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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Yours Affectionately

A Letter from Maharaj Sawan Singh

Your letter has been duly received. It was a pleasure to read it. It shows that you have very hard work to do, but still are eager to devote what time you can to your daily spiritual practice.

As for your visit to India, you are in the right, because spiritual progress has nothing to do with any particular locality; it depends rather on the attitude of mind. People in India find the spiritual practice as difficult as you do and their progress is not more rapid than yours. It is necessarily a slow progress. The holy Master keeps each one of us in the place best calculated for our spiritual good. A person who has begun his journey on the right path will reach his destination one day, sooner or later. He is far better than one who journeys on the wrong path. You should remain confident that both of you will one day see and know what you so long for, when your spirit currents completely focus in the centre behind the eyes. There is no time limit. You should fulfil your duty of doing the spiritual practice with love and faith, leaving the rest to the Master, who knows your time....

The wavering and faintness in the faith, which you say at times overtake you, will cease when you have seen the Master in his glory in the focus of the eyes, that is, when the spiritual currents concentrate behind the eyes, where the Master in his resplendent form is waiting to receive you. Strive to reach that point. Until that time, go on strengthening your trust in his mercy.

Dawn of Light





Why Do We Meditate?

As disciples on the path, we made a commitment at the time of initiation to devote at least two and a half hours daily to the practice of meditation. However, although we constantly strive to achieve some sort of balance between our worldly commitments and our spiritual responsibilities, sometimes we find ourselves so overwhelmed that living up to that commitment becomes a great challenge. As a result, we hurriedly rush through meditation merely to strike it off our to-do list, meditate mechanically, or even miss sitting altogether – leaving it for another day. Why then do we meditate? We would do well to reflect on our motive and objective for undertaking this commitment in the first place.

If we are certain that spiritual realization is our primary goal in life, then the first and most important thing to do is to support our spiritual self. Our spiritual self is to be considered our core, with all the other aspects of our lives revolving around this centre. Moreover, with a correct and renewed understanding and application of our objective, meditation will cease to become a mere ritual, and we will attend to it with a true sense of devotion, love and humility.

One of the main objectives of meditation is to appeal to the Lord for forgiveness and invoke his grace. The mystics explain to us that we are imprisoned in this endless cycle of birth and death, due to our enormous amount of karmas from countless previous births. These karmas are what separate us from the Lord and prevent us from merging back into our Source. As we look deeper into the workings of the law of karma, we begin to see that one reason we go on doing what we do is because we do not experience the repercussions of our deeds straightaway. It is precisely because of our ignorance that we end up in such a trap. Our spiritual nerves have been deadened to

such an extent that we fail to understand where our thoughts and deeds are taking us. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in one of his poems, “Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.” In the Buddhist scriptures it is written:

So long as an evil deed does not bear fruit, the fool thinks that it is like honey; but when it bears fruit, then the fool suffers grief. An evil deed, like newly drawn milk, does not sour; smouldering, like fire covered by ashes, it follows the fool.

Dhammapada, as quoted in *Honest Living*

The mystics teach that meditation is the most effective prayer to ask for forgiveness. It provides us with the opportunity to repent for our karmas and to beg the Lord for his compassion and mercy. It is a means for us to communicate with God and serves to open up our hearts, making it receptive to his ever abundant love and grace.

Meditation is nothing but seeking his forgiveness, nothing else. “Whatever we have done or we are too weak to do every day, please forgive us.” Meditation is nothing else. It is not vain words to say to him, but practically we pray to him for forgiveness by attending to meditation. It is the same as repentance. When we are sitting in meditation, we are actually repenting for what we have done in the past.

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

Meditation helps us develop and sustain an attitude of acceptance and surrender. In order for us to go through the ups and downs of life without losing our equilibrium, we need to constantly maintain an attitude of acceptance of our circumstances. When we are more accepting and react less to situations, tranquillity replaces anger,

humility replaces ego and contentment replaces greed. We are then more focused, more skilful and more productive in anything we do. We naturally adjust our attitude and behave in a manner that is in harmony with both the inner self and with our external environment. The mystics tell us that the attitudes of surrender, patience, awareness and contentment are strengthened through the process of meditation and are naturally applied to every aspect of our lives. We then reflect the peace, joy and calmness that develop in us automatically.

Meditation is the best way to prepare for death. The mystics explain to us that meditation is in fact a preparation to leave the body. By mastering the process of keeping our attention at the eye focus, not only will we go within and experience what it is to die while living, we will also be able to take refuge at the eye centre at the time of death – peacefully and willingly.

Die to live. You must withdraw to the eye centre, and then you will live forever. Otherwise, you are just living to die. Every time you live, you have to die; so die to live. Learn to die so that you may begin to live, and live forever.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

As we evolve and continue to grow in our understanding of the real purpose of meditation, we should never forget that the moment we receive initiation from the Master, we also receive all the grace we need to practice our meditation. We need to just strengthen our willpower that we can do it. Life will never present us with perfect circumstances, so we have to make do with the present moment and simply latch on to the circle of effort and grace – that is, the more effort we put in, the more grace we receive to make more effort. In keeping a commitment, we are encouraged to know that our word is worth something. There is great value in just making the commitment to meditate.

Something to Think About

To one who had recently retired on pension, Maharaj Jagat Singh wrote: “You should look upon this day as your most lucky day. You have played your game well. All of your worldly duties have finished. Now you should do something for yourself. Up to this time, you have been doing others’ work. Now do your own. All desires and worldly cravings should be turned out from your mind. Tell your mind that you have finished your game in the world and now God’s inning begins. Take your mind out from family, children, houses, property, wealth, honour, country and all connections with the world. Bring your mind to such a state that the existence or non-existence of these things may have no effect on you. Now give all your thought, attention and time to God and God alone. Become his now. Cleanse your mind of everything else. Think day and night of bhajan and of nothing else. Work hard. Fight the mind fearlessly. The Guru is with you. With his help, subdue the mind.”



The Lord loves the humble and the low. Beware of injuring the heart of any man. God lives there. To those who break another’s heart the gates of heaven shall ever remain closed. Always speak gently, lovingly and selflessly. The higher the position you hold, the humbler your mind should be. A sweet word never costs anything, but wins the world.

The Science of the Soul

To Know

Those who know, do not speak; those who speak, do not know.

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

As we gain knowledge and learn about the path of the Masters, we soon discover how fascinating this journey into our inner selves can be. The path embodies the very essence of what we have been searching for all along.

In the beginning, however, we feel the need to talk about it with other like-minded brothers and sisters; to share our thoughts about the monumental changes that are taking place in our lives. We get excited about small anecdotes about our Master. We get carried away with the hope that the more we learn about him, his lifestyle and where he has been, we somehow broaden our spiritual horizons and deepen our understanding of this mystic discipline.

But as long as we indulge in this type of external activity, we are merely trying to capture a reflection of an image, a mental construct that leads us to believe that we are making progress towards our goal when we are actually far from it.

We could spend our entire lives sitting at the feet of the Master, attending his every discourse, memorizing all the sacred scriptures, and yet be as far away from our spiritual destination as we were before. We progress towards our goal the moment we walk towards it, and that is exclusively done by attending to our meditation.

The truth we seek is beyond the confines of our present mental state. Our comprehension of Sant Mat, perceived through the prism of our mind by what we read about in books, hear in the discourses, or see with our eyes, only scratches the surface. This knowledge is useless

unless it takes us to the truth within. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that this is a path of transformation, not information, and that comes from application. For that to happen, we need to live a balanced life, aware of the traps and illusions set forth constantly by our minds. The beauty of this path lies in the principle that by working diligently towards our inner spiritual quest, we can develop the awareness to overcome all the barriers.

It is our mind that prevents us from coming into contact with the spirit, that truth within, and it is with the help of the very same mind that we gain entry into this treasure house. That unchanging state of bliss can be achieved only by shattering the limitations of the mind and breaking the bonds that our senses have over us. It is only our daily spiritual practice that will get us there, that will enable us to raise our consciousness through the body and focus it at the third eye, where we realize and experience that Truth, the Shabd within, the enrapturing music of the Lord.

It is, of course, to our advantage to use the help Master provides us. Performing seva, the act of selfless service, helps us to imbibe a spirit of humility: working shoulder to shoulder with our peers, regardless of our social status, wealth or background, helps us to deconstruct our ego. By attending satsang, we are reminded of the paramount importance of the vows we take at the time of initiation, hammering into our minds the necessity to keep our focus on the most important task of our lives.

The only way we can catch the faintest glimpse of this truth is by going beyond the very images and phenomena that drive our attention outward into this creation. As we diligently apply ourselves to a path of inner contemplation, we understand the true nature of everything we have taken so much for granted, and are able to rise above our myopic view of what we so long believed to be the source of our happiness.

True mystics and saints have perfected this technique, and always keep their attention within; thus they are in constant communion with that inner spiritual melody, the Word of God. We should never underestimate the Master's physical presence, but the ultimate objective of the outer Master is to take us to that inner Master – the Shabd – within, which is never born nor dies, and is as permanent as that Truth that we are seeking deep within ourselves. Our Master invites us to share this experience. That is the main difference between a spiritual Master and us: he is there, at that level of absolute Truth, all the time, and we are here. Once we get there, we will then understand for ourselves the mystery of life as it reveals itself and we will gain direct access to our real Master, which is none other than the Word, the Shabd, and only truth there is.

We then no longer feel the need to gush out with speech, to convince ourselves or talk to others about our faith on the path, to fill the gap with useless mental activity, for we have found what we set out to look for. We know, and so we feel no need to speak.



*The true lover of God keeps his love silently hidden in his heart,
like a seed sown in the ground; and if the seedling grows,
it grows in his actions towards his fellow-man.
He cannot act except with kindness,
he cannot feel anything but forgiveness;
every movement he makes, everything he does,
speaks of his love, but not his lips.*

Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message*, Vol. I

Blessed Are the Meek

It is a common misconception that humble and meek people are weak. Just because they do not express their opinions freely or just because they admit and apologize for their shortcomings easily does not mean that they are not intelligent, talented and do not have opinions as others do. They simply choose to maintain a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere at all times. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh clearly explains:

Meekness and humility are essential qualities for going back to the Lord. Meekness truly means elimination of our ego, of our self-importance. This ego holds us down and does not let us merge into the Lord.

Everyone has something to be proud of. Some of us are proud of our family. We shower them with love and attention and try to provide them with the best things in life. But who can say that they have never been disappointed by their family members for one reason or another? When we grow old, we lose our physical strength and we are no longer able to help out with household tasks the way we used to. And then we find that the same children who we devoted our entire lives to have no time for us.

Some of us are proud of our beauty and fine health. But often we don't realize that these gifts too can be taken away from us in a blink of an eye. There have been many real-life incidents where a strikingly beautiful person becomes paralyzed and disfigured in a terrible accident. Moreover, no amount of plastic surgery can save us from our

internal aging process. We start to wither away slowly till death claims our physical form just like every living being on earth.

We are simply the Lord's treasurer of a certain amount of wealth for a particular period of time. He has left all this in our trust and our duty is to look after it to the best of our ability. If we are only treasurers of this wealth, then what is there to be proud of?

Master has often given this example during his discourses: We are proud of the fact that we are the head of our family. But when we compare ourselves to our manager at work, or the CEO of our company or to the President of our country, what happens? As we compare ourselves to those with a higher status, our own status diminishes.

At the end of the day, what do we gain by being proud and arrogant? No genuine relationships can be formed with our family or friends if they sense that we look down on them. No one likes the company of a boastful person. India, during its toughest fight for freedom, chose a meek and humble person like Mahatma Gandhi as its leader. His noble views and thoughts have become an ideology and a way of life for many even today. A humble person recognizes his inner strengths, but at the same time has the confidence to recognize greatness in others. He respects knowledge and experience. If we possess the jaded attitude of "I've seen it all," it is a turn-off to many and makes us feel far more important than we actually are.

Just think for a moment. While we are in this body, what are we proud of? Is it our youth? Have we not seen old age creeping up on people? Have we not seen the pitiful condition of patients in hospitals? Is it our wealth? Have we not seen rich people losing all their money? What then are we proud of?

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*

It is clear how important it is to keep our ego in check at all times. This means that even for one second, we cannot let our ego creep in and give ourselves a pat on the back for the 'good deed' that we think we are doing. We should maintain a humble attitude in any task that we attend to. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, Maharaj Sawan Singh clearly says:

The way to God is firstly humility, secondly humility and thirdly humility.

And what a beautiful example his own disciple Maharaj Charan Singh set throughout his life when he kept addressing himself as a humble servant of the sangat. Till his very last day he worked in his office, he maintained a very humble attitude. It was on that day, that he left a note written in Urdu which read, "In service of my Guru, the perfect Master, Hazur Baba Sawan Singh Ji..." These are the words which grace the very first page of *Legacy of Love*, a pictorial book that lovingly depicts his selfless service throughout his life.

No tree can grow except from the root on which it sprang. Through all its existence, it can only live by the life that was in the seed that gave it being. Humility is not just a virtue along with all the others; it is the root of all. Being meek and humble in the presence of the Almighty is the best attitude one can have as it allows the Creator to decide what is best for us in every aspect of our life. In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh affirms this in a letter pacifying a disciple who complains of the ups and downs in life:

Who knows? Things could have been worse. So our feeling of gratitude to him must never be lost. He alone knows what is best for us and it is for us to live within his will.

Choosing Words Wisely

The value of silence has long been taught by saints and mystics. Its practice has been an almost universal requirement in all efforts to gain access to the inner depths of our soul. Silence has been demanded of the seeker in almost every faith. But modern man seems to be afraid of silence. It is held in contempt by most people, as it forces them to confront their inner selves. It forces them to think. Generally, society tends to appreciate talkers more than thinkers, as ceaseless talking is often considered to be a sign of culture, intelligence and sociability. Inability in this field is apt to be condemned as dullness or a lack of manners. So, we fill our lives with meaningless talk and endless words. What is the reason for our excessive fondness for speaking? In *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran answers:

You talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts; and when you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart, you live in your lips, and sound is a diversion and a pastime.

As victims of continuous speech, we fall into the trap of mechanical talking and endless discussions. We don't realize that most of our follies are follies of speech. How often a careless and unkind word can spoil our day, hurt a loved one, destroy a friendship or wreck a business deal. Without any hesitation, we blurt out the thoughts that run through our minds without realizing that control of speech is indeed the beginning of wisdom. As a result, the tongue has no bridle, no restraint. This runs entirely counter to the teachings of saints and mystics, who advocate strict control of the tongue.

What *is* our endless talk all about? In our daily conversations with family, friends and colleagues, we indulge in petty slander, drool over trivial social scandals, or at best criticize politicians and statesmen, writers and scientists, often without having the slightest authority on the subject we are discussing. It is because of our inflated egos and sense of superiority that we look down on others. We stress on our strengths while pin pointing the weaknesses of others. The sad reality is that people are comfortable with gossiping, character assassination, slandering and belittling others. So often we indulge in these unnecessary evils without realizing how they affect our mental and spiritual balance.

Saints and mystics point out that by slander or unnecessary criticism we attach ourselves to the very defect we criticize. This makes sense, because we attract to ourselves those qualities that we think about.

Too overburdened now is man with burdens self-imposed. Too rough and crooked is his road. Each judgment is an added burden, alike to the judge and the judged. If you would have your burdens light, refrain from judging any man.

The Book of Mirdad

Saints advise us not only to avoid indulging in slander and petty talk ourselves, but also to avoid listening to the slander of others. We become party to the slander when we give ear to it, and contradicting slander leads only to worthless disputes. Thus, when we hear people slandering others, we should try to control our own tongue, remain silent and meditate on the Lord's name instead.

It may be human nature to pick out faults in others, but this is not the way of the spiritually-inclined. Only one who considers others to be of more value and who looks at himself as unworthy makes spiritual progress. They are truly humble and fail to see anything bad in others. In fact, they even have regard and affection for their slanderer. They believe that slanderers make them aware of their faults, and praise the slanderer's cleansing role and call them their well-wishers.

Saints come into this world to set an example for us. They themselves avoid idle chatter. Of course, they are not always silent but all their talk is in service of the Lord. They say that much of our physical and spiritual energy is dissipated by talking and therefore advise us to speak as little as possible. Once we observe the habit of speaking less, we choose our words wisely. We automatically refrain from frivolous talk – which sometimes leads to gossiping and slandering others. Not only that, we also conserve our precious energy which can be directed towards our prime goal in life – meditation. So, silence is essential if we want to be successful in our spiritual pursuit.

With the practice of meditation, we learn to accept that everybody has his or her own set of merits and demerits. We rise above others' shortcomings and see everyone as a child of God. If at all we are inclined to find faults in others, we should realize our failings first, and make the effort to reform ourselves. We can aim to live life with an open heart and eliminate judgemental thoughts. We can try to keep in mind that everyone is doing the best they possibly can and if they knew better, they would do better. This simple thought can help us be less critical and more appreciative of all that is. When we see the best in others, there is no room for slander. But what should we do if someone fails to see any good in us? What should we do if someone slanders and speaks ill of us? Well, it is only our critics and slanderers that help us see our weaknesses.

Did You Know?

The bread of spiritual life is that audible life stream within. Its source is infinite and boundless. And when you get a taste of that nectar, you just want more. Everything else becomes insipid and tasteless. Nothing attracts you in the world anymore. You become completely attached to that sound and light, and by the grace of the Master you become whole, you become pure.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Saint Matthew*

* * *

It is the desires that create karmas, and the karmas lead to rounds of birth and death. Saints therefore exhort us to cut at their very root and to ask for nothing save the Lord himself, for when one owns the very source of the bounty, there is no dearth of his gifts.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

* * *

Unconditional surrender is certainly the foundation of spiritual progress in Sant Mat, but it is a hard thing to attain. Until we have vacated the body and met the satguru inside, unconditional surrender is not really possible, although the outward surrender also is very desirable. Strive for that inner darshan. Then unconditional surrender shall once and for all time solve all problems. Please devote all your available time to simran and bhajan in order to achieve this desirable end.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Not Again!

We sleep through our meditation more than we care to admit. Much to our frustration and stress, it resigns us to a day of worry as we try to find the time to make up and fulfil our two-and-a-half-hour promise.

Sleep is indeed a great obstacle in every devotee's path. It overcomes us during meditation and prevents us from complying with our full commitment. Furthermore, it makes us feel lethargic, lazy, distracted and indifferent towards our spiritual goal.

The path to the eye centre is not easy; the struggling soul sits in the darkness, day after day, trying to still the mind. This is the point where the disciple is most vulnerable – for in this very darkness is where sleep lays out its enticing pleasure.

Mira, in an unusual poem, compares sleep with a commodity for sale, illustrates her desire to give up this weakness:

*'Sleep, oh sleep for sale!
Loudly I'll shout and yell,
Begging the buyers to come.
If a customer approaches
With little money in his purse,
I'll dispose of thee on credit,
For payment at some distant date.
I will sell thee, my foe,
Below the market rate.*

Mira, The Divine Lover

Indeed, it would be a good thing if we could consider sleep a commodity we could sell, even at a loss, just to rid ourselves of this weakness. Unfortunately, this is not the case and those who suffer from it must explore its causes to find a realistic solution. In a question and answer session, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

If you get proper rest, you generally don't sleep during meditation; but the difficulty is, we don't take proper rest. We always try to sit in meditation at the cost of sleep. We don't give the proper time or rest to the body. When the body gets proper sleep, then of course you won't easily fall asleep. It also depends upon your diet. If the diet is wholesome and healthy and light, then you won't feel sleepy at all. If you tire yourself and eat too much and sleep too little, then naturally you'll always be sleepy.

Thus Saith the Master

Proper rest and a good diet as prescribed by the Master is the most obvious solution. How often have we done what we should not do – overeat, and sleep very little? And yet, despite our best efforts at applying the solutions, we continue to fail – and fail quite often.

Ultimately, the best solution is something that will hold our attention when we sit staring into the darkness; something that will keep us absorbed and wide awake, able to fight the strong allure of sleep. The ultimate remedy beyond rest and a proper diet are the Shabd – the Sound and Light experienced within. For once experienced, they captivate the disciple beyond all else.

However, until we reach that point where the Sound and Light keep us awake and absorbed in the bliss, what options do we have for overcoming sleepiness and lethargy?

The first key to success is discipline, followed by the proper application of rest and diet. Building good habits will create regularity and punctuality in our daily meditation. Even if at times we falter, we must never miss a day of meditation. The more disciplined we become, the less vulnerable we will be to sleep attacks.

We can also keep ourselves in high spirits by attending satsang, doing seva and reading Sant Mat literature – activities that keep us saturated in the remembrance of our Master. During satsang, we are given a review of the Sant Mat philosophy. Seva in turn keeps both our mind and body in the service of the Master. Lastly, reading about Sant Mat, even a little each day, gives us a fair dose of wisdom directly from the Masters.

Staying awake during meditation will always be a challenge, but we can make things a lot easier for ourselves if we keep in mind that the Master is our dearest friend, and that meditation is our daily time together. Would we fall asleep in the presence of our dearest friend?



There is seclusion at night.

Our Beloved is within us,

What a gracious time it is!

The Sound Currents of Nam are reverberating on all sides

And are easily audible in the silence of the night.

If you have an intense longing to meet your Lord,

You should know that the darkness of the night

Is like the long black tresses of the Beloved spread everywhere.

And if you continue to sleep at night,

Then you should be ashamed.

Shams-i Tabriz, as quoted in
Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I

His Love

I should like to point out that I have the same degree of love and affection for each and every member of the brotherhood, like a father towards his children; secondly, according to the teachings of the saints, the sins and shortcomings of a soul are viewed by the Master in the same light as a washerman regards the dirt on a cloth. He cares for the cloth and not the least for the dirt. His aim is to cleanse the cloth by some means or other; whether by the gentle method of applying soap or by the rough and ready method of beating the cloth against a slab of stone. It depends upon his will.

In the same way, the Master aims at reforming his disciples and curing them of their bad habits and wicked deeds so that the spirit may shine in its purity. He determines as to life's procedure. At first he points out our mistakes in gentleness and with love. If this fails, then he adopts a less gentle course and if even that does not serve its purpose, then he applies drastic remedies. In short, he is bent on reforming.

To explain the matter more fully, the Master at first tries to purify us by his discourses. If this fails, then he applies the soap of poverty, adversity, and disease. If these do not answer the purpose, then he gives another birth to the disciple. He does not rest until he has taken the spirit of his disciple to its source. Even if the pupil deserts him, becomes hostile towards him, or wishes to injure him, he does not slacken his efforts.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Put the Glass Down

A university professor once gave a very interesting lecture to his students. He began his class holding up a glass of water, so all the students could see it. Then he asked them, “How much do you think this glass weighs?” “50gms! 100gms! 125gms!” they answered.

“I really don’t know unless I weigh it,” said the professor, “but, the question is: What would happen if I held it up like this for a few minutes?” “Nothing,” the students replied.

“Okay. What would happen if I held it up like this for an hour?” the professor asked. “Your arm would begin to ache,” said one of the students.

“You’re right, now what would happen if I held it for a day?” “Your arm could go numb, you might have severe muscle stress and paralysis and have to go to hospital for sure!” ventured another student and all the students laughed.

“Very good, but during all this, did the weight of the glass change?” asked the professor. “No,” they answered.

“Then what caused the arm ache and the muscle stress?” The students were puzzled and couldn’t answer. “What should I do now to come out of pain?” asked the professor again.

“Put the glass down!” exclaimed one of the students. “Exactly!” said the professor. “Life’s problems are something like this. Hold them for a few minutes in your head and they seem okay. Think of them for a long time and your head begins to ache. Hold them even longer and they begin to paralyze you. Then you will not be able to do anything. It is important to pick up the challenges or problems in your life in order to face them, but it’s even more important to put them down!”

This is a wonderful lesson. In fact, we can apply it to our lives on other levels than just our problems. As it is in our nature to believe that we are in control of our own lives, we constantly make plans and set goals. We try to program ourselves and the people in our lives to achieve them. There are even some of us, who prefer to take the fast track by speeding through life's experiences without understanding or appreciating them.

Whichever life we may be living, we all experience circumstances which force us to slow down. We often come to a point where we realize that not everything goes according to our plan, and we have to adjust, make compromises, or simply face disappointment and sadness. We experience happiness only temporarily, and often we are left emotionally and mentally disturbed.

Thus, if we continue to hold on to our problems or even our plans and dreams as if they were the most crucial aspects of our lives, and give them more importance than they deserve, then we are prolonging our own pain and suffering.

If, however, we accept that our emotions, our plans, our highs and lows were never ours to begin with – they are not even within our control – then we open ourselves up to happiness and understanding.

Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh Ji used to explain that by following the teachings of the Masters, we can rise above the sphere of mind and matter so that pleasure and pain do not affect us.

The mystics explain to us that the only way to rise above the world and its dark coverings is to make the Lord's will our own. In other words, put our glass down in front of the Lord and surrender everything to him.

Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV:

Pain and pleasure, honour and glory, birth and death, the union of the soul with the body, coming together and separation, habitation in hell or heaven, recitals and penances, wandering in different species, knowledge and devotion, and crossing the ocean of the universe, all are happening according to his will.

Maharaj Charan Singh further says in *The Master Answers*:

We feel that we have surrendered, even in physical love, when we submerge our will into the will of the other person. We try to do what pleases the other person, and never try to assert ourselves or to adjust the other person to us. We always try to cooperate and to submit ourselves to the other person. Spiritual love is the same. We have to surrender ourselves to the Master. It means that we have to take our ego out of us and blend our whole heart with his heart.

So what pleases the Master? All he asks of us is to devote time and attention to our meditation regularly and punctually. He asks us to attend satsang regularly and adhere to the Sant Mat way of life. He advises us to spend our free time repeating the words of simran in our minds, even while walking, talking, working and moving around.

If we put in our best effort into following these guidelines, then we are learning to live in the Master's will. The best part is that no effort goes unnoticed by the Lord.

If we follow the sound advice of the university professor, and put our glass down in front of the Lord, then we reduce the stress and

problems of our lives. We will find we have more time for spirituality, and simran suddenly becomes sweeter. We begin to let go of our ego and surrender to the divine will of the Lord. And then we realize that what we have to do is actually very simple – just leave everything to him.



*In self-surrender to the Master's will
And utterly contented with your lot,
Remember the Master always, friend.
Whatever he may do,
Consider it to be of truest benefit to you;
And always treasure in your heart
Whatever word he utters.
Soami Ji, as quoted in *Divine Light**

The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Master, if meditation is the highest form of seva, is any other form of seva – the external forms of seva – really necessary for inner progress, and if so, how much external seva should we be doing?*

A: External seva definitely helps us in every way. It helps to eliminate ego from us. We are so conscious of our rank, our wealth, our status, our achievements. These things make us so egoistic, and seva helps to eliminate all that. It brings us to the human level. It definitely helps us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

* * *

Q: *What is the difference between outer and inner darshan?*

A: Inner darshan is permanent. It can stay with you forever. Outer darshan can't. Outer darshan should lead you to reach to that level of consciousness where you can get the inner darshan, which is your constant companion. Outer darshan only fills us with love and devotion so that we can reach to that level where darshan can always be with us. Outer darshan can't remain with us always.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *Master, yesterday you spoke about darshan and the helplessness of a disciple being pulled towards the Master. When we are in his presence or reading a book or even in meditation, feeling some fullness, being filled by the Master, is this also darshan?*

A: If you are feeling him, if you are thinking about him, if your attention is towards him, you are always with him.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

* * *

Q: *Is it okay to lean fully on the Lord to solve any problems in life?*

A: Sister, if you have given yourself to the Lord, then you have no problem at all. All your problems belong to the Lord and you don't exist anymore. Problems only exist when you feel separated from the Father. When you think that you don't exist and only he exists, you have no problems at all.

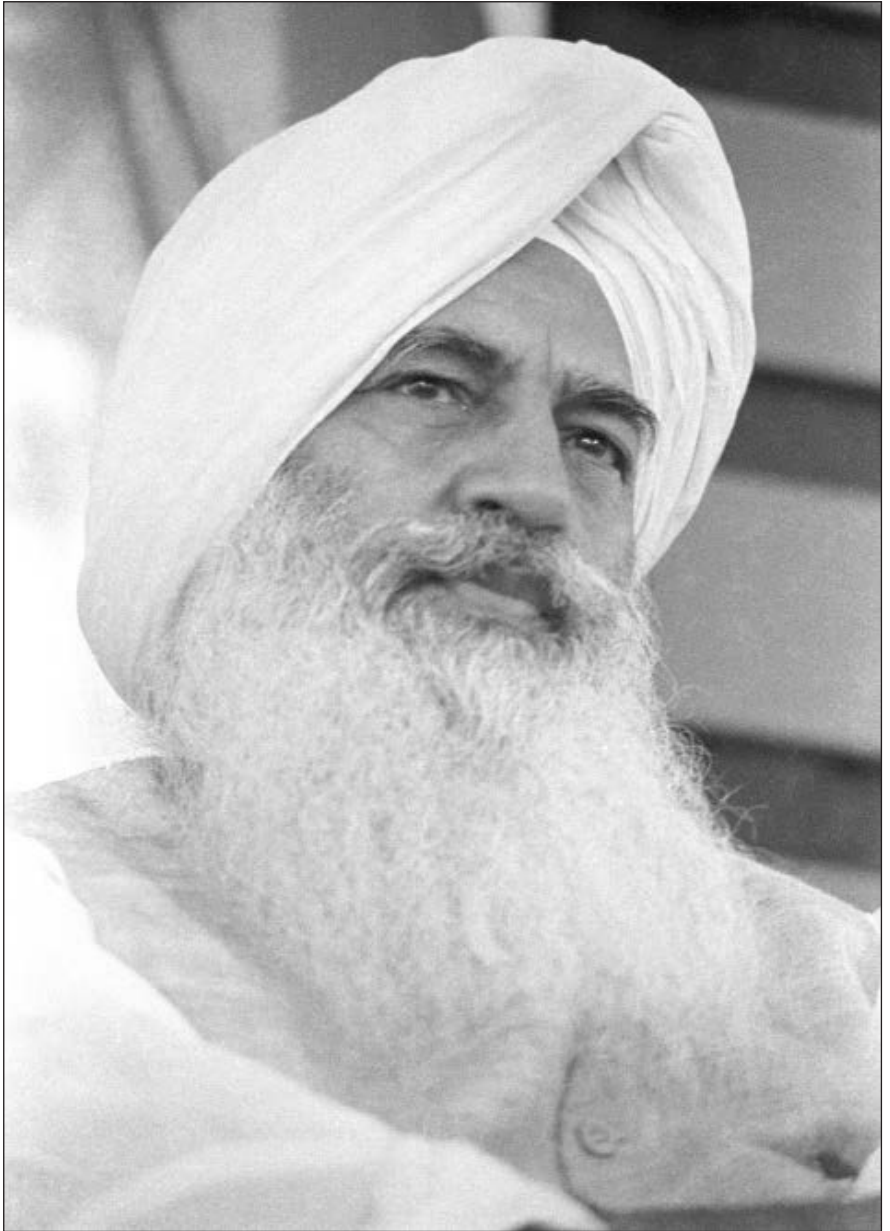
Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

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Q: *Master, the most helpful thing I have received from your lips is when you said, "You get only what you deserve."*

A: What I mean by "we get only what we deserve" is that whatever we have done in the past, we have sown certain seeds to deserve what we are getting now. We reap what we have sown in the past, and now we deserve it. Therefore, we should always do those actions, of which we want to reap the desired results.

The Master Answers



Maharaj Charan Singh

The Glance of Love

The Master in all his mercy and grace, takes on tremendous hardships and difficulties, to reach out to his disciples. He travels to different centres, with little rest or time for his own comforts. The Master does this because he loves us and because he knows how important it is for us to see him and hear his words.

Until the day we can reach the true form of the Lord within, the physical presence of the Master helps to motivate the disciple on his spiritual journey. The Master patiently repeats the same truth again and again, slowly chiselling the blocks in our minds that barricade us from the reality of our existence. And many times, words are not even necessary. Just sitting in his presence can have a profound effect:

Darshan makes an irresistible appeal to the inner being of the disciple, even when he receives no verbal instructions.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

It is difficult to adequately explain the nature of the experience. When we are in the physical presence of the Master, our troublesome minds, with their endless preoccupations, are suddenly at a standstill. Something inside us stirs awake and we feel a gamut of emotions – an outpouring of love and a sense of fulfilment beyond comprehension. The intensity of the experience goes beyond anything we are accustomed to. And it is an effort just to hold it all in – to channelize it inwards towards our meditation – as our Master wants us to.

No matter how hard we try to rationalize or explain it, we cannot. The effect on us is beyond words and leaves us totally overwhelmed.

deep impression that it remains vivid in our hearts and minds years afterwards. Such is the effect of the Master's darshan.

In the book *In Search of the Way*, the author recalls her first meeting with her Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh:

At last I arrived and there he was, impeccably dressed, an upright stately figure with a long snow-white beard and high turban and a countenance of quiet dignity, smiling into my eyes and holding out his hand, with a deep 'Hallo' of greeting. While he shook my hand, and I murmured a conventional reply, my mind felt as though it was metaphorically bowing at his feet. It is strange how we contain ourselves at such a time when our inner selves leap and dance for all the world like an exultant puppy greeting a much loved master after a long separation.

What magnificence was there in that face, and yet what a calm kindly dignity: the face, one might feel, of God the Father, such dependability and trust it engendered in one; a fearless eye, sometimes piercing in quality but when alighting on some fortunate person – full of gentle, caressing love.

The Master's love for his disciples is self-evident. His objective is to pull us out of this dross, and he leaves no stone unturned in fulfilling his purpose. Even the love we feel for him is his gift to us.

You see, love always starts with the Father. Unless he pulls us from within, we can never worship or love the Father at all. Love always starts with the Master; it never starts with the disciple. The pull is always from within....

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

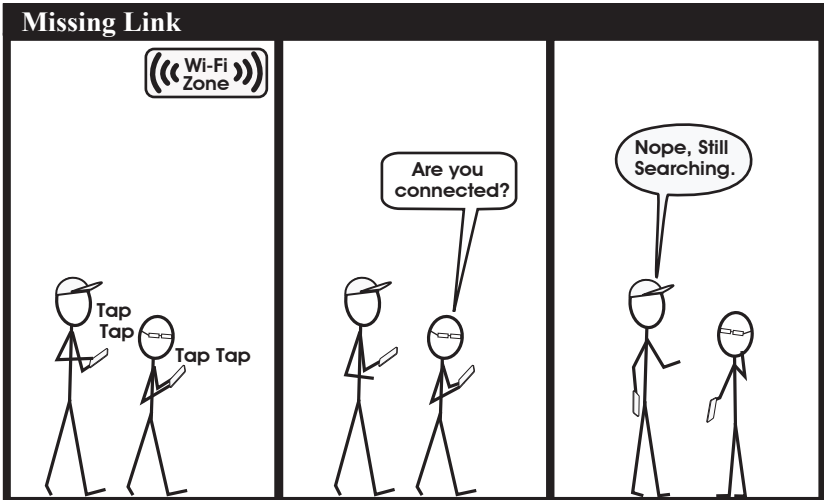
The Master's darshan is that nourishment that allows the seed of love to sprout and grow. He plants that seed and just as a gardener tends to his crop, the Master lovingly feeds us our soul-food. His darshan and satsang motivate us to keep meditating, to keep trying and to never give up. His every meeting, every word, every nudge is an encouragement to the disciple.

The glance of love is crystal clear and we are blessed by its light.

Rumi, as quoted in *Hidden Music*
as translated by Maryam Mafi & Azima Melita Kolin



SPIRITUALISTICKS[®]



To Live in Gratitude

In almost every question-and-answer session, there is usually someone who expresses his genuine gratitude to the Master. It may be as a result of a specific incident, or it may be just an opportunity to say “thank you” for all that the Master does and for all the blessings received. After all, who can resist thanking him? But can the words ‘thank you’ ever convey our true gratefulness for everything that we are given? Words are a weak expression of our gratitude. Maharaj Charan Singh explains this very beautifully:

Actually, we have no words with which to thank him – we cannot thank him at all with this tongue, whatever the Lord or the Master does for us in this life. We owe our very existence, all these privileges, just to the Father. This very human birth is nothing but his grace. So at every step we must thank him. We must find every excuse to thank him. After all, we take our Master as a representative of the Father, as being one with the Father. Actually, we are passing on our thanks to the Father through the Master.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

For many of us, it is when we experience something extraordinary, or only after we overcome a major challenge, that we offer the Lord our deepest gratitude. But as time goes by, and as life takes its usual course, we often forget our gracious benefactor, and assume that we are responsible for our success. If we become wealthier, we believe it is through our hard work; if we have a good family, we give credit to our efforts in implementing good, moral values at home. The truth is that

nothing can be achieved through our efforts; we owe everything to the immeasurable grace of the Lord.

We therefore express true gratitude when we recognize this truth, and live our lives as a gift from the Lord, when we thank him through our actions in the way that pleases him the most – by giving him our time, attention, effort and love. We don't express it only when good things happen; in fact, the real test is when we accept even the most painful times of our lives, as though they were a gift from him. Thomas à Kempis writes in *The Imitation of Christ*:

Be thankful for the smallest blessing, and you will deserve to receive greater. Value the least gifts no less than the greatest and simple graces as especial favours. If you remember the dignity of the Giver, no gift will seem small or mean, for nothing can be valueless that is given by the most high God. Even if he awards punishment and pain, accept them gladly, for whatever he allows to befall us is always for our salvation.

Mystics explain to us that all events which appear to be misfortunes are not really so; for every situation we go through takes place for a reason. Whether adversity is given to discipline us, or to strengthen our power of resistance – each incident takes place as a result of our previous actions.

Hazur Maharaj Ji often referred to adversity as a “blessing in disguise”, for it is during the most difficult times that we are pulled closer to the Lord. We may never understand what his plans are for us, but the mystics explain that the suffering we go through in this world purifies us and makes us worthy of that eternal joy within. As harsh as it may sound, a death in the family, financial difficulties, humiliation are all signs of his grace – because grace is anything that turns us towards the Lord.

In *Come Be My Light*, Mother Teresa reveals the amount of suffering she had to bear during her lifetime, yet she had only one desire: “to love God as he has never been loved.” She advises: “To live a life of love for God with great joy for what we have is all his gift and to use it all for the greater glory of his Name.”

If we apply this attitude and take whatever comes to us as the Lord’s will, then whatever we receive will become divine in itself. As we attend to meditation with sincerity and faith, eventually we will experience his presence all the time, and that includes the good days and the difficult ones. Then, there will no longer be any need for words; our entire being will be filled with gratitude. With every thought, deed and action, we will be saying: “thank you, thank you, thank you...”



The best and most appropriate way of appreciating his kindness and expressing our gratitude is to give more and more time to simran and bhajan, so that we may go in and contact Nam, and thus have a first-hand experience of everything.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

Complete Surrender

There was once a holy sage who was loved and respected by the people in his village. The chief of the village was very jealous of his popularity. He came up with a plan to get rid of the sage. One day, he invited the sage over to his house for a grand feast and presented him with an untamed, wild horse with a golden saddle. The disciples of the holy sage, who were present at the scene, begged him not to accept the gift nor to ride it, as it meant sure death.

The sage, fully aware of his host's motives, gratefully accepted the gift and gladly rode the horse, without even holding on to the reins. The horse darted forward and soon they were both out of sight. His disciples started to weep for the loss of their beloved guru. However, to their utter surprise and joy, after a short while, the sage returned on the horse, which was now completely under control.

The chief, seeing the miraculous incident, fell down at the feet of the sage and begged for mercy. The sage readily forgave him. The chief then inquired, "Why did you ride the horse without holding the reins?" To this the sage replied, "When the reins of our own life are in the hands of the Lord, who am I to hold on to the reins of the horse? The Lord may take me where he so pleases."



*No sufferings come to the seeker
who surrenders himself to the Name of the Lord.
Saint Paltu, His Life and Teachings*

The Fragrance

The desire for happiness is a powerful fuel that drives human life. But throughout the passage of time, the message of the saints has always been one and the same; that this world is just an illusion and that real, lasting happiness can never be found in this creation.

The question arises, what about those who have a Master and are following a spiritual path? If one has defined his purpose in life, is striving towards a spiritual goal, and has a perfect living Master to guide him, inspire him, and protect him throughout his lifetime, isn't that the greatest source of happiness? After all, the gift of Nam is not something that can ever be taken away or destroyed by anyone or anything.

*Water cannot drown it, thieves cannot steal it, fire cannot burn it.
My Guru's Word abides, forever within my soul.*

Guru Arjun, Adi Granth

It would, therefore, be logical to conclude that every disciple of a perfect Master should actually be the happiest person in the world. And yet, this is not the case. We are still plagued by worries and anxieties, we are still tormented by our passions and we are still troubled when things don't go our way. Why is that? Why is it so difficult to be happy when the greatest gift, the Guru's Word, abides within our soul?

As we travel on the spiritual path, it becomes increasingly clear how much of an impact attitude has on the outcome of everyday life. Whether it is at work, at seva, in relationships, during illness or

financial difficulties, it is one's attitude that can either make or break a situation.

Time and again, mystics remind us that we cannot change our circumstances, we cannot change our destiny, and other people will not change to suit our needs. The one thing we *can* do is work on ourselves. It has often been said that life is 10 percent of what happens to you and 90 percent of how you react to it. The Lord is in charge of the operation of this entire, magnificent universe, but he has given every human being one, exclusive privilege – that of being completely in charge of his own attitude.

So is there a 'correct' attitude to have in order to be happy? Sant Mat literature is filled with advice on how best to live our lives. But perhaps, anyone actively seeking spiritual development would benefit most by developing a detached attitude.

If any person were to reflect upon his attitude when he wakes up in the morning to go to work, it would perhaps sound something like this: 'I am going to work because I need money to provide a home for my family, to pay for my children's education and to accumulate some savings so that I can support myself when I retire.' On the surface it sounds reasonable, even practical, because certainly everyone needs to earn a living.

But from a spiritual perspective, the mystics tell us that this attitude can never be a source of happiness for one simple reason – the motivation behind the action is the self and the satisfaction of one's desires. The driving force is worldly, so therefore, at best, one can only get the worldly version of happiness. So if a person's business is successful, or if he has a good, well-paying job, he will be elated; but if the business fails or if he loses his job, he will be depressed, worried and anxious. Thus, caught up in the dual nature of the world, the individual will forever be swaying from one extreme to the other.

Inevitably, with this approach, one ends up burdening his own small frame with so much pressure to achieve and succeed, that he actually jeopardizes his ability to perform. He becomes so bogged down with stress that there is no room left for creativity and inspiration, much less, happiness.

But Sant Mat teaches us to approach life from a different perspective. The saints tell us that whatever is meant for every individual is already written in his fate, and nobody can ever take that away from him. Hazur Maharaj Ji explains this further in the following example:

Both a manager and the proprietor come to the office, but there is a difference in their attitude. The manager is not worried about profits or losses, but the proprietor, the owner, is very concerned about everything. The manager works eight or nine hours honestly and sincerely and that's all. He doesn't get heart attacks, but the proprietor does.

Similarly, we should think that nothing belongs to us in this creation. Everything belongs to the Father, and we have been allotted certain responsibilities and duties which we have to discharge truthfully and honestly.

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When an individual's aim is higher or larger than the self and the aspiration is to do his duty for the pleasure of the Lord, then automatically he is unaffected by the outcome. If the business suffers a loss, he can think, "Imagine how fortunate we are that in the last ten years there was nothing but profits." If the business is profitable, then he can think, "How can we give back to the Lord, who has given us so much?" Either way, no matter how it turns out, one's state of mind will always be left undisturbed – neither elated nor depressed.

There is enormous power in an action when it is done selflessly, when one is driven by something beyond the self. In fact, many, if not all of us, have some experience of this when doing seva. In seva, the motivation is to please the Lord, through the Master. So when given a seva task, the attitude is, “I’m going to do my best and leave it to him.” One adopts a completely detached attitude and the focus is on putting in time, effort and attention.

And a task at the onset might seem herculean or impossible always, without fail, works out. And not just works out, everything comes together so perfectly that somehow one feels the entire universe conspiring in every possible way, through every situation, through everyone you come across to help complete the task. This is why seva projects that take place at satsang centres all over the world are always such a phenomenal success – because the actions of the sevadars are selfless and their sole objective is to please the Lord. By having this attitude, they become his instruments, and through his infinite power and grace, the impossible becomes possible.

When one lets go of the limited self and its desires and focuses on that infinite divine power, it responds. It responds in a way that boggles the mind. This response is what we call the Lord’s grace, and it descends from the fountain source of eternal bliss.

Daily meditation allows the disciple to gain access to that bountiful spring. It is for this reason the Masters tell us that ultimately, it is meditation that will make the disciple happy because it is meditation that helps us develop the correct attitude in life. Even if we don’t experience anything within, at least we enjoy what Hazur Maharaj Ji used to call the fragrance of meditation.

Hazur used to say that when a blind man goes to a garden full of scented flowers, he may not be able to enjoy the beauty of the flowers, but at least he enjoys their fragrance.

In Sant Mat, that fragrance is one's change in attitude. Every disciple develops it as he evolves on the spiritual path. As we focus more and more on the sound current reverberating within ourselves, we automatically become more detached, more selfless, and ultimately much happier, as we make our way closer and closer to that one true source of eternal happiness which water cannot drown, thieves cannot steal and fire cannot burn – the Guru's Word that abides within the soul.



*As an ordinary tree becomes fragrant in the company of a sandalwood tree,
So do people begin to love God when in the company of his devotee.*

Kabir, The Great Mystic

Ocean of Misery

Maharaj Charan Singh was going on a short journey in his car. The party had reached a place where the Master was going to consult someone about canal irrigation. We stopped at a bridge over a small river with a sluice gate, over which a moderate force of water was flowing. On the lower side, in shallow water, was a strange sight. The river was almost solid with fish. Men waded in with baskets again and again, filling them each time and emptying them onto sacks lying on the bank.

For a moment, the Master pondered this wriggling mass of desperate things, but he quickly turned away with a sigh and with a great depth of feeling said, “A most distressing sight.” He left an impression – indeed a conviction in one’s soul – that he saw not just a simple harvesting of fish, but the cruel ravages of karma on the souls trapped in those writhing bodies. Looking back on the incident, one could not help seeing a close parallel to the human whirlpool.

The Mystic Philosophy of Sant Mat



Suppose your six-year-old child goes one morning with some of his friends to see a big fair, which is held at some distance from your house. In the evening a violent storm overtakes them. All the other children return home, but not your child. Night falls and there is still no sign of your child. Your wife runs crying to your office or club or wherever you are and tells you that the child is missing. Would you not instantly run in search of your child without even thinking of taking your hat or stick? Certainly, you would. Then will not our heavenly Father, who is the ocean of mercy, love, sympathy and benevolence, come down to save his children from this dire ocean of misery, pain, grief and sorrow?

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Call of the Great Master*

Discipleship – A Reflection

The First Few Years

In the first few years of initiation, the disciple is excited to wake up every morning and give time to her Master. She makes sure she schedules her day in such a way that her meditation is not missed. The spark of obedience is so alive. The enthusiasm with which she does seva, and spends her day is all centred around that love. Like a lover entranced, a glimpse of her Master makes her day like no other.

As Time Goes By

As time goes by, however, the disciple's life becomes somewhat routine. She drags herself out of bed after turning down loud rings of the alarm clock, snoozing repeatedly. She tries her best to sit but thoughts and checklists bombard her during her simran. Seva has become part of her life, so it is nothing to get excited about anymore. She does her meditation and her seva just to make her Master happy.

So the disciple often ponders where that spark has gone. But what she does not realize is that her act of little obedience is love. We sometimes think of love as only the excitement and the roller coaster heartbeats, but love is so much more than that. It is the selfless act of serving the person we love. Of doing anything no matter what our state of mind just because we know he or she would appreciate it. The disciple's going to sleep early because she knows she needs to get up early, even if she wants to enjoy a few more episodes of her favourite sitcom, is dedication. The daily meditation, even if it is a struggle, is love, because that is the one thing the Master wants.

Somewhere in Between

The Master knows how quickly our minds get dissipated in the whims of the world, and so he gives us his little goodies – just as a father comes home and sees his kids all over the place, trying to do their homework and be good children, but not actually being able to achieve much. The father knows that it is time for love and attention, and that is what he gives to them. Our Master does just the same. We enjoy it when it is packaged in the form of a new seva opportunity, an extra visit to the Dera, or when our circumstances are made better to meditate. In actual fact, anything that makes us feel his presence more is his gift of love.

We remember the love of our parents when we were young, and we smile. We think about the love we share with our spouses, and we are grateful. We cherish our kids with pride and happiness. Then, we combine all of this, and we are still unable to fathom the love we feel from him.

Rising in His Love

With that love, there is little left of us – maybe only enough to do what we have to do to make him happy. Every day is not the same, but we are focused and committed. He forgives us, scolds us, or pampers us when we are slacking, and that is all part of his love. We live in the bliss of what he gives us within, and little by little, we rise in his love.



The Definition of Love

Love is perhaps the most used word in almost every language and also probably the most misunderstood. Human beings have always tended to take love for granted. Diluted and depreciated, it has been demoted to the stuff of corny romantic novels or worse. And yet, love is the single most important ingredient of man's essence – it is his very source and fabric of his Creator.

But what exactly is love? We are besieged by expressions like “God is love”, “Love is infinite”, “being in love” or “falling in love”, and between these and many other literary and religious clichés, the true meaning of love has become obscured.

Thankfully, perfect mystics impart some clarity, by explaining that love is actually a form of energy. It is the very same energy that created the entire universe, and it is this creative power that also sustains the whole creation, including every object and being within it. It is the fundamental or primal energy from which all other forms of energy, such as light, sound and electricity, are derived.

Because of man's innate tendency to confine all things to his own physical limitations, humanity has equated this creative and sustaining power to the concept of “a being”, even endowing it with a generic name: God. This, of course, has led to the famous expression “God is love and love is God”, which is, in fact, raw truth.

Mystics have further explained that love is also a self-sustaining and self-regenerating energy, which means that it is eternal, or infinite. It has always existed, and will always exist. In its purest form, it is the divine spark which exists only in the absence of duality. It is the energy of singularity; it cannot truly exist until two have merged into one. It is for this reason that the ego, which makes mankind feel separate, acts as the barrier to the experience of pure love.

Since this energy created the entire universe, pure love naturally contains every element of information and knowledge of the creation. Therefore, any being or entity that has fully and truly experienced complete love would also automatically gain complete knowledge of the entire creation, and of this creative power called love itself.

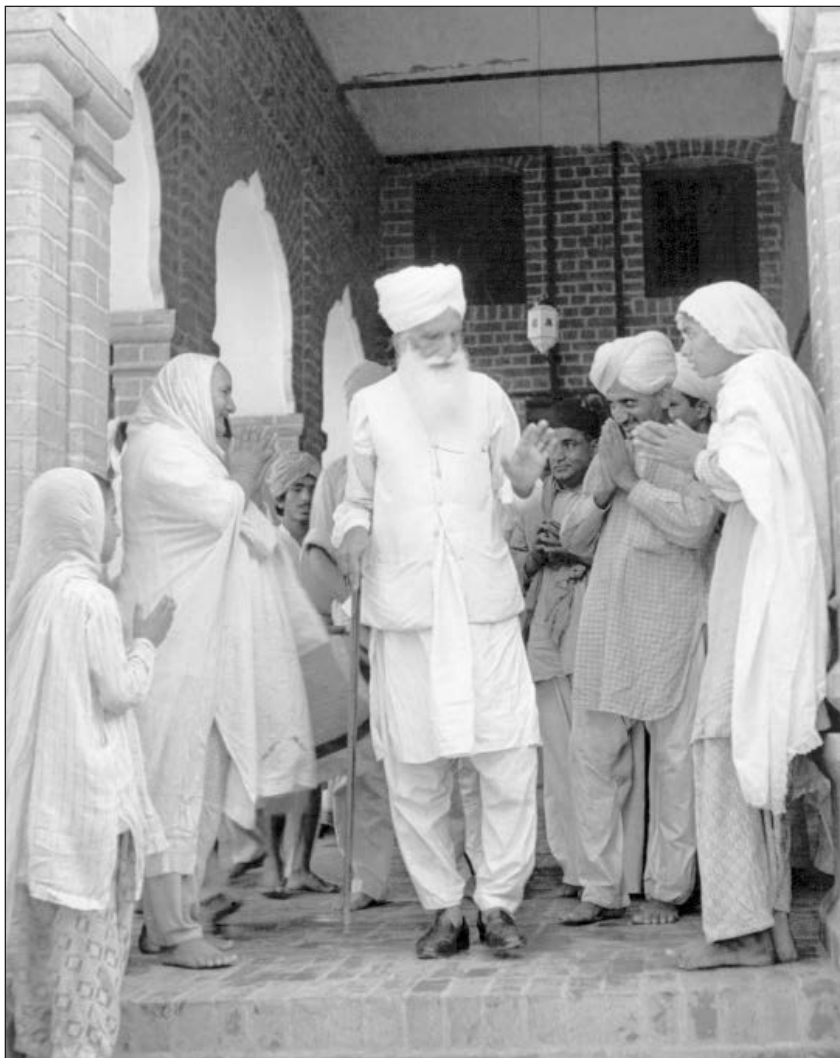
But there is that barrier once again. Man's physical limitations prevent him from experiencing pure love on his own – the situation necessitates a medium. Man must begin by directing his still imperfect love towards someone who has himself experienced this pure or perfect love. And only then can man learn to fully experience the same perfect love himself.

This perfect love is the hallmark of complete perfection – a characteristic of the highest order of teachers of mysticism. It is for this reason that they are called perfect Masters.

Since pure love is the common essence of the entire creation, a person who has experienced this energy firsthand will recognize its fragrance in all things. All beings, great and small, will be observed to radiate the same perfection of that divine spark. It will become apparent too that this energy actually resides within himself as the very essence of his core – the soul. This is the much sought after self-realization that ultimately leads to God-realization.

Ultimately, no words can ever adequately describe the energy of love, or even do justice to the concept. It is only actual experience that can provide true understanding, and this begins with the search for a perfect living Master who is the embodiment of pure love himself.





Maharaj Sawan Singh

Heart to Heart

Whenever the Great Master visited Sikanderpur, a large number of satsangis would follow him and stay as Sardar Harbans Singh's guests. Sometimes there would be as many as 200 people. Sardar Harbans Singh and his wife, Mata Sham Kaur, were both very happy to receive the sangat and looked after them with loving hospitality. Mata Sham Kaur would get up at three in the morning to prepare milk, tea and breakfast for the sangat. Cooking the meals and personally looking after serving the food, she would eat only after all others had eaten. She would usually work till midnight, but was happy to serve her Master and his sangat in this way.

Once in June – when the summer temperatures reached 120 degrees Fahrenheit – Mata Sham Kaur had finished cooking and serving lunch to the sangat and was planning to eat, when the Great Master called her and said, “Daughter, a group of twenty-five guests has just arrived. Please arrange for their food.” It was the hottest part of the day, but immediately she sat down again at the open tandoori oven and began cooking chapattis for the guests. The Great Master's wife, Bibi Kishan Kaur, whom the family called Amma Ji, came down to help her. Mata Sham Kaur rolled the chapattis, putting her hand inside the open oven to stick them to the sides and taking them out with an iron hook when baked; Amma Ji sat nearby, applying ghee to the hot tandoori chapattis and stacking them one on top of another, ready for serving to the guests.

When the guests had finished their meal, it was four in the afternoon, and Mata Sham Kaur, in obedience to Amma Ji's directions, ate a little food. As she was coming out of the kitchen area, her clothes drenched in perspiration from hours of working over the oven, she saw the Great Master standing before her, his face beaming with happiness and love. The Great Master patted her and said, “My child, I am greatly pleased with you and your loving seva. Your store will always be full. The grace and blessings of Baba Ji will always be with you.”

Book Review

The Children of the Truth

BY SHAYKH MUHAMMAD SAID AL-JAMAL AR-RIFA`I

AND MARYAM MUHAMMAD ABDULLAH

PUBLISHER: PETALUMA, CA: SIDI MUHAMMAD PRESS,; 1998.

ISBN 1-892596-0

In *The Children of the Truth*, Maryam Muhammad Abdullah relates the stories and sayings of fifteen Sufi masters who lived between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries. It is inspiring to read of their struggles, their willingness to sacrifice, and, above all, their restlessness to meet their beloved Lord. They lived their lives with a single driving purpose: to leave all traces of self behind and be united to God.

The author is a practicing Sufi, a disciple of Shaykh Muhammad Said al-Jamal ar-Rifa'i in the Shadhdhuli lineage of Sufi masters, based in Jerusalem. The shaykh writes an extended introduction to her book, welcoming the reader to the feast of spiritual wisdom embedded in the teachings and life incidents of these early Sufis. He begins his introduction:

This is the Table of Allah for the one who has searched for the real food to know himself and to know his heart and to know his spirit. If he is ready, he can open the door and cross the threshold into the Heart of God. He can sit at the Table and find the real food of love and peace and mercy through deep knowing. This Table is for all of my beloveds of all backgrounds.

The shaykh begs the reader, "Oh my beloved, listen for his Song, the song of peace and mercy, and be what he asks and give what he asks. Then he will give you everything that you have been waiting for."

The book is arranged chronologically, beginning with Rabi`a of Basra in eighth-century Iraq, then Bayazid al-Bistami in ninth-century Persia. Much of the material on these early Sufis is in the form of questions and answers. Rabi`a often stressed the need for absolute sincerity in the relation to God.

It was related how one day one of her followers said in her presence, "Oh Allah, may You be satisfied with us!" Whereupon Rabi`a said, "Are you not ashamed before Him to ask Him to be satisfied with you, when you are not satisfied with Him?" Then this was followed by the question to her, "When then is the servant satisfied with Allah Most High?" She replied, "When his pleasure in misfortune is equal to his pleasure in prosperity."

Answering questions from seekers, the love-intoxicated mystic often raises the questioner's understanding of love to another level. For example:

Someone once wrote to Bayazid al-Bistami: "What do you say of one who drinks a single drop of the Ocean of the Love and becomes intoxicated?" Bayazid replied, "What do you say of one who, if all the oceans in the world were filled with the Wine of the Love, would drink them all and still cry to satisfy this thirst?"

The book continues with chapters on each of six Sufi masters who lived in Baghdad from the ninth to eleventh centuries, collectively called the Baghdad School: Sari al-Saqati, Junayd, Nuri, Mansur al-Hallaj, Shibli, and Jilani. The writings of Junayd explore the meaning of annihilating the self and finding union with God:

Unification is this: that one should be a figure in the hands of Allah, a figure over which His Decrees pass according as he, in his Omnipotence, determines. One should be drowned in the Sea of his Unity, being annihilated from the self and dead alike to the call of mankind to him, and to his answer to them.

The writings of Jilani, founder of the Qadiri Sufi order, explore the meaning of true surrender:

The sign that your will has been merged into his will is that you seek nothing for yourself or of yourself, because the Will of Allah is

working in you. Surrender yourself into the hands of Allah like the dead body in the hands of the one who washes it, or like the child at his mother's breast.

In the chapters on the Sufis of Baghdad, the execution of Mansur al-Hallaj – one of the most perplexing and disturbing moments of Sufi history – is viewed from several angles. This was a time when Sufism was highly suspect, and revealing the mystic teachings was dangerous. Junayd, who was a respected judge and scholar as well as a Sufi master, taught that the Sufi must maintain the balance needed to hide his ecstatic states. His disciples Nuri, Shibli and Mansur al-Hallaj, however, were often unable to control their speech or behaviour while in a state of ecstasy. Mansur al-Hallaj's statement "I am the Truth" brought upon him the death sentence, and Junayd, in his role as judge, was called upon to sign the decree. The complexity of this moment is neither dismissed nor explained in this book, but rather explored by many of the sayings and incidents in these chapters.

Next the book moves to a number of Sufi masters of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, among them Rifa'i, Abu Madyan, Ibn al-'Arabi, Ibn Mashish. The final three Sufis discussed are Shadhdhuli, the founder of the Shadhdhuli Sufi Order, his successor Mursi, and Mursi's own successor Ibn 'Ata'llah. The story of Shadhdhuli meeting his master Ibn Mashish shows how the spiritual teacher deepens the disciple's understanding. Shadhdhuli was told that the greatest master of his times lived in the Rif mountains in North Africa. Accordingly, he sought all through the Rif mountains, and when he perceived a light emanating from a mountain, knew he had come to the right place. Seeing a spring at the foot of the mountain, Shadhdhuli made his ablution as prescribed by law (*shari'a*), and then climbed to the summit where he met Ibn-Mashish. The master asked if he had made his ablution. Though Shadhdhuli answered that he had, he was told to go back and try again. Again he went to the spring at the foot of the mountain, washed, and again climbed to the summit. Again, he was told that he shouldn't come in a state of impurity and to go make his ablution. This was repeated several times, before he suddenly understood the meaning of purifying himself:

This time, as he made his ablution, he emptied himself of everything that he knew, or thought he knew, or that he had learned and taken in from other teachers, and he destroyed all his attributes, pictures and prejudices, until he knew that he was left with only a vast space of nothingness inside him which was waiting to be filled.

This time, when he climbed again to the summit, he was embraced and accepted for initiation by his master.

This incident between Shadhdhuli and Ibn Mashish was much discussed by later masters in the lineage. One explained, “The first of what the seeker of this path needs is that he casts himself on the shaykh.... He does not resist the shaykh when he understands something to be lacking, even if it is not [required by] the Law (*shari`a*).” Another explained, “Make ablution with the Water of the Unseen, if you carry the secret. For with this he [the disciple] clings to him [the shaykh] and keeps him company until the shaykh is dearer to him than himself, his property and his children. Until if he commanded him to do the impossible, which cannot be thought of in the mind, he would do it without weariness or turning away.”

The author provides a bibliography of sources, listing many respected scholarly works on Sufism including reputable English translations of some of the earliest recorded traditional sources. Within each chapter, however, she does not give citations for each quotation, and at times it is hard to tell where she is supplying her own narrative or paraphrasing a source. Despite these limitations, *The Children of the Truth* may be commended for offering readers a rich compilation of inspiring material on Sufi saints, some of whom may be little known to readers outside the Sufi tradition. As diverse as these saints are, one word might characterize them all: intensity. These are individuals who gave their all in the quest for oneness with the Lord.



