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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Yours Affectionately

Overcoming and giving up outward tendencies, stilling the mind and dying while alive is not easy. The inner gate opens only when the outer gates are closed. There is no other way to get in. People wish to continue to run out through the outer gates and also wish to get into the inner. This is impossible. Two things cannot happen at the same time. One is to be given up to achieve the other. Strictly speaking, there is no wish to get in. If you probe or even scratch the surface, you will find that they are saturated with the grossness of the world, that their minds are as attached to the objects as a painted picture is attached to the wall or the canvas on which it is painted. If you ask the picture to detach itself from the wall, it cannot do so. It is a part of the wall. The worldly man is no better.

People take to bhajan as a curiosity. The day they come for initiation you may credit them with some sincerity. There is some desire to escape from this place of misery and sorrow. It is this stuff on which the saints have to work. Bhajan for the sake of bhajan is cultivated by few. Slowly and slowly the little ripples of awakening die out and disappear in the vast waves of karmic activity.

Yet saints are not disappointed. They know the helplessness of man and also know the efficacy of Nam. Nam is all-powerful. As one spark of fire burns away a forest of wood, so Nam burns away the karmic outgrowth. A bird may escape from the swoop of an eagle, but the mind dare not stir when Nam manifests itself. Saints are the custodians of Nam. Their method is sure and certain. They see that by and by the disciple is paying the karmic debt. By age he is slowly turning his face away from the temptations as he is getting feeble. Misery and sorrow of the world narrow down his mind, and death brings him



concentrated to the portal of the third eye, where the Master takes charge of him, for the soul is his, and he had accepted him when he initiated him.

Progress in Sant Mat is not slow when compared with other systems. In other systems people complete their incomplete courses in a series of lives, living under strenuous circumstances. In Sant Mat, while staying at home, living with kith and kin, not facing the hardships of jungle life, observing no restrictions of caste, creed, ritual or ceremony – young, grown-up and old, man or woman, go up never to return. Bit by bit we are marching in the right direction. Step by step we are nearing our goal.

My home is within you and I am also within you. The outward homes are of clay and are perishable. The real permanent home is within. I wish you could come up and see me there.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



*You are renowned as the thief of hearts,
the glory of your friendship knows no parallel.
I am in love with this mystery of You –
You remain veiled,
yet your Light shines through all the creation.*

Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine

Look at the Rose

A king wanted to test the wisdom of his two most trusted ministers. And so, he summoned the first one, well-known throughout the land for his cruelty and greed, and whom the citizens were fearful of.

The king ordered, "I want you to travel the world and find me one truly good man."

The minister replied, "Yes, my Lord," and obediently began his search. He met and spoke with many people, and after much time he returned to the kingdom and reported to the king, "Lord, I have done as you have asked and searched the whole world for one truly good man but he is nowhere to be found. Whoever I met were all selfish and wicked. I could not find this good man you seek!"

The king sent him on his way, and then called for the other minister who was well-known for his generosity and benevolence. He was admired by all. The king issued a similar order but with a slight difference, "I wish for you to travel the world over and bring to me one truly wicked man."

He too obeyed the king and immediately undertook the journey. On his travels, he met and spoke with many people.

After much time had passed, he returned to the king saying, "Lord, I have failed you. I have met many people, some are misguided, others are misled, and there are those blinded by ignorance but nowhere could I find one truly evil man. They were all good at heart despite their failings!"

It is clear from this story that people have an inclination to see the world through their own perspective. If they are loving, kind and benevolent, they recognize those attributes in others. On the other hand, if malice and greed have taken root, others are viewed in a

negative light. What we keep and nurture in our hearts is manifested in our thoughts, words and deeds. Saddled with these idiosyncrasies, who then is deserving of God's love?

As much as man has learned to master the world around him, bringing wonderful inventions and technology into play for the benefit of all mankind, he has yet to understand himself and his actions.

There is a great need to realize that our thoughts dictate our actions, and our actions shape our destiny. This is not an easy situation, for we are under constant assault from the fickle mind. Such is the need for vigilance over our thoughts, words and deeds.

Let us get some perspective on this. Say for example, you plant the seed of a rose and water it faithfully. Before it blossoms, you examine it. While doing so, you realize that the beautiful bud which is soon to blossom will produce thorns. You think to yourself, "How can such a beautiful flower come from a plant burdened with so many sharp thorns?" Saddened by this thought, you stop watering the rose, and before it blooms, it dies.

So it is, with many people. Within every soul there is a rose. These are the God-like qualities planted in us at birth, that grow along with the thorns – our faults and defects. Many of us look at ourselves and see only the thorns. We despair, thinking that nothing good can possibly come from us. We neglect to water the good within us, causing it to die, never fulfilling our true potential. Most people do not see the rose within themselves; someone else must show it to them.

One of the greatest gifts a person can possess is the ability to look past the thorns and see the rose in others. This is the characteristic of love – the ability to look at a person and recognize the nobility in his soul.

This is precisely how the Master goes about his mission of spreading the teachings and showing the way back to the Father. The very way the Master treats everyone and how he lives his life while interacting with every living being is an example for all to follow.

Fortunately for us, the Master sees what we truly are – a drop of the ocean of God. He sees the pearl in every oyster. He glimpses only our potential, not our imperfections.

The Master is an embodiment of love, nothing else. In spite of our weaknesses and faults, he nurtures, forgives and encourages us, every step of the way. He imparts the teachings by showing us how to be a 'human' being.

Through his physical presence, satsang, darshan, seva, and ultimately, our regular practice of meditation, day by day, with his grace, we grow to become like him – a rose worthy of being in the Lord's garden.



*Well, you know Hazur loved roses. You are all his roses
and he gave me the seva of head gardener to
look after the garden and his roses.*

Baba Gurinder Singh, as quoted in *The Equilibrium of Love*

Something to Think About

Faith and love are the very foundation of Sant Mat – faith and love in Shabd and Satguru. Then comes surrender to the will of the Satguru – not a slavish but a loving surrender. The mainspring of action then changes, and the will of the Lord or the Satguru replaces mind as the motive power. Then the soul is in perfect harmony with the Lord, mind is dethroned, and God is enthroned. It naturally involves a struggle, even a bitter fight to the last; but think of the crowning achievement too.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



We should always pray to him for his mercy and guidance. And for that, whether or not you say the spoken Word, it is immaterial. Real prayer comes from the heart. Generally, we have set prayers. We remember them and repeat them every day, several times a day. That is mechanical prayer, whereas it is the heart that should speak. No words are required, and no particular time is required for that; in fact, a true lover is in constant communion with the Lord. When the heart speaks, he hears, he gives. So we should pray to him to guide us, to be merciful to us, to redeem us from birth and death, to take us into his own lap; in fact, to merge us into himself. That is real prayer.

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

Parable of the Butterfly

The life cycle of the butterfly tells a story of transformation – the butterfly develops and changes form in each of its four life stages. It begins as an embryo, turns into a crawling caterpillar. Later it is encased in a cocoon, and eventually it emerges from the cocoon as the beautiful flying and fluttering insect that has fascinated human beings for aeons, its wings a gemlike palette of brightly coloured abstract patterns.

Because of its life cycle of transformation, the butterfly has been used as a symbol for spiritual transformation and resurrection in many world religions and cultures. Interestingly, in ancient Greek the word for ‘butterfly’ is *psyche*, which is also used for mind or soul. It is also said that in early Christianity, the butterfly symbolized the resurrection of the soul. Images of butterflies were often used on gravestones. But perhaps the most famous use of the symbol of the butterfly in spiritual literature is the enigmatic anecdote or koan of Chuang Tzu (also spelled Zuangzi), the Chinese mystic of the late third century/early fourth century BCE. The anecdote poses the question of what is reality and what is illusion – and what is our true identity?

Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Chuang Tzu. Soon I awakened, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a distinction. The transition is called the transformation of material things.

What is our reality, we might ask ourselves. Are we truly soul, flitting about, without consciousness of time and space, free of body and mind, happy only in our experience as soul? Or are we physical, material human beings, very much attached to mind and body, who can only dream of existence as soul? The Master often refers to this paradox when he cites the statement of the French philosopher and priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, that we are spiritual beings having a human experience, not human beings having a spiritual experience.

When we sit in meditation, isn't that the arena of transformation that Chuang Tzu is presenting to us? Meditation is the means to free ourselves from attachment to mind and body, and realize that we are essentially our soul, symbolized as the butterfly, that is undergoing a human experience in this body. It seems that this Chinese mystic is urging us to break out of our cocoon of body and mind – where we are trapped in the restlessness of our senses and thoughts – and experience the freedom and joy of the divine.

In considering Chuang Tzu's story, we are reminded of Hazur Maharaj Ji's response to a questioner about dreams and reality.

Q: Is this world really here or is it a dream world – does it really exist?

It exists in a manner of speaking. When you are in a dream, everything looks real to you. When you wake up from a dream, then only you realize that there was actually no reality at all. It was just a dream.... When we wake up from this dream, then we will know that this world is perishable.

Q: Well, if it is a dream, why is it so necessary to make such a great effort?

Because it's a dream that has no reality. You want to be one with the reality. We are miserable here, being separated from the Father. So we want to escape. If we had been happy here, we wouldn't have thought about the Father at all. We would not want to go to him if we were happy here....

Those who are happy in this dream will remain part and parcel of this dream. And those who are the blessed ones will realize the travesty of this world and will want to go to their everlasting home, their permanent abode. They will feel his separation. They will miss him. They will try to get to him.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Chuang Tzu's story had raised the question: which is the dream, and which is the reality? Or are both levels of consciousness actually dreams? Are they both levels of *unconsciousness*? Hazur Maharaj Ji says here that it is imperative for us to wake up from not only the dream we dream while we are sleeping, but also the dream that we are living in every day. This is because we are not happy here in this world, which is why we dream of being a butterfly, why the soul dreams of being free. Why would we want to live in the dream of this life when we can awaken to bliss of reality and return to the Father?

Chuang Tzu also presents the example of people who dream of living in great luxury, yet they awaken to the sorrow of its impermanence. Likewise, those who are dreaming of sorrow awaken to the fact that even their sorrow was an illusion; when they awaken, they "join the hunt" – they get engaged in the activities of life. This shows that no human experience is permanent – it is all illusion, a dream. It is as if God is playing a joke on us, because we have no idea of what the reality is. Chuang Tzu wrote:

Those who dream of the banquet wake to lamentation and sorrow. Those who dream of lamentation and sorrow wake to join the hunt. While they dream, they do not know that they are dreaming. Some will even interpret the very dream they are dreaming; and only when they awake do they know it was a dream.

By and by comes the Great Awakening, and then we find out that this life is really a great dream. Fools think they are awake now, and flatter themselves they know – this one is a prince, and that one is a shepherd. What narrowness of mind!

Confucius and you are both dreams; and I who say you are dreams – I am but a dream myself. This is a paradox. Tomorrow a sage may arise to explain it; but that tomorrow will not be until ten thousand generations have gone by. Yet you may meet him around the corner (tomorrow).

So Chuang Tzu is emphasizing that you and I, and even Confucius, the great philosopher – we who speak to you about the reality and the illusion – even we are illusions. We are all living in the dream. What is the reality? It is a great paradox. And then he says: Perhaps someday a sage, meaning a realized saint or master, will come to explain it; then you will know there is no time or space, that all is an illusion. To express this, he says the sage may not appear for another ten thousand generations, but then you will see he has been with you all the time – “you may meet him around the corner.” This whole discussion is an illusion.

As Hazur Maharaj Ji once said, there is no meaning to any of this – all our experiences are an illusion, a dream from which we will awaken when we go back to God. He explains:

The soul is immortal. The soul doesn't die – but it can be caged, it can be imprisoned, it can be kept in captivity. But it doesn't die. You see, a diamond is precious, and it has so much lustre. But when you throw it into the mud, you neither know its price, nor can you see its lustre. Its lustre hasn't gone anywhere, nor has the dirt reduced its price. When you wash the diamond, its lustre will be the same; its price will be the same. It is the same with everybody's soul.

Every soul is potentially God. But having come to this creation, having taken the association of the mind, it has become absolutely dirty. It has forgotten the Creator. It thinks this creation is the be-all and end-all. The moment the soul gets a little light on its own origin and gets help to leave the dirt, it at once goes back to the Creator. That is why everybody tries to seek the Father – whether in the right way or the wrong way – because the inclination of the soul is always towards its origin. So the search is there with everyone....

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

So, as Chuang Tzu taught, somewhere within us we have the memory of having been the soul, free and happy, fluttering about, simply happy to be itself, a butterfly. This memory lies deep within us and may manifest in our dream state. So from within the illusion of life, we can dream of being free. We can respond to the pull that the Lord has placed within us and transform into the butterfly. The Master comes to awaken us to the fact that life as we know it is an illusion, but that through meditation we can experience the reality – the butterfly of our soul can become free.



Behind the Eyes

As explained by Maharaj Charan Singh

At the time of meditation we are just to close our eyes. It is our attention that is to focus. The physical eyes are not involved at all. If our attention is outside, we feel that we are outside. We are contemplating outside. If we forget about the outside world, if we just close our eyes and hold our attention mentally in the darkness, we see behind the eyes. My meaning of 'behind the eyes' is that whenever you close your eyes, you are automatically in that darkness. Whenever you close your eyes, if you do not let your thoughts run out, scatter out, you are naturally in this darkness; you are naturally behind the eyes. At that place, your attention has to contemplate on the form of the Master.

You are not physically to try to invert your eyes nor to try to find any particular point in the darkness. If you do that, you will damage your physical eyes. You are just to forget absolutely about your eyes. Mentally, forget about the outside surroundings, you will be somewhere and that will be within yourself; that will be in the darkness. As you repeat these five holy names while contemplating on the form of the Master, you are going within, and you are not going out.

Do not try to visualize someone moving about or running about. If you do, then your attention is scattered outside, and slowly and slowly you will run outside; that is, your attention runs out. Try to eliminate and completely ignore everything that you see going on outside and try to contemplate on the form of the Master inside, in the darkness. Whether it appears or not, do not let your thoughts run out, but keep your mind in the repetition of the five holy names. You do not have

to think that you are within or that now you are without. When your attention is in this darkness, you automatically will be within.

At the time of simran, we are not to pay any attention to breathing. Some people who have been doing hatha yoga or breathing exercises or different types of yoga sometimes try to mix the simran with breathing. That is wrong. There are many schools which try to teach that principle, but satsangis should never bother with the breathing at all at the time of meditation. I am talking to you; you are listening to me. Neither are you conscious of your breathing, nor am I conscious of my breathing. Breathing is a normal function of the body. At the time of meditation we are just to forget about our breathing, forget about our eyes, forget even about ourselves. Keeping your attention mentally in the darkness, you will automatically be in the centre behind the eyes. You are not to try to locate any particular spot behind the eyes. If you can eliminate thoughts of the outside world, if you can stop letting your mind run out, you will automatically be within yourself, in that darkness, and there you have to contemplate on the form of the Master and do the simran and bhajan.

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



When our attention has been concentrated behind the eyes, we find the sweetest and most melodious Sound reverberating, attracting and pulling us toward itself. There is no question there of nationality, race, creed, wealth, authority or possession. This Sound is what the saints call Shabd or Nam. When our attention is fixed on it, we will reach the place from where it comes, Sach Khand, where the Lord himself resides.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Seva Matters

These days it is common and even necessary to measure progress over a period of time. Small businesses and large corporations measure success in terms of profits earned during the year. Students assess their achievements based on the grades they get in their examinations. Because we have been so accustomed to measuring progress in everything we do, we try to do the same as spiritual aspirants. Whether we have been initiated for several years or a couple of decades, we want to know if our effort is yielding any results.

The mistake here is equating success in meditation with inner experiences. We conclude that if we have no inner experiences then we are not making progress.

Saints and mystics say that we do not meditate only to experience the inner light and sound. Meditation is much more than closing our eyes and repeating a few words. It is a way of life that includes the development of spiritual understanding, as well as learning how to conduct ourselves with kindness, compassion and love. Everything that goes into the making of a human being is to be rediscovered through meditation. This is explained beautifully in *Living Meditation*:

The reality of spiritual progress is first measured not by inner experiences, but by increasing levels of serenity and contentment, by acceptance of one's karmas or destiny, and by how we behave when in contact with our fellow human beings. Are we now kinder, more helpful, more tolerant than before we were initiated? Are we only interested in inner experiences or do we have a growing sense of the extraordinary experience to be had simply in the effort of being truly compassionate to others, in the work of becoming true human beings?

The desire to be compassionate towards others comes with the deepening of our spiritual practice. The more we meditate, the stronger is our wish to be helpful to others. We feel compassion in response to others' suffering and predicaments. It motivates the desire in us to help. It can be expressed through different acts of kindness. We may show compassion through the body, by physically helping those in need; through the mind by motivating, encouraging and comforting those in distress; through money by donating items or buying meals for the homeless. Whether we give our time and attention or share our wealth, saints advise us to go on giving selflessly. They remind us that it is only when we are alive in this human body that we can do good to others.

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

Kabir as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III

Great importance is given by the Masters to seva. They always have their disciples' best interests at heart, and thereby create opportunities for seva. We have seen how Maharaj Charan Singh set up the annual Dera Eye Camp and the Beas Hospital for the rural community. Those who participated in these seva projects can never forget the Master's overwhelming love and concern for everyone. It is this compassion of the Masters that inspires the sevadars to serve with loving kindness.

We can also participate in various seva opportunities that are offered in our satsang centres. Seva gives us the opportunity to work

alongside people from different walks of life. It provides great learning experiences as we are reminded of the importance of curbing our ego. It instils in us a desire to place other people's needs ahead of ours; to always please the other person. It helps us become more humble and receptive to others. We learn not to cling to our opinions but to listen to and work harmoniously with others. There will be instances when we may sometimes feel overwhelmed or find it difficult. It is during times like these that we need to ask ourselves, "What am I doing this for?" And the answer that makes everything fall into place is: "To please the Master."

It is our meditation practice that will gradually help us look upon everything we do as the Master's work. Meditation is nothing but an attempt to eliminate the ego, our sense of self. Saints tell us that in whatever we do as long as we do not bring our ego into it, and we do everything as a duty towards the Lord and the Master, then that is considered seva. So, whether performing worldly or spiritual duties, everything is seva as long as we have the right attitude. In the book *In the Footsteps of the Master*, a close associate describes how Maharaj Jagat Singh exemplifies what it is to be a perfect disciple:

Everything he did, all his duties, whether spiritual or temporal, were all done in the Master's name. When we were young, he repeatedly advised us after initiation that whatever we did – whether it was our simran and bhajan, or whether we were studying for an examination or doing any kind of official work – we should do it in the name of the Master or for the Master. It must be regarded as the Master's work and not our own. If we regarded any duty as the Master's work, we could not but do it with the fullest love and devotion, and therefore, to the very best of our ability. And this was the way he did it.

Seva is an act of love, an expression of devotion towards the Master. The opportunity to perform service for the Master is one of the greatest gifts a disciple can receive. When Maharaj Charan Singh was asked if there was any gift we could give him, he answered: “The best gift you can give your Master is meditation. Nothing else matters.” Meditation is the highest form of seva and that is what pleases the Master most. No outer seva can ever replace meditation.

The next time we are tempted to measure our progress on the path, we can instead reflect on our attitude towards other human beings. Are we kind? Are we compassionate to others’ needs? Do we have the desire to serve? This inclination to serve is a reflection of the example set by the Masters themselves. We can see how the present Master travels all around the world for satsang tours and surprise visits. He tirelessly oversees various seva projects at the Dera and around the world. He even answers the same questions that are asked over and over again with the same kindness and composure. His whole life revolves around us and our salvation. Through our seva and meditation, we try to express our deepest gratitude to the Master. However, it is he who demonstrates his bountiful love and affection for his disciples through his ceaseless seva.



*In the spirit of his boundless love
We try to thank him and to render him service.
But in truth it is he who serves us.*

In the Footsteps of the Master

Repartee of the Wise

The disciples asked their Master: “Who is a *gyaani* (knower) and how can he be distinguished?”

He replied, “A knower is blind, deaf and dumb.”

They remarked: “These are the marks of an unbeliever.”

He replied, “The unbeliever is deaf to the voice of the Truth, dumb for the utterance of Truth, and blind to the vision of Truth, whereas the knower is deaf, dumb and blind to all *except* Truth itself.”



A disheartened disciple once approached his Master, “I have so many problems and life has become so difficult for me. My karmas are so heavy.”

The Master looked compassionately at his disciple, “Remember one thing: to be given the opportunity to realize the Lord means you have very, very good karmas.”



A disciple asked, “What is a sin?”

The Master replied: “A sin is any thought or action that keeps a person oblivious of God.”

To Please Our Father

When we hear about people suffering from affliction and illness, it is hard not to feel empathy and compassion. When it happens to someone close to you, it is even harder. And who can be closer to a disciple than his own Master. At this human level, to see the Master go through an illness fills us with a myriad of emotions, and the epicentre of all these feelings comes down to one final question: Why? Why do Masters take on such burdens? No matter how much we reason or attempt to understand, it is impossible for us, at our level, to comprehend the Master. The moment we think we know him, we realize that we know nothing.

Throughout history, Masters have endured hardships for their disciples. They live in total dedication to their own Master and the sangat. Being the epitome of love and mercy, they take on immense difficulties to lift us out of this world of illusion.

Daryai Lal Kapur, in *Heaven on Earth*, recounts his experiences with his Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh:

Maharaj Ji's entire life was dedicated to spirituality, and seva of the sangat. His own comfort, well-being, convenience, and even health became secondary for him. Endowed with an extraordinary willpower, Hazur had a great capacity for hard work. He would endure any amount of physical discomfort and hardship while carrying out his duties. He would completely disregard extremes of weather – heat, cold, heavy rains; nothing could deter him from his mission of satsang, initiation and seva. He would stand in the summer sun – sometimes it is 120 degrees Fahrenheit in June – without an umbrella, for hours at a time, supervising the harvesting. Once when I put an umbrella

over his head, he said, “No, son, I do not need it. Don’t you see the sangat is doing seva in the sun?” With Hazur looking on, seva that would normally take two days was done in half a day.

Another time, after blessing the langar food, Maharaj Ji went to give darshan to the women baking chapattis over the pits of burning wood. In order to be visible to the ladies, he had to stand in the thick smoke coming from the damp fuel in the ovens. I myself was hardly able to breathe or see because of the smoke, and I requested that Hazur move to one side, away from it. He refused, saying, “The smoke doesn’t bother me.”

Nothing seemed to disturb Maharaj Ji’s equanimity – hunger, thirst or illness.

The Masters do so much for us, regardless of their own welfare. They advocate that the sangat is their family and their lives bear testimony to this fact. Their love for their sangat is so pure and immense, they serve as an example to all of us. It is painful for the child to see his parent suffer, and even more so for the disciple to see his Master in physical difficulties. Maharaj Charan Singh was once asked how we as disciples can help the Master. He replied:

You cannot serve the Master in a better way than by following his instructions and living his way of life – attending to your meditation. That is the best service to the Master. You have seen the gardener working harder on the trees that don’t yield any fruit, than on those trees which yield fruit. Those which yield fruit are actually helping the gardener by not demanding much of his time. They are serving the gardener. And those which don’t yield any fruit at all, are making him work harder and harder, more and more. So we can serve the Master by

following the teachings, and by living the teachings, thus bearing the fruit for which this human birth has been given to us.

Die to Live

In *Spiritual Gems*, the Great Master explains in a similar vein:

The best service that one can render to the Master is to withdraw one's attention from the body to the eye centre, cross the stars, the sun and the moon, and meet the Radiant Form of the Master within. This service replaces "I-ness" with "Thouness" and completes the duty of the disciple.

Perhaps this is the objective of the Masters – to shock us into doing more meditation. To shatter our illusion that anything on this plane can be permanent. Whatever the reason, it does not help to analyze or question their motives. For the only thing that we do know and can know is that there is only one motive of the Master – and that is love. And the response to that love can only be more love.

Every step towards the Shabd can only bring us closer to him. Every feeble effort we make to follow the teachings can only serve to please him. And that is what we want – to please our Father, to make him proud.



Master always helps those who help themselves, and the best service which a disciple can render him is to contact the Shabd and to go in.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

No Problem

We all face disappointments and adversities at some point in our lives. Life is not always a bed of roses; there are times when we find ourselves jumping with joy, moments when we cry and weep with sadness and periods when we simply experience the everyday problems of life.

Saints say that this whole world is full of sorrow, misery and sickness, which is why we can never find everlasting happiness here. We have read, 'Whatever you sow, so shall you reap'. Whatever we have sown in past births, whether good or bad karma, we have now taken birth to reap the results of those karmas. The saints tell us that we have to live in the will of the Lord and pay for all those karmas without losing our balance.

So we have a choice – we can either give in to our despair and cry and lament and be miserable during times of difficulty or we can choose to put our faith and trust in the Master by living in his will.

Fortunate are the ones who refuse to be defeated and are able to deal constructively with life's hardships. Success is not a matter of being the best but of being able to handle the worst. This can be done by thinking and living positively.

Our lives are greatly affected by how we think. Negativity keeps us trapped in our thoughts and prevents us from attending to meditation, making it more and more difficult to achieve our goal of going beyond the realm of the mind and merging with the divine within. Positivity, on the other hand, inspires a positive perception of a negative situation and helps modify the outcome for the better. So if we adopt a positive approach towards any obstacle we encounter, we will be able to rise above it, making it easier to focus on our meditation.

We have to train the mind by telling it to forgive and forget, to take things easily and lightheartedly, to laugh our troubles away and ignore them. No doubt, this takes great effort, determination, perseverance and most of all, God's grace.

We cannot change the events of life but we can surely adjust to them. Destiny will play its part and we have to play ours by attending to meditation no matter what state we are in, whether we are elated or devastated. Saints explain that meditation will help us rise above our problems so that they will not affect us.

'Problem' is a relative word. Something may appear as a problem, but if we look at it from a different angle, it may not really be a problem at all. Saints say that if we attend to our meditation and are able to concentrate at the eye centre, and live according to the principles of the mystics, our willpower becomes very strong. This in turn helps us to face all the ups and downs of life. The bliss, peace and happiness that we build in meditation goes a long way in helping us confront these so-called problems and difficulties. We learn to keep our balance, and face situations smilingly.

A positive attitude gives us the ability to accept our condition and the inspiration to renew our commitment to meditation. We should let go of the problems of life and attend to our spiritual practice by adhering to the Sant Mat principles. We need to train ourselves to deal with the present and strengthen ourselves through meditation to be able to cope with the future. Then we will have no problems because whatever happens, we will remain in a state of balance, unaffected by the storms that are an inescapable part of the human experience.



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Is not God's grace the power to shape all that we are destined to become?*

A: God's grace is always there, but brother, we have to become receptive to his grace. If it is raining very heavily and your cup is upside down, not a drop of water will get into it. You have to put that cup with the right side up, then it will be filled with rain water. So God's grace is always there, within everyone of us, but we have to be receptive to that grace, and by receptive I mean we have to withdraw our consciousness to that point where his grace is coming day and night. Unless we attach ourselves to that and unless we are filled with that love and devotion to the Lord, naturally these desires and attachments of the world will not go out of us. There is no limit to his grace, which is everywhere, but we have to be receptive.

The Master Answers

* * *

Q: *Master, we know that this is the right path and we have the faith and yet there is no love in our heart, how shall we go about it?*

A: Sister, if you are attending to your meditation, love will come automatically. You do not have to work for love. It comes when it comes. Even in worldly love, you know, if you analyze yourself, you do not work for it. God gives this gift, and it just comes.

The Master Answers

Q: *Has the Master been pleased or displeased with our behaviour?*

A: You see, the professor loves all the students in the class, but some students are not attentive; some students don't work hard at all, and unless they are given seats in the front, they won't be attentive. It doesn't mean that the Master doesn't love the students sitting on the back benches and is only considerate of the students who are sitting in the front. He wants them to be attentive. Because he loves all the students, he wants everybody to pass. So this is a wrong way of judging things. The professor does not discriminate among his students; he only wants to teach and see that every student passes.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

* * *

Q: *Has the Master the power to help the disciple open the inner eye, while the disciple is meditating, or it is just that we have to be purified so much until it automatically opens of its own accord and then the Master helps us to open it?*

A: Brother, it takes both. We have to put in the effort, and the grace of the Master is always there. My Master used to tell us that if a disciple goes one step forward, the Master comes ten steps to receive him. If we go ten steps, he comes a hundred steps to receive us. If we are sincere and honest in our devotion, in our efforts, he never withholds his grace. It is always there.

The Master Answers

* * *

Q: *If it is decided at the time of death that we should take another birth, how do we find another Master?*

A: You don't have to find any Master at all. The Master will find you himself. We never find any Master; we are just pulled to a Master.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



Beyond Words

And now I wish I could really describe him to you or tell you of my impressions. But did you ever try to describe a beautiful sunset? ... No king could be more graceful and dignified, and yet that dignity is so tempered with sweet humility that one is drawn to him. His voice is low and clear as silver bells. His smile is extremely gracious and one can see that his heart holds loving kindness for all. He is to be seen and not described.

Julian Johnson, *With a Great Master in India*

Perhaps very few can talk about what transpires in the heart of a disciple when he is present before his Master – the enigma which unfolds in the realm of silence.

Our relationship with the Master can never be described in words, perhaps because he plays a role different from anyone else we know. It is a mystery how someone so unknown to us, feels the most familiar, and knows all that we hold in the deepest chambers of our hearts. Maulana Rum says:

Every inch of you does he know, for kept he the secrets of God.

Daryai Lal Kapoor writes about the Great Master:

Although our karmas were as clear to him as the contents of a glass jar, he would never speak of our shortcomings, even indirectly. He took care not to hurt anyone's feelings.

Heaven on Earth

Great Master would say, “Saints never look at our failings. If they did, who would come to them? Every soul is virtuous. Our eyes and heart are at fault if we fail to see a person’s worth, for God himself sits in every human heart.”

With faults and sins so grave, we run to be in his presence because there is no fear of judgment. Our human condition craves approval, craves appreciation. We often desperately need to see the good in ourselves. There are many things in life that warrant our time, help, attention and we just cannot deliver. Or there may be people we have cheated or lied to, and we carry all this baggage from our relationships. It makes it so hard to look these people in the eye. But when we are in the Master’s presence, no matter how sinful we are, no matter how disobedient we have been, all we receive in the gentleness of his eyes is his love. Those eyes reflect all the best that he sees in us and somehow every wrong is made right, every confession is heard, and every tear is dried.

Thousands of people have had the opportunity to ask their Master questions at the Dera or in their respective cities. Those who have had this opportunity will say that the Master has understood their heart’s woe, even before they have fully understood it themselves. Nothing is actually said and nothing is actually heard, and the dialogue is over before it even starts.

The Master’s answer (to the question), did not appear to be based on theory, speculation or reasoning. Rather I felt that he could see with his inner eye the condition of my mind and soul. And so his answer was based on direct perception. He was speaking factually. I am firmly convinced that the Master saw not only my previous lives but also the road ahead of me.

He knew my questions even before I asked them and he answered them in his own way. No words were needed.

Adventure of Faith

When the Master glances at us, in that moment, there is no one else. In that one fortunate glance, our heart is etched on to his palm like a magnet. Something happens. He inspires us with one glance, with one smile and sometimes with no words. We are like the *Ramonda Serbica*, the Serbian Phoenix Flower, which lives in the most unfavourable conditions. Whenever this plant is absolutely dry and on the verge of death, with just a few drops of water, in a matter of moments the flower can spring back to life. Every time we sit before him, this mystery unfolds, leaving us unburdened and ever so grateful.

In that silent dialogue, there is a space that feels like home. Nowhere do we feel more secure, more protected, more relaxed, and the most loved. He meets us in a place where we fully understand and have been fully understood. For this reason, we permit ourselves to be true, to be real. And only in this space can we, in time, come to experience our truth. Julian Johnson sums it:

How has he become my very life? It is a deep mystery, but an infinite joy. And how has this heavenly mystery come about in my life? It is so out of the beaten paths of ordinary experience. All who have walked the path know well, that in all the world there is no relation so close and so sacred as that between Master and pupil. There is no relation so crowned with the frenzy of divine joy. When the disciple feels that every ray of light that radiates from the Master carries with it streams of life itself, he must love him.

With a Great Master in India



Did You Know?

Our eyes are responsible for 83 percent of the impressions imprinted on our mind, our ears for 14 percent, and the remaining 3 percent are formed by the other sense organs of the body put together. If our attention ceases to go out and we thus stop the entry of impressions from outside, we can, with an inward gaze, realize the Truth. It is for this reason that saints always instruct us to shut our eyes and our ears while doing repetition or listening to the Shabd.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I



If we try to fight with the mind in order to detach ourselves from worldly things, we can never succeed. In order to overcome our mind, to subdue it and to take it back to its own origin, we have to give it a pleasure which is greater than the sensual pleasures.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II



The best way of working off karma and, at the same time, of avoiding the accumulation of further karmas is by doing things in a spirit of duty. This attitude in life, along with regular meditation, i.e., simran and bhajan, is the best way of overcoming the drag of karma and getting spiritual uplift.

Light on Sant Mat

The Search for Wisdom

In ancient times, knowledge and wisdom were concentrated in esteemed centers of learning. We read in our textbooks on the classical world about the Lyceum, where the philosopher Aristotle taught, or about the library in Alexandria, Egypt, which is said to have been one of the largest and most significant in its day. In those ancient times, it was clear that knowledge was available to those who searched for it.

Our modern age makes knowledge available literally in our laps. All we have to do is turn on a computer and search the web. Whether it is something important, like understanding an illness, or something mundane, like learning how to fix a leaky faucet, vast quantities of information are readily available to us.

From this simple action of searching the web, so ingrained in our daily lives, it is easy to be misled into believing that real knowledge is at our fingertips. But perfect saints with their vast experience tell us that there is a difference between knowledge and understanding.

To gain true understanding, we certainly have to search, but within ourselves rather than on the Internet or anywhere outside. It is said that Socrates once explained that he was focused on the maxim “Know thyself” and that until he was able to understand what that meant, he did not have time to investigate irrelevant things. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that it is the same Socrates who commented, “The more I learn, the more I learn how little I know.” Maharaj Charan Singh once explained this perspective:

It is absolutely useless to have all the knowledge of the world if we do not know the Creator, who is within every part of

his creation. When we know the Creator, then we realize that we know absolutely nothing. It is the Creator who knows everything.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

But we live in a society that believes “knowledge is power”. There is a story about a proud and learned pundit who once came to the house of the mystic Kabir on a bullock cart full of books to engage in an intellectual debate. Kabir was not at home when the pundit arrived; instead he was greeted by his daughter. On seeing her, he asked, “Is this the house of Kabir?”

To this the daughter replied, “Kabir’s home is on a peak, the path is slippery and hard where even an ant’s foot finds no hold. The erudite want to reach there with bullock carts of books!”

This story simply illustrates what true wisdom is. We like to think of humanity as having made great progress in the last few centuries. Indeed, we think of ourselves as wiser and more knowledgeable than our ancestors. But the saints challenge us to consider another perspective.

When we are filled with love and devotion for the Father, we get the real wisdom within us ... a simple person, who sees the Lord in everyone, in every part of the creation, he is a man of wisdom. However literate or illiterate he may be, however ignorant from the worldly point of view, he may have the real wisdom.”

Maharaj Charan Singh, Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

The logical question in our mind is how then do we fill ourselves with love and devotion for the Lord? In the Adi Granth, we read:

*Without serving the Satguru,
One is not blessed with the Name;
One may read till exhausted,
Yet will not find peace.*

And so, simply put, we will not be able to create that true love and devotion for the Father until we come across a perfect living Master. Under the Master's guidance, we can learn how to repeat the true Name and listen to the true Word. It is only then, having conducted that true search within ourselves, that we will obtain true wisdom and understanding.



*Reading volume after volume,
Men tire themselves to exhaustion,
But not one becomes
A real scholar;
Who learns the one word love
Is the truly learned one.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

From One Master to Another

A full fortnight before his passing away, the Great Master had executed his last will, nominating Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh as his spiritual successor. On the morning of 20 March, 1948, I was sitting with Rai Sahib Munshi Ram (retired District & Sessions Judge, Punjab, who after his retirement in 1941 had been acting as the Great Master's secretary) when Gandhi, the personal attendant of the Great Master, came and said that the Great Master wanted to see Rai Sahib. He immediately left, and, on his return after about fifteen or twenty minutes, told me that the Great Master had nominated Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh as his spiritual successor, and a will was to be written to that effect.

Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh was a retired vice-principal of the Punjab Agricultural College at Lyallpur and was already held in the highest esteem by satsangis for his piety, devotion and high spiritual attainment. His humility and meekness is evident from the following incident: Prior to the execution of the will, the Great Master had sent for Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh and said to him, "I wish you to carry on my mission which my great preceptor, Baba Ji Maharaj (Baba Jaimal Singh) had entrusted to me. You are being nominated as my successor."

Tears rolled down Sardar Bahadur Ji's cheeks. Acknowledging the exalted status of the Satguru, he addressed his beloved Master as emperor of emperors, the highest of the high, and with folded hands said: "The emperor's throne befits none but the emperor of emperors. May you live forever! I am but a slave."

The Great Master did not speak, but cast a loving gaze on him, and Sardar Bahadur Ji quietly left the place, with tears still flowing from his eyes. He was, however, later called again. In the meantime, the will had actually been executed. The Great Master told him that his orders had to be carried out. Sardar Bahadur Ji then humbly bowed down at the feet of the Master and said, “I submit to your command, my Master!”

Call of the Great Master



*That exalted status is yours,
When I bow my head before you;
Yet this head I bow
Is but a gift from you to me.
Far more than my destiny allows
From your gracious hands I receive;
Yet even my destiny
Is but a gift from you to me.*

Anonymous Urdu Couplet,
as quoted in *Legacy of Love*

Because I'm Happy

Because I'm happy ...

Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth;

Clap along if you know what happiness is to you;

Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do!

Pharrell Williams

There is a very upbeat song which has topped the charts. The name of the song is “Happy”, and it is played repeatedly on the radio, in dance studios and even in kindergartens. In fact, the song has become so popular, you find people of all age groups humming, grinning and clapping along to it. Similarly, nearly 30 years ago another song, called “Don't Worry, Be Happy” also topped the charts and won various awards. So many years later, we still know the song and almost inevitably hum along if we hear it on the radio. A questioner once told Maharaj Ji about the song and expressed his desire to sing it for him. The Master told him that although he had not heard the song before, it was something that he often said: “By nature, man is happy and contented.”

If man is contented by nature and we find ourselves inevitably humming along to happy tunes, why is it that we also often find ourselves in a negative state of mind? The answer is simple. It is because we often equate happiness with a set of circumstances rather than a state of being.

Often we feel that the responsibility of making us happy lies on someone else's shoulders. As children, we often looked to our parents

to make us happy, and even resented them if they did not buy the toy we wanted. As young adults, we depended on our spouses to make us happy, and often held high expectations that led to feelings of disappointment. Later in life, we looked to our children for happiness, yet felt disappointed if they did not choose the career or spouse we wanted for them.

Our mistake is depending on another being or an object for our state of happiness. The responsibility of maintaining a happy state of mind rests on our shoulders alone.

Another common mistake that we make is depending on certain life circumstances to make us happy. As children, we may associate happiness with just five more minutes of television before bed. As young adults, perhaps we feel that we will be happy only once we are accepted to the college of our choice or marry the girl of our dreams. Midway through life, our ambitions often centre on monetary advancements, and later in life, we look to our children to satisfy our unfulfilled dreams. But life can never go exactly as we wish, and as Maharaj Ji used to often explain, happiness lies in adjusting to life's circumstances and adopting the right attitude.

There is a beautiful story of an elderly woman that aptly explains this advice. This ninety-two-year-old, petite, poised and proud lady, who was legally blind, was forced to move into a nursing home after her husband of seventy years passed away. After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. She manoeuvred her walker to the elevator, and the nurse provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet curtains that had been hung on her window. "I love it," she stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy. "But Mrs Jones, you have not

seen the room ... just wait!” exclaimed the nurse. “That doesn’t have anything to do with it,” she replied. “Happiness is something you decide ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not does not depend on how the furniture is arranged, it’s how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it.”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we too could arrange our minds to always be happy? Masters are our perfect examples and just like that ninety-two-year-old blind woman, aren’t they also beaming pictures of happiness? Don’t their smiles brighten up any room? Regardless of what they may be going through personally, aren’t they full of humour, rhymes, laughs and smiles? How can we adopt such a state of inner joy, so that we too radiate happiness wherever we go? Like these noble souls, how do we get the happy song constantly beating in our hearts? How do we forget all our worries and anxieties and just sing along?

The second line of the song says, “Clap along if we know that happiness is the truth.” Maharaj Ji has himself assured us that we are happy at our core, so happiness undoubtedly is the truth.

Then the song goes, “Clap along if you know what happiness is to you.” If we simply realize that happiness is not a set of circumstances but a state of mind that we must choose to adopt, then we begin to understand what happiness truly means to each one of us.

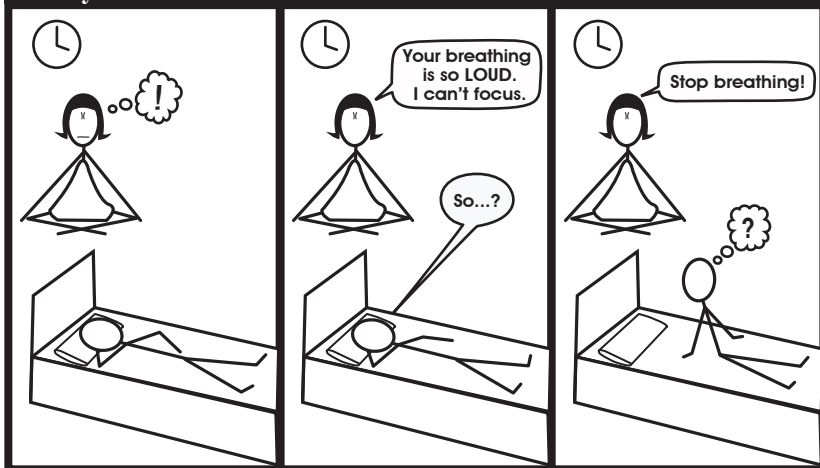
Finally, the song goes, “Clap along if you feel like that’s what you want to do.” Indeed, the lyrics accurately point out that once we have understood that happiness is a way of thinking – we simply need to decide whether or not we want to adopt it. The final decision of being happy – rather the responsibility of being happy – is ours and ours alone.

A young disciple once asked her Master what made him happy, and what made him sad. He paused, tilted his head to the side and said, “Your smiling faces make me happy, and your long faces make me sad.” If we find it so difficult to choose happiness for ourselves, at least let’s embrace it for him. Let’s clap along, because it’s what he wants us to do.



SPIRITUALISTICKS[®]

Every Breath He Takes...



The Commitment of Love

*Grant me the initiation of your Nam,
For it is the redeemer of sinners.
Do not evaluate my sins or good deeds
Cut the noose of my attachments now.
For numerous lifetimes have I sinned, O Lord,
Forgive me this time.
Dharamdas pleads with folded hands:
Free me from the cycle of transmigration.*

Saint Dharamdas, as quoted in *The Voice of the Heart*

Our memories of the day we were initiated will always be etched in our hearts. It was the day we were given the ‘gift of life’, as the Great Master referred to it, or a ‘new birth’ as Christ said. The treasure of Nam was what we had wanted more than anything else.

When we asked for initiation, we expressed our deep longing to go back to the Lord. Out of his mercy, the Master gave us what our heart longed for and revealed the path back to our spiritual home. This biggest commitment of our lifetime promised our final release from the bondage of this world, but it was emphasized that progress was dependent upon the practice of meditation. We made a pledge to the Lord that we would devote ten percent of our time to him every day; in turn, the Master made an eternal promise that he would guide us throughout our spiritual journey and that we would never be alone.

At the time of initiation, the Master imparts the secret knowledge of the heart. It then becomes possible to make spiritual progress by following the Master’s directions. After

explaining everything, directions are given which help in repetition, contemplation and manifestation of the inner Shabd or divine sound. They help the disciple in his inner ascent. At the time of initiation, the Master gives the ray of life and connects him with the melody of the Shabd. He then establishes a subtle link with the disciple, guides him and takes him to the original Home.

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

For some of us, twenty, thirty or even forty years may have gone by since we were initiated. Can we say that we have been true to our commitment to the Master by giving him our promised two and a half hours each day? Are we as eager today to attend to our meditation as when we were newly initiated? As much as we treasure this gift of a new life, why are there days when we find ourselves falling back into our old lifestyle?

In almost every question and answer session, we hear disciples pleading with the Master for his grace as they find their spiritual practice a constant struggle. Whether it is the problem of concentrating, falling asleep, lack of time or body aches, we all have our share of difficulties. Over the years, the Masters have reminded us that meditation is a constant struggle because for ages our attention has been running outwards. To reverse this habit and divert the attention inwards can take a lifetime. However, we are assured that with perseverance, dedication and the Master on our side, we can overcome all obstacles. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves what the Master repeatedly tells us – that meditation is our lifeline.

Hazur Maharaj Ji would often tell us that every disciple should always be like a warrior: one who fights with the mind as a warrior fights with his enemy – unafraid of the hardship that he must endure

and focused on victory. Each time we fight our mind, the Master gives us more and more of his grace.

Once a soul has received initiation from the Master on this path, giving the full method of concentration and other spiritual exercises, the disciple cannot fail to attain ultimate realization, provided he is faithful to the instructions given to him at the time of initiation and he sticks to the path with increasing love and devotion to the Almighty.

I have said many a time before and repeat it again that once the seed of Nam (sound current) has been sown in a soil (heart) it will sprout one day, grow, become a tree, and bear fruit. It is impossible to destroy this seed. The devotee of the Current must reach Sach Khand. It is inevitable and no power can stop him.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

The Master makes it very clear that every moment that we give to meditation takes us nearer to our home. He is not concerned with the results. He only asks for one thing from us: to give our full time to meditation. He will take care of the rest. We may have to face innumerable challenges in our spiritual practice, but are they really more difficult than some of the suffering that we undergo in this world? In fact, the mystics explain that the joy which accompanies the spiritual path cannot be compared to anything in this world.

The day we received the gift of Nam was undoubtedly the happiest day of our lives. With that boon, however, comes a great responsibility. The Master has told us that the biography of a saint is his disciples. This means that the way we conduct ourselves is a direct reflection on the Master's life story. What can we do to ensure that we live up to this responsibility so that our Master is always pleased with us?

The one who stands firm on the principles of Sant Mat and is attending to his meditation and living in the will of the Lord, naturally he's the right type of disciple.

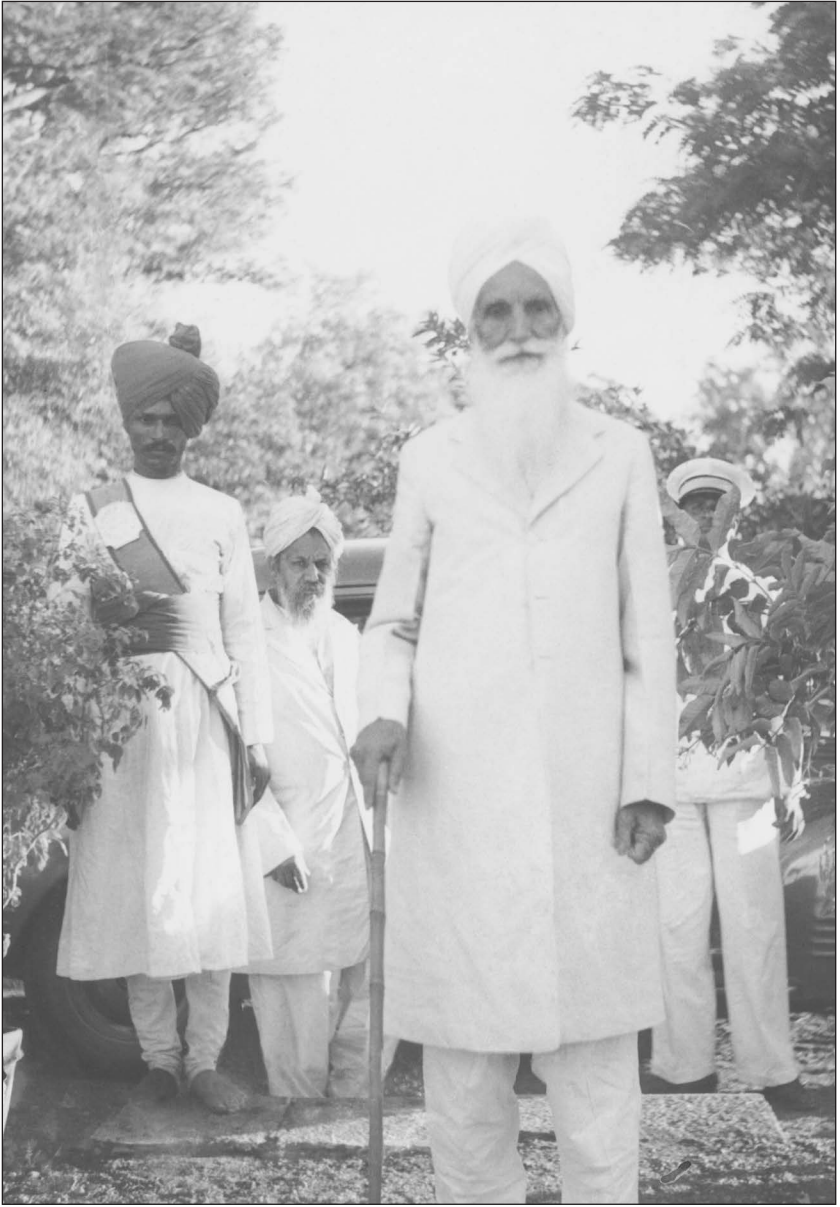
Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II

We know that our Master has made a commitment to us; we, too, need to live up to our part of the promise. When we live in this world strongly adhering to the teachings, we will begin to experience the Lord's love in every facet of our lives. His love for us is boundless; and he will give us much more than we can ever imagine – all it takes is to be committed to him.



We should also honour the commitment which we have made with the Father, that we have a certain time to attend to meditation. We have to sit, whether our mind is still or not. Whether we have to fight with the mind or not is a different problem, but we have made a certain commitment with the Father, and we should try to honour it by giving our time to the Father at that particular time.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*



Maharaj Sawan Singh

Heart to Heart

In a question and answer session, a disciple remarked: “Master, we long to be close to you, but it’s impossible for 600,000 satsangis to be close to the Master physically.”

Hazur replied, “You see, whenever you are attending to the Master within, you are showing your presence to him physically, within. The Master is within you. So be in his presence; you are physically present before him.”

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III



On one of his trips abroad, Maharaj Charan Singh was preparing to go through customs for boarding the plane. His face was glowing, more radiant than ever, and his smile was full of ineffable love and mercy. A new initiate, with tears in his eyes, suddenly spoke out the thoughts of all those present: “Master, I am very sad that you are leaving us.” The Master turned to him and gently replied, “Am I leaving you?”

Heaven on Earth



In *Heaven on Earth*, it is recorded that several priests were greatly impressed when the Great Master came to their village and gave a discourse. A few of them even asked for initiation. Upon hearing this, one of the villagers went to one priest and said, “You should be ashamed. You, a Brahmin, bowing at the feet of a Sikh!” The priest replied, “Just look at him with my eyes – what do you know of his greatness!”

Book Review



The Way of Chuang Tzu

BY THOMAS MERTON

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ISBN: 0811218511

Chuang Tzu was a Chinese mystic who is believed to have lived in the third and fourth century BCE, and was probably a contemporary of the legendary mystic Lao-Tzu, author of the *Tao Tè Ching*. The writings attributed to Chuang Tzu – traditionally referred to as ‘the Chuang Tzu’ – reveal a perspective similar to that of Lao-Tzu’s mystic teachings of the Tao (the Way). For both mystics, the Tao is the ultimate abstract source or root of the entire creation – the motive power that underlies everything and to which all must return.

A short collection of the most accessible and provocative writings from the Chuang Tzu was created by Thomas Merton, the late Jesuit priest, entitled *The Way of Chuang Tzu*. Working from various translations by others, Merton expressed them in his own words; yet, according to Burton Watson, a noted scholar of Chinese mystical literature, Merton’s versions remained “almost as close to the original as the translations upon which they are based.”

The Chuang Tzu tells short anecdotes about animals, characters of Chinese legend and history, even his contemporaries. His anecdotes are paradoxical, humorous, or may even seem nonsensical, but have the power to turn the reader’s mind towards truths beyond ordinary logic, culminating in an “aha” moment of self-realization. It was mainly due to the influence of Chuang Tzu that Ch’an Buddhism, usually called by its Japanese name Zen Buddhism, evolved in China from Indian Buddhism.

The most significant themes of the Chuang Tzu are: What is the Tao and where can we find it? How can we live in harmony with the Tao? He advocates an attitude of *wu-wei*, the principle of non-action or non-doing, acting without effort or desire, acting without attachment to the results, but simply going with the flow of nature. He urges us to remove our mind

from the extremes of passion and come in tune with the stillness of the Tao, which is at the pivot of all being, the pivot around which all opposites converge. “He who grasps the pivot is at the still-point from which all movements and oppositions can be seen in their right relationship.” The Tao is not a thing and cannot be described in words. It embodies the principle of reversal, in which everything contains its opposite and is perpetually in motion towards its opposite (the principle of *yin* and *yang*).

In responding to the question “Show me where the Tao is found,” Chuang Tzu replies, “There is nowhere it is not to be found.” He gives examples of how it is present in even the least of things, but it cannot be measured because even in the least of things it is great. It has no limits. He says:

*When I look beyond the beginning I find no measure.
When I look beyond the end I find also no measure ...*

*To name Tao is to name no-thing.
Tao is not the name of “an existent.”
“Cause” and “chance” have no bearing on Tao.
Tao is a name that indicates without defining.*

Many lines from the Chuang Tzu concern the true or perfect man. For example, the true man is one who knows, through a higher wisdom and union with the Tao, that conventional opinions about the purposes and values of human life are meaningless. Chuang Tzu says:

*What is meant by a “true man”?
The true men of old were not afraid
When they stood alone in their views.
No great exploits. No plans.
If they failed, no sorrow.
No self-congratulation in success...
The true men of old knew no lust for life,
No dread of death ...
They did not forget where from, nor ask where to,*

*Nor drive grimly forward
Fighting their way through life.
They took life as it came, gladly;
Took death as it came, without care;
And went away, yonder, yonder.*

The Taoist concept of “fasting of the heart” expresses the need to empty the mind of all thoughts and desires in order to merge with the Tao and perform one’s duties without attachment. On this subject, Chuang Tzu quotes Confucius:

The goal of fasting is inner unity. This means hearing, but not with the ear; hearing, but not with the understanding; hearing with the spirit, with your whole being. The hearing that is only in the ears is one thing. The hearing of the understanding is another. But the hearing of the spirit is not limited to any one faculty, to the ear, or to the mind. Hence it demands the emptiness of all the faculties. And when the faculties are empty, then the whole being listens. There is then a direct grasp of what is right there before you that can never be heard with the ear or understood with the mind. Fasting of the heart empties the faculties, frees you from limitation and from preoccupation. Fasting of the heart begets unity and freedom...

Look at this window: it is nothing but a hole in the wall, but because of it the whole room is full of light. So when the faculties are empty, the heart is full of light.

It is a Taoist principle that whoever distinguishes himself from others is liable to be attacked, while one who cultivates humility and simplicity crosses the ocean of life.

*If a man is crossing a river
And an empty boat collides with his own skiff ...
He will not become very angry.
But if he sees a man in the boat,
He will shout at him to steer clear.*

*If the shout is not heard, he will shout again,
And yet again, and begin cursing.
And all because there is somebody in the boat ...
If you can empty your own boat
Crossing the river of the world,
No one will oppose you,
No one will seek to harm you.*

About the perfect man, Chuang Tzu says,

*He will flow like Tao, unseen,
He will go about like Life itself
With no name and no home ...
Since he judges no one,
No one judges him.
Such is the perfect man:
His boat is empty.*

Readers interested in the complete works of Chuang Tzu may benefit from Burton Watson's *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). Watson has also released an abbreviated collection in *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968, 1996).



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