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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Ride away

*Turn around and listen
To the great resonance of Shabd,
O surat, beloved of your Master!
Why carry heavy burdens on your head
When your stay on earth is so short-lived?
The Master pleads with you again and again
To develop love for the melody of Shabd.*

*Nam alone is pure, all else is bitterness, poison;
make Nam the sustenance of your life.
I have revealed a unique method
which no scripture can teach.
Listen to me, stop being apathetic –
wake up, pay attention.
Uproot and destroy lust and other passions,
then wash yourself clean
in the refreshing stream of Shabd.
When you conquer your mind and maya,
both Kal and karma will also be ousted.
Then the soul will be in command –
free to ride to the palace of the perfect Master.*

Soami Ji, Sar Bachan Poetry





Daybreak

As the sun is the joy of those that wait for daybreak
So my joy is the Lord.
For he is my sun
And his rays have roused me.
His light has dispelled all darkness from my face;
Through him I have obtained eyes,
And have seen his holy day.
Ears have become mine,
And I have heard his truth.
I have received the thought of knowledge,
And through it I have lived fully.
The way of error I have discarded,
And I have walked towards him,
And I have received salvation from him ungrudgingly.

Odes of Solomon, Ode 15

The composer of this ode presents us with a beautiful image. The sun gives life to all things on earth. Without the sun there would be no life at all. Even when it is night the sun is maintaining our planet and sustaining our lives. And for those who are cold or afraid, the night is bearable only because they know that the sun will rise and daybreak will come. For them, the return of the sun is a great joy.

Using the simile of daybreak, the author tells us that in the darkness of his worldly existence, the Lord is his joy. There are many things that we need to survive in life in addition to physical light and warmth – and many things that bring us joy. We need love. We need hope. We need that fire of life within us, to propel us forward through our days.

We look for warmth and joy in many ways, whether it is through our friends and families, our careers, or perhaps through our sense of belonging in society.

But mystics warn us that nothing here is permanent. Everything that we see and all that we experience is subject to change and dissolution. In the world, the pleasures and comfort that we get are at worst insufficient and at best only temporary. If we want to rid ourselves of that emptiness and loneliness that strikes at us in the darkness of our nights, we need to look towards that power that brought the creation into existence and sustains it even now. They say if you want to find true joy, look to the Lord.

For he is my sun and his rays have roused me

Saints and Masters are shining suns in our lives because they point the way to the Lord. They give out their teachings to those who seek the light of the Lord, regardless of what social background they come from and irrespective of their religious backgrounds, showing us the spiritual message that is hidden in all of our scriptures.

Just as we do not have to pay for the privilege of living in the sun, the teachings of the saints are free of charge. They want nothing from us, only to share their message with those who are seeking the light of the divine.

Just as the rays of the morning sun wake us from our slumber, Masters come to awaken us from the sleep of ignorance. So it is that we begin to know that there is more to life than this daily grind; beauty beyond our finest paintings; greater satisfaction beyond the temporary distractions we find here, and that it is possible to achieve peace and bliss. At last we understand our full potential and who we really are. We are not just the body, the emotions and the mind – our true self is our soul.

Just as a plant leans towards the sunlight, so too we lean towards the light of the Master and his teachings. The power of the sun draws life to it irresistibly. Even weeds push through concrete to find it. The Master is our sun – we irresistibly grow towards him. The Persian poet, Hafiz, says: “How did the rose ever open its heart and give to this world all of its beauty? It felt the encouragement of light against its being.”

His light has dispelled all darkness from my face

All Masters are rays that come from the one sun, which is the Lord. We, in our ignorance, divide their teachings. But the Masters have always emanated out of that same light. The rays may be many but there is only one sun. When we begin to imbibe the teachings of the saints and gain understanding, the darkness of ignorance and division starts to leave us. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

The Saints tell us that there is but one father of all creation. He is the Lord of all the worlds put together. He is their sustainer. He does not belong to any particular caste or creed.... All religions preach the same ethical and spiritual truths. Their principal teachings are that a man should be of good conduct, have faith in the Lord and should finally merge into him.

By working to withdraw our consciousness within and upwards, we can realize the Divine in our human lifetime and so dispel the darkness that enshrouds us, the darkness of the five negative passions that cloud our mind and soul.

Saints teach us the spiritual practice which will enable our vision to be cleared: repetition to enable us to achieve concentration,

contemplation to hold our attention, and the technique of listening to the ringing radiance or Shabd, which is the power of life within us.

Each cycle of repetition of the five holy names given to us at the time of initiation is like a wipe of the windows of our souls. If we don't ever clean a window, letting dirt and grime build up, we eventually can't see out of it at all. But with regular meditation we keep our vision clear.

**Through him I have obtained eyes, and have seen his holy day.
Ears have become mine, and I have heard his truth.**

As Jesus said, "Having eyes, ye see not, having ears ye hear not", meaning that we cannot perceive the Divine with these physical eyes and ears. The writer tells us that he has now received those eyes and ears which perceive the truth and divinity of the Lord – his "holy day".

"Ears have become mine" means that we have been able to hear and understand the teachings of the saints. It also refers to the ability to hear and enjoy the Shabd. Once we experience the love of the Shabd ringing within us, life becomes holy. Through following the teachings of the saints, meditating and living a pure and moral life, our lives are transformed.

Just as there is a time to catch the rays of the sun, so too, there is an ideal time to catch the Shabd. One doesn't sunbathe at dusk, and at dawn there will not be much heat; we automatically want to sunbathe when the sun is high. Any time is good for meditation, but the Masters tell us that the ideal time is the early morning hours. They call this the time of elixir. Before the attention has been scattered out in the world, before the waves of the day have begun, when there are no worldly distractions, one is able better to concentrate the attention at the eye focus, become aware of the light and catch the sound.

Perhaps we are still waiting for the daybreak, in the process of gaining our inner eyes and ears. But we certainly start to notice the

effect of following the path. Our vision does become clearer in the sense that we are able to function with greater discrimination and clarity. Our awareness is raised and we gain a greater perspective.

I have received the thought of knowledge,

And through it I have lived fully

Through our understanding of the teachings, through receiving initiation which connects us with the sound current (the true thought of knowledge) and through living the type of life that the Masters encourage, we start to really live fully. We are no longer buffeted about by the winds of this world. We have a firm anchor to hold on to. We are actually able to enjoy life much more because we are not so attached to it.

Having come to the spiritual path, we have clear guidelines and a clear goal in life. If we have done our meditation in the morning, then our day is already fulfilled and we are prepared to face whatever comes our way. We can then enjoy our families, our friends, our jobs without expectation. We feel his love wherever we turn. Seekers, prior to attending to meditation, and while making a thorough search, can live in accordance with the first vows – being vegetarian, avoiding alcohol and mind-affecting drugs, and living a clean moral life.

The way of error I have discarded

And I have walked towards him

Maharaj Charan Singh used to lovingly explain that if the disciple takes one step towards the Lord, then the Lord takes one hundred towards him. He knows our condition, he knows our weaknesses and he understands our struggles. Becoming an initiate does not mean that we are perfect and that we are free from the five passions from day one. But walking “towards him” means making our best effort, getting

up after a fall, trying to live according to the teachings and making amends where we can. The writer states very simply and beautifully that he has now discarded “the way of error”. He is attempting to live in the way of goodness and truth – not lying, cheating or back-biting but rather adopting a loving and moral life. He no longer relies on rites, rituals and outer observances but understands the need to embark on the inner journey.

First we have to have the resolve, that faith that we are walking in the right direction, and once we have that resolve we need to walk.

And I have received salvation from him ungrudgingly.

Just as the Lord showers the gift of salvation on us in an open-hearted, ungrudging way, so we open our hearts and minds to receive that gift and whatever it entails “ungrudgingly”. Perhaps what the author means is that whatever the Lord sends to me I will accept without complaining, without minding, because he knows how best to save me.

The Masters tell us that we do not have to wait until we die to meet the Lord. Shabd or Nam is always shining within us, providing us with sustenance. They tell us that every day we can turn our face to the Lord, through repetition, through contemplation, and through listening. We can gain strength from the great power of the Lord, our sun.

When daybreak comes we realize that our seeming lack of sight – our darkness – was an illusion. When the Lord’s light manifests within us we realize that it was never dark at all.



Abandoned?

The world is unfathomable, its other side is invisible;
How shall I ever cross it ?
Is there no friendly boatman to ferry me across?
Is there no-one to reveal my Beloved's dwelling place?
I long to see the minaret of his palace
And I yearn to have my say to him:
"Why did you abandon me in alien lands?"

Tulsi Sahib, Saint of Hathras

Abandoned – is that how we feel in this creation? Abandoned by the Father? Sometimes it may seem so, but the Master tells us that actually the Shabd, our lifeline, is always there. The divine sound and light within us never lessen; it is we who turn away from it. We're rather like wilful children who pull away from a mother's hand in a crowd, then feel fearful and weep when we no longer sense her presence.

Our true happiness and well-being depend on the level of our contact with the divine within us, and to achieve this contact we must throw ourselves wholeheartedly into our spiritual practice. We read in *Teachings of the Gurus*:

For getting the highest thing in the world, Nam, we have to pay the highest price. Unless we offer our all to the saints, we cannot find God. To them we have to give our heart and soul.

It's sometimes said that God is a jealous lover. He wants our all, not just a tiny part of our attention. If we were to use the word 'abandon' in

quite a different way, we could say that to develop spiritually we should 'abandon' ourselves to love.

In a novel, there is an amusing incident in which a young woman tells her mother-in-law that she is going to a party that evening where there will be "a band and dancing". The suspicious mother-in-law mishears and repeats in consternation, "abandoned dancing!" To be 'abandoned', in that sense, means to give way to natural impulse – in other words to abandon all constraint. This can be bad if one is surrendering to downward impulses, as the mother-in-law suspects. However, if we are able to surrender or abandon ourselves in an upward direction, responding to a spiritual pull, it can only be good.

In Sufi literature there are many examples of the *mast faqir*, the one intoxicated by God, who surrenders or abandons himself to joy. The book *Tales of the Mystic East* relates a story from the time of Soami Ji Maharaj in which a devoted disciple completely forgot herself in his love. Bibi Shibbo, on hearing a beautiful hymn recited in the street outside the room where she was having a bath, ran out of her house quite oblivious to the fact that she was naked. "Good! At least I have one devoted disciple," said Soami Ji. The story then reassures us: "Now look at the coincidence! When Bibi Shibbo was running through the streets without her clothes, by his grace no one saw her. This is how the Lord looks after his devotees."

Maharaj Sawan Singh, in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, explains that it is through intense application to spiritual practice, the first stage of which is simran or repetition of holy names, that one achieves self-forgetfulness. He writes:

A devotee ... should remember God and become so absorbed in simran that he becomes utterly oblivious of his body. By doing so the soul ascends to higher spiritual regions.

Having access to a source of such joy makes meditation a delight rather than something to struggle over. The disciple longs for the time of day when he or she can be in touch with the sound inside. But to get to this point requires a lot of courage. It means really throwing oneself into the daily practice, no holds barred.

In a recent question and answer session, someone confessed to the Master that she felt she simply wasn't "giving enough". She felt a constant pain of loving but did not reach any fulfilment. In reply, Baba Ji said that this was the natural yearning of the soul to be with its Creator. Then, at one point further into the conversation, he acknowledged that perhaps we hold ourselves back; we are always conscious of other people and what they will think of us.

The truth of this struck me forcibly. We probably understand the need to keep a balance in life, to 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's' – but don't we sometimes overdo the whole idea of balance, so that 'Caesar' (the world) gets a much better deal than God? We are so fearful of appearing unworldly that we daren't take risks. We daren't get up in the beautiful pre-dawn hours and give genuinely good time to meditation in case the backlash is that we feel tired later in the day, unable to cope. But would it really matter if we dozed as we watched TV with the family in the evening? Or if we tumbled into bed and fell asleep the moment our head hit the pillow?

It seems that we daren't abandon ourselves to that force nine gale of true love and do what real lovers do – constantly think of the beloved, day and night – because we're always looking over our shoulder, wondering if somebody will find us odd, dismiss us from our job, seek a divorce, or just raise their eyebrows and consign us to oblivion. In *Honest Living* we are advised:

On our journey through life, if we weigh ourselves down with a cargo of stones, we will be unable to reach our destination. If, like the mystics, we accumulate no cargo, then the winds of God's love in the form of Shabd will power our ship. To make the journey, we need enthusiasm, fortitude and stamina.

Perhaps, just for a change, we could try saying: "I have faith in my Master; I'm going to do what he's advised and it's going to work out. I'm going to practise simran when I can, put in the hours of meditation, and not worry!" Maybe it wouldn't be as hard as we think; maybe our family and colleagues would accept us, maybe they would even join us. And maybe, eventually, after some ups and downs, we would feel so refreshed by our meditation that we would get over any feelings of tiredness. Maybe the joy we found as we abandoned ourselves to the spiritual discipline – the discipline that leads to perfect freedom – would carry us easily through those situations that we unnecessarily worry about. Sultan Bahu says:

*People howl and cry over the slightest of discomforts,
while lovers gladly embrace a million torments.
Who would risk his life boarding a ship
if the waves were hitting it hard
and the shore collapsing?
Lovers joyously board the ship of God's love –
even though their souls are pitched
against the vortices of life.
Unsurpassed is the joy of lovers in the court of the Lord.*





A Garden beyond Paradise

*Everything you see has its roots
in the Unseen world.
The forms may change,
yet the essence remains the same.*

*Every wondrous sight will vanish.
Every sweet word will fade.
But do not be disheartened,
The Source they come from is eternal ...*

*Why do you weep? –
That Source is within you.
And this whole world
is springing up from it.*

*The Source is full.
Its waters are ever-flowing;
Don't think it will ever run dry
This is the endless Ocean!*

*From the moment you came into this world
A ladder was placed in front of you
that you might escape.*

Jalaluddin Rumi in *God Makes the Rivers To Flow*,
by Eknath Easwaran.

What Am I?

“What am I?” the mind asks, unsettled

Our mind has been collecting and collating information for numerous lifetimes, all these lifetimes bringing with them a multitude of different complexities. These are stored and catalogued by our mind, thus ensuring that we remain in the dream state of each new identity. We do really believe that we are ‘this’ person or ‘that’ person and whilst, life after life, we’re busy identifying with these many varied forms, we’re also creating attachments with other identities. These attachments pull us back to the creation again and again, so prolonging an elaborate and convoluted dream. It’s a dream which is intricately entwined with the other elaborate and convoluted dreams of all those individuals that we’ve become attached to. Sant Charandas tells us:

*In a dream, one’s family and relations all appear wonderful;
but when one wakes up, they all dissolve
and nothing remains in form and substance.
Therefore always remember to contemplate on the Lord,
do not let your mind get engrossed here.*

When, in the middle of the dream of life, the mind comes to the conundrum, “What am I?” the realization may dawn that this question has brought us to the brink of a pause between thoughts. However, the mind has become accustomed to its dream. It will do all it can to prevent our catching that infinitesimally small pause of quietness. Why? Because if we should drop into that imperceptible gap, stop acting out our familiar ‘self’ – we find we’re nobody. The mind doesn’t like this loss of the familiar self, even for a millisecond,

and in point of fact, it's usually so baffled and confounded that it starts filling the gap instantly.

“How can I be nobody?” the mind insists

To automatically fill the gap is the mind's natural reaction. It generally fills it with its own persona – in other words, with memories and stories designed to reinforce the sense of self. But its frantic efforts are meaningless. If we really want to know who or what we are, we must experience this blessed and infinitesimally small gap and pass into our nothingness, which is actually our every-thingness.

“That's ridiculous” – the mind, perplexed, can't accept it

To comfort itself, the mind returns to its dream, spreading out again into this world with its familiar scattering of thoughts, restoring 'normality'.

In no time at all, the mind's back into its customary habits, running with the influence and fancy of the often wild and wayward senses. However, the mind may now have just an inkling that there's something rather wonderful about the gap it's just discovered – something that can seem far out of reach but that is enticing. Once there was no notion of anything other than life here in this creation but now, intrigued, the mind is questioning, “Is there more to life, something hidden in the stillness?”

“Is there more to life, something hidden in the stillness?”

For us to awaken from all our programmed ideas, beliefs and impulses – all these complexities that the mind has built up life after life – we must turn inward. If we are fortunate enough to come across a true Master, he will teach us how to turn inward and begin our spiritual journey. It is meditation, as taught at initiation, that will help us to turn inside. The Masters tell us there is no other way.

“But there’s nothing but blackness” – the mind is horrified

The mind at first is horrified by the darkness it encounters in meditation. But it will not be there forever. We have to make ourselves receptive to the Lord’s grace. It’s only his grace that helps us become free from this elaborate, convoluted dream world.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol II, Maharaj Charan Singh talks about meditation and the wayward nature of the mind:

Meditation may be dry, but if you leave your mind alone, it will have other, worldly thoughts. It won’t be still. It will always think something or other. So why not give it something better? Why let it go astray, why not pull it back? We are helping it not to run astray and go wild. The more it runs astray and wild, the more difficult it becomes to pull it back. That is why whenever we get time or we are mentally free, we do simran.

Becoming absorbed in our meditation, merging into our simran, so much so that there is nothing but simran, helps us enter the stillness of that gap between thoughts. In the Bible we read that it’s easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Trying to hold on to one’s identity (whether rich, poor, spiritual, worldly, man, or woman) whilst doing our meditation is like trying to push the camel forcibly through the eye of the needle. The only thing that can get through even the tiniest needle is our own nothingness – no shred of self-centred identity can pass through.

“That’s just too hard!” says the mind

But the mind rebels. Wanting to soothe its discomfort in some way, the mind may now look to past experiences, thinking that there must be an easier way than meditation. These experiences may have formed

the way one thinks and they may even have been great emotional or religious experiences, or grand intellectual insights. But to indulge in them now is of no help.

So, as it always does, it comes back to meditation. Sant Mat teaches that we must be rigorous in our practice, stringently abide by our principles and always do our daily meditation. If we are to encourage the mind to turn inward, we must give it something better to attach itself to. Eventually and naturally the mind will turn within, as we begin to enjoy the light and sound emanating from Shabd. It is then that we start withdrawing from our attachments, as the growing heat of yearning melts the mind's noisy voice.

The mind quietens and begins to feel at peace

Shabd, the Word, is realized only when we have passed into our own nothingness. We recognize that Shabd is that formless essence and ultimate truth that gives life and form to everything. There is in reality, nothing but Shabd. Sant Charandas says:

*Ever since I heard the resounding ceaseless melody,
my senses have become weary, my mind has dissolved,
and all hopes and desires have burned away.
These roving eyes have turned inwards;
the body has become still and the soul has become intoxicated.*

When the illusion of this elaborate and convoluted dream of life here is shattered and our receptivity is awakened to Shabd, the Masters tell us that our real spiritual journey will begin.



Bumble Bees Can Fly

The quest for the knowledge of who we are and where we come from is age-old. Mystics throughout the centuries have told us that, in this human life, we are given a unique opportunity to raise our consciousness and actually realize our spiritual heritage for ourselves. Nevertheless, a man of the world might reasonably ask why anyone should want to prove these spiritual truths. After all, they are beyond the daily experience of most of us and beyond the reach of the intellect. Is not life difficult and complicated enough without adding unfamiliar concepts to our burden?

For many people, only the perceptible facets of human life are accepted as the reality. For example, when they come across phenomena such as extra-sensory perception or hear of someone's near-death experience – things which find no ready explanation in physical science – it is easier and more comfortable to discredit these as delusion or trickery. Because what we see and scientifically understand is only a small part of the reality; the spiritual dimensions and capabilities of man are largely ignored.

History warns us, however, that when we assert complete knowledge of something and close our minds to other ideas and concepts, time may reveal the error of our thinking. Take the ideas prevalent in western Europe in the Middle Ages. To most people, including the religious clergy, it was clear that the earth must be flat. It felt flat and looked flat. It was clear to everyone that an observer standing still on the earth could see the stars and planets moving across the sky. One must surely be stupid not to deduce that the earth was stationary and the heavens moved around the earth – and surely a heretic, not to believe that the earth was the centre of the

universe; scientists who stated that the earth orbited around the sun put their very lives at risk. Merely a few hundred years later we see the ignorance of such positions.

And it goes on. One hundred years ago, a UK national newspaper reported that “All attempts at artificial aviation are not only dangerous but doomed to failure from an engineering standpoint.” In 1943 the chairman of IBM, then the world’s largest computer company, reportedly said, “I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.” So-called experts are not necessarily right in their judgement and are sometimes narrow in their imagination and perceptions. Perhaps the most entertaining scientific ‘no-no’ happened a few years ago when aeronautical engineers were unable to demonstrate technically that a bumble bee could fly. Body characteristics seemed to show that flight was impossible. Yet, as we know, the bumble bee, that familiar visitor to summer flowers, has always flown and continues to do so!

True mystics or masters of spirituality tell us that we humans are far more than we seem. We are far more than science can delineate. To understand the full scope of a human being, one must consider the totality of the physical, mental and spiritual, since our hidden and unrealized potential is vastly greater than our physical and mental capabilities. Just as the bumble bee can fly, the Masters tell us that we are able to fly (in a spiritual sense) and they urge us to prove it for ourselves. They say that the information to rely upon is that which one has proven to oneself through one’s own experience. They explain the method by which we may realize our full potential and they offer to guide us through the spiritual regions which can be accessed within us. Sant Mat is about proving these theories ourselves within the laboratory of our own bodies.

Anything which provides a way out of this impermanent and insecure existence in the transient world of mind and matter is worthy

of our attention. A good look around at the condition of the world is reason enough for anyone to take the philosophy of the Masters seriously. And encountering a Master is an inspirational experience that informs us of the joy known to those who practise their path.

Most world religions refer to a sound current, which is given many names, for example the Word, Shabd, Nam or Logos. This spiritual vibration or sound current is the Creator working in and throughout the whole of creation. Mystics tell us that the sound current or Shabd can be heard by those who develop their inner spiritual hearing, and a true Master connects disciples to this sound current and so releases their higher capabilities. The practice of Nam, or listening to and merging into the Shabd, helps the disciple to overcome the mind's downward tendencies and gives him or her a taste of the transcendent power that supports all existence. From being a disbeliever, he or she becomes a believer.

In the early stages of discipleship, our 'flight pattern' (our spiritual progress) rather resembles that of the bumble bee. The bumble bee goes round from plant to plant, responding to its senses. Like the bumble bee, we also chase after this or that and are readily distracted from our main goal. We do not make rapid progress, and this bumbling around in the world of distractions will likely cover us in more karma, like the pollen that sticks to the bee.

The Master tells us to become more focused by attending regularly to meditation and using our simran during our daily activities. In the world of flight, the peregrine falcon is the opposite of the bumble bee. Unlike the round, furry body of the bumble bee, the falcon is sleek and is one of the fastest birds in the world. It flies high, identifies a specific prey from way off, folds its wings, dives at high speed, focusing one-pointedly on the target and achieves its object in a very short

time. If we emulate the peregrine falcon and look steadfastly towards our target, forgetting the world around us, then we speed to our goal.

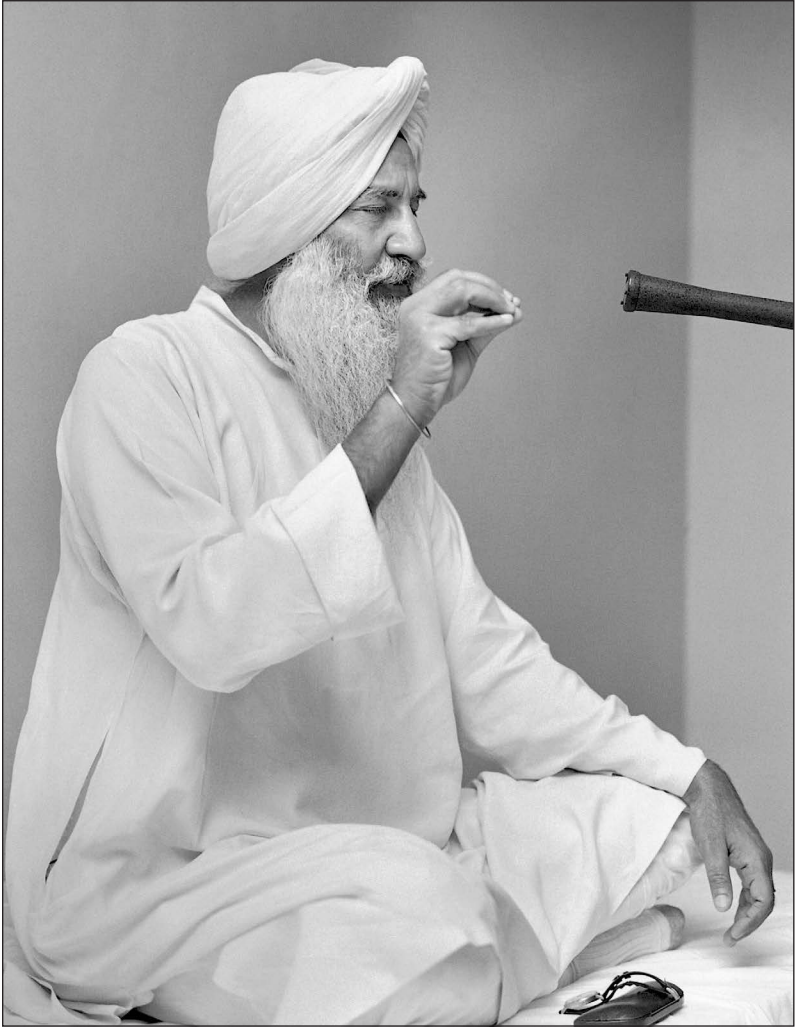
Focus is the watchword here, and the Masters propose that we determinedly set our goal as self-realization and God-realization, and then maintain our focus towards this end throughout the remainder of our lives here. If we build our efforts around this focus, then our lives will not be wasted and we will have no regrets. After death we will take with us whatever progress we have made.

The Masters tell us that in the human form the soul reaches its zenith, and this form is the only one from which the soul can progress upwards into spiritual regions. Access to the treasure that lies within us is the exclusive heritage of human beings, but, most importantly, it is only by having the company of the mystics and practicing their teachings – listening to the Shabd – that we can take wing and find our way back to our true home.



I think the wisest person is he who realizes that he knows nothing. Christ himself said: Oh Father, You have hid these things from the prudent and from the wise, and you have revealed them to the babes. You see, this ego, this intellect, makes us think we know everything. When we eliminate that ego, we realize we know nothing... If you're full of ego or intellect this will keep you from the real wisdom, from the spiritual experience and spiritual truth which the Lord has put within every one of us.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Thus Saith the Master*



Where Our Treasure Is

Maharaj Charan Singh discusses attachment and desire

Q: *It has been said that detachment can come only through attachment. My question is: should desires of the physical world be satisfied or fulfilled to get to the state of detachment?*

A: No. By fulfilling your worldly desires, you will not be able to get detached from the world. The more fuel you put on the fire, the more it blazes. The more you desire these worldly things, the more hungry and thirsty you become for them. By trying to satisfy these worldly desires, you will never be able to detach yourself.

Unless you are attached to something better, it will be impossible to detach yourself from the world because the mind is fond of pleasure. Unless it gets something more pleasurable, it will remain attached to worldly pleasures. It always wants more, more and more variety. But when you are able to attach yourself to the spirit and get the pleasure of the nectar within yourself, you will find that pleasure so fulfilling and satisfying that you will automatically become detached from the senses, and that attachment will be able to detach you from the world. Not otherwise.

Q: *Is it even possible to fulfil our desires here?*

A: Desires can never be fulfilled.... You try to fulfil one or two desires, and the mind creates another twenty. We make a list of twenty, and the mind creates another thirty.... The mind has to rise above these desires and learn to live in the will of the Father. Whatever he gives, we should accept with gratitude. He knows best what to give us. We must have faith in him. Whatever he gives, that is for our advantage, and we should accept it. We shouldn't desire anything at all.

Q: *Maharaj Ji, could you please explain about desires and duty? I tend to get the two slightly confused – not just my desires, but my wife’s desires and my friends’ desires. For example, if you need a car for your occupation, do you get a Volkswagen, a Buick or a Mercedes-Benz? Where to draw the line between desire and duty?*

A: You want to know the difference between necessity and desire? Well, you have to make up your own mind whether you can afford a Volkswagen or a Buick or a Lincoln. You have to make up your own mind, even whether you can do without all of them. It depends upon you. If you are becoming so obsessed to possess one, and it is bothering you, so have it. If you can afford it, buy one. If you can get rid of your desire and you can’t afford the car, get rid of the desire.... It depends upon one’s circumstances. If you have a desire to possess a Lincoln but you have no money in the bank, you shouldn’t commit a robbery to buy one. One has to look at one’s economic circumstances. Otherwise, you have to withdraw your mind from such desires.

Q: *Master, if before death a disciple had reached a stage where he has no strong attachments to this world ... and yet has not been able to still his wandering mind, would that disciple have to be given another birth?*

A: It is our attachments that pull us back to the world. As Christ said: If you build your treasure in the world, you come back to the world. If you build your treasure in heaven, you go back to heaven, because where your treasure is, there your heart will be. So our attachments always pull us back to this world. But you will not be able to detach yourself from this creation unless you are attached to something better. And that is the sound within, that light within, that holy ghost within. That melody automatically will detach you from this creation and from the senses.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Love Without Attachment

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.

Bible, Luke 12:49

This passage has baffled readers of the Bible for centuries. It is hard to understand why Jesus, who elsewhere spreads messages of peace, love and compassion, makes such an apparently divisive statement, striking at the heart of family life.

Perhaps if we interpret it in the light of Sant Mat its meaning may become clear. In matters of the family, the Masters say that we must do our duty by our children with love, but without attachment. And perhaps this is the key to this passage, since love without attachment is no easy option. It requires a warrior's resolve to love within the context of our worldly lives and yet to keep our spiritual destination in view. If we do our best to love in this way, then we will remain free and our spiritual freedom will reflect on many aspects of family life, enabling us to be good parents, giving a positive Sant Mat influence to our relationships within our families, and making family life a part of our spiritual practice, a seva.

So, what does it mean to be a parent while adhering to the teachings of Sant Mat? Life with children, especially when they are young, is a non stop round of feeding, nappy-changing, clearing up mess and providing an engaging schedule of activities to nurture our little ones' developing minds. It's a rollercoaster ride of emotions – yours and

theirs, and you are that essential person, always there to wipe away tears and provide cuddles and reassurance. You are their constant risk-assessor – looking around, ready to shout out in warning or to rush to the rescue if danger looms. And then, as they grow up, you have to learn to stand back and let them make their own mistakes so that they can become self-sufficient. Because you know that one day you won't be there to help them and they will need to be able to stand on their own two feet.

Baba Ji, in the way that he deals with his satsangis, is the perfect example of a good parent. He is known for his mix of humour, tenderness and sternness in question and answer sessions. But, though he sometimes seems strict, he is always fair. He tirelessly and selflessly gives each of us exactly what we need. And if we are lucky enough, we know or feel that he loves us unconditionally. He is always there – whether we realize it or not – ready to pick us up when we fall, to brush off our knees and eventually lift us up and away from the cold, hard ground of this physical plane.

Like children, we are almost entirely self-centred, absorbed in our own little worlds. Most of us run around attending to our busy lives and we don't heed the advice of the Master. This advice? Meditate, meditate, meditate.

When we have children, for all the reasons listed above, it is not easy to fit in a daily meditation practice. We know that there are twenty-four hours in every day and that we should be able to find the two and a half hours required of us as satsangis. But two and a half hours may still seem like a tall order. We may have to get up early – whenever our children wake up – and prepare for the day. Perhaps we also work outside the home. So then, by the evening, we are just too tired to focus and we fall asleep whilst trying. But, if we really examine our day, can we not find a little time? Perhaps we could go to bed

an hour earlier instead of watching TV or surfing the Internet. This would allow us to wake up earlier and do our meditation before the family wakes up. Or could we split our meditation and do half in the evening and half in the morning?

Of course, the answer really lies in our motivation. If we consider meditation to be important enough, we will prioritize and make time for it. Attending satsang regularly and doing seva can help move meditation to the forefront of our minds. We can also see our family life as seva and we can learn from it. Childcare requires a lot of patience, focus and selflessness. The more we meditate, the more these qualities will develop naturally. And if we approach family life with these ideals in mind, the more harmonious it will be. Cultivating this attitude will help us to deal with the physical and mental strains of this difficult work and enjoy moment to moment the joy that children bring. As Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol II:

If you meditate, you build an atmosphere around you, an atmosphere of bliss, happiness and contentment. And then you can pass through all these ups and downs of the world without losing your balance. But if that atmosphere of meditation is not with you, then naturally you get confused.

As satsangi parents we also have to decide how far Sant Mat ideas and lifestyle will influence the guidance we give our children. Returning to the original quote and the idea of losing our attachment to our children, the Masters' advice seems to be that we should not force our children to be like ourselves, but let them find their own path. For example, let us consider vegetarianism. If both parents are vegetarian it seems an obvious choice to bring children up as

vegetarian. But, what if they decide to eat meat of their own accord?
Hazur says:

If the atmosphere is of vegetarianism in the house, they'll automatically be influenced. But since they're going to school, they also have their own associations and friends who influence them.... You can explain to them, but you can't force them.

This is also relevant when considering bringing up our children with a spiritual background. How should we approach this? Should we try to encourage them to follow Sant Mat? Hazur says:

We should give children general knowledge about religion, about spirituality to make them receptive, to open their minds to alternatives to traditional beliefs.

In addition, he says,

I think we should, in this modern age at least, make them feel that they are making their independent choice to follow Sant Mat. We should guide them, explain to them, be good examples to them and let them grow to make their own decisions when they reach maturity.

So, relinquishing attachment to our children and family members doesn't mean we cease to love them, rather we love them more effectively and purely. This will be part of a natural process as a result of meditation. Loving our children without attachment means that we will see more clearly what is best for them. We will let them come to

their own beliefs, and we won't hold on to them when they need to fly the nest and when we eventually die and leave them.

As Kahlil Gibran describes so beautifully in *The Prophet*:

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

*The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift
and far.*

*Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as he loves the arrow that flies,
so he loves also the bow that is stable.*

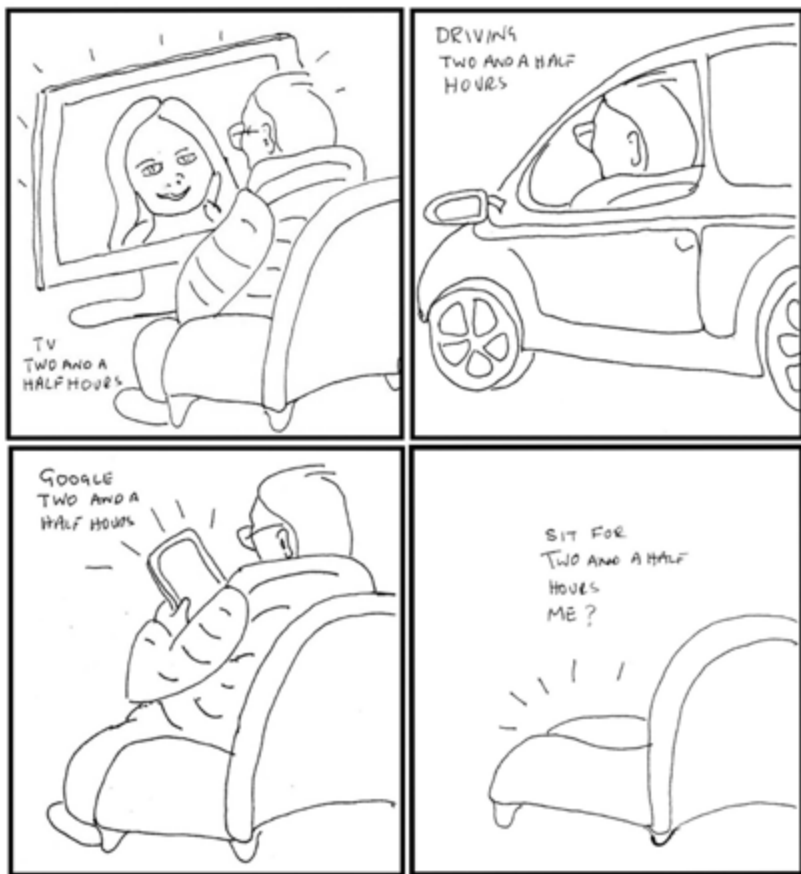


Mind needs vigilance of a higher order than is given by parents in bringing up their children. It is a very wayward child. So long as it is not trained, it is our worst enemy; but when trained, it is the most faithful companion.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Feeling Funny

A Matter of Time



Something to Think About

The privilege of seva

At the close of the Dera Eye Camp in November 1985, Maharaj Charan Singh, under whose auspices the camp had been held, spoke movingly to the sevadars in the following words:

“Hazur Maharaj Ji (the Great Master) used to say that blessed are those who get the opportunity of serving others. It is the infinite grace of the Lord that the eye patients have given the sangat the privilege of serving them. There is no parallel in the world for the love and devotion with which you have all served the patients, performing the most arduous duties, unmindful of your comfort and convenience. I do not have words to express my feelings of appreciation. All that I can do is to pray to Hazur Maharaj Ji that he may bestow his grace on all of us.”

Treasure Beyond Measure

When Majuddun Baghdadi entered the service of a sheikh, he was made to serve “at the place of ablution”, i.e. to clean the latrines. His mother, a well-to-do lady physician, asked the master to exempt the tender boy from this work, and sent him twelve slaves to do the cleaning. But he replied, “You are a physician – if your son had an inflammation of the gall bladder, should I give the medicine to a slave instead of to him?”

Jami, quoted in *Travelling the Path of Love*, by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee



Five Good Reasons

Would you like five good reasons to meditate? Here are mine:

We should meditate because the Master asked us to, and we promised we would.

Meditation is the only way to quieten the mind.

Meditation is a rehearsal for our death and thereby counters our fear of death.

Meditation is the strong boots that enable us to keep our balance in the world.

Meditation is ... but I'll keep the fifth and final reason to the end!

Our promise to meditate

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Maharaj Sawan Singh explains that initiation into the path of the saints can be had from a living Master only. It is only Shabd, the divine and audible creative power of the Lord, that can rescue us – and only a Master who himself has intimate knowledge of Shabd can awaken us to the Shabd that resounds within each of us.

Initiation gives the soul the ticket back to its origin. We can start to get control over our weaknesses, break free from our attachments, and awaken to a new, higher life of the spirit. This is set in motion with the gift of initiation and can never be taken away. However, it only works if we honour the promise we make to give full time to meditation.

Spiritual life without regular meditation is like spending weeks collecting good soil: cleaning, sifting and preparing it, putting it in the right location, building a protective channel around it, fertilizing it, watering it – and then not planting the tree. What sense does that make? The tree, if planted in such soil, and looked after, will grow

strong and give much delicious fruit, but if the tree is not planted, no matter how good the soil, how can it grow? Meditation has to be done to live the teachings; to meditate is to move closer and closer to the Master; to meditate is to plant the tree in the ground.

The principles given at initiation – following a strict vegetarian diet, abstaining from alcohol and habit forming drugs and leading a sincere moral life – are like cables that lead to a power station. But it is only through the power of the generator (fulfilling our promise to meditate) that our consciousness can be raised, and we can move beyond the grip of the mind, unfolding the truth of who we really are, who the Master is and what he is doing for us.

Meditation quietens the mind

Meditation has to be done. There is not a book, a satsang or a question answered by the Master where this point is not made clear – but no one, least of all the Master, says it is easy.

Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Die to Live*:

I don't think there is anything more difficult than meditation. Meditation is the most difficult. It looks simple and yet it is so difficult to attend to it. It's easy to understand Sant Mat because the whole philosophy is very simple, but when we put it into practice, many obstacles come in the way. To live Sant Mat, to live the teachings, means a constant struggle with the mind.

The Masters explain the teachings so clearly and concisely that – irrespective of our age or background – they are easy to understand. They explain that the mind must be brought under control through the practice of meditation and this will put it in touch with the all-powerful Word or Shabd. But it is essential that we move on from the concept to the practice.

How, practically, can we help ourselves to be faithful to our meditation? It's regularity and punctuality that strengthen the concentration when we sit. In *Light on Sant Mat* Hazur Maharaj Ji writes, "The Masters have always enjoined satsangis to spend some time daily in reading Sant Mat books or literature pertaining to the Sant Mat teachings." However, reading is easy. Meditation is hard. Reading cannot replace meditation. Reading is to inspire us to change our lives and to show us how. Reading has to lead to action.

Since most of us are intellectually comfortable with the teachings, why is it that we have such difficulty in converting this acceptance into practice and making meditation part of the very fabric of our lives?

A rehearsal for the moment of death

Perhaps a fundamental reason is that, although deep within ourselves we know that what the Master is telling us is true, we still find it hard to accept that each one of us has limited time left in this human body. Through meditation we will eventually cross the threshold of death and experience death while living and thus fear of death will be conquered. Meanwhile the subject of death is often an unwanted topic for discussion – we consider it to be far off in the future.

We fail to grasp just how serious our Master is when he tells us that it is of the utmost urgency that we make a persistent effort with our meditation. Kabir, in his usual outspoken and clear manner, warns that the grave awaits us:

*Kabir, it's no time to sleep –
Wake up, repeat the Lord's Name!
A day will come
When you'll sleep undisturbed
With legs outstretched.*

The truth is, we were born empty-handed and we will leave this world empty-handed. Our bank balances, properties, possessions, will remain here. The only wealth we'll take with us is that of simran and bhajan.

It is meditation that will remove the fear of adversity, remind us of the fleeting nature of life, and yet help us to live to the full, unafraid of death and what lies beyond.

Meditation gives us strong boots

We all have to live in the world, leading simple lives, earning honestly and fulfilling our worldly responsibilities to the best of our ability. All of us to some degree or another have to mix with people not necessarily following their higher minds.

In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that the company we keep has a great influence on us:

We should avoid persons with evil habits, character or reputation; people whose lives and behaviour give a jolt to our life and disturb our peace, happiness and mental equilibrium. Such company might rouse similar thoughts in a satsangi and lead him away from meditation.

The majority of people float downstream, moved and tossed here and there by the currents of life.

The spiritual aspirant has to be like a salmon, swimming upstream, trying to return to its original home, often against the current of habit, familiarity and the easy way out. We must keep our meditation up so that we are protected from worldly influences, and we need every bit of encouragement we can find. That is why the importance of satsang – true spiritual companionship – is stressed by the Masters. In *Die to Live*, Hazur Maharaj Ji writes:

Satsang will help you to remain in his will, which is real humility and meekness. Satsang will help you treasure all the grace of the Father that is within you.

So now we reach our fifth and final reason:

Meditation is the way to thank our Master

In *Die to Live*, there is a chapter entitled ‘Be Bold Enough to Struggle’. We have to struggle with our meditation and we have to struggle to develop qualities in our lives that are conducive to meditation. Our predicament is clear. If only we could meditate punctually and regularly, we would slowly reduce our egos; but as long as we are so full of ego, how can we meditate successfully? We need our Master’s help at every step and should be truly grateful to him for being here for us. Kabir Sahib writes of his Master, “Let me never forget him! In him I found a saviour.”

The Master is love, and we have to emulate the Master’s qualities and become like him. Baba Ji sometimes points out that it is our own self-importance that blinds us to reality. In *Quest for Light*, Hazur Maharaj Ji writes:

Why think so much about yourself? The very ego that we want to crush is the only barrier between us and the Lord. The moment you lose your identity and merge yourself into him, he appears before you. Ego is our only enemy, which attaches us to the world, and the whole struggle is to eliminate it from within ourselves.

To be full of ego is to be empty of love, while to be full of love is to have little ego.

In the first letter to Corinthians in the Bible, Saint Paul describes love's qualities:

Love is patient,

love is kind and envies no one.

Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude;

never selfish, nor quick to take offence.

*Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other's sins,
but delights in the truth.*

*There is nothing love cannot face: there is no limit to its faith, its
hope and its endurance.*

Love will never come to an end.

Is it the love and grace of the Lord which make it possible for us to meditate? Or is it our effort? The answer is that they both go together. Our effort invokes the Lord's grace and through his grace we are able to make an effort. It is through meditation that we feel that grace, so one could say that meditation is a conduit for grace. Actually love and grace are always with us. But if we want to know it, we must meditate. Through using this conduit, we offer our Master true thanks.



Love, Devotion and Surrender

At a satsang some years ago, Baba Ji briefly outlined two different qualities in a human being. He mentioned the lower qualities that we bring with us from previous incarnations, and which we are now trying to reduce or eliminate. And then he spoke about the higher, or spiritual qualities that are inherent in us; these are awakened and gradually developed as we progress on the spiritual path towards God-realization. Chief among these qualities are love, devotion and surrender.

Interestingly, though, the more we try to define these three attributes, the more we realize that they are interconnected and that their common denominator – or rather the underlying pre-requisite – is love. In order to have devotion for the Lord, we must first develop love for him. In order to surrender to the will of the Lord, we must first develop love for him. And as our love for him grows, so do the other two attributes.

Devotion, broadly speaking, has two meanings. One has to do with time. When you 'devote', you are giving time to something (for example, you devote time to meditation). We also use the word 'devotion' to mean that we have love or loyalty for someone (such as the Master) or that we are enthusiastic about an activity (such as meditation). We can see, then, that to be a true devotee or disciple is to be loyal to the Master's instructions and to devote the specified amount of time to meditation.

If a person attends to meditation determinedly for the full time every day, but believes they have no devotion, that disciple is mistaken. The devotion is in the effort. Those, too, who struggle to put in the full time, but at least try, will be encouraged by these words of Soami

Ji Maharaj in *Sar Bachan Prose*: “You may not have much devotion, but if it is sincere, it will gradually develop and will eventually become perfect.”

However, about the person who has little or no respect for the Master’s instructions and whose time is taken up with opposite pursuits, Soami Ji points out in another passage in *Sar Bachan*: “Those who are alive to the external world only, do not know what lies within. Without internal devotion to Shabd, the end in view will not be obtained. Devotion to the Satguru and his satsang externally, and devotion to Shabd internally are both equally necessary.”

An integral part of our devotion will be the giving up or surrender of many of the mind’s pursuits. True surrender is attained only when we go beyond the second region. At our level of consciousness, however, we can certainly take the first steps towards surrender. Again, we can obey the Master’s instruction to sit in meditation each and every day. We can also do our best to accept, with balance, all that comes to us physically, emotionally and in all other ways – the good and the bad; the comfortable and the uncomfortable; the painful and the pleasant.

At our present stage, this is all we may understand about surrender. But if we are sincere in our efforts to live in his will, the Lord will be pleased with us and, as with devotion, our surrender too will develop and gradually become perfect and true. Maharaj Sawan Singh, known as the Great Master, writes in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II:

In the ecstasy of his love and in his complete surrender, [a lover of the Lord] considers poverty or wealth, pain or pleasure, health or illness – and whatever else may happen – as gifts from the Beloved, feeling no difference between them. By the

grace of love, he rises above these things and remains above the limitations of the body.

The English word ‘surrender’ comes from the Latin word *reddere*, which means ‘to give back’. Rabindranath Tagore expresses it poetically by saying, “God waits to win back his own flowers as gifts from man’s hands.”

An incident which took place at the Dera many years ago echoes Tagore’s lines. It was the twelfth of December and the morning of Maharaj Charan Singh’s birthday. In those days, there was a daily meeting for foreigners in Hazur’s garden after morning satsang. On this special day, a lady had picked a rose and placed it on the Master’s footstool. Hazur came out from his house, prepared to sit down and saw the rose. “What’s this?” he asked. The lady replied, “It’s for your birthday, Maharaj Ji.” With a twinkle in his eye, he then asked, “And where did you get it?” She had to admit: “From your garden, Maharaj Ji.”

What a wonderful parallel of the way in which the Masters give us of their own love, motivating us to give back to them. It is love which prompts in us the first stirrings of devotion and which impels us towards a rudimentary surrender.

Attaining true devotion and surrender can nevertheless seem well beyond our reach. We’re still in primary school, as it were, learning our ABCs. And whilst Baba Ji would like to see us graduate to a higher class, he also says to us that we *should* be like little children. Children are blessed with pure and simple minds, and they are also carefree, because they know that their father is taking care of all the details.

We should remember that the Master is in control of all that happens to us, and we should therefore trustingly hand over all our cares and worries to him. Similarly, it is only with the pure, uncluttered

mind of a child that we can begin to be receptive to the Shabd. This must be why Jesus advised us to become like little children.

We can all appreciate the words of the child-poet Mattie Stepanek, who sadly passed away at the tender age of thirteen. Mattie once said, “People tell me I inspire them – and that inspires me. It’s a beautiful circle, and we all go around together, with and for each other. What a gift!” In his poem, *Heartsong*, Mattie wrote:

*I have a song, deep in my heart,
and only I can hear it.
If I close my eyes and sit very still,
it is so easy to listen to my song.
It makes me feel happy.
Happier than ever.
Happier than everywhere
and everything and everyone ...
My Heartsong sounds like this:
I love you! I love you!*

Despite his few years, Mattie felt the oneness of all creation. Elsewhere, he described each living thing as a bright colour in a mosaic, each human being as a bright, colourful thread in a tapestry, and he had a true sense of that greatest of human qualities, love. The Great Master says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II:

*Love is to be found in its original form in every human being.
God is love and the soul is a part of him; therefore, the soul is
also love. But because the soul is concealed under the coverings
of the mind, love is also concealed along with it.*

It is only the negative human attributes which hinder our progress on the path. In a discussion on love and devotion in *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

As long as the mind is dominant there's no surrender, there's no living in the will of the Father; there's no elimination of the ego. You can achieve real surrender only when all coverings are removed from the soul. Then the soul shines, it becomes perfect, and then it is capable of merging into the perfect Being. That is real surrender, that is real love, that is real devotion.

So how do we achieve this? Real love can only be found through spiritual practice. Through meditation we will experience the all-pervading power of the Shabd. Shabd is love, and the more we meditate, the more we will develop love for the Lord. The more we meditate, the more we will love others, because, in loving the Lord, we will see the Lord in everyone else. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

In actual practice, the first essential is to awaken love of God by means of repetition and then by contemplation. As we repeat the five Holy Names, our attraction and love for Him increases. When a lover remembers Him and becomes fully absorbed in His remembrance, then God turns the lover's attention towards devotion by His divine grace. Simran, done with faith, produces a unique feeling in the heart. By doing simran, a feeling of bliss and divine influence fills the heart. This state is produced sooner or later, according to the individual devotee's sanskaras. The third part of the spiritual practice is listening to the Shabd. God is Shabd, and God is also Love. Therefore, Shabd is Love. As the soul contacts Shabd, Love flows out from within.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II

It follows that, if we are seeking to love, our prayer to the Lord should be only for that. Since God is love and the Master is love personified, this explains why, when we do ask the Lord for anything, we are encouraged to ask for him and for him only.

This also explains why we are irresistibly attracted to the Master: because he is love personified – in fact the personification of all the spiritual attributes. Our attraction to him stems from our recognition of those qualities in the Master and makes us long to be just like him. As we look at our Master, we are reminded of who we really are and we long to merge with him.

The Great Master says, “Love unites two hearts into one and thus removes duality. In such a state, it is not possible to separate them – just as milk and water, if mixed, become inseparable.” Sant Dadu Dayal says:

*Where God is, there I am not;
where I am, there God is not.
Narrow indeed, is the palace;
it has no place for two, O Dadu.*

The union of love is the purpose of our lives. It can take us years, a lifetime, or more. But if we just take the first simple steps, we will get there. Our love for the physical Master will engender devotion to him, and will automatically result in surrender to him. And surrendering to the will of the Master will enable us to bring the mind under control, because we will be giving it a taste of the nectar of the inner love – the Shabd. In other words: through meditation, our love for the Master’s form will finally culminate in our love for the formless.



How Much For a Pair of Shoes?

Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia was a great saint, and it is said that no one who ever approached him went empty-handed. So a poor man, who had a daughter to marry off, once came to him and begged for his help.

“My son,” the saint told him, “whatever offering comes to me during the next three days I will gladly give to you.”

Filled with hopeful anticipation, the poor man stayed for three days with the saint. But during that time not a single soul brought any offering to him. On the evening of the third day, when the poor man, his high hopes dashed, was weeping miserably, Nizamuddin Aulia gave him his own shoes.

“Take these, my good man,” he said, “for what they may be worth. They are the only possessions I have, and, at the least, you can sell them for enough to buy a day’s supply of food.”

Greatly disappointed, the poor man nevertheless thanked the saint and left, to return to his village. As he trudged wearily along the dusty road, he saw approaching him a large caravan of richly appointed and heavily laden camels. It was the caravan of Amir Khusro, who was returning from Kabul with all of his many possessions, after retiring from the king’s service.

Amir Khusro himself was riding at the head of the caravan, and, as he approached the poor man, he began to smell the fragrance of his beloved Master. After he had ridden past the poor man, he noticed that the fragrance came from behind him. Both puzzled and intensely curious, Amir Khusro at once got down from his camel and ran after the poor man.

“Who are you, friend,” he asked. “Where have you come from?”

The poor man, still feeling very miserable and wretched, told the whole story of his three days' stay with the great saint, and held up the pair of shoes to show how old and of little value they were.

“Would you sell the shoes to me, my good man? Amir Khusro asked with some impatience.

“Why, by all means, noble Sir. I was hoping to sell them in the next village, so I could get a little food, for otherwise I would go hungry,” the wretched fellow replied.

“I will pay you well for them,” said Amir Khusro. “Give me the shoes, and in return you may have all my caravan, including all the camels and their loads, except for the two beasts that are carrying me, my wife and children.”

Overjoyed at this totally unexpected good fortune, the poor man thanked Khusro profusely, and went away rejoicing at the head of the great caravan.

Amir Khusro eventually reached his Master and placed the pair of shoes at his feet.

“And how much, my son, did you pay for such an old pair of shoes?” asked Nizamuddin smiling.

“Sir, I gave everything I had, except for the two camels that are standing here,” Amir Khusro told him humbly. Again Nizamuddin smiled, “You got them cheap.”

When he realized the depth of Amir Khusro's love, Nizamuddin ordained that when they died they should be buried side by side.

“If you dig Khusro's grave anywhere else, he will break from the tomb to be with me,” said the saint.

Tales of the Mystic East





Our Masters Taught: Rabbinic Stories and Sayings

BY JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI

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This collection of sayings and teaching stories offers a particularly accessible introduction to the wisdom of Judaism's revered teachers from the first to the sixth century CE, collectively known as the rabbis. The selections are grouped into short chapters by subject, such as "About God and the Gods", "About Life and Death", "About Revelation and Torah", "About the Greatest Commandment", and "About Prayer". For the most part, the selections are easily understood without an in-depth background in Judaism.

In the introduction, Petuchowski, the translator and editor, explains that he chose to leave the word "Torah" untranslated – the only one word of Hebrew or Aramaic he didn't translate – because the word has so many deep meanings. Literally meaning instruction or law, "Torah" can mean the Bible, or more specifically the first five books of the Bible. It can mean the actual revelation Moses experienced, as differentiated from the "written Torah", the scripture recording the meaning of that revelation. Torah can also mean the whole way the rabbi conducts himself and teaches, and sometimes the rabbi is referred to as the living embodiment of Torah. The rabbis even take Torah to mean the subtle power by which God created the world. As Rabbi Osha'ya explains the verse, "The Lord created me as the beginning of His way" (Proverbs 8:22), the "me" refers to Torah. He says the correct reading of Genesis 1:1 is "With the Beginning, God created heaven and earth," which he says means "With the Torah, God created heaven and earth."

Thus, Petuchowski says, "the overtones and the undertones" of the word Torah add a richness and depth of meaning to the texts. For example, once the Roman government forbade Jews to study Torah or to live according

to it, but Rabbi Aqiba continued his teaching of Torah. When asked if he wasn't afraid of the punishment, he gave a parable:

One day a fox was strolling along by the banks of a river. He saw how the fishes were anxiously swimming around from place to place. He asked them: "From what are you trying to escape?" The fishes answered: "From the nets that people have cast for us." The fox said: "Why do you not come up and find safety on land, so that you and I can live together in peace...?" But the fishes replied: "...If we are already afraid in the element in which we live, how much more would we have to be afraid in the element in which we are certainly going to die!"

In other words, if one gives up living according to one's spiritual principles to avoid the dangers of this world, he puts himself into a far graver danger.

In his introduction, Petuchowski provides background on the rabbinic way of discussing spiritual matters, explaining that the rabbis did not develop a systematic theology, hammering out the single 'right' interpretation of spiritual truth. They believed that divine revelation was absolute truth and applied to all times and all people, but that human perception of that truth was always fragmentary. To illustrate this point, Rabbi Ishmael cited a biblical passage, "Is not my Word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that smites the rock?" He takes this line to mean: "What happens when a hammer smites the rock? Sparks fly. Every single spark is the result of the impact of the hammer upon the rock. But no single spark is the sole result. Thus, too, one single Scripture verse can transmit many different teachings." Thus, a single verse from scripture could be interpreted in many different, even contradictory, ways, without some interpretations being right and others wrong.

The book is, therefore, full of the debate and discussion of the rabbis. One of the chapters is a collection of sayings in which various rabbis – each in his own way – distilled all of Torah down to one greatest commandment. For example, when challenged to explain Torah in one sentence, Hillel said simply: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your

whole Torah. All the rest is commentary.” When Bar Qappara was asked if there was one brief text upon which all the rest of Torah depended, he cited Proverbs 3:6: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.”

The rabbis frequently illustrate points with parables and stories. When Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai wanted to impress on his students the need to be ready for death at every moment, he likened death to a banquet:

This can be compared to a king who invited his servants to a banquet without, however, telling them at what time the banquet would be held. The wise servants beautified themselves at once and waited at the gate of the palace. For they thought that the royal palace was lacking in nothing, and that the gate could be opened at any time. But the foolish servants continued with their work. For they thought that a great many preparations would first have to be made for the banquet, and that it would take a while for the gate to be opened. Suddenly the king demanded the presence of his servants. The wise servants entered all beautified, but the foolish servants entered in their dirty clothes. The king ... commanded: “Those who have beautified themselves should sit down and eat and drink! But those who have not beautified themselves for the banquet are to stand and merely watch!”

Even simple truths that could be easily understood by anyone are clothed in vivid imagery to make a memorable impact. For example, to convey the idea that we leave the world just as naked and empty-handed as we came, Rabbi Genibha compared our situation to a fox who finds a vineyard full of plump and juicy grapes. The vineyard is surrounded by a fence which has only one very small hole. The fox can't squeeze through the hole, so he fasts for three days till he is slim enough to get through. Once inside the vineyard, he feasts on the rich abundance there, but now he is too fat to get out through the hole, so he has to fast for three days again.

Once outside, he turned toward the vineyard and lamented: “O vineyard, O vineyard, how good you are and how good are your

fruits! All that is within you is beautiful and praiseworthy! But of what use are you? The way one enters is also the way in which one leaves you again.” And so it is with this world!

Many of the selections take the form of a question and answer. For example, someone asked Rabbi Joshua ben Qarehah why God had chosen a thornbush as the place to reveal Himself to Moses, and he said:

If He had chosen a carob tree or a mulberry tree, you would have asked the same question. Yet it is impossible to let you go away empty-handed. That is why I am telling you that God chose the humble thornbush – to teach you that there is no place on earth bereft of the Divine Presence, not even a thornbush.

Several sayings and parables stress that humans have the free will to turn toward God and strive to follow divine guidance. Rabbi Hanina bar Papa explained that at the time of conception an angel asks God whether this will be a healthy or a weak person, an intelligent or a stupid person, and a wealthy or a poor person. “And God decides all that. But one question is not asked by the angel, nor is it decided by God: ‘Will it be a righteous or a wicked person?’” As Rabbi Hanina taught: “Everything is in the hand of God except fear of God.”

Yet the rabbis also taught that God showered his grace freely on whomsoever He wished. They told the story of God taking Moses to heaven and showing him the various treasure chambers where He stores treasures to be given to the righteous. One chamber was for those who help orphans, one for those who lead a righteous life, and so on. Finally they came to a vast treasure chamber, bigger than any of the others. God explained, “If someone has his own merits, I give to him from the particular treasure chamber intended for him. But if someone has no merit of his own, then I give him freely (i.e. graciously) from this treasure chamber.”



