there is. As the author of *Living Meditation* concludes, by living in the moment, “we are empowered to become serene witnesses of our own lives while we engage with and fulfill our own responsibilities.”

Elaborating further on Zen, Hemenway states:

To live in Zen is to live in meditation and to be constantly aware of the nature of mind. The continual preferences for and against this and that, yesterday and tomorrow are simply a disease of the mind. The practice of Zen is to recognize the disease, catch hold of it, and let it go.

The preceding quotation is similar to a central tenet of Sant Mat philosophy, namely, stilling the mind in order to reconnect with Shabd. The “disease” Hemenway is referring to is, as the author of *From Self*

to Shabd put it, our “addiction to thinking.” Regardless of whether our thoughts are “positive” or “negative,” both keep us in the realm of maya, thereby keeping our attention away from the eye centre. Thus, the Zen idea of living in the present moment could be viewed as analogous to eradicating the habit of compulsive thinking. This, in turn, will render the mind motionless, enabling us to go deep within ourselves and realize we are Shabd.

Bodhidharma’s disciple, Sosan, distills Zen’s notion of an empty mind as follows:

*Zen is not difficult for those who have no preferences.
When love and hate are both absent everything becomes clear and
undisguised. Make the smallest distinction, however,
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.
If you wish to see the truth
then hold no opinions for or against anything.
The struggle with what one likes and dislikes is a disease of the mind.*



A Death to End All Deaths

Many faiths recognize the significance of the coming to earth of a “son of God”, the plight of “sinful man”, and the need for help at the critical time of our death. For example, in Chapter Eight of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna:

*And whosever at the time of death leaves his body
And departs remembering Me alone,
He attains My being; there is no doubt about this.
Whosoever leaves his body thinking of any being
At the final moment, to that being alone does he attain, O Arjuna,
Because of his constant thought of that being.
Therefore, at all times remember Me and fight.
With your mind and understanding absorbed in Me,
You will surely come to Me.*

In setting out to address the existential dilemma facing Arjuna – should he battle with members of his own family to combat evil or should he refrain from fighting, out of family loyalty and to avoid bloodshed? – Lord Krishna addresses humanity’s ultimate question about the purpose of life and proceeds to outline three paths for liberating the soul. In the preceding verse, Lord Krishna explains how to achieve immortality when the angel of death comes knocking. Thus, he impresses upon Arjuna the importance of meditating daily in order to redirect his attention inwards and develop his concentration so that it is focused entirely upon Krishna. If Arjuna achieves this whilst living, he will not panic at the time of his death but will, instead, automatically turn his attention to Lord Krishna. By retaining his focus on Krishna when dying, Arjuna’s soul will merge with Krishna and thereby attain liberation from the karmic wheel of life and death.

Our attachments bring us back

The importance of meditation is exemplified in a fable featured in *Tales of the Mystic East* about a man who kept putting off his meditation. In the fable,

whenever Kabir Sahib went out walking, he would come across a man sitting in his fields. “Sir, instead of sitting idly in your fields,” Kabir would say to the man, “you could spend your time more effectively in meditation and thus improve yourself.” But the man would always reply, “Oh no! I am far too busy!”

One day, without any warning, the man died. Since he had been greatly attached to one of the cows he looked after, the man’s final thoughts turned to his favourite cow. As Kabir walked by the empty field a few months later, he enquired after the man. Learning that he had died, Kabir turned his attention inwards and saw that the man had been reincarnated as the calf of his favourite cow. “Ah, that is indeed a great pity,” Kabir said. “Poor man, his life was wasted. Even a few moments of love for the Lord would have started to end his imprisonment here.”

Rehearsing the process of dying

All saints come to the world on a mission of mercy. They may be born in the East or West, in any country, caste or creed – it makes no difference. Imparting the same eternal message of God-realization, all mystics teach their disciples the technique of ‘dying while living’. Hence, in the first of his four letters to the Corinthians, Saint Paul wrote, “I die daily.” Similarly, by impressing upon Arjuna that daily meditation will counteract his fear during the process of dying, Lord Krishna is also indicating that meditation is a way of rehearsing for death. Maharaj Charan Singh makes the same point in *Die to Live*:

Why should death be terrible when we are trying to experience that same death every day? Unless we start preparing ourselves for that time, death is terrible and painful. But when we sit in meditation every day, it means we are preparing ourselves.

As well as preparing ourselves for death, the saints say that meditation brings about our spiritual awakening in which we become alive to the Lord but dead (i.e., detached) to the world. Some of us may become sufficiently advanced in our practice to realize the mysteries of the truth within. Guru Nanak put it like this:

*If you die while living, you will know all,
And experience the Lord's grace within.
Such a one, O Nanak, attains true esteem,
And recognizes the Lord within all beings.*

The chances are, however, that most of us will spend our lifetime *trying* to reach the eye centre. But this itself is a sign of the immeasurable grace bestowed upon us by the Lord. Were it not for him, we would neither meet the Master nor follow a spiritual path. By his grace, we make the effort to attend to our meditation. And it is by his grace we fulfill the purpose of life and, returning home, become one with our Father forever.

*O Nanak, when the Lord is merciful to someone,
He brings him in contact with a Satguru;
Such a one, through the Guru's grace,
Dies while living,
And never faces death again.*



Facing Discouragement

Everyone, at some point in their life, faces discouragement or even worse. It's said that "the world lives on hope". We live on hope, feed on illusion, and are shattered when reality breaks in on us – when we find out how vulnerable we are and that our hopes and expectations do not necessarily bear fruit.

Learning to place our love and hope in our Master and the spiritual harvest he offers is difficult but it can be done. Below are two extracts from the Radha Soami literature showing us how to face life with courage and acceptance of God's will.

Whatever good or bad happens to you, through whatever person or object, directly proceeds from our loving Father. All persons and objects are but tools in his hand. If an evil befalls you, think it as his greatest mercy... Suppose someone ill-treats you without any fault on your part – you should see in this ill treatment the hand of the Master working. He wants you to find out whether your pride has died or not, and how deep has meekness and love taken root in your mind.

All events which appear to be misfortunes are not really so. They come to chasten us, to add to our power of resistance, and leave us better in the end. Be always resigned to his will. What the Father does, he does for the best. In this world, those persons who are engaged in the upward march have constantly to face the inroads of two powerful enemies – mind and matter. They try to put many obstacles in our way. If an untoward event happens, we need not be disheartened. Rather we should rise with redoubled love, and final victory will be ours.

Our Father is love and we are small drops from that ocean of love. This huge machinery of the universe is worked on the eternal principle of love. So try to bring yourself in harmony with this principle of love. The deeper the love for the Master takes root in you, the fainter will be the worldly love in you. His love will displace the love of earthly things.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

Whatever happened in his life, Sardar Bahadur accepted as his Satguru's will. Happiness or pain, prosperity or sickness – he would accept everything with an unshaken composure. He never complained about anything; he never appeared to be discontented or disappointed with anything. In 1920, fairly early in his teaching career, Sardar Bahadur was selected by the Imperial Agricultural Service Commission for the Indian Agriculture Service. It was a prestigious post, but even as the letter of appointment was being written to Sardar Bahadur, the post was given to another person because of his political influence. Sardar Bahadur's friends and colleagues were much upset and urged him to protest against the injustice and apply to the higher authorities for a revision of the decision, but he refused.

The following Saturday, while on their way to Beas, Pundit Lal Chand several times urged him to stand up for his rights. Sardar Bahadur's only reply was, "My officer is Hazur Maharaj Ji. What has happened has happened at his command." In Beas, when his brother, Sardar Bhagat Singh, told Maharaj Ji the whole story of Sardar Bahadur's being unjustly superseded, the Great Master turned to him and said, "What about it Jagat Singh?" Sardar Bahadur replied, "What Hazur has done, has been well done." Greatly pleased, Maharaj Ji said, "Good, Jagat Singh! This is how a satsangi should be."

Daryai Lal Kapur, *Heaven on Earth*



The Value of Time

In this busy and hectic life of ours, in which time is so precious, how often do we take stock of our lives? Are we spending most of our time on activities and relationships that will keep us bound to the material plane, or are we investing our time to develop spiritually?

The mystics inform us that human birth is a precious and rare gift of the Lord, but one that comes with an expiry date. Warning us not to become sidetracked by worldly activities, they impress upon us the need to use our human form for the purpose for which it was given: God-realization. Do not become seduced by the glitter of the world, they say, since all that we see before us is perishable. Even our own body will one day turn to dust despite the countless hours we dedicate to its beautification and preservation. Whilst this message is constantly repeated, we turn a deaf ear to the Master's teachings. So absorbed are we by life's attractions, and sometimes its pain, that we postpone our daily meditation until we've completed something (ostensibly) more important. However, Kabir warns us:

Time is draining away like water held in the palms of your hands, but mind takes no heed. Like a moth it flies into the flame of passions and in the end is burned. O mind, why do you rejoice at the sight of pleasures? Don't you see the fire that will consume you? You are hugging the serpent of sense pleasures and squandering the wealth of human birth. Says Kabir, mind is vile and capricious; one learns this through the knowledge given by the Master. Mind, without devotion, will keep burning wherever it goes.

We will leave our body the very moment we draw the last of the finite number of breaths allotted to us, irrespective of whether we've fulfilled our spiritual purpose or not. Unlike in work assignments, negotiating an extension is not an option. This is exactly why devoting at least some time to meditating each day is essential; otherwise our soul will not be released from the cycle of birth and death. As Baba Jaimal Singh wrote to the Great Master in *Spiritual Letters*:

You should do your bhajan and simran every day, whenever you have time. You are not to waste your time.... This human body you will not

get again. The great object of being born as human beings is that one should listen to the Nam Dhun with attention.... Always keep in mind that we have to leave this world. And whatever we do here according to the dictates of the mind, we will have to suffer for it. Insist on the mind remaining within the orders of the Satguru.

Upon our demise, we will face the king of judgment, who will mete out justice in absolute fairness. As per karmic law, each action will need to be accounted for. If we have neglected our spiritual practice, who knows where we'll end up? Where our final destination will *not* be, that is certain; with little or no spiritual wealth supporting us, the doorway to the Divine will remain closed.

In the fifteenth century, the Christian mystic Thomas à Kempis wrote:

Very soon your life here will end; consider, then, what may be in store for you elsewhere. Today we live; tomorrow we die and are quickly forgotten....

Therefore, in every deed and every thought, act as though you were to die this very day. If you had a good conscience you would not fear death very much. It is better to avoid sin than to fear death. If you are not prepared today, how will you be prepared tomorrow? Tomorrow is an uncertain day; how do you know you will have a tomorrow? ...

In the morning consider that you may not live till evening, and when evening comes do not dare to promise yourself the dawn. Be always ready, therefore, and so live that death will never take you unprepared. Many die suddenly and unexpectedly, for in the unexpected hour the Son of God will come. When that last moment arrives you will begin to have a quite different opinion of the life that is now entirely past and you will regret very much that you were so careless and remiss.

The present is very precious; these are the days of salvation; now is the acceptable time. How sad that you do not spend the time in which you might purchase everlasting life in a better way. The time will come when you will want just one day, just one hour in which to make amends, and do you know whether you will obtain it?

See, then, dearly beloved, the great danger from which you can free yourself and the great fear from which you can be saved.... Try to live

now in such a manner that at the moment of death you may be glad rather than fearful. Learn to die to the world now, that then you may begin to live with Christ....

Keep yourself as a stranger here on earth, a pilgrim whom its affairs do not concern at all. Keep your heart free and raise it up to God, for you have not here a lasting home. To him direct your daily prayers, your sighs and tears, that your soul may merit after death to pass in happiness to the Lord.



The Day Everything Changed

It was 5:15 a.m.

The alarm on my phone blared and awoke me from my slumber. I could see semi-lucid shapes from the corners of my eyes. The birds chirped their merry songs as the world slept.

I had to get up.

By the time I got ready, it was six o' clock. Many people my age would either be sleeping or returning home after their usual Friday night capers. I, on the other hand, was showered and raring to make my way to seva.

Attending seva, grudgingly

I have not always been excited about spending the day at our satsang property – far from it. Whilst my mother had been following the Sant Mat path for years, I never associated with it. But to keep her happy, I (grudgingly) began going to seva with her. At first, I didn't know anyone and viewed volunteering at a secluded property situated in the middle of the countryside, and without any mobile reception, as a waste of my weekend. Now, at the age of twenty-two, that same place is my bliss, my family, my everything!

Sant Mat philosophy

Sant Mat is not a religion but provides an overarching set of principles for living a spiritual life. Its teachings imbibe the universal truth found at the core of every major religion including Hinduism, Christianity and Islam (to name but a few). One of the basic tenets of Sant Mat is to be a good human being as, for example, exemplified by showing kindness and compassion to everyone and learning to forgive those we believe have harmed us. The Sant Mat way of life is based on the law of karma; this means that much of what happens to us is the result of actions we've taken in previous lives. Since all actions – good and bad – need to be accounted for, the only way to escape the perpetual cycle of debt and credit is to find a guide who teaches a method of meditating that liberates the soul.

The joy of seva

Our property offers the opportunity to perform week-long seva during which volunteers immerse themselves in an atmosphere of spirituality whilst undertaking their assigned tasks. Volunteers travelling from farther afield are given on-site accommodation. A few years ago, I too was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to perform seva during one of its busiest times. Being surrounded by everyone I love and cut off from the rest of the world felt like a dream come true. Although long and tiring, twelve glorious days went by in the blink of an eye. The mornings started early; I was up by five to undertake my daily tasks. But the evenings were the most special. Finishing seva at four, larking about with my friends till late and doing it all over again – that's something I dearly miss.

The final pull

The exact moment I fell in love with the spiritual path is hard to say; if pushed, I'd have to say that it was probably when I turned eighteen. I was already being pulled towards Sant Mat; everything I saw and read reminded me of the teachings imparted during satsang. But it was my first (and hopefully last) serious car accident that finally made me believe in the divine. This is what happened.

After returning from seva, I decided to go for a drive. On a high from the atmosphere of love and devotion, I was thinking about how lucky I was to be part of such a loving community and at the start of my own spiritual awakening. Ten minutes later, my car skidded and collided head on with a traffic divider on a roundabout. As the car released the airbags, my glasses went flying and I lost consciousness. Unaware of what was happening, I was pulled out of the car by strangers who happened to be at the scene. Amazingly, these spectators turned out to be off-duty professionals.

Among my band of good Samaritans were two nurses and a doctor, who gave me medical attention. A mechanic prevented my car from catching fire by disconnecting its battery, whilst an off-duty police officer investigated the scene and drew up the paperwork. Everybody said, given the force of the collision, how lucky I was to have escaped with only seatbelt bruises.

It took a car accident for me to believe in the power of the divine. From that day to the present, so many unimaginable things have happened that feel like miracles to me. It has made me believe in the loving protection of the divine, and this has opened my eyes to a new world that exists amongst the turmoil and disarray of the world we all live in.

Each of us has our own unique story of finding and making a commitment to Sant Mat. Now, on this bright morning, I was off to meet my fellow sevadars. I got in my car, switched the ignition on, chose my music and plugged in my auxiliary cable, then started on my way from my house – to my home.



Food for Thought

Enlightenment for Lunch!



The Ladder of Perfection

The following quotations are taken from a book on spiritual guidance by Walter Hilton, a fourteenth-century hermit often viewed as one of England's three great mystics (Julian of Norwich and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* are the others).

Mystics have little difficulty in breaking convention when seeking enlightenment, sometimes drawing attention to the futility of the social customs of the day or, as with Walter Hilton, democratizing access to the scriptures. During a period in which the Christian church in England was powerful and its language of choice Latin, Hilton produced the first English-language book on mysticism. He spent most of his life in a monastery, writing several texts, although *The Ladder (Stairway) of Perfection* is by far his most popular and attracts new readers to this day.

Published as a single text, *The Ladder of Perfection* combines two separate works, written at different points of time, and possibly for a different readership. His aim was to provide an easy-to-read, foundational text on spirituality for beginners. By contrast, other books of the time predominately targeted experienced spiritual practitioners. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for instance, gives a warning in its prologue, in which readers are cautioned to continue reading only if they are fully committed to cultivating a contemplative life.

That Hilton is not readers' preferred mystic is an observation recently made by a contemporary contemplative writer. Most readers tend to pass over Hilton's plain-speaking, stern tone and his emphasis on discipline and the hard work required to inwardly experience the divine. Readers seem to prefer what one author terms "spiritual goodies" – books discussing spiritual awakening and all that this bestows. Imagining a blissful future is a more inviting read than one offering guidance on self-improvement – virtue, humility, motivation and so on – in preparation for a contemplative life.

And yet perhaps it's specifically because of Hilton's style and approach that, nearly seven hundred years after it was written, his book's insights and observations resonate with our experiences of trying to reach the

eye-centre. Certainly we can relate to his assertion in the first quotation that our receptivity to divine grace ebbs and flows.

In the second quotation, Hilton counsels readers to make it their life's mission to "feel the sweetness of His [the Divine's] love." His impassioned plea is all the more inspiring since he maintained that he was simply a struggling soul, working towards rather than enjoying the experiences described in his writings. This is strangely reassuring. For all that has changed, there is much in the twenty-first century which is the same as in the fourteenth: spiritual liberation is just as difficult now as it was several hundred years ago.

The awareness of special grace that accompanies the invisible presence of God and makes the soul perfect in love does not always continue at its highest intensity, but comes and goes unpredictably... "The Holy Spirit breathes where he wills, and you hear his Voice; but you do not know whence he comes or whither he goes." Sometimes He comes secretly when you are least aware of Him, but you will recognize Him unmistakably before He goes, for He stirs your heart in a wonderful way, and moves it strongly to contemplate His goodness. Then your heart melts with delight at the tenderness of His love like wax before the fire, and this is the sound of His Voice. Then before you realize it He departs. He withdraws a little, He departs. He withdraws a little, but not entirely, and the soul passes from ecstasy into tranquility. The intense awareness of His presence passes away, but the effects of grace remain as long as the soul keeps itself pure, and does not willfully lapse into carelessness and worldliness, or take refuge in outward things.

We should desire always to be conscious (so far as we may) of the lively inspiration of grace brought about by the spiritual presence of God within our souls. We should desire to contemplate Him constantly with reverence, and always to feel the sweetness of His love in the wondrous nearness of

His presence. This should be our life, and this our experience of grace, for God is the source of all grace, and grants this gift as He wills, to some in greater measure and to others less.

For He grants this experience of His presence in various ways, as He sees best. And this experience is the goal towards which we should direct our lives and exertions, for without it we cannot live the life of the spirit. For just as the soul is the life of the body, God is the life of the soul by His gracious presence.



What the Living Master Does for Us

We lack the capacity to understand what the Master, in his physical form, does for us, let alone understand anything of his power and protection beyond the material plane. Nonetheless, we can gratefully acknowledge a little of how he looks after us.

We can probably remember the Master entering our lives and how different they became. Where we once might have felt alone or vulnerable, now we're reassured by the knowledge that, as our eternal guide, he is constantly helping us deal with the uncertainties of life. Where we once might have struggled to understand why the world is as it is, the Master teaches us the law of karma, encouraging us to view events from a broader perspective. As a result, when things don't turn out as we desired, we remind ourselves that whatever is taking place is the result of our actions in previous lives. Even though it doesn't always stop us from feeling disappointed, we try to follow our Master's example by looking for the silver lining in every cloud. When we think of how we might have reacted to events before and after meeting the Master, we get perhaps one of the clearest illustrations of his transformative effect on us.

The Master wishes us to become good human beings. In fact, of the four life-changing vows we make upon initiation, the first three are blueprints enabling us to do just that. Adopting a lacto-vegetarian diet stops us from hurting any of the Lord's creatures. By refraining from eating eggs, we stop endangering unborn life. By not indulging in alcohol and intoxicants, we keep a clear mind and avoid a host of awful actions and complications that could hurt others and drag us downwards, entangling our soul ever more tightly in the material world.

The Master wants us to think logically and realize that actions have consequences, so that, during this life, we learn to make better choices. He explains the importance of finding a living Master rather than devoting ourselves to a past Master. We should not rely on second-hand teachings but receive initiation direct from a Master who is contemporary with us.

The Master tells us what we must do if we wish to leave this creation, which includes adopting the three life-changing vows outlined earlier. If we show we can do this for at least a year, then we can apply to become

initiated into the path of the Masters, during which we are taught the fourth foundation of a satsangi's life, namely, meditation. This is the method by which we learn to focus our attention at the eye centre. As our focus deepens, we become attentive to the Shabd resounding within us.

Both before and after initiation, the Master encourages and guides us, answers our questions in satsang meetings or in letters. By spending time with us, he strengthens our relationship with him and loosens our ties with the world. In fact, in ways we don't often recognize, the Master guides our life, shaping it in such a way that we are directed towards seeking him within. Whilst this is one of the greatest forms of grace bestowed upon us, it is different from how we normally view grace. We believe the Master is showering his grace when things are going well and our hopes and aspirations are realized. *His* concept of grace brings us closer to meditation and draws us away from the world. For him, an ideal prayer is meditation, during which we ask for nothing but communion with our inner Master. As the Great Master wrote in *Spiritual Gems*: "It is the business and duty of every disciple to make his mind motionless and reach the eye centre. The duty of the Master is to help and guide on the path."

The present Master says he would like us to develop spiritual maturity – to view as significant not what happens to us but how we deal with it. Again, he emphasizes the role of meditation. The Master does not change our karma but reassures us that practising meditation will help us remain balanced during life's crises. As our attention gradually shifts from the outside to the inside, the worldly things we once held dear lose their attraction.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, the Great Master wrote that unless we meet a living Master, such is the nature of divine law that we can never return to our source. Explaining further, he writes: "We need the Lord's conscious self to be manifested so that we may know him. The Shabd or divine creative sound takes bodily form, connects us with itself, and unites us with the Lord."

The present Master is clear that, instead of becoming dependent on his physical form, we should meditate. Reminding us that life is precious and will not last as long as we think it will, he has said that none of us is doing

enough meditation. Not to do the full time is ‘crazy.’ In fact, the Master continually emphasizes that he won’t be satisfied with anything less than 100 percent of our effort. Meditation must become a priority rather than something we try to fit into our schedule if we can. The Great Master gives the same advice, writing in *The Dawn of Light*, “Any part of our time not used in spiritual practice is lost. Therefore you should always try to save your time for meditation, because to incline our mind and spirit towards the things other than the holy sound is to lose our fortune.”

One reason why the mystics wish us to prioritize meditation is that it helps us become receptive to divine grace. Meditation is the ‘actionless action’ that provides the gateway for us to merge with the Master. Ultimately, the choice to meditate and our level of effort is in our hands, while the results are in his hands. If at times it seems that our best efforts are too puny or that he is silent to our calls, let us remember Maharaj Charan Singh’s repeated reassurance that he is always with us. When we think about it, this is the only ‘result’ we’re seeking: that our beloved Master is forever standing by our side. In fact, of all the immeasurable graces bestowed upon us, perhaps the greatest is yet to come. During our greatest hour of need, when it’s time to leave this body, the Master will be with us and, leading us into the ringing radiance of the Shabd, he will finally take us home.



The Eternal Bond

The strongest relationship in the world is that between Master and disciple. The joy and love characterizing this relationship cannot be described in words. To be fully realized, it must be experienced in the innermost depths of the soul.

In spirituality, there are no coincidences; everything happens according to a divine plan. The Master-disciple bond commences once a disciple has been marked by the Lord. From this time forward, the disciple's life is organized to lead him or her to the door of their Master. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh uses the example of shepherds grazing their sheep to explain this point:

When a shepherd whistles, only his particular sheep will go to him – and they will not go to another shepherd. There are maybe five thousand sheep brought together and they may belong to three different folds and three different shepherds. When one shepherd whistles, only those sheep which belong to him will come to him – the other sheep won't even listen to his whistle.

In the same way that the sheep run to the shepherd who calls out to them, a Master's disciples are automatically drawn to him.

During initiation, the Master connects the soul to the sound current. The union is eternal and impossible to sever. Indeed, the Master pledges to guide his disciples to their true home – the source of all – and, should he leave his physical body, the Master's spiritual power remains with his disciples, helping their souls to ascend. Writing in the *Adi Granth*, Guru Nanak states:

*That friend have I with me, O Nanak,
Who goeth with me at my death;
And where one has to render account,
There is he seen standing by me.*

Adi Granth, p. 729

The Master-disciple relationship is one of great compassion and mercy. Out of his boundless benevolence, the Master undertakes the process of washing his disciples clean of the many negative actions of their past. The Master accepts the disciples for what they are, never passing judgment. However, until a disciple reaches the higher spiritual planes, he remains unaware of the Master's grace and the tremendous help he receives. Very occasionally, in the same way that a loving mother scolds her misbehaving child, the Master may reprimand an erring disciple to keep his spiritual progress on track.

The disciples on the path of God-realization under the tutelage of a true Master are indeed fortunate. However, the disciples must also put in their share of effort, honoring the vows undertaken at the time of initiation to the best of their ability.

Just as we carefully put in time and attention to our worldly relationships, we must cultivate our relationship with the Master. The key to this is meditation. Meditation is the foundation of the Master-disciple relationship. It is the highest service a disciple can offer the Master.



The Bright Side of Life

The following incidents – one from a tour in India and another overseas – are reproduced from Legacy of Love and provide an insight into Maharaj Charan Singh's jovial disposition.

Maharaj Ji always had a way of looking on the bright side of life, no matter what the circumstances. Rajasthan is a hot desert state, and on one occasion some of his group had chosen to sleep on the roof terrace because of the heat. During the night, a dust storm blew up and their mosquito nets collapsed around them, causing everyone to shift beds and bedding back indoors. One person, however, unperturbed by all the commotion, slept on through the night in a tangle of bamboo poles and mosquito netting. This brought about a conversation the following morning during which Maharaj Ji commented that “a man truly at peace with himself could sleep on the edge of a sword.” Someone complained that as a result of the disturbed sleep he felt “miserable.” Maharaj Ji laughed and said he shouldn't feel miserable: the morning air was pleasant and they'd passed a good night. “I slept sound,” was another comment, “to the sound of mosquitoes,” to which Maharaj Ji responded with a mischievous smile: “My sound was much better.”

[Maharaj Ji's] laughter was spontaneous, vibrant, joyful and infectious. He would catch his lower lip in his teeth as though this were the only way he could stop himself laughing too much. Were he not himself to limit it, one felt his merriment might shake the whole world.

“Next morning, walking down some high, steep, stone staircase of one of the buildings at the pyramids, Master was sighted by a group of about fifty Mexican children, early teenagers and younger, and all brightly dressed. The very same instant they all let out an uninhibited whoop of joy and raced across the eighty yards or so to completely engulf the Master at the foot of the stairs. He joined them in their joy, laughing as much as they, caught up in the innocence, catching them up in his soaring, carefree laughter.”



BOOK REVIEW

Awareness of the Divine

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Awareness of the Divine delves into the experience of the divine presence. It gathers passages, mostly from Western sources, referring to such experiences covering a period of more than 2500 years. The book is in three parts: it begins by examining spontaneous experiences of the divine that come “out of the blue”; it moves on to descriptions of not momentary but continuous awareness of the divine; and it concludes by reviewing ways of life and contemplative practices developed in a variety of traditions by which people strive to gain awareness of the omnipresent reality of the divine.

In the first section of the book the author assembles statements by many individuals recounting sudden experiences of the divine presence, moments in which they unexpectedly were able to perceive a divine grace that, they realized, enfolds all of us all the time but which we normally never notice. For example, the British novelist Mark Rutherford wrote:

One morning when I was in the wood something happened which was nothing less than a transformation of myself and the world, although I ‘believed’ nothing new. I was looking at a great, spreading, bursting oak. The first tinge from the greenish-yellow buds was just visible. It seemed to be no longer a tree away from me and apart from me. The enclosing barriers of consciousness were removed and the text came into my mind, “Thou in me and I in Thee.” The distinction of self and not-self was an illusion. I could feel the rising sap; in me also sprang the fountain of life up- rushing from its roots, and the joy of its outbreak at the extremity of each twig right up to the summit was my own: that which kept me apart was nothing.... “Thou in me and I in Thee.” Death! What is death? There is no death: ‘in Thee’ it is impossible, absurd.

In the book *But for the Grace of God*, J.W.N. Sullivan, a British journalist, said, “At such moments, one suddenly sees everything with new eyes; one feels on the brink of some great revelation. It is as if we caught a glimpse of some incredibly beautiful world that lies silently about us all the time.”

Many of these moments of insight occur when individuals are contemplating the beauties of nature. The author quotes the British historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle calling nature the “living, visible garment of God.” The English poet William Wordsworth said that nature reminded him of the presence that “rolls through all things.” For him this divine presence within nature was,

*The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.*

In moments of awareness of the divine presence, the author says, time itself disappears;

it is no longer needed; indeed, it cannot support that which is eternal. Martin Buber, an Israeli Jewish philosopher, says, “In ecstasy, all that is past and that is future draws near to the present. Time shrinks, the line between the eternities disappears, only the moment lives, and the moment is eternity.” As St. Augustine wrote in the 4th century, describing God’s knowledge: “It is not with God as it is with us. He does not look ahead to the future, look directly at the present, look back to the past.... All things which He knows are present at the same time to His incorporeal vision.”

In the second section of the book the author discusses how spontaneous experiences of the divine can awaken a longing for a more continual or “unbroken” awareness. Thomas Kelly, a 20th century Christian mystic, in his Testament of Devotion, says that, although “there come times when the presence steals upon us, all unexpected, not the product of agonized effort,” these instances create the desire in us to be “saturated with God’s own life” and to experience “the radiance of His presence” continually.

The intensity and continuity of the divine presence, however, may vary in degree and be disrupted despite our best efforts and desires. The medieval Christian mystic Walter Hilton, in Ladder of Perfection, after describing moments of divine presence, says, “Then before you realize it, He departs.... The intense awareness of His presence passes away, but the effects of grace remain as long as the soul keeps itself pure, and does not willfully lapse into carelessness and worldliness, or take refuge in outward things.” He adjures us to “desire to contemplate Him constantly with reverence, and always to feel the sweetness of His love.”

Introducing the third section of the book, the author points out that, however welcome and joyful spontaneous experiences of the divine are,

the question remains: how can human beings gain awareness of the divine and make it a steady and consistent part of their lives? What spiritual practices lead to a “deeper and more permanent experience of the divine”?

A simple practice of continuous remembrance is described in the book *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence, a French Carmelite monk living in the 17th century. God’s presence was the primary focus of Lawrence’s life. He gradually learned to rely on a simple practice of “awareness of the presence of God” in place of formal prayer. A fellow religious practitioner said about Brother Lawrence:

His prayer was nothing else but a sense of the presence of God, his soul being at that time unaware of anything but divine love;... when the appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with God, praising and blessing Him with all his might, so that he passed his life in continual joy.

In a letter, Brother Lawrence wrote,

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God... Ah! if we but knew the need we have of the grace and assistance of God, we would never lose sight of Him, no, not for a moment.

Similarly, Nancy Mayorga, a disciple of Swami Prabhavananda, wrote in the 1960s, in *Hunger of the Soul*:

The whole purpose of life as I see it now is to practice the presence of God at every conscious moment. I used to think that such a state of mind or soul would be conferred suddenly when I succeeded in reaching samadhi or union. Now I realize that it is a habit that has to be trained into me, and that samadhi is not to be the cause of this perpetual enjoyment but the result and crowning achievement of it.

Ceaseless prayer is another form of spiritual practice that can lead to awareness of the divine. In the *Philokalia*, an anthology of the writings of monks from the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, one monk states, “Through unceasing prayer and the study of the divine scriptures, the soul’s spiritual eyes are opened, and they see the King of the celestial powers, and great joy and fierce longing burn intensely in the soul.” An example of ceaseless prayer is the constant internal repetition of what is known as

the Jesus Prayer “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.” Mystics of many different traditions have taught that ceaseless prayer leads ultimately to a profound inner silence and in that silence one recognizes the presence of God. Nancy Mayorga describes surrendering to “that absolute stillness”:

More frequently now my mind is drawn to that very deep state where the presence of God is explicit, incontestable.... Sometimes His presence comes with such a quiet and tender sweetness that I find myself weeping with gratitude. When you surrender to that absolute stillness, that all-pervasive beneficent light, that inexpressibly sweet, sweet bliss, there is no doubt, no doubt at all, in your heart or in your mind, that you are experiencing God.

As *Psalm 46* of the Bible teaches, “Be still and know that I am God.”



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